

Preface

When one mortal rubs shoulders against another, you will see either the best or the worst in them. And since marriage is the most intimate of human relationships, or at least should be so, we often see the best and the worst in that sphere of life. This work is presented from a deep conviction that we all need to rethink the Bible model of married life, to clarify the rules and expectations God established for a contented, happy marriage. Perhaps we could call this subject The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly, for an examination of the marriages we see around us will reveal all three. While looking at some of the bad and the ugly, my intent is to re-establish in our minds the beautiful, the good image of marriage as God designed and ordained it, along with the God-given wisdom for building, and repairing, strong, healthy marriage relationships.

What is the responsibility of religious journals and preachers in this area? Is it to teach only on the negative? Which divorce is justified and which is condemned? Or does it also include the teaching of positive, sound foundations upon which healthy fulfilling marriages are built? As I pondered this subject and the teachings of the Bible in this area of life, I became more aware than ever that the Bible has much more to say about building good marriages and healing strained ones, than it quite adequately says about divorce and remarriage. Should we not spend more of our time on prevention by establishing healthy balanced ideas in young minds about marriage, and building, or rebuilding, strong marriage bonds in those who are married?

It is ever so easy for relationships to slip away from the strong contented balance that God has wisely designed in scripture. That imbalance can take the form of a domineering man who heaps verbal and emotional abuse upon his wife, or it can appear as a shrewish woman who is never satisfied with anything that her husband does. However, most often the shift is more subtle and more difficult to define, but it nevertheless contributes to a nagging dissatisfaction with the way things are. Where is that balance of sweet reasonableness in the lifestyles of husbands and wives?

While there is a Divine oneness in the marriage bond, the ground rules of a marriage must also preserve the individuality of both partners. Especially in this area, over-demanding husbands, complicated by the wife's responsibilities of childrearing, threaten the woman's identity. Her individuality in the human race is essentially stripped from her, and she is made to think that God ordained it to be so! Such an imbalance is an abuse of the relationship that God sanctified and intended to be the most intimate and loving bond known among earthly creatures. Where in the Bible was Christ ever abusive, severe or disrespectful to his bride? The key verse in the entire Bible on the husband's responsibility is found in Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." Christ's love for his church is not demonstrated by demands, denigration, and abusive criticism. The verb, the word of action that tells us how Christ showed his love for the church is gave! Don't forget that word, men! Your love for your wife is biblical only to the degree you give yourself, your respect, your love, and your tender friendship to your wife!

After completing these writings, I was tempted to change the title to Of Husbands and Wives, Especially Husbands. By design and conviction these writings, while dealing with both husband and wife, will often emphasize the model conduct and responsibility of the husband. I truly believe that the excesses of the women's movement are more the result of abusive and irresponsible men than of rebellious women! If a man truly loves his wife as Christ loved the church, do you really think she will be unhappy and unfulfilled? No way! She will be the happiest soul on earth!

The foundation for a Bible marriage, a fulfilling, enlarging, growing, loving marriage, is found in the model marriage of all time, the marriage relationship of Christ and his church. Is

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there ever a perfect marriage? No. Can hurting, troubled marriages improve? Yes, they certainly can in direct proportion to the extent the parties are willing to examine and adjust the priorities of their lives in conformity to the kind, practical teachings of the Bible on this subject. The one necessary ingredient in any hurting relationship is that both parties care enough to make a commitment to try to work out the problems. With that commitment as a foundation and the Bible model as their textbook, they can rebuild and rehabilitate the worst of situations. Is it easy? No. Will it happen overnight? No. But the resources are available in the truth, not those one-sided clichés that both men and women are prone to use.

Perhaps these writings will make you take a second look at the Bible handbook of marriage, at the possibility that every relationship can be improved, enriched. Fundamental Christian living will work; love, forgiveness, respect, that Golden Rule kind of godliness. We take our Lord and his teachings too lightly to think that they only work in the sterile atmosphere of church and the assembly of saints. They really work in the hurting, cruel world where we live for the other six days of the week. When a dear friend, or spouse, hurts us, they work. When the unfairness of life closes in on us, they work. When everything seems impossible, they work. When the foundations of life's dearest dreams, even marriage, are threatened, they work! While holding the perfect model often before your eyes in this work, I realize that the real world in which we live is not so perfect. Therefore, I have included a liberal portion of observations that are designed to help get us through those rough times, to learn from them, and to forgive our mates and ourselves for less than perfect conduct.

I offer hearty tribute to a mother whose godly example of faithfulness and love in her marriage set a high challenge for me to follow. I thank a wife who loved me and tolerated many years of double standard conduct out of me that now causes me grief and shame. Never have I felt so thankful and contented in my marriage as when I finally discovered that the noble lady God planted firmly beside me was my godly equal and my God-given partner, not my personal slave. Perhaps some who read these words can learn more about God's ideas of marriage and can build on that foundation without the necessity of repeating the mistakes of the past. "Jonah school" may be a well-attended school, but in God's class schedule of life, it is not on his list of mandatory attendance. We are graciously invited to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn life's most important lessons directly from him. May it be so with us in this most significant part of our lives.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

**This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.
(Ephesians 5:32)**

One could make a strong Bible argument that God has made the family the cornerstone of society. As society respects and honors God's exemplary family, God blesses society, and as society repudiates God's family values, society becomes its own curse. Considering the clear rip in the present fabric of our society, we need to examine the Bible pattern of the family, the foundation of which is the husband-wife relationship, to correct our course. Perhaps God will grant us a renewed vision of a God-fearing productive culture by which to inspire the church of the next generation. The alarming divorce rate, the commonly accepted notion of living together without the benefit of marriage, the deep strain between men and women in the social and professional world, and the frightening perversion in the area of intimacy between men and women, all cry out for examination and prayerful consideration.

This series will focus on the Bible model of marriage and the husband-wife relationship. If you see some thoughts that are a bit different; if your thinking is challenged to take another look at God's marriage laws, whether you agree altogether or not, I have accomplished a worthwhile purpose. While we may boast that the church is in, but not of, the world, we cannot deny that the church and its members are definitely affected by the world in which we live.

The most comprehensive marriage manual to be found in print today, size notwithstanding, is the New Testament, Ephesians chapter five. The fact that God used his version of marriage as a symbol of eternal and spiritual truth should tell us that he considers the marriage relationship in a very special light. In few subjects as distinctly as in marriage do we face the clear truth that the Bible is altogether a contemporary, relevant book, full of valuable truth for the Christian of the Twentieth Century, or any other century. In the New Testament as the Jews considered the teachings of Jesus on this subject, they thought out loud that perhaps the moral responsibility of marriage was more than they were willing to accept.

His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. (Matthew 19:10)

In many marriage ceremonies the very idea that the marriage vow is taken for life is now altered to legitimize the vacillating emotions of man's carnal nature. "So long as you both shall love," has replaced "So long as you both shall live." As traditional Jewish writings of the New Testament era document a casual irresponsible opinion of marriage, so our society has taken the same view. Divorce, then as now, was considered nothing more than a neutral eraser applied to the chalkboard of life to eliminate a relationship that no longer held any desire or challenge to its participants. It was considered no more or less immoral than changing jobs or moving to a new city.

Is there a moral issue related to the marriage vow? To divorce? To the maintenance of a legitimate attitude toward marriage? What is the biblical teaching on the relationship that should exist between a husband and a wife? Does the Bible say anything about polygamy? Infidelity? Divorce and remarriage? Many of these issues will be considered here, for the Bible has much to say about them all, and many more. What about the controversial issue of surrogate parenting, straight from today's headlines? Did you ever think about Sarah and Hagar? The controversy is no less divisive now than then. Is the wife just a "Pretty thing" to hang uselessly on her husband's arm, or has God established a clear-cut defined responsibility for the woman?

Several centuries before Christ, a wise man named Solomon wrote of certain things that were too wonderful for him, things too mysterious to understand or explain. One of those things was "The way of a man with a maid." The beautiful beginnings of love should do more than

simply live up to their expectations; they should exceed them wonderfully! Sadly, that is frequently the opposite of the more normal experience. Why? Could it be that the relationship that began freely and lovingly from the heart somehow ended in stereotypes of what people expected, instead of what God had graciously planted in the heart? How often, even in those marriages that survive, do we hear the parties confessing with sad dismay, "The honeymoon is over." Did God end it? Does he build you up for such a painful let down? Never! Then what happened? In this series we will certainly not cover all the possible detours that can bring a marriage to grief and a dead end, but as we examine the Bible example of marriage and the foundational truths of the relationship between husbands and wives, we may just find a nugget here and there to help restore the warm, fulfilling spirit of marriage that God breathed into it with his marvelous design and instruction.

Yes, this is a great mystery. We cannot understand how two people can forsake their families who bore them, cleave to one another, and become one flesh. Can we grasp some portion of God's grace loving us when we were unlovely, sacrificing himself for us when we were undeserving, and caring for us until with loving kindness he drew us to his bosom and hid us from the storms of life, or carried us through them? Can we grasp that God loves us, not how or why, but is there some deeply imbedded conviction, however mysterious, that God really does love us? If we can take hold of this spiritual truth at all, then we have unearthed the bedrock, the Divine foundation, for God's style of marriage. May he renew that holy vision in our minds daily!

Chapter 2

The Theology of Marriage

Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband. (Ephesians 5:33)

Nevertheless; it's amazing how much we can learn from a simple utility word like this. In this passage it tells us that while the most important lesson is something else, the timely relationship of husbands and wives is not to be taken as unimportant or unnecessary. Before embarking on our study of husbands and wives, let's study the spiritual reality behind the lesson, the heavenly theme that was used to illustrate the husband-wife relationship. It will help us immensely as we are faced with a less than perfect world, a less than perfect husband or wife, and a less than perfect marriage relationship. In reality, since no mortal is perfect, no relationship, even the most successful marriage, is perfect. Therefore, this lesson will serve to instruct us richly in the reality of life's relationships, marriage included.

Marital relationships begin with verse 22 of this chapter. We cannot read far into the lesson without being drawn to the conclusion that marriage is a spiritual relationship. The wife is compared with the church that Christ loved, sanctified, and washed, the church that he will finally present to himself, a glorious church without spot, wrinkle, or blemish. The husband is compared with Christ, the faithful lover and savior of the church.

While the wife is taught to be in subjection to her husband, it is to be the kind of subjection we see in the church's subjection to Christ. It is a certain quality of subjection, not general slavery, for the church is not Christ's slave, but his beloved bride. The example he gives here is based on unconditional love. Equally, her subjection is to be in loving consideration for the miracle of love that he has bestowed upon her. The husband is not told to domineer over his wife,

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but to love her in the same way that Christ loved the church and gave himself for her. Men may be disappointed, but the specific command that the wife is to "Obey" her husband is conspicuously absent from scripture! Whatever subjection the husband may have reason or right to expect, his most significant responsibility is to love his wife with the same kind and quality of love that Christ had for his church.

In our modern culture there is an underlying belief that anytime a spouse, husband or wife, crosses over a certain line of conduct, the offended partner is not only excused, but almost compelled to divorce the offender. The example of Christ and the church eliminates that notion altogether. What was the visible indicator that Christ loved the church? Was it not that he made provision to remove her spots, wrinkles, and blemishes? Modern theology may be more the villain in the corruption of marriage than Hollywood. Think of the popular theology of our day. It is clearly that, if you do not remove some of your spots, wrinkles, and blemishes, you cannot become a member of the family of God. You are told that God loves you, for he supposedly loves everybody, but you are also warned that his love is not forever. It is in danger of ceasing unless you respond to it. Are you not told that God is altogether justified in deciding to stop loving you unless you respond to his kind overtures. Can you not see the fallacy of this doctrine? If God is justified in terminating his love for the sinner who does not correctly respond to his courtship (Have you ever heard a preacher speak of the "Wooing" of the Holy Spirit?), then a husband or wife who becomes displeased with a less than perfect partner is equally justified in breaking the marriage bond. What a disastrous theology! It violates the Bible's clear assertion that God's love is everlasting, specific, and unconditional! His model love removed the imperfections of his bride, rather than justifying his divorce of her!

Because of severe abuse or other threatening issues, a marriage may necessarily have to be dissolved, but it should be noted that in such a case one of the partners deserted a responsible position in the marriage long before the dissolution. That irresponsible desertion of responsibility is what this lesson is aimed at preventing. We should never think that God is confused by the spider and the cobweb, the cause and the effect, of actions. This lesson aims directly at the cause of marital problems and is designed to interrupt the erring behavior before it destroys the marriage.

Take note that the quality and kind of love that is here set forth as the foundation for a lasting, happy marriage is neither physical, nor emotional, but spiritual! Physical appearance changes with age, and so does the shallow love that is based on it. Emotions ride up and down the roller coaster of human cycles and circumstances, and so will the love that is based on them. The word translated love in this chapter, comes from the Greek word that defines love as a moral quality, not based on the beauty or behavior of the object loved, but based on the preciousness of the object in the heart of the lover, and endowed with a constant moral commitment to control and influence the attitude and conduct of the lover toward the object that is so loved. Physical attraction and emotions certainly will be present in a sound marriage, but this deeper love should be the foundation. Biblical morals don't change with time or circumstances. It is just as wrong to lie or steal when you are happy as it is when you are sad. And while we are thinking about God's "Big Ten," let's apply the relevant commandment to our lesson. It is just as wrong to commit adultery when you are mad at your spouse, as it is when you are madly in love with him or her. Moral conviction controls thoughts and behavior. The moral quality of love that is to be the basis of marriage also controls thoughts and behavior! God's love affair with his church will not end! Neither should ours with our marriage partner!

Chapter 3

Marriage, For Time or Eternity?

Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. (Matthew 22:29, 30)

Especially when a couple is happily married, the idea that marriage carries over into heaven is quite romantic, but it is altogether unsupported by the Bible. The primary theological advocate of this idea in our age incorporates the notion into its larger theological scheme that those who succeed in this life will become gods in the next life, and their wives will be instrumental in populating the world over which they will rule as gods. Inherent in this theology is also the idea that the god-man will have more than one god-wife, not at all the elevated concept of an ideal marriage continued in heaven. It smacks too much like the words of God's adversary in Genesis 3:5, "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Jesus called the being that spoke these words a liar and the father of lies. I believe Jesus, don't you?

