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RELIGION AND SEX

by D.R. Knox

"The Protestant Faith"

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The American news magazine 'Time' in this weeks issue (Sept. 1, 1975) reports the result of an extensive survey of American women with regard to the satisfaction they have found in their married life. Almost 20,000 replied to the professionally prepared questionnaire on sexual attitudes and practices. Time states that the survey showed that "strongly religious" women report more sexual satisfaction and better communication with their husbands than do "fairly religious" women. At the bottom of the happiness scale are "non religious" women. They are the least satisfied. The publishers of the survey admit to "being astounded" at the relation between religion and successful love-making, and suggest that the reason is that enlightened clergymen have been teaching that sexual pleasure is a necessary element in a good marriage. This, of course is an absurd explanation, as though only the religions have been told this, or indeed as though merely being told that you ought to enjoy marriage enables you to do so.

The unbeliever and worldly person may be surprised at the survey's results. This is because he thinks that freedom to do what you like brings pleasure, and he regards the christian religion as restrictive and what he calls puritanical. But the opposite is the case. It is God who has created all the pleasures of life, and God has given these pleasures to us to enjoy. God's rules for life are not inimical to his own gifts. By keeping God's rules for life and particularly for sex we do not diminish our enjoyment of God's gifts but enhance the enjoyment of them. The puritans were happy people. The wowser, if you like to call him such, is a happy person. Deeply religious people are happy people. Not that they seek happiness for itself, as the worldling does (though he does not find it in its fulness). But they seek God, they seek the Lord Jesus Christ, and in finding God they find happiness, not only in their relationship with God, but are happy and at peace in themselves, and are happy in their friend-

ship with other people.

Sex is an area of life closely connected with true relationships. That is why the American survey results come as no surprise to the Christian. Religion purifies relationships. Sex is designed to express and deepen relationships. True relationships provide the truest pleasures and sex is intended to be the expression of true permanent relationship. That is why sex is to be reserved for the permanent life-long relationship of marriage. As the marriage relationship deepens, so sexual satisfaction deepens. The irreligious person, who thinks he knows better than God and who does not obey God's commands, but chooses his own way of life, uses sex for its pleasure. But this is shallow and short lived and is unsatisfying. As a consequence, the worldling, whether man or woman, excludes himself from the possibility of enjoying the depth of the pleasures of married life which God has created to be enjoyed. The survey confirms this. It should be no surprise. If you keep God's rules for life, you will not miss out on any good thing for God has created them to be enjoyed, and his rules will not contradict that enjoyment but will protect it and deepen it.

The same conclusion can be reached from another point of view. Our human life consists of relationships, and true relationships provide the truest pleasure in life. Selfishness is destructive of relationships, and complete self-centredness means the absence of relationships. But true religion helps overcome selfishness. The deeply religious person finds the centre of his life in God not in himself. Jesus is his Lord. He seeks to please him rather than to please himself. He seeks to follow the example of Jesus who was among us as one who served other people and not himself. Moreover, by giving his life to God and making Jesus the Lord of his life, the deeply religious person receives

God's own presence in his life. God's spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus himself, is present in his life, creating personal relationships and enabling the true christian to reflect the character of Jesus of serving other people without selfishness.

Kindness and thoughtfulness for others is the key to all relationships and especially to a happy marriage. Serving the interests of your spouse is the essential feature of marriage. Your sexual life is for your spouse and not for yourself (1 Cor. 7:4) and vice versa. In this way both spouses are satisfied though neither are seeking their own satisfaction but that of their friend. The worldling is wrong when he thinks sex is for self and for self expression. This is the way of diminishing returns. Life is not for self, but for God and other people. This principle which God has stamped on creation is never found to be truer than in marriage which reflects Christ's relationship to his people. So for a happy marriage, seek to please your spouse. You will find the strength to do this if you seek to please the Lord first.

We all ought to obey God's will completely putting our trust in the full wisdom of everything he commands. By being sorry for our past disobedience and making Jesus the Lord of our life for the future, we will not only enter on the deep pleasure of friendship and fellowship with our God and Saviour which lasts for eternity but will also enjoy increasingly rewarding relationships with one another as these grow deeper, truer and less selfish.

God is love, and obedience and trust in him is lovely.

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