



THE MARKS OF A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE



a believer's
bible booklet



THE MARKS OF A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

William J. McRae

Believers Chapel
6420 Churchill Way
Dallas, Texas 75230

Copyright, 1973, 2000 Believers Chapel

THE MARKS OF A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

A nationally known psychiatrist recently said, "There is little or no happiness in ninety percent of American homes!" More than twenty-five percent of our marriages end in the tragedy of divorce. Over seventy-five percent of all teenage marriages terminate in a court room. An undetermined number of young people are so disillusioned with marriage that it is no longer even a desirable option for them. For many of us marriage is really nothing more than an "armed truce." What once was holy wedlock has become in the words of Oscar Faust nothing but "unholy deadlock." If the amount of time evangelical pastors spend in marriage counseling is any indication, marriage is a major problem even among Christians and in evangelical churches. What are the reasons? Is there an answer?

It begins, I believe with realizing that marriage comes to us from God. It was He who said,

"It is not good for the man to be alone, I will make him a helper suitable for him."

Gen. 2:18 NASB

God established marriage. Society did not invent it. We received it. God was the one who performed the first marriage ceremony. He was the one who gave away the first bride. Adam did not take a wife unto himself. He received a wife as an offering from the Lord. Marriage is from God. He instituted marriage. Now, if that is true, it seems to me that it is most logical to conclude that our ideas of marriage must come from God. They cannot come from the books we read. They must not come from the movies we see. They can only come from God. Then part of the explanation, it seems to me, for the erosion of our families and for the collapse of our marriages is that, by and large, we do not understand the nature of marriage - God's style.

What are the marks of a Christian marriage? The Word of God isolates several. The first mark is probably the most obvious of all.

1. THERE IS A COMMON FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

A Christian marriage is not one which begins with a church wedding. Regular attendance in a Christian church does not make a marriage Christian. Prayer and Bible reading in your home are great, but do not make a home a Christian home. In a Christian marriage the husband and wife have a common faith in Jesus Christ.

A. The Christian Marriage

Both the husband and the wife are Christians. The Bible clearly defines a Christian for us. He is one who, first of all, has realized before God that he is a guilty sinner (Romans 3:23). He has also recognized that when Jesus Christ died upon the cross He died for him. He died in his place, as his substitute, bearing the judgment of God that was upon him as a sinner (Romans 5:8). Then, by an act of faith, he has entered into a personal relationship with God by receiving Jesus Christ into his life as his savior. If you have a personal relationship with God, if you have personally received Jesus Christ into your life as your savior, if you are depending upon Him and Him alone for your salvation, the Bible says you are a Christian (John 1:12). The basic prerequisite for a Christian marriage is that both partners be true Christians with a common faith in Jesus Christ as their savior. If you are not a believer, your marriage is without the most crucial ingredient. If you have never experienced God's salvation, the marriage you are planning will not and cannot be a Christian marriage.

But, you say, you are a believer? And you're planning marriage? Great, but beware! The Word of God clearly teaches that when a Christian marries he ought to marry another Christian. To marry an unbeliever is to enter into an unequal yoke.

B. The Unequal Yoke

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

II Cor. 6:14 NASB

A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

I Cor. 7:39 NASB

Do you see what these verses teach? Read them again. Don't miss this. If you are a Christian you must marry another Christian or else you must never marry at all. God clearly forbids an unequal yoke, the marriage of a believer and an unbeliever. But why is God so severe? Why does he forbid that unequal yoke? For at least three reasons.

The first is

The Purpose of Marriage

Here our view and God's view may be miles apart. But remember, marriage is His institution. He ordained it. What does He say is its purpose? In Ephesians 5:22-23 we discover that one of its primary purposes is to illustrate the relationship between Jesus Christ and His church. When a Christian young man marries an unbelieving young lady he destroys that picture. He is to love her as Christ loves the church but she surely cannot represent the church if she is an unbeliever. When a Christian young lady marries an unbelieving young man she also destroys this purpose. She is to be subject to her husband as the church is to Christ but he can never represent Christ in that marriage if he is an unbeliever. God forbids an unequal yoke because it destroys the primary purpose of marriage.

The second reason is

The Goal of Marriage

God in His infinite wisdom forbids an unequal yoke because it makes the ultimate goal of a marriage unattainable. Again our sights need to be corrected by His. What is the goal He sees? When our God instituted marriage He said:

For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh.

