The Sweetness of Love and Marriage in the Letters of Believers

The Christian Lover

Michael A.G. Haykin
with Victoria J. Haykin

Endorsements

"*The Christian Lover* is both insightful and inspirational. Your heart will be touched as you gain a brief glimpse into the love shared by these heroes of the faith. Be prepared for the unexpected. The passions of these couples will surprise you, but you will not be disappointed."

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"*The Christian Lover* portrays some of our most revered historical personalities as men of deep marital love. Haykin's work enhances (rather than diminishes) the pictures we have of them as towering scholars, faithful pastors, pioneering missionaries, and bold martyrs. This epistolary anthology of the Puritan and Reformed divines' marital love may serve as a great buttress to the continued testimony of the goodness of marriage as the Creator's provision for a companionship of joy in the highest order. May all in the church who read these accounts of love be awakened to the passionate pursuit of the lifelong, unbreakable, satisfying relationship every marriage should be. My heart was stirred more with each letter."

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what a romantic relationship between husband and wife can be—anytime, anywhere."

—Dr. Leland Ryken
Professor of English emeritus
Wheaton College
Wheaton, Ill.

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To the love of my life, Alison,
to whom it has been ever my privilege
and my delight to have written letters from time to time

Contents

Introduction

"How greatly are we inclined to the other sex," Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) observed in the spring of 1725 after he had met Sarah Pierpont (1710–1758), whom he would marry just over two years later.[1] This observation serves as a concise summary of God's divine purpose in creating humanity male and female. At the heart of marriage, as conceived by God in the primal state, is the intention that the husband delight in and passionately love his wife, and vice versa.

Another eighteenth-century author, the London Baptist Samuel Stennett (1727–1795), rightly maintained that when God declared in Genesis 2:18 that He would make a helpmeet for the man after no fit companion was found for him among the animals, it was as if God had said, "It is fit that man whom I have made for society, should have one for his companion, with whom he may intimately converse, and who may assist him in the duties and be a sharer with him in the joys of life."

This meant, from Stennett's perspective, that "the woman was created, and given to man in marriage, not merely for the purpose of propagating the species, but for that of promoting his and her own felicity." Undergirding their marriage was to be an "unextinguishable flame" of love, "a flame which the endearing intercourses of virtuous friendship will daily fan, and the most tempestuous storms of worldly adversity will not be able to put out," for the relationship of the two is to be "very intimate."[2]

A cursory study of the history of love and marriage within Christian circles will reveal, however, that this divine ideal has not always been heeded and, indeed, sometimes has been rejected.

Some Patristic Perspectives

For instance, the fourth-century Bible scholar, Jerome (d. 420), who was responsible for the Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate, vigorously defended the view that celibacy was a vastly superior state to marriage, seeing it as far more virtuous and much more pleasing to God. In Jerome's thinking, those who were closest to God in the historical narrative recorded in the Scriptures were all celibate. In fact, Jerome argued, sexual relations between spouses were a distinct obstacle to leading a life devoted to the pursuit of genuine spirituality.[3]

Augustine (354–430), another Latin-speaking theologian from the same era, whose thought provided the foundation for much of the thinking of the Middle Ages, similarly maintained that the celibate individual who devotes himself or

herself to Christ is like the angels who do not marry. Celibate individuals, he said, experience a foretaste of heaven, for in heaven there is no marriage.[4] Why, then, did God ordain marriage? In Augustine's eyes, it was primarily for the procreation of children. Commenting on Genesis 2, Augustine declared that Eve would have been no use to Adam if she had not been able to bear children.

What, then, of the biblical idea, found in this very chapter of Genesis, that the woman was made to be a delightful companion to the man, a source of comfort and strength? And what of the man as such a companion for the woman? These ideas receive scant attention in the theology of Augustine.[5] Instead, he argues that God instituted marriage for three basic reasons:

- for the sake of fidelity, that is, the avoidance of illicit sex;
- for the purpose of procreation;
- as a symbol of the unity of those who would inherit the heavenly Jerusalem.[6]

With slight differences of emphasis, these positions of Jerome and Augustine were largely embraced by the various Roman Catholic authors of the Middle Ages.

