

The Christian and Marriage

Paul L. Canner

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THE CHRISTIAN AND MARRIAGE

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Introduction

While skimming the local newspaper one day my eye caught the statement that couples “are getting divorced in unprecedented numbers and ... the American family is in crisis because the American marriage is in crisis.” Figures from the National Center for Health Statistics tell us that in 1900 there were 8 divorces for every 100 marriages; in 1920, 13 per 100; in 1940, 17 per 100; in 1960, 26 per 100; in 1980, 49 per 100; and 2000, back down somewhat to 41 divorces for every 100 marriages. The recent reduction, far from being encouraging, likely reflects a trend for young couples to live together without marrying.

Statements and statistics like these are read and heard so frequently these days that they no longer shock or surprise us. However, the trends and attitudes depicted by such statistics are very distressing to most Christian believers and to many non-Christians as well. The author of the first statement quoted above went on to offer a possible solution to this problem. The solution was commendable to a certain extent, emphasizing the importance of marriage partners developing a close friendship. However, as with most advice offered in today’s secular news media, it fell short of any real and lasting solution in that it completely ignored the spiritual elements of the marriage relationship and the wisdom that God has to offer on the subject in His holy Word.

Unfortunately, as the world at large adopts more lax, careless, unscriptural attitudes and standards concerning marriage and divorce, it is inevitable that the changing standards will be—indeed, are already—creeping stealthily and steadily into the Christian community as well. Things that shocked us 20 years ago are accepted almost without question today in many Christian

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circles. There are strong Satanic and humanistic movements at work today that are in effect aimed at breaking down marriage and family relationships. Thus, it is with a sense of urgency and deep concern for my brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as for our country as a whole, that I have been burdened to write this book.

Chapter 1

Developing Friendships That Could Lead to Marriage

Adam and Eve had it easy, didn't they? They didn't have to try to figure out whom they were supposed to marry; they were literally *made* for each other—by God. Christian young people today who want to find the right marriage partner—the one God has prepared for them—may find it more difficult than did the first bride and groom.

Examples in Scripture of Premarital Interactions

Let us look at some examples in the Bible of “boy-meets-girl” situations and man-woman interactions before marriage; then we shall try to draw some lessons and principles from these examples for Christian young people today.

1. Isaac was content to let Abraham's servant, through God's guiding hand, find a bride for him (Genesis 24).

2. Jacob helped his cousin (and future wife) Rachel water her sheep (Genesis 29:10,11).

3. Dinah “went out to see the daughters of the land” and was raped (Genesis 34:1,2).

4. Moses protected the seven daughters of Reuel as they watered their sheep; as a reward, he was given one of the daughters, Zipporah, to be his wife (Exodus 2:17-21).

5. Samson's relationship with Timnath was a selfish one—based on her pleasing him (Judges 14:1-10).

6. Samson supposedly “loved” Delilah but didn't have an open, honest relationship with her, and his infatuation for her destroyed him (Judges 16:4-21).

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7. Ruth was a Moabite whose Israelite husband died. Boaz learned of Ruth's loyalty to Naomi—her mother-in-law and Boaz's cousin-in-law—so he encouraged Ruth to glean in his field and provided protection for her. Ruth had a reputation as a virtuous woman and this attracted her to Boaz (Ruth 2,3).

8. David committed adultery with Bathsheba while she was married to Uriah, and then had Uriah killed so he could marry Bathsheba and cover up her pregnancy. The consequences of these sinful actions haunted David the rest of his life (2 Samuel 11-18).

9. Joseph felt disgraced and nearly broke his engagement when he discovered that Mary, his bride, was pregnant (Matthew 1:19; Luke 1:27-35).

Dating and Courtship Today

The following questions often are asked about dating: How old should a girl be before going out alone with a boy? How late should a couple be allowed to stay out? Should kissing be permitted on the first date? any date? Is it okay for a Christian to date a non-Christian? We won't try to answer all of these questions because there are other, more basic, questions that need to be asked about dating: Is dating scriptural at all? What purpose does dating serve in discovering *God's* choice for my marriage partner? Does dating tend to turn one's attention away from (1) seeking *God's* will concerning a lifetime partner, and (2) devoting oneself to growing in the Word of God and in likeness to Christ so as to be the best possible marriage partner for the one of *God's* choice?

Let us see what we can learn about dating from the scriptural examples given earlier and from scriptural principles.

1. Scripture forbids marriage between a believer in Christ and an unbeliever because it is an unequal yoke (2 Corinthians 6:14). The believer and unbeliever have totally different goals and objectives in life which their love for each other will never

be able to overcome. Therefore, a believer should never enter into a relationship that could lead to marriage with an unbeliever. If an unbeliever asks you for a date, make a counter invitation to gospel meeting, Bible study, or a discussion of the Scriptures at your home with you and your parents.

2. Scripture also instructs us to marry “*only* in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39). This means that a woman who loves the Lord and is seeking with all her heart to know and do God’s will in every area of her life should not enter into a serious relationship with a man who *claims* to be a born-again Christian but shows no interest in engaging in Christ-centered discussions or activities.

3. Going out and looking for a fellow or girl or a fun time or a romantic evening often leads to disaster (Dinah was raped; Samson’s marriage with Timnath was very short-lived; Samson’s friendship with Delilah led to the loss of his strength; David’s voyeurism led to his committing adultery and murder; Bathsheba was inviting trouble when she bathed in view of nearby residents).

4. Several women in the Bible were discovered by men—eventually leading to marriage—while they (the women) were engaged in their daily household responsibilities or helping their parents. These include Rebekah, Rachel, and Zipporah when they came to the public well to draw water, and Ruth when she was gleaning in Boaz’s field to provide food for herself and her mother-in-law. Abigail impressed David at their first meeting because of her industriousness (she prepared a huge meal for David and his men) and because of her fearless, faithful, but gentle rebuke to David which kept him from shedding innocent blood (1 Samuel 25:24-42).

5. The wife of Proverbs 31 was attractive to her husband because he could safely trust her (verse 11), she consistently did good things for him (verse 12), she worked diligently each day to provide the family with food and clothing (verses 13-22), her labors resulted in enough additional clothing to sell (verse 24), she

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was not selfish but helped the poor and needy as well as her own household (verse 20), she habitually spoke words of wisdom and kindness (verse 26), and she feared the Lord (verse 30). She did not require physical beauty to be attractive and highly respected (verse 30).

6. While many young men (actually, older men as well) today expect to receive sexual favors from the girls they take out on a date, sex before marriage is forbidden by God (Proverbs 5:1-14; 6:20-35; Matthew 15:19; Acts 15:20; 1 Corinthians 6:18; Ephesians 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:3) and can lead to disastrous consequences. Therefore, avoid any and every situation that might give room to temptation. Don't trust your ability to triumph over temptation. Peter confidently claimed, "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison and to death" (Luke 22:33). Pray, "Lead us not into temptation" (Matthew 6:13), and then cooperate with God by not giving temptation any opportunity to assert itself. Instead of going out on "dates," just the two of you alone, try taking walks in public places. Or plan activities at home where you can be doing things together (like baking cookies, washing the car, making a puzzle, playing a game, or studying the Bible together), are free to talk together, can interact with other family members (perhaps your future in-laws), and thus not be far away from other people who can serve as a buffer zone against temptation.

7. Scripture places a high value on being a "one-woman man" and a "one-man-woman" (1 Timothy 3:2; 5:9). This doesn't forbid breaking an engagement if it becomes clear that it is not God's will for the two to marry. But it does suggest that it is not God's purpose for His children to be flitting from one date to another or one relationship to another.

8. Follow the example of Abraham and his servant who counted upon "the LORD God of heaven" to provide just the right wife for Isaac. Pray much and experience the blessed result, "I being in the way, the LORD led me" (Genesis 24:27). Girls, don't

try to attract a potential husband by your beauty (or attempts to be beautiful or sexy); fellows, don't try to attract a potential wife by your handsome looks, muscular build, or athletic ability. If you marry someone who is only attracted by your youthful good looks, what is your mate going to do when your beauty fades, the wrinkles appear, the muscles lose their tone, and the fat begins to build around the middle?

9. Take advantage of school lunch hours, athletic events, Bible conferences, Christian youth groups, retreats, and other large group events to get to know and be known by different young people. Be diligent in your school studies; be diligent in carrying out your household duties and responsibilities (remember the three R's—Rebekah, Rachel and Ruth); be conscientious, honest, dependable, and responsible in your employment (Romans 12:11); be respectful to your parents (Ephesians 6:2); dress modestly (fellows too!) so that those of the opposite sex will not be overly attracted to your body (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3,4); exhibit the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23); be faithful in speaking of your Lord and Saviour (2 Timothy 4:5) in your conversations with other young people. You may not attract Handsome Hunks and Homecoming Queens this way, but you might attract the attention of a serious-minded, dedicated Christian who is God's choice of a life-partner for you.

10. Introduce your friends to your parents and give them an opportunity to get to know your friends. Ask for your parents' approval and advice before pursuing any relationship with one of the opposite sex (Proverbs 6:20-24; 13:1; 30:17).

Chapter 2

Choosing a Marriage Partner

No doubt the most important element that goes into making a lasting and happy marriage is the proper choice of a marriage partner. I am convinced that God is intensely interested in this matter for each of His children. Not only has God laid down general principles in His Word to guide us in our choice of a partner, but He is also willing to lead us—if we so allow Him—to the specific person whom He, in His infinite wisdom, knows to be the one best suited to be a lifetime partner for us. The selection of a bride for Isaac (Genesis 24) is an example of this.

How, then, can we discern the Lord's mind concerning a marriage partner? First, the Scriptures provide some general guidelines as to where to begin looking and how to “narrow the field.”

General Guidelines

As stated in Chapter 1, it is very clear from Scripture that a Christian should never under any circumstances marry an unbeliever. How “can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). “Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion has light with darkness? and what concord has Christ with Belial? or what part has he who believes with an infidel” (2 Corinthians 6:14,15). The nation of Israel was warned repeatedly not to enter into marriages with the men and women of the nations around them, the reason being that “they will turn away your son from following Me, that they may serve other gods” (Deuteronomy 7:1-4). These warnings are, in principle, no less needed by God's children today.

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Related to this is the injunction in 1 Corinthians 7 that marriage should be only “in the Lord.” This certainly includes the notion that a true, born-again Christian should marry only another true, born-again Christian.* But there is a further thought found in the expression, “in the Lord.” We are to look for a marriage partner who is not only saved but openly desirous of living for Christ, having Him as the Lord of his/her life, doing the will of the Father, and filled with the Holy Spirit.

These general guidelines might be carried yet another step as we consider that Isaac’s wife was to be selected from his father’s relatives (Genesis 24:3,4) and the daughters of Zelophehad were commanded to marry only men who belonged to their own tribe of Manasseh (Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1-13). As stated by another: “We have already seen that it is *never* right for a believer to marry an unbeliever, for that is a very serious infraction of the injunction against the unequal yoke. But what shall we say of a child of God marrying another child of God when they are not of the same mind in the things of the Lord? when one is associated with a group of Christians opposed to the position of the company with whom the other is identified? Such a marriage could not correctly be called an unequal yoke in the sense of one being a child of light and the other being a child of darkness, for they are both saved by the precious blood of Christ.... Yet it would very likely be a most unhappy union, fraught with danger to both partners and to their posterity” (Paul Wilson in *The Institution of Marriage*, Bible Truth Publishers).

* A true, born-again Christian is one who acknowledges before God that he/she is a sinner (Romans 3:23) who deserves eternal separation from a holy God in the lake of fire (Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:10-15), and who trusts, not in his/her own works and merits, but in the Lord Jesus Christ alone as the One who suffered and died for those sins and who rose again (1 Corinthians 15:3,5; John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8,9).

Marriage is difficult enough—that is, requiring the joining together of two different personalities, points of view, family backgrounds, educational backgrounds, and sets of personal interests and abilities, and learning to live in harmony for the next 50 years or so—without having these difficulties compounded by husband and wife having differing ecclesiastical affiliations. As we shall notice in more detail in subsequent chapters, the backbone of a healthy, happy marriage is a strong spiritual relationship; this spiritual relationship is substantially weakened when the husband and wife are not of one mind as to the assembling together with other Christians.

Further problems arise when there are children in the family: often the husband will want the children to go with him and the wife will want them to go with her to the meetings of the assembly, possibly leading to marital conflicts as well as confusion in the children's minds. Seeking to resolve these conflicts by compromise leads to no happy and lasting solution. This compromise may entail one spouse giving up his/her ecclesiastical affiliation and joining with the other as a matter of convenience and of making peace rather than conviction of heart that he/she is acting scripturally and according to the Lord's mind in changing the ecclesiastical association. This may often lead to a bad conscience before God and consequently to defeat in one's spiritual life. It is better to avoid this conflict in the first place by not entering into marriage under such circumstances. Needless to say, these problems are equally, if not more, acute when a Christian marries a non-Christian.

Discernment of the Lord's Specific Choice

In the preceding section, some general guidelines from Scripture were considered as to choosing a marriage partner. The Christian should be looking for a partner who is also a true, born-again Christian, who loves the Lord and desires to live for Him, and who has the same ecclesiastical affiliation. In this section we

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consider the matter of discerning the Lord's mind as to a specific marriage partner.

As we have noticed previously, Abraham instructed his servant not to take a wife for Isaac from among the daughters of the Canaanites but from his own relatives (Genesis 24). These are the general guidelines. But when the servant arrived at the city of Nahor his concern for the specific became evident. As he stood near the public well he prayed to God that the woman whom God had appointed for Isaac might come to the well that evening, and that by certain signs he might recognize her when she came. God answered his prayer; he met Rebekah who turned out to be the grand-niece of Abraham. As a result, the servant bowed and worshiped the LORD saying, "Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who has not left destitute my master of His mercy and truth; I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren" (verse 27).

What a beautiful example for us today! As Christian young people begin having attractions to members of the opposite sex, and as they begin developing friendships and having thoughts of getting married some day, they should be praying that the Lord will lead them to the one of His choice for a marriage partner. The parents of these young people should be praying too and encouraging their children thus to pray.

We cannot say what means God may use with each particular person to reveal His mind as to a marriage partner. It is most important to maintain an open mind about the matter until the Lord's mind is clearly manifest. It will not do to make up our mind first and then challenge the Lord to prevent us if we are not in His will. Sometimes He may graciously do this, but we cannot count on it; God sometimes, in His wisdom, lets us go our own way if we are definitely bent on it.

If we are truly seeking the Lord's mind in the matter of marriage, we may find Him closing and opening doors—

sometimes in quite unexpected ways—in the process of directing us to the partner of His choice. Sometimes He will use our own actions and behavior in this. For example, not a few times has a relationship between a young man and a young woman terminated either because one or the other was too forward and wanted to develop a closer relationship too quickly, or because one did not take enough initiative or interest in developing or maintaining a friendship with another. Following the break-up, the person who may have been “to blame” for the separation may tend to engage in self-incrimination for having been too aggressive, or not aggressive enough, or whatever the reason may have been. But while there may be important lessons for us to learn from our social mistakes, let us also recognize that the Lord may well be working through these very mistakes to redirect us to the one who is *His* choice for us.

Just as the Lord may close doors in some instances, so does He cause new ones to open. For those readers whose concern is that they do not seem to have any marriage prospects—at least among persons who meet the general guidelines considered previously—it should be an encouragement to realize that the Lord opens doors and is well able to lead you to the right person or the right person to you. However, do not think that He will necessarily hand a wife or a husband to you on a silver platter while you remain in the confines of your living room. (Recall the effort spent by Abraham’s servant in finding the wife for Isaac.) He expects you to get out and be friendly to those of your age group as well as everyone else in your local assembly. And if there are not many prospects in the local assembly of believers, you should try to get to regional or national Bible conferences and seek to make acquaintances among the Christians gathered there. This, of course, will not guarantee that you will find a wife or husband; the Lord may have other plans for you (as will be discussed shortly), or He may have

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certain things for you to learn before bringing you and your life's partner together.

The Option of Remaining Unmarried

Thus far we have been exploring the question of determining God's will as to the choice of a marriage partner. But we have not yet considered the even more basic question, "Is it God's will that I should become married at all?" Remaining single, for the Christian, is a definite option set forth in Scripture. The apostle Paul states, "I would that all men were even as I myself [that is, unmarried] ... I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I" (1 Corinthians 7:7,8). For some types of service for the Lord there is a distinct advantage to being married, while other aspects of Christian service might more easily and faithfully be carried out if one is not married. The apostle Paul, of course, is a special example of the latter; how could he have accomplished what he did if he had family responsibilities? Those "gifted" to remain unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:7) are free, the apostle Paul tells us, to serve "the Lord without distraction" (1 Corinthians 7:35). Thus, married Christians should not make unmarried Christians feel that there is a social stigma to being single, nor should they feel it is a necessity to engage in matchmaking for their unmarried friends.

There is an appeal in 1 Corinthians 7 not only to those who have never married, but to those who are widowed and divorced as well. We shall consider in Chapters 14-16 what Scripture has to say about divorce and remarriage, but suffice it to say here that even in situations where remarriage may be allowed by Scripture, the option of remaining unmarried should be carefully weighed before the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:8,27,32-34,38-40). The one who has lost husband or wife should carefully and prayerfully seek to learn what the Lord is trying to teach through the bereavement and to determine if the Lord has a special service to be carried out

while in the unmarried state. The widows eligible for support by the assembly of believers were those who had only one husband; they never remarried but rather gave themselves to prayer and supplication, and to good works such as raising children, lodging strangers, washing the saints' feet, and relieving the afflicted (1 Timothy 5:3-10). The bishops (or overseers) and the deacons of the local assemblies likewise were to be "the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2,12). Grammatically, this expression is exactly comparable to the phrase in 1 Timothy 5:9—"the wife of one man"; thus it would seem to be saying that to be qualified to fill one of these offices a man should remain unmarried if widowed. Such a one puts the Lord and the needs of the assembly above all else, and perhaps finds in widowhood greater freedom to serve the Lord and help his fellow believers (1 Corinthians 7:32,33). On the other hand, the apostle makes it clear that it is no sin or shame for the widowed person to remarry (1 Corinthians 7:9,28,36,39).

In summary, the Lord is very much concerned about the questions of *whether* we should marry and, if so, *whom* we should marry. May all who are considering the matter of marriage seek diligently and earnestly to know the Lord's will as to these questions.

Chapter 3

Preparation for Marriage

There is much talk today about “compatibility” in connection with the marriage relationship. A large percentage of marriages today end in divorce due to so-called “incompatibility.” And so, as the relationship between a young man and a young woman passes from the stage of casual friendship to that of steady friendship and then to the contemplation and discussion of possible marriage, the question of mutual compatibility for marriage usually comes to the fore.

Development of Spiritual Compatibility

An idea prevalent in this country today is that persons contemplating marriage should go to bed together, or even share a room or apartment together, in order to find out whether they are physically compatible. The big problem with this notion—and divorce statistics bear this out—is that the demonstration of so-called physical compatibility prior to marriage does not give any assurance that enjoyment of the physical relationship will continue much beyond the honeymoon period. A good and healthy and lasting marriage is one based not on *physical* but on *spiritual* compatibility. The enjoyment of the physical relationship throughout a couple’s marriage will depend in large measure on the strength of their spiritual relationship.

What does this say, then, to those who are contemplating marriage, whether in the pre-engagement period of their relationship or else the time when they are formally engaged to be married? Surely it helps to define the proper range of activities that should occupy such persons. During the earlier periods of the couple’s relationship—the casual and steady friendship periods—

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they no doubt have found out each other's basic interests, likes and dislikes, attitudes about God and Christ and the Church, and whether the other is truly saved. If both are saved, they also have begun to discover what place the Lord has in each other's lives. As the mutual relationship becomes more serious, the need to ascertain the depth of each other's commitment and relationship to Christ as Lord of their lives becomes more intense.

Thus the premarital period should be characterized by the young man and woman spending time reading the Bible together and going through Bible study guides together, including one or both of the following written especially for engaged couples: *Before You Say "I Do"* by H. Norman Wright and Wes Roberts (Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR, 1997) and *Preparing for Marriage God's Way* by Wayne A. Mack (Hensley Publishing, Tulsa, OK, 1995). A set of cassettes by Ed Wheat, M.D. entitled *Before the Wedding Night* (available from Scriptural Counsel, 130 N. Spring St., Springdale, AR 72764) is also recommended listening as the wedding day gets closer.