Gen. 2:24 NASB

The Hebrew word translated "flesh" may mean "person". The ultimate goal of a Christian marriage is that two people become one person. Each person, body, soul and spirit is to be so joined to the other that they become one in these areas. In a total marriage there is the union of two bodies. There is also the union of two souls with their emotional, intellectual and social capacity. Primarily, however, there is the union of two spirits - our capacity to know God. But, you see, here is exactly the problem. An unbeliever has a spirit but his spirit is dead! He does not know God. He is without spiritual life. He is dead until he is quickened in the work of regeneration by God the Holy Spirit.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Eph. 2:1-2 NASB

Therefore it is absolutely impossible for a believer and an unbeliever to attain the divine goal of a marriage. They can never be one in spirit and this is the most basic area of their relationship. There will never be true intimacy as long as one is a believer and one is an unbeliever. When a Christian enters into an unequal marriage yoke he enters marriage with a wall between himself and his partner. They are two persons going in two different directions, but trying to go together! Imagine meeting an old friend in the air terminal at Love Field. You ask: "Where are you going?" He replies: "Why, I'm going to Mexico." With great exuberance you respond: "That's great. I'm going to

Chicago. Let's go together." Ridiculous, you say? But that is exactly what an unequal yoke is. As the two people move toward different destinations they grow farther and farther apart. That is the life of an unequal yoke. You will short change yourself if you marry an unbeliever. You will never have the total marriage God wants you to have. You have no right to lead someone you say you love into that kind of marriage either. You will marry him with a divided heart. As you move in your direction and he moves in his the two of you will grow further and further apart.

The most tragic situations I face as a counselor come several years down this road. She was one of the loveliest teenagers I have ever had the privilege of working with. Exceptionally talented in music, very attractive, popular and congenial. She was the spiritual giant in the youth program. When she began to date him it was just for fun. He was a very fine young man - but an unbeliever with no spiritual interests in the slightest. The announcement of her engagement was a blow I will never recover from. In rebellion against her parents, her conscience and her Lord she entered into an unequal yoke. That was several years ago. Immediately she terminated all associations with her previous Christian life. Often I wondered if she was truly a Christian herself. Then she phoned me long distance at 2:00 a.m. one morning a few weeks ago. I was jolted into consciousness when she told me of her separation from her husband and their problems. Through it all she has been restored to the Lord. What a thrill! We agreed to pray for her husband and his salvation. That is what their marriage needs! But she will reap the consequences of her rebellion and disobedience for the rest of her life. That is what's tragic! God forbids an unequal yoke because it prohibits any possibility of ever attaining the goal of total oneness and He wants this for you!

The third reason God forbids unequal yoke is The Threat to the Spiritual Life. Marriage to an unbeliever is a terribly dangerous hazard to the spiritual life of the believer. No one better illustrates this than Solomon himself.

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, neither shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love. And he had seven hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away.

1 Kings 11:1-3 NASB

"Mark Twain" was the pen name of Samuel Clemens. As a young man he fell in love with a beautiful Christian girl named Livy and married her. Being devoted to her Lord, she wanted a family altar and prayer at meals after she and Sam were married. This was done for a time and then one day Sam said, "Livy, you can go on with this by yourself if you want to but leave me out. I don't believe in your God and you're only making a hypocrite out of me."

Fame and affluence came. There were court appearances in Europe. Sam and Livy were riding high and Livy got farther and farther away from her early devotion to her Lord. The eventual fall came. In an hour of bitter need Sam Clemens said, "Livy, if your Christian faith can help you now, turn to it." Livy replied, "I can't Sam; I haven't any; it was destroyed a long time ago."

Do not ever think you are going to be the one who is going to lift that person up and bring them to the Lord. Now that may happen. Sometimes it does happen by God's grace, but even when that happens the disobedient believer always goes through years of heartache and deep sorrow. You have no guarantee that he or she will ever be saved. To enter into an unequal yoke is to jeopardize your entire spiritual life. This is one of the tragic consequences of an unequal yoke. That is why God has said that if you are to marry as a believer you must marry a believer or you must never marry ever.

What a help Christian parents can be and must be at this time. Cathy, a very lovely Christian young lady, was planning to be married last summer. Her fiance was a fine young man in every way but one. His father was a minister but the son had no interest whatsoever in spiritual things. Her parents so opposed the marriage that Cathy agreed to postpone it. Twice this winter she has come to her mother, put her arms around her and thanked her for being a "mean mother." She has promised "When I marry I am going to be a mean mother like you." What a wise young lady! She followed the counsel of her parents.

Now you see why it is impossible for a Christian minister of the gospel to ever officiate at a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever. I can never do that. I have had to decline many times. On one occasion I was compelled to refuse to officiate at the wedding of a very close friend of ours because she was marrying an unbeliever. It cost me our friendship for five years - until she came back weeping in her repentance to the Lord. But, you see, a

Christian minister of the gospel can never officiate at that kind of a marriage. He could never pray, "Oh God, bless this marriage." He could never take the hand of the groom and say, "God bless you, young man." He could never condone such open disobedience.