As we study the Bible doctrine of marriage, we learn that God created woman and marriage for the earthly happiness and contentment of the man he created in the Garden of Eden. There is no Bible evidence, not one shred, to suggest that marriage survives the grave.

In the greater context of this lesson we can learn much about life after death and the resurrection. Verse 23 reveals that the people who initiated this discussion did not believe in the resurrection; Mark and Luke enlarge and suggest that they neither believed in the angels. In a futile effort to embarrass Christ and prove to their constituents that he was a fraud, they challenged him with the question about a woman who had been married more than once in full compliance with the law. Then they sprang the trick question, "Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her." Trick philosophical questions are often a dead give-away that the person asking the question really doesn't believe God, so he must pose hard questions and philosophical knots to justify his unbelief.

The Sadducees error is the error of all who desert the truth of God in all ages; they do not know or respect the scriptures or the power of God. Not a person living can explain or understand a power so great as to resurrect those who have been dead for centuries, but the child of God who has experienced the power of God and believes the Bible can, nevertheless, believe the doctrine of the resurrection. The Sadducee sect was more a political party than a religious order, not unlike those in some countries who are waging civil and political war with the establishment under the name of Christianity.

Lest some might become anxious about the future state and their sense of fulfillment and contentment, that they relate so closely with marriage in this life, Jesus barely cracked the door of that heavenly world and gave those who challenged him, and us, a glimpse of something in heaven that is far better than any sense of contentment we are capable of enjoying on earth. "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." "As the angels," mysterious, but very real creatures who appear in the Bible as Divine messengers, always in harmony with God, always obeying his bidding, and always so fully absorbed in the very being of God, that we can hardly separate them in our minds from God himself.

In Ephesians 3:15 Paul bowed his head in a prayer of thanksgiving to the Father, "Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." It would not be biblical to deny that there is a family setting in heaven; it would only be wrong to assert that the heavenly family is no greater or better than the earthly. However rewarding your marriage on earth may have been, it cannot be compared with the heavenly family of God who will be your eternal companions and family in glory. The intimacy, the honesty, and the sense of deep comforting fulfillment that rise from a

godly marriage on earth are simply prophetic of the greater sense of all those emotions, and more, in the world to come. In that family there will be no empty chairs, no visits to cemeteries, and no black sheep. All the family will be present and just as contented with that wondrous world as you will be, for all will admire the Father who is head of the family more than any other being who will be there.

Proof of life after death and the resurrection is not reserved in scripture for deep or mysterious scriptures, but rather appears in the simplest of statements. To prove to his critics that the Old Testament taught this doctrine, Jesus selected one of the simplest verses in the entire Old Testament from Exodus 3, "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." The entire argument Jesus used was built on one simple word and its present tense form, "Is." He made the point that if there is no life after death, then at death we do not exist and God is therefore no longer our God. But at a time when Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had been dead for many long years, the verse said, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." While the bodies of these three men were buried in the grave, they were alive and well in the presence of their loving and holy God, and he was at that very moment their God. Therefore there is life after death and a resurrection of the dead. There may be no marriages in eternity, but all of the blessings that God put in this heavenly relationship, and countless more, will be enjoyed without measure in that glory world.

Chapter 4

The Assignment-Each According To His Order

Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. (Ephesians 5:24) So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. (Ephesians 5:28)

While either of these two subjects would justify any entire series on their own merit, this lesson will simply establish a pattern, a way of looking at the subject. Throughout this series, Of Husbands and Wives, the issue of a God-defined position or function, in direct contrast to the superiority or inferiority of one sex over the other, will be repeated often. In my sincere view, both sexes have largely deserted the position that God assigned to them in favor of the opposite turf, frequently justifying a self-serving behavior with the idea that God made them superior to the opposite sex.

First, consider the instructions to the wife in this lesson. The verse does not require that women become thoughtless slaves to their husbands, nor does it demand unqualified obedience. As a matter of fact, fellows, you should rethink the idea that God commands your wife to "Obey" you. Such a statement is not found anywhere in the Bible! Obedience usually suggests that the one who is commanded to obey another is inferior to the other party. The issue in the admonition to the wife in this verse is not obedience, but subjection. Subjection is more suggestive of an equal being assigned a particular function or position, and that position calls for subjection to the assignment or the person responsible for the assignment.

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Far from unqualified slavery or unthinking obedience, this verse imposes a strong, highly structured form and limit to the subjection that is taught. "As the church is subject unto Christ," is most instructive, for only as the church is subject to Christ should the wife be subject to her own husband. The basis of Christian obedience is not fear, threat of death or bodily harm, or emotional harassment, the method many husbands use to brow-beat their wives into submission to their whimsical ego, all the while reminding the wife that this is the way God intended it to be. The foundation of the church's subjection to Christ is based on its love for Christ, which in turn is based on Christ's unqualified love for the church.

The driving force behind true subjection to Christ is love for Christ, confidence in his faithfulness, and a trusting reliance on his judgment. Included in the word subject is the idea of subordination and reflexive obedience. This thought is forcefully presented in II Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ constraineth us." The constraint of Christ is not fear of hell and punishment, but love. Oh, that more women had this attitude toward their husbands, and that more husbands deserved such an attitude!

The verse that focuses on the husband's responsibility is equally instructive. What would you say is the single most important responsibility of the husband? To be the bread-winner? To remain faithful? These obligations are not under question, but they certainly are not inherently the foundation of a Bible marriage according to this verse. The husband's chief obligation to his wife is "To love their wives as their own bodies." Before you say that this is too simple and too easy, you should carefully examine the word love, for it speaks of far more than simple affection. While warm, tender affection is included in the scope of this word, it primarily carries a sense of moral and personal obligation.

The broader sense of the verse adds to this moral and personal dimension, the element of degree, "As their own bodies." It is highly objectionable to me for a man to speak of his wife as "The old lady," for the inference in the title smacks of disrespect and disaffection. Often the same man who so speaks of his wife will pay large sums of money to the gym and invest many hours a week to keep his own body in prime shape. His body is the object of intense pride, for it is a part of him. Well, doesn't this verse give the wife the same position? Love of one's own body is far more comprehensive than simple pride in its physical appearance. It also considers a sense of self-respect, not unlike the verses that command that we "Love our neighbor as ourselves."

One of the best fail-safe rules to maintain a healthy marriage relationship, one which is stable, fulfilling, and rewarded with joy and contentment, is a simple honoring of the Golden Rule in all aspects of the relationship. As strongly as I object to much of the Feminist's movement and the damage it is doomed to impose on the Bible integrity of the woman's assignment in marriage, I believe with equal conviction that the movement is a predictable reaction to the mass failure of men to honor their responsibility toward women, including very especially this responsibility of love.

Often when a marriage in trouble is examined, each partner emotionally points the finger of blame at the other party, as if the failure of one partner fully justifies any course of convenient action by the injured partner. We need to move beyond the realm of what can be excused into the personal responsibility each partner in the marriage has before God. The failure of another never justifies my failure before God! To the extent of my knowledge of God's will, I am consciously responsible to perform it, regardless of anyone else's conduct. If husbands and wives thought first of the responsibility God has assigned personally to them and less about how their partner has failed, this image of a model marriage from Ephesians 5 would be a more common sight than it is. May it be so!

Chapter 5

The Original Order, Man Alone

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. (Genesis 2:18)

Every so often, you read about people trying to regain the paradise of Eden by various philosophies and life styles. But they never succeed. The flaming sword still keeps man from his illegal re-entry. We have two views of Eden from the outside, only two. First, we have the record of scripture that speaks of the most significant events of the Garden, and, second, we have the institution of marriage that God allowed man to take with him as he left the Garden. The origins of man, woman and marriage should be studied extensively.

In this lesson we will study man alone in the Garden. A number of things are commonly mentioned as substitutes for marriage. Are they really? Yes, Jesus told us of those who chose to be eunuchs for the kingdom of God's sake, but that lesson and the Bible at large, suggests that such a state of life is indeed rare for man. More often than not, these substitutes are among the most common rationalizations for the breaking up of a marriage.

Religion, ironic as it seems, is a frequent excuse for the dissolution of a marriage. For some few, religion is considered the basis for a life of celibacy, a life that I suspect is not as rewarding as it is purported to be, but for many others who married without understanding each other's religious convictions, it becomes a bone of contention. Religious intolerance does not stop in churches; it invades every arena of life, but it should not be so. The Genesis account of man's creation and his first days in the Garden of Eden reveal man in fellowship with his Maker. God and man communed on a daily basis, talked as old friends, and discussed the future of this new world together. There was no strain in the relationship, no struggle of one against the other. Yet after this truly spiritual experience, man was not complete. It was after this period of fellowship with God that our verse says that it was not good for man to dwell alone.

Massive numbers of marriages are destroyed by careers. It is nothing less than alarming to consider the frequency with which a young couple madly in love get married, and the wife works to put the husband through college. Once he has graduated and becomes successful in his chosen career, suddenly that girl, who stood by him through the lean years and worked hard to pay the bills while he studied to become a professional, is no longer good enough for him. His carnal heart begins to look for a woman with more class and pizzazz, a woman who is worthy in his mind of his newfound success. Little does he remember who made that success possible. As a natural creature, at least, man in the Garden was in tune with God and comfortable with the relationship. He joined God in naming all of the animals that had been created. Likely, much more than simply calling out names was involved in this process. In order to be named and categorized, each animal had to be described, studied and examined. Adam was the first and best biologist, for he had regular access to the Creator of the animals, not just to the animals. A research biologist might think that such an experience would be worth any sacrifice to obtain. Loss of a marriage partner would be truly a small price to pay for such an opportunity. But alone with his career and his God, Adam was still a lonely man. It was not good for man to dwell alone. No, career is not a justifiable excuse to destroy a marriage!

It seems strange that many young married couples are always getting together with friends so often they hardly have private time for each other. Frequently, they spend time separately with friends in otherwise harmless activities that were their prime entertainment before marriage. Are they uncomfortable with each other? Have they not learned how to relax and enjoy each other's companionship? It is altogether appropriate, in balance, for young people to develop a circle of friends, but these friends should never command so much of their time or energy as to invade the marriage relationship, much less compete with it. Adam had God for his best friend, and he certainly had plenty of things to do with God. But, nevertheless, we read that it was not good for man to dwell alone.

Now consider the balance of all these things. Obviously, a religious schedule should be a part of every godly life, and nothing should compromise the conviction a man or woman have about their faith in God. A profession is a necessity to meet the financial demands of life, and there is nothing wrong with working hard to be good at what you do. Friends are a blessing from the Lord and should be treasured. "So what's the problem?" you ask. It's this. When these things are used as a substitute for marriage, or when they are used in excess to crowd out the emotional investment the couple are to make in assuring the success of their marriage, they become cheap imitations of something that God has put right under our noses, and they will never offer the inner peace and fulfillment that God designed for the marriage relationship. Nor should they become so dominant of our time as to rob the marriage relationship of its unique and blessed function. Long before the first divorce or the first marital infidelity occurred, God observed for us in the simplest of language that none of these things was adequate for man. With them all in hand and at man's full disposal, God said that it was not good for man to dwell alone. And I add, neither are these things good when they choke out the intimacy of the marriage bond. In God's order of marriage there is something more rewarding and fulfilling than any of these things without it.

God's original order reveals that man alone without a unique companion in marriage is not a complete man. To that we can add nothing!

Chapter 6

The Original Order, An Help Meet

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. (Genesis 2:18)

The Bible record of origins is deeply insulted by the prevailing notion of man's origin. Man's course did not slowly evolve from inorganic slime, to mutated animals, to apes, to sub-human cave dwellers, to man. According to the Genesis account, man's beginnings were in the cradle of the Creator, his highest creation and his daily companion. This verse immediately follows a dense record of God parading every living thing before man and man giving each of them their names, likely including their identity in a very thorough, systematic form. There is no record of the amount of time that passed in the Garden of Eden, but it is obvious that the life of Adam and Eve in that earthly paradise was not spent lying around twiddling their thumbs.

Fellowship with the Creator, unparalleled knowledge of the animal world and the physical creation, man had the potential for a perfect existence. Yet despite this Edenic state, he needed something more. God himself observed, "It is not good that the man should be alone." To find fulfillment, even in Eden, man needed something that was still missing from his perfect world.

"I will make him an help meet for him." The two key words in this statement that will set the tone for the Bible's entire teaching on the God-inspired position the woman is to fill in the marriage are "Help" and "Meet." Help is translated from a Hebrew word that means an aid or helper, and that word traces its root to another word that means "To surround, protect, or aid," and is translated as either "Help" or "Succour" in the Old Testament. Obviously, the significance of this word does not call up images of a passive doormat. To surround, protect and aid is a vital function, one that requires wisdom, energy, and determination. An interesting question arises. From what did Adam need protection in the Garden? There was no animosity between him and

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the animals there. There were no other human beings to threaten his safety. And certainly at that time God was not yet offended by the rebellious sin, so he was altogether friendly with Adam. So we are left with one remaining option. Adam needed to be surrounded and protected from himself! How much more in our age does the man need to be protected from himself and his pride, his overgrown, destructive, egotistical, macho pride. The woman who fills her assignment from God will nurture her husband with confidence, love and respect, satisfying his needs as no other person on earth. She will surround and protect him from seeking his ego-satisfaction in unhealthy or ungodly ways by making him know that he is the most important thing in her life. And with that confidence he will beam with joy and satisfaction. A good friend who understands this truth once told me that he often hears men on the job talking about their "Old lady," a very offensive and demeaning way to talk about their wives. When the men reach the peak of their "Old lady" conversation, he speaks up and loudly says, "I think I'll go inside and call my beautiful bride." Perhaps they get the point.

"Meet for him." The definition of the Hebrew word translated "meet" is a counterpart, mate. It suggests one who complements her husband, who draws out his best side and develops it by her presence and actions. Such is the God-defined position of honor that has been assigned to the wife.

The God of the Bible has clearly defined the qualifications and activities that are reserved for the ministry and the deacons in his church. He has exemplified good governmental activities and responsibilities, good neighbors, good masters, good servants, good parents, and good children. It may not be a proper sin when someone in one of these assignments fails their position, but it is without doubt a failure to complete the assigned task that God has directed for that position. In Eden the woman's assignment was to surround and complete the man, almost to be his alter ego. Perhaps the severity of her punishment related to her failure to complete that assignment. I sincerely believe that we would see more healthy, happy families if we adopted the idea of a divinely assigned position, rather than thinking of woman as altogether inferior to the man. Such language is more the language of God and his book than our present superior/inferior stereotype language.