Ideally, the couple should undergo an extensive period of premarital counseling by an experienced, spiritually mature minister of the Word (and his wife, if feasible). Often it is the person who officiates at the couple's wedding who conducts the counseling sessions.

The couple should spend time finding out where each stands on the basic doctrines of Scripture. If they disagree widely in certain areas of doctrine—for example, one believing in believer's baptism and the other in household baptism, or one believing in a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church and the other holding to a post-millennial rapture—they need to learn how they react to these differences and how they might either resolve or cope with these differences throughout their married lives. If one seems to possess an overwhelming need to "convert" the other to his or her way of thinking, this may be a portent of great difficulties in the future.

In addition to exploring where each stands with regard to the basic doctrines of Scripture, it is well to discuss the practical applications of the Scriptures, particularly as they might impact on their future husband-wife and parent-child relationships. For example, there could be real problems in raising children if one favors using the rod and the other is adamantly opposed to this method of disciplining one's children.

During the pre-engagement period in which marriage is being considered, as well as throughout the engagement period while more definite plans are being made for the wedding and marriage, there should be a willingness and desire for the man and woman to pray together, not only for the Lord's help in every aspect of their plans for marriage, but that the Lord would make abundantly clear to them His will concerning the proposed marriage. It is well to remember that while the engagement to be married represents a solemn pledge between a man and a woman of their intention to marry each other, and that it must not be lightly entered into nor lightly broken, yet it is far better to break off an engagement if led by the Lord to do so than to enter into the lifelong commitment of a marriage that does not have the Lord's approval. It is also important to have a sufficiently long pre-engagement and engagement period to find out about possible problem areas and to learn conclusively God's will concerning the proposed marriage.

The Physical Relationship Prior to Marriage

Before concluding this chapter on the premarital period, let us return once again to a consideration of the physical relationship. Some may be saying, "It is fine to develop the spiritual relationship, but what is wrong with experimenting with the physical relationship as well?" Others may add, "What harm can it do? we are planning to get married anyway."

Let us see, first of all, what Scripture has to say concerning

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this matter of premarital sexual activity. As the reader, no doubt, is fully aware, there are many Scriptures that forbid fornication—that is, a sexual relationship outside the confines of marriage. Here are a few:

1. “Abstain ... from fornication” (Acts 15:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:3).

2. “The body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.... Flee fornication.... Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:13-20).

3. “Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day 23,000” (1 Corinthians 10:8).

4. “But fornication ... let it not be once named among you, as becomes saints” (Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5).

Further, in Deuteronomy 22:13-21, we find that it was expected of young women that they should enter into the marriage relationship as virgins. As a New Testament testimony, Mary could never have been chosen as the mother of the Messiah if she had been influenced by the thinking that characterizes the world today—and is influencing many Christians as well—that if two people are in love or engaged to be married, then any degree of physical demonstration of their love is acceptable. God honored Mary’s purity and He will honor all young men and women who wish to please Him by remaining virgins until marriage by helping them to achieve truly happy marriages.

As a further scriptural evidence against premarital sexual activity, consider the apostle Paul’s words to the church at Corinth: “I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2). Marriage is a type of the union between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5). This “Church age” is actually the Church’s engagement period; the marriage ceremony will not take place until after Christ comes to raise up the Church to Himself in the “rapture” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 19:7). Just as the Church is to be presented

as a chaste virgin to Christ, our Bridegroom, so it is beautiful and pleasing to God when a Christian couple enters into marriage as virgins.

Premature entry into an intimate physical relationship short circuits the development of a real spiritual relationship. This can happen in several ways, as pointed out by another: "First, the intimacy is physically and emotionally exciting and the couple loses interest in spiritual matters. Second, the fact that their relationship is a secret between the two of them which they try to conceal from others may make them feel a certain closeness and loyalty to each other. They may mistake this closeness for real unity of spirit, but it will fade away when marriage makes their relationship 'respectable' and there is no need to conceal it. They no longer will share a secret and they will find they share little else of real meaning. Third, since they are not pleasing God, they cannot become closer to Him while out of communion with Him. Fourth, the feelings of guilt which their behavior may arouse will tend to interfere with the development of real intimacy after marriage. God will bless those couples who use dating and engagement periods for the development of spiritual and emotional unity and save physical intimacy for marriage. They will have not only spiritual intimacy but a truly joyous physical relationship as well" (A.M. in *Young People of the Bible*; Moments With The Book, Bedford, PA, 1977).

A further reason for avoiding premature physical intimacy is this: If this intimacy should result in pregnancy prior to marriage, the couple's focus will tend to shift all the more away from the development of a strong spiritual relationship and from seeking to make absolutely certain that it is God's will that they should marry each other. Rather, all too often, hasty plans are made to consummate marriage in order to reduce the level of shame and embarrassment.

Finally, let us consider some observations made by a Christian

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counselor: “Throughout Scripture, God makes it clear that intimacy is to be enjoyed by married partners.... God designed us emotionally so that sex outside of marriage is not nearly as fulfilling or enjoyable as within that secure bond.

“Tragic damages occur when God’s standard is violated. Let me share just one for the sake of clarification.

“A great deal of my counseling time is invested in the lives of couples planning to get married. During the three premarital counseling sessions, I probe deeply into their relationship. We discuss their lives from several perspectives: spiritually, emotionally, financially, socially, and sexually. It is not uncommon for those I plan to marry to have been intimately involved with each other. I require that this be stopped if such has been the case. Before we proceed I have each one promise me that from that day on (until they are married) they will sustain restraint and self-control in their relationship.

“Here’s why. If promiscuity is not completely stopped for a period of time before marriage, then after marriage a strange reversal in their roles occurs. The young bride marries with disappointment over the violation done against her by her fiancé. She soon becomes dominant and aggressive, taking the role of leadership from her husband because of a mixture of resentment and anger. And the man? Well, he feels guilty, disappointed with himself, and ultimately becomes passive. She takes charge (and hates it) while he backs off (and feels miserable). All because their intimate relationship was incorrectly set in motion before marriage.

“Of the hundreds of unhappy couples I have counseled who finally admitted to premarital promiscuity, I can hardly recall an exception to this strange pattern. A Christian psychologist friend of mine told me that the number one problem he deals with in his busy practice is the passive male.

“So many men today find it difficult (impossible?) to take

the proper role of authority in their home. I wonder how much of it stems from aggressive yet immoral, illicit involvements that were maintained during courtship days ... and now they are suffering reverse consequences” (Charles R. Swindoll in *Strike the Original Match*; Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993; used by permission).

Further points to be considered by a couple who is contemplating marriage are given in Appendix 1 entitled, “Before You Marry.”

Chapter 4

Elements of a Happy Marriage: Introduction

Some of the key elements that go into making a lasting and happy marriage have been discussed earlier in this book. These include the proper choice of a marriage partner and appropriate behavior during the premarital period. If both the man and the woman are dedicated, born-again Christians, and if they have developed a strong spiritual relationship during the engagement and pre-engagement period, the marriage will be off to an excellent start. However, to maintain a happy, vital marriage long term usually requires a great deal of adjustment by both partners and much effort throughout their lives.

Our local newspaper published the results of a survey of 35 couples who had attained their 50th wedding anniversary. Spouses were interviewed individually with the promise that their responses would not be told to their mates. To the surprise of the researchers, they found that the majority of the couples—60 percent of them— were unhappy in their marriages. The fact that they had lived together for 50 years was not so much an expression of their happiness as it was of the times in which they lived. They did not believe in divorce; it was not an option to them nor to most couples who had grown up in their generation.

One of the purposes of this book is to reaffirm the position of the Word of God—which happens also to coincide with the *traditional* American viewpoint—that divorce is *not* an option, but is hated and forbidden by God (Malachi 2:16). (This topic of divorce will be dealt with in detail in Chapters 14-16.) But in urging the position that marriage is for life and that the couple

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should stick it out at all costs, it is not my desire to consign married couples to lifetimes of mutual misery. Marriage should not *just* be a lifelong commitment (that is, “till death do us part”); rather, I believe it is God’s intention that it should be a continual, lifelong source of mutual joy and happiness for both partners. “Rejoice with the wife of your youth” (Proverbs 5:18). *This is indeed possible* when both are true Christians. As both partners are progressively drawn closer to Christ, with Christ dwelling in their hearts by faith and being rooted and grounded in love (Ephesians 3:17), they will experience not only increasing joy in the Lord but a growing love for and joy with each other as well.

Some of the many factors that contribute to the achievement of a happy and successful marriage will be discussed in the following chapters. Further thoughts on having a happy marriage relationship are presented in Appendix 2 entitled, “The Ideal Couple.”

The apostle Paul has exhorted all believers to pray “always ... with all perseverance and supplication for *all* saints” (Ephesians 6:18). As we pray daily for one another, let us not forget to consider the many married couples among the believers, praying that they might enjoy a truly happy marriage. Let us not wait until we learn that a marriage is on the rocks before we begin praying for the couple. If the Lord makes us aware of a possible trouble spot in the marriage of a particular couple, let us be faithful to seek wisdom from the Lord to be able to help that couple. Perhaps if there were more “preventive medicine” being practiced, there would be fewer sick and dying marriages and more truly happy ones today.

Some suggestions for further reading on this topic are given below:

1. LaHaye, Tim: *How to Be Happy Though Married*. Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 2002.
2. Mack, Wayne A.: *Strengthening Your Marriage*. P & R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 1999.

3. Smalley, Gary: *Hidden Keys of a Loving, Lasting Marriage*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1988.

4. Swindoll, Charles R.: *Strike the Original Match*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993.

5. Wheat, Ed and Perkins, Gloria Okes: *Love Life for Every Married Couple*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1980.

6. Wilson, Paul: *The Institution of Marriage*. Bible Truth Publishers, Addison, IL, 1969.

7. Wright, H. Norman: *Communication: Key to Your Marriage*. Regal Books, Ventura, CA, 1974.

Chapter 5

Elements of a Happy Marriage: Submission and Love

Mutual Submission

“Be not drunk with wine ... submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:18,21). I have linked these two verses together because verse 18 is the beginning of the sentence that ends with verse 21. What is the connection? One who is drunk with wine is controlled by the wine, just as one who is “filled with the Spirit” (verse 18) is controlled by the Spirit. In like manner, our relationships with one another are not to be characterized by seeking to control one another but rather by submitting one to another under the control of God.

Verse 21 applies to the Christian marriage relationship as much as it applies to every other relationship among God’s people. However, the specific manner of this mutual submission differs for wives and husbands. Wives, before you decide you don’t like this passage, please read the instructions given to your husbands as well as those given to you.

Submission by Wives

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church; and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it... So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He who

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loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the Church" (Ephesians 5:22-29).

First, the wife is to submit herself to her husband, as the Church is subject unto Christ. What does this entail? Let us note first that the One to whom the Church is to be subject is all-knowing, all-wise, righteous, good, and loving. His commandments and actions and decisions are not grievous but for the blessing of the Church (1 John 5:3). So it is in the best interests of the Church to listen carefully to all that Christ enjoins and to obey implicitly and unquestioningly.

Let me ask you wives a question: If your husband were totally Christlike, if every household decision he made and everything he did for you were in accordance with God's will and in the best interests of you and your family, would you have any difficulty being submissive to him? Once when I asked this question in a home Bible study a lady responded, "Yes." It turned out that her problem with submission was much broader than toward her husband; she didn't want to have to be submissive to God. This attitude was similarly expressed by a woman who said, "For me, would I describe Jesus as my master? No. Would I describe Jesus as my mentor? Absolutely." In other words, Jesus could be her teacher as long as she remained free to decide for herself what she wanted to accept and follow and what she wanted to reject. So if you have a problem with submitting to your husband, ask yourself first of all if you have a more basic problem of being submissive to God and to the Holy Scriptures.

Women caught up in the woman's liberation movement object in principle to the notion of wives being submissive to their husbands. Neither is it politically correct to espouse such an idea. It may seem to be grossly unfair for the woman to have one who is head over her. But notice what the Scriptures say: "The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and

the head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3). The men (males) have a head too. That Head is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The risen Lord is looking upon the men who have confessed Him as Lord and Saviour to see if they are demonstrating the same kind and degree of love that Christ Himself expressed toward His Church in giving Himself sacrificially for it (Ephesians 5:25). The Christian husband has been given the awesome responsibility of being submissive to Christ, especially with regard to demonstrating the sacrificial love of Christ to His wife. So the question might be posed to the Christian wife who wants to consider herself liberated: “Which would you rather be? a woman who must be submissive to a husband who is called upon to love his wife sacrificially, ‘even as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it’? or a man who has been given this most serious and far-reaching responsibility toward his wife?”

Most often, however, a Christian wife’s problem with submitting to her husband comes from the fact that her husband is *not* like Christ all the time; he is *not* all-knowing and all-wise; he may *not* always be seeking to do God’s will; he does *not* always sacrificially give himself for his wife; and rather than always being good and loving he may at times act out of selfish interests. Is the wife to suppress all her own thoughts, knowledge, and wisdom, and quietly, submissively leave all decisions, large and small, to her husband? In Genesis 2:18 we read that “the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him [that is, a helper suited to him].” Thus, since the husband, unlike Christ, is *not* all-knowing, all-wise, and completely unselfish, he should value the help and input of his wife in the decision-making process. If she feels that a decision he has made or is about to make is contrary to God’s mind, or may be harmful to the family or to others, or is in any other way unwise, she should be free—as his helpmate—to communicate in a loving way her disagreement and her suggestions for a more appropriate

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course of action. Such communication is for the good of all and should be encouraged by the husband.

What about those areas in which the wife's expertise and experience far exceed the husband's? In situations like this, it is important to observe the order laid down in Scripture: "The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3). The husband may be willing to delegate completely some areas of household decision making to his wife. However, he must realize that God has appointed to *him* the ultimate authority and responsibility for the running of the household; thus he must keep in close communication with his wife on such matters and be prepared at least to share in the responsibility for any unwise decisions made by his wife.

Husbands often are quite happy to delegate all child discipline responsibilities to their wives. However, the Book of Proverbs makes it clear that the father needs to take the lead in this regard. "My son, hear the instruction of your father, and forsake not the law of your mother" (Proverbs 1:8; also 4:1; 6:20; 13:1; 15:5). "Whom the LORD loves He corrects, even as a father the son in whom he delights" (Proverbs 3:12; also 13:24). If he delegates this authority to his wife while he is away at work, he needs to affirm his backing of the mother's discipline when he returns home.

Love by Husbands

Let us now focus more directly upon the husband. On his part there is to be no lording over his wife just because she is to be submissive to him. She is not his slave to do his bidding nor his property to use as he pleases. The Lord Jesus gives a very clear and strong message that can apply to husbands who go overboard in asserting their headship over their wives: "He who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he who is chief, as he who serves" (Luke 22:26). As head of the wife and head of the household, the husband has the primary responsibility to see that

all of the material, physical, instructional, emotional, and spiritual needs of his wife and children are provided for.

In full agreement with this we have the word to husbands in Ephesians 5—“love your wives.” This love is far deeper and more inclusive than romantic love, or the love that is associated with physical intimacy. Husbands are to love their wives “even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.” This is *agape* love, the self-sacrificing love that seeks the benefit and blessing of others, whatever may be the cost to oneself. So the decisions made by the husband, if he is filled with love for his wife and family, will be designed to please his wife; thus he will draw upon the wisdom of his wife and seek to have her share in every household and family decision.

The model presented by Christ to Christian husbands does not stop there: “That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies.... For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the Church.” What a tremendous contrast is this to what, sadly, has been meted out by all too many Christian husbands to their wives! Wives have been brutally beaten, sexually abused, emotionally traumatized, or almost totally ignored by their Christian husbands, all in the name of the headship of the husband. For shame!! Let every Christian husband examine whether he so values his wife that he nourishes and cherishes her, helping her—and encouraging her to help him—to grow in holiness and likeness to Christ.

Final Authority

There may yet, with all this, be matters on which the couple continues to disagree, even after patiently discussing each other’s viewpoints and even after praying together about the matter. In

such a case, it must be recognized that God has ordered that final authority rest with the husband and that the wife is to submit to his decision. If it is a decision that the wife feels could lead to adverse consequences for the family (for example, purchase of a luxury item beyond the family's financial means), the wife might still pray that the Lord will deal directly with her husband to prevent or undo the decision or action; she should also pray for patience and seek the Lord's help to do whatever she can to minimize the possible adverse consequences of the decision upon the family.

If any of our female readers resent the fact that God has granted to the husbands the final authority for running the household, please realize that at all levels of society there is a need for a chain of command, an ultimate authority. Otherwise there would be anarchy. Thus, God has given parents to be over the children; teachers over the pupils; employers over the employees; mayors, governors, and presidents over the people in political subdivisions. The "powers that be" are ministers of God for good (Romans 13:1-4). All the more should the Christian husband be a minister of God for the good and blessing of his wife and children.

It has been observed that in non-Christian households, or households in which the Holy Scriptures serve as bookends rather than floodlights, a great deal of time and emotional energy is spent by newlyweds trying to establish who will be the head and who will take primary responsibility for the various household activities. Isn't it a blessing for Bible-believers that God has already settled those questions? Well, maybe. It will only be a blessing if both husband and wife seriously follow the model provided in Ephesians 5.

Affection and Appreciation by Wives

While husbands are enjoined to have *agape* love for their wives

(Ephesians 5:25), wives are to be taught by the older women to have *philia* love for their husbands (Titus 2:3,4). Most wives and mothers seem to have a certain measure of *agape* love built into them as evidenced by their self-sacrificing care for their children and family. They don't need to be taught to *love* their husbands, but they often do need to be encouraged to *like* their husbands, that is, to show affection and appreciation for them.

The story is told of a young boy who, when asked how his older sister and her boy friend were getting along, responded, "Oh, he's not her boy friend any more; they are married now." We may smile at this but sadly there is often more truth than fiction in the boy's response. A husband and wife *should* be each other's best friend. The older women are to teach the younger women how to become her husband's best friend.

The wife may have a tendency to remember and dwell upon her husband's faults and failures, while forgetting his good points, the ways he helps her in different ways, and his provision for and protection of her and the children. The wife who says or thinks, "I love my husband but I don't like his leaving his dirty clothes on the floor and his incessant channel surfing and his snoring and his playing golf with his male friends," may have some legitimate complaints. Perhaps her husband needs to work on some of his behaviors and attitudes; perhaps he needs to grow in his exercise of *agape*, self-sacrificing love toward his wife (such as spending more time with her and less time with his male friends). But if she constantly nags him about these things, she is not going to become her husband's best friend.

What, then, should the wife do to help her husband to change? Titus 2 gives the answer: learn to have *philia* love, that is, learn to *like* her husband and show him appreciation for the things she *does* like about him. The next time he puts his dirty clothes in the laundry basket, doesn't channel surf, lies on his side so he won't snore, or declines the opportunity to spend time

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with his friends in order to spend time with his wife, she should express her appreciation to him for his thoughtfulness. Husbands appreciate that, and will often respond by trying to do more things that their wives will appreciate.

Final Thoughts

In conclusion, when the husband and wife can learn to work together, communicate their feelings and desires to each other in a friendly, loving, respectful atmosphere, make decisions jointly that are motivated by the desire for the welfare of each other and the family and the glory of God, and follow the scriptural order of wives being submissive to their husbands if agreement cannot be reached, there will be a strong basis for a truly happy marriage.

Chapter 6

Elements of a Happy Marriage: A “Help Meet”

“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18). The expression, “a help meet for him,” means a helper corresponding to him or suitable to him.

In what sense was the woman (Eve) whom God provided for the man (Adam) a helper corresponding to him? This provision occurred before the need to wash dishes, launder clothes, or take care of children. The LORD God had given Adam the tasks of caring for the garden and giving names to the great variety of living creatures (Genesis 2:15,19). There were animals that were helps to Adam as beasts of burden and as a means of entertainment. But there was something missing. Adam had no one to talk to.

The “help meet” (now termed “helpmate”) for Adam served as one with whom Adam could communicate, one with whom he could be intimate, not just physically, but also intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. If there is any truth to the expression, “A dog is man’s best friend,” it is only because of failure in human relationships. For those of us who are married, our wife or husband should be our best friend on earth.

Examples of Helpmates

The following are examples in the Bible of some women who were helpers meet for their husbands, along with a couple of examples of women who failed to carry out this God-given role.

Michal. “Michal Saul’s daughter loved David.... Saul also sent messengers unto David’s house to watch him and to slay him

in the morning; and Michal David's wife told him, saying, If you save not your life tonight, tomorrow you shall be slain. So Michal let David down through a window: and he went, and fled, and escaped" (1 Samuel 18:20; 19:11,12).