There is a situation other than a Christian marriage or an unequal yoke that is anticipated in the scriptures. That is a mixed marriage.

C. The Mixed Marriage

Often the marriage of two unbelievers is invaded by God who by His grace saves one of the partners. This results in a mixed marriage. They did not enter into an unequal yoke. Neither is their marriage a Christian marriage. The Bible has a great deal to say about this state. We are told clearly in 1 Cor. that the Christian is never to depart from the unbeliever (vs. 12-16). Further, we infer from Romans 8:28-29 that God will use this situation, regardless of how difficult it might be for the Christian, to mold his character and to cultivate within him the very qualities of Christ-likeness. Most important, I think, we are told in 1 Peter 3:1-6 that by her life, by her witnessing, by her conduct before the unbelieving partner she may be used to bring her husband to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ (c.f. 1 Corinthians]:12-16). Then they will have a common faith in Christ. This is the first mark of a Christian marriage.

Recently I stood before a young couple entering into marriage. In the midst of the ceremony I turned to the young man and said, "Don, have you believed in Jesus Christ as your personal savior?" He said, "Yes sir, I have." I turned to the young lady and said, "Janet, have you received Jesus Christ as your personal savior?" She said, "Yes, I have." That is the first mark of a Christian marriage. There is a common faith in Jesus Christ.

But there is more!

A young man once asked John Wesley for an evaluation of his fiancée. Wesley advised against the marriage. "Why?" asked the young man, "She's a Christian. The wise Wesley responded, "But there are some Christians only God can live with!"

Abraham Lincoln once said, "Love is blind, but marriage is a great eye opener!"

In choosing a life partner there is more to consider than whether or not she is a believer. This is only the beginning. What is the second mark of a Christian marriage?

II. THERE IS A CHRISTIAN CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE

Now there are at least three principles that are involved in a Christian concept of marriage.

A. The Principle of Monogamy

Recently, in California, Michael, Janice and Karen were married! That's a trio marriage and that is taking place all over the country. This is not a Biblical concept of marriage, Our Lord said,

"And the two shall become one flesh."

Matt. 19:5b NASB

God said he "shall cleave to his wife" not wives. The Biblical concept of marriage is monogamy. Now, of course, I know that in the Old Testament polygamy was practiced. But God never commanded it. He never approved of it. In the cases where we have enough information to study it, there is abundant evidence of God's discipline and judgment for it. Polygamy was never part of God's order for marriage.

B. The Principle of Fidelity

A recent issue of Newsweek magazine tells us that there are more than two million middleclass American families that are engaged in some form of group sex. "From coast to coast married swingers are experimenting with radical redefinition of marriage." This is not a Christian concept of marriage. If you take God seriously then you will take His commandment seriously: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). You will also take His warning very seriously: "Fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4b NASB). You will not ignore His advice: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality" (I Thess. 4:3 NASB). Fidelity within marriage, as well as chastity before marriage, is a Biblical concept of marriage.

I wonder why God in His Word has thirty-eight times forbidden premarital sex or extramarital sex? Every evidence to every sane person is that it is to protect things that are very valuable. He wants to protect your physical health. Isn't it remarkable that with all of the advanced medicine in the United States we are, in 1973, in the midst of a venereal disease epidemic?

He also wants to protect your mental health. Max Levin, psychiatrist and neurologist in New York City, writes:

I am among those who regard premarital chastity as the desirable ideal to hold up to our youngsters. As a physician I speak solely from the standpoint of health. Premarital intercourse is hazardous, not so much because of the risk of pregnancy, but because of its threat to emotional health. It is not necessary to spell out the details to the coed who slept with her boyfriend in the hope that it would bind them together and lead them to the altar, and who woke up disillusioned a few months later when he threw her aside for another girl. Her dreams of a rosy future were shattered, and she suffered an emotional trauma from which she might never recover.

Two prominent psychiatrists have underscored the tragic side of sexual permissiveness on the American campus. Dr. Francis J. Braceland, clinical professor in psychiatry at Yale, told a gathering of the national Methodist Convocation on Medicine and Theology that the liberalized dormitory rules and more lenient attitudes toward sex have imposed stresses on some college women severe enough to cause emotional breakdown.

