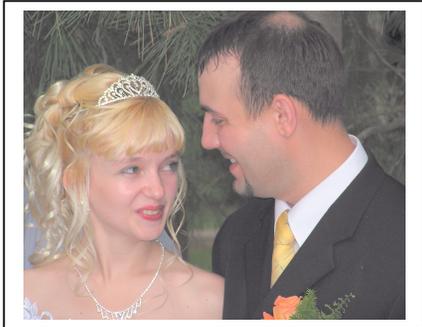


MARRIAGE IN THE LORD

David M Pearce

Marriage is a wonderful institution. It comes from God himself, for God arranged the very first marriage in the Garden of Eden, and laid down the rules for all subsequent ones. Sadly, in our day this beautiful relationship,



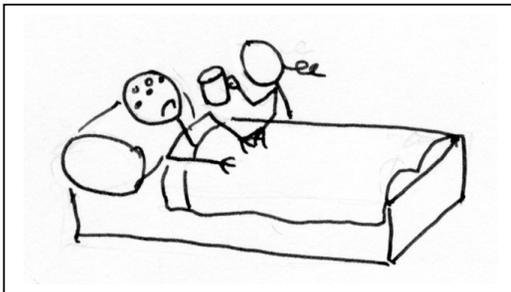
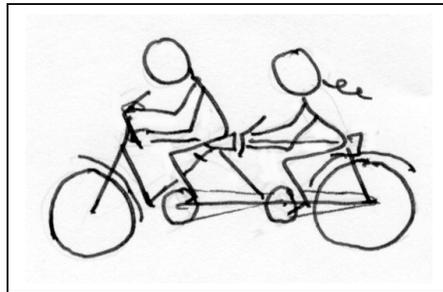
ordained by God for human happiness, is being attacked on all sides. People 'live together' without getting married. Marriages split up through divorce. Films, novels and newspapers assume that it is 'normal' to have an affair and commit adultery. The result is broken hearts and broken homes, loneliness, financial difficulties and weeping children. If you are a young disciple of the Lord, it is important to understand the principles of Bible marriage before you

commit yourself, for marriage in God's eyes is for life. You need to think through the roles and responsibilities that lie ahead, and learn how to create a strong and lasting bond that will take you through the trials and tests ahead, united and secure in each other's love.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE?

When God made the living creatures, they were all in pairs, male and female, except for Adam, who was created alone.

In Genesis 2 v18 God observed 'it is not good that man should be alone', and he provided Adam with a companion. Here we have the key to the primary purpose of marriage. *It is to provide companionship.* Eve was not just another man, a duplicate of Adam. She was specially designed as 'a helper suitable for him'. She was to provide qualities which would complement the man's, so that together they would make a strong and practical partnership.



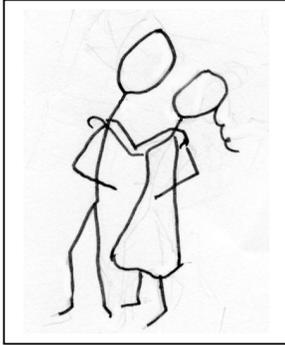
Straight away, we see how the spirit of our age has spoiled this relationship. It tries to make women and men interchangeable, with the same opportunities. There must, it decrees, be no discrimination. Yet God's arrangement was balanced. The softer qualities of the woman – her maternal instincts, geared to

caring for children, her dexterity in spinning, sewing, and weaving, her patience, sympathy and affection, all match the virile characteristics of the man – physically stronger, organising, planning ahead, hunting and cultivating the soil, solving problems, protecting and defending his family.

The second purpose of marriage is stated in ch 1, where God says to the human pair in v28 that they should 'be fruitful and multiply'. Marriage provides *a stable and secure background for the rearing and training of children*. We shall need to return to this topic later.