Abigail. When David was about to kill Nabal and all the men with him, Nabal's wife Abigail boldly came to David with a gift of food and appealed to him not to shed blood without just cause. "And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel who sent you this day to meet me; and blessed be your advice, and blessed be you who has kept me this day from coming to shed blood and from avenging myself with my own hand" (1 Samuel 25:18-34). Even though Nabal was a "churlish [or stingy] and evil" man (verse 3), Abigail did all she could to help him get out of the messes he got himself into. She was truly "a help meet for him," even though he did not appreciate it. But David appreciated what he saw in Abigail, and when the LORD saw fit to smite "Nabal that he died," David took Abigail to be his wife (verses 38-42).

This example shows how different temperaments between husband and wife can complement each other. But for it to work, we need to respect each other's temperament, help each other to develop the beneficial and positive aspects of it, and to judge the negative parts of it. The husband and wife need to help each other to grow in the Word and likeness to Christ, which will result in a greater likeness to and kinship with each other.

The Virtuous Woman of Proverbs 31. Here is Biblical testimony to "a virtuous woman": "The heart of her husband safely trusts in her.... She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.... Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.... She opens her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looks well to the ways of her household, and eats not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her" (Proverbs 31:10-31).

Priscilla. “And [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue, whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26). Aquila is never mentioned in the Bible apart from his wife Priscilla (Acts 18:2,18; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19). Obviously they worked together as a team in ministering “the way of God” to Apollos and, no doubt, in all of their ministries.

Our next door neighbor came over and asked a theological question. I gave him an answer, and then my wife offered a supporting answer from a slightly different perspective. Her comment, in turn, reminded me of yet another way of addressing my neighbor’s question. We worked together; she was a help to me. I wonder if every Christian husband realizes the spiritual treasure he has in his Christian wife. I perceive that in some Christian homes the wife is not at liberty to discuss her thoughts on scriptural and spiritual matters with her husband. What a loss! This is taking the man’s headship and the woman’s submission to an unwarranted extreme. Notice that the Lord Jesus was willing to discuss (that is, *listen* as well as talk) spiritual and doctrinal matters with women (John 4:9-26; 11:21-27).

Eve. Being a God-given helpmate to one’s husband is a very responsible position. The first helpmate, Eve, in fact, failed miserably in her responsibility. She certainly was not a help to Adam when she ate of the fruit and offered him some as well. The LORD God had told Adam one thing (not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil upon pain of death; Genesis 2:17), Adam had passed this information on to Eve (Genesis 3:3), and the serpent told Eve just the opposite: “You shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). Whom should Eve believe—her husband or this serpent? Would it not have been wise for Eve to ask her husband, who had received the instruction directly from God, about this discrepancy? Think of the far-reaching consequences

upon the whole human race of her failing to do so!

It works the other way as well. It is often wise for a husband to ask his wife what she thinks of his plans concerning an activity, a change in employment, a purchase, an investment of money or time, and so forth. We all have blind spots, hidden lusts, desires, pride, envy, or distrust, and we often allow our feelings rather than wise judgment to rule us. Our spouses, if given the opportunity, can help reveal to us our blind spots.

Sapphira. Loyalty to one's spouse is a wonderful trait, but even this can be carried too far. Sapphira was loyal to her husband Ananias, but failed terribly in being a help to him. Ananias had lied to the apostles about how much he had gotten in the sale of a piece of land. He pretended that he was giving the entire amount of the sale to the apostles to be distributed to the poor. His wife knew what he had done, and when asked about it, she told the same lie. The consequence? Both fell down dead for agreeing together "to tempt the Spirit of the Lord" (Acts 5:1-10). Why didn't Sapphira warn her husband that he was doing wrong in lying about it? My wife certainly would have and so would most of the wives reading this. But there are some Christian wives who are afraid of their husbands (even if the husband is a Christian) and would not dare correct or contradict their husbands about anything. Again, what a loss! what a tragedy for the whole family! How vital it is for all of us honestly to own and acknowledge before the Lord and each other our own weaknesses and ask our spouse (or another family member or close friend if unmarried) to alert us when they see us getting off track.

Communication

One of the most important jobs of the husband's helpmate is that of facilitating communication. We husbands are notoriously poor at this and should try to cooperate when our wives attempt to draw us out. In Scripture we read, "Rejoice with those who rejoice,

and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). But to do this there must be the communication to one another of our joys and successes, as well as our depressions, anxieties, and failures.

Often it may be particularly difficult for the husband to share with his wife his feelings of depression or fear or failure. He rather prefers to regard himself as emotionally independent and able to work out his own problems by himself. However, an understanding wife can be an immense help—a helpmate—to the husband in such matters. At the very least they can pray together and unitedly seek the Lord’s help concerning the problem. Sharing in this way will have the effect of drawing the two closer together emotionally and spiritually. Real communication in marriage is the ability to share one’s innermost thoughts and feelings with one’s partner. For this to be effective there must be a foundation of mutual love, trust, patience, forgiveness, and understanding.

It is well for a young husband and father to consider that often while he is at work associating with other adults all day long, his wife may be spending most of her days with only her small children for company. So the husband—wary as he may be—should try to put his wife’s need for adult-level communication above his natural and selfish desire to relax in his favorite easy chair with the newspaper or television when he gets home from work. In this way he can be a helpmate for his wife.

A particularly difficult area of communication involves things that the husband and wife find in each other that they do not like. Marriage involves a very major adjustment in the lives of two persons who often have quite different personalities, likes and dislikes, collections of friends and relatives, and so forth. To take an oft-used example, a matter so trivial as how one squeezes the tube of toothpaste can be a source of friction in a marriage. Or it may be certain words or expressions one uses, stories or jokes one tells, or other habits or manners that may irritate the spouse. If there is no sin or compromise of Christian testimony involved, the

spouse may choose to adapt himself/herself to the other's behavior and, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, accept and overlook it (see Proverbs 19:11). But if the disagreeable behavior continually produces irritation, or if it is sinful, then one should seek lovingly, patiently, and meekly (Galatians 6:1) to express to the other the nature of the concern. Here there is a great need to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and to have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:5). The one with the disagreeable habit correspondingly should learn to accept the criticism without anger, irritation, defensiveness, or retaliation. It is best if the two can pray together about the matter.

Some couples have found it helpful occasionally to write down and share lists of things they like and dislike about each other. This, of course, should only be done by mutual consent, and obviously the emphasis should be on trying to list as many positive, likeable traits as possible. The counsel given at the end of Chapter 5 about the wife learning to *like* and *be friends with* her husband is applicable in this regard.

Chapter 7

Elements of a Happy Marriage: The Fruit of the Spirit

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22,23). I like to depict the marriage relationship as a triangle, with the husband and wife at the two angles at the base and with the Lord at the peak of the triangle. As both husband and wife grow spiritually and become more and more like their Lord and Saviour, we can imagine them ascending the two sides of the triangle toward the Lord. What happens then? The closer each one comes to the Lord, the closer they come to each other. The more the husband and wife grow in their display of the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit, the more strong and beautiful their marriage will become.

Love

Here are expressions sometimes spoken by married persons: “I wish my husband would try to understand me.” “My wife just isn’t meeting my needs.” “What am *I* getting out of this marriage?”

John 3:16 doesn’t say, “God loved the world so that He could *get* love in return.” Rather, “He *gave!*” If we give to our mate with the idea of getting something in return, we may often be disappointed. We may come to the point of saying, “Forget it. I’ll never try to give him/her anything again.” But this isn’t love; it isn’t the way God has loved each one of us.

Loving is giving, giving, giving, and giving some more. How much did Christ love us? How much did He give? “Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and has given himself for us an offering

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... to God” (Ephesians 5:2).

Here are some characteristics of love:

1. Giving, self-sacrificial (John 3:16; Ephesians 5:2).
2. Unconditional, not dependent upon the good behavior of its object (Romans 5:6-10).
3. Not selfish, self-centered (1 Corinthians 13:4,5).
4. Not easily provoked or nursing grudges (1 Corinthians 13:5).
5. Enduring (1 Corinthians 13:7).

In a study of 750 couples with marital difficulties, the two most commonly reported problems were (1) a partner who was in love with himself/herself and (2) indifference on the part of one of the partners. Both of these problems—selfishness and indifference—are opposites of that love which is a fruit of the Spirit.

Husbands: Do you love your wife? Wives: Do you love your husband? Really? Do you love your partner sacrificially, just as Christ loved the Church? Are you willing to give up some or all of your own interests, time, friends, hobbies, habits, attitudes, behaviors, and/or pleasures in order to bring your wife or husband the greatest pleasure and happiness? Have you ever tried to find out what things make your partner happy? If you knew that your wife hated some activity that you enjoy, would you give it up, or greatly cut back on it, in order to spend time with her doing things she likes to do?

You may ask, “What if I am the only one who gives? What if my partner receives it all without giving anything in return?” First, you may need to become more alert to—and show appreciation for—the little bit of love your partner *does* show to you. But even if you can’t find *any* evidence of loving or giving by your partner, you have the glorious privilege of loving and giving as Christ did—who died for the ungodly, for sinners, and for His enemies (Romans 5:6-10). Dear brother or sister, be encouraged to persist

in this activity of true love! “Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9). I have no doubt that God has prepared special rewards for those who are content to give and give and give without receiving anything in return.

Joy and Peace

“The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts” (Colossians 3:15). If both husband and wife are experiencing the “joy of the Lord” and “the peace of God” in their daily lives, it will be easy for them to create an atmosphere in their marriage in which they can be perfectly intimate and at ease with each other, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Both will feel totally comfortable in each other’s presence, and will be free to share their ideas, opinions, fears, concerns, and innermost thoughts and feelings with each other without fear of being rejected, put down, preached at, ridiculed, or teased. They will feel free to admit their failures without fear of their partner’s criticism or displeasure; they will feel free to talk about their successes without being rebuked by their partner for being proud and boastful.

Joy is having the sense of God’s grace and presence in the midst of trying circumstances (Acts 16:25; Philippians 4:4). When there is this joy in the marriage relationship, there will also be frequent expressions of thanks and appreciation by the husband and wife to each other.

Peace is freedom from worry about what *might* happen—but usually doesn’t. The antidote for worry is prayer: “Be careful [anxious, worried] for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6,7). The more areas of our lives we commit to the Lord daily in

prayer, the more God's perfect peace will surround us.

Praying and Reading Together. Let us apply these principles to the marriage relationship. While standing in the meal line at a young people's conference, a newly married young woman asked a couple of us old guys, "What advice do you have to offer to newlyweds?" I responded, "Set apart some time each day to spend with your husband reading the Bible and praying together." While my wife and I were already in the habit of doing this with our children most evenings, once we started getting up earlier and reading and praying together as a couple, our marriage relationship began to improve dramatically. We began to find better ways to resolve our conflicts. We began doing more things to serve the Lord together. In short, our marriage was becoming more peaceful.

We need not take an "all or nothing" approach to this. If there is not time for both reading *and* praying, they might be alternated—reading together one day and praying together the next. By praying together I do not mean that the husband should pray and the wife listen, but that both should share in the praying. In the process of praying together we find ourselves taking an active interest in that which interests and concerns our partner. Of particular importance is joining together in united prayer for our children and for wisdom in bringing them up for the Lord (see Matthew 18:19 for the value of united prayer). Also, as another example of the value of praying together, if the husband has been joining with the wife in prayer for the salvation or spiritual growth of her friends and acquaintances, he will more readily and enthusiastically support her in activities—such as having her friends over for dinner—that may afford an opportunity to share the things of Christ with them.

In summary, as we allow the Holy Spirit to minister His fruit of joy and peace in our lives, we will be freed up to reach out more to our marriage partner, our children, and others around us.

Longsuffering

“We have been married for 15 years and still my husband does such and such” complains the wife. If you are tempted to think or say something like this, try to put yourself in God’s place. How long have you been a child of God? How long has He been trying to get *you* to change a certain habit or attitude?

Thus, the fruit of longsuffering means patiently adapting to each other’s idiosyncrasies and habits without trying to change the other into your own image. “With longsuffering, forbearing one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2). It involves praying for, rather than preaching to, one’s partner. It literally means “long-tempered,” that is, the opposite of “short-tempered.”

Gentleness or Kindness

“Be kind [or gentle] one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:31,32). “Take My yoke upon you ... for My yoke is easy [or gentle], and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:29,30).

The opposite of gentleness is being controlling or domineering—wanting to be king of the hill, having everything *my* way, with *my* opinions the only ones that count, *my* decisions the best ones.

We see in Ephesians 4:32 that gentleness leads to forgiveness. Chapter 8 will take up this theme of confession and forgiveness.

Goodness

This word goodness in the New Testament denotes an attitude of helpfulness. Christ’s parable of the good Samaritan exemplifies this quality. “Honey, what can I do to help you?” should always take priority over, “Honey, get me my slippers and the newspaper.” “He who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who is chief [or leader], as he who serves” (Luke 22:26).

Faith

Our faith does not end with trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). “Your faith grows exceedingly (2 Thessalonians 1:3). Our entire lives as Christians should be characterized by the exercise of faith, that is, trust and dependence upon the Lord. Just as we received Christ into our lives by faith and have the blessed confidence that we are saved and bound for heaven, so with equal confidence we are to entrust Him with every matter and care of our daily lives, to count upon His guidance and supply for our every need.

If husband and wife are both living and walking by faith and dependence upon the Lord every day of their married lives, this means that every decision will be referred to the Lord, seeking guidance to know and power to do His perfect will. How much marital conflict would be avoided in this way: Instead of the husband and wife arguing over what each would prefer to do, both honestly and earnestly dedicate themselves to finding out what the *Lord* wants them to do.

Meekness

Meekness involves giving up your own rights, not taking vengeance or retaliating if your partner says or does something that hurts you or that you don't approve of (Numbers 12:3,13; 1 Samuel 25:32-34). For example, if your partner goes on a spending spree that you can ill afford, instead of getting even by going on a spree of your own, you do your best to help your family weather the financial problems left in the wake of your spouse's indiscretion. Christ is our example: “I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29). “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.... Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:5,44). “A meek and quiet spirit ... is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Peter 3:4).

A meek person is a confessing person. The theme of confession and forgiveness will be taken up in Chapter 8.

Temperance or Self-Control

What part of the body is most likely to get out of control? In James 3 we read, “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; it defiles the whole body. The tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, who are made after the similitude of God.”

There is a little ditty that we used to say as children: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” In reality, however, the wounds administered by the tongue often hurt far more and longer than physical wounds. This is so often the case in the marriage relationship. “The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly” (Proverbs 26:22). “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21).

U.S. News & World Report, February 21, 1994, reports on a long-term follow-up study of married couples to identify the factors that predict divorce. The most significant factor during both early and later years of marriage was the frequency of insults and putdowns hurled at each other.

May the Holy Spirit help each married couple to control their tongues, to choose their words carefully, and to use their powers of speech to *build up*, rather than *tear down*, the marriage. May we learn the lessons of Proverbs 15: “A soft answer turns away wrath” and “A word spoken in due season, how good is it!” (verses 1 and 23).

Chapter 8

Elements of a Happy Marriage: Confession and Forgiveness

In moments of weakness, impatience, tiredness, and being out of communion with our heavenly Father, we say or do things that are unwise, or sinful, or offensive to our spouse. All too frequently, since it is “only” our spouse, we have a lax attitude about the matter, or perhaps even become defensive about our offense. Instead of being sorry for the word or deed that hurt our spouse, we become irritated that the other cannot just overlook and not take seriously those careless things we say and do. This may lead to angry exchanges and continuing conflict. Or what may often be worse, one of the spouses retaliates by giving the other the “silent treatment.”

Confession

What is so greatly needed in such instances is confession—that is, the acknowledgment of sin or careless behavior on the part of the offender. (Often both spouses will be the offenders by the time it is over.) Let it be noted that statements such as, “I am sorry if I did anything to offend you,” do not constitute real confessions. Rather they place the blame on the other person for having so sensitive a constitution as to be easily offended. Next to “I love you,” perhaps the most important words to be communicated by one marriage partner to another are, “Honey, I was wrong; will you forgive me?”

Confession to God of our sins is incomplete if it does not also include confession to those particular persons against whom we have sinned. “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and

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there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23,24). “Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another that you may be healed” (James 5:16). “He who covers his sins shall not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

King David did some pretty terrible things in his life. But he was preeminently a man of confession. “I acknowledge my sin unto Thee, and my iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and Thou forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:5). “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight.... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God Thou will not despise” (Psalm 51). Thus, in spite of his sins, David could be called by God, “A man after My own heart” (Acts 13:22).

Husbands, the fact that you are the head of your wife (1 Corinthians 11:3) and she is to be submissive to you (Ephesians 5:22-24; 1 Peter 3:1) does not mean that she is your property, that you can treat her as you please, or that you should never confess to her your sins against her. This failure by husbands to confess to their wives (and sometimes failure by wives to confess to their husbands) their sins against them is a major cause of broken marriages. David confessed to Abigail (who later became his wife) his sinful intentions of wanting to do harm to her household (1 Samuel 25:32-34).

Forgiveness

On the other side, let there always be a spirit of forgiveness toward our spouses as toward all men. We need not wait for confession to do this. “The discretion of a man defers his anger;

and it is his glory to pass over a transgression” (Proverbs 19:11). Just think of all that God has forgiven in us; the vast majority of our sins we have never even been aware of. In the light of this, how can we withhold our forgiveness of others? “If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:12,14,15). “Then came Peter to Him and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus said unto him, I say not unto you, Until seven times: but, Until 70 times seven” (Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 17:3,4).

An important principle is stated in 1 Corinthians 13:5: “[Love] thinks no evil.” Literally this means that love does not keep accounts or records of the evil done against it. So the message to husbands and wives is not to hold grudges against each other, or bring up again past offenses that have already been confessed and forgiven. “But you don’t know how much my wife/husband has sinned against me,” you may reply. No, I don’t, but neither do you have more than the slightest idea of how much you have sinned against God. He has forgiven you—fully and freely—and you are to forgive your spouse in the same way and to the same degree. “Be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).

Forgiveness is not really forgetting, as some people say. When God says, “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 10:17), He means that He will not bring the sin up as a matter requiring judgment (see Jeremiah 14:10; Hosea 8:13,14; 9:9). Based on this, someone has said that when I forgive you, I am making a promise not to bring up the matter again (1) to *you* (to throw it in your face), (2) to *others* (to gossip about you), or (3) to *myself* (to brood over it).

Chapter 9

Elements of a Happy Marriage: Physical Intimacy

To those who are dating or engaged to be married the warning was given in Chapter 3 against entering prematurely into the physical intimacy that belongs to marriage alone. A marriage built solely on the physical relationship, without strong emotional and spiritual bonds, is not likely to thrive far beyond the honeymoon. This is not to downgrade the physical relationship but to emphasize those other aspects of the marriage partnership that are often given but little consideration. Indeed, unless a marriage is built upon the foundation of *agape* or Christ-like love, the physical relationship will tend to become mechanical and selfish, and hence may ultimately lead to conflict and resentment. A strong spiritual relationship will, on the other hand, tend to enhance the enjoyment of the physical relationship.

Not Defrauding Each Other

Let us consider some scriptural counsel to the married couple concerning physical intimacy. “Let the husband render to the wife her due, and in like manner the wife to the husband. The wife has not authority over her own body, but the husband; in like manner also the husband has not authority over his own body, but the wife. Defraud not one another, unless, it may be, by consent for a time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and again be together, that Satan tempt you not because of your incontinency” (1 Corinthians 7:3-5 JND). Not only in first century Corinth, but throughout the history of the Church to the present day, there have been Christians who have gotten the notion that physical

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intimacy in marriage is beneath the dignity and calling of a spiritual Christian. Some have gone so far as to separate from their wife or husband in order to be free to live “a more spiritual life.” Others have pushed the physical relationship in marriage into the background for similar reasons. But the apostle Paul warns that neither marriage partner should unilaterally deprive the other of physical intimacy. Only if both agree together to live celibately “for a time” (such as they would do while fasting) in order to devote themselves to prayer and communion with the Lord should such a program be undertaken. And this is to be for a definitely limited period of time so that neither partner will be tempted to sin as a result of unsatisfied physical desires.

The Greek word translated “defraud” in 1 Corinthians 7:5 means literally “turn away from, reject, repulse.” The sexual relationship should never be used as a club to achieve one’s own selfish ends. One should not reject his/her mate sexually as a means of forcing the mate to yield to his/her will concerning any matter. The elements of prayer, communication, and love—discussed previously—should be brought into play in such situations.