Let me illustrate. If woman's assigned task is to surround and protect her man, then she is able to complete that task with more success than anyone else on earth. When a man attempts to fill that role with another man, we immediately recognize it as perversion and are repulsed by it. Therefore, we may rightly conclude that, in her designated function, the woman is as truly superior to the man as the man is in respect to his assignment.

The last point to observe in this beautiful original order is that there was no animosity between man and woman. There was no bickering over whose responsibility a certain task was or whose fault a certain failure was. They accepted each other as complementary, divinely arranged and proportioned pieces of a puzzle, pieces that must fit together in a designed way to present the image and picture their Creator intended.

There is a rule that Bible expositors honor highly. According to this rule, the first appearance of a certain symbol sets the interpretation of all future appearances of the symbol. If this is a valid rule of interpretation, then, my friends, we have a lot of serious Bible study to do in the matter of the husband/wife relationship. And rest assured that we shall see happier marriages and marriage partners when this is done.

Chapter 7

Marriage, A Divine Institution

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (Genesis 2:23, 24)

As surely as God created Eve, just so surely did He create marriage as well. While marriage partners are free to work out the integration of preferences and personalities within the marriage, we must respect the relationship that God has defined for marriage or suffer some form of loss in the relationship. In the one chapter marriage manual, Ephesians, Chapter 5, Paul drew extensively from this lesson, the record of the first marriage. "No man ever yet hated his own body." See the reference to the woman literally being taken from the man's body? How could he hate her? She was a part of him! In the comfortable setting of church or a quiet moment of Bible reading, it is easy to agree with the philosophical position of this lesson. But in the rag-tag world of imperfections, stresses and disappointments, it is so easy to justify any particular conduct that seems convenient for us at the moment. Friends, these words were written for the down-and-dirty trenches of life where we all live in a flawed, imperfect world, a world in which, frequently, those who hurt us most are those whom we love most. Hurt and disappointment must be dealt with, but they should not be allowed to justify equal error on the opposite side of the moral scale.

While we will study divorce more directly later in this series, it is appropriate at this juncture to observe that when God institutes something, he gets it right the first time. This fundamental truth is often ignored in the traditional ideas of society about marriage. After all are we not reminded that Moses himself made specific provisions for divorce in the law? Our modern social perception of marriage and divorce chooses to politely remember Moses and to forget Christ, "The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he who made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. His disciples say unto him, "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (Matthew 19:3-10). I have quoted extensively from this passage, for it records the interpretation of the lesson by the Author himself and because it provides us with more instructive truth than we will ever find in any other quarter.

Obviously, the Pharisees inferred an inconsistency between the Genesis account of marriage in the Garden and the provision of Moses in the law for divorce. Seizing this hotly debated issue, they hoped to catch him in a tangled web of reasoning that they could use against him. Knowing their hearts and the need his family would have for clear instruction on this common-to-life, emotion-charged issue, Jesus appealed to the simple original institution of marriage and quietly reminded them that the same institution still prevailed. God had not mysteriously changed the laws of marriage somewhere along the way. In yet another attempt to catch Jesus in error, a wonderful flaw of disagreeing with Moses, they questioned why Moses allowed divorce, but they were not prepared for his answer. The real problem was not the original institution of marriage, nor the permissive rule of divorce written by Moses, but it was the hardness of the human heart. Moses suffered divorce; he didn't encourage or sanction it! When the disciples comprehended that perhaps the original law of marriage and Moses really did agree, and that God intended for a marriage to last for a lifetime, they demonstrated the very hardness of heart that Jesus had exposed. Their reaction that concluded, "Then perhaps it isn't good to marry

at all," revealed the true sin of their hearts. They were unwilling to consider the responsible assignment of a lifetime pledge to one marriage partner, God's intent for marriage.

Life is full of choices and priorities, and most problems arise by a faulty ranking of the various priorities in our lives. I offer this sequence of priorities as the nearest to God's order that I have found. We should put God as our first priority, husband or wife second, children third, and profession fourth. If devotion to our marriage partner is second only to God and if we live out that priority, then we have just embarked on a way of thinking and living that would virtually eliminate broken homes from the Christian community. Just as thoroughly as one partner should leave father and mother, lowering them in the hierarchy of priorities, the other partner should reduce profession and career ambitions to their lower position in the priority list.

"They shall be one flesh," is enlarged by Jesus in Matthew 19, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." Contrary to the modern self-serving idea, marriage is not just a piece of paper. It is God's prescribed commandment for a man and a woman to live together with a commitment, second only to the commitment to God himself, to keep that relationship for life, to keep it joyfully, as keeping one's own self. In this kind of marriage God is honored, and the partners find more fulfillment and joy than can be imagined in any other relationship known to man.

Chapter 8

The Order Polluted by Sin, Woman's Curse

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. (Genesis 3:16)

One of the most intriguing dialogues in the Bible is God's interview with man, woman, and the serpent in Genesis 3. Before we search the lesson for relevant truth, we should document the difference between what God directed and what occurred as a result of the curse. God's order was for man to dress and keep the Garden and to enjoy the companion God gave him. That many things occur that are not of God is witnessed in scripture. The scriptures will clearly verify that God permits that which he does not cause or command; among them Jeremiah 7:31, 19:5, 32:35, along with I John 2:16 from the New Testament, "For all that is in the world... is not of the Father, but is of the world." Of denotes cause or origin, and we are here told that all that is in the world, typified by three examples, is not of, caused by, the Father, but is of, caused by, the world. The idea that man can be as wicked as he pleases and justify himself by simply blaming God is preposterous!

It is necessary to note this distinction, for many quote the curse as the basis for their blatant disrespect of the woman in marriage or in any other position, except abject servitude. God's order remains for the woman to be exactly what he created her to be, "An help meet for" the man. But because of sin and the wonderful tendency of human nature to eagerly blame anyone or anything rather than take the responsibility for one's actions, the woman will become the disrespected example of contempt and irreverence by men as long as the world stands. No feminist movement or constitutional amendment will ever change the basic tendency of human nature to blame anyone or anything else.

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That the woman was told that her sorrow and conceptions would be multiplied is as truly a consequence of the sin, the natural results of the fall and the curse, as that the man was told that he would fight the elements and the weeds to bring fruit forth from the ground. But the consequence and the penalty must be distinguished. The penalty did not change any more than the Divine purpose for the man and the woman. God imposed the ordained penalty, death; in Genesis 3 he simply informed man and woman what to expect in a corrupted world that had fallen under the curse they had caused by their sin.

Perhaps the unbalanced perception with which people look at their roles or the roles of their marriage partners is more the direct product of that horrid act of original rebellion against God than we are comfortable to admit. It is easy to talk of impersonal sin, of the doctrine of sin, or of a sinful disposition that is inherent in human nature. But when we single out a particular action, one that we are admittedly guilty of practicing, the sin becomes personal, and we become very uncomfortable with the idea. But the reality of that act of sin in the Garden first brought a Divine curse upon the participants and their offspring. Then it brought with it a continuous flow of secondary consequences, personal, direct conduct in each of us that reflects and verifies our participation in the horrors of a rebellious, God-rejecting character.

In this present state of Adam's offspring where emotions and carnal tendencies comfortably violate the Divine order, man will go to great lengths to defy any personal challenge, even from God and his laws. He will speak of sin in the third person with great boldness, but he shirks in fear, deep disruptive fear, at any attempt to personalize that sin in self. To admit that our attitude toward members of the opposite sex, especially our own wife, has been perverted and flawed by something so deep and fundamental to our temperament as this is frightening beyond acceptance. We have been so indoctrinated into believing that man is the "Controller of his own destiny," that to be confronted with a specific and rather emotional example of the opposite truth just cannot be tolerated!

To comprehend the role the woman should fulfill in the marriage relationship, we should not attempt to model the predictions of sorrow and grief recorded in God's description of the unfriendly world Adam and Eve faced after their sin. We should continue to look at the original design of the woman and expect her to be the appropriate helper, the only person God ever designed uniquely for that position, not in any way inferior or second rate in relationship to the man and the position God assigned to him. Marriages would be much healthier if the partners gave reverent consideration to the God-assigned functions for the husband and the wife, sincerely honoring each other as being exactly what God ordained. How can anyone be inferior when they obey God? And how can those of us who grew up at the feet of God-fearing, wise, moral, and loving mothers look ourselves in the mirror of conscience and have the brass to say that she was just one of those poor inferior women? Doesn't that seem like a rather transparent ego trip? Such a strong, beautiful model of godliness in the woman who so intelligently and lovingly raised us was, after all, truly made of weaker clay, and was really less worthy before God and society than we men? Sorry, folks! Such teaching is not to be justified by Bible example.

In the realm of spiritual conduct we can readily accept that the laws of God run contrary to the carnal nature and that the work of the Christian is to develop those spiritual traits that harmonize with God and are in conflict with the carnal nature. Now, in the realm of the marriage relationship we should begin to cultivate the same disciplines and respect that partner as our "Heir together of the grace of life," a direct quotation from the Bible.

Chapter 9

The Order Polluted by Sin, Man's Curse

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. (Genesis 3:17-19)

Do you ever feel caught in a "Vicious cycle?" Think of the cycle in which Adam was caught, the ultimate cycle of human corruption! It starts with dust, and it ends with dust. The cycle must have seemed even more futile, since Adam had spent his entire existence up to this time in personal companionship with God, in joint ventures with God, naming and classifying every living creature and in surveying the beauty of the Garden, his familiar home.

Adam was the only man in human history that lived without sin in either his person or his environment. He knew, Christ excepted, as no other man who ever lived, the meaning of full harmony with God. Up to this time he had lived in perfect oneness with his Creator and with the creation. But by a foolish and inexcusable act, he introduced discord and division into that perfect world. Although he tried, he soon discovered that there was no hiding from God. That flimsy fig leaf was no covering; he must now stand face to face with his Maker and hear the consequences of what he had done.

It is altogether fitting that this lesson be considered in our study of husbands and wives, for it warns us that we should not listen to any, even the wife whom God gave us, whose words discord with the message that comes from God. It warns that all who ignore the course of life that God has directed are subjected to the cycle of dust. They start in dust, and they shall end in dust. But the cycle is somewhat more complex. In the meantime the weeds that grow out of the dust plague them. They are forced to sweat over an uncooperative plot of dust to obtain their food, and they live with a body of dust that is never willingly submissive to the will of God. They are cursed by dust from the womb to the tomb.

It is not conceivable to determine the precise agenda that motivated Adam to follow Eve in the transgression, and we are best advised to avoid endless speculation about the matter. But we can safely conclude that Adam traded God's agenda for his own, whatever it was. We can also assume that Adam decided to transform the position of the woman from an "Help meet" for him, to a prominence more influential to him than God had been, for God said, "Don't eat," and the woman said, "Eat." What did Adam do? Who did he heed? It seems that often when we elevate something to the level of being competitive with God, that the very thing that we exalt becomes most despised to us.

"Cursed is the ground for thy sake," is first in the order of appearances of the curses that fell upon man, and it is attributed directly to the fact that Adam listened to Eve and not to God. "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife," this is the absolute kernel of man's sin, of his rebellion against God. Therefore, it is fitting justice that the greatest thorn in his side should relate to the very woman who led him away from his Creator and God. The greatest conflicts ever experienced are not on the battlefields of national war, but on the battlefields of private homes where husband and wife forget the order of marriage that God set forth, and become lost in the fruitless struggle for harmony and meaning without submitting to the God of peace and harmony. It is not a battle of blood and bone, but of spirit and soul. It is not a war of weapons and physical strategies, but of minds and emotions, draining the strength of the soul.

As for the woman, so for the man, the model relationship that God ordained between husbands and wives is not to be found in the cursed soil of the fall, but in the original order that God instituted when he made the woman and gave her to the man, "An help meet for him."

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Lest someone might conclude that the position of "Help meet" is necessarily inferior, I first observe that this relationship was established prior to the entrance of sin; it was God's description of the woman's relationship to the man. Secondly, I observe that the role of servant is often used in scripture to define the most productive and prominent positions. The words deacon and minister in the New Testament are translated from a Greek word denoting a table servant. The reality of the matter is that when anyone, regardless of their sex or position, truly do what God designed for them to do, they should not be looked upon as inferior in any way. They should be honored for following the example God gave them.

And, finally, we should always remember that the only peace and productive order we shall ever know, in marriage or in any other pursuit, will be experienced in direct proportion to the degree to which we conform our thinking and conduct to the model of conduct that God has ordained in his Book, the Bible. Society will not outgrow this wisdom; culture will not eliminate it. God was true in the beginning, and God is true today! Look away from the curse to the order that God instituted when he took Adam's rib, the part of his anatomy nearest to his heart, and made the woman, taking her from man and giving her back to man, the Divine "Help meet" for him. That model from God is the subject of our study. We have much to learn!

Chapter 10

Monogamy, God's Order

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)

Periodically, the question arises, "How many wives can a man have with God's blessing?" Especially when the person asking the question is interested in expanding the number of partners he or she has, they will raise the matter that the patriarchs of the Old Testament had multiple wives. What about it? Does the moral code of the Bible allow polygamy, the having of more than one husband or wife? It seems uncanny at times that God knew exactly how human nature would think, so he strategically placed simple, but very effective roadblocks along the way of man's creatively evil imagination. It should be no surprise to see men using God to justify their sin. After all, Adam did just that as soon as God questioned him about eating the forbidden fruit, "And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat," Genesis 3:12. This is the same satanic spirit we see in modern music lyrics, that is when you can hear what they are saying over the horrid noise; for example, "It can't be wrong if it feels so right." Are human emotions the final word on morality?

