

The  
Principles  
of  
Christian  
Marriage



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## Foreword

THE Christadelphian Bible Mission has used the following booklets, particularly in Africa, as the standard guides on the subject of Christian marriage and behaviour:

- *Christian Marriage in an African Setting* by Alan Hayward
- *Christian Marriage* by Alan and Mary Eyre
- *Rules for the Sex Life of Christadelphians*

Unfortunately, these all need reprinting and so we were asked by CBM to produce one booklet combining the subject matter of these three. However, although there was inevitably duplication of many subjects, there was no mention of the devastating effect of AIDS, because this was not recognised until 1981, which was after the above books were written. We were indebted to Dr Stephen Palmer for his booklet, *AIDS – Bible Answers to Today's Questions* for our information in this respect. We also used *A New Creation* by George Booker in some of the relevant chapters. Various other sources were used for background knowledge relating to the cultural problems of Africa.

We give our grateful thanks to Mark Whittaker and the members of the reading committee and CBM Council for their many corrections and suggestions for improvements in the text.

We have acted mainly as editors rather than authors and although this booklet is primarily for Africa, we hope it will have a wider appeal because everything included has a scriptural basis. The New International Version has been used throughout.

Paul and Elisabeth Genders

January 2003

# 1 – The Meaning of Marriage

THIS booklet is written to guide Christadelphians – both men and women – about marriage. If you are already married, it will show you how to get the best out of your marriage and keep free from sin. If you are a young man it will guide you in choosing a wife, and if you are a young woman it will help you to recognise the kind of man that is suitable for you to marry.

In this first chapter we shall find out what marriage is all about.

- Marriage is the union, that is, the joining together, of one man and one woman. They become “one flesh” for the rest of their lives.
- A husband and his wife should be partners, helping one another along the way to God’s kingdom.
- A Christian marriage should be happy and permanent. Then the children can be brought up to serve God faithfully.
- Sex between a man and his wife should be a great blessing to them both. But sex outside marriage is a great evil.
- Good communication between husband and wife is essential in a happy marriage.

## Two become One

There was a time when the Pharisees came to the Lord Jesus and asked him a question about marriage. His answer was:

“Haven’t you read ... that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female”, and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?” So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” (Matthew 19:4-6)

Notice how Jesus began his answer. “Haven’t you read ...?” As much as to say, “The answer to this question is in the same place as the answer to all the most important questions in life – in the Bible. Why don’t you look there for it?”

The passage that Jesus was referring to is in the book of Genesis. It reads like this:

“The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’ ... So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of

my flesh; she shall be called “woman”, for she was taken out of man’. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:18,21-24)

We can learn a great deal by thinking deeply about these two passages of scripture.

First, we see from the words of Jesus what marriage is intended to be. It is the joining together of two people to become one. God intends that this joining, or ‘union’, of a man and woman in marriage should last as long as they both remain alive. The marriage union is ordained by God. Therefore what God has joined together must not be separated (or broken) by man or by woman.

So now we can give a definition of marriage, as God intends it to be: *marriage is a union of one man, with one woman, for a lifetime.*

### **Joint Heirs of Eternal Life**

Suppose we ask the question, “What is a wife for?” One man might say, “To bear children and bring them up”. Another might say, “To cook, and keep the house clean”. A third might say, “To give her husband sexual pleasure”.

But none of these answers is the right one. They all mention secondary reasons for having a wife. The main reason for having a wife is greater than any of these. The passage from Genesis explains it like this: God did not want man to go through life alone, so He created a wife to be a helper for him.

Don’t misunderstand the word “helper”. It does *not* mean that a wife is just intended to be a servant to cook a man’s meals, to give a man sexual pleasure, and to bear his children and bring them up. It means much more than that.

This is how the Apostle Peter told husbands to regard their wives:

“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life”. (1 Peter 3:7)

So a Christian’s wife is to be *respected*. She is very, very much more than a servant. She is *his fellow-heir of eternal life*. She is someone to stand beside her husband so that together they form a team, helping each other through life towards God’s everlasting kingdom.

### **One Flesh**

God made Adam out of the dust of the ground. But He did not make Eve out of a second heap of dust. He made her from a rib that was taken from her husband. For this reason, Adam and Eve were truly one flesh.

Since then women have not been made from the same piece of flesh and bone as their husbands, of course. But nevertheless, husbands and wives are still supposed to act as if they were. This is how the Apostle Paul sums up how husbands and wives should be in the Lord:

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” (Ephesians 5:22-31)

So a husband must think of his wife as being part of himself. Is he ever unkind to his wife? Because, if so, he is really being unkind to his own body! Is a wife ever unfaithful to her husband? Because, if so, she is really being unfaithful to herself!

Marriage is intended to be a living parable of the relationship of Christ and the church. It ought to be the ideal of every marriage to reflect this relationship of Christ to the ecclesia in the love and respect between husband and wife. Even though Christ was the head of the disciples, he showed his love to them by washing their feet. So the man should show he is the head by similar service, rather than by asserting himself.

### **Godly Children**

All this follows from Paul’s explanation of what it means to be one flesh. But this is not the whole story. The prophet Malachi gives another reason why God has made every wife to be one flesh with her husband:

1. “She is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.
2. Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his.
3. And why one?
4. Because he was seeking godly offspring.
5. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.
6. ‘I hate divorce’, says the LORD God of Israel.” (Malachi 2:14-16)

Malachi's words are not easy to follow. So here is an explanation of this passage, sentence by sentence. Numbers are used to show which sentence is being explained:

1. Your wife is supposed to be your good friend and partner. You should be faithful to her because you made a solemn promise (a covenant) when you took her to be your wife.
2. Now remember the teaching of Genesis 2. God made Eve out of Adam's side, so that they were one flesh. He did not have to do it that way; He could have created Eve in the same way as He created Adam.
3. Then why did God do it the way He did? Why did He take Eve out of Adam's side, and thus make the man and his wife one flesh?
4. He did it for the sake of the children. God wanted a godly seed – that is, God-fearing children. So God commands that husband and wife should stay together for life, as one flesh that must never be separated, so as to provide a good home where their children can learn to serve God.
5. Therefore every husband must be faithful to his wife, all his life.
6. God hates men who put away their wives and take new wives. This is very wicked, because it goes against God's law of marriage.

### **The Place of Sex**

Whenever a man and a woman have sex together they become one flesh (1 Corinthians 6:16). This is why a man is forbidden to have sex with anyone except his wife, and a woman must not have sex with anyone except her husband.

God's law says that two people may become one flesh – but *only two*. Before a man or a woman marry, they must not have sex with anyone at all. After marriage they must not have sex with anyone except their wife or husband.

People who break God's laws about sex are called fornicators, or adulterers. (Fornication means any kind of unlawful sex; adultery means unlawful sex by a married person.) Those who continue to commit fornication or adultery will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9,10). See also Appendix 5.

The Bible likens sex to fire (Proverbs 6:27-29). Like fire, sex is one of God's great gifts to mankind. If we use it lawfully, it can bring us much happiness. Sex between a man and his wife can bring great joy and comfort to them both.



But sex that is used unlawfully is like fire that is out of control. It is a raging force of destruction. It breaks up marriages, causes the birth of unwanted children, and spreads horrible diseases like AIDS. Worst of all, it will cause those who behave like this to be rejected from God's kingdom.

Like fire, sex must be kept in its proper place. And the only right place for sex is within marriage. As Paul says, briefly but powerfully:

"Flee from sexual immorality." (1 Corinthians 6:18)

And as Solomon says:

"May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love. Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife? For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths." (Proverbs 5:18-21)

### **Importance of Communication in Marriage**

Communication means talking to and listening to each other. The way we say things and how we act with our bodies is a vital part of this communication. When two believers are married they know they are joined together – they know that Jesus said:

"So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Matthew 19:6)

This joining starts to show in their feelings for each other – how they can please each other – and is then expressed in words as they talk together and start to help each other. They communicate with their eyes, their smiles (or scowls), and then by touch to show how much they care. Finally, married couples communicate by having sexual intercourse. This is not just for having children; it is a way of talking and saying how much they love and care for each other.

Believers' marriages must be based on the solid foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ, on what he has done for us and on our united commitment to him. If possible, try to read from the daily Bible readings together, and allow time for quiet talk, meditation and prayer together. All this helps to strengthen a marriage.

When talking together, husbands and wives should be kind and polite, remembering to say 'thank you', and not taking each other for granted. It is important to praise good points, acknowledging them to each other and to other people.

We must remember three important phrases:

- I love you

- I am sorry
- I forgive you

All marriages have their ups and downs and we must prayerfully work at our relationship together. We must not give up at the first disagreement or problem. It is a lifetime's work but it brings many blessings.

