

The Call to Fidelity

Fidelity has to do with living faithfully in a covenant relationship. It is loyalty, dependability and reliability when it comes to fulfilling covenant obligations. Fidelity is the most defining stance in regard to God and his people, typified in marriage between a husband and wife.

Fidelity is intentional and deliberate. Every year for our anniversary, my wife and I engage by priority in a marriage appraisal. We take stock of the past year and use it as a basis for growth goals in our marriage relationship.

In order to appreciate and embrace the call to fidelity, it is crucial to understand the interpersonal dynamics that express who we are as men and women – known as sexuality or the maleness and femaleness of our being.

These two belong at the center of God's ultimate purpose. When God described the glorious work of His Son Jesus Christ, as the sacrifice of a husband for his bride, he was telling us why he made us male and female.

He made us this way so that our maleness and femaleness would display more fully, the glory of His Son in relationship to His blood-bought bride, the church that we are.

This means that if any woman tried to reduce her womanhood to physical looks or features of biological functions, and then determine her role in life purely on the basis of such competencies, she not only misses the point of womanhood, she also diminishes the glory of Christ in her own life.

It means that if any man tried to reduce his masculinity to physical strength, mental capacity or abilities of biological functions and then determine his role in life purely on the basis of such competencies, he not only misses the point of manhood, he also undermines what really defines a godly man on whom the crown of Christ rests.

God designed marriage to make us holy; sexuality and spirituality are together

God's primary intent for your marriage is not to make you happy, but to make you holy. The coming together of two sinners as husband and wife is only the beginning; the holding up together of such imperfect people over the years is real transformation.

The pursuit of holiness in marriage leaves us not only happy, but fulfilled and joyful as God-glorifying saints.

This is because God fashioned our sexuality and spirituality as sides of the same coin. And our maleness and femaleness are designed by God to teach us about Him. We have sexual thoughts that lead us into sexual attitudes and actions and habituations. **Where do our sexual thoughts come from?** What do we do with them? **How far can we go in satisfying these overwhelming longings?** Can we engage in them without implications on our relationship with God who created us with such feelings?

In all ways, what we do with our sexual thoughts have spiritual implications at every turn. The truth is that behind every sexual longing, there's an even deeper spiritual longing. So, there is always much to learn about God through our understanding of human sexuality, and there is much to learn about our sexuality through a deeper exploration of God.

Looking at sexuality through a spiritual lens, and vice versa, is not a new concept. In the **Song of Solomon**, a man and woman's desires for healthy sexual intimacy are celebrated, as to teach us about God's own longing for us and our yearning for him.

In the book of Hosea, God uses the analogy of a husband's relentless pursuit of a sexually unfaithful bride to illustrate the depth of His own passion and commitment to His people Israel. God obviously knew that "sexual metaphors" would teach us about ourselves and about Him.

When we are expressing our sexuality in the way God our Designer intended, there is an enormous, undeniable connection between sexuality and spirituality.

The connection between sexuality and spirituality is the equivalent of the connection between body and spirit. The purest undertakings of life are associated with sexuality and they can render us pure and righteous or impure, filthy and defiled in body, mind and spirit. They can be the most glorious and the most scandalous in similar measures.

A call to fidelity is a call to oneness on the spiritual, psychological, and physical levels.

Spirit: On the deepest level, we are spiritual beings, created in God's image to have an eternal relationship with Him. Nothing short of this relationship will satisfy our God-given needs for unconditional love and acceptance, significance and identity, and competence and achievement. No spouse can ever deliver these. Our spiritual satisfaction is only in God.

If we look to our marriage partners to get such personal worth needs met, we will be exploiting the relationship to get something the other person can never deliver. But if we look to Christ and daily renew our minds with the truth that our needs are fully met in Him, we will liberate our partners from unrealistic demands and find fulfillment rather than frustration.

When we trust God's love for us and believe His promise that our deepest longings are satisfied in Him, we are then free to give to the other person without expecting or demanding anything in return.

Oneness takes place on the spiritual level when both partners look to the Lord to meet their needs and encourage each other to develop this sense of complete dependence. As the two people draw nearer to God, they also come closer to each other because both are finding meaning and fulfillment in the same source. That is the triangle of relationships in the marriage communion.

Soul: A spiritual oneness that develops between husband and wife is the basis for unity on the psychological level; married couples have been called to an interpersonal oneness of mind, of emotion, and will. While they cannot alter the reality of their individual security and significance in Christ, they can enhance one another's realization of this truth.

Body: Oneness on the level of spirit and soul provides the basis for physical oneness in marriage. The two bodies that physically come together house two persons who are already together in spirit and mind.