First to the matter of the patriarchs, yes, they had many wives, but there is not a word in the Bible to justify that conduct, and nowhere in the New Testament do we read of them being commended for this practice. The multiple wives of Abraham are not mentioned as fruits of his heroic faith in Romans or Hebrews! The fact that an Old Testament patriarch did something is not moral justification for it at any time. Do we justify murder and broken marriages because of David and Bathsheba? Do we justify incest because of Lot's daughters? God forbid! Then why do we hear the idea that multiple marriages are morally justified because someone did it in the Old Testament? Someone asks, "Well, if it was wrong, why didn't God condemn it?" And I answer that he did condemn it. Have you read his ten commandments? Did you notice that one

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of the commandments mentioned adultery and another mentioned coveting your neighbor's wife? Can there be any doubt about God's moral position on the issue? Those two laws alone should settle the matter!

However, there was apparently a spirit in the religious professors of Christ's day that was anxious to justify divorce and remarriage "For any cause." In Matthew 19 Jesus inserted in his Bible a record that forever destroys the self-serving justification for divorce and remarriage. We are given in these verses a dynamic exposition, controlled by the Lord himself and aimed as precisely at the moral corruption of the Twentieth Century as it was at human sin in his day. "The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (Matthew 19:3-10).

A thorough examination of this lesson is quite revealing. These men who were supposed to believe in the integrity of God's writings raised what they thought to be a contradiction in the Bible, always a dangerous action and frequently a calculated justification for personal sin. Do you suppose that some of these fellows had divorced their wives and remarried or were thinking of doing so? They tried to inject a contradiction between the text from Genesis 2 and the Law of Moses, Deuteronomy 24, perhaps suggesting that God changed his mind about morality. Does that sound familiar? However, Jesus promptly and convincingly persuaded them that there was no real conflict. Moses tolerated divorce because of the hard-hearted Israelites, not because God modified his moral code. Then Jesus set forth a very simple, straightforward principle of marriage, according to the original law God gave, one man and one woman, living together as husband and wife, one flesh, for the duration of their lives.

Strangely, even after these understandable words from Jesus, the disciples, not the Pharisees, revealed some hardness in their own hearts, "If the case...be so... it is not good to marry." Rather simply interpreted, their idea was that if they were so solemnly bound to their wife, perhaps they should not assume such a serious, lifelong obligation at all. They were suggesting that it would be better not to marry, than to marry and divorce, a quote straight from the modernists who say, "Marriage is only a piece of paper. Why not just live together as long as we want and then go our separate way?" Let the record stand clear that this reaction was not a responsive agreement with the words of Christ, but a complaining and irresponsible rejection of his words!

What was Jesus' teaching on the subject of marriage in this lesson? Is it not obvious that he taught that the original law of marriage, one man and one woman join in marriage for life, recognizing that God has joined them together permanently as husband and wife?

Chapter 11

Living Together Without Marriage

Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. (John 4:16-19)

This Samaritan woman's surprise at the Lord's knowledge of her life is great! The Lord's revelation of her checkered past stripped her of all pretense, and she just blurted out, "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet!" Then she ran into the village and told her neighbors, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29) Only the Messiah, the Christ, could penetrate the deep recesses of this woman's past, perhaps hidden from her neighbors, but not hidden from God. There was no doubt in her mind that she had confronted the Messiah.

Since we live in a social era that boasts itself of liberal, non-judgmental morals, including a frequent defense of this woman's life-style, our lesson is as relevant as this morning's headlines, and much more honest. Take a look at contemporary situational ethics—a nice way of describing no ethics. We are told in talk shows, women's magazines, and in just about every other form of mass communications, that it is wise for people to live together to see if they are really compatible, that marriage is little more than the formal trappings of an outdated Victorian morality that offers no beneficial contribution to modern man. You've heard it all before.

The real issue is this. Is there a solid, black and white morality? Are some things basically wrong, regardless of the situation? For those of us who believe in God and the integrity of his Bible, the answer is, "Yes, there is a foundational morality that is the basis for constructive society, and when that basis is deserted, the benefit of society to the man or woman of God vanishes." There is another danger we need to confront within the minds of many Christians who are sincerely distressed by this situation. They consider the pressures that a corrupt society can put on its individual citizens, especially the young, and cry out, "To expect Bible morality to be enforced and honored is not realistic. You've got to bend." It may not be realistic, but if that code is not restored to the foundations of our society, we will most certainly live in a very different, and much worse, society in the very near future. We must respect the foundation or prepare to loose the whole structure that is built on the foundation. Which is it, folks? Whether or not anyone listens, it is the obligation of every God-fearing Christian man, woman, boy, and girl, to commit their lives and reputations to the example of Christian morality that they respect. We can do that. We must do it!

Think about this conversation, almost two thousand years old and yet as relevant as if it occurred yesterday. Marriage had been disrespected; this woman, married and divorced five times, had decided that it was "Right for her" to simply live with man Number 6 without the benefit of a formal marriage. She probably could justify it to her own mind with such trivia as, "This way, when we separate, I won't have to pay all those lawyer bills and suffer the embarrassing inconvenience of the legal process." Or, "Marriage is just a piece of paper; it means nothing. Why bother?"

To re-discover our moral landmarks and keep our spiritual sense of direction, why not go right back to one of the most basic points of Bible morality. The basic meaning of the Hebrew and Greek words that appear as adultery or fornication, to say nothing of the definition of the English words, should settle the matter for those who respect the Bible. Remember, one of God's "Top Ten" is "Thou shalt not commit adultery." One would think that if God said, "Thou shalt not," the matter should be settled, but it seldom is. There is more than circumstantial evidence here that God has offered his personal moral judgement that sex outside of marriage or between unmarried couples is contrary to the relationship he established in his social order and moral code. While

the concept will perhaps be developed more on another occasion, I quickly note that there is nothing in the Bible to support the idea that adultery is a state, and fornication is an act. In the commandment quoted above the word commit is used in reference to adultery. Both actions are acts committed against God's moral code and model social order.

While women's equality may have focused attention on unjustified work-place discrimination, it has also pushed with alarming success toward the idea that women have the same rights of immorality as men. Sexual behavior polls clearly indicate that women are becoming more openly promiscuous than they were in the past. They have won their equality, but they crawled in the gutter to be equal with men on this count! They could have better demanded that men rise to their previous higher level of fidelity and morality.

Remember God's original purpose for creating woman, to be "An help meet" for the man. Consider the final chapter in the life of the most notoriously "Liberated" man in the Old Testament, Solomon. After experiencing the futility, the empty ache, of moral abandon that was reflected in his thousand women, he climbed out of his moral abyss and made one last effort to help others escape the trap that had snared him, an effort entitled "Ecclesiastes." "Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity.... for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 9:9). No one could say it better!

Chapter 12

Divorce and Remarriage

And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery. (Luke 16:17, 18)

Are there some parts of God's moral code that you would like to eliminate? These two verse seem at first unrelated, and both of them seem to be forced into the context where they appear. However, God orchestrated his Bible exactly as he wished, and these words, context and all, are his. A Jewish religious writer of the First Century is quoted in John Gill's commentary on the subject of stoning for adultery. After observing that the practice had ceased, he observed that if it were practiced, Jerusalem would have been emptied of stones before it were emptied of adulterers. The tempter's question posed to Christ in Matthew 19:3, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" is quite instructive. Many Jewish writings record procedures that allow a man to divorce his wife for burning bread or for other such trivial matters. A number of scriptures appear in the Bible account of Christ's time on earth that leaves little doubt that marriage was not honored in the way God intended. An irresponsible view of marriage is not original to the Twentieth Century, popular as it is in our time.

The primary design of this series is to focus our thoughts on preventive morality, how to prevent the wounds and scars of divorce, not simply how to patch up the agony after the damage is done. If God said that he hated divorce, Malachi 2:14-16, so should we. God-fearing people who have been through divorce will agree with God; they hate it, too. Spending inordinate time and mental gymnastics on the morality of divorce and remarriage begs the question of how to prevent the agony of divorce in the first place. No, we cannot perfectly do that as long as there

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are men and women who purpose to forsake their God-given responsibility, but perhaps we can return the emphasis to the value of that responsibility and prevent the actions that so often cause divorce. If these articles prevented just one divorce, they would be worth their weight in gold.

At no time in history is there a greater need to re-discover God's pattern for marriage than today. The moral issue of divorce and remarriage is often muddled with hair-splitting technical interpretations in an altogether honorable desire to relieve the innocent victims of divorce from the cloud that settles over the typical scene of a dissolving marriage. The verses quoted above are considered too simplistic to deal with the complete issue. There must be exceptions and justified waivers of this rule. May I kindly offer that the Bible is quite fair in handling the innocent victim in a cruel divorce, if we will allow it to speak in the simplicity that is so characteristic of God and his Bible.

Simply stated without detractive, hair-splitting interpretations, this lesson teaches that divorce and remarriage constitutes adultery. Period! It also infers that many of God's own people would just as soon see the jot and tittle of the law that teaches on divorce and remarriage fail. Let God speak and let man listen! The original law of marriage, established in Eden, remains God's foundational truth on this issue. "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. According to Christ, violation of that simple, basic concept is adultery, and adultery violates God's moral code. If we follow biblical teaching, we will look for reasons to preserve shaky marriages, not seek excuses to dissolve them.

No marriage can be preserved against the desire and will of both of the partners. One partner, acting alone, cannot single-handedly preserve the marriage when the other partner is determined to end it. To see people we love involved in such problems is deeply painful; to experience it must be infinitely more painful. The moral code of the Bible on the sanctity and life-long commitment of marriage is God's prescribed deterrent to this pain in the life of his people.

The utopian appearance of marriage in the movies may mislead the partners in some very workable, but less than perfect, marriages into thinking that they are missing out on a "Real marriage" without problems or rocky moments. For others the siren song of the tempter or temptress to escape the boredom of a steady, always there, predictable partner allures the simple-minded into the trap that Solomon experienced. There is this itching, nagging idea in the minds of so many that it is altogether right and good to experience, first hand, all the varieties and flavors of life, that such depth of experience will instill wisdom and contentment. Can we so soon forget that God gave Solomon wisdom and contentment without request when Solomon asked for wisdom to rule the nation wisely? Can we forget the frightening lesson of Ecclesiastes, that when Solomon became blind to that gift of God and attempted to personally experience all that was "Under the sun," he cried out, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit!" It didn't work for Solomon, and, dear, dear friend it will not work for us either! God's moral law is not a cold cage to rob us of fulfilling experiences. It is a loving bridle to lead us to a warm, contented life-style. It makes us the kind of person others, especially that marriage partner who is so close to us, can depend on without fear and doubt. Nothing is more deepening and fulfilling than doing what God teaches us to do! Nothing!

Chapter 13

Adultery, Cause and Responsibility

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery. (Matthew 5:31, 32)

Frequently, the Bible presents divorce as if initiated by the husband. It is fascinating that, two thousand years later, statistics suggest that the husband is the most frequent transgressor of the marriage vow. While both partners often lose interest in perpetuating the marriage, somewhere in the process of dissolution, there was a time when one of the two took the initiative and led the way in the demolition of the relationship. Of course, it is not always the man, but it is noteworthy that after so many centuries, the man is still leading the charge in this moral demolition derby. No-fault divorce laws tend to obscure the actual dynamics that caused the divorce, so we need not look to court records for incisive answers. Male theologians tend to illustrate the cause of divorce with examples of an unfaithful wife, but God illustrates the truth as it most often occurs. God is fascinating! How can anyone read the Bible perceptively and think of it as boring?

Luke 16 and Matthew 19 treat on the morality of divorce and remarriage. This lesson deals with another dimension of the shipwrecked marriage, the cause. If we expect to improve the number of successful marriages, we must consider what God says about marital failure and liability for the pain and wrongs precipitated by a broken marriage. Clearly, the Lord attacked the divorce-for-any-cause mentality of his day. With unmistakable clarity he put the spotlight on the man who deserted his wife, contrasting the corrupted interpretation with the truth of God's moral code. In the First Century a single adult woman, especially one with children, must have found survival nearly impossible. Consequently, most divorced women married again, a matter of practical survival. Perhaps many men looked with some disdain on these women of second marriages as careless adulterers. Underlying their thinking appeared to be the idea that a man had the right to divorce his wife at will by simply giving her a bill of divorcement, but the wife had no such rights.

The one exception for fornication seems to relate to the Old Testament provision for an effective annulment at the inception of the marriage, Deuteronomy 22:13-21, more naturally than to infidelity later in the marriage. Once a husband and wife accepted each other as husband and wife, their marriage was accepted with God, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder," Matthew 19:6.

Where did true responsibility fall when the marriage was later dissolved? According to the prevailing notion of the day, it was on the wife for burning the bread, not seasoning with the right flavors, or similar crimes. That remarriage constitutes adultery in the light of God's essential law is not challenged here. The issue is responsibility and cause! The simple grammar of the lesson says that the man who indiscriminately and irresponsibly divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery. The word translated causeth is defined by Strong as to "Make or do (in a very wide application, more or less direct)." This means that the man is directly responsible; he made her commit adultery! He must bear the moral guilt for her violation!

The ethical morality established here is most often applied to the man who forsakes his wife and the marriage. Whatever she does out of circumstance to preserve her life, and that of her children, he is marked as the responsible cause. The same precept could apply to the wife who forsakes her husband and small children. God never justifies double standard morality! This lesson offers legitimate consolation to the innocent victims in divorce. God holds the partner that abandoned the relationship accountable for the dissolution of the marriage and the subsequent misfortune of the divorced mate. How reasonable and entirely just God shows himself to be in this lesson. Game playing and finger pointing mean nothing to him. He knows what happened,

and he holds the truly responsible person accountable for the resultant sin. This is no strange tenet to Bible teaching that presents a consistent pattern of accountability. The offending party is responsible for the outcroppings of his offense. This lesson simply applies that same equitable truth to the often twisted, tangled web of emotions that commonly accompany a divorce. It wades through finger pointing and empty facades that blame the other party for the problem, however insignificant the other party's behavior. Without exception, God knows who is responsible for a broken marriage, and he imposes suitable responsibility on that party.

The emotions that are stirred by divorce have been compared with the emotions of those who lose a loved-one in an untimely death. Depression and anger of major proportions occur in both circumstances before acceptance and reconstruction can take place. It is not likely that clear blame can, or should, always be placed by mere mortals in such an emotional and private matter as divorce. But it is important to understand that God knows, equitably and fairly imposing the guilt of the divorce where it belongs. Most victims of unjustified divorce are flooded with guilt and illogical self-blame, often to the extent that the experience of divorce destroys their functional activity in the church. Conceivably, a better appreciation of both the moral significance of marriage and the fair, insightful reality of God's ability to hold the liable party to the divorce accountable would help these victims to recover their lives and their faith.