Finally, if we can memorise the following words of Paul and put them into practice, our marriages should grow into a wonderful and godly relationship:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

## **2 – Preparing for Marriage**

LONG before considering marriage, young Christadelphians should have resolved in their own minds that if and when they get married it would only be to another Christadelphian. The Bible abounds in warnings against marriages to those having other beliefs or no Christian beliefs at all.

It is very significant that right in the beginning of human history it is recorded that –

“When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.” (Genesis 6:1,2)

Those called “the sons of God” were the descendants of Adam through Seth, who began to call on the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26). In contrast, the daughters of men had no interest in worshipping God and the resulting wickedness brought the terrible judgement of God upon the earth by the Flood (Genesis 6 & 7).

Other examples are Abraham and Isaac, who opposed their sons' marriages with the heathen Canaanites (Genesis 24:3,4; 28:1,2). The Law of Moses forbade the Israelites to have anything to do with the heathen Canaanite nations or to take their daughters as wives (Exodus 34:15,16). Moses specifically forbade the children of Israel to intermarry with the foreign nations around them (Deuteronomy 7:3,4). Joshua reinforced the same message (Joshua 23:12,13). King Solomon's foreign wives turned his heart away from God (1 Kings 11:1-11). Ezra (Ezra 9:1,2,12) and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:23-27) met the same problem and spoke of the evil of these alliances. It would be good to look up all these references.

In the New Testament Paul makes it very clear that a believer is not free to marry an unbeliever:

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?  
(2 Corinthians 6:14,15)

“A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.”  
(1 Corinthians 7:39)

So those who are thinking about marriage must remember that complete fulfilment can only be achieved when both partners belong to the Lord. Where there is no unity of thought, belief or purpose, a marriage has no real foundation. It is not surprising that so many such marriages become just two people living together or they break down completely.

True followers of Christ must always keep two things clear and firm in their minds. The first is that whoever has not obeyed the Gospel is still in darkness in God’s sight. This is His judgment, not ours. So, however charming, tender, kind and gentle a person may be, he (or she) is in darkness until the Gospel has been obeyed. God wants all these attributes in a person, but they must be the qualities of a person who has shown obedience to Him.

The second fact that needs to be clear in our mind is that God has called us out of darkness into His wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9). The extent of this light includes the knowledge of God and his Son, the awareness of His kindness and severity, and the revelation of His Gospel. God called us to this light and we obeyed His call and in doing so took on a serious responsibility. This is not something we do lightly. Paul says that indignation and wrath will come on those who do not obey the Truth (Romans 2:8).

This call of God must be kept firmly in mind, for our eternal future depends upon our faithfulness to it. Thus our loyalty to God and to Jesus must come first, if our faith is a real faith – and this includes our friendships and our marriage partner. Jesus was very clear about this when he said:

“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”  
(Matthew 10:37)

Obviously, we must each love our own close relatives but we must not allow this love to come above our love for Jesus. Otherwise why are we waiting for his second coming and for all the great things promised in his coming kingdom?

This must be remembered, particularly in Africa, where family and extended family can exert strong pressure in regard to marriage and family matters. If we are in Christ then we must obey him. If our family wants us to do something which is against his commands – like marrying someone who does not share our faith – then we have to resist family pressure for the sake of obeying our Lord and for our own spiritual well-being. As we have already said in chapter 1, in marriage we form a team with our partner, helping each other through life towards God’s kingdom. This cannot happen if we marry an unbeliever because our family wanted us to!

### **3 – Courtship**

#### **Must not involve Immorality**

CORINTH was a very wicked city not unlike most cities today. The letters Paul wrote to the converts there give much valuable help to us today. In the first of these he sets out seven reasons why believers should avoid, or flee from, sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18).

1. The immoral will be excluded from the kingdom of God:

“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers ... will inherit the kingdom of God.”

(1 Corinthians 6:9,10. See also Galatians 5:19-21)

2. You were separated from immorality at baptism:

“But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 6:11)

3. Your body belongs to the Lord; therefore you are not free to do as you wish with your body:

“The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (1 Corinthians 6:13)

4. The body will be the subject of a future resurrection:

“By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.” (1 Corinthians 6:14)

5. Your body is a member of Christ:

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, The two will become one flesh. But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.” (1 Corinthians 6:15-17)

6. Immoral unions violate the oneness with Christ. The believer is one with the Lord in spirit, meaning there is a unity in thinking and attitude. You cannot be as one with the Lord in spirit and also of one flesh with an immoral person.

7. Fornication is a sin against one’s own body:

“All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.” (1 Corinthians 6:18)

8. You are not your own:

“You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:19,20)

The world around us thinks nothing of having sexual relations before marriage. Indeed, how can it when it tolerates or encourages intercourse between those who have no intention to marry? But it should not be so among true Bible believers. Intercourse is intended only for those already married and is an expression of heart and mind between a married couple. Sexual relations before marriage destroy the proper joy of marriage.

Casual sex, apart from being wholly unchristian and loose, makes nonsense of the sanctity of the marriage bond and encourages unfaithfulness after marriage. Right behaviour begins in the mind. Christian behaviour follows the precepts of Christ.

### **Warning about AIDS**

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a terrible disease causing death within a few years. It is widespread in Africa and increasing at an alarming rate. It is spread mainly by sexual intercourse with an infected person.

The AIDS virus only passes from one person to another when body fluids carrying the virus pass from an infected individual into the body of another. There are three main ways in which this occurs:

- By sexual intercourse.
- By sharing blood, either from intravenous needles which are contaminated with blood, blood transfusions or blood products.
- By mother to baby in the womb or at birth.

If there is any doubt that your proposed marriage partner may be infected by AIDS by any of the above three ways it would be prudent for both of you to have an AIDS test. By both having the test you avoid embarrassment and will not appear to be judging one another. If either of the results of the test is positive, it would be prudent to call off any plans to marry the infected person.

A person who marries someone infected with AIDS will almost certainly become infected themselves with all its very bad consequences. If any children are born they too will be HIV positive, meaning that they will be carriers of the AIDS virus though not suffering from fully developed AIDS; this will come later. So you see that immoral behaviour, apart from being against God's laws, can now bring about its own punishment through this terrible disease. Unfortunately, many innocent people are also affected, for example, babies who have been infected from their mothers, or those who have been raped by an infected person.

(There is more about the effect of AIDS in chapter 9 on "Divorce".)

### **Choosing a Wife**

For obvious reasons, this section is addressed to brothers, but sisters ought to read it too. There is a special word for them at the end of the chapter.

A brother generally has only one opportunity to find a wife for himself. Once he has taken a wife he must stay with her always. If he makes a wrong choice he may have to pay for his mistake by being unhappy for the rest of his life.

The Bible often warns us of this. Here are three such passages:

"Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife ... Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife." (Proverbs 21:9,19)

"Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion." (Proverbs 11:22)

"Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised." (Proverbs 31:30)

All over the world men admire beautiful women. In countries where bride price has to be paid, a woman's beauty often determines her price. After all, it is a very natural thing for a man to want a beautiful wife.

Natural, yes, but also dangerous. If a man is concerned only with a woman's beauty, he may find himself married to an unsuitable wife.

Look back at the three Proverbs quoted above. The first tells us that life with the wrong sort of wife can be very miserable. The last two tell

us that beauty alone is not enough; what really matters is that a woman should have discretion (that is, good judgement) and respect the Lord.

### **A Gift from God**

Obviously, a brother must choose a wife with great care. There is another Proverb that speaks like this:

“Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.” (Proverbs 19:14)

There is a very important lesson in that verse. We can inherit worldly riches from our fathers (or we may earn them for ourselves). But we cannot find a really good wife by our own efforts. Only God can provide us with the right wife.

This message should not surprise us. After all, scripture tells us to let God guide us in all the important parts of life. For example, we read:

“In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:6)

King David is a good example to us in this matter. He said to God:

“Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel.” (Psalm 73:23,24)

We should try to live as David did, holding hands with God, so to speak. If we read the Bible eagerly every day, and pray to God frequently, He will direct our lives. He will watch all the important decisions we make, and help us to choose wisely.

Above all, He will help us to choose the right wife. But we must pray to Him earnestly about our need for a wife. And we must be guided in this matter by His word, and especially by one great chapter: Genesis 24.

### **The Lesson of Isaac**

Genesis 24 tells us how Abraham found the right wife for his son, Isaac. If you are concerned about finding a wife for yourself (or for your son) you should read it carefully, two or three times. Pray about it. Then write down the lessons you have learnt from it.

