

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

87 What Is Your Christian Marriage? (Practical)

Editors Note: This lesson was not originally included in the corpus of work that Pastor Christensen prepared under the overarching title, **Questions We Want Answered**. He prepared it separately for an adult Bible study. The editor thought it would be helpful to include it in this book.

INTRODUCTION

There are many things that some people would rather talk about than marriage. To them it is a gloomy subject that calls for too much wishful thinking. After all, that is what we do when we find out that two people are going to get married, we wish them our best. But it seems that it is becoming increasingly more difficult to even do that because of the realization that marriage often brings more tears than it does smiles. This is not to say that everyone doesn't appreciate the excitement and glamour of a wedding. Weddings are happy events, people look just out of this world and the spirit of the occasion causes everyone to be in a good mood. The newlyweds roar off in the finest car they can find and we would like to believe they will live happily ever after. My purpose in all of this is to do what I can to insure this kind of permanence in their relationship. Most people who are getting married do not have the slightest notion of what they are getting into and therefore should be made aware of the real truth about marriage, the truth that comes from the One who designed it in the first place. It has always been interesting to me that Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding feast which means that He stands ready to perform a kind of miracle at your wedding also. Jesus Christ touches marriages and makes them happy and wonderful. Let us seek to understand a few of the things the Bible has to say about marriage and the establishment of a Christian home.

I. LEAVING AND CLEAVING:

Marriage means starting a brand new way of life which means that the old way of life is put aside. In a very real way we leave one family to begin a new family. This is what Jesus meant when he said, *"Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to one wife, and two*

shall become one? What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." (Matthew 19:4-6) These words give a very basic principle and insight into marriage as the Bible is concerned. People who get married should be able to stand on their own two feet. They should be able to make decisions for themselves and support themselves. If they are not able to do this they are not ready for marriage. It is not a matter of any less respect or recognition for one's father or mother. Furthermore, I believe included here is leaving the old gang, at least as far as the predominant place is concerned. There is no question that marriages fail because of family involvement and that people continue to live as if they were still single. Leaving leads to cleaving and that is good Bible teaching. Before Eve came, Adam had a relationship with things all around him, with the animals and the trees, the sun and the sky. However, he did not have affinity with these things. When he encounters Eve, we read of a brand new kind of relationship, *"You are flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone."* (Genesis 2:23) She was not a tool to be used in the tilling of the soil, nor was she a toy to be played with in the coolness of the evening. She was not a thing, but she was a person, and Adam found for the first time an experience of affinity, a sameness, and this is the first thing that we want to understand in our quest for permanency in marriage.

II. THE CHRISTIAN HUSBAND:

The role of the Christian husband is given in Ephesians 5:21-33. We have already referred to the Old Testament and laid the foundation for marriage in the leaving and cleaving principle. The New Testament enlarges upon this as it spells out specific responsibilities for both the husband and wife. Perhaps the key to this relationship of a man to his wife is in the 25th verse, *"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."* If we go to other places in Scripture we can learn more about this kind of love:

1. It is unselfish. (Philippians 2:6)
2. It is characterized by humility. (Philippians 2:7)
3. It is sacrificial in nature. (Philippians 2:8)
4. It involved prayer and empathy. (Hebrews 4:14-16)
5. It provided for wellbeing through long range planning.
(I Thessalonians 4:11-12)

Yet another aspect of the husbandly role is understanding. This is reflected in I Peter 3:7, *“Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife as the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”* Note the recognition of spiritual equality even though she is lacking in physical equality. One further concern here is that of the leadership role. *“The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.”* (Ephesians 5:23) Also in I Corinthians 11:3 we read, *“But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.”* This is the Biblical chain of command as far as administrative authority in the home is concerned. It is a very great tragedy that this teaching has been so misunderstood and abused. Surely, this does not mean that the woman has no freedom. It does not mean the man is to be a tyrant or has any such liberty. Christ is the head of the man and Christ does not make men tyrants. The man of the house exercised his leadership by following Christ's example.

III. THE CHRISTIAN WIFE:

We read about the Christian wife in I Peter 3:1-6, also in Proverbs 31:10-31. The Bible recognizes that men and women are equal. *“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is **neither male nor female**, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* (Galatians 3:27-28) Before God there is an equality of the sexes. They should be considered equal also in terms of compensation and job opportunities. When we come to marriage however, we come to something different. We are not then considering people as men and women, we are now calling them husbands and wives. Marriage is a particular kind of social relationship. You are on the road to trouble if you are still thinking of equality here. Three verses in Peter, and in Ephesians reveal the authority structure in the home. The word “submission” is best chosen to describe the wife's place. This submission is closely related to the husbands function as the spiritual head of the house. *“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as it is fitting in the Lord.”* (Colossians 3:18) You will notice the implication here that her “submission” must be *“fitting in the Lord.”* The husband must not demand anything that causes the wife to disobey the Lord. I believe at this point we can distinguish between “submissiveness” and “servility.” A wife who believes that a husband is wrong in what he is doing should tell him so. She should make her thoughts fully known. It is not right for a husband to demand submission from his wife

when he has not acted as a Christian toward her. Circumstances will arise when there can not be a meeting of the minds over a given matter. A fork comes into the road of two who had mutually agreed to walk together. There must be a point of concession or there is a parting of the ways.

