

The Christian marriage

Preliminary remark

Today, marriage as an institution is in a deep crisis, which also extends far into Christian communities. In a situation in which it is now normal to have sexual intercourse without being married, and in which people expect sexuality and marriage in particular to fulfill their desires, there are now very many unfulfilled and unhappy people. How can we as Christians shape our marriages in this situation so that they are stable and sustainable for us and for others?

God created people as men and women and placed in them the longing for a spouse.

Eroticism and sexuality are good gifts from God.

They should delight us

They are supposed to make us have children.

They are intended to create a strong emotional bond between the spouses, binding them together in a strong, reliable community that enriches both of them and provides a stable framework for their children to grow up in.

Sex outside of marriage weakens this bond, and frequent sex with different partners before marriage destroys the ability of sexuality to create or maintain a bond.

Christian marriage is a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman, entered into before God and joined together and blessed by God.

In many cases, it is erotic and sexual attraction that urges us to get involved with another person. Christian marriage, however, is a covenant that a man and a woman enter into before God, which God then blesses and joins together. This covenant is then valid until one of the two spouses dies. It is valid even if the erotic feelings are not or no longer present. This covenant is also valid if I have the impression that my spouse no longer gives me the fulfillment I expect from him or her. This covenant also applies when sexual intercourse is no longer wanted or possible. In the close companionship of a marriage, you get to know the other person very thoroughly, including their weaknesses and wretchedness. And in marriage, the spouses develop and change, and new sides of them come to light. My wife once jokingly said: "I now have husband no. 38." Ultimately, the sentence "**Accept one another as Christ has accepted you!**" stands over Christian spouses. (Romans 15:7) And Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

On the choice of spouse

God gives us the freedom to choose our spouse. When we get married, we agree to marry a certain person, not just certain characteristics of this person.

There are certain qualities that fascinate us about others. Eros, a love that lives from the fascination of the other person, seeks to fill a hole in one's own soul with the other person. Such love is ultimately about myself.

Strong feelings at the beginning of a relationship can diminish or disappear over time. People change, even during their marriage. Suddenly, completely unexpected sides can emerge.

For a Christian marriage, it is therefore crucial not to rely solely on one's feelings when choosing a spouse, but to think as carefully as possible about whether I am prepared to live my whole life with this person, as he or she is, in a close relationship. If I want to be a Christian, my spouse should be a Christian. If I want to follow Jesus, my spouse should also want to follow Jesus. And if I have decided that I want to be open to every way that God offers me, I need a spouse who is also open to every way of God. It is very necessary to talk in great detail about what you want before marriage: Do we want children, if so, how many? How do we deal with finances? What do we want to achieve professionally? What annoys you, what are you particularly happy about? What do we want to achieve in the short and long term? What role should God play in our lives? What are we prepared to let go of if God asks us to? How far do we trust God?

God can change many things in a person's life, compensate for deficits. But God cannot change a lack of devotion to Jesus. If I really want to follow Jesus, but have a spouse who doesn't want to, I will be put together with a person who doesn't understand my innermost concerns in the course of my marriage. And so many things that are actually necessary now and that I would be ready for, I can't do because my spouse won't go along with it. This can be very, very bitter.

Normally, in our society, we assume that I will marry the ideal spouse for me; we ask: "What do I need?"

Another question would be: "Who needs me?"

Who is willing to marry a widow?

Who is prepared to marry a very sensitive woman?

Who is willing to marry a very intelligent woman?

Who is prepared to marry a physically disabled woman?

Who is prepared to marry a woman who has made herself completely available to God?

God knows us much better than we can ever know ourselves. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to ask God if He has someone in mind for me. My wife and I both had the impression that God had chosen our spouses for us. God gave us a very good path together. I found this path together so good that after my wife's death I decided to let God choose whether I should marry again, and if so, whom.

In the course of our marriage it turned out that Christine was a very sensitive woman. This meant that I had to be more careful with her because she didn't take things as

easily as other women. In her past this sensitivity was seen as a severe deficit in her life, but I found this high sensitivity to be a wonderful quality that made Christine extremely attractive to me.

For 44 years since the age of 16 I had lived very consciously without a wife and experienced that God helped me to do so. And it would have been a good and realistic option for me to remain single until my death. I married Christine because we both had the impression that this was now God's will. But neither then nor later did I have a erotic bond with Christine; I never saw her as a part of myself, and I never had the thought, that I couldn't live without her.

The priorities in marriage

- 1) God
- 2) my spouse
- 3) our children
- 4) my profession
- 5) part-time activities for the kingdom of God

If I consider my activities for the kingdom of God to be more important than my spouse and our children, I am not in Christ and am spiritually compromised. Such work is not a blessing from God, but a detriment to the kingdom of God. And how can I be a witness for God if I neglect the duties of my job?

We had clarified these priorities before our wedding. After our honeymoon we took time to listen to God together for a few days. During these days we realized that we were spiritually united, i.e. we always felt the same way about what God's will was. We found this inner unity very helpful. It made many things much easier for us. We never had to discuss it or try to convince the other what the will of God was. So we decided to keep this unity and decided to only do tasks if we were both convinced that they were in accordance with God's will. And we had the rule that we wanted to be reconciled with each other by the end of each day at the latest.

When Christine was diagnosed with cancer, we were immediately able to make the decision in unity that God could choose whether to heal Christine through a supernatural miracle (we both knew that this was no problem at all for God, and we had both prayed, alone and together, for God's supernatural healing of the sick) or whether God wanted to heal her through medical treatment, or whether she should go the way of death. When it turned out a short time later that the cancer had grown so large that it could no longer be operated on without chemotherapy and radiation, we immediately agreed that we would reject chemotherapy and radiation and consciously accepted that she would probably die within 6 months. For over 9 months we watched Christine get weaker and weaker and finally die. We never regretted our decisions and remain deeply convinced that God's ways really are the best.