We suggest that you do this now, before reading any more of this booklet. Lessons that we learn direct from our own Bible reading will always help us more than the same lessons written in a book. Try this now. Put down this booklet and pick up your Bible. Ask God to bless your reading, and then read Genesis 24 at least twice. Finally, write down the lessons this chapter teaches us. When you have completed this exercise, you might like to compare your own list of lessons with this list:

1. Good fathers should be like Abraham. We, too, should take a great interest in the well-being of our children (verses 1-9).
2. Believers ought not to marry unbelievers (verse 3).
3. We must be willing to take a great deal of trouble to find a suitable wife. Abraham's servant had to make a journey that would have lasted several weeks (verse 4).
4. We must trust in God, and believe that His angels provide the answer to our prayers (verse 7).
5. But notice that Abraham's servant did not leave it all to God. He used his common sense, and took with him everything he might expect to need in his search. We, likewise, must not be lazy. We must co-operate with God, and do everything possible ourselves (verse 10).
6. Whenever we are in doubt we must pray for God's guidance (verse 12).
7. Abraham's servant was very wise. He did *not* say, "Let the most beautiful woman be the one I want." He asked that the chosen woman should be *the one who was the most kind and generous*. If we are wise, we also shall choose a wife because of her *character*, and not because of her bodily beauty (verse 14).
8. God answered the good man's prayer and provided a very faithful young woman. If we trust Him, He will do the same for us (verses 15-27,58-61).
9. She became a wife who was a comfort to Isaac: he loved her. We, too, can expect to find happiness and love if we let God choose the right wife for us (verse 67).

### **A Lesson for Sisters**

There is also a special lesson in Genesis 24 for young sisters, and for their parents.

Rebekah's father and brother said that she could go away with the servant, and become Isaac's wife. They said this without consulting Rebekah herself. Fortunately, Rebekah's mother seems to have been more considerate. She and her son asked Rebekah if she was willing to go, and only when Rebekah said 'Yes' did they send her away (Genesis 24:55-58).

This teaches us that every young woman should be given the chance to say either 'Yes' or 'No' when a marriage is proposed. A girl should not be pushed into a marriage when she is too young to know her own mind. A woman should never be forced to marry a man against her will.



When a man asks to marry a young sister, she should not be too quick to agree. First, she should pray for God to help her make the right decision. She should ask herself many questions about him. Is he a brother in Christ? Is he sincere about his religion? Is he a good man and kind? Does he want to read the Bible with me and talk to me about it? Will he help me to get into the kingdom of God? Or will he hold me back?

From questions like these, and from her prayers, the sister will learn what God wants her to do. If she concludes that God wants her to say 'Yes', like Rebekah, then she should marry the man and be a good wife to him. But if not, then she must follow God's guidance and say, 'No'.

### **No Second Chance**

Every brother choosing a wife, and every sister who accepts a brother who wants to marry her, must remember this: according to God's law, *marriage is for life*.

If you choose the wrong partner you will have to face the consequences of your great mistake. Happy or unhappy, you must stay with her (or him) for the rest of your days. That is why you must be sure to choose wisely the first time.

God does not offer us a second chance.

## **4 – The Duties of Wives**

WE have already seen that woman was created to be a helper to her husband: not a servant; not just someone to help with the children, the house and the garden; but a *helper in Christ* – someone to help her man towards God's kingdom.

This is how the New Testament describes the duties of wives:

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.” (Ephesians 5:22-24)

Notice how often the Lord Jesus Christ is mentioned in this short passage – four times in a few lines!

This shows us what marriage is meant to be like. Christ should be there, all the time. He should be at the centre of every Christian marriage.

Christ is the *real* head of the house. The husband has some authority because he is Christ's servant. The wife must be subject to her husband, *because her husband is subject to Christ*.

## The Good Wife

Every sister should be familiar with Proverbs 31:10-31, which says what a good wife is like. Many sisters have learnt this passage by heart, because it is so valuable. Here are some of its verses:

“A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls. She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks.” (Proverbs 31:10-17)

This shows that the good wife is a hard working wife. She does many things to make sure her husband and her children are well cared for.

But this is only the beginning. She is not only concerned about the bodies of her husband and children, but also about their hearts, as verse 26 shows:

“She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.

So we see that she is also a teacher of God’s ways. She has wisdom, that is, she knows well the message of the Bible. Thus she is able to be a teacher of the true Gospel of the kingdom of God to her household, and to others. She provides spiritual food as well as ordinary food.

## New Testament Teaching

Paul describes the good wife like this:

“Train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands.” (Titus 2:4,5)

You will notice that Paul begins by telling the young wives to love their husbands. It is not enough for a wife to be submissive to her husband if she secretly hates him! She must try to love him – even if he does not seem to love her (see next section – “Good Wives and Bad Husbands”).

Now look at the other words he uses to describe the good wife:

- *Self-controlled*. She takes her responsibilities seriously, so that her husband can always rely upon her. She is self-controlled and sensible about the house, in bringing up her children, and in her attitude to the Gospel too.

- *Pure.* She does not start friendships with other men – not even small friendships that might seem harmless. Remember that small friendships with men can easily grow into big friendships, and big friendships can easily lead to adultery.
- *Busy at home.* This means a good house worker. The good wife does not neglect her work at home and go around the village amusing herself. She does all that she should do, and does it at the right time.
- *Kind.* The good wife follows the commandments of Christ. She is kind to everybody: to her husband, her children, to members of her own family and her husband's family, and to anybody in need or in trouble.

### **Good Wives and Bad Husbands**

It should make no difference whether a husband is good to his wife or not. A wife must still try to love her husband, even if he is unkind to her. There are some good sisters who have a very difficult life. They are married to bad husbands, men who do not serve the Lord Jesus. They may have learnt the Truth when their husbands would not believe it. They have been baptized into Christ, despite their husbands. What should such a sister do?

The Bible teaches that she must not take the easy way out, and run away. She must stay with her husband, unless and until he decides to put her away. This is what it says:

“And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him ... But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. (1Corinthians 7:13,15)

“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. (1 Peter 3:1,2)

Those words of Peter are very comforting to wives who are badly treated by their husbands. Peter says that bad husbands may change their ways when their wives set them a good Christian example.

If you, sister, are in this unhappy condition, take courage. Try to obey God's commands, and He will bless you. Ask God to help you to love your ungodly husband. Perhaps God will cause your husband to be changed by your good example. Perhaps your husband will one day make life easier for you.

One thing you can be sure of. God will not allow you to be tried more than you can bear. He promises that (see Romans 8:28 and 1 Corinthians 10:13).

## **Inward Beauty**

In a passage we have just looked at Peter goes on to say:

“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. (1 Peter 3:3,4)

This does not mean that it is wrong for a wife to make herself look attractive. Part of a wife’s duty to her husband and to Christ is to keep herself (and her children) looking clean and properly dressed.

Peter’s concern was with those sisters who took *too much* interest in their appearance. There are many women like that today. The most important thing in their lives is beauty. They only seem to think about their faces, their hair, their clothing, and their jewels. This, says Peter, is all wrong. Real beauty – the beauty that God sees – is the inward beauty of a good character.

Christian wives should realise this. They should put their biggest effort into making their *hearts (their inner selves)* beautiful. After that, they can spend a little time improving their outward appearance. But the inward beauty of a Christlike character is what matters most. A beautiful character is much more precious than a beautiful face.

## **Helping with the Ministry of the Word**

God does not allow women to teach in the church. This is because woman was created to be man’s helper, not his leader (See 1 Timothy 2:11-14). The silence of the sisters in the ecclesia is a reminder that when Eve told Adam about the forbidden fruit, it led to sin and death. The breaking of bread meeting, in particular, is a meeting in which there are symbols. The bread and the wine are symbols. The quiet behaviour of the sisters is a reminder to both brothers and sisters that all must submit to, and obey, the word of God (I Corinthians 14:33-35).

For the same reasons, sisters must wear a head-covering, for this shows that they accept the authority of Christ, the head of the man. Christ is at the centre of the meetings of the ecclesia. Even if there are things that are hard to understand, we must do what the Bible teaches in order to show our love for, and submission to, God in Christ (1 Corinthians 11:2-16).

Nevertheless, a wife is allowed to help her husband with his work as a teacher of the Gospel in many ways – by supporting and encouraging his efforts in practical ways, by helping him in searching and understanding God’s word, and by praying for him. She can teach her friends and neighbours about the wonderful message of the Bible. If she is blessed with

children, she has a special responsibility and opportunity to teach them faithfully about the true Gospel. She can try to manage the household's arrangements so that it is possible to do the daily Bible readings together and to pray together at mealtimes and other times. She can help to ensure that meals and other activities are organised so that all the family can attend the meetings. In this way she can become a true "mother in Israel".