The sexual relationship was never intended to lead to a good marriage, but to be the product or a result of it. It does not cause love, but expresses and strengthens the love through oneness that is already there. Many confuse love with lust, and think that they are loving when they are lusting.

The connection between sexuality and spirituality is the equivalent of the connection between body and spirit. There is spiritual “energy” we are given as humans who are made in the image of God. Then there is our body as the “conduit” through which that energy flows.

Without the conduit (the body), there would be no way for us to experience that energy and let it flow from ourselves to another human being in the totality of spirituality. But without the God-anchored spiritual energy, our bodies by themselves cannot helpfully gather the human connection with God which we naturally crave for.

Many try to engage the conduits of their bodies without the flow of spiritual energy, and they end up in evil human outlets for their physical sexual desires—manipulative seduction, child molestation, sexual abuse, sexual addiction, prostitution and the like.

But a physical connection to someone with whom we also share a strong spiritual and emotional bond is pure love, romance, passion, intimacy, ecstasy . . . euphoria.

Our culture has cheapened and debased the idea of sexuality by minimizing this dimension of personal meaning and ignoring the boundaries originally set by God. Physical intimacy has become associated with coarse humor, promiscuity, obsession, perversion, exploitation, and abuse. It is an oppressive master to those who pursue physical pleasure in a spiritual disconnect from God who designed this for a purpose.

A great Christian writer of years past, C. S. Lewis in his Screwtape letters to his nephew said:

“Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are in a sense, on the Enemy's ground”.

What was Jesus's vision of marriage? When Jesus gave a glimpse of the magnificent view of marriage that God willed for his people, the disciples said to him, “**If such is the situation of a man with his wife, then it is better not to marry**” (Matt. 19:10).

In other words, Christ's vision of the meaning of marriage was so enormously different from that of the disciples, they could not even imagine it to be a good thing.

That such a vision could be good news was simply outside their categories, and the issue was centered around fidelity. He was telling them of the one flesh mystery between a husband and wife, and affirmed that what God has joined, no one should put apart, meaning that there is no room whatsoever, for infidelity.

If that was the case back then with the sober, Jewish world in which they lived, imagine how much more the magnificence of marriage in the mind of God seems unintelligible to the world we live in.

We live in the world where the main idol is self, and its main doctrine is a freedom without responsibility. Its flow is autonomy and its central act of worship entertainment. Its main shrine is the media, and its cravings are unrestrained acts of sex.

Such a culture will find the glory of marriage in the mind of Jesus virtually unintelligible. Jesus would very likely say to us today, the same thing he said in his day: **“Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it”** (Matt. 19:11–12).

Our own sin and selfishness and cultural bondage make it almost impossible to feel the wonder of God's covenant keeping between a man and a woman in the biblical vision of marriage.

The fact that we live in a society that can embrace, and even defend the rights of two male men or two female women entering such a relationship, and inconceivably call it marriage, shows that the collapse of our culture into debauchery and barbarism and anarchy is probably with us in our own generation.

The family is under attack and the church needs to be aroused to swing into action with God's mind on marriage to save families. All this should wake us up to consider a vision of marriage that is higher and deeper and stronger and more glorious than anything this culture ever imagined.

The greatness and glory of marriage is beyond our ability to think or feel without divine revelation and without the awakening work of the Holy Spirit. That is why we need the biblical Gospel not counterfeit stuff which is increasing infidelity and breaking homes.

The world cannot know what marriage is without learning it from God. The natural man does not have the capacities to see or receive or feel the wonder of what God has designed for marriage to be.

May God use this year of family beyond the Anglican Church whose them it is, to help set us free from the worldly, culturally contaminated, self-centered, Christ-ignoring, God-neglecting, romance-intoxicated, unbiblical views of marriage.

Fidelity demands a proper understanding that marriage is the doing of God to the glory of God. Jesus makes the point most clearly that marriage is the doing of God. Mark 10:6–9 says that, “**From the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female’.**”

Gen. 1:27 says that, ‘**..... a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’.** Gen. 2:24 tells us that **they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”**

These are the clearest statements in the Bible that marriage is not a merely human doing. The words “**God has joined together**” means it is God’s doing. Our response to the call to fidelity is founded on this, and the most foundational thing we can say about marriage is that it is God’s doing:

- because it was his model and design in creation;
- because he personally gave away the first bride in marriage;
- because he spoke the design of marriage into existence: to leave parents, to cleave to your wife, and to become one flesh;
- because this one-flesh union is established by God himself in each marriage.
- marriage is God’s doing because marital analogies teach us truths about God

A glimpse into the magnificence of marriage comes from seeing in God’s word that marriage is his doing. It is from him and through him, and to him.