Following Jesus

When we see the way of Jesus on earth, it becomes very clear that Jesus did not hold on to anything for Himself, but was prepared to let go of everything. This went so far that Jesus, the Son of God, through whom God had created the whole universe and who carries this whole universe through His powerful Word (Heb 1:2-3), said of Himself during His walk on earth as a man: "The Son can do nothing of Himself unless He sees the Father doing it." (Joh. 5, 19) During the time of His public ministry, He did not even know where He would spend the next night (Mt. 8, 20). And finally Jesus' path ended at the cross, where He had lost everything: His honor, all His possessions, all His rights, all His reputation, all His relationships, His health and finally even His life. And Jesus invited people to follow Him on precisely this path: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Mt 16:24) At that time, taking up the cross did not mean carrying a small piece of gold jewelry, but rather dragging the heavy crossbeam of a wooden cross to the place of execution in order to suffer the most painful and shameful death that the Roman Empire had to offer, nailed to the cross: To croak in agony for hours under the mockery of onlookers, harassed by flies that you cannot shoo away. The longer we both lived with Jesus and served God, the clearer it became to us that we could not follow Jesus on our own, but that we were completely dependent on God. In recent years, the words of Jesus became increasingly important to Christine and me: "When you have done all that you were told to do, say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we ought to do'" (Luke 17:10) This means that we will ultimately arrive in heaven empty-handed, because God had to do in and through us what we could not do on our own.

Following Jesus therefore means that we are prepared to let go of everything, because God has promised to give us everything we need along the way (Mt 6:33, 2 Pet 1:3). This is important in the little things of everyday life in our dealings with one another, where it is more important to listen to the other person than to assert ourselves in a discussion and be right at all costs. It is important when deciding whether we want to gather treasures for ourselves or whether we want to be available to God for everything He calls us to do. For both of us, this also meant the fundamental decision we made before we began our journey together, that God may take our spouse away at any time. In the course of our marriage, we have always held on to this, and there have been several situations in which each of us or both of us were in concrete danger of losing our lives. On the first such occasion in our marriage, it was only difficult for a few minutes and then the fear of death was gone. We experienced that we were carried through by God and lost many fears in our lives precisely because of this. A decisive help in this was that God had given us the hope that for a Christian who has accepted salvation through Jesus Christ, bodily death is only the door to a wonderful relationship in love, light, joy and peace with God our Father, with Jesus our Lord and Savior, with the Holy Spirit who already lives in us anyway, and with all the perfected righteous in heaven (Heb. 12:22-24). This fellowship remains eternal and will never end, and it is much better than anything we can have here on earth. For the Christian it is a great joy, and if you love your spouse, you wish him or her the best

and rejoice from the bottom of your heart when he/she gets it. You can be sure that God, who is omnipotent and sees everything clearly, will take the best possible care of the bereaved.

If marriage is to last a lifetime, our erotic feelings are not enough, we need the selfless love of God (agape).

We were very aware that our human ability to love was not enough. The foundation of our marriage was instead the love of God poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (Rom. 5:5), which we need only to let out. In order to be able to use it, it is only necessary that we decide to forgive everyone and not to consciously withhold love from anyone, and when we become aware of guilt, to turn to God immediately and ask forgiveness for this guilt. God's love is then always available to us in abundance. This love of God within us gives us the joy of loving, because loving as such is beautiful and good, regardless of whether we receive something in return from the one we love.

I never saw our marriage as competition. I rejoiced in the gifts my wife had and wanted to give her the space to grow and develop what God had put into her. I never wanted to force her into an image I had of her. I was very pleased that God gave her her own songs and was very supportive of her being able to buy her own keyboard, I was very supportive of her painting a large stained glass picture of the Risen Lord. She had a gift and calling for social work and development aid and I was fully behind this and felt it was a wonderful addition to my ministry.

My wife belonged to God more than she belonged to me. It was therefore necessary to treat her with appreciation, respect and consideration and, where necessary, to do without things that I could have demanded of her. God gave me some gifts. It was very clear that I had not been given my gifts to boast about them, but to serve with them. I was very aware that my wife was never my possession to do with as I pleased, but a gift entrusted to me by God for a specific time only, during which I was to love her and help her to become what God intended her to be.

The mutual appreciation and thinking for each other made our love for each other grow more and more over the years, so that our last year of marriage was the best.

Farewell

The psychiatrist I saw for psychotherapy for a while once said to me: "Mourning is remembering in order to say goodbye". Our whole life as a couple was characterized by farewells and especially the nine months in which we very consciously approached her death. On her last night, when she was in great difficulty breathing but very weak, I asked God to end her misery and consciously released her from my marriage. A few moments later her heart stopped beating. A short time later, I gave her back to God as a gift with great gratitude and became very happy. Since then, I have

never experienced the pain of loss, but only a deep gratitude for my wonderful wife, for whom I always had great respect, who was a true counterpart to me and with whom I was always able to live and serve together in spiritual unity for over 14 years, and for the path we were able to walk together.

My wife is now with God and she is doing well there. Our love for each other has remained, but it is no longer exclusive. I am looking forward to our reunion when I will also go home to my heavenly home. Perhaps there will be an opportunity for the two of us to sit down together over coffee and cake and look back on the journey we were allowed to take together on earth. When everything is open and nothing is hidden anymore, we will really realize how much God gave us back then and how wonderful His ways were with us during this time, and we will thank God from the bottom of our hearts.

© *Reiner Hennig* (henniglumsum@yahoo.com), October 3rd, 2025