## 5 – The Duties of Husbands

IT is very difficult indeed to be a truly Christlike husband. Christian wives are told to take Abraham's wife, Sarah, as their example (1 Peter 3:5,6). But Christian husbands are encouraged to take their example from the Lord Jesus Christ himself!

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy ... In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies." (Ephesians 5:25,28)

It is a pity that many people use the word love in a wrong way. They use it to mean 'have sex with'. This, of course, is not the way the Bible uses it. In the Bible, 'to love' means to be unselfish and very kind to somebody.

The passage quoted above tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church. It goes on to remind us that Christ *died* to save his church. So husbands must be willing, if necessary, to lay down their lives for their wives.

We must also remember that Christ did not act like a big boss to his disciples. Once he took water and a towel and washed their feet. When he had finished, he said:

"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (John 13:13-15)

This shows how a husband should treat his wife. He should be her teacher and lord. Nevertheless, he must not treat her like a servant. He must honour her, and do many (or different) kind things for her, of which washing the feet is only one example. He must be the servant, for "the greatest among you will be your servant" (Matthew 23:11).

The husband must also be concerned about his wife's eternal well-being. He must do everything in his power to help her reach the kingdom of God. When she needs help with her Bible readings, her prayers, or any other part of her religious life, her husband should be quick to provide that help.

If a man has a good wife he will not lose out by treating her in this truly Christian way.

### **Good Husbands and Bad Wives**

It should make no difference to a husband whether his wife is good to him or not. A husband must still try and love his wife, even if she has betrayed him. Jesus washed the feet of Judas, the traitor. So we, too, must try to love those who hate us (see Matthew 5:43-48).

Sometimes faithful husbands do find that their bad wives have a change of heart, but we cannot always expect this to happen. As Paul says:

“How do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?”  
(1 Corinthians 7:16)

The fact is, a husband can never know whether or not his good example will save his wife. All he can do is to try to save her, and pray that God will help him.

A rebellious wife may laugh when her husband first starts to treat her kindly. She may think he is weak, or foolish, but he should not despair. Men thought things like that about Jesus Christ.

If you are a husband in this unhappy position, take courage. God knows how difficult your life is and He is pleased with your efforts to love your wife. Be patient. Sometimes it has taken many years before a wife has at last responded to her husband's Christlike love.

### **Providing for the Family**

Some men are naturally lazy. They leave their wives to grow food in their gardens, or to earn money by trading, while they themselves do nothing.

This is not God's way. The Bible says very clearly that it is the husband's duty to provide for the needs of his family.

It was Adam, not Eve, who was told to till the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15). After they were driven out of Eden, it was Adam again, not Eve, who was told he must sweat as he tilled the ground (Genesis 3:19).

In the New Testament, Christian husbands are warned:

“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”  
(1 Timothy 5:8)

If a brother's wife helps him in the garden, or does a little trading, this is right and good. But what she grows, or earns, should be regarded as something extra that will give the family a few luxuries. It is the husband's responsibility to provide all the basic needs of the family.

The husband must not try to escape this responsibility. Only when he is ill and unable to work is it right for him to let his wife become the provider.

## **6 – Birth Control and Barrenness**

### **Birth Control**

THIS is something that really should be discussed by couples before they get married. What does the Bible say about it?

The only direct mention of the subject in the Bible is in Genesis 38:9, where Onan is said to have used a primitive (but fairly effective) method of birth control. This shows that the practice was known to the Jews. Now we must remember that God clearly condemned every form of sexual sin in the Law of Moses (see Deuteronomy 27:20-23, for example). If birth control were a sin, surely God would have forbidden it in the Law.

Onan died, but this does not prove that birth control is wrong for us, just as the story of the man who gathered sticks does not prove that gathering firewood is wrong for us (Numbers 15:32-35). Onan died because he should have been raising up offspring for his dead brother, but chose deliberately to disobey God's law (Genesis 38:8). Birth control was wrong for him *in his circumstances*, but not necessarily for anyone else.

There is nothing in the Bible that condemns the wise and unselfish use of some of the methods of birth control. Obviously we must avoid those methods that may be harmful to our health or involve the use of dangerous drugs or implants.

Paul talks about sexual relations between married couples in 1 Corinthians 7:3,5. Husbands and wives must satisfy their partner's reasonable sexual needs. Therefore the most satisfactory methods of birth control are those that allow a married couple to follow Paul's teaching and at the same time allow them to limit their family sensibly.

There are different methods of birth control – some work better for some people than others. The couple, along with the midwife, health worker or doctor should discuss which methods are available and which are likely to be best for them. Differences in effectiveness, safety, convenience, availability, and cost should be considered. *Husbands and wives should decide together, and share the responsibility.*

It is clearly not right to bring children into the world if we cannot support them, as the words of Paul in 1 Timothy 5:8 clearly show.

Christadelphian parents should set a good example, and if possible have only as many children as they can well provide for. In some African countries the government provides a birth control service at

very little cost or free of charge, and asks people to use it. Many brothers and sisters will agree that we ought to use these services and limit our families to a reasonable size. We are, of course, only talking about birth control *within marriage*.

There is a helpful chapter on the medical aspect of birth control in the book, *Where there is no Doctor*.

### **Abortion**

This should not be an option for sisters in Christ under almost all circumstances, because:

- a) Conception is given by God (Hebrews 11:11; Ruth 4:13).
- b) He oversees the development of the child in the womb (Psalm 139:13-16).
- c) God is there at birth (Psalm 22:9; 71:6; Galatians 1:15).
- d) The child is an inheritance from Him (Psalm 127:3). We must not destroy this little life.

The usual requirement for an abortion is to do away with an unwanted pregnancy and this is wrong for all the above reasons. However, there may be medical exceptions where, for example, a mother's life may be at risk due to damage in her foetus or womb. Such cases should be made a matter of prayer, and husbands and wives should decide together the right course of action in conjunction with their doctor and according to their own consciences.

### **Barrenness**

Sadly, it does sometimes happen that a married couple cannot have children. There may be a problem with the man's body or with the woman's that prevents conception. Sometimes things can be put right medically, but other times we just have to accept the fact that we are not able to have children.

We know that in Africa this can be a major problem and husbands even divorce their wives because of it. This must *not* be so in the Lord. We know that children are a gift of God, but we also know that God is in control of our lives if we are in Christ. We have to accept that God knows what is best for us and for our spiritual development, and if we are unable to have children we must learn how to fill our lives in positive service to Him in other ways. The following are some suggestions:

- a) If we do not have children to care for, we should have extra time to be more active and caring to members of our ecclesia.



b) We can help and support others in the same position and show that having babies is not the only thing that makes a woman or a couple worthwhile.

c) We may be able to care for or adopt children who are orphans.

## **7 – Bringing up Children**

WE have already looked at the prophet Malachi's teaching about marriage. He said that its main purpose was for godly children to be raised.

In this chapter we shall look more closely at the duty of husbands and wives to bring up their children faithfully. To begin, let us look at two Proverbs:

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”  
(Proverbs 22:6)

“Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death.”  
(Proverbs 19:18)

Three thousand years have passed since Solomon wrote those words. But they are as true today as on the day he wrote them.

If children are really well trained to walk in God's ways, they are not likely to wander away when they are grown up. But they will not be well trained without discipline – that is to say, firm rules, and punishment when they break them. Discipline steers children towards God's everlasting kingdom. If there is no discipline, children will only drift towards destruction and eternal death.

Whose duty is it to provide training and discipline for the children? Is it a job for the mother, or for the father? As we shall see from scripture the answer is, both! This is such an important work that the husband and the wife must each play a full part in it. Both should show by example that everything done is based on the word of God, and the top priority must be the support of the ecclesia – breaking of bread, Bible study, preaching efforts, fraternal meetings etc. If available the children should attend Sunday School and Youth Group, but parents must never forget that the primary responsibility for teaching their children the ways of God rests with themselves, not the Sunday School teachers or youth leaders.

“Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain ... Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him.”

(Psalm 127:1,3)

The psalmist is speaking here of building a family, and unless this is done following God's principles then all our efforts will be in vain.

## The Duties of Fathers

One of the greatest men who ever lived was Abraham. He is the only man in the Bible that God refers to as His friend. This is what God said about Abraham:

“For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just.” (Genesis 18:19)

So it was Abraham’s duty, as a godly father, to teach God’s ways to his children. There is a lesson here for all married brothers. If we are the spiritual sons of Abraham, then we, like Abraham, must bring up our children to serve the Lord.