I would assume that both desire the mind of the Lord in the matter. At such a time, the husband will prayerfully and carefully make the decision. If you are willing to accept the Bible as your instruction source, the husband will assume the lead and the wife will give it to him. A very great source of strain and sickness in marriage lies in the fact that neither partner will concede when there is a difference of opinion. In the case where husbands are either unbelieving or threats to one's wellbeing the wife is asked to submit for Christ's sake to unreasonable ways, but there is room for departure. Some people are not able to live under the same roof with one another. There may be physical cruelty, alcoholic addiction, drug addiction, a man being a criminal, or insanity. I think there are valid reasons why two people may not be able to live together. These are extreme and matters of life and limb. We must remember that the Bible always makes sense. (I Corinthians 7:10-11) Let me say that the Scriptural formula is that the wife submit to the husbands judgment as she leaves the matter in the hands of God.

The verses mentioned from Proverbs 31 give a composite picture of a woman who indeed loves the Lord. She is temperate, pure in heart and life, devoted to her home, Christ like and dedicated to her husband. Titus 2:3-5 also describes her place and significant contributions.

IV. THE CHRISTIAN HOME AND PROBLEMS:

Homes have their problems and Christian homes are not exempt. Let us look at some of the problems Christians face within the home.

1. Disagreements:

An article which has come to my attention is entitled "How To Make The Most Of Family Fights." There are several rules given for making family fights more useful. One of them is that the main goal in a dispute should be to reach a settlement which is mutually agreeable. Another is that we should disagree as calmly as possible. These and several others are mentioned. There is nothing wrong with them, the trouble is that people do not consult the rule book when a spat canes on. The Bible never suggests that people will get along on natural ability. We are just incapable of being selfless and loving.

The lifestyle of the Christian is not a naturalistic style of life. It is supernatural. Only those who know and love Jesus Christ are equipped to live in love in the intimate family place.

2. The Triangle:

Everyone has heard about marriage triangles. A third party enters into a family relationship and seeks to woo a partner away. Of course marriages are destroyed this way and that is my reason for talking about it. People have not discovered what Christ does when he cements two lives together. The way to avoid the triangle trap is to stay very much in love with your mate. People do not have the moral stamina to carry on when love has grown cold at home and they become vulnerable. Marriage partners are also partners in Christ. We stay lovable when we look to the Lord.

3. Alcohol:

Not necessarily "alcoholism," but alcohol in its "innocent use." Pages could be devoted to the harmful effects of alcohol upon the home. I believe that total abstinence is the best and most helpful position to take for a happy, solid Christian home.

4. Financial Difficulties:

This is a lack in planning together the finances of the family, a lack of sharing together the plans, the lack of intelligent budgeting of the family income, foolish spending instead of saving when there is a little surplus. These factors are among the largest in causing unhappiness in marriage. We are to be good stewards of the monies that God has entrusted to us.

5. The Song Of Love:

Perhaps the words, "The song of love is a sad song..." are familiar to you. The song of love is indeed a sad song for me if we can think of the sexual relations which exist between men and women. The reason for this sadness is because mankind has become obsessed with his body. People are stumbling over their sexuality. The Bible describes the sexual relationship between man and women in a straightforward way. Embarrassment about the subject comes from a non-Biblical prudishness. God has laid the reality of sexuality into the very fabric of human relationships and in His sight it is chastely erotic. When expressed in a God honoring way it results in a man and a woman becoming

one flesh. All the richness of human sexuality is to be enjoyed within the bounds of the marriage relationship.

IV. THE ALTAR AND SERVICE:

The altar has been a center of spiritual activity since the beginning of time. Family worship is often referred to as the family altar. This means that there is a time and place in the life of a family when all other interests are set aside for the moment and members in the family read the Scriptures and pray. There is no overestimating the importance of this activity, perhaps it is more important than anything else we do as a family, even sit in church. This is the nub of the matter. If we do not feel that family altar is important, we are not going to bother with it. I believe that family altar begins with pausing to return thanks over our meals. We are not like animals that attack their food when it is put before them. We have been given the power of reason and recognize that eating a meal is not an accidental event in our lives. The second element in the family altar is the reading of Scripture. This need not be long and tedious. It can be short, to the point, and interesting. The more modern versions are very helpful. The material should be read reverently and thoughtfully. Now, there is no magic in reading the words of the Bible and this is not done as a fetish or for good luck. The Scriptures are a vehicle of faith and through the reading of the Scripture we grow in Christ and God shapes our lives. The final part of the liturgy in the life of the family is prayer. It is in prayer that the family has the opportunity to participate and bring their joys and burdens to the Lord. It is the outgoing of ourselves to God on the behalf of others. It is all quite simple. It is a good time to remember the needs of others, perhaps the sick person down the street and etc.. There are all kinds of variations in the liturgy of family worship. The important thing is that it is vital. No Christian home should be without a family altar. We will never know how important this activity is.

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