

Dear fellow pilgrims,

Last week we had the privilege of delving into Lewis's profound chapter on Christian Marriage, which is full of robust (though countercultural) wisdom from the Scriptures about this important topic. He addresses a Scriptural theology of marriage and problems with our cultural understanding of Love. As we said in class, Lewis would not be a fan of the old hit song "You've Lost That Loving Feeling!"

Here is a summary of what we discussed:

**6. Christian Marriage** There are two reasons why I do not particularly want to deal with marriage. The first is that the Christian doctrines on this subject are extremely unpopular. The second is that I have never been married myself, and, therefore, can speak only at second hand. The Christian idea of marriage is based on Christ's words that a man and wife are to be regarded as a single organism—for that is what the words "one flesh" would be in modern English. And the Christians believe that when He said this He was not expressing a sentiment but stating a fact—just as one is stating a fact when one says that a lock and its key are one mechanism, or that a violin and a bow are one musical instrument. The inventor of the human machine was telling us that its two halves, the male and the female, were made to be combined together in pairs, not simply on the sexual level, but totally combined. The monstrosity of sexual intercourse outside marriage is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate one kind of union (the sexual) from all the other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union. The Christian attitude does not mean that there is anything wrong about sexual pleasure, any more than about the pleasure of eating. It means that you must not isolate that pleasure and try to get it by itself, any more than you ought to try to get the pleasures of taste without swallowing and digesting, by chewing things and spitting them out again.

**Marriage is for life** As a consequence, Christianity teaches that marriage is for life. [Churches]...are all agreed that [divorce] is more like having both your legs cut off than it is like dissolving a business partnership or even deserting a regiment. What they all disagree with is the modern view that it is a simple readjustment of partners, to be made whenever people feel they are no longer in love with one another, or when either of them falls in love with someone else.

**Justice and promise-keeping** Before we consider this modern view in its relation to chastity, we must not forget to consider it in relation to another virtue, namely justice. Justice...includes the keeping of promises. Now everyone who has been married in a church has made a public, solemn promise to stick to his (or her) partner till death.

**Chastity v. perjury** If people do not believe in permanent marriage, it is perhaps better that they should live together unmarried than that they should make vows they do not mean to keep. It is true that by living together without marriage they will be guilty (in Christian eyes) of fornication. But one fault is not mended by adding another: unchastity is not improved by adding perjury. The idea that "being in love" is the only reason for remaining married really leaves no room for marriage as a contract or promise at all.

**Feeling "in love" v. commitment** And, of course, the promise, made when I am in love and because I am in love, to be true to the beloved as long as I live, commits one to being true even if I cease to be in love. A promise must be about things that I can do, about actions: no one can promise to go

on feeling in a certain way. He might as well promise never to have a headache or always to feel hungry. But what, it may be asked, is the use of keeping two people together if they are no longer in love? There are several sound, social reasons; to provide a home for their children, to protect the woman (who has probably sacrificed or damaged her own career by getting married) from being dropped whenever the man is tired of her.

**Feelings are fleeting** But, as I said before, "the most dangerous thing you can do is to take any one impulse of our own nature and set it up as the thing you ought to follow at all costs." Being in love is a good thing, but it is not the best thing. There are many things below it, but there are also things above it. You cannot make it the basis of a whole life. It is a noble feeling, but it is still a feeling. Now no feeling can be relied on to last in its full intensity, or even to last at all. If the old fairytale ending "They lived happily ever after" is taken to mean "They felt for the next fifty years exactly as they felt the day before they were married," then it says what probably never was nor ever could be true, and would be highly undesirable if it were. Who could bear to live in that excitement for even five years? What would become of your work, your appetite, your sleep, your friendships?

**Feeling "in love" v. loving** But, of course, ceasing to be "in love" need not mean ceasing to love. Love in this second sense—love as distinct from "being in love" is not merely a feeling. It is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit; reinforced by (in Christian marriages) the grace which both parents ask, and receive, from God. They can have this love for each other even at those moments when they do not like each other; as you love yourself even when you do not like yourself. They can retain this love even when each would easily, if they allowed themselves, be "in love" with someone else. "Being in love" first moved them to promise fidelity: this quieter love enables them to keep the promise. It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run: being in love was the explosion that started it.

**The "perfect partner"** People get from books the idea that if you have married the right person you may expect to go on "being in love" for ever. As a result, when they find they are not, they think this proves they have made a mistake and are entitled to a change—not realising that, when they have changed, the glamour will presently go out of the new love just as it went out of the old one.

**Thrill-seeking** In marriage, as in every other, thrills come at the beginning and do not last... What is more (and I can hardly find words to tell you how important I think this), it is just the people who are ready to submit to the loss of the thrill and settle down to the sober interest, who are then most likely to meet new thrills in some quite different direction. The man who has learned to fly and becomes a good pilot will suddenly discover music; the man who has settled down to live in the beauty spot will discover gardening.

**Christian v. Civil Marriage** The Christian conception of marriage is one: the other is the quite different question—how far Christians...ought to try to force their views of marriage on the rest of the community by embodying them in the divorce laws. A great many people seem to think that if you are a Christian yourself you should try to make divorce difficult for every one. I do not think that. At least I know I should be very angry if the Mohammedans tried to prevent the rest of us from drinking wine. My own view is that the Churches should frankly recognise that the majority of the British people are not Christians and, therefore, cannot be expected to live Christian lives. There ought to be two distinct kinds of marriage: one governed by the State with rules enforced on all citizens, the other governed by the Church with rules enforced by her... The distinction ought to be quite sharp, so that a man knows which couples are married in a Christian sense and which are not.

**An unpopular doctrine** Christian wives promise to obey their husbands. In Christian marriage the

man is said to be the "head." Two questions obviously arise here, (1) Why should there be a head at all —why not equality? The need for some head follows from the idea that marriage is permanent. Of course, as long as the husband and wife are agreed, no question of a head need arise; and we may hope that this will be the normal state of affairs in a Christian marriage. . (2) If there must be a head, why the man? A woman is primarily fighting for her own children and husband against the rest of the world. Naturally, almost, in a sense, rightly, their claims override, for her, all other claims. She is the special trustee of their interests. The function of the husband is to see that this natural preference of hers is not given its head. He has the last word in order to protect other people from the intense family patriotism of the wife.

### IMPLICATIONS

Lewis shares much-needed counter-cultural wisdom from Scripture on Christian marriage in this short chapter:

--marriage is for life, justice and promise-keeping, feeling "in love" v. commitment, feeling "in love" v. loving, the myth of the perfect partner, Christian v. civil marriage, headship/complementarity

**Here is the link for class tomorrow, Wednesday, April 14, at 7:15 p.m. EDT--please feel free to share the link with any friends who may be interested:**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/99307536525>

I look forward to "seeing" you tomorrow in class on Zoom!

Further up and further in,  
Brian+

Music link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTpKuWJbe-k>

Video link to last week's class:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpKStk2XfjA>

Podcast link:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/mere-christianity-episode-20-book-3-chapter-6-christian/id1537579476?i=1000516285000>

Church website link:

<https://www.stphilipschurchsc.org/mere-christianity-/episode/2021-04-07/mere-christianity-episode-20-book-3-chapter-6-christian-marriage>

Additional resources for scuba divers:

<https://www.amazon.com/meaning-Marriage-Facing-Complexities-Commitment/dp/1594631875>

<https://www.amazon.com/Severe-Mercy-Sheldon-Vanauken/dp/0060688246>