The story of Eli is a terrible warning to all those brothers who fail to discipline their children. Eli was a high priest of Israel. His sons were priests in the tabernacle, but they were thieves, blasphemers and fornicators. Eli was a weak father. He said to his sons, “Why do you do such things?” But he did nothing to stop them (1 Samuel 2:23). God decided to punish Eli for this. He said:

“For I told him that I would judge his family for ever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them.” (1 Samuel 3:13)

In the New Testament, fathers are given their instructions very plainly:

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

There are two big lessons in that verse. First, it confirms what we have already learnt: that fathers must discipline their children, and teach them to serve the Lord. In addition, it tells us something new. It warns fathers not to exasperate their children, which means to make their children angry. This is excellent advice. It is very easy, when punishing a child, to make the child angry.

### The Way to Punish a Child

How can we avoid this mistake? Here are a few hints that will help. They do not come from the Bible, but are based on experience and common sense.

- a) *Be friendly.* Spend as much time as you can with your children. Be a good friend to them. Then, when you have to punish them, they will know that you are doing it because you love them, and not because you hate them.

- b) *Be fair.* Make sure that your children know exactly what they must do, and what they must not do. Punish them for disobedience, for breaking the rules you have given them. Do not punish them for making mistakes or for having an accident – it's not fair to punish them when they are not to blame.
- c) *Be calm.* Try not to punish a child while you are angry yourself. Make a big effort to calm yourself, and then punish the child as gently as possible. Otherwise, in your anger you are likely to sin against the child by venting your anger upon it.

### **The Duties of Mothers**

Mothers also have a great responsibility to train their children. Here are two verses that say so:

“The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to itself disgraces his mother.” (Proverbs 29:15)

“So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes.” (1 Timothy 5:14)

Because mothers spend so much time with their children, they often have more influence on the children than the fathers do. We see this happening in the history of the kings of Israel and Judah. Ahaz was a wicked king who worshipped idols. But his son, Hezekiah, was a very good king who brought the nation back to God. Yet good King Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, was even more wicked than his grandfather Ahaz.

How did it happen that a wicked man had a very good son, and that good son had a very wicked son? We do not know for sure, but we are given a hint. Hezekiah had a mother called Abi, or Abijah; and Manasseh's mother was Hephzibah.

We are not told what these women were like, but it may be that Abi was a good woman who brought her son up well, and Hephzibah may have been a bad woman who let her son grow up in wicked ways.

So sisters have a great responsibility. Even if you are married to a bad husband, as Abi may have been, you can still do as Abi did. You can teach your children to serve the Lord, as Abi taught her son Hezekiah.

### **The Family's Daily Time with God**

Every Christadelphian family should have a daily time with God.

At this time the father should lead his family in prayer. Those who can read should take turns in reading aloud from the Bible. If nobody in the house can read, perhaps a brother from another house could come in and read for them.

If some of the children are too young to understand a Bible reading, the mother or father can tell them a simple Bible story before putting them to bed.

As soon as they are old enough to benefit from it, the children should join in the family's time with God. They should be taught that this is the most important event in the day, and that it is a great privilege for them to take part in it.

Older children should also be taught to say their own prayers each day, either in the morning, or at bedtime, or at both these times.

Every time the family sits down to a meal, the father (or some other senior person) should lead the family in thanking God for the food. We read of Paul doing this on a ship, in Acts 27:34,35.

Eventually the children will become teenagers and grow into young single adults, and the family's time with God will become even more important. At these times especially, parents can provide spiritual help and support to these youngsters in their practical difficulties, whilst doctrinal questions can also be discussed.

Remember that preaching is done as much by actions and way of life as by teaching correct doctrines.

The children must be taught about God's laws regarding sexual relations: that they are only permitted in the marriage bond; not before marriage or outside marriage, which is adultery.

When families behave like this, the children will know that God and the Lord Jesus Christ are a real power in their lives. They will grow up knowing that it is good to serve the Lord.

They will know that the scripture is true, when it says:

"The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young."

(Lamentations 3:25-27)

As they grow up to be adults, we pray that they will want to accept the true Gospel and be baptized, so that they become brothers and sisters of their parents as well as their children.

In time they will think about marriage partners and parents must be there to help and advise them in this. Marriage should be only between baptized believers, and not because they belong to the same earthly tribe or clan. At baptism believers become part of spiritual Israel (Galatians 3:26-29) and that is the tribe they must marry into.

However, it should be remembered that marriage and sex are not the most important things in life. There is nothing wrong in staying single if you cannot find a baptized believer. In fact, you may be able to serve God more wholeheartedly as a single person (see 1 Corinthians 7:32-35). There are many faithful brothers and sisters who go through life without marriage or indulging in sex at all, but rather devote themselves to seeking to do God's will instead of trying to find a godly spouse. The Lord will remember such sacrifice for Him.

### **Grandparents**

Grandparents have a special responsibility in helping to train the young ones in the ways of the Lord:

“Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when he said to me, ‘Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.’” (Deuteronomy 4:9,10)

See also Psalm 78:1-8.

Grandparents often have more time and usually more patience than the parents and they must use the precious time and opportunities given to them with their grandchildren.

For those who do not have grandchildren of their own, there are usually plenty of opportunities in the ecclesia where help and encouragement can be given to the children growing up there. Remember that the ecclesia is a big family.

### **Widowhood**

Widowhood can be sad and lonely. Often it comes when we are old, but not always and many have lost their partners when the family is still young. This is very hard and the ecclesia must do all it can to help care for and support the bereaved brother or sister and family. Paul says quite a lot about widows in 1 Timothy 5. In this passage he only seems to mention widowed sisters but widowed brothers have just as many needs.

Read how Paul describes the ecclesia as the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 and how what happens to each individual member affects the whole ecclesia. We must all be caring for each other's needs.

Paul has some advice on remarriage for those who have been widowed in 1 Corinthians 7:

“A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is – and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.” (verses 39,40)

And for younger widows he says:

“So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander.”

(1 Timothy 5:14)

## **SOME PRACTICAL PROBLEMS**

### **8 – Polygamy**

POLYGAMY – the marriage of one man to two or more women – is wrong. People sometimes try to justify polygamy by saying that men like Abraham and David in the Old Testament had more than one wife. This is true, but it does not follow that we can do the same. Jesus set a very high standard concerning marriage. At the same time he pointed out that his teaching was only a return to the high standard that God appointed in the very beginning. As we said in chapter 1, when God created a wife for Adam, He declared that the principle of marriage was to be one man and one wife, coming together for life.

Later on, God relaxed this law a little because of human weakness, but now, Jesus indicated, the time had come to tighten up the law again. He said:

“Haven’t you read ... that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female”, and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” (Matthew 19:4-6; Genesis 2:24)

Marriage was intended to be a joining together of two people: not three, or four, but two – one man, and one wife. That is the law of Christ. So Christadelphians teach that a true believer should have only one wife. We teach this because it is Bible teaching. When a man or a woman wishes to be baptized, this teaching must be made very plain to them.

#### **When a Polygamist is Converted**

Bible principles are quite simple and clear. But life is often very complicated. Sometimes we find ourselves in a position where it is difficult to know what we should do, because two different principles are involved, and one principle pulls us in one direction while the other principle pulls us in the other direction. This kind of situation arises

when a polygamist is converted and wants to be baptized. Should he put away all but one of his wives, or should he keep them?

As we have seen, God does not approve of polygamy. But God does not approve of putting away wives either! In fact, God says He hates putting away (Malachi 2:16). It is very painful for a wife to be put away and very bad for the children when a marriage is broken up. In fact, it is because children need to be brought up in a stable, godly home that God hates putting away. Malachi 2:15 indicates this.

Some words of Paul to the Corinthians are helpful here:

“Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.” (1 Corinthians 7:17)

He was talking about whether a man was circumcised or not when God called him. Then he went on to talk about whether a man was a slave or not and said much the same thing:

“Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.” (1 Corinthians 7:24)

Both of these situations, circumcision and slavery, were not easily altered and so the command was to be baptized in the situation the person was in at the time. Polygamy is also a situation which cannot be easily altered without much upset to the family, and in this case, by going against another command of God regarding putting away a wife.

So when a polygamist wishes to be baptized, he should be clearly shown what the Bible teaches about polygamy. If he agrees with this teaching, and promises not to take any additional wives, he may be baptized. He should then be a good husband to all his wives, and a good father to all his children.

But he must not hold office in the ecclesia. In 1 Timothy 3:2, the Bible commands that *an elder must be the husband of one wife* (the word “overseer” or “bishop” in the English New Testament refers to *elders*; Acts 20 shows this, for the same people who are called “bishops” or “overseers” in the Greek of verse 28 are called “elders” in verse 17).