Chapter 14

In God's Pattern, The Right Foundation

And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her. (Genesis 29:20)

A basic premise of construction is that the building, regardless of its appearance, is no better than the foundation upon which it is built, a proposition that holds true in the moral and the spiritual aspects of life as surely as in the world of buildings. It certainly holds in the building of a marriage. Clichés are great mirrors of our thinking. Initiate a conversation about a lasting marriage, and the quips and clichés flow freely. "A good marriage is made in heaven." Then the distant reply is heard, "They may be made in heaven, but they are preserved in the kitchen." "The secret of my long happy marriage is _____." How many ideas have you heard in that blank?

A few years ago when our children were involved in Girl Scouts, there were a large number of parents who all seemed quite dedicated to their children and their families. Recently, my wife observed that we were the only couple still married of that whole troop. At times our girls almost felt different from their friends because their parents were the only ones in the crowd who were still married. I offer these thoughts, not to boast, but to lament the sad state of our society when such a devastating experience as divorce is so commonplace. Television shows depicting marriage ceremonies cast the minister as requiring faithfulness to the vows "So long as you both shall love," not the traditional and biblical "So long as you both shall live." One of the key ingredients in the model of a successful marriage in the Bible has become a four-letter word today; that factor is commitment. It's a dull word, a bit boring, certainly nothing to strive for in this exciting age of diversity and adventure. The depth of our cultural perversion is clearly unmasked when society's morals improve from fear of AIDS more than out of respect for moral integrity.

About the only concept of love that is commonly known in this enlightened generation is

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that soft, gushy, gooey kind of love that is solidly based on the fickle emotions of the carnal human nature. One day it is irresistible, demanding that the object be embraced and loved with abandon. The next day that same object is viewed with dedicated indifference, as just another casual acquaintance. Emotional love, carnal love, I don't know what to call it, but it is certainly not the foundation for a good marriage. Look at the kind of love that appears in our study verse. "They seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." How much time did Jacob work for Rachel? A month? Six months? Not a year? The answer is seven years. What kind of love drives a man to work with joy for seven whole years to have that wonderful thing that wakes him up every morning with a smile, that drives him to work hard, long hours with faithful dedication, and to think of seven whole years as but a few days? Friends, it takes something with solid substance to drive a man to work for seven years and think of them as just a few days for the love of that woman.

Jacob was not always the sparkling example of commitment and faithfulness, but this chapter of his life illustrates a love for Rachel that is a worthy role model for young couples considering marriage. Perhaps it offers some notable wisdom for a good foundation. During those seven years, he had time to see his Rachel in her best appearance and behavior, but he also saw her at her worst. He had time to talk with her about life, about managing a family budget, about children, about religion, and just about everything else. How many young couples get married without a single discussion of these issues, matters that will be the daily reality of their life as husband and wife? After all, they're too much in love to bother with such trivial things. Well, just wait.

When the echo of wedding bells has vanished and they are confronted with the reality of an overdrawn bank account, the bank will see to it that they have a discussion of family finances and budgets. When the first child is born, there will be some real concern about how to raise it, what moral values are important to teach it, what religious teachings. If they didn't have a discussion of religion before, they will likely have one then.

Interestingly, many of those who practice living together outside of marriage justify their practice by saying that they are really just getting to know each other to see if they would be happily married to each other. I recently heard of a couple that had lived together for ten years and finally decided to get married. One of the partners said a few months after the wedding, "Well, it didn't work. That man I'm married to now is not the same man I lived with for ten years." Enough said! Honest discussions of such matters during courtship would accomplish several very important things. First, it would revamp the whole concept of dating, long overdue, for the accepted dating activities are deeply involved in recreational activities, most often prohibiting any direct conversation, much less intense and honest dialogue. Secondly, they would learn early in the courtship if any foundation for a good marriage existed, or, for that matter, if there were any desire to get married after learning the true person. Seven years of communication didn't diminish Jacob's love for Rachel in the least. Was his Rachel worth seven years of hard work? Was it worth all the raw deals his future father-in-law pulled on him? Just remember that this commentary occurred after the seven years, not before them. After it was all over, the seven years were still well worth it.

Such love forms the right stuff for a good marriage, one that will last a lot longer than the time it took to earn the respect, the good comfortable confidence, and, yes, the lasting love, all of which find their way into the solid, no-nonsense foundation for a lasting marriage.

Chapter 15

Off To A Good Start

When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: but he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken. (Deuteronomy 24:5)

Behavior patterns formed early in a relationship are undoubtedly the hardest to break or modify later on. This verse is one of the most profound Bible verses on the subject of building a lasting, happy marriage.

Usually, the first few years of a marriage are the stormiest times it will face, but why? Often, instead of following this verse, the young couple becomes enmeshed in a painful ritual dance to see who will be the leader, the most influential. In short, they conduct a sort of polite lovers' war for position and dominance. Each party becomes more concerned with his own personal turf than with the integration of the two lives in a united linked-for-life relationship. Turf lines drawn in that first year will cast their shadow over the relationship for all the future. A rather insightful poem by Robert Frost, *Mending Wall*, offers wise commentary on this and all genuinely meaningful relationships between two people. Two New England farmers join forces each spring to mend the stone wall that separates their property. When Frost questions the need for such a fence, the farmer responds, "Good fences make good neighbors." Frost's thoughts are full of the milk of human kindness and insight into open, supportive relationships that grow beyond battles over turf, relationships that are based on confidence and love toward self and the partner, the true cement for a good marriage. "Before I built a wall I'd ask to know What I was walling in or walling out, And to whom I was like to give offense. Something there is that doesn't love a wall, That wants it down." Perhaps the best advice to newlyweds is to keep walls out of the marriage relationship. A marriage should be more than a journey through life with someone who lives on the other side of a wall, any wall.

Consider the force of this verse. For one full year after the marriage, the husband was freed from obligations to go to war or other civic duties. He was to remain at home and "Cheer up his wife which he hath taken." Now compare this example with the usual first year activities of young married couples. Soon after the honeymoon is over, the wife wants to perpetuate many of the relationships and activities that were altogether normal for her single life, a regular night out with the girls, a recreational weekend away with friends, or whatever. Likewise, the man wants to re-establish his regular habits with the boys, bowling, football, hunting, fishing, or similar activities. While none of these things for either husband or wife are inherently wrong or harmful, this first year of marriage is to be more than just another year in the life of.... It is to be the foundational year that will influence the remainder of their life together; it is to be different by design.

Based on this verse, the first twelve months of marriage are to be dominated by time and activities with each other, integrated, caring time. Since the man is most often called away by business and civic duties, the verse focuses on his behavior, but the principle applies to both partners. During this year, a calculated distance should be held between the new couple and all others. Parents, especially parents if they tend to be overbearing and want to continue directing the life of their child, best friends, professional activities, separate recreational interests. That first year is dedicated to becoming one in a manner that runs much deeper than words repeated in a marriage vow. The honeymoon offers a brief ritual of this function, but a few days away is not sufficient to form the bonds of support and dependence, of love and respect, that are necessary for the marriage to last through the rocky times and storms that life will most certainly bring upon it. In a beautiful, wise manner this verse suggests a yearlong honeymoon of sorts.

Those old patterns of dependence on parents, friends and work associates should be put on hold while the new relationship becomes established on firm emotional ground. The commentary in Genesis 2 about a man "Leaving father and mother" is developed in a truly practical manner in this verse.

The counsel of this verse does not require a perpetual shielding of the marriage partners from all outsiders forever. Once the marriage relationship has been established and those feelings of respect and trust have taken on that new depth and dimension of a willing and very serious life-long commitment, the couple can then reach out into the world around them and jointly select and enjoy friendships, fellowship, and recreational interests that they want and enjoy. Perhaps the night out with the boys or girls will be replaced with an evening out with another couple. Perhaps football and hunting will be replaced with bowling or fishing together or with other couples. The direction our verse offers is intended to allow an extended time for the couple to work out a comfortable relationship between them with a minimum amount of influence from the old sphere in which they lived before marriage. We should not think of life after marriage as just a continuation of the old life with the addition of another person in our lives. That thinking will tend to make the other person surplus baggage, not exactly the best way to build a model marriage.

Life after marriage should be more enjoyable, more rewarding, more fulfilling, and more of everything good than it ever was before. This verse offers God's unbeatable model to assure that blessed state. Many races are won or lost by the start the runner gets. A good start does even more to assure final victory in this more important race, the quest for a really good marriage.

Chapter 16

Marriage In God's Pattern, Joyful Monogamy

Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 9:9)

Coming from any man, these are wise words, essentially profound. However, coming from an old man who experienced wisdom and riches, but squandered it all for the sake of a carnal appetite that boasted of a thousand women, but could not boast of contentment, it is a real gem. So many become infected with a wandering eye and a desire to satisfy the eye with the self-justifying "It's not a matter of morality; it's simply a matter of an additional experience, a broadening of horizons, desired to make one wise and worldly." We do not need to experience everything to know that it is right or wrong. God does not allow each generation to re-invent a new moral code, suited to its warped appetites! Ecclesiastes stands before us as a stark witness to the fact that trying "Everything under the sun" only leads its victims to the empty shell of an aching life that cries out at every corner, "Vanity of vanities. All is vanity and vexation of spirit." If that kind of painful mood is what you want in your old age, follow Solomon's example. Live it up, indulge your every appetite, for this course is guaranteed to do for you what it did for Solomon. His advice was spoken out of bitter, disappointed, self-indulgent excesses. His was the bitter agony that could only cry out, "Don't do what I did. It's wrong! Please, do what I say! It is a better way."

There is a better way for God's people in this age, as well, and it is marked by the words of the man in the Bible who had the wisdom to know better, but was allowed to speak to us from the dark agony of his error. With God there is hope for mercy and forgiveness, but my dear friends there is also the certainty of a painful memory, that unforgettable disappointment in one's

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self for the error that was allowed. As Jacob boldly wrestled with the angel all night, and prevailed, but left the scene with a life-long limp, so we, too, will walk away from our night battles with God limping, limping for life. Rich blessings do not have to be mingled with battles and midnight wrestling with God. We are not forced to follow Solomon's footsteps to learn his wisdom. He has given us a path that offers greater blessings than any he ever experienced, joys that do not turn to tears with the light of day, and contentment that follows us to old age and creates a joyful smile in the aged face whose contented beauty runs deeper than any face of rebellious youth.

Live joyfully! Do you have reason to laugh? Do it with your wife. Include her in your joys. Is there reason to be thankful for the good things that have come your way? Be thankful for the wife of your youth and share the blessings of gratitude with her. Do you thank God for those good things? Thank the wife of your youth for all of her dedication to your blessings and joys. She deserves it and more. Inherent in these words is a command that is within our reach, but liable to be neglected. As we grow into old age, there is a constant danger of becoming cynical, of remembering the wounds and hurts of life and becoming a skeptic, a cold remote soul who cannot remember the sunshine of life and of the soul. We are here commanded to live our natural lives in a joyful spirit and, by all means, to include the wife of our youth in all of the joys and blessings that we remember. There is an inherent command to take control of both our minds and our memories. We are to cast off the bitterness and coldness of winters, to remember the days of sunshine and joy. How beautiful are the words of the poet, "Grow old along with me; the best is yet to be."

With the wife of thy youth. The life-long bond of a God-honoring marriage is clearly the foundation of this thought. When I look back to that day when I was 21 and said, "I do," I shudder with fear that I was so young and so unaware of the life that was ahead. But I am thankful that God lead my wife and me along a path that, however painful and difficult, only served to solidify the cement that was between us. Some say that marriages are made in heaven. Perhaps they are, but they are preserved in the kitchen, the family room, the bedroom and in every other room of our lives. They are preserved by remembering the wife, or husband, of our youth when we need a shoulder to cry on, when we need someone to share a good laugh with us, when we need a boost over the tough times. In those times we are to look to the wife or husband of our youth and remember to live joyfully with them. When the common saga unfolds, the wife works at a routine job to put her husband through college only to later discover that he has "Outgrown" her and rejected her for another woman more his "Intellectual equal," someone has forgotten to live joyfully with the wife of his youth. The road of Solomon is a well-traveled road, but not a very happy one in the end.

That is thy portion in this life. As God gave the woman to man in the Garden of Eden, "An help meet for him," a joy and a fulfillment that he could not find in any ambitious pursuit, even in the Garden, so God gives us marriage with the opportunity to find a small portion of that wonderful, mysterious contentment that can only be known by a husband and wife who are committed to sharing every dimension of their lives and finding joy between them, regardless of what they have been through in the ragged experience of life. A joyful marriage is God's appointed portion and blessing. However, it is not forced upon us. It is offered to us each day, and we must seek out the joys of life to share with the wife of our youth whom we love. May it be so more often.

Chapter 17

Marriage in God's Pattern, A Two-Way Street

Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. (I Corinthians 7:3)

We are told much about the model relationship that is to exist between husbands and wives, and we are often told that God has divinely established a double standard, one that applies to the man and another to the woman. God is not the author of a double standard! He most definitely has assigned different roles and duties to the man and to the woman, but he has no double standard. Neither does he view the man as inherently better than the woman or the woman as inherently less important than the man. That God has designated specific roles for the man and the woman does not make God a chauvinist, nor does it make him regard either sex as better or worse than the other.

That a woman is prohibited to teach or assume a position of authority in the church does not make her a second-class citizen. God has not assigned deacons the responsibility of public teaching in the church either. Does that make them less important to the church than the preacher? Neither has he given the other members of the church a teaching position. Does that mean they are less important than either the preacher or the deacons? Unless you subscribe to the doctrine and deeds of the Nicolaitanes, the hierarchical dominance of the ministry over the "Laity," a position that God says in scripture that he hates, then you cannot subscribe to this idea of one member or office in the church being more important than another. This position is hostile to the very foundation of the Bible truth that every true believer is a priest of God and has personal privilege at the Throne of Grace. The assignment of an office or ministry neither makes the person assigned better or worse than another. So it is with the woman. Her assignment in the marriage relationship does not make her a lesser being than the man.

