

## The Redemption of Love: Rescuing Marriage and Sexuality from the Economics of a Fallen World

Carrie A. Miles. 2006. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press. ISBN: 1-58743-150-5, \$24.99 (pbk).

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Carrie A. Miles writes a biblical theology of marriage in *The Redemption of Love: Rescuing Marriage and Sexuality from the Economics of a Fallen World*. She uses a socioeconomic analysis of scripture to more clearly understand the causes and solutions to today's problems in sex, relationships, marriage, gender norms and family issues.

In the first part of the book (Chapters 1–4), Miles reviews the history of male-female relationship by laying out God's ideal plan, discussing the economic impact of the fall, and the impact of Christ's redemption on the relationship, from both Jesus' and Paul's perspectives in scripture. The second part of the book (Chapters 5–8) reviews modern problems and solutions in family structures, gender roles, and the role of children, including the impact of technological change, the idyllic male-female relationship according to scripture, the modern Christian family, and the role of politics.

There are several significant themes in this book, particularly the scriptural analysis of relationship and the economic analysis of family systems. Miles' scriptural insights are powerful foundational tools to answer the question—how then shall we live?

God's original plan for love and sex intended in his abundant creation is true oneness. God made man and woman in his own image and gave them both the same instructions, not roles specific to their gender (p. 20). He said it was not good for man to be alone, and so he created an *'ezer kenegdo*—a “helper fit” or a powerful equal “who alleviates isolation through identity” (p. 23). What God wanted for Adam was not a servant, or a pet, or another god. He wanted a companion suitable, a strong equal. And when Adam found Eve he exclaimed, “Here at last is someone like me!” (p. 26). His perfect match—woman—“not only was made of the same substance as man, she was made from *his* substance” (p. 26). “But humankind made male and female completed creation. And this God pronounced *very good* (Gen. 1:31)” (p. 26). The creation account begins with one human and ends with two. Adam is complete and no longer lonely. “For the difference God created in dividing *ha'adam* [Adam] into male and female, sexuality,

is not a divisive one but a difference that unites” (p. 28). Miles points out that sexuality in creation belongs to the relationship, not the individual, and it is intended for consumption, not production. Genesis 2 describes the humans as one flesh, naked and unashamed—God’s intent for human relationship when he made us male and female.

Soon after the idyllic scene in Genesis 2 comes Genesis 3—the temptation of the serpent, and the fall into sin—the sin of wanting to be like God, wanting control. Following the fall into temptation is the human curse of “sorrowful toil,” economic circumstances of the fall that move the humans from abundance to scarcity, force them to make trade-offs and toil to survive, and jeopardize their oneness. Their sexual relationship becomes one of production, and children become a necessity of survival. Miles points out that the development of patriarchal cultures is a byproduct of this sexual relationship of production and survival. Child production, a critical product of survival and a female specialty, keeps women tied to home and men concerned about protecting female chastity. It objectifies females and shapes men into aggressive competitors. Economic realities and a fallen world of thorns and harsh survival lead men to seek power over their environment, and to view women as property and a means of production to control.

Miles ends the first section of her book by outlining the impact of Christ’s coming on the male-female relationship, and this is the first principal strength of the book—Miles’ explanation of what Jesus and Paul had in mind in New Testament scriptures. Through Christ’s sacrificial love and example, the man and woman can have perfect redemption in their relationship—unity instead of separation; equality and oneness instead of hierarchy and the struggle for power over one another. Jesus frees women from the stranglehold of male ego and power, sees their value as more than breasts and wombs, and brings them into full personhood as children of God, fully worthy to be disciples. Equally, men are freed from the need to control and the pressure of sexual conquest, which enables them to enter the intended holiness of discipleship in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said, “whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me (Mark 8:34)” (p. 72). The original sin of seeking control and power is redeemed by the blood of Christ on the cross. Likewise, in Mark 10:45, Jesus says, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (p. 73). Jesus turns society’s concept of gender relationships based on control and power

upside-down as he takes up his cross, becomes a servant and dies for the ransom of our sins, and expects us to do the same.