Marriage is God’s doing because it was his design in the creation of man as male and female. This is clear in the flow of thought in Genesis 2:18–25. In verse 18, it is God, not man, who decrees that man’s solitude is not good: “**It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”**

It is God himself who sets out to complete one of the central designs of creation, namely, woman and man in marriage. God paraded the animals before him so that he might see that there is no creature that qualifies until God made her. The central and all important statement is that: **God himself will make a being perfectly suited for him** — a wife.

Marriage is the display of God. The reason it is the display of God is that in Christ, God has made a new covenant with his people. In it he promises to forgive and justify and glorify all who turn to him from sin and receive Christ as the Savior and Lord and supreme Treasure of their lives.

Marriage between a man and a woman was designed from the beginning to be a reflection and display of that covenant relationship.

In Eph. 5:31–32, Paul quotes Gen. 2:24 and then tells us the mystery that it has always contained: ‘**Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

In other words, the covenant involved in leaving mother and father and holding fast to a spouse and becoming one flesh is a portrayal of the covenant between Christ and his church. Marriage exists most ultimately to display the covenant-keeping love between Christ and his church.

Christ's leaving his Father and taking the church as his bride, at the cost of his life, and holding fast to her in a one-spirit union forever (1 Cor. 6:17). Marriage is designed to be a unique display of God's covenant grace because, unlike all other human relationships, the husband and wife are bound by covenant into the closest possible relationship for a lifetime.

Understanding marriage as a model of Christ and the church:

1) lifts marriage out of the disgusting sitcom images and gives it the magnificent meaning God meant it to have;

2) gives marriage a solid basis in grace, since Christ obtained and sustains his bride by grace alone; and

3) shows that the husband's headship and the wife's submission are crucial and woven into the very meaning of marriage as a display of Christ and the church; but that they are crucified because they are both defined by Christ's self-denying work on the cross so that their pride and slavishness are cancelled.

Husband and wife each die to self in order to live for each other. This covenant, sealed with solemn vows and sexual union, is designed to showcase the covenant-keeping grace of God.

The coming together of a man and woman to form one flesh in marriage is a mystery because its deepest meaning has been partially concealed, but is now being openly revealed, namely, that marriage is an image of Christ and the church. Verse 32: **"I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."**

So, marriage is like a metaphor or an image or a picture or parable that stands for something more than a man and a woman becoming one flesh. It stands for the relationship between Christ and the church.

The deepest meaning of marriage is purposed to be a living drama of how Christ and the church relate to each other. And fidelity can only be understood in these terms.

If you want to understand God's meaning for marriage, you have to grasp that we are dealing with a copy and an original, a metaphor and a reality, a parable and a truth.

And the original, the reality, the truth is God's marriage to his people, or Christ's marriage to the church, while the copy, the metaphor, the parable is a husband's marriage to his wife.

As God made man in His own image, so He made earthly marriage in the image of His own eternal marriage with His people.

Marriage is God's doing because God himself revealed the mystery of marriage

The words “**hold fast to his wife**” and the words “**they shall become one flesh**” point to something far deeper and more permanent than serial marriages and occasional adultery. What these words point to is marriage as a sacred covenant rooted in covenant commitments that stand against every storm of “**as long as we both shall live.**”

Christ thought of himself as the bridegroom coming for his bride, the true people of God (Matt. 9:15; 25:1; John 3:29). Paul knew his ministry was to gather the bride — the true people of God who would trust Christ — and betroth us to him. He says in 2 Cor. 11:2, “**I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.**”

Christ knew he would have to pay the dowry of his own blood for his redeemed bride. He called this relationship the new covenant — “**This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood**” (Luke 22:20). Christ obtained the church by his blood and formed a new covenant with her, in an unbreakable “marriage.” That is fidelity!

Once we see how marriage is patterned after Christ's covenant relationship to the church, the highest meaning and the most ultimate purpose of marriage is to put the covenant relationship of Christ and his church on display. That is why marriage exists. If you are married, that should be why you are married as husband who love like Christ and wives who submit yourselves to your husbands as the church does to Christ.

Marriage is a doing of God because God gave away the first bride. God personally took the dignity of being the first Father to give away the bride. In that way, God spoke the design of marriage into existence. This is implicit in Gen. 2:24, but Jesus makes it explicit in Mark 10:8–9.

He quotes Gen. 2:24 then adds a comment that explodes like thunder with the glory of marriage. “**‘The two shall become one flesh.’ So, they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not one put asunder.**” God performs the one-flesh union and these are God's words of the institution for marriage.

When a couple speaks their vows, and consummates their vows with sexual union, it is not man or woman or pastor or Ssenga who is the main actor. It is God who join a husband and a wife into a one-flesh union.