The Journal of the American Medical Association reported a study made by Dr. Deymore Halleck, director of student psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin. Among 300 girls who became psychiatric patients, 86 percent had had intercourse and 72 percent with more than one person. Dr. Halleck concluded that stresses associated with sustaining sexual relationships before marriage have been critical factors in precipitating severe emotional disorders.

More than this, He wants to protect your marriage. Premarital sex always brings a barrier into marriage. Extramarital sex fractures a relationship that has been established in marriage. But most of all, He wants to protect your relationship with God. Sexual immorality always leads to such a guilt in one's heart that the first thing that goes is a person's communion with God. We must also see that He wants to protect our society. It can be demonstrated from history that "no society has ever survived after its family life deteriorated" (Dr. Paul Popenoe, Time, December 28, 1970. p. 34). Here are the reasons God has established for marriage and pre-marriage the principles of fidelity and chastity. This suggests, as Dr. Haddon Robinson says, that there is a sense in which we never break God's laws. Rather, we break ourselves against His laws. There is a sound Biblical basis for the vow to "keep thee only unto her so long as ye both shall live." This is a Christian concept of marriage.

C. The Principle of Permanency

This needs to be very underscored today. Everyday in the United States of America two thousand marriages are dissolved either by divorce or by separation. Anthropologist Margaret Mead said some time ago that the most serious thing that was happening in the United States was that young people were entering into marriage with the

idea that it can be terminated. By the time my children reach marriageable age every indication is that there will be five-year renewable marriage licenses in this country. Now I submit to you that this is not a Christian concept of marriage. Our Lord's commentary on the institution of marriage is this:

"What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

Matt. 19:6 NASB

Malachi 2:16 clearly states that God hates divorce. It is true that God permits divorce on some vary rare occasions. But God never commands it, He never approves. It always violates the divine ideal. Divorce is not part of God's program for marriage. It is generally an unbiblical response to a problem and therefore only creates more problems.

As the Christian young person approaches marriage one of the most important things that he must determine carefully is whether he and his prospective partner have a biblical concept of marriage. It involves monogamy, absolute fidelity and permanency. Marriage is a relationship between two people, only two people, for life.

Does your fiancée have a Christian concept of marriage? This is not determined by simply asking a question. It is extremely easy to say, "Of course, Honey, I believe this." But does she really believe this? Are these his deep rooted convictions? Do you both really believe that when you enter into your marriage relationship that it is a relationship for life? When you both stand before that preacher and exchange your vows and say that you will keep yourselves only unto each other so long as you both shall live, are you both saying it with the depth of conviction that is rooted in the teachings of the Word of God? That's an essential ingredient in a Christian marriage. It involves a Christian concept of marriage itself.

But that is not all. It involves still more!

III. THERE ARE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES WITHIN MARRIAGE

A young couple came to my office some months ago for help with their marriage. As they began to unload I stopped them and said: "I want to tell you something. I hardly even know you, but I think I know exactly what your two problems are." The husband smiled and assured me they had many more problems than two. As he continued I took out my little yellow pad and recorded the problems. When it was all over I was able to point them to the fact that I had listed their problems in two columns and that all of their problems could ultimately be traced to two wrong attitudes within their marriage.

A truly Christian marriage contains two basic attitudes within that marriage. God, who made marriage, instituted these principles to make it work. They are as fundamental to marriage as the law of gravity is to living in this universe. To violate these two basic principles is as dangerous, hazardous and stupid as it would be for a person to challenge the law of gravity by jumping off the top of the Southland Life Building. That is how basic and fundamental the two principles are. What are these attitudes?

A. The Submission of the Christian Wife

Recently a poll was taken in the United States in which ninety percent of the women who responded were in favor of deleting the word "obey" from the marriage ceremony. The Lutheran Church of America revised its marriage ceremony last summer omitting the words "honor" and "obey." Dr. Eugene L. Bland who was responsible for the revision said, "We feel that they should be regarded as equal partners in the marriage." Regardless of how Dr. Bland feels and regardless of what women's liberation teaches, that is not how God feels and it is not what the Bible teaches! If the Bible says anything concerning a wife's attitude within marriage it is that she is to be subject to her husband.

Wives be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

Eph. 5:22-24 NASB

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Col. 3:18 NASB

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

1 Cor. 11:3 NASB

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the Word they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives.

