



## Lesson 32

### CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

#### Reading 1 Corinthians 7

Marriage is an agreement by one man and one woman to live together. It is not enough simply to 'set up home' together. A couple must show publicly that they are husband and wife, so the agreement is made before witnesses.

Christian marriage is that, and more. The promises made before witnesses are also made in the presence of God, and they are promises that are meant to last. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). If possible, have the marriage registered by the State, and obtain marriage documents.

The Divine ideal is that one man and one woman should live together always

- When God created the woman to be a suitable helper for Adam (Genesis 2:18), He meant that they should care for each other in every way-spiritually as well as in body and mind.
- When God said that they would become "*one flesh*" (Genesis 2:24), He showed that they should be part of each other-faithful, loyal, truthful and trustworthy towards each other for always.
- When God blessed Adam and Eve and said they should be fruitful and increase in number (Genesis 1:28), He was showing that a stable marriage gives the best conditions for children to grow up in.

But not everyone has to marry. Jesus Christ remained single, and so, as far as we know, did the apostle Paul, although he said he could have had a wife if he wanted one. The fact is that some people are made in such a way that they prefer to stay single, and others need the company and support of a husband or wife. Paul advised those in Corinth, to whom he wrote in a time of trouble for the believers (1 Corinthians 7:26), that they should only marry if they really needed to. Some people are better able to serve God if they remain single (verses 32-35); others need to marry (verses 2-9). It is all a matter of our individual bodily and mental make-up.

Marriage is an arrangement God has provided. It is not a convenient way of getting a housekeeper free of charge, or for finding a man to look after you. There are important principles to learn and practise if the marriage is to be pleasing to God, and we will trace them through from the time a man thinks of finding a wife, or a woman decides she would like to be married. A separate lesson will deal with other situations which may arise, because of local marriage customs or different standards of behaviour.

#### Sex before Marriage

The first thing to understand is that sexual intercourse is something God created, but He does not want it practised outside of marriage.

The Bible condemns all sexual abuse. Sex before marriage and outside marriage, prostitution, homosexuality and bestiality are all specifically condemned. The proper and only place for sex is within marriage. The Bible says:

"Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind ... shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10).

That does not mean that if we have been foolish in the past, and have committed such sins, we have no hope of forgiveness. The apostle goes on to say to the Corinthians that some of them had once been sinners like that (verse 11) but that they had been "*washed*", "*sanctified*" and "*justified*" in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. If in the past we have done

such foolish things, we must now stop, repent of those sins, and ask God for forgiveness. Then at our baptism into the saving name of Jesus, we can be given a new start in life.

**Sex within marriage** is a gift from God; it is a blessing designed among other things to bring children into a loving caring family. There is no commandment that Christians must have as many children as possible - some churches encourage that just to increase the number of church members. Parents will want to consider their family circumstances before deciding how many children to have and, as in everything else in family life, husband and wife should discuss the matter to reach agreement about a planned family. But sex is also a God-given way of allowing husband and wife to express their love for one another in a very special way (1 Corinthians 7:3-5).

### **Finding a Husband or Wife**

When a follower of Christ decides to get married, he or she will want to know what sort of person to marry, and the Bible gives a clear command which should be obeyed.

Believers should marry believers
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If they are to live together as spiritual partners (the apostle Peter calls them *"heirs together of the grace of life"* (1 Peter 3:7), they must share the same faith, the same understanding about what the Bible teaches. A believer who marries an unbeliever will find difficulty and conflict in the marriage. So it is no wonder the inspired apostle Paul said:

"Be ye not unequally yoked together (for example, married) with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14),

and in respect of a widow:

"The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; **only in the Lord**" (1 Corinthians 7:39).

### **Living Together**

A caring Christian husband, and a devout Christian wife are a great blessing, both to one another and to those with whom they worship God. Husbands must try to follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, who set a very high standard of love and care for all those he met in life. When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he explained that husbands are to behave in the family just as Christ behaved towards his followers:

"For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body ... Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5 :23-25).

Being the head of the family does not mean that the husband is allowed to boss everyone around - expecting everything to be done in answer to his commands, and having his own way all the time. That was not how Jesus exercised leadership over his disciples - he was among them as one who served (Luke 22:27), and he considered the needs of other people more important than his own. It does, however, mean giving a firm and positive lead, setting a good example, being in charge of all aspects of family life, and talking things through with all the other members whenever there are important decisions to be made.