In the maze of marital attitudes this sage counsel from scripture cuts to the heart of the matter. It is a one-sentence marriage manual! What happens when husbands and wives begin to quarrel and break the bonds that hold them together? They begin to find fault, to pick at minuscule flaws and shortcomings of their partner, rendering viciousness and biased judgement against the partner who has some way disappointed or hurt them. They feel entirely justified in doing this because of their own anger or pain. But this verse calls them back to a levelheaded, sensible way of treating each other. Due benevolence—what is due—is an obligation, a debt. A debt must be paid to preserve one's integrity. Benevolence defines the milk of human kindness, looking for the best qualities in another, not picking faults.

History reports that the First Century Jews had capitalized on the allowance in the Mosaic Law for divorce to the extent that their binding written traditions included intricate procedures for a man to divorce his wife for burning the bread and other such trivial matters. This certainly is not an example of "Due benevolence." When husbands and wives have a disagreement, as certainly they shall over the years, they are commanded to remember the kindness of Christ toward us and to show that same kindness toward each other.

Likewise, this word makes the obligation to benevolence as binding in one direction as it is in the other. The husband toward the wife or the wife toward the husband, it matters not. Both are equally obligated to show due benevolence. Marriages that are based on scorekeeping and getting even are not lasting marriages. They will surely dissolve from the caustic juices of personal revenge. Marriage in God's pattern requires us to control those base tendencies and to consciously choose the course of due benevolence. We sometimes operate under the mistaken notion that husbands and wives must agree to the most minute detail on every particular, to be virtual clones of each other. Were that the state God intended, this verse would be unnecessary. It would serve no purpose. Benevolence is necessary when there is a difference of opinion. It calls on us to respect the other party, even in the disagreement. Just because a friend, neighbor, or work associate disagrees with us does not make them our enemy, or does it justify us in

treating them with contempt or disrespect. Should not the same benevolence be honored in our marriages?

So what if the wife is not the best cook in the world or the husband cannot earn quite as much money as Dad did? What's so important about these trivial matters anyway, when we consider the moral obligation God has laid upon us to be kind and caring to each other? Why do we think that the scriptures that teach the moral obligation of love, forgiveness, patience, and tender-heartedness should only be applied to the people in church or the people we like? Why should we think that if we decide not to like someone, even our marriage partner, that we are entitled to treat them with any form of disrespect or contempt that tickles our fancy? This is not the case! These obligations were designed to govern our conduct, specifically with those who are not as compatible or desirable to us as we think they should be. Remember, the Lord really did say that we are to love our enemies, not the love of fraternal or mutual respect, but the love of moral integrity and conduct. Because someone is our enemy, we are not mysteriously relieved of the moral obligation to be honest, truthful, and kind toward them.

If these truths apply to our enemies, should they not even more surely apply to our mates? The obligation of "Due benevolence" is one of the most delightful debts we ever assumed, and payment of it always produces great joy.

May God bless this marvelous trait to heal many hurting marriages!

Chapter 18

Marriage in God's Pattern, Heirs Together

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)

This verse follows Peter's teaching that the women should be in subjection to their husbands, as Sarah was to Abraham. It is one of the most explicit lessons in the Bible on the two-way relationship of husbands and wives. In context it is altogether illogical to demand that the woman obey verses 5 and 6, if the man is not willing to obey verse 7. The subjection of those verses is not slavery, but respect and consideration. Likewise, the first word of this verse, applies every example of those earlier verses to the man, exactly as they were applied to the woman. If verses 5 and 6 require submission of the woman to the man, this verse equally requires the same submission of the man to the woman. No scripture allows a man to apply a double standard of conduct to himself and to his wife, one of superiority and license to himself and one of slavish inferiority to the wife. Such a notion finds its seed in the soil of man's fall under sin, not in the Divine example of truth. While I strongly reject the feminist movement, I believe that it is in large part an understandable reaction in the extreme to the long-standing extremes of many men who demand the position of superiority, but whose life does not deserve to be respected in that position.

As being heirs together of the grace of life. The grace of life vigorously infers that every good thing in life is the product of God's grace and should be received as such, not regarded as the well-earned reward of our own superiority and ingenuity. Scripture repeatedly teaches that all good things we enjoy are from God and that he deserves the tribute for them. Once we rid

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ourselves of the idea that we are the gods of our own destiny, accomplishing every good thing that comes our way, we will be in a better position to thank God for all that is good. It is fascinating that the executive in the mahogany office is happy to take credit for his accomplishments, but the alcoholic on skid row never says, "I am in charge of my destiny. Everything I am is attributed to my own doing." Human nature is quite selective, boasting of all the good, but quickly blaming others for all the bad.

Heirs of the grace of life. The good life we have we inherited from a caring relative who remembered us in his will with a rich supply of the necessities, and frequently more of the luxuries than we have any right to claim or expect. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth," (Matthew 5:5) he reminded us of this comforting truth. Perhaps at times our notion of what we have, compared to what we would like are not the same as God's, but we must acknowledge that God has, nonetheless, provided us with a greater abundance than we have any reason to expect.

Heirs together. The inheritance of the grace of life, focused here on the blessings of marriage and the riches of having a caring someone with whom we can share both the joys and trials of life, is something God has given husband and wife together. The word translated "heirs together" is the same word as is translated joint heirs in Romans 8:17 and means to share in company with another or to co-participate in something together. The idea of the word requires a sharing of the grace of life equally, not allowing a one-sided portion for one of the parties and a smaller share for the other.

Inherent in the Bible teaching that marriage is a covenant (Malachi 2:14) is the foundational premise of equality between the parties of the covenant. Both must be responsible adults who are viewed in the eyes of the law as being equal and equally capable of entering into a legal contract. The marriage vow that is usually presented in terms of pledging faith and freely giving vows infers the same sense of inherent, covenant equality. As in the context of our study verse, when subjection is taught, it imposes the obligation of subjection on both parties, not conveniently on the woman alone. The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is not a legal slave of her husband. She most certainly is respectful and in subjection to him, but the very force of her virtue is seen in the strength and responsibility with which she directs the home, considers a field and buys it, or makes fine cloth and sells it. It is worthy of our consideration to think long on the conclusion of the description of this model wife, "Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her," Proverbs 31:25-28. Candidly the husband who does not respect his wife enough to accept her in this capacity falls just that far short of the Bible model of a good husband!

When the husband and the wife begin to think of each other as equal beneficiaries of the grace of life, they will respect each other more fully and complement each other more perfectly. They will spend less time and energy vying for supremacy over each other and more time accepting each other as enhancing partners of the grace of life. This foundation encourages a deeper honesty in the relationship, for it exemplifies an equal sharing of the good things of life with each other. Rather than thinking of either party as some way more deserving or superior, it sets the pattern that both husband and wife are equal beneficiaries of the goodness of God that imputes grace into every dimension of the day to day reality of living, including the marriage relationship. God help us to see his grace in all the good of life.

Chapter 19

Marriage In God's Pattern, The Weaker Vessel

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)

This verse is often used to infer that the woman is the "Inferior Vessel," but the word is weaker, not inferior. Frequent interpretations of this verse include the idea that the woman is generally inferior, feeble-minded, or second class in relation to her husband. As she was reviewing the articles in this series, my wife observed that I seemed to be focusing more on the biblical role of the husband than the wife. I must confess that much of what has been on my heart in relation to this subject does relate to common abuses of the wife by well-meaning husbands. It is my conviction that the feminist movement is a reactionary movement to two extremes on the part of men. First, there is a rejection of the man who thinks he is more intelligent, more enlightened, and more in charge because of his being a man. In his mind sex alone makes him better than the wife. Then there is the spineless man who evacuates all areas of responsibility and leadership. Since nature hates a vacuum, that void cries out to be filled, and if the man refuses, the wife will step into the gap. Both situations represent extremes, out-of-balance conditions, compared with the Bible model of the husband-wife relationship.

Likewise requires all of the respectful submission and deference from the man that Peter in the verses immediately prior to these imposed upon the woman. It emphatically rejects the double standard so commonly demanded by overbearing husbands on the false premise that "Everyone knows that a good wife must be submissive to her husband." Where are these men when Peter says, "Likewise, ye husbands?" It seems quite convenient for enlarged egos to demand submission so long as it is one sided. When it is appropriate to respectfully honor the wife's wishes, where is this husband then? Is he willing to forego his preferences and plans in respect of his wife's? If he is unwilling to walk on her side of the street, why should he expect her to be overjoyed to spend all of her time on his side?

Is the woman the weaker vessel intellectually? In the specific issue of the deception in the Garden of Eden, scripture teaches that the woman was actually deceived by the serpent, equally teaching that the man was not deceived. In terms of absolute error which is worse, to commit a wrong in deception and ignorance, or to knowingly walk away from the commandment of God? Was it not the woman's intellect that enticed the man to join her in the transgression? Whether men like it or not, they are often wrapped around a woman's finger, as thoroughly as Adam was wrapped around Eve's. Many of Solomon's proverbs deal with the uncanny ability of a woman to deceive a man and control his actions. Does this describe an inferior intellect? Hardly!

How many preachers use the godly example of their mother's upbringing, often in the shadow of an irresponsible father, to illustrate the tremendous impact one person can have on another and to honor the godly direction they received from their mother? How shallow this applause is if it is only lip service from someone who really believes that, because she was a woman, his mother was actually his intellectual inferior. In the words of scripture, "The less is blest of the better."

Certainly the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 was the intellectual equal of her husband. The results of her investments and the impressive variety of her activities speak weightily of a highly intelligent woman.

A survey of the sexual behavior reports that periodically find their way into the news consistently witnesses that fewer women than men violate the moral foundation of the Bible by engaging in extra-marital affairs. Morally, intellectually-you name the basis-there is no biblical grounds to suggest that the woman is inferior to the man in any area other than their prevailing physical stature and lesser brute strength than the man.

What am I suggesting? What is my purpose here? Very simple. The foundation of

scripture, here and elsewhere, teaches that the husband and wife are to respectfully live with each other as equal partners, "Heirs together of the grace of life." In bonds that bind equally and fairly in both sides of the relationship they are to submit to each other, respect each other, honor each other, love each other, and share with deep conviction the ties that hold them together, neither imposing more on the partner than they are willing to take on themselves.

Should this equality be allowed to go to seed? No, here is the true example of the lesson. There are activities that demand the exertion of every ounce of brute strength available; they require the grime and grit that are more natural to the disposition of the man. In those areas the man should step in and take the primary responsibility, giving due consideration to the weaker frame of his wife. Equally, there are areas of the marriage where the natural disposition of the wife is more appropriate. There she should step in and take the lead just as freely as the man did in the other area. Neither activity makes the husband or the wife superior or inferior to the other. They simply observe a logical, natural division of activities that each partner shares fairly and willingly with the objective of complementing the other. As God has defined the purpose and function of each of his children, so he has wisely defined the relationship of husbands and wives to support and strengthen the whole of his moral creation. May we respect his example.

Chapter 20

Marriage In God's Pattern, Hindered Prayers

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. (I Peter 3:7)

That your prayers be not hindered. Peter was well aware of the vital significance of the home and the marriage as key ingredients to effective Christianity. How can prayer, the most intimate fellowship between the child of God and his Lord, be hindered by a problem in the marriage? To which I respond, how can it be otherwise?

Through over thirty years of ministering to people and trying to understand the strange course of discipleship, often with frustration trying to understand the causes for shipwrecked faith, problems in the home life seem to have been at the heart of the problem more often than any other single issue. It appears that the family, the church, and civil government are the three foundational building blocks that God has established for a constructive, moral culture. Perhaps even the order in which I have listed these institutions is the correct order of priority. If this be so, we should observe that cleaning up civil government, a frequent mission of many well meaning Christian groups, will not cure the moral disease of our society. Equally, we should note that institutional discipline in the church, administered exactly as taught in the New Testament, will not replace a well disciplined moral code in the individual Christian's life, especially in the marriage relationship. If we want to improve the moral quality of our society, we must begin in the home. Satan is well aware of this truth, for he has quite successfully eroded the sanctity of the home and of marriage over the last several generations. Once he succeeded in this battle, he easily corrupted the moral fiber of our culture with little resistance. In fact he has succeeded so thoroughly that a public stand for morality will draw criticism, even from the godly, that you are narrow and unrealistic.

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Few things can create peace of mind and deep, moral contentment as effectively as a healthy, well-balanced marriage relationship. Husband and wife do not have to agree on every minute detail of life, nor do they have to live in perfect 24-hour-a-day harmony. However, they must love and respect each other as "Heirs together of the grace of life." This thought offers the key to a strong, healthy marriage. Life, with all of its ugliness and pain, is also full of beauty and goodness. Grace is the basis of God's undeserved blessings upon his people, and it is here set forth as the basis for the Bible model of a good marriage. In Ecclesiastes 9:9 Solomon urged that a man should "Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun." This verse requires more than grudging fidelity; it requires joyfully sharing your life with your partner, friend, and "Help meet."

If we can look past the temporary difficulties of any particular situation in life and realize that there remains more good than bad, more joy than sorrow, more blessing than trial, we can conquer the pain of the moment with hope for something better later on. And if we can truly believe that there is something better ahead, we can keep a strong faith in God, including continuing in prayer. There is no greater incentive to pray than to realize that a past prayer was answered with grace and goodness. Having a caring partner who faces the ups and downs of life with us, who loves us in bad times as well as in good, who is by our side when it seems that the whole world has caved in on top of us; when all else is in doubt, this serves as the most personal reminder of God's grace imaginable. Ah! How the appearance of grace encourages prayer! Just one little spark of grace in one corner of our life, and we rejoice that God is still concerned for our good and will hear our petitions. Herein is the incentive to prayer, based on a good marriage.

Now consider the other side of the coin. When a marriage goes bad, the very bulwark of the soul feels invaded by the enemy; the innermost being has been violated. The disappointed partner feels vulnerable, at risk to every loss. Such a state of mind is fertile soil for the devil to plant his poison doubts as to the very person of God in the life of this hurting, disappointed soul. If that visible, intimate partner forsook you, could it be that God has done the same? Such a state of mind is most clearly a hindrance to effective, fervent prayer, the very point of our lesson.