1 Peter 3:1 NASB

One of the reasons why many women resent such an injunction is, I think, because they do not understand it. It surely does not imply that she is inferior, nor that she is to be without a voice. But it does imply that she is subordinate in rank. The verb Paul uses is a military word - it refers to rank. The woman occupies a rank in a home which is subordinate to her husband. Submission in any area of life simply means a humble and intelligent obedience to an ordained or authorized power over us. God has ordained the husband to be an authority over the woman and the basic attitude of a woman in her marriage relationship is that she is to be submissive to her husband "in everything." She is to do it cheerfully and respectfully (Eph. 5:33) as the church does to Christ. She is to do it "as to the Lord" recognizing that her submission to her husband is simply a reflection of her submission to the Lord. She says: "I'll do it for the Lord." A submissive wife then, is one who assumes a subordinate rank in every area of marriage, obeying respectfully the authority God has ordained over her - her husband.

Now that makes a whole lot of sense. As long as there is agreement within marriage the matter of submission never comes up. Right? As long as the husband and wife agree then submission isn't a point. The problem is when they disagree. That's when the issue of submission arises. What shall we do when we disagree as to how we should discipline our child, or what we should do about the budget? How should we handle that? Well, the first thing that we would obviously do as intelligent adults is sit down and talk it over. But sometimes that doesn't solve the difference. Then what shall we do? Take a majority vote? There's a problem with that because there's only one husband and one wife. So a majority vote won't settle it. There are only two alternatives that remain. We could continue to disagree until a separation or divorce seems to be the solution OR one of the two could make a decision and the other follow. God has appointed the man to make that decision. God instructs the wife to allow him to make that decision, to respect it, and to obey it. This places great responsibility upon the husband. When he stands before his God he shall give an account of the decision he made on that day.

Do I hear the wife saying: "But my husband won't take the leadership. He won't give the leadership. He leaves it to me. If I left the decisions to him, they would never be made. Our home would be a disaster area and our children would be delinquents." Has it ever entered your mind that two wrongs never make a right? By you taking the lead you are thwarting the very thing you wish. Is it possible that you are the problem? Take your God-given role and this will gently force your husband into his God-given role as head of the home.

Do I hear another protest? You are thinking: "But what if he is wrong? What if I don't agree?" Your only recourse is to God in prayer. You may ask him to change the heart of your husband if his decision is, in fact wrong (cf. Proverbs 21:1). Now you have taken your proper place and put the pressure on God, so-to-speak, to change your husband's heart. And He can do a better job than you!

Young lady, do not marry a man whom you do not respect enough to submit to him when he makes decisions and takes the leadership. If he is not taking the leadership before marriage you can be sure he won't after. You are not ready to marry until you have developed this attitude of submission. Every indication from the scriptures and experience is that a wife is happiest and most beautiful when she is in submission to her husband.

When William Jennings Bryant went to call on the father of his prospective wife and seek the hand of his daughter in marriage, knowing the strong religious feeling of the father, he thought to strengthen his case by a quotation from the Bible and quoted the proverb of Solomon: "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing" (Proverbs 18:22). But to

his surprise the father replied with a citation from Paul to the effect that he that marrieth doeth well, but he that marrieth not doeth better (1 Cor. 7:38). The young suitor was, for a moment, confounded. Then with a happy inspiration he replied that Paul had no wife and Solomon had seven hundred, and therefore, ought to be the better judge as to marriage. Accepting this very dubious bit of interpretation we will at least agree with Solomon that "whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing" especially if she is a submissive wife! But there is another side to the coin.

B. The Love of the Christian Husband

This ought to be the basic attitude of a Christian husband within marriage.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

Eph. 5:25 NASB

Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them.

Col. 3:19 NASB

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

1 Cor. 11:3 NASB

YOU husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

1 Pet. 3:7 NASB

The two illustrations that are given to us in Ephesians 5 clearly show us that this is not some kind of a romantic, emotional type of love. He is to love his wife as Christ loved the church (v. 25). How is that? Our Lord made a volitional decision to give His life as a sacrifice for the salvation of the church. That is the way a husband is to love his wife. He should be willing to die for her. He is to give His life for her. He is to bring his life and lay his life at the feet of his wife and give his life to seek her highest good; to care for her and for her particular needs. That is what it means for a husband to love his wife.

The second illustration is that he is to love his wife as he loves himself, as he nourishes himself, as he cherishes himself, as he looks after himself (v. 28-29.) That is never any more obvious than when he hits his thumb with a hammer. Then he becomes very sensitive to his pains and his needs. As he nourishes and cares for himself, so he is to care for his wife. The husband's responsibility is for the mental, physical, and spiritual health of his wife. His basic responsibility is to give his life to meet the spiritual, emotional, physical and material needs of his wife. Young man, do not marry a girl for whom you are not prepared to give your life. You are not ready to marry until this attitude been cultivated and developed in your relationship.