Miles helps us understand the meaning of Paul's analogy of head and body to the relationship between husband and wife. Through the metaphor of head and body Paul reveals that the male and female in relationship together are perfected, completed, fulfilled (p. 97). Paul believes in the unity of the male-female relationship as he believes in the unity of the body of Christ. "Head and body united in one accord, together both the fullness and the one that fills, the divine peeks through, offering a glimpse into the mysterious union of all believers in Christ" (p. 110). The two—man and woman—by submitting to one another and caring for one another, serving each other and laying down their lives for each other, complete each other in perfect unity through Christ, a return to God's perfect creation, God's ideal revealed in one flesh.

The New Testament scripture, the meaning of Christ's coming, and even Paul's exhortations, Miles claims, are to mutuality, equality, oneness and unity for husband and wife as partners. Here is the place where Miles has a chance to launch the significant application of this book and use the foundational truth of scripture to answer the question—how then shall we live?

In the second half of the book, Miles turns to the issues of the modern world. She analyzes the economic impact of technological change on modern family structures, sexuality, gender roles, and the role of children. The age of wealth in the industrialized world turns the value of the marriage relationship and children into that of consumption rather than production, since the necessities of life—food, clothing, shelter, education—can be purchased more economically than produced at home (p. 114). However, she points out that this modern view of sexuality is nowhere close to a return to God's ideal. With the launch of *Playboy* in 1953, men—now free to consume instead of producing as sexual partners with their stay-at-home wives—are viewed as unhappily trapped by a female parasite. Miles explains modern women's liberation as a direct result of the massive social change wrought by the economic freedom that occurs when rational norms of the agriculturally based world change. "Feminism did not cause the breakdown of the family; rather, the breakdown of the historic functions of the family caused feminism" (p. 119).

Before returning to applications for today, Miles takes the reader through another beautiful picture of the ideal relationship between man and woman, found in the Song of Songs (Song of Solomon). This insight is the book's second principal strength.

Miles' articulation of the full meaning of sexual unity and the ideal relationship between a man and woman as described in the Song of Songs includes an evolving reality of love and commitment beyond faults. The relationship matures through the phases of sexual attractiveness (*eros*), steadfast attention and patience in getting to know the real person behind the flawed beloved (*building of trust*), and the long-term commitment of choosing to love despite and beyond the faults (*agape*). This perfect, sustainable and powerful love relationship transcends material wealth and creates sanctuary for those who love fully. "The Song of Songs describes redeemed marriage and the possibility of living as 'one flesh, naked and not ashamed' within the world of thorns" (pp. 139–140). In the Song of Songs, the profound moment of change in the relationship is brought about by true caring while living everyday life in informed acceptance of the loved one as he or she really is. "I arose to open to my beloved (Song of Songs)" (p. 152). "Compassion may be defined as this: no longer blind to our beloved's flaws, we open the door to him anyway. Love-blind infatuation becomes open-eyed, open-armed acceptance" (p. 155). "In the Song of Songs, man and woman are once again perfect equals, as they were in creation" (p. 159). "...when people are not wrapped up in material concerns, when they place their priority on love without fear, they have no reason or desire to hold power over each other" (p. 160). "Self-giving love, learned over time, chosen daily, provides all" (p. 164).

At this point Miles returns to application. What does this mean for us considering today's problem of sexuality, marriage, family systems, gender roles, children, and the church? She makes a wide sweeping attempt to cover numerous societal problems. I do not find a clear link between the foundations laid in the interpretation of the scriptures as expressed in the ideal relationship and her suggestions for living out that relationship in the real world. Instead I find the issues addressed with over-generalized social science data, worn-out rhetoric pointing to parental blame, and narrowly-drawn political lines along an oversimplified Christian right agenda of abortion and homosexuality. The exciting possibilities for implications from scriptural truth are missing.

