**Consent or covenant** dkm April 2021

In September last year (2020) Helen Reddy, who gave the feminist movement the song, ‘I am woman’, died. Before her, in the year 1960, the Beatles came on the scene with their new type of music and ‘counter culture’. They turned their backs on Christianity, and some looked to eastern religions. The year 1960 also saw the oral contraceptive pill enter the market. And so the sexual revolution began. ‘Sexual liberation increased the acceptance of sex outside marriage’. No-fault divorce laws, passed in 1975, further eroded the sanctity of marriage. Soon marriage was widely abandoned; living together without any commitment became common.

A new generation has arisen that accepts sex before marriage, and sex outside of marriage, and easy divorce if they do get married at all. This second, and even third, generation is living with the consequences of this sexual liberation, even as they cling to Helen Reddy’s song. The introduction of ‘the pill’ was hailed as female liberation, and so the feminist movement was born, a movement that continues today, but with a very different cry. The cry for ‘consent’ was not heard back in the 70’s; there wasn’t the confusion about rape and consent that we see today. Who would have thought that women or girls would be alerting the world to their ‘consent’, or lack thereof, via an ‘app’ on their phone! This suggestion has been widely criticised, but have we heard of a better way out of this confusion?

History is a good teacher, the Bible an even better teacher. What was life like before the sexual revolution of the 60’s and 70’s? I suggest it was more simple and straightforward when it came to relationships between men and women. It was by no means a perfect society; the sin of adultery and of rape goes way back to biblical times (2Sam 11:4, 13:14). But marriage, the lifelong union between a man and a woman, was the norm, as intended by our Creator.

In marriage the man and the woman make public vows. Their promise to ‘love and to hold till death do us part’ is voiced for all to hear and written on a marriage certificate. There was no confusion as to who was married, or to whom they were married. The man and the woman were expected to share the same bed and be faithful to each other. ‘Marriage is honourable among all, the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge’ (Heb 13:4).

Within marriage there is no such thing as ‘consent’ because, ‘The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does’ (1Cor 7:4) - no wonder feminists hate the apostle Paul! But Paul goes on, ‘Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does’. Under God’s law, women are given much more respect than they are under man’s laws. The feminist movement was supposed bring equality and respect for women but look what we see today.

When biblical marriage is adhered to, relationships between men and women do not revolve around consent but around respect. A married man will talk to a married or an unmarried woman without lusting after her- he has his own wife. A married woman will talk to a married or unmarried man without flirting or seeking to seduce him- she has her own husband. The boundaries, as we say, are clear. Of course, neither will put themselves in a situation where they might be tempted, or where they lose self-control - drunkenness in itself is sinful.

If laws regarding the sanctity of marriage as a covenant made before God were restored, we would not be hearing calls for laws regarding consent. Teaching school girls about consent is an indication of the depths of depravity to which our society has sunk; ironically, they were being taught about ‘safe sex’ not long ago. They should be taught that sex belongs in marriage, not before and not outside of marriage. They should be free to study without being pressured into a sexual relationship. Trying to teach them about consent is to admit failure on the part of parents and teachers and our law makers.