One example must suffice. It comes from the commentary of Bede (ca. 673–735) on 1 Peter 3:7:

> Sexual intercourse is a barrier to prayer. . . . This means that whenever I have intercourse I cannot pray. But if we are supposed to pray without ceasing, as Paul also said, it is obvious that I can never have sexual intercourse, because if I do so I shall have to interrupt my prayers.[7]

THE REDISCOVERY OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

For many in Western Europe, the Reformation in the sixteenth century was not only a rediscovery of the heart of the gospel and the way of salvation, long hidden under centuries of superstition and theological error, but a recovery of a fully biblical view of marriage. After the death of his wife Idelette in March 1549, John Calvin (1509–1564), for example, wrote to his fellow Reformer, Pierre Viret (1511–1571): "I am deprived of my excellent life companion, who, if misfortune had come, would have been my willing companion not only in exile and sorrow, but even in death."[8] This simple statement from one of the central figures in the Reformation, who was normally very discreet about his personal feelings, reveals a view of marriage poles apart from that of medieval Roman Catholicism. For the Reformers and those who followed in their steps—such as the Puritans of the seventeenth century and the evangelicals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—marriage had an innate excellence, was vital for the development of Christian affection and friendship, and was one of God's major means for developing Christian character and spiritual maturity.

Consider the English Puritans, who have been wrongly regarded as utter prudes when it comes to the joys and delights of marriage, especially those dealing with the experience of sex.[9] As J. I. Packer puts it, they gave marriage "such strength, substance, and solidity as to warrant the verdict that . . . under God . . . they were creators of the English Christian marriage."[10] Like the Reformers, the Puritans strongly opposed clerical celibacy and affirmed that marriage is as intrinsically good as virginity, even hinting that it might be better. Thomas Adams (fl. 1612–1653), a renowned Puritan preacher, declared, "There is no such fountain of comfort on earth, as marriage."[11] Similarly, the Elizabethan Puritan author Robert Cleaver stated, "There can be no greater society or company, than is between a man and his wife."[12] And a later Puritan preacher and author, George Swinnock (1627–1673), said of husband and wife, "They are partners in the nearest degree imaginable."[13] The New England Puritan Thomas Hooker (ca. 1586–1647) put it beautifully when he wrote, "The man whose heart is endeared to the woman he loves, he dreams of her in the night, hath her in his eye and apprehension when he awakes, museth on her as he sits at table, walks with her when he travels and parlies with her in each place where he comes."[14] In another context, Hooker noted of husband and wife, "She lies in his bosom, and his heart trusts in her, which forceth all to confess, that the stream of his affection, like a mighty current, runs with full tide and strength."[15] It was thus not fortuitous that when

the writers of that quintessential Puritan text, the Westminster Confession of Faith, listed the reasons for marriage, they placed companionship first. "Marriage was ordained," chapter 25.2 declares, "for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed; and for preventing uncleanness."[16]

As Packer notes, Puritan preachers and authors are regularly "found pulling out the stops to proclaim the supreme blessing of togetherness in marriage."[17] They rightly saw that this was a central emphasis of scriptural passages that address the purpose of marriage: for instance, Richard Baxter (1615–1691) stated:

> It is a mercy to have a faithful friend, that loveth you entirely, and is as true to you as yourself, to whom you may open your mind and communicate your affairs, and who would be ready to strengthen you, and divide the cares of your affairs and family with you, and help you to bear your burdens, and comfort you in your sorrows, and be the daily companion of your lives, and partaker of your joys and sorrows. And it is a mercy to have so near a friend to be a helper to your soul; to join with you in prayer and other holy exercises; to watch over you and tell you of your sins and dangers, and to stir up in you the grace of God, and remember to you of the life to come, and cheerfully accompany you in the ways of holiness.[18]

Celebrating Christian Love and Marriage

With the significant increase of divorce in Western societies during the past fifty years and the call for the legal recognition of gay and lesbian unions, there is little doubt that marriage in general is under heavy attack in our day. Neither are Christian marriages immune. Divorce has become a frequent option after serious marital discord for Christians, and homosexuality has not left Christian marriages unravaged. This small anthology grows out of the conviction that the Reformers and the Puritans were right on the big issues about love and marriage, and that thinking about the past with regard to this issue and reading expressions of love from the past can be a helpful way of responding to the frangibility of Christian marriage in our day.