TWO BECOME ONE FLESH

Uniquely, Eve was created, not from the dust, but from Adam's own body. So she and he had a closeness that was much greater than any of the other



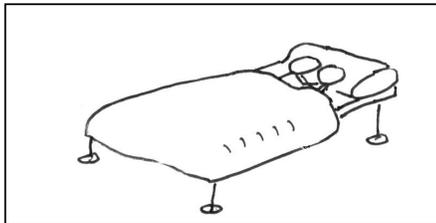
animal pairs. She was literally Adam's flesh. When they were joined together in marriage, the two halves became one again in the perfect partnership, and Adam declares this when in Genesis 2 v23 he declares Eve to be 'bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh'. What is particularly interesting is the next verse, v24. At a quick glance you might think this was spoken by Adam, like v 23. But at the time when Adam made his declaration, there were no fathers or mothers to leave behind. In fact, Jesus tells us in Matthew 19 v4 and 5 that it was God himself who made this pronouncement.

God was looking ahead to all future marriages, and saying that in these marriages too, in some mystical way, there would be an affinity between the two partners, which would come to resemble the unity between Adam and Eve. It is on how to foster that bond that we must focus our attention.

PRE- MARITAL SEX IS WRONG

Many young people nowadays fall in love, and then move in to live in the same rooms. They go to bed together, and frequently have children in this relationship.

It has to be said that this arrangement has no parallel in Bible times. Down



through thousands of years of human history, people would never openly go to bed together until they were legally married. Jacob, for example, fell in love with Rachel, but he waited seven years until he had finished paying his dowry to Laban before he "went in" unto his beloved.

In Israel in Old Testament times, premarital sex (going to bed with someone before you were legally married) was treated as seriously as adultery (sexual relations with a married person who is not your partner). Both were punishable with death! For example, when Shechem went to bed with Dinah their sister, her brothers insisted "He had done a disgraceful thing in Israel...which ought not to be done" (Genesis 34 v7), and they killed him. Under the Law of Moses, if a young man found his bride was not a virgin, she could be executed (Deuteronomy 22 v14, 20,21). The New Testament says the same. It calls sex before marriage 'fornication', and warns that God will judge both the fornicator and the adulterer (Hebrews 13 v4). Both sins, if unrepented of, Paul says will exclude us from the Kingdom of God (e.g., 1 Corinthians 6 v9, 10).

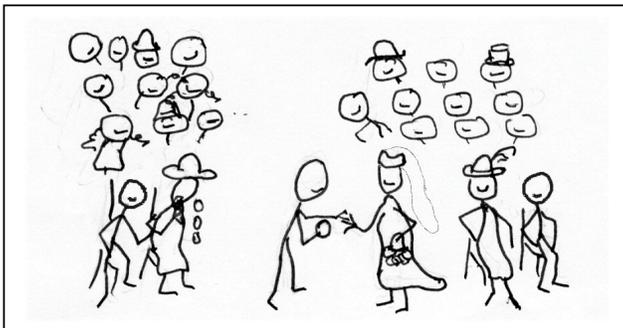
This condemnation of pre-marital sex may come as a surprise, if you have grown up in recent years. A great loosening of moral standards came about in the 1960's, a period when rules and laws were being widely challenged. People were no longer afraid of the judgement of God. At the same time easily available contraceptives (the Pill) made it possible to have sex without having children, and a wave of promiscuous behaviour swept through society. Its *mores* were changed, probably for ever until the coming of Christ. The pursuit of Bible-forbidden sex has brought in its train a wave of sexually transmitted diseases. Sadly, ours has become "an adulterous and sinful generation". But it is not just unwanted babies that make sexual relations outside marriage wrong for believers. As we shall see, it is the whole principle of two people becoming one flesh, as a permanent, secure foundation for life-long companionship in the Lord. If we want to please our Heavenly Father we will be different to other people, and keep ourselves virgins until we are married.

WHEN ARE WE TRULY 'MARRIED'?

But, you may argue, could we not say that people who live together for years are effectively "married"? Indeed, some people claim that the act of intercourse itself constitutes marriage. What does the Bible say about this? Well, here is an example. The Samaritan woman who spoke to Jesus at the well was living with a man, but she insisted she had no husband. Jesus agreed. "Thou hast well said 'I have no husband'", he said. So in his view she was not "married" to the man she was living with. "He whom thou now hast is not thy husband," he declared (John 4 v16-18). So, just living together is not the definition of being 'married'. What, then, actually makes the difference between a married and an unmarried couple?