## 9 – Divorce

SADLY, marital problems are very frequent today and may happen to men and women who are committed disciples of the Lord Jesus. We need to know what to do when they occur and what the Bible teaches us about the breakdown of a marriage. The first thing is to pray about it, and to keep on praying. Ideally we should do this together with our

husband or wife and we should pray as soon as we are aware of any problem. It is also advisable to seek help from within the ecclesia. This may be difficult but we should seek out a wise brother or sister with whom we can share the burden of our problem and who can help us see the right thing to do. If there is no one locally who can help, then it may be possible to write to a brother or sister in another country for advice.

“To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.” (1 Corinthians 7:10,11)

This passage (a command from the Lord) clearly teaches that, for brothers and sisters in Christ, divorce is contrary to his commandments and that remarriage to another partner should be out of the question.

We have seen in Matthew 19:5,6 that God intended marriage to be the union of one man and one woman for life, and from Malachi 2:15,16 that God hates divorce; so as a general rule the Bible forbids brothers and sisters in Christ to divorce their partners and remarry someone else. Is there any exception to this general rule?

Some sincere Christadelphians feel that in Matthew’s Gospel the Lord Jesus Christ makes an exception and permits divorce for marital unfaithfulness, although others, just as sincere, feel that because of the original word used, Jesus is only referring to the betrothal period before the marriage was consummated (e.g. Mary was found to be with child during the betrothal period with Joseph – Matthew 1:18,19).

On two occasions Jesus said:

“Anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.” (Matthew 19:9)

Similar thoughts are expressed in slightly different words in Matthew 5:32. Just how these words are interpreted becomes a matter of individual conscience and we must prayerfully decide for ourselves what they mean for us and how we interpret them.

If we believe that Jesus does not forbid divorce for unfaithfulness in a consummated marriage, then we must go about it in as Christlike a way as possible. In other words, we must not divorce our partner as soon as the adultery is committed. That would be quite contrary to his teaching. It is our duty to be patient, gentle and forgiving. We must even love our enemies.



So if, for example, a brother's wife commits adultery, he must do all in his power to win her back to him. And he must do this in a spirit of humility and kindness, not behaving like a judge.

First, he should ask himself, "Is it partly my own fault that my wife has sinned? Have I done something that has provoked her into doing this?" Usually, if a man is really honest with himself, he will realise that he has not been a perfect husband. He will think of ways in which he might have treated his wife better, and he will want to be a better husband in future.

In this humble spirit he should try to persuade his wife to repent and to return to him. If she does, he should take her back and forgive her. Afterwards he should never talk about the sin she once committed. *True forgiveness means forgetting the past.*

Even if she refuses to repent, he must not give up. He must keep trying to regain his wife for a long time (see the example of Hosea in Hosea 1-3).

Only when it is quite certain that she will not repent should he give up trying. For example, if she joins herself firmly to another man and has children by him, then her former husband must face the sad fact that his marriage has completely broken down.

What should he do then? Without any doubt, the Bible principles we have looked at tell us that he should remain unmarried for the rest of his life. By so doing he would show that he respects these principles of Christian marriage: one man, joined to one woman, for a whole lifetime.

Unfortunately, many men are not strong enough to stand the strain of living without a wife for the rest of their lives. This seems to be why Jesus makes his exception. He understands our human weakness, and he does not put upon us a burden so heavy that we cannot bear it.

So a brother whose adulterous wife has left him long ago and will not come back is given leave to take another wife. He is not *advised* to do so, because it would be better if he did not, but the Lord recognises his weakness and his need to marry again if he cannot manage without a wife. Similarly, a woman whose adulterous husband has left her permanently may also be given leave to marry again, although the ideal is to remain unmarried.

### **Important Note about AIDS**

The course of action described above is based on scriptural principles. However the twenty-first century has brought with it a deadly twist to the dilemma of a brother or sister facing the problems of an unfaithful spouse. This is the widespread occurrence of people who are HIV positive or who have fully developed AIDS. There will be the strong

possibility that your unfaithful partner has now been infected with this virus.

If your partner repents and wants to come back, you may feel you wish them to have an AIDS test. The best way to achieve this is for you to go with your partner and for you both to have the test. If the results are negative for you but positive for your partner, then you both have some big decisions to make, prayerfully taking into account the following points:

1. If you take your partner back you will almost certainly become infected, leading to an untimely death.
2. Any future children will probably be infected, therefore no more children should be conceived.
3. Practising so-called “safe sex” (using a condom) is not entirely safe.
4. Bearing the above in mind there is one possible solution that could be better than remaining entirely alone. The couple could remain together as companions for each other in all the daily family life; they could support and care for each other into old age but not have any sexual relations. This would be very difficult to do, but with our Heavenly Father’s help and guidance it could be the answer to a desperate situation.
5. If couples divorce then the ideal state is to remain unmarried for the rest of their lives – there should be no remarriage to another partner.
6. Remember that following true repentance all sins can be forgiven. However, the consequences of our sins may remain with us for the rest of our lives and we must cope with these in as godly a way as possible.

## **10 – Bride Price**

THE custom of paying bride price is very ancient. It was practised by the children of Israel (see Genesis 24:53; 29:20; 34:12; Exodus 22:16,17; Deuteronomy 22:28,29; 1 Samuel 18:22-27). But it seems to have ceased in Bible lands by the time of Jesus Christ.

There is no evidence that it was practised in the early church, and it is not mentioned in the New Testament. However, it is still widely practised in Africa, but experience shows that it is a custom which human nature easily abuses.

Bride price often causes unhappiness and sin. Here are a few of the problems that can arise out of this custom:

1. *Bride price is looked upon as the purchase price for a bride.* As a result the wife is treated as a slave who has been bought and is owned by

her husband and considered inferior to him. This is wrong and against the scriptural principle of a wife being a partner who should be loved and respected by her husband (see chapter 1).

2. *It causes a girl to be valued in monetary terms.* For example, a girl with a good education or possessing a professional qualification may have a very high bride price. But these qualities in Christian terms are meaningless. The inward beauty of a Christlike character is what matters most (see “Inward Beauty”, page 17).
3. *Parents think of the marriage of their daughters only as a means of getting money.* It is a commonly held opinion in some countries that a man with many daughters will gain a lot of money from bride price payments. This is not the right attitude for Christians. Our daughters are not for buying and selling. The Bible shows that children are a blessing from God (Psalm 127:5). If daughters are brought up to obey the Lord and become sisters in Christ, then their husbands should be faithful brothers in Christ and they should marry because they are genuinely in love with each other.
4. *It is looked upon as payment for work done in bringing up a daughter.* If children are a blessing from God then we must be ready to do the work of looking after them without thinking of payment. We are stewards of God’s children and He gives children to parents, expecting they will bring the children up to love Him. Thinking about getting a bride price as pay for work well done does not agree with the Bible teaching on selfless love. One wonders why parents want to get paid for bringing up their daughters and not for bringing up their sons!
5. *It is looked upon as compensation for the loss of a family worker.* We must remember that we do not own our children – they are given to us on trust from God to bring up to love Him.
6. *A high bride price can cause immoral behaviour.* If a young man is not able to find the money for the bride price, he may think about sleeping with the girl so that she becomes pregnant and this will force them to get married. This sort of behaviour is absolutely against Bible teaching and not the way to start a true marriage (see chapter 3 – “Courtship”).
7. *A poor family with a beautiful daughter can be tempted to marry her to the highest bidder.* This would not be right because if she has been brought up in a Christian way she will want to marry a man who is godly and a fellow believer. By selling her to the highest bidder, it is unlikely that the right kind of husband will be found for her.

Instead, she should be encouraged to obtain a husband who will be a real help to her in her walk towards God's kingdom. You should also remember the commandment:

"Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."  
(Colossians 3:21)

You will certainly break this commandment if you force your daughter to marry an unsuitable rich man (see also Appendix 4).

From the above examples it will be realised that the sooner the custom of bride price is given up within the Christadelphian community the better. We should concentrate on making sure our daughters marry suitable partners in the Lord rather than on how much we can get for them.

## **11 – A Final Word**

MANY problems will arise that are not mentioned in this booklet. Brothers and sisters with difficult marriage problems would be wise to seek advice and help from the elders of their ecclesia.

If they live far away from an ecclesia in isolation they can always write to some experienced brother or sister about their problems. Or they can wait until a Christadelphian elder comes to visit them, and then ask for his help.

## Appendix 1 – Some Husbands' Problems

1. *I am told that a Christadelphian ought to marry someone of the same faith. There is no Christadelphian girl available for me to marry. What should I do?* (This answer can also be applied in principle to a Christadelphian sister seeking a husband.)

Yes, you are right. A Christadelphian man ought to marry a Christadelphian woman.

The Bible teaches that a believer ought not to marry an unbeliever. From reading 2 Corinthians 6:14,15 you will see that if you do, you will be joining yourself to her and thus separating yourself from the body of Christ.