C. The Attitudes at Work

In marriages today there are four major problems: sex, money, children and religion. Disruptions or problems in any of these areas can be immediately traced on almost every occasion to a wrong attitude on the part of the wife or husband. The wife is not submissive or the husband does not sacrificially and wholly give himself to seek the good of his wife. Adopting these Christian attitudes with the help of the Holy Spirit and as unto the Lord will dissolve many marriage problems. Accepting these attitudes as you launch into marriage will prevent problems. These are fundamental. To disregard those two principles within marriage is to completely undermine a marriage relationship. To ignore them before entering into marriage is to build a relationship without a solid foundation.

These attitudes are individual responsibilities before God. That is, I am to love my wife one hundred percent regardless of how submissive she is to me. My love for her is my responsibility to God. Marriage is not just a

partnership. It is not a fifty-fifty arrangement. It is a one hundred percent commitment on the part of the Christian wife, under God, to be submissive to her husband regardless of how much he loves her.

Yet in the wisdom of God these attitudes are not entirely independent of each other. As the wife submits to her husband, she will surely encourage him to love her more. As the husband loves his wife she surely will respond and be more submissive to him. So there is an interaction between the two. But as the headship resides in the husband so the responsibility to initiate this interaction begins with him. A chapter from the pages of history will illustrate this. The wife of one of the generals of Cyrus, the ruler of Persia, was charged with treachery against the king and condemned to die. When her husband realized what had taken place, he ran to the palace and threw himself on the floor before the king. "Oh Lord, take my life instead of hers. Let me die in her place" he pleaded. Cyrus, who by all historical accounts was a noble and extremely sensitive man, was touched by this offer. "Love like that must not be spoiled by death" he said, and gave the husband and wife back to each other. As they walked away, the husband said, "Did you notice how kindly the king looked upon us when he gave you the free pardon?" The wife replied. "I had no eyes for the king. I saw only the man who was willing to die in my place." This is the dynamic of a Christian marriage.

These attitudes, I believe, clearly teach us that the real joy of a marriage relationship comes from giving, not getting. It is as the wife and the husband give that marriage becomes a joy.

The most important thing that emerges from these principles is that emotional love does not and never will sustain a meaningful Christian marriage relationship. One of the greatest errors we teach our children today is that the basic condition for marriage is love. When I counsel persons who are planning to get married I ask them How they know this is the right partner. The immediate response is: "Well, because we are in love." I do not know of any indication in all of the Bible that, from God's point of view love is never a basis for a marriage relationship. Now, admittedly, it's a very important ingredient but a marriage does not depend on love. Rather, as Larry Christenson has pointed out, our love depends upon our marriage. That's the point! When a young couple become disillusioned and conclude they do not love each other anymore, the only option they see left for them is separation and divorce. They have lost their love for each other. They need to be told that their marriage does not depend upon love. Their love depends upon their marriage. That is, marriage has been formulated by God with these two principles or attitudes to sustain a love relationship between two people. As the wife gives in submission and as the husband gives in sacrificial love, then emotional love grows. It matures. It intensifies. It is sustained. Our emotional love for each other depends upon our marriage. Our marriage doesn't depend upon love. When a couple say they have lost their love for each other, the first thing they need to be told is that they had better start to learn how to love each other again. The way that you start again is by giving. As the husband gives himself sacrificially as unto the Lord, then their emotional love will be rekindled and grow. We are not the helpless pawns of love. Love is subjective to us. With the enablement of God we need to take the potential for love and make it a servant to our marriage. We need not become a slave to it. (Christenson, Larry, *The Christian Family*. Bethany Fellowship, 1970, p. 29-30).

By the way, if these attitudes are not emerging and growing in your courtship do not expect them to appear after you are married. They ought to be very apparent and at work in the relationship before engagement is ever considered. This will be a giant stride toward assuring a truly Christian marriage.

A Christian marriage is one in which there is a common faith in Jesus Christ, a Christian attitude toward marriage and Christian attitudes within marriage. But that is not all!

IV. THERE ARE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD PARENTHOOD

To our first parents the Lord said,

"Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth."

Gen. 1:28

The bearing of children is one of the purposes of marriage and in it marriage finds a particular fulfillment. Christians welcome children as a blessing from the Lord and view parenthood as their highest vocation.

A. The Christian Father

Several years ago while I was attending seminary a very prominent preacher visited one of the classes. For about forty minutes he told of the great work that he had done for God. God had used him magnificently. Then he asked for questions. One of the perceptive students asked: "Sir, how is it that you've ever been able to write all that you've written and preach and do all that you've done and still bring up your family?" The renowned servant of the Lord quietly reached into his pocket for his handkerchief and began to weep. He said: "Men, I frankly confess to you that as a father I've been a total failure." I recognize that above being a Bible teacher I am a father. Above being a businessman, above being a professor, above being a surgeon or a physician, you are a father. We participated with God in the work of creating a life and we brought that life into the world. We have no higher responsibility, no higher vocation, no higher obligation than to be a father to that child.