Most of all, it means that the husband has to lead the family in worship and instruction, to lead family prayers and daily Bible reading. It was said of Abraham by God, *"I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment"* (Genesis 18:19). So, the husband should regard himself as the head over the family, responsible for their lives before God, and he should think of his home as the Christian church in miniature. Indeed, if there are no other believers nearby, this may be the only opportunity he has to worship God in the company of others, and he should

involve his family in that worship to instruct them in the ways of God, although only baptized believers will share in the bread and wine.

In some countries, the pattern of working life has so developed that the women in the family do most of the heavy work. A Christian marriage is a partnership, and the husband who wants to keep God's commandments will be keen to share all the burdens of life with his wife and family. He will want to give *"honour to the wife, as unto the weaker vessel"* (1 Peter 3:7), and to love her as much as he loves himself (Ephesians 5:28). This sort of spiritual and practical partnership will be a joyful experience for the whole family. Finding a way of working together and of sharing tasks will be an excellent way of showing neighbours just what true Christianity is like.

## **A Christian Wife**

So far we have looked at the duties and responsibilities of the Christian husband, but he can only exercise those functions if he has a wife who is prepared to play her proper part. There may be no believing women living nearby, in which case the husband-to-be will want to find someone who is willing to learn the true gospel and accept the way of salvation taught in the Bible (by faith and baptism). Some people who read this course will already be married to a wife or husband who is not studying with them and that is something to be considered in the next lesson. But the man who wants a wife will have in mind the need to find a spiritual partner, someone who can share all aspects of his life in Christ, and the same is true for a Christian woman who wants to marry.

Eve was created to be a suitable helper for Adam, and this is the standard which all wives should follow. There is a delightful word-picture of a good wife in Proverbs chapter 31. A "virtuous woman" is shown there as one her husband can trust absolutely, who *"will do him good and not evil all the days of her life"* (verse 12). She is a hard worker for herself and her family; she is kind and understanding, and she is one *"that feareth the Lord"* (verse 30).

Many faithful women in Scripture have lived up to this description; they have helped and supported their husbands, whilst letting them take the lead. Sarah was such a woman of faith and she so revered her husband that she thought of Abraham as her lord (1 Peter 3:1-6) and was subject to him in all things. The husband, however, must not abuse his position. In a Christian family he and his wife are *"heirs together of the gracious gift of life"*. The apostle Paul instructed Titus to:

"Teach the young women to be sober (wise), **to love their husbands, to love their children**, to be discreet, chaste (pure), keepers at home, good, **obedient to their own husbands**, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2 :4,5).

It may seem strange to urge wives to love their husbands, but this is not something all couples achieve. They live together to benefit from each other, and have children, but sometimes do not really love each other. Nor do they manage to bring up their children well. But, Christian family life is to be shared with God. For that reason, mothers have their part to play both in showing love to all the family, the gentle touch that only they can bring, and in guiding and teaching the children, especially when they are young and in close contact. The Scripture says that parents should *"train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it"* (Proverbs 22:6).

Here, then, is the Divine ideal: a believing husband and wife who are sharing the blessings given them by God and bringing up a family who are also learning God's truth. In this way they will be a blessing to all they meet. Their joyful life together in Christ shows others what a blessing they enjoy, and thus God is glorified in all their ways.

## **Summary**

1. Marriage was ordained by God and is good and right.
2. Some people are content to remain single, and this is also good and right. Indeed, it may allow extra devotion to serving God.
3. Sex is a blessing of God but it is only allowed between a man and his wife.
4. Sex outside or before marriage is sinful and to be rejected.
5. Marriage is only allowed with someone of the same faith - a baptized believer.
6. Husbands must care for their wives and children and lead the family in everything, especially the worship of God, Bible reading and prayer.
7. Wives must obey their husbands and guide the family in God's ways.

## **Chapters to read:**

Ephesians 5; Proverbs 31:10-31; 1 Timothy 3; Colossians 3:12-25

## **Learn by heart:**

Matthew 19:5, 6

"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."