Submitting to One Another

Another Scripture that is relevant to the physical relationship of a married couple is “submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21). Mutual love (again, *agape* or divine love) will lead the two partners to be sensitive to the moods, needs, and desires of the other. Love will lead the husband or wife to subdue his/her own physical needs and desires when it is sensed that one’s mate does not share this mood. At the same time, the spouse who perhaps is not in the mood for physical intimacy may be led, out of love, to give himself/herself over to satisfying the needs of the mate. Out of love for each other, each will be willing to take the lead in submitting to the other.

If one of the partners seems frequently to be not in the mood

for physical intimacy, it may be that he/she is harboring bitterness or resentment toward the spouse for some reason. Here again, as stressed previously, there is a great need for communication. Harboring resentment toward another is not a proper response for a Christian. The offended one should seek lovingly, patiently, and meekly to express to the spouse the nature of the offense (Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1). The offending spouse should be quick to confess and forsake any wrong so that the joy of the marriage might soon be recovered.

As we have seen previously, wives are told to submit themselves to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22). But clearly this is not to be used by the husband as a club to force his wife to satisfy his physical (or any other) needs and desires. For this reason, verses 23 and 24 are tempered by verses 25-29 which emphasize the man's need to love his wife. Further, it is well to keep in mind that husbands have the privilege of submitting themselves to their wives in many areas of life, even while retaining overall authority and responsibility over the household (Ephesians 5:21). Christ took the form of a servant, though He was worthy that all should serve and submit to Him. How can we, who have no such worthiness in ourselves, take a place higher than the one Christ took in love? (Luke 22:27; John 13:13-16; Philippians 2:7).

Knowing Each Other

Have you noticed how frequently the word “knew” is used in the Old Testament in connection with the sexual relationship? For example, “Adam *knew* Eve his wife, and she conceived and bare Cain.... And Cain *knew* his wife, and she conceived and bare Enoch” (Genesis 4:1,17). This is not an old-fashioned, King James translation of a Hebrew word but it is the common word for “know,” as in “Know that the LORD He is God” (Psalm 100:3). Similarly, the husband is exhorted in the New Testament to “dwell with [his wife] according to *knowledge*” (1 Peter 3:7). These verses

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indicate that the sexual relationship is founded upon the husband's knowledge of and attentiveness to his wife's needs, desires, health, strengths, weaknesses, emotional makeup, and spiritual maturity. He treats her as a co-equal creation of God to whom he can give himself sacrificially (see Ephesians 5:25) rather than as an object to exploit for his own pleasure. Truly, "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35; also Philippians 2:4).

By creating man in such a way that the sexual relationship would be a mutually pleasurable and fulfilling experience for a man and wife, God gave mankind a strong incentive to "be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:28; Deuteronomy 7:13,14; Psalm 127:3-5). At the same time, the Scriptures are clear that procreation is not God's *only* purpose in the sexual relationship. "Rejoice with the wife of your youth. Let her be as the loving hind and the pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and be ravished always with her love" (Proverbs 5:18,19). "You have ravished my heart ... how fair is your love, my sister, my spouse! How much better is your love than wine! and the smell of your ointments than all spices! (Song of Solomon 4:9-15; also 1:13-16).

Birth Control

All of the verses cited in the previous paragraph plus many others (such as Mark 16:15; 1 Corinthians 7:27,32-34,40; 2 Corinthians 10:16; 1 Timothy 5:8) have something to contribute to the controversial question of whether or not Christians should use methods of birth control. I know of no plain, clear-cut command of Scripture that forbids family planning or birth control. (Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 127:3-5 are sometimes put forward in this regard, but neither one can be applied absolutely to every adult; otherwise the apostle Paul would have been disobedient to the Lord for not marrying.) It is of utmost importance that husband and wife study the Scriptures together for principles that may bear upon this

decision, and that they pray unitedly for knowledge of the Lord's will for themselves in this matter (as with every other decision in their marriage).

While on this topic, it should be evident to every student of the Bible that abortion is totally forbidden as a method of birth control. Many people today have been taught to think that the human fetus does not become a "person" until birth. To the minds of those who believe this, abortion is not murder but merely the destruction of tissue. However, there are several passages in the Bible that affirm that life as a person begins at *conception*, not at birth. First, the same Hebrew and Greek words are used in the Bible for a child in the womb and a child after birth (compare Exodus 21:4 with 21:22 and Luke 1:41,44—"babe"—with Acts 7:19—"young children"). Second, Jeremiah was sanctified by God as a prophet before he was born (Jeremiah 1:5; see also Isaiah 49:1-5). Thus if Jeremiah's mother had decided to have an abortion she would have put to death God's prophet. Third, we might ask, "When did the eternal Son of God take up residence in His human body? Was it at His conception or at His birth?" In Matthew 1:20 we read, "The angel said to Joseph, Fear not to take unto you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." What had the Holy Spirit conceived in Mary? Was it just a bunch of tissue (as pregnant women are advised today) or was it the Person of the eternal Son of God?

Finally, we consider two passages in the Psalms that identify personhood with conception or with the fetus. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). "Thou did form my inward parts; Thou did weave me in my mother's womb.... My frame was not hidden from Thee when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance, and in Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them" (Psalm 139:13-16, NASB).

The Bible does not speak of fetal life as a mere chemical activity or growth and development of living tissues. Rather, the psalmist vividly describes the fetus in the mother's womb as being formed, woven, made, and skillfully wrought by the personal activity of God. Just as God formed Adam from the dust of the earth, so He is actively involved in fashioning the fetus in the womb. If everyone realized this wondrous truth, who would dare terminate purposely God's creative activity in the womb by abortion?

Sexual Purity

Finally, Scripture demands total marital fidelity and total sexual purity both within and outside of the marriage relationship. This is not just abstaining from sexual acts with someone other than our spouse. It means not flirting, not dressing scantily, immodestly, and/or provocatively, and not engaging in any other activity that might stir up the lusts, romantic emotions, and baser interests of someone other than our spouse. And the commandments against "uncovering the nakedness" of others would certainly include surfing the television and Internet and watching videos and movies for such purposes (Leviticus 18:6-19; Job 31:1; Psalm 119:37; Matthew 5:27-30). When we do these things we commit adultery in our hearts, thus dishonoring both our spouse and our Lord and Saviour, and cheapening the value of our marriage relationship. Given the culture we live in we must guard our eyes and thoughts when we go to the work place, the shopping center, and, sadly, sometimes even when we go to meetings of the assembly. God has given us a good gift. Let us not spoil it!

Chapter 10

Elements of a Happy Marriage: Management of Finances

Who Has Responsibility?

There are a number of scriptural principles that relate to management of finances in a household. First, on the basis of 1 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 5:23,24, and 1 Timothy 2:12,13, the husband is the head of the wife. Therefore, the husband should have the overall responsibility for managing the household finances. It may be that he is a terrible mathematician and she a trained bookkeeper; in such a case it might be profitable for the two to work together on paying bills, balancing the checking account, and so forth. But final responsibility and authority for expenditures rests with him.

Whose Money Is It?

Sometimes the husband gets the idea that since *he* earned his paycheck through *his own* hard work, the money belongs to *him* and he is free to spend it as he pleases. The working wife may also develop this attitude, particularly if her husband already manifests it. However, in general it is not wise to make a distinction between “his money” and “her money.” The statement of Scripture that “they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24) is not, I believe, limited to the physical union of husband and wife. It involves as well the pooling of resources, having all things in common, and not having separate bank accounts. In this connection, it is well to keep in mind that all that we have in the way of material wealth and property, as well as talents, abilities, and intelligence, belong to the

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Lord and are only on loan to us (1 Samuel 2:5-7; Job 1:21; Luke 16:12). We are responsible to God to use what He has given us for His glory and the edification of His people, and not to make a name and a place for ourselves in this world nor to satisfy our own fleshly desires.

Preparing a Budget

It is wise for the husband and wife periodically to plan together a budget based on total resources and anticipated income that allots a set amount for food, clothing, household expenses, automotive expenses, utilities, and so forth, and also allows for some saving for larger purchases and for emergencies. They should pray together for wisdom and guidance from the Lord as to spending, saving, and specific purchases.

To live within their budget, the husband and wife must steel themselves against peer pressures and media forces to spend, spend, spend in order to keep up with the latest fashions, entertainments, and electronic toys. They should prayerfully consider restricting (or better yet, eliminating) television watching for themselves and their children, not only because of program content but because of the encouragement the commercials give to young and old to want things they don't need, to spend money they don't have, and to think that "the good life" is defined by things that can be purchased.

Giving

Prayerful consideration should also be given to the proportion of total (before taxes) income to be devoted to charitable contributions. While the Old Testament guideline for this is a tenth (or tithe; Leviticus 27:30; 1 Samuel 8:15,17), a sense of God's grace and the extent of His great gifts to us may lead us to give far more than a tenth ("as God has *prospered*" us; 1 Corinthians 16:2) toward support of the Lord's work.

Standard of Living

A snare that newly married couples often fall into, and that often ends up destroying the marriage, is coveting too high a standard of living from the outset. There is a tendency with young people to want to begin their own homes at the same standard presently enjoyed by their parents, forgetting that in most instances their parents started out quite simply and lived within their means. In attempting to attain this standard the couple quickly finds themselves deep in debt with a large portion of the weekly paychecks going to make payments to creditors. In order to meet expenses, the husband begins volunteering for overtime duty or takes a second job, and the wife gets a job—or maybe two—as well. As a result, the husband and wife hardly see each other any more; if they should have children, these soon get shuttled off to a day-care center; and the marriage relationship becomes strained, often to the breaking point.

Listen to what Scripture has to say in this regard: “Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1 Timothy 6:6-8). “Be content with such things as you have” (Hebrews 13:5). “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another” (Romans 13:8). “The borrower is servant to the lender” (Proverbs 22:7).

Paul Wilson in *The Institution of Marriage* (Bible Truth Publishers, Addison, IL) offers the following comments on this topic: “It is not the style of our homes, nor the model of the automobile, that are the great criteria of how a Christian is getting on; but rather, is there godliness and contentment? Some of the happiest Christians are those who have little of this world’s goods, but who enjoy Christ and the things of God, and go on in contentedness of spirit in temporal things. A striving for the things beyond one’s circumstances will help to produce leanness

of soul on the one hand, and the very opposite of happiness on the other.

“Even from a purely worldly standpoint, it is a happy experience when young married people find it pleasurable employment to labor together on fixing up an old house, or refinishing some furniture, or on any of the many things that go to make up a home. We have heard unsaved people remark that the surest way to make newly married young folks discontented is to give them everything they could wish, so that there is nothing left to work toward.”

Buying on Credit

Let us approach this matter of borrowing and going into debt from another standpoint. It is becoming a common habit for young individuals and young couples to obtain several credit cards, “max” them out early on, make the minimum payment each month, and figure on the credit card company sustaining the loss when they die with a huge debt many years down the road. Sounds like the joke is on the credit card company, doesn’t it? Well, sorry, but that is not the case. The joke is really on those who decide to live this way! And it is no joke but could be a real tragedy to the family if the husband drops dead at age 40 and leaves his wife and four children with little income, no home equity, and a huge debt. “No problem,” you say. “I have a generous life insurance policy that will cover my debts and more.”

Okay, then let us consider the following simple example: Suppose your family obtains several credit cards with a total credit line of \$40,000 (not difficult to do when many different credit card companies are competing for your business). Flush with all of this “free money,” you go out and purchase beautiful home furnishings, a nice vacation trip, lots of fine clothing, and all the latest electronic toys. At an annual interest rate of 15%, the monthly interest charge is \$500. To make it simple, suppose you

make the minimum payment each month which may just cover the \$500 interest charge. Then you keep all of your cards maxed out for the next 50 years until you die. At the end of 50 years you have paid a total of \$300,000 for purchases valued at \$40,000. So the credit card company has “made a killing” off of you. But it doesn’t stop there. After spending the \$40,000, you find there are other things you want or maybe even need, so you add more cards and more debt.

Alternatively, you could control your impulses, not give in to the need for instant gratification of your desires, wants, and lusts. You could delay each of your purchases until you had the cash in hand, spending, on the average, the \$500 per month that you would have had to pay in interest. After a little more than seven years, allowing for some inflation, you would have been able to buy everything you wanted in the first place, and still have \$500 per month free to spend in other ways.

An even better alternative, for the Christian couple who is actively seeking to know and follow God’s will in the use of His money, is to cut back on some of those desired purchases and expenditures that really are not needed and not designed to bring glory to God. Then there will be even more money left over with which actively to serve the Lord, either by sending financial assistance to missionaries, evangelists, and others who are ministering the Word of God, or by reducing one’s hours of employment to have more time available to serve the Lord oneself.

Shopping Sprees

As a final word of caution, just as one might wrongly refuse physical intimacy with one’s spouse because of anger or resentment, an offended husband or wife may give vent to the hurt by going on a shopping and spending spree. This, like a drinking spree, may provide temporary feelings of relief from one’s anger or

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frustration, but clearly only compounds the problems. The much preferred solution, as discussed in previous articles in this series, involves *verbal* communication to the spouse concerning one's unhappiness, and love and patience with each other while seeking a resolution to the problem.

Chapter 11

Elements of a Happy Marriage: Dealing with Anger

I haven't labeled this chapter "Conflict Resolution" because some areas of potential conflict, such as making decisions, misuse of the physical relationship to gain power over the spouse, and spending beyond one's means have already been considered in earlier chapters. Here we shall deal with the problem of anger, which all too often is the way the marriage partners deal with conflict, hurt feelings, and the like, and which saps the life-blood out of the marriage.

The topic of anger is referred to frequently in the Bible. There are nearly 500 verses in the Bible that have the words "anger," "wrath," "bitterness," and related words. This emotion is referred to in the Bible more frequently than love. It is complicated by the fact that most often the expression of this emotion is sinful ... but sometimes it is not. It is also complicated by the fact that its expression may take a wide variety of forms.

Righteous Anger

Scripture includes many references to God's righteous anger toward people who sin (Numbers 11:10; Deuteronomy 6:14,15; and many more). God is a holy God who hates sin and must judge sin; that is why He had to send His own Son to bear His holy judgment against sin.

On several occasions the Lord Jesus displayed righteous anger toward the religious Jews for their hypocrisy—using their religion as a means of enriching themselves at the expense of others (Matthew 23; Mark 3:1-5; John 2:13-16). It is important

to see that on none of these occasions was Jesus' anger in response to being *personally* offended or hurt. On the occasion of man's greatest personal offenses against Him, when they wrongfully condemned Him to death by crucifixion, consider His responses: "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). "When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

Moses displayed righteous anger when he came down from the mountain and found the people worshipping a golden calf (Exodus 32:19). Elihu was angry toward Job "because he justified himself rather than God" and toward Job's three friends "because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job" (Job 32:2,3).

To his fellow believers the apostle Paul writes, "Be angry but sin not" (Ephesians 4:26). We do well to respond with anger when we hear or read of men or women bringing reproach upon God or Christ or the Holy Scriptures or God's people, or grossly misrepresenting the Bible or God. Our righteous anger should lead us, first of all, to pray for wisdom and guidance, and then, as the Lord may lead, to speak to the sinning person about the offensive words or behavior. Our anger stirs us to action; however, we don't attack the *person*, using nasty language and the like. Rather we try to get such people to see how they have reproached or hurt or misrepresented God by what they have said or done. Let us make sure that what may start out as righteous anger does not end up as sinful anger (see Genesis 34 along with 49:7).

Sinful Anger

There are over 40 people, or groups of people, reported in the Bible as having sinful anger. For example, Cain was angry at his brother Abel because of envy (Genesis 4:5,6); Moses was angry

when the Israelites complained to him about having no water (Numbers 20:10,11); Balaam was angry at his donkey when it didn't go where he wanted it to go (Numbers 22:27); Balak was angry at Balaam because Balaam didn't do what Balak had hired him to do (Numbers 24:10); Saul was angry at Jonathan because Jonathan was siding with David (1 Samuel 20:32); Asa was angry at the prophet Hanani for rebuking him (2 Chronicles 16:10); Herod was angry at the wise men because they did not tell him where he could find the child Jesus (Matthew 2:16).

If we were able to interview these people in the Bible and ask, "Why were you angry?" here is what they would have said (if they had been honest):

1. I'm being treated unfairly.
2. I'm being blamed for something that is not my fault.
3. I or my family haven't been treated with proper respect.
4. That person didn't do what I wanted him to do.
5. That person isn't on *my* side.
6. That person dared to tell me I was wrong.

Notice that each of these reasons has a strong element of pride in it. If I were to interview a group of marriage and family counselors and ask for the most common reasons people give for being angry, their list would hardly be any different from this list gleaned from the Scriptures. Notice too that in many instances in Scripture, including some of the examples given above, a person was angry at one who was seeking simply to do God's will. These examples in the Bible should give us much pause the next time we are about to blow up at our wife or husband.

If my spouse sins against me and I respond in anger, does the fact that it is a response to sin automatically make my anger righteous? Not necessarily. Sometimes our anger at another's sin arises from wounded pride (Genesis 30:1,2), covetousness (Genesis 27:41), or impatience (Numbers 20:1-12); the anger is not used to make a godly appeal to the person to repent of his/her

sin, but to attack and/or get even with the sinner. Perhaps you firmly believe that you have a right before God to become angry every time you perceive your spouse has sinned against you. There are several things wrong with this idea:

1. Your perception may be wrong; you may have misunderstood or misinterpreted your partner's words or actions; thus your anger would be totally wrong.

2. Your perception may be correct, but if your anger is only for the purpose of punishing your spouse, it is wrong, because you are to leave vengeance in the Lord's hands (Romans 12:19).

3. Sometimes God may want you to "pass over a transgression" (Proverbs 19:11). Husbands! wives! before you lash out at your spouse for some trivial misdeed (like squeezing the tube of toothpaste in the wrong place), pray! Ask God and ask yourself if it is worth bringing conflict and disharmony into your marriage over such a matter as this. Also ask God to remind you of the many times your spouse has passed over your transgressions.

Expressions of Anger

How is anger manifested and expressed? We most often think of angry people losing their temper, blowing up, shouting, and so forth. But there are other ways. Here is an example from Scripture: "Ahab spoke unto Naboth, saying, Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs.... And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto you. And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased ... and he lay down upon his bed and turned away his face and would eat no bread" (1 Kings 21:1-4). Ahab was angry because he was not getting his own way even though he was king. He did not blow up in anger; rather he went off and pouted, and perhaps became depressed. I remember a brother making the observation that depression often results from suppressed anger—not always, but often. Some

of what people call “stress” is due to going on day after day with suppressed anger and holding grudges.

Another way anger is manifested is the silent treatment. Some people sort of realize that losing one’s temper is wrong, so they express their anger by being silent, not communicating with the ones who make them angry. I remember reading about two sisters who lived together in the same house. They had a falling out, and lived the last 20 years each keeping to her side of the house, and never once speaking to the other. How awful! How stressful!

Then there are those whose motto is: “I don’t get angry; I just get even.” Surely that is wrong because the Bible says, “Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord” (Romans 12:19,20). Are not all these other forms of anger, including the silent treatment, also a form of vengeance? A variation of this is using cutting or mocking words. For example, I remember a high school teacher of mine who, when a certain boy misbehaved in class, called him “Butterball.” If, in our anger, we attack or make fun of the person (in this case, the physical appearance of the person) rather than using the energy derived from our anger to attack and resolve the problem (in this case, his misbehavior), then we are really taking vengeance into our own hands.

Dealing with Our Sinful Anger

Scripture exhorts us to stop our sinful anger. “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not yourself in any wise to do evil” (Psalm 37:8; also Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8; Galatians 5:19-21). Our anger can have serious consequences, for “a wrathful man stirs up strife” (Proverbs 15:18), “wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous” (Proverbs 27:4), and “the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God” (James 1:20). Therefore we do well to be slow to anger (James 1:19), for “he who is slow to wrath is of great understanding” (Proverbs 14:29), “appeases strife” (Proverbs 15:18), and “is better than the mighty” (Proverbs 16:32).

While it may be easy to say, “Stop your sinful anger,” many people, including Christian husbands and wives, really struggle with the problem of uncontrolled anger. It may seem like the anger just flashes out before the person knows it is happening. What advice can we give to such people?