Anthologies such as this one are inevitably somewhat eclectic and reflect personal preferences. The final letter, for example, from Helmuth James von Moltke (1907–1945) to his wife Freya (1911–), I first read in the 1970s, and it deeply impressed me as to how a Christian can live in one of the most heinous of states known to human history. Its power to move and inspire me has not diminished over the decades. I first encountered the love letters of Samuel Pearce (1766–1799) at the end of the 1980s, and they have been a regular part of my reading ever since. I am, in fact, currently working on two literary projects dealing with Pearce's life. I have always regarded Calvin's letters about his wife's death as providing an excellent window into his

personality, which was anything but dour, but deeply passionate. I encountered most of the other letters as a result of preparing to write this book, but the choice of authors reflects some longtime favorites, such as the ever-colorful Martin Luther, that winsome author Philip Doddridge, the fascinating Baptist Benjamin Beddome, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones, ever a mentor of my Christian pilgrimage.

While most of the chapters contain only a couple of letters apiece, I have included around four or five letters apiece of Philip and Mercy Doddridge and Thomas and Sally Charles. In part, this is because of my interest in them as couples. I am confident, though, that what I find attractive in them will draw others to be interested readers of their letters.

Letters of other figures could have been included in this work, but hopefully the letters I have selected reveal the full range of the experience of Christian marriage, from the first flush of love to the ups and downs of married life to the experience of grief when one of the spouses goes to be with the Lord of glory. All in all, they are a reminder of what an awesome experience and privilege love for another human being is, and that, from the Christian standpoint, married love at its best is a foretaste of eternal bliss. It was not without reason that Paul in Ephesians 5 compared the love of the Lord Jesus for His church to the love of the husband for his wife.

Some of the letters included in this anthology have been

lightly edited: punctuation, capitalization, and paragraph divisions have been made amenable to modern reading habits.

Anyone who writes a book like this incurs debts. First of all, I am deeply indebted to my daughter, Victoria J. Haykin, who worked as my research assistant for the summer of 2008 and typed out most of the letters in this anthology. She also did some of the basic research for the mini-biographical introductions to each couple. Then, I am thankful to Jason Fowler, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary archivist, and to Chris Dewease, his assistant, for help with the Broadus letters. A number of years ago, Stephen Pickles of Oxford, who has been researching the life of Anne Steele, drew my attention to Broome's discovery of the letter of Benjamin Beddome to Miss Steele. Dr. Tom Nettles suggested the inclusion of the letters of Adoniram Judson, advice I have happily followed. Judson's letter to his first wife's father seeking his permission to marry his daughter has to be unique indeed. Dr. Wyn James of Cardiff University selected and transcribed all of the Charles letters, though I added the annotation. Marylynn Rouse of Stratford-upon-Avon, England, expert in all things Newtonian (that is, John Newton), identified a Newton quote in one of Thomas Charles' letters and provided helpful detail about it. Dr. Robert Strivens of London Theological Seminary, England, helped

with regard to the Doddridge letters, for which I had relied on the notoriously deficient nineteenth-century edition of Doddridge's correspondence.

Finally, I have dedicated this anthology to my wife, Alison: for me, the dearest of women.