If you cannot find a Christadelphian girl to marry, then there are a number of steps you can take:

- As with all the problems of life you should pray about it and believe in faith that God will guide you.
- Some men and women, who cannot find a wife or husband who share their beliefs, are able to remain unmarried for all of their lives. They do this in response to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 19:12. Jesus recognised that this is a very difficult thing to ask and his words tell us the divine ideal in this situation rather than a commandment to all disciples.
- If you need a wife then you must do what is possible to find a God-fearing woman to marry. In some countries it is possible for a young man to meet a young woman in an innocent way, and talk to her. If your country is like this, perhaps you could teach a young woman the Gospel and then, after she is baptized, you could marry her. There are dangers with this, particularly if the woman is a member of another church. There is a risk that she may draw you away from the true Gospel and your beliefs into her own church. These things need to be very carefully prayed about and talked through together before any commitment to marriage.

If you still cannot find a suitable girl then you must wait patiently until the Lord, who knows all our needs, causes circumstances to change so that you are brought into contact with a suitable Christadelphian sister. This may seem hard but look at the warnings given in Section 2, "Preparing for Marriage" and Section 3, "Courtship".

2. *My elder brother has just died, and according to the custom of my tribe it is my duty to marry the widow. Should I do so?*

It all depends. If you are not married already, if she is a sister in Christ, and if she is a suitable person for you to marry, there is no reason

why you should not marry her (the answer to the previous question will help you to see what is meant by 'suitable').

If you are already married, or if she is not a suitable person to become the wife of a Christadelphian, you should disregard the custom of your tribe, and refuse to marry her.

3. *My wife is barren. My friends tell me that this is because God has cursed her. Is this true?*

No. Barrenness could almost be called a form of illness, like being blind or lame. As with other forms of illness, it comes upon both good people and bad people. The Old Testament tells us about Job. He was afflicted with a terrible illness. His friends said that this was God's way of punishing him for being sinful, but they were wrong. Job was a very good man, and although he had to suffer, God was not cursing him. So it is wrong to think that God is not blessing a childless marriage. There are many good Christian couples that are unable to have children, but God blesses them in other ways.

A true Bible believer will never despise a childless wife. Her husband ought to love her just as much as if she had borne him children (see 1 Samuel 1:8). Her parents and her friends should be sympathetic and kind to her, and not treat her as if she had done wrong. She is not to blame for her childlessness, any more than a sick man is to blame for his sickness.

Because barrenness is a kind of illness it can sometimes be cured. It is important for you and your wife to visit a hospital. The doctors there may be able to find the cause of the barrenness (which may lie in either your wife's body or your own) and treat it (see "Barrenness", page 21).

4. *I have been married several years and my wife is barren. It is a terrible thing to be childless. Can I take another wife who will give me a son?*

No. Bible teaching forbids you to do this. You must be content with the wife you have. It is much worse to be a eunuch than to have a barren wife, and yet God has said:

"Let not any eunuch complain, 'I am only a dry tree'. For this is what the LORD says: 'To the eunuchs who ... hold fast to my covenant – to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off.'" (Isaiah 56:3-5)

In other words, the place in God's kingdom that He offers you is worth more than all the children in the world. But if you still want children in this life you should adopt a child that has lost its parents, and bring up that child as if it were your own. Also remember that

barrenness is sometimes the problem of the husband, not of the wife (see 3 above).

5. *I am the only son of my father, and he insists that I should put away my barren wife and take another, because he wants to see his line carried on through me. Should I obey my father?*

No, not in this case. The Bible commands, "Honour your father and your mother", and this means that generally we should obey our fathers. But when a father commands us to do something forbidden by the Bible, then we must disobey that father, and instead obey our Heavenly Father. Jesus said:

"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me."  
(Matthew 10:37)

6. *My wife has just given birth, and according to the custom of my tribe I must not have sex with her again until the child is two years old. Should I obey this custom?*

No. It is a bad custom, based upon a pagan superstition. It puts men under a great strain, and causes many men to fall into sin. Because of temptations that arise when married couples abstain from sex for a long time, the Bible forbids them to do so:

"Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."  
(1 Corinthians 7:5)

For medical reasons a couple should not have sex from a number of weeks before the expected birth of a child until a number of weeks after the birth. Otherwise the wife can catch an infection that may endanger her life, but when the child is six weeks old it is quite safe and right for the couple to resume a normal sex life. The belief that this will affect the milk is quite wrong.

It would probably benefit both the health of the mother and the child if another baby is not born within two years of the first. This should be a matter of birth control though, not a matter of abstaining from sex altogether.

7. *My wife has died. Is it right for me to marry a second wife?*

Yes. Polygamy is wrong, but it is not polygamy for a man to marry another wife when his first wife is dead. God says that you may marry again if you wish. A woman also is free to marry again if her husband dies. But remember that the Bible commands you to choose a sister in Christ for your new wife (1 Corinthians 7:39).

## Appendix 2 – Some Wives' Problems

1. *My mother taught me that only bad women get pleasure out of sex but I enjoy having sex with my husband. Is there something wrong with me?*

No, there is nothing wrong with you. Your mother taught you wrongly. Just as God gave us a sense of taste to enjoy eating, so He made the bodies of both men and women that they obtain pleasure from sex. To enjoy this pleasure outside of marriage is a great sin, but to enjoy it inside marriage is right and proper.

God has made it plain that He wants Christian wives to enjoy sex as well as their husbands. Indeed, He commands Christian husbands to help their wives to obtain full enjoyment from the sex act:

*“The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.”* (1 Corinthians 7:3,4)

2. *My husband beats me and our children. Should I run away?*

Not unless he makes life very hard indeed for you. If you did leave him, you would not be free to marry another man. You should pray that God will help you and your husband to live more peaceably together, and you should do your best to be forgiving and obedient towards your husband.

Do not take your husband to the local court. The Bible says it is wrong for believers to go to law (1 Corinthians 6:1-7). If you want someone to judge between you and your husband, you should go to the elders of your ecclesia. They may be able to help restore peace to your marriage (see “Good Wives and Bad Husbands”, page 16).

3. *My husband says he intends to take a second wife. What should I do?*

Try to persuade him, humbly and gently, that it would be wrong in the sight of God for him to take another wife. Seek the advice and help of the elders of your ecclesia. If your husband rejects your advice and takes a second wife, do not leave him (see also the answer to Question 4).

4. *I am the junior wife of an unbelieving polygamist. My husband is willing for me to be baptized, but will not divorce me. What should I do?*

Stay with your husband and apply for baptism. Your relationship with your husband is not an ideal one, but it is not your fault if your husband does not want to release you. The ecclesia would not refuse you baptism on account of this situation, over which you have no control. Although your husband is having sex with more than one woman, you yourself are only having sex with one man – your husband – and so you are doing no wrong.



5. *My husband died soon after we were married and left no children. According to local custom it is my duty to have sex with one of his relatives, and so raise up a child in my dead husband's name. Should I do this?*

No. Like many human customs this is wicked. If you follow this custom you will be committing fornication and sinning against God. If your late husband's relatives press you to follow this custom you should seek the help of the elders of your ecclesia.

Although this custom sounds similar to the Old Testament commandment under the Law of Moses, for a married man who died childless, the difference was that his brother (or nearest kinsman) would *marry* the dead man's wife to raise up children to carry on the dead man's name. However, it was a commandment under the Old Covenant, and so is not necessary to be kept by those who are in Christ.

6. *My husband is working away from home. I have become pregnant by another man. My friend has offered to give me an abortion. Should I accept this?*

No. You have already committed the sin of adultery. If you try to hide your sin by having an abortion you will not deceive God. You would only be sinning a second time. Also you would be risking your health. Many women are made ill through having abortions, and some die.

Instead, you should confess your sin to your husband. Tell him that you are ashamed, that you repent, and promise never to commit adultery again. Then ask him to forgive you.

You should also confess to the elders of your ecclesia, and ask them to pray for you. They may perhaps suspend you from membership for a time, until they are sure that your repentance is sincere.

Also, you should confess to God, and ask Him to forgive you. Remember that no sin is too bad to be forgiven, provided that we are truly repentant. God will help you to repent and to be a good wife in future, if you are truly sorry and if you pray for His help (see also "Abortion" on page 21 and "AIDS" on page 30).

## **Appendix 3 – Some Parents' Problems**

### *1. Should I circumcise my sons?*

In the sight of God it does not matter whether you do or not. There is no harm in it, but there is no good in it either (except on rare occasions when a doctor advises it for medical reasons). The children of Israel were commanded to circumcise their sons (see Leviticus 12:1-3), but the New Testament says plainly that Christians need not do this (see Acts 15:1-20; 1 Corinthians 7:18,19).