1. First of all, take an inventory of all the excuses you have given yourself for your anger problem. Do you say, “That’s just the way I am,” or “That’s the way God made me,” or “I’m only human,” or “I’m just a sinner like everyone else,” or “All the males in my family have anger,” or “I have a short fuse but I get over it quickly,” or “I often wake up on the wrong side of the bed”? Not a single one of these excuses is valid because as a Christian you are a new creation in Christ: “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

2. Check your thought life. Do you often have angry thoughts toward your spouse? Does your mind go through scenarios in which you are engaged in an angry argument with another person? When this happens, do you catch yourself, confess your sin to God, and ask Him to help you to deal with that person in a loving, Christ-like way? “Be not hasty *in your spirit* to be angry” (Ecclesiastes 7:9).

3. Memorize Matthew 5:44: “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, . . .” We may not think of applying this verse to the present situation of a spouse who has irritating habits and behaviors. But if we are to love and bless and do good to those who are our sworn enemies, how much *more* ought we to do these things to those who are our close friends and loved ones!

4. If you have a problem with angry words “popping out” before you know it, pay attention to whether this ever happens when you have company over or are in the presence of other Christians in the assembly or your next door neighbor or your boss at work or while you are talking on the telephone with the head of the local gossip society. If you can control yourself under certain circumstances,

then you can control yourself under *all* circumstances by simply keeping in mind that the entire Trinity dwells in us if we are God's children (Romans 8:9,11; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 3:17; 2 Timothy 1:4; 1 John 4:12,15,16). Surely we want to have self-control in the presence of our blessed Saviour. The "fruit of the Spirit is ... temperance [or self-control]" (Galatians 5:22,23), so we are not slaves to the lack of self-control that is part of our old, sinful nature.

5. Memorize Philippians 4:8 and meditate upon it often. If you find a tendency to have angry, vengeful thoughts concerning your spouse, whenever you find yourself thinking such thoughts, replace them with thoughts of that which is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy about your spouse. "Whatsoever things are lovely" means those things that tend toward making friends, so replace your angry thoughts with thoughts about how you and your wife or husband can become better friends.

6. Just keeping the anger bottled up inside us is *not* the solution to our problem. This will tend to create other problems such as depression, stress, and physical illness. You need either to turn the whole thing over to the Lord and let Him deal with it, or else in a prayerful, loving, Christ-like manner go to your spouse with whom you are angry and seek to resolve the problem. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

Dealing with the Sinful Anger of Our Spouse

"A soft answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1). "Wise men turn away wrath" (Proverbs 29:8). "A gift in secret pacifies anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath" (Proverbs 21:14; see Genesis 43:11,12). "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:44,45).

Chapter 12

Marriage with an Unsaved Partner

Our hearts go out to married couples of which only one of the partners is saved. How difficult it often is for such couples to enjoy the full mutual happiness that comes from both partners being submitted to the Lord. We should seek to encourage the believing spouse by assuring him/her of our prayers. But can we do more? Is there any advice we can give to our brothers and sisters in such situations? Let us seek counsel from the holy Scriptures.

The Wife's Meek and Quiet Spirit

In 1 Peter 3:1-4 we find the following advice given to the wife of an unsaved man: "Likewise, you wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, that, if any obey not the Word, they also may without the Word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

The first point made by the apostle is that wives should be subject to the authority of their husbands. We have noted previously how important this is for achieving a happy marriage when both partners are saved. It is of no less importance if the husband is not saved, for it not only will help to make the marriage more stable and enjoyable, but it will also be a most effective testimony to the unsaved husband. An attitude of submission

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(verse 1), chaste or pure behavior (verse 2), and a meek and quiet spirit (verse 4) are all important elements to be manifested by a woman who wishes to see the salvation of her husband. The word “conversation” in verses 1 and 2 is an unfortunate translation in the King James Version. “Behavior” is a better translation. The thrust of the passage is that the husband is won to the Lord not by much preaching and cajoling by the wife but by the submissive, pure, meek, and quiet *behavior* of the wife. Often, the wife may try too hard to push Christianity onto her husband. Sprinkling the house with gospel tracts, covering the walls with Scripture texts, having the Christian radio station on whenever he is home, and having Christian friends come over to speak to the husband may have the effect of driving him further away from the Lord. On the other hand, the husband is watching the wife very carefully to see what effect Christ and Christianity are having in her personal life. If she is living a Christ-like life (see 1 Peter 2:21-23 for some elements of this), diligently attending to his physical, emotional, and material needs, showing love and affection to him, and being submissive to him, these attitudes and actions will certainly not go unnoticed by him.

The Wife’s Manner of Dress

Another point made by the apostle has to do with the wife’s manner of dress. She should dress modestly at all times, not seeking to draw attention to herself by the type of clothing or jewelry she wears. Her husband will tend to fear that he may have rivals for his wife’s affections among her Christian friends, so he needs a great deal of reassurance as to his wife’s devotedness to him.

The Wife’s Submission to Her Unsaved Husband

With regard to “Wives, be in subjection to your own husbands,” a perplexing question frequently arises: “How far does this subjection go?” Suppose the husband does not allow the wife

to attend the meetings and activities of the assembly. Should the wife submit and stay home on the basis of this Scripture along with Ephesians 5:22,23, or should she disobey her husband on the basis of “we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29) and “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25)? There is no easy answer to these questions, but I would tend to advise along the line of submission to the husband in this as well as other situations that do not require her to engage in wicked behavior. It may help to consider that while man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart. If the sister’s heart is with the assembly—if she longs to be there but is prevented by her husband—the Lord takes notice of that. One is not generally considered to be forsaking the assembly if prevented because of a trial such as a serious chronic illness; is it any different if one is prevented because of a different kind of trial such as an unsaved and unyielding husband?

Not Blind, Unquestioning Obedience

Obedience to the husband in such instances should not necessarily be a blind, unquestioning obedience. The wife would do well to seek to discern her husband’s reasons for his prohibition. It may be that he simply resents her being away from home. He may fear that she is not satisfied with the friendship and companionship that he has to offer her and that she is seeking it from persons who share her Christian faith. He may feel that she will neglect her household duties, or may not be available when he needs her. Thus, the wife should make a special effort to prove to her husband that she really does care for him and enjoys spending time with him. She should take the initiative in suggesting things to do and places to go together, considering particularly his interests. If he does allow her to go out occasionally, she should make it a point to return home promptly after the service is over. If she believes that it is God’s will that she disobey her husband’s wishes in order

to attend meetings of the assembly, then she should bend over backwards to be submissive to her husband in every other respect possible.

An Unsaved Wife

If it is the husband who is saved and the wife unsaved, many of the same principles apply. While the husband is not bound by Scripture to submit to his wife's wishes concerning his Christian activities, he must give full consideration to her fears, needs, and desires. He might consider curtailing some of his church-related activities in order to spend time with her. He ought to make every effort frequently to reassure her of his love for her. Also, Peter exhorts the husbands to give "honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel" (1 Peter 3:7). Since women tend to be weaker physically and tire more easily than men, the husband should guard against frequently running off under the guise of serving the Lord or meeting with his fellow Christians, while leaving his already tired wife behind to clean up the kitchen, put the children to bed, and pack his lunch. Such actions will not go far in attracting the wife to the Lord Jesus.

Sanctifying Influence of the Saved Spouse and Parent

Further instruction is given in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16. While Christians are to carefully avoid entering into an unequal yoke in marriage, once they find themselves in such a yoke they are not to seek to get out of it. The saved one by a Christ-like life has a sanctifying effect upon the unbelieving spouse, as well as upon the children. But suppose the unbelieving spouse lays down the ultimatum: "Either you give up all manifestations of your Christian life or I am leaving." Verse 15 of this chapter suggests that the believer should let the spouse leave in such instances. While every effort should be made to preserve a marriage (in keeping with

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Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:6), no one is asked to do this at the expense of giving up the Christian faith.

A Saved Person Marrying an Unbeliever

The passages we have been considering in 1 Peter and 1 Corinthians likely were written primarily to those who were already married when they became saved. The principles apply equally to those believers who, in violation of 2 Corinthians 6:14, willfully marry an unbeliever. However, many additional problems may exist here because of the sin of the believer in disobeying God's Word with regard to choice of a marriage partner. There may be the problem of guilt feelings due to not having confessed the sin or not being sure that God can or will forgive so serious a sin. For this we need to be reminded of the wonderful promise in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from *all* unrighteousness." There may be envy toward others who did *not* commit the same sin and as a consequence are enjoying happy Christian marriages. This attitude needs to be confessed as sinful. One may engage in self-pity, which often leads to depression, as a result of having made such a foolish choice. Or, conversely, there may be fantasizing about how much more pleasant life would be if married to another Christian. Brooding over the past, being depressed over the present, despairing over the future, and dreaming about what might have been, will only increase the problems, make it more difficult truly to love and cherish one's spouse, and lessen the effectiveness of a Christian witness toward that person.

No Thoughts of Divorce

Above all, the saved partner must diligently avoid entertaining the hope that his or her unsaved partner will initiate a divorce. If this is at all in the mind of the saved partner, it may give rise to subtle behaviors aimed at sabotaging the marriage and turning

away the heart of the partner. The saved partner might think that a divorce will automatically set him/her free to find and marry another Christian. However, this thinking is not scriptural. The verse, “if the unbelieving depart ... a brother or a sister is not under bondage” (1 Corinthians 7:15) does not imply freedom to remarry. (A detailed exposition of this verse is given in Chapter 15.) Only if the unsaved partner remarries (thus committing adultery in the extreme) might the saved partner be free to remarry (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). Even then, if the saved partner has undermined the first marriage, how can he/she expect God to bless a new marriage?

For those who may not be doing all they can to preserve their marriage and to be the best possible wife or husband to their spouse, I urge the following: Confess your sin to God and accept His forgiveness. Persevere in prayer (Colossians 4:2 JND), both for the salvation of your spouse and for spiritual wisdom, patience, and strength for yourself. Keep believing that God will answer your prayers concerning your unsaved spouse. Keep feeding on God’s Word, and if you have children, be faithful and persistent in feeding them the Word as well. Keep living the Christian life with a meek, quiet, submissive spirit. And though faint, keep pursuing (Judges 8:4) these goals; keep following Christ.

Chapter 13

Perversions of Marriage

“Whoever finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor of the LORD” (Proverbs 18:22). “Marriage is honorable in all [things]” (KJV) or “Let marriage be held every way in honor” (Hebrews 13:4 JND).

Marriage of a man with a woman is no accident. God made all of the higher species of animal life male and female. Noah was instructed by God to take two of every kind of animal—male and female—into the ark (Genesis 6:19). After God created the first man Adam, He made a wife for him out of his rib (Genesis 2:22).

However, man’s fall into sin has caused the marriage of one man, one woman, like every other good thing that God has put upon this earth, to be marred and perverted. Some of these perversions are so obviously and grossly wrong—such as incest and child sexual abuse—that there is really nothing to write about. A father who is tempted to sexually abuse his daughter or a brother his little sister or a camp counselor one of his campers will not be persuaded otherwise by anything written in this book or in Scripture about the wrongness of such activities. These are issues of the heart resulting from being far away from the Lord. The only words of counsel we have to offer such persons are the Lord’s dire warning: “Whoever shall offend one of these little ones who believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

In this chapter we shall discuss in some detail two perversions of marriage that have become so common that people who may not themselves be guilty of these perversions defend others who

do those things. These are the cluster of adultery-fornication-pornography (or heterosexual sin) and the various expressions of homosexual sin. A third perversion to be discussed in this chapter—polygamy—is not so common in the western world because it is widely outlawed; however, in other parts of the world polygamy is an accepted and common practice, even in Christian circles. Probably the most common perversion of marriage—divorce and remarriage—is so widespread and accepted, even in the Christian Church, as well as being extremely controversial, that we have devoted three separate chapters (14-16) to the discussion of this problem.

Adultery—Fornication—Pornography

The seventh commandment, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14), seems very simple and straightforward on the surface, but is found, when other Scriptures are brought in, to have many ramifications. This commandment basically is directed toward those who are living with or behaving toward one of the opposite sex as if they were married, when that is not so. If this is the case with one who is married to another, it is termed “adultery.” The term “fornication” is more commonly used in Scripture if it involves those who are not married; however, “fornication” is often used in the New Testament as a more general term that includes both married and unmarried persons who commit sexual sin.

Warnings against adultery or fornication are frequent in the New Testament:

“Be not deceived: neither fornicators,... nor adulterers,... shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9,10).

“Flee fornication. Every sin that a man does is without the body; but he who commits fornication sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18).

“To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband” (1 Corinthians 7:2).

“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becomes saints” (Ephesians 5:3).

“Mortify therefore your members that are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness,…” (Colossians 3:5).

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication” (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

“Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled; but [fornicators] and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).

For additional examples, see Acts 15:20,29; 21:25; Romans 13:9; 1 Corinthians 5; 1 Corinthians 10:8; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; James 2:11.

Under the Old Testament law, the punishment for committing adultery was death: “The man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, ... the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. And the man who lies with his father’s wife, ... both of them shall surely be put to death” (Leviticus 20:10-12).

While the death sentence was not always carried out for cases of adultery, King Solomon pointed out the particular reproach connected with this sin: “Men do not despise a thief if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry. ... But whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does it destroys his own soul. A wound and a dishonor shall he get and his reproach shall not be wiped away” (Proverbs 6:30-33).

In the New Testament, for the believer in Christ, the death penalty for adultery is replaced by discipline carried out upon the sinner by the members of the local assembly of believers. In 1 Corinthians 5 we read of a man in the assembly of believers at Corinth who was committing fornication with his father’s wife. The assembly was enjoined by the apostle Paul “to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus,” or in other words, “Put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Corinthians

5:5,13). The purpose and goal of such disciplinary action was to help the sinner realize how much he had been dishonoring God and behaving like an unbeliever and thus, it was hoped, result in his restoration to communion with the Lord and thence his restoration to the assembly. In the case of the man of Corinth, such restoration did occur, praise God, as we find recorded in chapters 2 and 7 of 2 Corinthians.

In the present day and age, when a great many moral values are being discarded as out of date, it is common among some people to experiment with sex. The public has been hoodwinked by television, movies, magazines, newspapers, and novels into believing that premarital sexual experimentation is the normal thing to do—and thus, by implication, the *right* thing to do. It has become such a common thing that even young believers in Christ are sometimes surprised to find that the Bible forbids it. And even if some are able to resist the pressures and temptations to engage in sexual activity within casual relationships and friendships, they may not be prepared to resist the additional temptations present while “going steady” or while preparing for marriage during an engagement period. As previously noted in Chapter 3, it may even be argued by some, “What harm can it do? We are planning to get married anyway.” In addition to the many Scriptures already referred to forbidding fornication, we note in Deuteronomy 22:13-21 that it was expected of young women that they should enter into the marriage relationship as virgins. (And we can be sure that the intent of Scripture is that the young *men* should enter into marriage as virgins as well.)

Mary could never have been chosen as the mother of the Messiah if she had been influenced by the thinking that characterizes the world today—and is influencing many Christians as well—that if two people are in love or engaged to be married, then any degree of physical demonstration of their love is acceptable. God honored Mary’s purity and He will honor

all young men and women who wish to please Him by remaining virgins until marriage by helping them to achieve truly happy marriages.

As a further scriptural evidence against premarital sexual activity, consider the apostle Paul's words to the church at Corinth: "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). Marriage is a type of the union between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5). This "Church age" is actually the Church's engagement period; the marriage ceremony will not take place until after Christ comes to raise up the Church to Himself in the "rapture" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 19:7). Just as the Church is to be presented as a chaste virgin to Christ, our Bridegroom, so it is beautiful and pleasing to God when a Christian couple enters into marriage as virgins.

While God may be viewed by many as not wanting people to have fun, the truth is just the opposite. "His commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). God's commandments reflect His infinite wisdom and infinite love for mankind. He alone knows what true happiness, true blessing, true "fun" is. He knows that while temporary pleasure—"Enjoy[ing] the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25)—may be found in violating the seventh commandment, far greater pleasure, happiness, blessing, and, may I say, fun will be found in refraining from premarital and extramarital sexual activity. True happiness in marriage is based on a total commitment of a man and a woman to each other: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Equally, it is based on emphasizing the spiritual relationship (that is, the relationship of each to the Lord and the commitment to help each other grow spiritually through reading God's Word, praying, worshiping, and serving the Lord together), and then the emotional relationship (that is, promoting love, affection, friendship, the nourishing and

cherishing of one another—Ephesians 5:29—being helpmates, and supporting one another through trials and hardships). If the spiritual and emotional relationships are strong, the physical relationship will be continually nourished and refreshed, and will be a source of joy, the depth of which cannot be approached in casual relationships outside of marriage. If, on the other hand, a marriage is built only upon the physical relationship—in many cases initiated prior to marriage—the physical joy and pleasure will soon be eroded by unresolved spiritual and emotional conflicts, and often fueled by guilt, jealousy, and/or suspicion concerning premarital sexual activities.

The sin of adultery is not limited to the physical act alone. The Lord Jesus made this clear in His Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not commit adultery. But I say unto you, That whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye offend you, pluck it out, and cast it from you; for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body should be cast into hell” (Matthew 5:27-29). This is supported in the Old Testament by the repeated command, “You shall not uncover the nakedness ...” (Leviticus 18:6-18). This extends the sin of fornication beyond sexual intercourse to petting and fondling (uncovering one’s nakedness with our hands) and to pornography (uncovering one’s nakedness with our eyes).

Many may congratulate themselves for never having succumbed to the sin of adultery. But how many of us can honestly say that we have never committed adultery in our hearts? King David had an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. But his sin began earlier when he “walked upon the roof ... and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon” (2 Samuel 11:2).

In the Jewish writings known as the Talmud, a story is told

about Rabbi Amram's duel with sensual desire: Once, feeling himself incapable to resist the temptation of a beautiful woman, the rabbi sought safety in numbers and summoned his colleagues with the cry, "Amram's house is on fire." This story is told in Jewish circles to illustrate the glory and honor that man can bring to himself through his personal efforts to gain the victory over temptation and sin. What is lacking in this illustration is the realization that people like Rabbi Amram have already sinned by allowing lust to fill their hearts and minds. Surely it is well if the lustful thoughts can be halted before leading to the open, active sin of fornication or adultery; however, the thoughts themselves need to be confessed before the Lord as being in the same category of sin as adultery itself in God's eyes.

Coming back to David, we might ask how he could have avoided the sin of lusting after Bathsheba. Surely, he had the right to take a walk on his own housetop. How could he help it if his eyes just happened to see a naked woman on the housetop next door? We sometimes have no control over what may happen to cross our line of vision unexpectedly. But we do have control over what we do next. We have the power of turning our head and averting our gaze, or else we can sharpen the focus of our eyes and look intently on what has come into our line of vision. David obviously responded in the latter way when he first noticed Bathsheba.

Sometimes the temptations aren't so unexpected. It is conceivable that David knew from previous experience that exciting views might sometimes be found from the roof of his house. Similarly, we may invite such temptations by watching certain television shows or movies, surfing the Internet, or reading certain books or magazines or sections of the daily newspaper that are highly likely to contain material designed to stir up the lusts of the flesh. I may realize that I need to stop watching or reading such stuff but yet I keep yielding to the ever-present temptation.

What should I do? Maybe I should think about getting rid of the television set, cancelling my Internet or magazine subscription, or curtailing visits to the public library. Or if I were David, maybe I ought to give up my right to walk on the roof of my house, or if that doesn't work, have a carpenter enclose the housetop with a high wall. These may seem to be rather drastic measures, but perhaps this is the kind of thing the Lord Jesus was referring to when He said, "If your right eye offend you, pluck it out, and cast it from you."

No doubt the reason we are so weak and so often yield to temptation is that we neglect the daily reading of and meditating upon God's Word, as well as prayer and communion with our Father in heaven, and are not really walking in the enjoyment of our salvation and appreciation of our Saviour. Plucking out our eye, whatever that may entail, may do some good, but will be of no lasting value to us if the eyes of our hearts are not redirected to Christ. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2).

Homosexual Sin

There is abundant scriptural evidence as to the sinfulness of homosexual activities. Sodom and Gomorrah were totally destroyed by God because of the rampant, open, homosexual activity carried out in those cities of old (Genesis 19:1-25; see especially verse 5). Among the various laws given to Moses for the children of Israel we read, "You shall not lie with mankind, as with womankind; it is abomination. Neither shall you lie with any beast to defile yourself therewith; neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it is confusion. Defile not yourselves in any of these things; for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you. And the land is defiled; therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomits out her inhabitants" (Leviticus 18:22-25). "If a man also

lie with mankind, as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them” (Leviticus 20:13).