And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Eph. 6:4 NASB

It is our responsibility to instruct them in the Word of God. The best teacher your children will ever have is their father. We may instruct them formally and systematically sitting at the supper table or before the fireplace. We may instruct them informally as we play football, hike, drive the car, or watch television. Every situation provides opportunities for informal instruction in the scriptures. When a problem arises or a question is asked, that is the time for teaching. Teaching includes both aspects: formal and informal. These are the responsibility of the father (Deut. 6:7). Yes! This is the father's responsibility. Our text directly states this. Socrates once wondered how men were so careful about the training of colts could be so indifferent about the training of their children! We pity the poor parent who mistakes permissiveness for love.

It is our responsibility to discipline our children. As the head of the house, the father determines the principles for discipline. He will set the penalties too. In his absence the mother ought only to administer his policy. I have seen a torn chaotic marriage and home return to peace and orderliness when the wife backed away from disciplining the teenage daughter and allowed the husband to play his role. Eli failed to discipline his children and was severely judged of the Lord. This is a father's responsibility.

More than this, it is our responsibility to counsel our children.

Train up a child in the way he should go. Even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Prov. 22:6 NASB

Someone has suggested that every child comes into the world with "sealed orders." Part of the calling of the father is to help unseal those orders; discovering what it is that God means the child to do and to be. We are to train up each individual child in the specific and particular way he should go according to his talents and gifts, according to his interests and God's will. This responsibility extends to counseling them in their problems. To do so we must know the problems and know the child. Then we must know the scriptures as they relate to both. This takes time: Time for prayer, study, listening and talking!

Sometime ago a study was conducted at Columbus University to determine the forces at work influencing our children up to their fifteenth birthday. It was discovered that 31% of their influence came from their peer group; 16% from character forming organizations like Scouts, church, etc.; and 53% from parents. This will not surprise most of us. But listen to this. The greatest single factor in influencing these children was the father's conversation at the supper table!

B. The Christian Mother

Sweden has a system of laws whereby in 1973 the home will be destroyed. Marriage is to be completely eliminated. Children are to be taken from home at six months of age to be reared in institutions. The daily newspaper of Stockholm's socialistic party recently published an article that was entitled, "Woman, Don't Let a Man Support You." The entire thesis of the editorial was that the place of a woman is in the labor force not in the home. My friend, that is not a Christian attitude toward parenthood.

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teach what is good, that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children.

Titus 2:3-5 NASB

Proverbs 31 gives us the most beautiful and complete picture of a woman anywhere in the Bible and above all else she is a mother. She is a homemaker. U.S. News and World Report reported that ten thousand children between the age of ten and sixteen run away from their homes, school, or institutions every week in the United States of America. Ten thousand every week! In their analysis they traced it back to the state of disarray of the traditional American home. As they interviewed the children, one of the causes that constantly reappeared was their resentment against the "second job." Why such resentment? From their point of view that extra \$8,000 was not needed. Forty percent of American women today work. I believe that it is one of the greatest undermining forces in a Christian home and in a marriage and; we need to be very aware of it. Peter Marshall said it best when he said:

Modern girls argue that they have to earn an income in order to establish a home which would be impossible on their husband's income. That is sometimes the case but it must always be viewed as a regrettable necessity, never as a natural thing for the wife to do. The average woman, if she gives her full time to her home, her husband, her children... if she tries to understand her husband's work... to curb his egotism while at the same time building up his self esteem, to kill his masculine conceit while encouraging all his hopes, to establish around the family a circle of true friends... if she provides in the home a proper atmosphere of culture, a love of music, of beautiful furniture and a garden... if she will do all this she will be engaged in a life work that will demand every ounce of her strength, every bit of her patience, every talent God has given her, the utmost sacrifice of her love. It will demand everything that she has and more and she will find that for which she was created. She will know that she is carrying out the plan of God.

What is the Christian attitude toward parenthood? Parents consider children a blessing from God. Husband and wife consider parenthood as their highest vocation. How would you grade your marriage? How would your children grade you? How does God grade you?

Planning to marry? Here is an area that must be worked out thoroughly before marriage to insure that yours is a Christian marriage. But there is one last ingredient to consider.