In some countries, such as Kenya, it is the custom for all boys to be circumcised at birth, and it is illegal to forbid this. In such countries Christadelphians may circumcise their baby boys. As a practical guide, all such circumcisions should be carried out by a medical specialist, ideally in a hospital.

In other countries, such as Malawi, boys are often circumcised when they approach the age of puberty, and circumcision is then accompanied by evil pagan ceremonies. Christadelphians should not take part in these wicked practices.

2. *Should I circumcise my daughters?*

No. This is a cruel and wicked custom that is practised in many parts of Africa and elsewhere. But it was unknown to the children of Israel, and therefore it is a mistake to apply the Bible name circumcision to it.

The proper name of this operation is clitorrectomy. It consists of cutting away that part of a woman's sexual organs from which she derives most pleasure.

You will see why this is wrong if you read the answer to Question 1 in Appendix 2. God intended women to have pleasure from sex, just as much as men. By performing this operation on girls you rob them of a precious gift that God has given them.

3. *The custom in my tribe is for parents to arrange marriages for their children while they are still very young. Should I follow this custom?*

No. It is the duty of parents to help their children find suitable wives and husbands. You cannot hope to do this unless you wait until the children are grown up. Then, if your children accept the Truth, you will want to find marriage partners in the Truth for them.

4. *I am the head of an important family, and I want my children to marry people in my own class, but all the other young Christadelphians in this district are from poor families. What should I do?*

Read James 2:1-9. This says it is wrong for a Christian to be concerned about the social standing of another Christian whether he is rich or poor. Among unbelievers it is natural for a rich man to despise the poor, but it should not be like that in Christ. A Christian is commanded to love all his brothers, whether they are rich or poor (see John 15:12).

The Gospel is worth more than all the money in the world. Therefore it is better for your son or daughter to marry a poor Christadelphian than a rich unbeliever.

5. *In my village, when children reach marriageable age, the local people arrange ceremonies of celebration. Should I let my children take part in these ceremonies?*

No. These ceremonies all have a pagan origin. A Christian should have nothing to do with them.

6. *My son (who is a Christadelphian) is about to be married (to a Christadelphian girl). I live in isolation, and so I cannot arrange for him to have a wedding ceremony in a Christadelphian ecclesia. Should I arrange a wedding in accordance with traditional native custom? Or should he get married in the local Methodist church?*

No. You should not do either of these things. A wedding according to native custom would be wrong, because it is based on pagan superstition. So would a wedding in an ordinary church, because that would be accepting false doctrine. Some think that a marriage is not pleasing to God unless it takes place in a church building. This is quite wrong.

Help your son to understand that a formal wedding ceremony is not essential. All that is needed is for the bride and bridegroom to declare before witnesses that they are becoming man and wife. Also, if the laws of your country provide for it, you should register the marriage at the government office.

Later on, perhaps your son and his wife will visit a town where there is a Christadelphian ecclesia. Then he can ask the elders of that ecclesia to hold a simple service, where the brothers and sisters can pray for God's blessing on his marriage. If this is not possible, you could offer such prayers yourself. Or you could wait until a Christadelphian elder comes to your town on a visit, and then ask him to pray for your son and his wife.

7. *I have a daughter of marriageable age, but no sons, and my wife is past childbearing. According to local custom I should keep my daughter at home, allow her to have sex with some man until she becomes pregnant, and so let her raise a son in my name. Is this right?*

No. This is another wicked custom of pagan origin. If you follow this custom you will make your daughter a fornicator, and thus you will sin grievously against God and against your daughter.

## **Appendix 4 – Some Problems arising from Bride Price**

1. *In my country bride price is so high that a young man cannot afford to marry until he is about 30 years old. That is why nearly all the young men of my age are fornicators. How can I go without sex until I am 30?*

By prayer and help from God. If you can take your problem to the Lord in prayer, He will give you extra strength. With God's help you will be surprised how strong you can become. You should also throw yourself

wholeheartedly into the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, as in this work you are much more likely to find a Christadelphian girl who is right for you, and whose parents will not exact an unaffordable bride price.

2. *Since I gave up fornication I have sometimes given myself relief from sexual tension by handling my own sex organ. My friend says this is as bad as fornication and I may as well go back to casual sex. Is this true?*

No, it is not true. You would do well to avoid this habit (which is called masturbation) if you can, but it is not a terrible sin like fornication, and it is not directly condemned anywhere in the Bible. At all costs a Christian must avoid fornication and adultery, because no immoral person (i.e. one who commits fornication or adultery) has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (Ephesians 5:5). Do not let any friend tempt you back into fornication, for in that way lies eternal death.

3. *My wife has gone with another man and he has offered to repay me her bride price. Should I accept it?*

No. Your duty is to try and win back your wife, and if she repents, to forgive her and receive her again as your wife. You must not just cast her off and accept the return of her bride price. Your situation is a difficult and unhappy one. You would be wise to seek the advice of the elders of your ecclesia. They may be able to help reconcile your wife to you. However, she may have become infected with AIDS (see page 30 regarding AIDS).

## **Appendix 5 – Rules for the Sexual Behaviour of Christadelphians**

1. *Christadelphians do not have sex unless and until they are married*, and those who want to become Christadelphians do not do so either. Sex is a blessing within marriage.

2. *Christadelphians who are married should love their wife or husband* and have sex only with their own wife or husband, showing consideration for one another in this, as in all matters.

3. *Christadelphians do not live with someone to whom they are not married*. Those who have been living with a woman or man without being married must put the matter right as soon as they learn the Truth. They either stop their old way of life completely, or else get properly married and then remain faithful to their lawful wife or husband.

4. *Christadelphians do not commit acts of homosexuality*. Our men and boys do not have sex with other men or boys, and our women and girls do not have sex with other women or girls.

5. *Christadelphian parents do not have sex with their children, and Christadelphian young people do not allow their parents or other relations to have sex with them.*

These are *rules*, and we do not have the right to break them and still expect to live in fellowship with other Christadelphians. If a member has broken these rules, he or she must not wait to be found out, but must put the matter right immediately. It is best, too, to confess to the sin before an elder of his or her Christadelphian meeting.

If a member is committing any of these sins and does not intend to give them up, the right course is to stop calling himself or herself a Christadelphian, and to leave the community. Once again, the wrongdoer should not wait to be found out.

If it seems that any of our members are living in this way, it is the duty of the elders of their ecclesia to make sure of the facts as kindly as possible, going straight to those concerned and not listening to, or encouraging gossip.

If as a result of this firm but gentle discussion, confession is made, and a promise to stop this way of life immediately is given, then the repentance should be accepted unless there is clear evidence that the promise is not being kept.

But if there is no repentance, or no promise of reform, or the promise is broken, there is no doubt what must be done. The offenders should be withdrawn from by their ecclesia, and not allowed to return until it is clear that they have repented and reformed their behaviour.

### **The Lesson is for us all**

What you have just read does not mean that bad sex is the only sin, or even necessarily the worst sin, that people can commit. We should all consider our own lives and think about the sins that God knows about, even though our brothers and sisters do not.

None of us should think he or she is better than those who commit the sins of bad sex: God alone can judge such matters. But, all the same, we have a duty to maintain right standards, and the things written here must be taken seriously.

They should be part of the rule of life for Christadelphian ecclesias everywhere.

We must also remember that we have a duty to set a good example to our families, and to our non-Christadelphian friends and neighbours, so that the work of the ecclesia will uphold the standards of the Bible (2 Corinthians 6:3).

Finally, sympathy, understanding, and help must be readily offered to our brothers, sisters, and young people, when we know that they are tempted to commit sins of this, or any other kind. Those who are or have been guilty should not be afraid to confess, and those who get to know about their sins should show compassion, and the kind of forgiveness that they themselves hope to receive from God.

Everything possible must be done in love to help to get the sinners on the right road again. But no one should think that the sins would be tolerated in a Christadelphian community. If this awakens anyone to the knowledge that things have been allowed which are contrary to the Gospel of the Lord, there is no time to be lost.

### **The Door of Hope**

Perhaps we should remember that when Paul required the Corinthians to withdraw fellowship from the sinful man in their midst, he described it as handing this man over to Satan; that is, to put him out of the ecclesia to show that his sinful behaviour must stop, in the hope that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord – at the Judgement to come (1 Corinthians 5:5). They were to cut him off until he repented.

But when he really did repent, they were to receive him back with gladness:

“The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.”  
(2 Corinthians 2:6-8)

That is what we have to strive for: faithfulness in condemning the sin, indeed, but glad restoration and forgiveness when repentance follows.

And may the Lord look on all of us with just such mercy when he comes, that our spirit, too, may be saved in the day of the Lord.

PAUL AND ELISABETH GENDERS

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# The Principles of Christian Marriage

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