THE MARRIAGE VOW IS CRUCIAL

The Bible answer is that the essential ingredient of a marriage is the marriage



vow, an oath made by both parties, normally taken in public, that they will stay together for life. This vow is considered so solemn that in the Bible it is often referred to as a covenant, the most binding of all agreements. It was taken before witnesses, so that there would be no

argument afterwards that the agreement had been made, and in Jewish (and New Testament) weddings there was normally a written contract, too.

Let us look for examples of weddings in the Bible. The very first, indeed the archetypal wedding, is the one where Adam declared, before the angels, that Eve was to be his partner. From that day, as in our own weddings, Eve took his name, just as a bride today takes her husband's name. "She shall be called 'Wo-man'", he said (Genesis 2 v23).

God speaks of his covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai as a symbolic marriage; he spread his wing over her, he said (just as a Jewish bridegroom does today,

spreading his shawl over his bride). They were bound to each other for ever (Ezekiel 16 v8, 59). He would be their God, and they would be his people.

The fullest description we have of a Bible wedding is the taking of Ruth by Boaz. He calls together 10 witnesses (Ruth 4 v2). He makes a public declaration that he is taking her to be his wife (v10). The people of the city then bless the bride and bridegroom, wishing them a happy and fruitful marriage (v11). After that Boaz was free to have sexual relations with the maiden (v13).

Once we have made our vows, and the marriage bond has begun, there can be no going back. If we are believers, we cannot just 'try out' living with someone, and leave them after a few years because we are bored, or have found someone we like better. Jesus says 'What God has joined together, let not man separate' (Matthew 19 v6). Our marriage vow 'joins us together' in the sight of God, and he expects us to keep our promise, as he always keeps his promises. So we must think very carefully before we embark on marriage. It is not a casual relationship. We must be absolutely sure we have found the right person with whom to spend the rest of our mortal life.

'BETROTHAL' IN BIBLE TIMES

In Bible times, the first stage in a marriage was the betrothal, a period of preparation during which the couple had agreed to get married, but had not yet taken their vows. It was a period of adjustment, of testing fidelity, and of organising somewhere to live. Is important to note that in this period the betrothed had no sexual relationship. They were expected to remain virgins. That is why Joseph was so upset when he discovered Mary was "with child" (Matthew 1v18). We ourselves are in exactly this position, spiritually speaking, as the future bride of Christ. We have been 'espoused to one husband', Paul says, so that we may be presented "as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11v2). The wedding will take place when our bridegroom returns. The modern Western concept of being "engaged" is similar to the Bible betrothal, but there is a difference. It is not legally binding on the couple, and although upsetting, there is no stigma attached if they decide to "break it off".

FINDING THE RIGHT PARTNER

Since Bible marriage is for life, we need to be absolutely sure we are yoking ourselves to the right person. Sadly, there is a true saying - 'love is blind', and in the heady passion of falling in love, we may lose our normal good sense of realistic judgement.

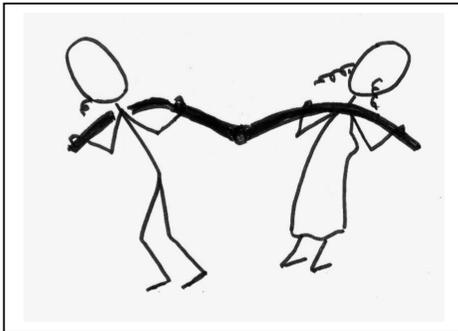
How does the Bible help us find the ideal partner? One thing becomes plain from the very beginning. If a marriage is to be happy, a believer must only marry a believer. Any compromise on this issue will result in a tension in the marriage, and will make it difficult for the believing partner to remain faithful to the Lord. Some examples. Right back in Genesis ch 6 we have the sad story of the 'sons of God' marrying 'the daughters of men'. It does not take a lot of imagination to see that the sons of God are the descendants of Seth in ch 5, the faithful few who, when men were worshipping many gods, named

themselves by the name of the Lord (ch 4 v26). Conversely, the daughters of men are probably the seed of Cain. Instead of marrying only 'in the faith', the family of Seth began to choose partners on the basis of their physical beauty (ch 6 v2). The results were disastrous. Instead of the righteous men lifting up their glamorous wives to a higher standard of morals, it worked the other way round. They were dragged down. And the result was a world where the Way of the Lord became almost extinguished.

