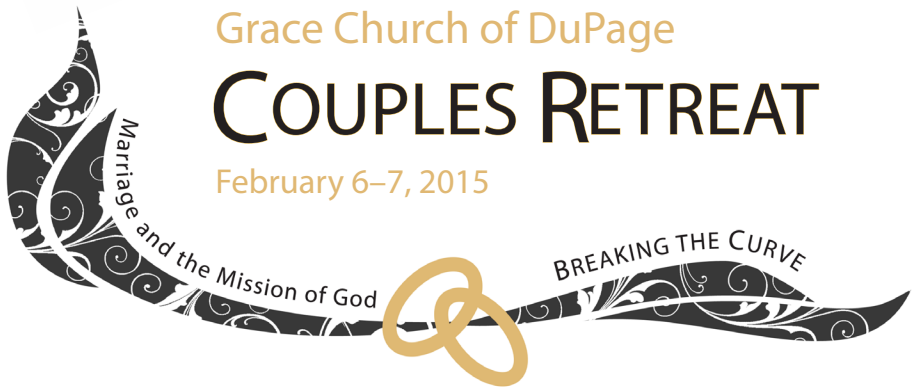




Grace Church of DuPage

# COUPLES RETREAT

February 6–7, 2015



## Session 2: The Curve of Sin

### 1. Recap and Introduction to Session 2

### 2. The Curve of Sin

#### 2.1. What Is It?

**Matt Jenson, *The Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther and Barth on homo incurvatus in se*: The metaphor of *humanity curved in on itself* provides “a relational construal of sin ... with an understanding of sin as a violation, perversion and refusal of those relationships. Eberhard Jüngel puts it succinctly, calling sin ‘the urge towards relationlessness and dissociation’. And the sinner? ‘The sinner is, to put it simply, a person without relations’ ... our sinning embodies a twisting of these relationships, a radical self-centeredness in which we assert an insidious gravitational force, seeking to pull all others into our orbit ... Sin is the self-contradiction in which we live for ourselves in self-enclosure rather than for God and others.”**

## 2.2. Three Primary Features

### 2.2.1. Self-Concern

**Matt Jenson, *The Gravity of Sin*: “The point is not the way in which one is centered on the self, but *that* one is centered on the self. Who has not been annoyed by mini-martyrs whose service and self-denial is a (sometimes only thinly) veiled appeal for love and significance? To be curved in on oneself is to make oneself the *telos* of one’s thoughts, words and actions.”**

### 2.2.2. Self-Enclosure



### 2.3. The Absence of Love, the Presence of Exploitation

**Matthew 22:35–40:** 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And He said to him, “‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

**Peter J. Leithart, *A Great Mystery*:** “If love is merely a feeling or desire, then the object of love is no more than a means for indulging that feeling or satisfying that desire. ‘I love you’ comes to mean ‘you meet my needs.’ ‘I love you’ comes to mean no more than ‘you scratch my itch.’ That kind of love ... is destined for tragedy, because it turns the person I love into a means for meeting my needs, a means for my own gratification. That is a lie about the person loved, and it is a perversion of the true nature of love. It is a form of self-idolatry, because it says that the person I love exists to satisfy me.”

## 2.4. The Madness of Curving In on Ourselves

Wendell Berry, "Men and Women in Search of Common Ground": "By ourselves we have no meaning and no dignity; by ourselves we are outside the human definition, outside our identity ... Some time ago I was with Wes Jackson, wandering among the experimental plots at his home and workplace, the Land Institute in Salina, Kansas. We stopped by one plot that had been planted in various densities of population. Wes pointed to a Maximilian sunflower growing alone, apart from the others, and said, "There is a plant that has "realized its full potential as an individual." And clearly it had: It had grown very tall; it had put out many long branches heavily laden with blossoms—and the branches had broken off, for they had grown too long and too heavy. The plant had indeed realized its full potential as an individual, but it had failed as a Maximilian sunflower. We could say that its full potential as an individual was this failure. It had failed because it had lived outside an important part of its definition, which consisted both of its individuality and its community. A part of its properly realizable potential lay in its community, not in itself."

Peter J. Leithart, *Against Christianity*: "The only 'individuals' in the Bible are idols and their worshipers, who have all the equipment for relating to others and the world but cannot make use of it (cf. Ps 115)."