We find God’s attitude toward homosexuality unchanged in the New Testament writings. The apostle Paul speaks of the Gentiles who “worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature; and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet” (Romans 1:25-27). Paul also writes to the believers at Corinth, “Know you not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind [or those who have intercourse with other males], nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9,10; see also 1 Timothy 1:9,10).

Some have tried to argue that the above Scriptures are all directed toward the common practice by homosexuals of having multiple partners or toward men who prey sexually on young boys, and that there is no scriptural prohibition of a lifelong, committed relationship between two men or two women. In response, let us consider the big picture that the Bible paints concerning marriage and sex.

1. Biblical Marriage. “Therefore shall a man ... cleave unto his wife [Hebrew: *ishshah*, wife or woman or female]” (Genesis 2:24). Nowhere in the Bible does God give instruction to two men or two women to leave their parents and cleave unto each other. The Bible tells us specifically of the wives of Adam, Cain, Lamech, Noah, Shem, ... Aquila, Felix, and Peter (at least 72 that

I have counted). This list does not include the multitude of wives inferred from the many genealogies of the Bible. Not once in the Bible is there a hint of two men or two women in a long-term, committed, marriage-like relationship.

2. Whom Do We Image? “God created man in His own image; in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them” (Genesis 1:27). “As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Corinthians 15:48). God, in creating “male and female” and instituting the marriage of “the man and his wife” (Genesis 2:25), had something still larger in mind. The relationship of the man and the woman in marriage is intended to image and reflect the relationship of Christ and the Church.

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church: and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.... For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church” (Ephesians 5:22-32; Colossians 1:18,19)

“I would have you know that the Head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the Head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3).

“I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2).

“He who has the bride is the Bridegroom; but the friend of the Bridegroom, who stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly because of the Bridegroom’s voice: this My joy therefore is fulfilled” (John 3:29). “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the

marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7).

Each Christian man and woman has a responsibility individually to bear the image of God and of Christ, in which he/she was created, and which image has been restored through the new creation (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 5:17). In addition, each Christian husband and wife has a responsibility in his/her marriage to image the relationship of Christ and the Church. It works the other way around as well: knowledge of the relationship of Christ and the Church helps the Christian married couple to define the parameters of their relationship with each other.

What does a lifelong monogamous homosexual relationship illustrate or image or reflect? Does a male-male relationship image the relationship of Christ with Himself? Does a female-female relationship image the relationship of the Church with itself? Scripture is totally silent as to this, just as it is totally silent as to instruction for the homosexual couple. There is nothing comparable to 1 Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5 that instructs the homosexual couple as to which one is to be the head, which one submissive, which one takes the lead in loving and giving. Neither is there instruction as to the propriety of adopting or fostering children in such a relationship where the child gets a double dose of one kind of parent and no dose of the other. I suggest that the reason no instruction is given in the Bible for such important considerations is that the whole relationship is contrary to Scripture. The weight of the entirety of Scripture is against it.

3. **Forbidden Homosexual Relationships.** In Leviticus 18 we find a long list of forbidden male-female relationships. However, forbidden male-male or female-female relationships are conspicuously absent, except for the all-encompassing, “You shall not lie with man as with woman” (verse 22).

4. **“Men with Men”.** In Romans 1:27 we read, “Men [*arsenes*]

with men [*arsenes*] working that which is unseemly,” not “men with boys.” The word *arsenes* means “male, masculine [as opposed to *thelus*, feminine], manly, strong.” Our word “arsenic” derives from it. The picture is not that of a stronger man preying upon a weaker one or upon a boy, but of two strong men—equal partners. The Greeks had a word for man-boy “love”—*paidierastes*, from which is derived “pederasty.” If this is what the apostle Paul through the Holy Spirit was referring to in these New Testament passages, he could easily have employed this word.

5. **“Abusers of Themselves with Mankind”**. This rather awkward phrase in 1 Corinthians 6:9 is a translation of a single Greek word, *arsenokoitai*; the same Greek word is found in 1 Timothy 1:10, translated slightly differently in KJV. The word bears a close resemblance to the one (*arsenes*) used twice in Romans 1:27, and literally means “male coitus” or “coitus between males.” My comments in item 3 above apply here as well.

It is disgraceful that many so-called Christian churches are allowing homosexuals as communicants and even as elders, pastors, and bishops. But it is not surprising that this is happening, because this trend was preceded by the allowance of *heterosexual* sin in the churches. If fornicators and adulterers are to be allowed in the local churches, why not homosexuals as well? Such has been the cry of the gay community, and justifiably so. It is hypocrisy to preach against homosexuality and to ban homosexuals from a congregation while winking at heterosexual sin in the same congregation. There has been much strong preaching in recent years by radio and television evangelists against the sin of homosexuality, while at the same time a relatively feeble voice has been raised against heterosexual sin which is much more prevalent and at least as destructive of human relationships.

May we seek to maintain personal purity and purity in our local assemblies with respect to not only homosexual sin but heterosexual sin as well. And let us remember, in accordance with

the words of the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, that purity begins with our thought lives, cleansing ourselves of the adultery in our hearts.

Polygamy

While polygamy—the practice of having two or more husbands or, more commonly, two or more wives at the same time—is not legal in the United States and most western nations, it is a fairly common practice—often a symbol of affluence and societal rank—in other countries. This practice is rather difficult to evaluate scripturally since polygamy was widely practiced among God’s chosen people in Old Testament times, and without apparent condemnation by God.

The main scriptural arguments against polygamy overlap those against homosexual practices. God made for the first man Adam *one* wife, not two or several. “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). The Lord Jesus makes it even clearer by quoting this Old Testament verse in the following way: “And they *two* [not *three* or *four*] shall be one flesh. Wherefore they are no more *two*, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:5,6). A man cannot be “one flesh” with multiple wives.

The arguments under “Whom Do We Image” in the section above on “Homosexual Sin” apply equally to the practice of polygamy. If the husband-wife relationship mirrors the relationship between Christ and the Church, what does a husband and his three wives mirror? Christ and three Churches?

Men appointed to the leadership positions of bishop (or overseer) and deacon in the local church were to be “the husband of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2,12; Titus 1:6). This does not directly speak to Christians who are not in positions of leadership in the local church. However, given that it is much more common in

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certain cultures for Christian *leaders* to have multiple wives—again, as a symbol of their social status—these verses certainly speak loudly and clearly to such men.

When Jesus quoted Genesis 2:24, adding, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder,” the Pharisees responded by asking Him, “Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement and to put her away?” The Lord answered, “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:6-8). It may be for a similar reason that God tolerated multiple wives on the parts of men of such stature as Abraham, Jacob, and David. While all three of these men appear in the Hall of Fame of Faith (Hebrews 11), yet the foundations of their faith were not as complete as those of New Testament saints whose faith was founded on the atoning sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

While God did not openly condemn the practice of polygamy among His chosen people of Israel, it is instructive to notice the effects of multiple wives on the husband-wife and wife-wife relationships.

Sarai and Hagar. “When [Hagar] saw that she had conceived, her mistress [Sarai] was despised in her eyes.... And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.... And Hagar bare Abram a son ... Ishmael” (Genesis 16:1-15). The results of this are still being played out daily, 4,000 years later, in the conflict between the descendants of Sarah’s Isaac and those of Hagar’s Ishmael.

Leah and Rachel. Jacob “loved also Rachel more than Leah.... And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren.... And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. And Jacob’s anger was kindled against Rachel” (Genesis 29:16-30:2).

Hannah and Peninnah. “Elkanah ... had two wives ... Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.... Her [Hannah’s] adversary [Peninnah] provoked her sore, to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb.... [Hannah] was in bitterness of soul” (1 Samuel 1:1-10).

Michal and King David’s other wives and concubines. “Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!” (2 Samuel 6:20). Michal was David’s first wife—his prize for killing Goliath. We read twice that “Michal Saul’s daughter loved David” (1 Samuel 18:20,28). But when Michal helped David escape from her jealous father, Saul took her away from David and gave her in marriage to another man (1 Samuel 19:11-17; 25:44). Years later, when Saul was dead and David became king, he foolishly and sinfully forced Michal to leave her husband and to become his wife again (2 Samuel 3:14-16). However, this time, Michal was just one among many wives and concubines (2 Samuel 3:2-5; 5:13-16), and she obviously did not love David any longer.

Solomon’s wives. “King Solomon loved many strange [or foreign] women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites.... And he had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines; and ... his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God.... And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD” (1 Kings 11:1-8).

So while none of these men were expressly forbidden to have multiple wives, it is clear from each of their sad stories that God’s plan from the beginning was for marriages of one man and one woman.

If a polygamist should become convicted by the Scriptures

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that polygamy is wrong, what is he to do? To divorce any or all of his wives would be in violation of Scripture (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). The following verses may apply: “Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised.... Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.... Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God” (1 Corinthians 7:18-24). I believe, from the context of the entire chapter, this is saying that if one has been through a series of unscriptural divorces and remarriages prior to being brought to the Lord, this person is not to change his present situation by terminating the present marriage in order to try to straighten out the past. But does not this principle apply equally to a Christian who, through lack of Biblical instruction or through being away from the Lord, has wrongfully married multiple wives? When such a one finally heeds the voice—the call—of the Lord, becomes restored in soul and spirit to the Lord, and wants to do what is right according to Scripture, he is to “abide in the same calling wherein he was called.” The instructions given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 strongly suggest that Christian leaders who have multiple wives should step down from their leadership positions.

Chapter 14

Divorce and Remarriage: Basic Principles

It is axiomatic with respect to many physical diseases that prevention is the best cure. The same holds true concerning broken marriages. It is for this reason that an effort has been made in earlier chapters of this book to present ministry aimed at strengthening marriage relationships. If scriptural principles were followed in the choice of a marriage partner, in behavior during the friendship, courtship, and engagement periods of the relationship, and in the marriage relationship itself, the question of divorce should rarely, if ever, arise. Particular attention has been paid in this book to the topic of “elements of a happy marriage.” If diligent attention were paid to the attitudes of submissiveness, love, confession, and forgiveness, to maintaining lines of effective communication between the partners, to praying and reading the Scriptures together, and to following scriptural principles with respect to physical intimacy, management of finances, and all other aspects of the marriage relationship, there would be not only much less talk of divorce but more positively happy marriages. So if any of our readers are in the process of casting about in various Christian books on marriage to find out what the authors have to say on the topic of divorce and remarriage, the first bit of advice we have to offer is first go back and read the previous chapters in this book.

If a couple is experiencing seemingly unresolvable problems in their marriage, help and counsel should be sought from their brothers and sisters in Christ. If there is no one in the local church to whom the couple feels free to turn, there are many

Christian counseling centers where couples can receive help for their marriage based on scriptural—rather than worldly and humanistic—principles. “In the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22; 24:6). Often troubled marriages end in divorce because one or both partners have waited too long before seeking help from counselors. By the time help is sought the emotional scars may be very deep, making reconciliation a difficult task. Let us all pray that the Lord will raise up more pastors and counselors among us—those with whom brothers and sisters in trouble will have confidence and liberty to share their problems, and who will have scriptural knowledge and spiritual wisdom and insight to provide real help to those who seek counsel. May each of us see our responsibility to watch out for and have a godly concern for one another, prayerfully seeking to minister to others in a discreet and gentle way when the Lord shows us needs such as troubled marriages.

Two Fundamental Principles

Let us begin our scriptural consideration of this very difficult and controversial topic of divorce and remarriage with a statement of two fundamental principles from the Word of God:

1. God *hates* divorce. “I hate putting away [or divorce], says Jehovah the God of Israel” (Malachi 2:16 JND). “What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:6).

2. God *loves* forgiveness and reconciliation. “Be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32). “Let her ... be reconciled to her husband” (1 Corinthians 7:11).

In this age of great laxity with regard to divorce as with all aspects of morality, there is a tendency for Christians to approach the matter of divorce from a totally wrong standpoint. The primary focus often is seeking to find scriptural reasons to justify divorce

and remarriage, trying to define the so-called “exception clause,” and so forth. However, it is the great responsibility of marriage counselors as well as brothers and sisters in Christ of couples contemplating divorce to attempt to get the couple to refocus their attention on the ways and means of resolving problems and to the prospect of reconciliation. We need to remind ourselves and one another of what God has done for us. He has “reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:18). Also, “God for Christ’s sake has forgiven” us (Ephesians 4:32). Is it not His desire that we in turn forgive one another (especially our spouses!) and be reconciled to one another (2 Corinthians 5:18; Matthew 6:14,15; 18:21-35)?

Many mistakes are made in every marriage. Divorce often comes in through the unwillingness of one or both partners to forgive the other of these mistakes. How easily do we lose sight of the tremendous debt of sin and guilt on our part which God has mercifully and graciously forgiven us, and then proudly, self-righteously refuse to forgive our spouse of offenses that pale in comparison to our own offenses against God!

We shall now consider what the Scriptures say about acceptable reasons for divorce and remarriage. But as we consider such things as the “exception clause” of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 and the “not under bondage” clause of 1 Corinthians 7:15, we need to be careful not to become like the Pharisees who tried to find ways and means of interpreting Scripture to meet their own selfish desires. While there may indeed be scriptural allowance for divorce and remarriage in certain prescribed circumstances, we need ever to keep in focus the fundamental principles stated above that *God hates divorce* and *God loves forgiveness and reconciliation*.

Four Viewpoints Concerning Divorce and Remarriage

There are many different viewpoints found in Christendom

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and even among born again Christians concerning divorce and remarriage. These may be broadly categorized into the following positions:

1. Divorce is not permitted for any reason.
2. Divorce is permitted under certain circumstances, but remarriage is not permitted for any reason.
3. Divorce and remarriage are both permitted under certain circumstances.
4. Divorce and remarriage are permitted under virtually all circumstances.

In considering these four positions, it is clear, first of all, that God intended marriage to be a permanent bond between a man and a woman. "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they two shall be one flesh. Wherefore they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:5,6; see also Genesis 2:24). "For the woman who has an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he lives; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband" (Romans 7:2). However, many of the Jews were grossly violating God's Word and purpose for marriage, divorcing for almost any reason (Matthew 19:3). At that time, according to extra-biblical writings, a controversy about divorce was taking place between the rival rabbinic schools of Hillel and Shammai. Rabbi Shammai taught from Deuteronomy 24:1 that the sole ground for divorce was some grave matrimonial offense, something evidently unseemly or indecent. Rabbi Hillel, on the other hand, held a very lax view, arguing that the ground for divorce could include a wife's most trivial offences, such as being an incompetent cook or having plain looks. In Matthew 19 we read that the Pharisees asked Jesus for His opinion in regard to this controversy. His response was first to draw their attention back to their own Scriptures (Genesis 2) concerning the permanency of the marriage bond. He then stated,

“Whoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery” (verse 9). Since adultery is a violation of God’s commandments, divorce must therefore also be a violation—except for the cause of fornication.

There are some Bible teachers today who limit the scope of fornication to unfaithfulness during the engagement period. They claim that the “exception clause” of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 only allows for the breaking of an engagement (such as considered by Joseph, Matthew 1:19), not of a consummated marriage, for the cause of unfaithfulness. However, the basic meaning of the Greek word for “fornication” and its use throughout the New Testament do not seem to support this notion. People often differentiate the words “adultery” and “fornication” in the following simplistic way: “Adultery refers to an immoral act after marriage and fornication to such an act before marriage.” But the Greek word *porneia* translated “fornication” throughout the New Testament has the primary meaning of having a relationship with a prostitute, and, by extension, any illicit sexual relationship, either before or during marriage. While the prostitutes themselves were usually young unmarried women, often slave girls brought in from a conquered country, the men who visited them were not necessarily unmarried. The word *moicheia* translated “adultery” throughout the New Testament has a more restricted meaning of intercourse between a married man and a woman not his wife, or between a married woman and a man not her husband. “Fornication,” as used in the Scriptures, is a more general term and often includes adultery as well as premarital relationships. Thus, it does not seem warranted to restrict the term “fornication” to unlawful *premarital* relationships alone.

Further, if the “exception clause” applies to couples *engaged to be* married, let us note how Matthew 19:9 could be read: “Whoever shall break an engagement, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who

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had once been engaged to another commits adultery.” Thus, if there has been no unfaithfulness, but an engagement is broken due to some other reason, and both persons remain virgins, Scripture would be saying that these persons would be committing adultery if they were later to marry other partners. Such an application puts a definite strain upon the definition of “adultery.” It also negates part of the purpose of an engagement period, namely, for a couple to learn more about each other in view of the possibility of living the rest of their lives together, to identify beforehand potentially disastrous problem areas if they were to marry, and to pray together to learn definitively God’s will concerning the proposed marriage—all leading to the possible outcome of termination of the engagement if it becomes clear that it is not God’s will for the marriage to be consummated. Thus, the restriction of the exception clause to breaking of an engagement rather than to divorce seems not to be supportable from Scripture.

On the basis of the preceding arguments, the first of the four positions listed above—“divorce is not permitted for any reason”—does not appear to be valid. Likewise, the verses cited from Matthew 5 and 19 set aside the fourth position—“divorce and remarriage are permitted under virtually all circumstances.” Now, if divorce is permitted under certain circumstances, does Scripture likewise give permission to remarry under these same circumstances? It would appear, again on the basis of Matthew 19:9 that it does: “Whoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery.” Some might argue that the exception clause in this verse is attached to “put away his wife” and not to “marry another.” Let us read the verse again, omitting the clause about marrying another: “Whoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, commits adultery.” Clearly this does not make sense apart from the assumption that the person instituting the divorce will remarry another. If remarriage after divorce were not permitted

under any circumstances, verse 9 would most likely have been written: “Whoever shall put away his wife and shall marry another commits adultery.” The exception clause would be superfluous in this case. Thus the second position—“divorce is permitted under certain circumstances but remarriage is not permitted for any reason”—does not appear to have scriptural support.

We are left with the third position—“divorce and remarriage are both permitted under certain circumstances.” Various aspects of this position will be considered in more detail in Chapter 15. We shall consider whether permission of divorce includes the liberty of the believer to *initiate* a divorce under any circumstances. And we shall take up the difficult, and controversial, task of trying to define precisely the “certain circumstances” under which divorce and remarriage are permitted by Scripture.

Chapter 15

Divorce and Remarriage: Guidelines for Specific Situations

In Chapter 14, four broad categories of viewpoints concerning divorce and remarriage were listed and discussed. On the basis of various Scriptures, particularly Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, three of these positions were eliminated, leaving us with the position that “divorce and remarriage are both permitted under certain circumstances.” However, as pointed out at the conclusion of Chapter 14, we still need to define precisely the “certain circumstances” under which divorce and remarriage are permitted by Scripture. This is the topic under consideration in the present chapter.

Four situations will be discussed in the following pages:

1. A believer is divorced and the former spouse remarries.
2. The believer’s spouse commits fornication, but does not divorce the believer.
3. The believer’s spouse obtains a divorce, but does not remarry and does not commit fornication.
4. The believer is deserted by the spouse.

Divorce and Remarriage by the Believer’s Spouse

If a believer is divorced and the former spouse remarries, this might be considered as “fornication in the extreme” on the part of the former spouse. Therefore, it may be inferred from Matthew 5:32 that the believer in this situation is free to remarry without being guilty of adultery. However, let it be added that the one divorced (or equally, one who is widowed), should not feel compelled to remarry, but should carefully weigh before the

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Lord the option of remaining unmarried. The apostle Paul offers the advice, “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.... Are you loosed from a wife? seek not a wife” (1 Corinthians 7:8,27; see also verses 32-34, 38-40). The one who has lost husband or wife through death or divorce should prayerfully seek to learn what the Lord is trying to teach through this trial, and to determine if the Lord has a special service to be carried out while in the unmarried state. (See Chapter 2 for further thoughts on this subject.)

Fornication but Not Divorce by the Believer’s Spouse

If the spouse of a believer commits fornication, but does not initiate a divorce from the believer, it would seem, again on the basis of Matthew 19:9, that the believer is given permission to divorce the unfaithful spouse and to remarry without being guilty of adultery. As noted in Chapter 14, because of the variety of contexts in which this word “fornication” is found in Scripture, there does not appear to be any basis for permitting divorce for certain classes of sexual sin and not for others. However, for one who may be contemplating initiating divorce from an unfaithful spouse, there are some important questions and principles to consider.