The world does not know this. Which is one of the reasons why marriage is treated so casually even in church, where today, marriage is not seen as the wonder that it is. Marriage is what God designed, it is what God performs, it is what God has joined together, it is God's doing because it is a one-flesh union that God himself performs.

Marriage is God's doing because marital analogies teach us truths about God

Your marriage is more than a sacred covenant with another person. It is a spiritual discipline and engagement which is designed to help you know God better, trust him more fully, and love him more deeply.

Marriage is the merciless revealer, the great white searchlight turned on the darkest places of human nature. If you think you can love, try marriage. If you think you are patient and kind and courageous, try marriage.

Marital analogies teach us truths about God. Isaiah uses marital imageries to stress how God rejoices in his people: “As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you” (Isa. 62:5).

At times, Jesus himself employed this marital imagery, referring to himself as the “bridegroom” (Matt. 9:15) and to the kingdom of heaven as a “wedding banquet” (Matt. 22:1–14). This picture is carried over into the culmination of earthly history, as the book of Revelation talks about “the wedding of the Lamb” in which “his bride has made herself ready” (Rev. 19:7).

The breakdown of fidelity is often depicted with marital analogies as well. Jeremiah compares idolatry with adultery: “I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries” (Jer. 3:8). Jesus picked up on this same imagery, referring to an “adulterous” generation in Mark 8:38. In context, Jesus is not attacking human sexual faults; he is agonizing over a spiritually unfaithful nation that is violating its divine marriage to God.

God gives us families as laboratories for loving, homes are schools of grace. A successful marriage refines out the selfishness and teaches sacrifice. Marriage shows us how to sacrifice for the best of another, how to keep the vows that we made, how to live in a covenant relationship—a relationship that is unbreakable. That is fidelity. And a covenant cannot be terminated; it can only be violated.

A significant dynamic should not be overlooked in this discussion on marital fidelity. The foundation of covenant-keeping love between a man and a woman is the unbroken covenant between them and God.

God governs them for their good as they enjoy him in that security and rely on him. Because of the Fall, only in Christ, marriage can once again make the originally intended meaning.

In marriage, we live vertically in Christ, then bend it outward to our spouse

A call to fidelity means that we discover what it means to build our lives on the vertical experience of what we have become in Christ and then bend it out horizontally to our spouse. That is how marriage is to display the covenant-making, covenant-keeping grace of God.

The reason I stress living vertically from the grace of God and then bending out horizontally toward your spouse is:

- 1) because there is going to be conflict based on sin and strangeness (and you won't be able even to agree with each other about what is simply strange about each other and what is sin); and

- 2) because the hard, rugged work of enduring and forgiving is what makes it possible for affections to flourish when they seem to have died; and
- 3) because God gets the glory when two very different and very imperfect people forge a life of faithfulness or fidelity in the furnace of affliction by relying on Christ.

Since Christ's new covenant with this church is created by and sustained by blood-bought grace, therefore, human marriages are meant to showcase that new-covenant grace. And the way they showcase it is by resting in the experience of God's grace and bending it out from a vertical experience into a horizontal experience with their spouse.

We love at all, because he first loved us. You can only bend out to your spouse what you have become in Christ; you cannot give out what you don't have. A dynamic relationship with Christ is a priority in finding meaning in marriage as God designed it.

Christ will never leave his wife. Staying married is not about staying in love. It is about covenant keeping, and that is fidelity. **“Till death do us part,”** or **“As long as we both shall live”** is a sacred covenant promise — the same kind Jesus made with his bride when he died for her. This is fidelity.

Therefore, what makes divorce and remarriage so horrific in God's eyes is not merely that it involves covenant breaking to the spouse, but that it involves misrepresenting Christ and his covenant. Christ will never leave his wife.

There may be times of painful distance and tragic backsliding on our part. But Christ keeps his covenant forever and marriage is a display of that! That is the most ultimate truth about the call to fidelity.

That is how marriage makes the invisible God visible in the world through the church. That is also why every broken marriage leaves the church weaker and obscures God.

Conclusion. Once you understand fidelity in these terms, what kind of relationship do you call your marriage? How are you two held together? Could you walk away from this relationship? Could you go from spouse to spouse? Could it be that your marriage relationship is simply rooted in cultural convenience? Where is the anchor?

Marriage is how a husband and a wife embody the new-covenant in the gospel of Jesus Christ and so create a new, safe and sacred place where it can be said again that: **The two were both naked and were not ashamed.**

Prayer. For now, would you pray with me that God will replace and powerfully deal with ungodly stances in the church and in our land, including the self-exalting, marriage-destroying, unbiblical commitments to cater to our emotional desires.

Let us pray that God replaces these with Christ-exalting, marriage-honoring, biblical commitments to keep our covenants in true fidelity.