At the heart of this lesson is the truth that marriage is first, and most importantly, of Divine institution, and that institution nurtures respect and appreciation for its wise Creator. We unwisely tend to departmentalize and isolate the various portions of our lives; our religion belongs to Sunday and church, our professional skills belong in the 8 to 5 routine of the work place, and our friendships belong to those occasions when we gather with family and friends. In this mind set how can marriage have any impact at all on our prayers? Apparently Peter was wisely instructed to see that every part of life is linked, and, only when we integrate and accept all of the pieces and sectors of life as a complete whole, can we find the deeper roots of our faith and happiness. A good marriage is linked to an effective prayer relationship with God? There can be no question in the light of this verse!

May God grant us renewed and enriched dedication to the wisdom of marriage in his pattern, and the joyful excitement of an unhindered prayer relationship with him.

Chapter 21

Husband's Duties, Fidelity

**Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.
(Proverbs 5:15, 18)**

Proverbs Chapter 5 offers one of the most pointed lessons in the Bible to a young man regarding the moral and practical necessity for faithfulness to his wife. It is sad that Solomon was in the position of saying to his son, "Don't do as I did; do as I say." As you read over the message of the chapter, you get the feeling that the writer is speaking from experience when he warns against the vices of a "Strange woman." Over my years in the professional world, I have witnessed the aggressive young professional, "Yuppie," who was so dedicated to career success that he forgot the wife who worked to put him through school. Somewhere up the career ladder, he decided that she was not polished and sophisticated enough for his professional position, so he divorced her for a more educated type. Let God's record be noted, "Rejoice with the wife of thy youth." Life for any couple will bring about many changes, and each of the marriage partners will not always grow in exactly the same direction or to the same degree. But this situation is so transparent and insignificant, compared to the moral obligation of faithfulness, that it does not deserve any degree of legitimacy. The bond of marriage should be considered more important to one's integrity than any title or salary in the professional world.

A survey of this chapter will reveal the following points of major significance to the fidelity issue:

- Verse 3. The strange woman first uses smooth, sweet words to flatter the foolish young man.
- Verse 6. She is fickle, changeable, mysterious. Getting to "Know her better" will cause the young man to question his morality and personal integrity, to "Ponder the path of life."
- Verses 8-10. Compromise with her will bring upon the young man lost honor, years of cruelty, loss of wealth and labor.
- Verse 11 is suggestive that the certain end of this kind of relationship will bring upon the young man a consuming perpetual grief. This is either suggestive of his own guilty conscience or of a nagging uneasiness that, if she violated a past trust with him, she might equally now violate her trust with another.
- Verse 14. This snare not only exists in the dens of iniquity in the world. It can also be found in the "Midst of the congregation." Discretion in all relationships should be the rule.

Knowing human nature, the writer does not stop his argument with only the negative reasons for fidelity. Beginning with verse 15, he develops a strong argument on the positive side of the issue. "Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well," draws a convincing positive argument. Why steal waters from an unknown well, one that may be muddied and polluted, when you have a fresh, beautiful well in your own wife? Although the emotional implications of this verse are most significant, the physical threat of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases makes this verse a conspicuous reality in the most basic physical sense.

Verses 16 and 17 seem to suggest that we owe to our children the debt of sending them forth into the world from the clear, clean pools of a faithful marriage. Children learn much from the example of their parents. Parents owe their children the good example of loving, joyful fidelity. According to verse 18, this represents a blessing to "Thy fountains," the waters sent forth from the clear, refreshing cistern. It seems that these fountains symbolize the children of a marriage, raised in a loving home, and sent forth into the world from the strength and nurturing home of dedicated and loving parents.

Too often, young women are taught the virtues of morality in their courtship, while young men are encouraged to "Sow wild oats and pray for a crop failure." This lesson joins emphatically with the consistent teaching of scripture that God does not approve a double standard of morality. He expects the same moral integrity in young men and in young women, in the husband equally as in the wife. No marriage will be perfect; none will be so solid that they never experience moments of anger or disappointment with the partner. At times when such strains are allowed a permanent position in the husband/wife relationship, the partner who feels the anger or disappointment is most vulnerable to the flattering words of an outsider of the opposite sex. Remember verse 3, the strange woman begins her conquest with smooth sweet words. The biblical antidote to this snare is to care enough to resolve the problems that occasionally arise between you and your spouse. Agree when you can, but lovingly and respectfully disagree when you can't. Make even your differences a bond of overcoming love and strength.

"Live joyfully." This verse commands that we take control of our emotions and make the relationship with our wife one of fulfillment and joy, that we take the necessary steps to inject joy and laughter into the marriage relationship. Life is full of seasons and changes. We can either allow ourselves to be victimized by them, or we can adjust to them and continue with a joyful outlook to the future. Change is certain; it cannot be curbed, but how we handle change is within our control. God's moral expectations do not change with the seasons of life. "Live joyfully with the wife of thy youth."

Chapter 22

Husband's Duties, Love

So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. (Ephesians 5:28)

As if telling men to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her had not sufficiently made the point, Paul used this verse to make the point that the obligation of the husband toward the wife supremely calls for an unselfish, giving kind of love to the ultimate degree. While the Bible imposes the same moral guidelines on the husband and wife with equality and balance, it wisely illustrates certain specific issues with the partner who most naturally needs reminding of those traits. There is such a strong tendency in men with being macho, showing what it means to really be a man, that many men are ill at ease when they attempt to show tender emotions. They somehow think that such emotions compromise their manhood and make them appear to be less masculine. To counter that tendency, Paul illustrated the marital obligation of love with the husband, not that the wife is any less obligated to love, but that the man more often needs the reminder.

As their own bodies. While women are frequently used to illustrate excessive vanity in their appearance, men are no less obsessed with their appearance. There are two kinds of self-love that the Bible addresses, one is commendable and one is sinful. Self-respect is really self-love in a commendable and honorable way. Self-gratification, especially at the expense and humiliation of others, is wrong. It should be obvious to us that the honorable sense of self-love, or self-respect, is the issue in this verse.

Often in a group of men who are ready to break up and go home, you hear one or more of

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the men say, "Well, it's time to go see what the old lady is up to." "The old lady" seems a bit disrespectful as a reference to one's wife. When I hear a man say this, especially if he has demonstrated in other ways that he does not sufficiently respect his wife, I want to remind the man that he could have chosen any woman who would have him and he chose her as his wife. A man's attitude toward his wife reflects much of his attitude toward life.

Many who reject the Bible pattern of the husband/wife relationship do so from the basis that Paul, the supposed bachelor who didn't really like women, had the most to say about this relationship. If we read the writings of Paul on this subject, we will quickly discover that he did not hate women. Far from it, he held them in deep, sincere respect.

Many men use the Bible as an excuse to abuse and mistreat their wives. Such use of the Bible is ill advised and unjustified. The greater obligation in scripture seems to be on the man. Only when a man has demonstrated his love for his wife to the same degree that Christ demonstrated his love for the church can a man claim to have fulfilled the Bible pattern of a good husband, and this example rejects the man as a failure who abuses and mistreats his wife. No one in their right mind will impose pain and humiliation on their own body. Why then should a man be allowed to inflict pain and humiliation on his own wife without the stern disapproval of God-fearing people?

Love, legitimate love, for one's own self requires constant consideration of what is right and wrong, good and bad. The obligation of this verse imposes that same sensitivity on the husband toward his wife. Is what I do right or wrong toward her, good or bad for her? Will it strengthen our relationship or tear it down? It was a common saying among the Jews that a man's wife was as his own body, and that he should honor her more than his own body. This thought is suggested by the language God chose to describe the first marriage in Genesis 2:24, "And they shall be one flesh." According to this teaching, marriage is more than a simple joining of minds and lifetime goals. It is a mysterious joining of their two bodies into one. That very point gave rise to Paul's words, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church," verse 32. There is a physical, emotional, and spiritual dimension to the Bible marriage. All three areas must be involved to make it complete.

Two words appear in verse 29 to describe this love of the husband for his wife. Nourisheth and cherisheth. The words translated from the Greek language are instructive. Nourisheth comes from a word that means to nurture and nourish up to maturity, and on beyond. The same loving care that began their relationship should be the landmark of their relationship through all the seasons of life that follow. After the children are raised and on their own, the wife might develop a feeling of uselessness. "What is there for me now?" It is the loving husband who can give her a feeling of importance and contribution, regardless of the age of the children. Cherisheth comes from a word that means to warm and foster with tender care. How easy it is for the "Macho man" to forget that his wife is probably much more touched and warmed by tenderness than by muscles and a macho image.

If husbands want to claim the position of the Bible husband as the "Head of the woman," they need to find out how Christ became the head of the church, for only in that same manner can they legitimately claim that position. Christ became the head of the church by loving her so much that he gave himself for her, a demonstration of his unqualified love for her. Her respect for him as the head of the church is not based on fear of a physical beating or emotional rejection. It is based on her admiring love for the one who so lovingly and tenderly nurtured her and loved her, even when she was altogether unlovable. Husbands, here is your example. Your work is cut out for you. Are you willing to live up to the pattern?

Chapter 23

Husband's Duties, Respect

Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. (Colossians 3:19)

A definition of marital duties would be incomplete without inclusion of the basic duty of any sincere relationship between two human beings, especially in the intimate setting of marriage. Each partner must maintain conduct that accepts and validates the individual personality and worth of the other person. A wife should be held at all times to be an individual with her own identity, not just someone's wife. She should be accepted as one of God's individual creatures and children, loved and created by him to be a unique vessel of his grace and intended to fill a position of value and significance in the family by her own personal right. In that position she deserves to be respected and loved as herself.

The lesson from Colossians carries a two-edged sword. On one side the husband is told to love his wife. Let the record show that this is a positive, active, self-sacrificing love. Too often, husbands demonstrate conditional love for their wives. They work 8 or 10 hours a day, but assume that it is the wife's duty to work 18 hours a day. Being a housewife isn't work; it's just existence, so when hubby calls for a special favor, it is wife's duty to jump. Let the wife get sick for a while and place the responsibility of the house on hubby. He will complain loudly at the fraying exhaustion of the pace he must keep for those few days. He should remember that his wife keeps that pace all the time, and seldom complains. The significant issue of love here and in other passages that command that the husband love his wife is the kind and quality of love. It is the God-kind of love, agape, the unqualified and unselfish giving of self, even the sacrificing of self, as Christ did on the cross for his church, his bride. If a husband constantly demands one duty after another from his wife, but does not respond with this quality of love, he knows nothing of the Bible example of a husband's love for his wife.

The other side of the two-edged sword in this lesson requires, "And be not bitter against them." This really is a part of the same lesson and obligation of the husband. In counseling people with problems in their marriage I have observed the almost universal tendency of one or the other parties, usually the husband, to blame the other for lost opportunities. "I wanted to accept that great promotion with the company, but you refused to consider relocating to Timbucktoo. Therefore, my present failure to succeed is all your fault." "Before we got married, I spent three weekends a month hunting, fishing, and doing all of those other things with the boys. Every time I walk out the door now, you complain. It's all your fault." Friends, the Bible example of a husband's love is not characterized by hubby blaming the wife for business failures and by looking over the fence to greener grass on the other side! That is the very sin Paul warns against here, "Be not bitter against them."

The husband's duty to respect his wife and accept her as a contributing partner with the right to voice her ideas in family issues is vital to this example. Perhaps the business relocation that strained the marriage beyond its ability to survive could have been prevented by respecting the wife's opinion to keep the family roots established in familiar soil. Perhaps the affair the husband got involved in would never have occurred, had he not insisted on his right to continue his old routine with "The boys." There certainly are times when a family relocation is appropriate. When both husband and wife are agreed and committed to the change and keep their values, it can actually be a strengthening experience to the marriage. There is nothing morally objectionable to a man spending time with his friends in athletics or sports, but when it overshadows the time he needs to spend with his wife and children, then it becomes a violation of the husband's first obligation to his family. When these or other issues are inserted at the expense of respect for the wife, they become fertile soil for the devil to plant the seeds that threaten to make the marriage a statistic, a casualty, instead of a warm nurturing climate for every family member.

Periodically, I have heard husbands and wives say that they were only preserving the

marriage temporarily until the children were grown and out of the nest. This short-term band-aid avoids more serious attention to the real problems that could well be resolved by rebuilding the relationship on the simple foundation of respect. When a man or woman thinks of self, all sorts of actions can be justified and defended. But the very essence of the simplest and most basic of the New Testament's guidelines for godly living with those around us will be violated. We call that basic rule, the Golden rule, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matthew 7:12). The simple application of this rule to the husband-wife relationship could save large numbers of troubled marriages, because the problems between the two people are very manageable problems when treated by the simple respectful spirit of this marvelous Golden Rule.

Rules for a model marriage necessarily include rules for working out difficulties between two partners who are both less than perfect, rules that impose kindness and respect to each other and to the differences and strains that will periodically enter the relationship. When God imposed the rule of a lifetime obligation for the marriage relationship, he knew very well that the parties to the contract would be human and imperfect, so he also imposed remedial attitudes and practices that, if applied by both partners, heal the wounds and preserve the relationship. May we lovingly and respectfully administer the Divine prescription to our marriages and to all of our relationships.

Chapter 24

Wife's Duties, Subjection, Not Slavery

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. (Ephesians 5:23, 24)

Throughout this series, the basis of the husband/wife relationship has been presented as a Divine assignment or division of responsibilities. In I Peter 3 we observed that subjection is imposed upon both husband and wife. This lesson from Ephesians 5 clearly defines and limits the sense in which the wife is to be subject to her husband. The husband is to be the head of the wife, even as, exactly as, Christ is the head of the church. And the wife is to be subject to her husband, even as, exactly as, the church is subject to Christ.

Those who view God as a cold-blooded despot will use this verse to defend their abusive, denigrating treatment of their wives, but the context will not stand still for such an interpretation. Those who view God's love as tentative and conditional will justify that fickle, manipulative kind of conditional love for their wives, but God will not allow such a cheap interpretation of his love to stand. The love of God for the church and the sacrificial offering of the Lord Jesus Christ is neither despotic, nor conditional. In John 15:15 Jesus said, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." Here we see that Jesus elevated his disciples to the position of friends, not slaves. How then can a husband treat his wife like a slave and selfishly justify his conduct with the example of Ephesians 5? How many of these husbands truly embrace their wife as their best friend?