Particularly problematic is Miles' advice on parenting which assumes that families have the economic independence to choose private schools and flexible work arrangements, and the economic luxury to stay home with children, and her implications that work is a choice motivated by materialism. Miles over-generalizes child development research to conclude that time away from parents is the critical factor leading to trust disorders, mental health problems, and criminal and self-destructive behavior. A

more correct interpretation would be that it is the quality of the care rather than the quantity that matters. Children need a sense of belonging, touch, and routines, which may or may not be provided by parents or non-parent care-givers. Miles gives a somewhat conflicting message when she says joint parenting is condoned by Biblical truth, but then applauds mothers staying home as the best practical solution. Parenting research shows that women who are most satisfied with their lives overall make better parents. While dumping children in daycare for long hours is harmful, so is overly sacrificial behavior of mothers who give up too much of their own personal identity and self-fulfillment to raise children.

Miles' Biblical foundations seem primed to recommend joint parenting and a balance between the needs of the parents (meaningful work) and the needs of the child (quality care). But instead she ends up recommending sacrificial motherhood (moms staying home) as the practical solution. A more helpful approach would be to exhort fathers to be more attentive to children and to reduce the guilt faced by mothers who seek meaningful work outside the home. Both parents should find the balance between being attentive to the needs of their children through quality care and their own needs to seek a contribution through meaningful work outside the home. The narrow conclusion that mothers should stay home also seems insensitive to the economic realities for most American families.

Also problematic is Miles' advice to shelter children from secular influences. Child development research suggests that developing trust requires a balance between safety and risk within the child's environment. A small degree of risk in the environment is important so that children learn to trust what is safe. As children grow up, instead of sheltering them from all worldly influences, it is better to help them learn to critically evaluate those influences.

There are other key economic concepts pertaining to today's issues surrounding family systems, motherhood, and gender roles that are missing from the applied chapters. For a book that purports to be a socioeconomic analysis, there is a disturbing silence about the current economic climate for the families addressed by Miles' scriptural ideals.

The final two applied chapters take the tone of personal advice, and I hear conflicting messages. She implies that the reason the Christian way is good is because it works. What about because it's right? Miles loses the most important potential contribution of the book—an opportunity to anchor Christian family life to the absolute truth of scripture.

I commend this book for stirring me up, and criticize it for leaving me hanging. While I find the first part of the book wonderfully helpful, at the end

I am left with more questions than answers. First, how should the Christian church deal with its own controversy over male-female hierarchy? Second, what is wrong with Christian feminism? Can it help us make an adjustment in the male-female power balance to achieve mutuality? Third, how do we really apply the absolute truth of scripture in our parenthood? Can both mothers and fathers reach a balance in time spent caring for children and God's call to be stewards of our talents through contributing to society by doing meaningful work? Fourth, how should our society deal with current economic pressures pertinent to family systems, like single parenthood, the absence of living wages, and the undervalued work of mothers who have no social security benefits for their years of raising children? Fifth, how can we understand a more complex and nuanced understanding of the scope of Christian ethics that goes beyond narrow political party lines that relegate Christian ethics to abortion and homosexuality? (Miles says Christians should not be moral police, but then concludes politics is futile based on the failure of the Moral Majority to successfully sustain long-term change in the rules against homosexuals in the military and abortion restrictions (pp. 204–205).) Sixth, how can we raise our children to become discerning, thinking individuals, rather than merely sheltering them from secular influences?

I would like to boldly instruct my children to “open the door to one another” (p. 152) and to live in mutuality and respect as strong equals, so that they “may faithfully live together in this life, so that in the life to come they may have life everlasting” (p. 16). Miles' scriptural foundations would provide great insights had she offered practical ways to jointly parent through structural policy changes such as professionalizing part-time work arrangements with health care and *quality* child care, social security benefits for motherhood, and practical ways for parents to balance care for children and work in light of the tough economic realities facing most American families as they try to make living wages in today's economy, perhaps with the church's help. I agree with Carrie Miles in that I believe this scripturally ideal way of living can change the world. Thanks to her, I am now thinking about these issues by anchoring them to scriptural truth. ■