Notes

1 Cited in George M. Marsden, *A Short Life of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2008), 31.
2 Samuel Stennett, *Discourses on Domestick Duties* (London, 1783), 144–145, 174, 177.
3 J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 183, 187.
4 James A. Mohler, *Late Have I Loved You: An Interpretation of Saint Augustine on Human and Divine Relationships* (New York: New City Press, 1991), 71.
5 Edmund Leites, "The Duty to Desire: Love, Friendship, and Sexuality in Some Puritan Theories of Marriage," *Journal of Social History*, 15 (1981–1982), 384.
6 Mohler, *Late Have I Loved You*, 68.
7 *James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude*, ed. Gerald Bray (*Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament*, vol. 11; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000), 100.
8 Cited in Richard Stauffer, *The Humanness of John Calvin*, trans. George H. Shriver (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 45.
9 There are numerous studies of this fact, but see especially two, the first from a secular commentator, the second by a Christian author: Morton M. Hunt, "The Impuritans," in his *The Natural History of Love* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), 215–252, and Joel R. Beeke, "The Puritan Marriage," in his *Living for God's Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* (Orlando, Fla.: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 317–332.
10 J. I. Packer, "Marriage and Family in Puritan Thought," in his *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway,

1990), 259–260.

11 Cited in C. H. George and K. George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation 1570–1640* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 268.

12 Cited in Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 100. For further discussion, see Daniel Doriani, "The Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 53 (1991), 128–129, and Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 41–42.

13 Cited in Michael Parsons, "Marriage under Threat in the Writing of George Swinnock," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, 20, No.1 (Spring 2002), 42, n47.

14 Thomas Hooker, *The Application of Redemption* (London: Peter Cole, 1659), 137. For this quote, I am indebted to Beeke, "The Puritan Marriage," in his *Living for God's Glory*, 325.

15 Thomas Hooker, *A Comment Upon Christ's Last Prayer* (London: Peter Cole, 1656), 187. For this quote, I am indebted to Beeke, "The Puritan Marriage," in his *Living for God's Glory*, 325.

16 On the significance of the order of reasons given for the institution of marriage, see Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 261–262. See also Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order*, 99–100.

17 Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 262.

18 Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory: or, A Sum of Practical Theology, and Cases of Conscience,* II.1 (*The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter* [London: James Duncan, 1830], IV, 30).

"Love is a talkative passion."

—Bishop Thomas Wilson[1]

Note

1 This quote from Thomas Wilson (1663–1755), Anglican bishop of Sodor and Man, often appears in anthologies of love letters, though the full statement actually reads thus: "Love is a talkative passion, and yet the divine lover is backward to talk of the very delight of his soul." (*Sacra privata* in *The Works of the Right Reverend Father in God, Thomas Wilson, D.D.* [Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1860], V, 194).

Chapter One

Martin & Katharina Luther

Martin Luther (1483–1546) played a vital role in the recovery of the biblical doctrine of salvation at the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation. As noted in the introduction, though, the Reformation also involved a rediscovery of Christian marriage. Just as Luther's experience of conversion proved to be paradigmatic for many in sixteenth-century Europe for the rediscovery of true Christian salvation, so his experience of wedlock became paradigmatic for the recovery of the biblical view of marriage.

At Easter 1523, Luther arranged for the escape of twelve Cistercian nuns in empty barrels from a nearby Roman Catholic nunnery. Luther found himself acting as a matchmaker

for most of these women over the course of the next two years, until all were married save one, Katharina von Bora (1499–1552). She apparently had her heart set on marrying Luther. When they eventually did marry, in June 1525, Luther had a strange trio of reasons for his entry into the state of matrimony: "to please his father, to spite the Pope and the Devil, and to seal his witness before his martyrdom"![1] Those were not the most romantic of reasons for marrying, but Martin and Katie came to have a fabulous marriage. One gets a glimpse of the joy they found in each other when he stated, "I give more credit to Katherine than to Christ, who has done so much more for me."[2]

In the two letters of Luther that follow, written in the year of his death, one sees Luther's keen sense of humor, but also his awareness of the responsibility of a married man or woman to pray for his or her spouse. Also evident is the responsibility to encourage one's spouse in the faith.

