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FLESH

THE DESIGN OF MARRIAGE

FLESH BY RICK JAMES- ARTICLE EXCERPT

AN UNBREAKABLE HABIT OF PURITY IN A PORNOGRAPHIC WORLD. Sexual immorality and pornography have become the defining issues and obstacles to spiritual growth and ministry on campus.

Flesh (for men) deals fearlessly with lust, sex and pornography in a clear, comprehensive manner and in a way that supports the Campus Ministry's spiritual Growth Model. Written in a straightforward, gracious and humorous style, Flesh does not stir up guilt but helps the reader to develop an unbreakable habit of purity.

Flesh is divided into three sections: small group discussion material, topical articles, and a month of daily devotionals.

Partial List of Topics Covered: Temptation, Confession, Community, Filling of the Spirit, Faith, Accountability, Pornography, Worship, Truth-Scripture, Habitual Sin, Homosexuality, Masturbation, and Sanctification-How We Grow.



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an ORIGINAL design



There is no original evil, for as Peter Kreeft writes: “Evil can’t be greater than good, because evil is a bent good, a diseased good, a parasite on good.” You cannot have destruction without something to destroy. You cannot have bulimia without the joy of eating to corrupt. You cannot have sexual immorality, perversion and pornography if the beauty and joy of sex and marriage had not come first. So, before we discuss lust, sexual immorality or pornography, we need to begin here, with God’s original design. We need to begin in the beauty of marriage and the goodness of sex, when God called things “good.”

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”
Genesis 1:26, 27

MARRIAGE AND SEX: A PICTURE OF THE TRINITY

What jumps out from this account is the clear multiplicity of the creation called man—that’s pretty weird. It’s in this multiplicity that we are in God’s image. In other words, man and woman together are in the image of God. The union of the two is a picture of many things; among them is the relationship of the Trinity: unity with diversity, one God—three persons.

Twentieth-century theologian Karl Barth put it this way: “Man never exists as such, but always as the human male or female... Nor can he wish to liberate himself from the relationship and be man without woman or woman apart from man.”

Think, then, of the profundity of sex within the context of marriage: two becoming one flesh (literally). There is nothing else on the planet that comes as close to manifesting an image of one God in three persons. It should now be quite clear

how miraculous the event of sex is, for that which it imitates. It should also clear why Satan would want to scrawl graffiti across it—more than any other work of God’s creation—defacing it in any and every way imaginable, making the image unintelligible.

Sex not only reflects the structural unity of God (two individuals becoming one flesh) but also mirrors the joy and complete satisfaction that this unity brings. This is going to sound weird, but the enjoyment—or fun, if you will—of sex is extremely glorifying to God, because it reflects the joy and satisfaction the Trinity experiences. On the other hand, lifeless, forced, unenjoyable sex—or a dissatisfying marriage—symbolizes something that is not true of God’s unity. Therefore, the design of sex is for enjoyment every bit as much as procreation.

A third purpose of the design of sex and marriage is procreation. True love and unity cannot help but bear fruit. In a fallen world this is not always realized, but it is an essential feature of the original design.

MARRIAGE AND SEX: A PICTURE OF GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS PEOPLE

Marriage is not only a reflection of God's relationship within himself, but his relationship with us. In their book *Authentic Human Sexuality*, Dr. Judith and Jack Balswick define four components of God's marriage design. When lived out, it becomes clear how these elements indeed reflect God's relationship with us. This is the blueprint for marriage.

COVENANTAL COMMITMENT

The marriage relationship, like God's relationship with us, was meant to be based on an unconditional covenant commitment. It is a commitment to pursue the other partner regardless of his or her response, for that is what God does with us. The only grounds for breaking covenant love is if the other person leaves and establishes a covenant with another person. Otherwise, each person in the relationship must be unconditionally pursued, much like God pursues us. This should explain why the only ground for divorce given by Jesus is marital unfaithfulness—or, when one partner breaks the covenant the only way possible, by establishing a new one with someone else.

GRACE

The second design principle follows from the first: Offering grace, rather than judgment or placing blame, is what provides healing and renewal within the marriage relationship. How many times does God forgive us when we ask? Always, his grace is bottomless, and that is the design for marriage. Marriage ceases to reflect God's relationship with us and, therefore, its intended design when one or both partners reach a threshold in their grace giving ("I can forgive this but not *this*"). They move from a disposition of grace to an adversarial, judgmental deposition. They look to blame, convict, find fault or pay back wrongs rather than

forgive. There is nothing quite like hell on earth than a graceless adversarial marriage, which is why many end in divorce.

EMPOWERMENT

The third principle of God's design for marriage is that personal gifts and resources are used to affirm the other rather than control. Covenant is the vow to love. Grace is the ability to forgive, and empowerment is the use of power to affirm and strengthen the other. God uses his power to empower us, not to control or manipulate, and this is what marriage is to mirror. Marriage is about living to help your partner succeed and doing all within your power to bring this about. I'm sure you've seen marriages where the ruling dynamic is each partner trying to get his or her own way, each vying for power. This is the relational dynamic of the mafia, not marriage.

KNOWING AND BEING KNOWN

Last, the Balswicks propose that marriage was designed to deepen one's experience of knowing and being known. This is the essence of our walk with God and therefore is the essence of the marriage relationship.

For some reason, if you go to Roy Rogers at 7:00 a.m. you'll find dozens of old people—really old people—having coffee. As you watch the couples, they seem to have an endless capacity to stare and not communicate with each other. Unfortunately, even with the aid of caffeine, their camaraderie doesn't increase, and if you speak with them, both answer at the same time, not listening to the other. This is bad advertisement for marriage, as well as for Roy Rogers (Come to Roy Rogers, where you're always alone). At some point, each couple's knowledge of each other stagnated. Each individual ceased the pursuit of knowing his or her partner. Such relationships no longer mirror the vitality of God with his people, which should grow in intimacy not boredom.

When you look at the blueprint of marriage, it's an amazing construct, isn't it? Because we've never seen a marriage that has not been flawed by sin, no one has ever seen the building as it was meant to be built. We've only seen glimpses. Because this design was meant to show forth the elements of God's love for us, Satan is always looking to deface the image of marriage and sex. When there is conditional love, divorce, selfishness, isolation, judgment and pettiness, we can no longer see our Father's reflection.

With that picture of God's original design for sex and marriage and the way it was meant to glorify God and speak of his beauty, love, intimacy, unity and grace, it should help explain why God has put very specific parameters around how sex and marriage are supposed to function. There is a blueprint to be followed, and if one deviates from it, he or she constructs something that does not mirror the image of God or, worse, creates an image that mocks him.

That is exactly what lust, sexual immorality and pornography do. As God's design for sex and marriage shout to the universe, "Look how great God is!" sexual immorality and pornography scream of self-centeredness, abusive and manipulative love, degradation and a God who does not adequately provide and whose ways are wholly unsatisfying.

This is what's at stake. This is what that battle of purity is really about: We will either be vehicles and vessels that bring praise and glory to God, or pawns used as insults for Satan to hurl against God.