First of all, it is important to consider the attitude of the so-called “innocent party” toward the marriage and toward the sinning spouse. If a marriage is floundering, it may be that one or both partners—instead of trying to take the necessary steps of confession, forgiveness, reconciliation, and so forth—are secretly looking for a scriptural excuse to terminate the marriage. A single act of infidelity on the part of one’s spouse, whether present or past, whether repented of or not, may be seized upon as a justifiable reason for divorce. Considering the exception clauses of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 alone, one cannot argue against this reason. But we

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must consider this matter in the light of the *entire* Word of God. We must balance the tendency to seize upon any act of marital unfaithfulness as a basis for divorce with those fundamental principles stated in Chapter 14 that *God hates divorce* and *God loves forgiveness and reconciliation*. Certainly, if the sinning spouse has confessed and repented of his/her sin to the spouse, there is an obligation to forgive, just as God “is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” when we confess them to Him (1 John 1:9); we are also exhorted to forgive “one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32). But even more, God has forgiven us far beyond those sins of which we have consciously recognized, confessed, and repented. He is always seeking to draw His wandering, sinful children back to Himself. Are we to be any different from our heavenly Father in this respect? Should we not be patiently, prayerfully seeking the return and reconciliation of our errant spouse, however great or extensive the sin?

In this regard it would be well to read the account given in the first three chapters of Hosea concerning the prophet Hosea and his wife. Upon direction from the Lord, he married a harlot, then had three children by her. Subsequently she left him to resume her trade as a harlot. According to Mosaic law, he was perfectly justified in having her stoned to death for adultery. But instead he pursued after her, keeping track of her whereabouts, and working by various means to draw her back to him (Hosea 2:6-8). Finally, when she was reduced to the wretched condition of a slave and placed upon the auction block, he *bought* her—his own wife—for the substantial sum of 15 pieces of silver and a quantity of barley (3:2). Then he said to her, “You shall abide for me many days; you shall not play the harlot, and you shall not be for another man; so will I also be for you” (3:3). This, of course, was not just the story of Hosea and his wife; it was written to the nation of Israel to illustrate the kind and amount of love that God had for the nation of Israel which had forsaken Jehovah for idol

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worship. For us Christians as well, it serves as a pattern for the length to which our love should go in seeking reconciliation with a wayward spouse. Let us remember also that very rarely is the fault or failing one-sided. All behavior is caused, and there may well be reasons within the marriage why one has looked elsewhere for gratification.

Thus, before divorce for fornication is even contemplated, the “innocent spouse” should truly be doing everything within his/her power (or, more properly, through the power of God and under the direction of the Holy Spirit) to bring about restoration and reconciliation of the sinning spouse. But what if the spouse yet persists in unfaithfulness, while at the same time having no desire to terminate the marriage relationship? Such a situation makes a travesty of the marriage relationship as well as placing an immense emotional strain upon the faithful spouse and the rest of the family; thus it may be best for all concerned to force the unfaithful one to make a choice between the two mates—with separation or divorce being a possible outcome.

At this point, a crucial question must be posed: Does Scripture really give us permission to divorce our mate, either in this situation of extreme and persistent unfaithfulness on the part of the mate or for any other reason? Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 appear to grant such permission. However, another passage seems to state the matter differently: “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart [literally, be separated] from her husband; but and if she depart [or be separated], let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband; and let not the husband put away his wife” (1 Corinthians 7:10,11). The Matthew passages seem to assume the man is free to put away his immoral wife, while the apostle Paul states clearly that the husband should *not* put away his wife. I have no clear answer to this apparent conflict. It may be that the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 is stating the matter in general terms, without considering the special

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case of fornication. In that he says, “I command, yet not I, but the Lord” (verse 10), he seems to be reiterating the principle stated by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9: “What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder [or separate].”^{*} The application of this general principle to the specific case of fornication is given three verses later in Matthew 19:9. On the other side of the coin, the argument might be presented, similar to our references to Hosea and his wife, that the relationship of husband and wife is intended to be a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:23-32). Christ will never divorce His Church, no matter how unfaithful the Church may be to its Head. Our blessed Lord is always ready to have us reconciled to Himself when we drift away from Him. Therefore, by analogy, it may be argued, the Christian husband should not divorce his wife for unfaithfulness, nor should the believing wife divorce her immoral husband.

Tying these various arguments together, it would seem to be most safe and wise for a Christian to refrain from *initiating* a divorce. As mentioned above, the persistent unfaithfulness of the spouse may strain the relationship to the point of necessitating separation—perhaps even a legal separation. The door should always be left open for reconciliation, and a legal separation allows for this much more readily than a full divorce. (Note: Situations other than persistent marital infidelity—for example, wife- or child-beating—may likewise force a believer to separate from the spouse for a time. But again, reconciliation should ever be the ultimate aim.)

Suppose a divorce does take place under these circumstances. According to the Matthew passages the “innocent party” may remarry without being branded an adulterer. However, as final as

^{*}The Greek word *chorizo* is found both in Matthew 19:9 and Mark 10:9, translated “put asunder,” and in 1 Corinthians 7:10, translated “depart.”

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a divorce may seem to be, the desire and hope for reconciliation should not cease once a divorce has been finalized. My own counsel to such a one would be not to consider marriage to another person until there is indication that reconciliation will never or can never occur. Thus, one who is divorced would do well to wait either for the Lord to work the miracle of reconciliation or for the matter to be resolved by the unfaithful one remarrying another person. This latter, as pointed out above, is an extreme act of fornication or adultery, and renders impossible recovery of the original marriage.

Divorce but Not Fornication by the Believer's Spouse

So far we have considered the question of divorce and remarriage of a believer when fornication or remarriage of the unfaithful spouse has occurred. Let us now consider the status of the Christian who has been divorced by his/her spouse but where there is no remarriage and no evidence of fornication on the part of the divorcing spouse. The crucial question in such a situation is whether there is freedom for the divorced one to remarry.

The Lord's teaching in Matthew 5:32 again appears to be very plain in this regard: "Whoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, *causes her to commit adultery*; and whoever shall marry her who is divorced *commits adultery*." Thus, if the divorced one remarries, both she and the one who marries her become adulterers; apparently this is because the divorce is not recognized as valid in the eyes of the Lord.

A passage in 1 Corinthians 7 is often referred to in this connection and used to present instruction contrary to that found in Matthew 5:32. Concerning a believer who is divorced or deserted by a spouse who is an unbeliever, verse 15 reads, "A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace." This is taken by some to be another exception

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clause to be added to the one in Matthew 5:32. That is, the believer is free to remarry not only if the divorcing spouse is a fornicator, but also if the divorcing spouse is an unbeliever. The problem with this teaching is that the second exception, rather than supporting and extending the first exception, blatantly contradicts it. How can it be that the believer divorced by an *unbeliever* is free to remarry when at the same time “*whoever* shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery”? The so-called exception clause in 1 Corinthians 7:15 cannot stand without altering the Lord’s teaching in Matthew 5:32.

What then does 1 Corinthians 7:15 mean? Both the context and the original Greek will help us as we consider this passage in some detail. In verses 10 and 11, as mentioned previously, we have a statement of the general principle: “Let not the wife depart [or *be separated*] from her husband; but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband; and let not the husband put away his wife.” This is a restatement of the words of the Lord in Matthew 19:6, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder [or *separate*].” Then in verses 12-16 the apostle Paul considers a special situation not explicitly covered by the Lord Jesus in His address to His disciples. “But to the rest speak I, not the Lord, If any brother has a wife who believes not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman who has a husband who believes not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean, but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. For what do you know, O wife, whether you shall save your husband? or how do you know, O man, whether you shall save your wife?”

In the corrupt city of Corinth, it was not uncommon for a

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new believer in Christ to have previously been an idolater and perhaps also an adulterer, and to have an unsaved spouse still taken up with the corrupt practices prevalent in that locale. Thus the question no doubt was posed to the apostle Paul as to whether it was appropriate to continue living with one's unsaved spouse—to continue in that unequal yoke with an unbeliever while now linked with Christ. In the Old Testament we read in Ezra 10 of the Israelites putting away the wives they had taken from the surrounding nations. Is this what the believers in Christ were to do with their unbelieving spouses? No, the apostle gives instruction befitting the period of grace in which we now live: if the unbeliever is willing to continue the marriage, this is fine; do not leave or break up the marriage, “for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband.” The daily prayers and Christian testimony of the unbelieving spouse are of inestimable value to the soul of the unsaved one and may result in the salvation of that one. Note that again the fundamental principles of the permanency of marriage and God hating divorce are in evidence in the instruction given here.

But what if the unbeliever is *not* content to continue the marriage? What if he is ashamed or embarrassed to have a wife who will no longer join him in his corrupt or worldly practices and who would much prefer to spend her time reading the Bible, worshiping with other believers, and serving the Lord? What if he threatens her that unless she gives up her new religion he will leave or divorce her? “If the unbelieving depart, let him depart” (verse 15). In other words, although God's desire for all is permanency in marriage, He does not expect one to give up Christianity in order to keep his or her marriage from disintegrating (see Matthew 19:29). While we are enjoined to submit ourselves one to another in the fear of God, and while wives are to submit themselves unto their own husbands (Ephesians 5:21,22), this submission and

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subjugation cannot be carried out at the expense of obedience to the Lord. “We ought to obey God rather than man” (Acts 5:29); “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, *as it is fit in the Lord*” (Colossians 3:18).

This seems to be the setting for the next phrase of our passage, “A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases” (1 Corinthians 7:15). “Under bondage” is a translation of the Greek word *douloo* which means literally “*brought into* servitude or subjugation.” It does not say that a brother or a sister is *no longer under* servitude or subjugation (the Greek word for this is *douleuo*) but is *not brought into* this condition. (See Acts 7:6, Romans 6:18,22, and 2 Peter 2:19 for examples of *douloo* and Acts 7:7, Romans 6:6, and Galatians 4:9 for examples of *douleuo*.) It is referring to a new kind of servitude—to one’s marriage rather than to the Lord—that would be imposed upon the believer if forced to give up the Christian walk to prevent the unbelieving spouse from breaking up the marriage.

It is argued by some that “not under bondage” means that the bond of marriage (referred to in 1 Corinthians 7:27,39 and Romans 7:2) is broken when an unbelieving spouse departs or divorces, thus freeing the believer to remarry another. To some extent this notion has been promoted by a misreading of the Greek words in the four passages. In 1 Corinthians 7:15, “bondage” is *douloo*, while in Romans 7:2 and 1 Corinthians 7:27,39 “bound” is *deo*. A number of prominent Bible teachers have based their interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:15 at least in part on the mistaken notion that the same Greek word is used in these four passages. *Deo* means “to bind, as with a rope or chain,” and is also found in Mark 11:4 in reference to a “colt *tied* by the door,” and in Acts 12:6 and 24:27 of prisoners bound by chains or other measures. *Douloo* along with its companion verb *douleuo*, “to serve or be in servitude,” and noun form *doulos*, “servant,” are sometimes used in the New Testament to denote slavery to a human master (as in Philemon 16). However,

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these words are used much more frequently to denote a willing service by Christians to God or to one another. For example, “You became the *servants* of righteousness ... and ... *servants* of God” (Romans 6:18,22); “I made myself *servant* unto all” (1 Corinthians 9:19); and “By love *serve* one another” (Galatians 5:13). *Deo* and *douloo* (and its companions) have distinctive meanings and are not used interchangeably nor as denoting different degrees or stages of the same condition. For this reason, along with the one given in the preceding paragraph, we have no warrant for saying that “not under bondage” in 1 Corinthians 7:15 refers to the breaking of the marriage bond.

Many people have another misconception concerning “bondage” in 1 Corinthians 7:15. They regard having to remain unmarried for an indefinite period of time while hoping for reconciliation to be a state of bondage. The believer is not able to enjoy marriage with the original spouse, and neither is he or she free to remarry another as long as the unbelieving spouse does not break the original marriage bond by remarrying or committing fornication. It is thus argued that “not under bondage” in 1 Corinthians 7:15 means that there is freedom for the believer to remarry under such circumstances. However, this interpretation does not fit in with the context of the entire passage. The apostle Paul did not regard it bondage to be in an unmarried state, but rather freedom (verses 7,8,27,32,34,37,38,40).

It may therefore be concluded that while the believer is not required to give up his or her Christian religion in order to appease the unbelieving spouse and keep the marriage together, there does not appear to be any clear Biblical permission for remarriage when one is divorced by an unbelieving spouse. In fact, according to Matthew 5:32, as already noted, remarriage by the believer would result in an adulterous relationship unless there were fornication on the part of the unbeliever or the marriage bond had been broken by remarriage of the unbeliever to another

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person. Thus, the general principle for separated or divorced ones laid down in 1 Corinthians 7:10,11—“remain unmarried, or be reconciled”—seems to remain valid in this specific situation.

To those who may reject the foregoing arguments and insist that “not under bondage” implies liberty to remarry, I would urge two things:

1. The fundamental principles that *God hates divorce* and *God loves forgiveness and reconciliation* ought to be very carefully considered should such a situation of divorce by an unbeliever occur. Thus remarriage, if it occurs at all, should be put off for a lengthy period of time—perhaps years—to allow adequate time to see if the unbeliever’s heart will be changed in response to the periodic reaffirmations of devotion by the spouse and of the desire for reconciliation. Reconciliation with the original spouse rather than remarriage to a new one should always be uppermost in the mind of the believer.

2. The person who rejects these arguments ought to be honest enough to write to the author of this book and tell him where he has erred in his explanation and interpretation of the Scriptures concerning divorce and remarriage.

Desertion by the Believer’s Spouse

We have considered the passage in 1 Corinthians 7 as applying to divorce by an unbelieving spouse. It might equally apply to desertion by the unbeliever without formal divorce. By “desertion” I refer to a person dropping out of sight—totally disappearing—for an extended period of time. This is generally a very trying situation for the believing spouse because of the uncertainty of it all. There is no knowledge of whether he is dead or alive, whether he has remarried under a different name, or whether there is any possibility of reconciliation.

Here, as in the other situations we have considered, every provision for reconciliation should be made. I would suggest that

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the *minimum* standard for the believing spouse should be to fall back on state or local law concerning the presumption of death after a person has been missing for several years. In most states this period is seven years. Once a person is legally presumed to be dead, a marriage with that person can be annulled or dissolved by the courts if the “surviving” spouse so desires.

Further Considerations

Some may regard the instruction given in this chapter to be overly strict, imposing an intolerable burden upon those divorced or deserted. Indeed it is possible that a believer who is divorced or deserted may be in a position where it is not scripturally permissible to remarry for many years or perhaps the rest of his/her life. This will be a very trying and burdensome situation for most in that position, although not beyond the ability of the Lord to come in and provide the needed strength and help and encouragement. “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted [or tried] above what you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

There may be a strong temptation to go ahead and remarry in spite of scriptural prohibition, and hope that God will forgive. Certainly God does forgive in such situations, but much blessing is lost whenever we take matters into our own hands and move contrary to Scripture. For those who may think their trial and burden is unique, it might help to consider other calamities, some perhaps even worse than divorce or desertion, that bring marriage to an end, for all practical purposes, and at the same time make it impossible for one to remarry. There are those whose spouses have been in a coma or have existed in a “vegetative state” for years following a stroke or heart attack or accident; those whose spouses are in prison for life or perhaps in a prisoner-of-war camp in a foreign country; and those with spouses who have become severely

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mentally ill and must spend most of the time in an institution.

This leads into another important point. What is the responsibility of the fellow-believers of those who experience such trials? We must recognize that persons who have been divorced or deserted—like those whose spouses have been taken away in death—will have many needs, both material, emotional, and spiritual. We must be willing to put ourselves out, both as individuals and as assemblies of believers, to help those fellow members of the body of Christ who are in distress.

A wife and mother who has been divorced or whose husband is severely disabled may need baby sitting help while she goes out and works to provide for her family. She may for a time need help paying the bills. Either a husband or a wife left alone will tend to be lonely and will welcome phone calls or visits or letters, and being included in group activities. There may be a tendency toward self-pity and depression on the part of such which requires spiritual ministry by sympathetic and understanding fellow-believers.

In conclusion, it is most encouraging these days to find one who takes seriously the truth that God hates divorce and loves reconciliation, and is willing to forego divorce and/or remarriage in order to persevere in prayer and expectation of reconciliation with his/her spouse. Such a person will be richly blessed by the Lord and is most deserving of all the financial, emotional, and spiritual support we can possibly give.

Chapter 16

Divorce and Remarriage: Assembly Discipline and Restoration

Scriptural guidelines concerning divorce and remarriage have been presented in Chapters 14 and 15. It was concluded that there is scriptural warrant for divorce and remarriage, but only under a very restricted and extreme set of circumstances. Suppose now that a Christian fails in walking according to these guidelines; suppose divorce and remarriage occurs that is not according to God's Word, and suppose the nature of the sin is so blatant and extreme as to result in the excommunication of this person from the local assembly of believers. What is such a person to do when once the sin is recognized and repented of? And what is the responsibility of the assembly toward such a person?

General Principles

Before getting into the specifics of this situation, it might be profitable to review some general principles of Scripture with respect to restoration of a sinning Christian. Another writer, discussing the matter of discipline of a wicked person, writes the following: "Thank God, there is a bright side when, after [the assembly's] faithfulness in the path of duty, there is the joy of seeing the wanderer restored. We can almost feel the thrill of the apostle's gladness as he wrote of the recovered brother, 'I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation' (2 Corinthians 7:4).

"Restoration is what was prayed for, hoped for, expected.

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While one put away is to be let alone, this does not preclude the thought of prayer for him, and looking after him after the lapse of some time. Especially should this be done if he is weak and untaught, and if he has bowed to the Lord's judgment. Of course, those who put a bold face on it, or who continue in sin, can only be left in God's hands.

"Marks of true recovery are very plain. There will be a sense of sin against *God* (Psalm 51), a judging of the root of it, a submission to God's governmental dealing, even when undue severity may have been used by the saints; these are some of the proofs of true recovery. If there was trespass against any, the wrong will be righted as far as possible—the dishonest gains refunded, the bitter, false accusations withdrawn; also, we need hardly add, the sin will be forsaken. Until there is restoration to communion with God there can be no true restoration to the assembly. The steps in the reinstatement of the cleansed leper (Leviticus 14) to his privileges are interesting and instructive in this connection. It was the priest who was to examine the healed man, and the various rites in his restoration are most suggestive of complete recovery.

"It will be noticed that the leper, even after his restoration to the worship of God, 'remained abroad out of his tent seven days'; it suggests that even after personal recovery an interval may elapse before the person is restored to his privileges in the assembly. There are many reasons for this: if the offense has been glaring or disgraceful, it is fitting that the world should see the genuineness of the repentance. It will not hurt, but deepen in the individual a sense of his sin. In addition to this, it is well to remember that the tender consciences of the saints have been sorely wounded, and the offender will gladly allow time for the healing of the shock inflicted. Anything like insistence upon his immediate reception after confession, or resentment at delay, would show that the work in his soul lacks completeness.

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“On the other hand, the assembly needs to guard against a hard, unforgiving spirit. When the consciences of all are satisfied, there should not be needless delay in confirming their love to their recovered brother. ‘Sufficient to such a man is this punishment that was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise you ought rather to forgive him,... lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that you would confirm your love toward him’ (2 Corinthians 2:6-8). How gracious, how loving, and yet how holy, are all these directions!

“And may we not add that when the restored brother is again in his place, his sin is not to be remembered? True, *he* will not forget it; but shall the others, by look or manner, betray lack of confidence? Ah, we are too much like the world, which ‘forgives, but cannot forget.’ Neither can we say such an one must keep silence, and never again expect to be used of the Lord. It was Peter, the wandering sheep, who was made a shepherd for others (John 21:15,17). When David was restored he would teach transgressors God’s ways (Psalm 51). He will walk softly the rest of his days, a chastened person, but a happy and a useful member of the body of Christ. ‘He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake’ (Psalm 23:3).” (Samuel Ridout in *The Church and Its Order According to Scripture*, Loizeaux Brothers, Neptune, NJ).

One mark of true recovery of a sinning Christian mentioned by Mr. Ridout is forsaking the sin. Herein lies a difficulty in applying the general principles of restoration to the situation of unscriptural divorce and remarriage. It is held by some that the one who is unscripturally divorced and remarried lives in a continual state of adultery as long as this new marriage relationship exists; and as long as the sin of adultery is not forsaken, such a person—though he may be repentant and restored to the Lord in his own soul—cannot be restored to

fellowship with the assembly of Christians.