Martin Luther to Katharina Luther,
Halle, January 25, 1546

Martin Luther to my kind and dear Katie Luther,
a brewer and a judge at the pig market at Wittenberg[3]

Grace and Peace in the Lord! Dear Katie! Today at eight we drove away from Halle, yet did not get to Eisleben, but returned to Halle again by nine. For a huge female Anabaptist

met us with waves of water and great floating pieces of ice; she threatened to baptize us again, and has covered the [whole] countryside.[4] *But we are also unable to return because of the Mulde [River] at Bitterfeld, and are forced to stay captive here at Halle between the waters—not that we are thirsty to drink of them. Instead we take good beer from Torgau and good wine from the Rhine, with which we refresh and comfort ourselves in the meantime, hoping that the rage of the Saale [River] may wear itself out today. For since the ferryman and the people themselves were of little courage [to try to cross], we did not want to go into the water and tempt God. For the devil is angry at us, and he lives in the water. Foresight is better than hindsight, and there is no need for us to prepare a fool's delight for the pope and his hangers-on. I did not think that the Saale could create such a flood and rumble over the stones and everything in such a way.*

No more for now. You people pray for us, and be good. I am sure that, if you were here, you too would have advised us to proceed in this way; [so,] you see, at least once we are following your advice. With this I commend you to God. Amen. . . .

—Martin Luther. Doctor

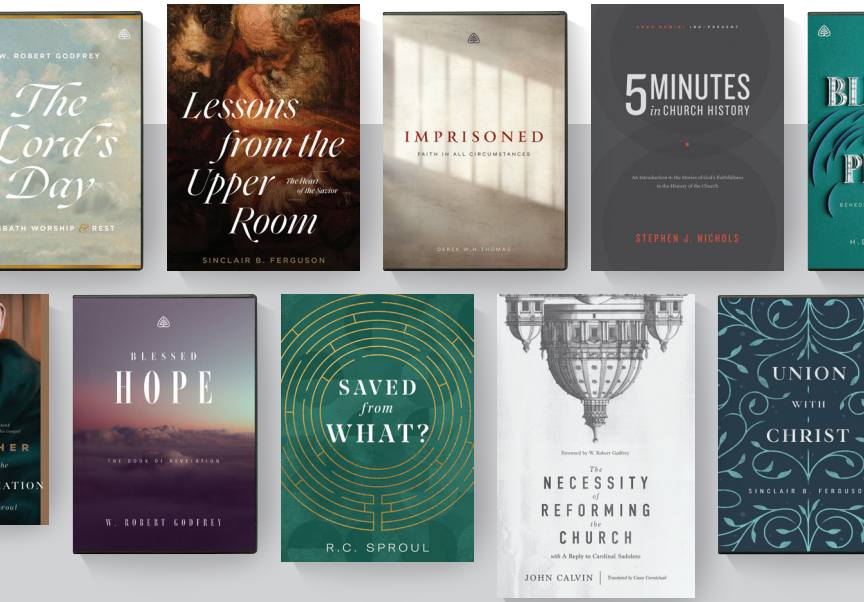
Martin Luther to Katharina Luther, [Eisleben,] February 10, 1546

Martin Luther to the holy lady, full of worries,
Mrs. Katharina, doctor, the lady of Zölsdorf, at Wittenberg,
my gracious, dear mistress of the house[5]

Grace and peace in Christ! Most holy Mrs. Doctor! I thank you very kindly for your great worry which robs you of sleep. Since the date that you [started to] worry about me, the fire in my quarters, right outside the room, tried to devour me; and yesterday, no doubt because of the strength of your worries, a stone almost fell on my head and nearly squashed me as in a mouse trap. For in our secret chamber[6] *mortar has been falling down for about two days; we called in some people who [merely] touched the stone with two fingers and it fell down. The stone was as big as a long pillow and as wide as a large hand; it intended to repay you for your holy worries, had the dear angels not protected [me]. [Now] I worry that if you do not stop worrying the earth will finally swallow us up and all the elements will chase us. Is this the way you learned the Catechism and the faith? Pray, and let God worry. You have certainly not been commanded to worry about me or yourself. "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you," as is written in Psalm 55[:22] and many more passages. . . .*

Your Holiness' willing servant,
Martin Luther

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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