V. THERE IS A CHRISTIAN ACCEPTANCE OF GOD'S WILL

Probably one of the most touching moments I have ever experienced came after pronouncing Ralph and Kay husband and wife. They turned to face the audience while Ralph sang a solo:

*Take our lives and let them be Consecrated,
Lord to Thee;
Take our moments and our days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take our wills and make them Thine,*

*They shall be no longer ours;
Take our hearts, they are Thine own;
They shall be Thy royal throne.*

That's a Christian marriage! The husband and wife join hands together and say, "We will together seek first the Kingdom of God." They kneel beside their bed holding each other's hand and say, "Not our will but God's will be done." Together they are ready to commit their way to the Lord. That's a Christian marriage. Here is the acceptance of God's values, a submission to God's will.

Where shall we find the will of God ? Where else but in the Word of God! Are you in the Word regularly? Mark this well. The Christian who is not in the Word - reading it, studying it, enjoying it, praying over it, sharing it - has little regard for the will of God. Measure your fiancée's concern for the will of God - or your own concern - by the amount of time and the quality of time you have spent in the Word together this past month. Set the course of your dating and your marriage in this direction. The dividends will be tremendous..

The primary channel used God to guide Christian children is the parent.
"Children, obey your parents in the Lord. for this is right..."

Eph. 6:1

Last year a wonderful young Christian couple came to my office for our first premarital counseling session. Their marriage was set for several months in the future. One of the highest hurdles to overcome in the meantime was to gain her parents' approval. We talked about ways of achieving this and off they went to her home over Christmas vacation. What a disaster! The parents forbade her to see him for three months! What should they do now? They believed God guides children through their parents - even unsaved parents (by the way, her parents were unbelievers), so reluctantly they agreed. Within four weeks they both told me they had discovered they were not really in love after all, and dissolved their relationship. They had been saved from certain tragedy! God does guide through parents. To resist them is to resist God. By the way, the best indication of the true character of a boyfriend or girlfriend is their attitude toward and relationship with their parents! Mark this well. Take a careful look at him in his home. This is the real "him."

CONCLUSION

Have you been disillusioned by the mockery and the mess that my generation has made of marriage? I implore you to realize that it is because we have not followed the directions! If the directions had been followed Christian marriages with all of their happiness and blessing would have been followed. Do not let the mess that you see rob you of the joy of a Christian marriage. Rather, let it make you exceedingly cautious as you move in that direction. Are you a young person on the threshold of marriage? I would warn you that love can be a very blind thing. Look before you leap. Look carefully. Look critically. Look over a period of time. Look in various settings. Evaluate. Will this person contribute toward making your marriage a truly Christian marriage? Is he a believer? What is his view of marriage? What is her attitude toward you now in your relationship? Would you want him to be the father of your children? What is her value scale and her commitment to the Lord and His Word? Above all, wait and pray. The test of time is a test of love.

Are you among the ninety percent who are living in an armed truce? Perhaps you're separated, on the road to a divorce court. I want to inform you, my dear friend, that all of the tragedy of your marriage is because you have ignored the directions of God. You have turned to counselors, lawyers, ministers and books. I invite you to turn to God and confess to Him your failure in following the directions that He has laid down for His institution. Then I ask you to turn to your wife or your husband and, holding the Word of God in your hand, admit to them that you have not been the husband or the wife that you ought to have been. Ask for forgiveness and then promise that with God's help and by His grace you are going to follow the directions that are laid down in the Bible for a Christian marriage.

Could it be that you have never taken the very first step toward making your marriage a Christian marriage? You have never believed in Jesus Christ? You do not have a personal faith in Him? Perhaps you are part of a mixed marriage? You have seen your wife or husband saved. You have seen the difference in his life. God has matured and

worked in her life. The Lord has been working in you through your husband or through your wife. Is it possible that God just now is giving you such grace and so opening your heart that you are prepared to turn simply to Him and receive Him personally as your savior? This is the first step toward a Christian marriage.

The marriage relationship represents the relationship that one must have with Jesus Christ to be a true Christian and a child of God. Just as the man takes the initiative in loving the woman and winning her love, so the Lord Jesus has taken the initiative in loving us. He has demonstrated His love for us by His death upon the cross. It was there He died for us, as our substitute, bearing the judgment of God for our sins. He has certainly taken the initiative in loving us.

We can also say, just as the woman responds to that love and by an act of her will receives the man to be her husband, so we are invited to respond to Christ's love and by a definite act of our will receive Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. This is the most appropriate response to such love as our Lord has shown to us.

Just as the product of the man's initiative and the woman's response is a marriage union, so the product of our Lord's initiative in loving us, and our response in receiving Him as Savior is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Only the one who has entered into this personal relationship with Jesus Christ is a true Christian and a child of God. Why not receive Him right now?