In I Corinthians 13:4-7 we find a very explicit description of charity, the God-kind of love

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that is distinguished by a sacrificial, self-giving quality, not by a despotic self-centered kind of taking. "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." Only when a husband demonstrates the kind of considerate, compassionate, self-sacrificing love described in these words does he have any claim to loving his wife as Christ loved the church! Notice that every attribute in this list has to do with actions, not feelings.

Inspired by that kind of love from her husband, the wife is told to be subject to her husband, even as the church is subject to Christ. Every commandment Christ has given to the church, he has given in the spirit of love. Never has Christ given the church a despotic command and justified the order by a "Because I said so, that's why!" attitude. Never! His direction of the church is characterized by the kind of love defined by I Corinthians 13.

I maintain that the love of Christ is the foundation for willing, joyful Christian obedience. And I equally maintain that the same kind of love from the husband is the foundation of Paul's teaching that the wife is to be subject to her husband. The husband who does not model his love for his wife after Christ's self-sacrificing love for the church has no right to expect, and certainly no grounds to demand, subjection from his wife! And the husband who truly gives of himself and his love to his wife in the pattern of Christ will have no occasion to be disappointed in the response of his wife. She will joyfully stand by him and seek his interests in all things.

The basis of this relationship is misconstrued, largely due to the despotic theology so prevalent in religious thinking. The accepted notion of God's love is that it is conditional. "God loves everybody, but he will not save any who do not meet with his terms and conditions." If God loves everybody, and his love is everlasting, as the Bible teaches that it is, we are forced to the absurd conclusion that the wicked in eternal hell will remain in the love of God, even in eternal fire. Absurdum infinitum! With such a conditional view of God's love, husbands who are unwilling to stand in the true example of the love of Christ will demand unqualified subjection from their wives to the extent of near slavery. Then they wonder why their wife isn't happy and fulfilled with their relationship. How could she be? Her husband has not filled the example of Christ's love for the church!

To the surprise of many, Christian obedience is not based on fear of hell or the wrath of God being poured out through all eternity, but on the love of Christ. The subjection of the wife to her husband must be on the same basis, or it has no Bible footing! Fear of a husband's disapproval and wrath will never make a biblical marriage. The husband must demonstrate such deep, unselfish love for his wife that he will give of his very soul for her wellbeing. When he has demonstrated this kind of love, he will be rewarded by the love and subjection described in this lesson from his wife. The two conditions are linked in an absolute cause/effect relationship.

The word translated subject in this lesson is the same word that Luke used in Luke 2:51, when he recorded that the twelve-year-old Jesus went with his parents to Nazareth, "And was subject unto them." At that time was Jesus inferior to Joseph and Mary? Of course not! The significance of the lesson is that he accepted the Divine assignment to honor the moral law of God to submit to and respect one's parents. It was the role God assigned him at that time. Even so, the wife is to be subject to her husband.

Chapter 25

Wife's Duties, A Strong Example

Likewise, ye 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. (I Peter 3:1, 2)

This verse could well be described as a living Bible, for it describes a wife whose godly, gracious life wins the respect and admiration of her unbelieving husband, despite his lack of respect for "Organized religion" or the Bible. He knows her intimately, knows her moral integrity, her sincerity, her forgiveness and her kindness by personal experience, and they all cry out in witness to him, "You can call all those other professing Christians hypocrites if you wish, but you know your wife is genuine!" While the word translated "conversation" certainly includes her speech, it embraces her entire life and deportment, as well. She speaks with her entire life, not just her mouth. Men, can you remember the marvelous influence of your mother on your formative years? On Mother's Day do you pay her, or her memory, tribute in some very special way for that profound influence? Then you acknowledge that pervasive influence that is the subject of this lesson.

In I Corinthians 14:34 we read, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak." This lesson clearly sets the Bible role of the woman in the activities of the New Testament church, and this God-directed role precludes a woman from being a preacher, unpopular as that truth is today. This lesson, set in an extensive dissertation of spiritual gifts, reminds the woman that her gift in the church is not in the area of public speaking or teaching. However, it should extend beyond the negative "Not permitted to speak" to embrace the scope of the woman's place in the realm of spiritual gifts, a positive contributing influence, for women do have spiritual gifts that are needed in the church. If the lesson were intended to teach only that the woman's place in the church is one of silence, not engaging in personal speech or teaching, the language should read, "Let your women keep silent in the churches." However, the subtle, but convincing words, "Let your women keep silence in the churches," impose a far greater responsibility, a spiritual gift unique to the women in the churches. I suggest that the lesson sets the example for women to make a positive contribution, which God has especially enabled them to do, to maintain a spirit of peaceful silence, reflective of contentment and fulfillment. Satisfied sheep are quiet, not continuously bleating their discontent for all to see and hear. So in the church, the godly women are given a spiritual gift to encourage that peaceful spirit within the church body.

As usual in practical truth, Proverbs offers some gems to focus our thoughts. Proverbs 11:16, "A gracious woman retaineth honour." What a beautiful description of the godly woman who maintains her integrity in the face of adversity! Her honor is such an integral part of her that she will not allow herself to be separated from it. Proverbs 12:4 joins the list, "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones." A crown is the symbol of royalty, either in position or conduct. No man ever wore a more honorable crown than the virtuous wife who stood by his side, who knew his innermost secrets and flaws, yet loved him fiercely and supported him like the Rock of Gibraltar. Proverbs 14:1 continues, "Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands." Normally, we think of men talking to each other about the faults of their wives, but this verse confirms that the woman is capable of the same conduct. The lesson poses a constructive challenge to all of us, men and women alike. In the absence of our spouse, what do we say about them? What impression do others form of our marriage by our conversation? Are we building "Our house," or are we tearing it apart, board by painful board?

As I recall the influence of my mother, my wife, and a number of other godly women in my own life, I can think of no single issue in which they so powerfully influenced me as by their

compelling, all-encompassing good example. The gracious substance of their lives latched onto my better side, and kindly, but forcefully, commanded my respect and my emulation. I have counseled with a number of couples whose marriage would have been saved by the husband's respectful regard to the convincing example of the wife. I have quietly groaned in sadness as I observed other marginal marriages that merely demonstrated a struggle to survive, but could have easily moved into the joyous sunshine of contentment by honoring the unselfish example of the wife.

When Paul required husbands to love their wives "Even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it," he did not leave men in the dark as to the true exhibition of that Christ-like love. I am embarrassed at my own conduct in times past, and I am disappointed at so many men who think, pretentiously based on this verse, that they have every right to make any demand they wish on their wife, and she is obligated to mindless obedience. The love of Christ for the church, the foundation of the husband's role model, is characterized, not by an unending litany of demands for service. It is characterized by one simple word, "Giving!" See that word in the verse, "Christ also loved the church, and gave?" Men, hang that word as a lens over your eyes to refocus every view you have of your wife and of your relationship with her, for if your relationship toward her is not characterized by giving, yourself, your respect, your faithful support, and your energetic services to her, you have not yet performed the most elementary responsibilities of a Christ-like husband! The only example in marriage that should be more important than the wife's is that of Christ himself!

Chapter 26

Wife's Duties, Directing the Home

That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. (Titus 2:4, 5)

Who said women have nothing important to do? Added together, this list places the primary responsibility of directing the home on the wife. Of course, the husband has a part to play in the child-rearing arena. Yes, he is involved in the whole scene, but his assignment is perhaps best fulfilled by a supportive reinforcing position in the background, while the wife is the primary keeper of the home scene. "Keepers at home" sums up that idea and clearly places the woman in the primary position of keeping the "Home fires burning."

The biblical assignment to the wife is far more comprehensive than most men are willing to acknowledge or accept, much to their own shame. With this lesson from the New Testament as a background piece, let's look carefully at the description given in the last chapter of Proverbs. The subject is the virtuous woman.

"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies" (Proverbs 31:10). The stage is set for a treasure hunt, a treasure far more valuable to any man than a chest full of rubies.

1. **"The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil" (Proverbs 31:11).** Trust is a two-way street. Both parties must earn it. When this

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- man goes on a long journey, he has no anxiety about what his wife is doing. He trusts her, but more important perhaps is the observation that his trust is safely placed in her. There is no fear of broken trust. He safely trusts her.
2. **"She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Proverbs 31:12).** Everything she does will concern itself with him, and her activities will be in his interest.
 3. **"She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens" (Proverbs 31:13-15).** She is industrious, hard working, and is obviously in charge of the family budget. She is also a good money manager. How often men ridicule their wives in the financial activities of their life. That would be a grave mistake for this man, for his wife is active in the financial affairs of the family, and she gets results!
 4. **"She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard" (Proverbs 31:16).** Lest we get the idea that her financial talent is only allowed expression in the grocery store, we see her in this verse integrally involved in major financial investments. She not only evaluates the investment, but, once the field is purchased, she is substantially more than an observer. She works hard to make the investment pay off.
 5. **"She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms" (Proverbs 31:17).** This is not the Hollywood image of a retiring, helpless Scarlet O'Hara. This lady has backbone, and she knows how to use it!
 6. **"She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night" (Proverbs 31:18).** She is proud of her work and of her family. Her work is not finished when the lights go out at night. The candle of her mind is busy thinking about her family and its best interest. How characteristic of the godly women I have known. When the rest of the family is sound asleep, she is thinking about each member of the family and what she can do to help them succeed.
 7. **"She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy" (Proverbs 31:19, 20).** This woman is not just involved in gathering resources; she stays with the project until the final task is complete. Then she makes compassionate and wise disposition of the household prosperity to those who are less fortunate than she. Her caring kindness for the needy and the poor sets a beautiful example for her family.
 8. **"She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet" (Proverbs 31:21).** Into the best of lives a little coldness and rain must enter. Every godly woman I ever knew concerned herself with such stormy days, but the best insulation her family has in such times is the clothing of godliness and integrity she has given them in earlier times.
 9. **"Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness" (Proverbs 31:25-27).** While she is strong and carries much influence, she doesn't forget the law of kindness, and this law is demonstrated, of all places, in her tongue. When it comes to her family, this lady is never asleep or idle. The bread of idleness is not on her menu!
- "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).** Wives, are you willing to tackle this list? Men, are you willing to trust your wives with these responsibilities?

Chapter 27

Kindly Coping With a Less Than Perfect World

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. (Ephesians 5:25, 26)

Regardless of the shattering disillusionments often faced in the flawed world in which we live, there is only one sure way to keep our perspective and survive with a balanced, godly outlook. We must frequently go back to the God-inspired pattern set forth in scripture as our example. In this work we have examined the theology of marriage based on unconditional love, we have seen the original purpose and design of marriage, the horrible degeneration imposed on marriage by the entrance of sin into the world, divorce and remarriage, and we have attempted to emphasize most of all the Divine pattern of marriage. While many are fortunate enough to see major segments of their personal marriage in that pattern, none will see the entire pattern duplicated in their marriage. I have labored to hold before your eyes the wisdom of God's model marriage, at the same time offering some biblical insight into the more serious conflicts that afflict growing numbers of marriages.

Sanctify, cleanse, wash, water; these words hold prominence in the lesson before us. Applied to Christ and the church or to individual marriages, they point to the correcting of that which has missed the mark and become less than what it was intended to be. A popular women's magazine runs a column, "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" All too often, when a marriage develops problems, the partners panic that there is no remedy, no corrective course to get the relationship back on solid footing. This lesson offers the hope and wisdom necessary to reset the relationship on a sound foundation. Perhaps I should qualify the observation with only one proviso, that to heal a broken or breaking relationship, both partners must be committed to the task! One partner cannot shoulder the entire responsibility of the marriage. However, I believe, without qualification, that if both husband and wife sincerely want the relationship to work and are willing to examine and change the areas of their lives that may have contributed to the problem, the marriage can be saved and restored to a fulfilling and healthy relationship.

Regardless of the root cause, most marriages in trouble suffer from wounds inflicted by self and by the partner in the relationship. Those wounds must be addressed and healed. In resolving personal hurt the injured party focuses on self, "How I feel because of this injury," "What deep wrong was inflicted on me." That issue must be resolved, and the injuring parties must honestly accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions, including the hurt. However, this lesson takes us through that process and well beyond it to the fertile soil in which a relationship can prosper again.

A key factor in restoration is willingness to forgive and change. The Lord's forgiveness of us knows no limits; neither should ours. The language of scripture from Luke 17:4, "Thou shalt forgive him," to the simple eloquence of the model prayer in Luke 11:4, "And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us," makes the importance, the vital importance, of forgiveness clear to us. No marriage can survive the scars of life without a liberal application of forgiveness on the part of both husband and wife.

Now examine the issue of change. When someone is hurt and angry, it is difficult to get them to change. "Why should I change?" However, change may be the only way to survive. Married or single, we all must change every day we live. Should we not be willing to change to improve the health of a hurting relationship? Study this lesson from the perspective of change. The church had offended and sinned grievously. Christ would have well been within his moral right to do nothing! But instead, based on his profound love, the offended Christ accommodated the offending church! He left the world of spotless purity and assumed the very nature we possessed without assuming the sin that was inherent in that nature. His objective was not to join the church in the gutter, but to cleanse and wash the church, so that he could bring her home with him again. Upon learning of this marvelous work, the church also is willing to change. In the

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Bible it is called repentance, and, as the church becomes aware of the deep love Christ has for her, she rejoices that she can change to be more like him. In the process both parties change, and in the application to marriage, both become better, stronger, and the love that originally bound them together grows even stronger, for it has not only overcome the threats from the unfriendly world around; it has now overcome the threats from within. Love has conquered, and a new trusting, fulfilling relationship can be created.

When you were first married, were you willing to change to meet some need or desire in your spouse? Of course, you would have done almost anything to see that gleam of joy and approval. Well, why should you not also be willing to do the same after years of marriage? What is different now than then?

Applied to marriage, unselfish, love-motivated change and forgiveness is capable of sanctifying, cleansing, and washing a marriage from the grit and grease of wrongs and hurts that were grudgingly carried for years. As Christ will see the church in glory without the stain of her past sins, so husbands and wives should forgive, change, and move their relationship into the sunlight of the model marriage of scripture. It can be done! It is worth doing! It only requires the fundamental wisdom of Christ's teachings applied to the very personal world of your marriage.

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