Application to Unscriptural Divorce and Remarriage

In the remainder of this chapter, we shall examine this point of view from different angles and consider various options that might be considered with respect to the person who is unscripturally divorced and remarried, has repented of his sin, and desires to be restored to the assembly of believers. The first three options involve physical actions or events that could be interpreted as forsaking the sin of adultery; the fourth is a spiritual action that might be acceptable evidence of forsaking the sin:

1. Living celibately within the framework of the present marriage.
2. Terminating the present marriage.
3. Continuing in the present marriage and remaining excommunicated until the previous spouse dies.
4. Confessing the sin and giving evidence of true repentance and restoration to the Lord.

Option 1. Living celibately within the framework of the present marriage. This is a solution proposed by a major denomination of Christendom today, namely, to enjoin a couple in which divorce and remarriage has occurred to take a vow of celibacy for the rest of their married lives. I believe Scripture opposes this approach. 1 Corinthians 7:5 expressly declares: “Defraud not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; *and come together again*, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.” This approach does not seem to be a very practical solution either as it would tend to put a great strain on the marriage relationship and make for a very unnatural marriage.

Option 2. Terminating the present marriage. This approach might satisfy those who demand the forsaking of the sin of adultery

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before receiving one back into fellowship. However, we need to examine whether there is scriptural warrant for terminating the present marriage under such circumstances.

I am aware of but one passage of Scripture (Ezra 9 and 10) that supports the purposeful dissolution of unlawful or ungodly marriages. When the remnant of Israel returned from the Babylonian captivity, many men took wives from the local nations (Canaan, Moab, Egypt, and others). But when convicted that this was wrong, and not according to God's law (Exodus 34:10-17), they covenanted with God, under Ezra's leadership, to put away their foreign wives as well as the offspring from these unions (Ezra 10:3,11).

For the Christian there is a similar law against mixed marriages: "If her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39).^{*} But what if this law is violated? What is to be done if a Christian *does* marry an unbeliever, or if one already married becomes saved and the spouse remains unsaved? Is the example of Ezra to be followed? No, but rather the answer for those who live in the New Testament era of grace is clearly stated in 1 Corinthians 7:12-14: "If any brother has a wife who believes not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.... For the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband."

It surely is sin for a Christian to marry a non-Christian. But once the marriage is consummated there is no scriptural call to terminate the marriage in order to give evidence of forsaking that sin. With regard to another sin—that of unscriptural divorce and

* 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers ..." also applies in a general way. However, the primary emphasis of this passage is something other than the marriage yoke since the exhortation in verse 17, "Come out from among them, and be separate," conflicts with the teaching in 1 Corinthians 7 concerning marriage with an unbeliever.

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remarriage—there is no direct instruction in Scripture concerning dissolution or non-dissolution of such a marriage. However, the instruction provided with respect to the foregoing situation—that is, “Let him not put her away ... let her not leave him”—might well be applicable to the situation of divorce and remarriage as well.

The instruction given by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:12-14 is further emphasized and generalized in verses 18-24: “Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised.... Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.... Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.” I believe, from the context of the entire chapter, this is saying that if one has been through a series of unscriptural divorces and remarriages prior to being brought to the Lord, this person is not to change his present situation by terminating the present marriage in order to try to straighten out the past. But does not this principle apply equally to a Christian who has gotten away from the Lord, who has behaved and lived for a time as if he were an unbeliever, and has unscripturally divorced and remarried during that period? When such a one finally heeds the voice—the call—of the Lord and becomes restored in soul and spirit to the Lord, he is to “abide in the same calling wherein he was called.”

Thus, there does not seem to be scriptural warrant for terminating the present marriage for the purpose of forsaking the sin of adultery.

Option 3. Continuing in the present marriage and remaining excommunicated until the previous spouse dies. This approach is followed by some Christian assemblies. The rationale is found in Romans 7:3: “If, while her husband lives, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.” It is assumed that the one who has unscripturally divorced and remarried is, in

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God's eyes, still married to the previous spouse and thus living in a continuous state of adultery. But when and if the previous spouse should die, the bond of the first marriage is broken and the present union can no longer be considered an adulterous relationship. Thus, such a person, or couple, would be eligible for restoration to fellowship in the assembly of believers.

Up to a point, the logic of this option seems reasonable. But upon deeper consideration, it seems to fly in the face of other scriptural principles. Generally, restoration to fellowship following excommunication is based on confession, repentance, and clear evidence of being restored to the Lord and following Him once again. But in the case under consideration, restoration to fellowship is based on an event—the death of the previous spouse—entirely outside the experience or control of the excommunicated person or couple. Is it possible that the death of another person—and that alone—can have any direct bearing on whether I have been restored to the Lord in my soul? Was the restoration of King David to the Lord effected by the fact that the husband of the woman he had stolen was killed in battle, so that David was not continuing to live in adultery? Was he not restored because of true, heartfelt repentance toward God? Consider his confession in the Psalms: “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight.... Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou will not despise” (Psalm 51:2,3,12,17). “I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and my iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD, and Thou forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:5).

There is a further disturbing aspect about this option; it could lead to an inconsistency of action by an assembly as illustrated by the following example: The person who *murders* his/her spouse and

remarries upon release from prison has better prospects of being restored to the assembly of believers than the one who merely *divorces* the spouse and remarries another. Thus, those who espouse the procedure of enforcing the continued excommunication of one who divorces and remarries until the death of the previous spouse are invited to take a fresh look at this practice in light of *all* Scripture.

Option 4. Confessing the sin and giving evidence of true repentance and restoration to the Lord. This, I believe, expresses the scriptural viewpoint concerning what an assembly should require from one who has unscripturally divorced and remarried. It is true that with this approach there is not the literal, physical forsaking of the sin of divorce and remarriage. However, just as David was restored to the Lord following his heinous sin of adultery and murder, so, I believe, it is possible for any one who has grievously sinned against God by divorcing and remarrying, or committing murder, or any other sin, to truly repent of the sin and be restored to the Lord.

When a Christian marries a non-Christian or unscripturally divorces and remarries, the basic sin is self-will—doing what I want to do rather than what *God* wants. Guilt continues to hang over the head of the sinner as long as the sin is denied, excused, or justified. But when the sinner puts an end to his denial or excuses for the sin and confesses to God and to others that he has done wrong and that he has sinned against God and man, he is forgiven and on the road to restoration to the Lord. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Just as fire or heat stops the action of yeast in bread dough, so does the application of self-judgment and true repentance toward God and those offended stop the action of sin in our lives (1 Corinthians 5).

Some might argue that just because a person is restored to the Lord in his soul and spirit does not necessarily mean that he

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can be restored to the assembly of believers. However, such an argument essentially places the servant above his Master (John 13:16) and the body (the Church) above the Head (Christ); it ascribes a higher level of holiness and purity and righteousness to the Church than to Christ.

Having said this, a couple of qualifications must be added: The first is that since a physical forsaking of the sin of divorce and remarriage (such as by termination of the present marriage) does not seem to be warranted by Scripture, other evidences of true recovery to the Lord may be required by the assembly before receiving back the repentant sinner. In other words, the assembly may very well be justified in requiring a longer waiting period in this situation so as to be assured that there has been real recovery of heart and soul to the Lord and that there is sound evidence that the person is now truly walking with the Lord and desirous of doing His will. Also, the divorce may have taken its toll of broken hearts and bitter feelings. Time is needed to heal these hurts. If the divorced partner and members of his/her family are a part of the assembly, they may be reluctant to have the divorcer restored to fellowship. Added time may be needed for God's grace to work in the hearts of those who have been hurt, and for them to become fully convinced that the divorcer is truly repentant and restored to the Lord.

The second qualification is that while God is gracious in restoring the repentant sinner to Himself, and while such a one may be restored to the assembly, there is no guarantee that the sinner will be preserved from suffering the consequences of his sin. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). David was forgiven by God for his sin, yet he reaped the fruit of his sin for the rest of his days—first the death of his infant son, and later on many problems in handling his other children.

In conclusion, unscriptural divorce and remarriage by a

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believer in Christ results in an adulterous relationship that must be dealt with as such by the assembly with which the believer is associated. However, by virtue of the grace of God, without which none of us would know forgiveness and justification and peace with God, such a person can be restored to fellowship with the Lord and, consequently, to the assembly of the Lord's people. This restoration is founded on true, heart-felt confession of the sin and repentance toward God, and is manifested to the assembly by a submissive, faithful walk with the Lord in obedience to His Word.

Concluding Thoughts

This brings us to the end of our study on the Christian and marriage. The final three chapters have dealt with the unhappy topic of divorce and remarriage; it has been needful to address this topic in detail in view of increasing departure from scriptural principles and godly conduct by Christians today. However, let us not forget the topics covered earlier with regard to choice of a marriage partner, preparation for marriage, and elements of a happy marriage. To my mind, these are by far the more important chapters of this study. If scriptural principles with regard to those matters are diligently and prayerfully adhered to, there will be little need to consider questions relating to divorce and remarriage.

Appendix 1

Before You Marry

Marriage is a lifetime commitment (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5,6). It should not be entered into quickly or lightly. The following paragraphs, compiled from various sources, give some thoughts from Scripture and from human experience that may help a couple in determining whether God wants them to marry each other, and, if so, how best to prepare for marriage. Various kinds of incompatibilities, warning signs, potential problem areas, and questions to be asked of one another are presented below for consideration by couples contemplating marriage.

* * *

One of the prime considerations when one is contemplating marriage is an understanding of the roles of both the husband and the wife. Who in the marriage relationship will be responsible for what? Both partners must clearly understand the teachings on the marriage relationship that are presented in the Epistles (Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18,19; 1 Peter 3:1-7) and they must agree to live by these teachings.

* * *

A matter often overlooked as unimportant is the matter of in-law relationships. Many a young man has said, "I am not marrying her family; I am marrying her." But in marrying her, he is, in a sense, marrying her family, for she brings into the marriage relationship all her family background. And so does he. If it has always been understood in a girl's family that the entire clan gathers at Grandma's house every Sunday afternoon, then a habit has been formed that may be difficult to alter. If this girl plans to marry a young man who comes from a background where everyone stays at home on Sunday afternoon reading the paper,

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resting, or whatever, a decision will have to be made. How much better it is if the decision can be reached before the wedding so as to avoid conflict and hurt feelings early in the marriage.

* * *

Another question that should be discussed before the knot is tied has to do with service for the Lord. By the time young people have reached “marrying age” many of them have made commitments to the Lord concerning their future lives. These may relate to service overseas as missionaries of one type or another, or they may deal with ministries on the home front. It is not enough simply to be committed to Christ as an individual. In marriage, the two become one, and the “one” which is created through marriage must be free to follow God’s leading. It is far better for both partners to know they are heading in the same direction with regard to service for the Lord before the wedding day than to assume so, only to learn later that they had different goals in mind.

(The preceding three paragraphs were taken from “Before the I Do” by Jan Reeser; reprinted by permission from the Good News Broadcaster, copyright 1976 by The Good News Broadcasting Association, Inc., Lincoln, NE.)

* * *

Notice what the servant of Abraham looked for with regard to the girl that he was hoping to find for Isaac: “And she said, Drink, my Lord; and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for your camels also, until they have done drinking. And she hasted ... and drew for all his camels” (Genesis 24:18-20). Here was a young lady who, I believe, was born into a fairly wealthy family, but she had a servant’s heart. Ruth also had a servant’s heart. Ruth 2 gives the actual account of how she had worked all day out in the field, and then when she came back, she took time yet that evening to beat out the grain. A Christian person considering marriage should

similarly look for a man or a woman of principle and of kindness, one willing to make himself/herself available to minister to the needs of others.

* * *

It is important to see how each treats his/her parents. Girls, how does he treat his mother? I have seen again and again that the man who is unkind to his mother is going to treat his wife in the same way. And fellows, how does she respond to the authority of her parents? I have had to point out to more than one young man how his future wife resists the authority of her mother and father and simply does as she pleases. I can assure such a young man that such a girl will do that same thing to him once the honeymoon is over.

(The preceding two paragraphs were taken from "Selecting Your Life Partner" by Curtis Lehman; reprinted by permission from the Good News Broadcaster, copyright 1979 by The Good News Broadcasting Association, Inc., Lincoln, NE.)

* * *

Marriage demands stability. Therefore a couple should be realistic and do some serious thinking before they sign. An honest evaluation should be made of the intended partner in such areas as school, jobs, friends (of both sexes), church, family relationships, goals for the future, and spiritual devotion. Ask these questions: Does he have a certain type of vocation in view, or does he keep changing his mind? Does he keep his same Christian friends for a number of years? Does he consistently get along well with his parents? Answers to these questions will tell you whether he is stable or a vacillating person.

* * *

Marriage is companionship. In addition to loving one another, the couple intending marriage should like each other. They should make sure they can be happy just being good companions. I assure them that there is the ecstasy of physical love. But in marriage

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a large amount of time is spent “companioning”—going places together, doing things together, washing the dishes together, talking together, training and caring for the children together—just being companions and friends.

(The preceding two paragraphs were taken from Young Only Once by Clyde M. Narramore, copyright 1963 by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI; used by permission.)

* * *

Studies of happy, satisfying marriages have shown that in choosing the right person, he or she most likely will be:

1. Someone whose company you enjoy.
2. Someone who is well-adjusted and relatively free from emotional hang-ups.
3. Someone whose character and personality you admire and respect.
4. Someone who respects both himself and others, and therefore respects you.
5. Someone who brings the best out of you and encourages your personal development.
6. Someone who has a positive outlook and a happy disposition.
7. Someone whose social and cultural background is similar to yours.
8. Someone whose friends are the kind of people you appreciate.
9. Someone whose doctrinal beliefs are near enough your own so there will be no disagreement over church membership.
10. Someone whose standard of living will be easy for you to accept.
11. Someone whose intellectual and educational levels will be near enough your own to assure you the joy of companionship in shared understandings.
12. Someone, if possible, who meets with the approval of

your father and mother. Parents often see the overall picture more clearly than you do, and they have your good at heart.

13. Most vitally important, the right one for you should be someone who shares your consecration to Christ and your spiritual commitment. In other words, the right Christian for you will be someone who is “going your way” with Christ—someone who encourages you to grow in the Lord.

Marriage is a very demanding relationship. When two people put their lives on the line together, the more they have in common, the less likely they are to encounter conflicts. It is true that occasionally we know of marriages that appear to be doing well even though the husband and wife have completely unlike backgrounds and widely diversified interests. Such marriages, however, are the rare exception rather than the rule.

(Taken from “Choosing the Right One to Love” by Clyde and Ruth Narramore; reprinted by permission from *Psychology for Living*, copyright 1983 by Narramore Christian Foundation, Rosemead, CA.)

* * *

Questions for the pre-engaged to consider:

1. Are the two of you on an equal spiritual plane?
2. Are your family backgrounds similar in culture? tradition? economic, educational, and social status?
3. Do you agree on each other’s career choices?
4. Do you agree on moral values?
5. Are you listening to your parents’ observations?
6. Do you share common likes and dislikes in recreation? entertainment? friends?
7. Do you enjoy one another’s appearance? sense of humor? attitudes toward life? achievements? personality? emotions? habits of cleanliness?

If you have more No than Yes answers, could you overlook these differences during a lifetime together?

* * *

Some things to consider carefully and prayerfully together during engagement:

1. Are you both grounded in Bible doctrine?
2. Can you freely discuss your spiritual convictions?
3. Do you pray aloud with one another?
4. Do you memorize Scripture together?
5. Are there any serious differences in your spiritual concepts?
6. Are you both concerned with ministering to the lost?
7. Do you both desire to develop your gifts, as outlined in Romans 12?
8. Do you enjoy having fellowship with other Christians?
9. What were your relationships with brothers and sisters, father and mother? How were disagreements handled in the home?
10. Are you a night person or a day person?
11. Can you get along with your future mate's parents without conflict?
12. Would you ever gossip to your parents about your mate's weaknesses?
13. Do you agree on the geographical location of your permanent residence?
14. What are your short-term and long-range goals?
15. What are your spending (and saving) habits?
16. Are you equally punctual? equally neat?
17. How do you resolve arguments?
18. Do you hold grudges?
19. Can you forgive your mate-to-be for any past wrongdoing?
20. Do you ever blame anyone else for your mistakes?

* * *

It is inevitable that some differences will exist in personality,

attitudes, goals, and so forth, between the man and woman who plan to marry. The marriage is not doomed because of such differences per se. However, an engaged couple ought to understand that marriage will accentuate their differences. Therefore, all differences should be discussed and understood and steps taken during engagement to accept what they see without criticism and without selfish demands. The key to success in marriage is to agree to disagree agreeably.

One wife said a year after the wedding, "During the engagement I was so afraid of losing him that although I noticed a lot of things I did not like, I didn't say anything. I thought things would get better after the wedding. Now all we do is fight." But why wait until after marriage to discover differences? The pre-engagement period is far more important than people realize; and the engagement is crucial, for it prepares a couple for marriage. Since a successful marriage depends on constant communication, the engaged couple must talk, talk, talk.

(The preceding three sections were taken from "Before You Marry, Ask These Questions" by Craig Massey, published in *Moody Monthly*; used by permission.)

Appendix 2

The Ideal Couple

Hebrew scholars tell us that the same Hebrew word for “one” is used in Genesis 2:24, “And they shall become *one* flesh,” and in Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is *one* LORD.” This fact has sometimes been used as an evidence that even in the Old Testament the triune nature of God—a unity of more than one part—was alluded to. I would like to look at the reverse side of the coin and use it to show the ideal nature of the oneness between husband and wife.

The Persons of the Trinity have had, have, and will have the same purposes and goals for all eternity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit may have different roles in carrying out these purposes, but there is no conflict of purpose or will in the Godhead. Just so, the ideal married couple will have the same purposes and goals although their roles in achieving these goals may be somewhat different. There will not be a conflict of wills, because for a Christian couple the question should never be, “Shall we carry out *his* will or *her* will in this matter?” but, “What is *God’s* will for our family in this matter?”

In the New Testament we have a couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who closely approached this ideal. The first mention of this couple is in Acts 18. Paul lived with them in Corinth because they were tentmakers and so was he. The passage implies that Aquila and Priscilla worked together at the same secular occupation. (For the purposes of this article, secular occupation will mean the work by which one provides for the physical needs of oneself or others.) I believe that in an ideal environment all husbands and wives would do this. Unfortunately, in modern society few couples can work together in the same secular work. However, even if they are

physically separated during their secular work, they can carry it out with a common purpose; they can have a partnership of attitude. For example, let us suppose the husband of a young couple with children goes out to some job or business, while the wife stays home to care for the children and house. The husband should not regard his job as a means to inflate his ego or to make a name for himself in the business or professional world. The purpose of his job is to glorify God, provide a means to lay up treasure in heaven, and to provide for the physical, emotional, and educational needs of his family. Likewise, the wife in spending the money her husband earns and in caring for the home should not have as her goals keeping herself and the children in the forefront of fashion or making her home the showplace of the neighborhood, but to glorify God, have the means to lay up treasure in heaven, and to provide for the physical, emotional and educational needs of the family.

If the wife works outside the home her purposes should be the same ones; her work should not be a means to pursue selfish ends. There should be this oneness of attitude toward the purposes of secular work even if the couple cannot engage in exactly the same work.

The husband and wife should also minister together to the emotional, educational, and spiritual needs of the family. Both should be interested in the training and discipline of the children. Both should share the interests and activities of the children. Both should provide time in their schedules for family worship, family communication, and family recreation.

Aquila and Priscilla not only worked together in their secular work, they worked together in their spiritual ministry. Together they traveled with Paul to Syria (Acts 18:18), together they ministered to Apollos (Acts 18:26), and together they provided a place in their home for the assembly (1 Corinthians 16:19). Both are referred to as Paul's helpers in Christ Jesus (Romans 16:3). The

ideal Christian couple should be seeking ways to serve the Lord together and to help one another develop and use the spiritual gifts of each. A husband and wife can minister together in teaching children, in visits to homes and hospitals, in tract distribution, and in ministering to the saved and unsaved in their own home. If the husband has been given a gift for public ministry, the wife can have a part in this as they study the Bible and pray together. The wife's spiritual and scriptural insights spoken to her husband privately may be very helpful to him as he ministers publicly. Even if their roles in the ministry are somewhat different, they should have the partnership of a common purpose.

Serving the Lord together promotes the unity of the couple as well as the interests of Christ. In fact, the unity of the couple *is* one of Christ's interests (Ephesians 5:28-31). Working together to promote spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being in each other, in their own children, and in persons outside the family will form special ties between husband and wife that can be formed in no other way.

M.K.C.