## 2.5. Augustine's Image of a Person Standing Upright vs. One Bent Over

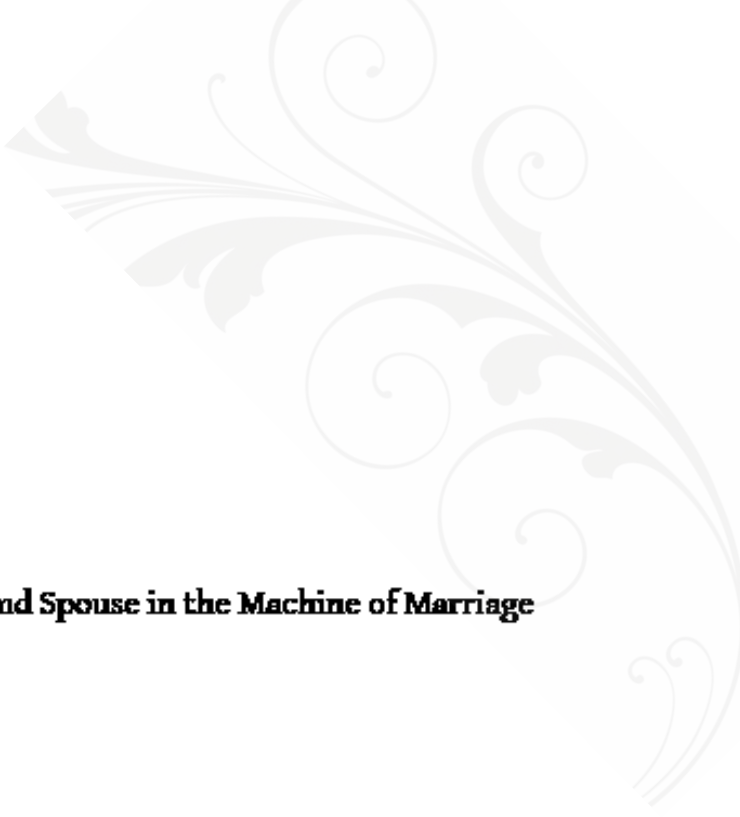
### 3. Marriage and the Curve of Sin

#### 3.1. Individuals within Marriages Who Are Curved In on Themselves

##### 3.1.1. Not an Unfamiliar Topic

##### 3.1.2. The Curve of Sin Using God and His "Way"

**Christine J. Gardner, *Making Chastity Sexy: The Rhetoric of Evangelical Abstinence Campaigns*:** "In popular culture, sex is used to sell everything from automobiles to cell phones to deodorant; apparently, sex is also now being used to sell pledges not to have sex ... American evangelicals are persuading teenagers to avoid sex by making abstinence 'sexy.' Evangelicals are using sex to 'sell' abstinence, shifting from a negative focus on 'just say no' to sex before marriage to a more positive focus on 'just say yes' to great sex within marriage. Sex—along with marriage—is presented as the reward for abstinence, which I suggest presents potential problems for the campaigns and evangelicalism as a whole. Overall, the evangelical abstinence campaigns do not address the challenges of singleness (What if I never get married? Where, then, is my reward for my abstinence?) or homosexuality (What if marriage is not an option?). They also present a limited and distorted view that marriage is all about self-fulfilling sex."



### **3.1.3. Using God and Spouse in the Machine of Marriage**

## **3.2. Marriages *Themselves* as Inwardly Curved**

### **3.2.1. Some Manifestations the Curve**

### **3.2.2. Some Common Characteristics in the Curve**

#### **3.2.2.1. Pride**

#### **3.2.2.2. A Distorted Notion of “Privacy”**

#### **3.2.2.3. Sloth**

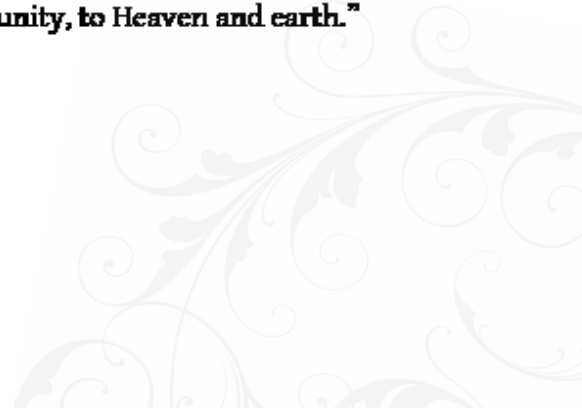
**Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*: “[Slothful man] wants to be left alone ... He regards the renewal of human nature declared in His [i.e., Christ’s] existence as quite unnecessary. He sees and feels, perhaps, the limitation and imperfection of his present nature, but they do not touch him so deeply that he is not finally satisfied with this nature and the way in which he fulfils it. A serious need, a hunger or thirst for its renewal, is quite foreign to him ... A life which moves and circles around itself, which is self-oriented and self-directed, seems to hold out far greater promise than one which is lived in this fellowship.”**



### **3.2.3. Contemporary Christian Discussion of Marriage**

### **3.2.4. Marriage, Community, Mission, and Identity**

**Wendell Berry, “Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community”:**  
“Lovers must not, like users, live for themselves alone. They must finally turn from their gaze at one another back toward the community. If they had only themselves to consider, lovers would not need to marry, but they must think of others and of other things. They say their vows to the community as much as to one another, and the community gathers around them to hear and to wish them well, on their behalf and on its own ... From their joining, other living souls come into being, and with them great responsibilities that are unending, fearful, and joyful. The marriage of two lovers joins them to one another, to forebears, to descendants, to the community, to Heaven and earth.”





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