The Law of Moses was emphatic about marrying only a believer. As the Israelites were entering the Promised Land, God spoke through their aged leader. He warned them that they must not inter-marry with the nations round about them. "You shall not give your daughter to their son", he said, "nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn away your heart from following me!"

A similar situation resulted when Solomon 'married many strange wives'. They turned him away from God.

And in the New Testament the Apostle insists that believers must not be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6 v14). We should marry "only in the Lord", he says (1 Corinthians 7 v39).



If we marry an unbeliever we shall have different standards and expectations from our partner. Yoked together, we will inevitably end up pulling up in opposite directions. We will want to meet with our brothers and sisters at the Breaking of Bread or Bible School, but they will want us to take the family out shopping. We will try to tell the truth, but they, knowing no better, will tell lies, to the confusion of

our children. We will make a big effort to be holy to God, but they will follow the way of the world.

Sometimes a young believer meets a girl and becomes interested in her (or vice versa – a girl meets a boy). Right early on, he must explain to her that there is no future in their relationship unless she is to become a disciple herself. Sometimes, impressed by his sincerity and his good example, she will start looking into the Truth, and eventually she may be baptised. Then there is no barrier to their marriage. But if from the beginning she shows no interest, it is best to end the relationship at once, rather than to press on and be sorry later.

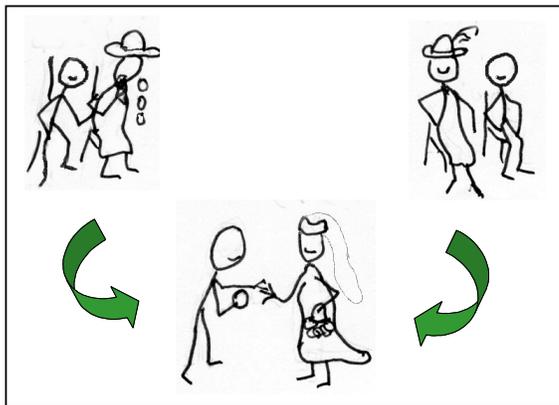
One important aspect here is the importance of prayer. Although we often feel very small in his presence, God through his angels is concerned about the everyday details of our lives. Hagar found this, when her mistress cruelly drove her out. An angel met her in the wilderness and told her God had seen her affliction. She could not believe it. 'You, God, see ME!' she said. She had discovered God was concerned about the happiness even of a little Egyptian



slave girl. (Genesis 16 v 8-13). So it is with us. God sees our tears and feels our yearnings. A few chapters later in Genesis, in a time of arranged marriages, Abraham's servant was sent by his aged master to search for a wife for his son Isaac. Eliezer approached Haran, the city of Abraham's family. He knew Abraham would want him to bring back a God-fearing girl. But there were many young ladies in Haran. How would he choose the right one? He made it a matter of prayer – the earliest recorded prayer in the Bible. 'May the first girl who volunteers to draw water for me and my camels', he said, 'be the one you have chosen!' Within minutes, his prayer was answered. And a few days later, he returned home with Rebekah, who became the beloved wife of Isaac, and grandmother of the 12 tribes of Israel. Our prayers may not be answered quite so promptly, but we can have every confidence God knows and hears.

TIME TO REFLECT BEFORE MARRIAGE

Once we are convinced we are truly in love with each other, it is time to announce to the world our intention to get married, normally indicated by the wearing of an engagement ring. Out of courtesy we need to tell our families we intend to get married, to enlist their support. There are many plans to be laid, the most important being where we will live. To buy a house or flat takes a lot of capital, and so the money is usually borrowed, and paid back over a long period, typically 25 years. Because house prices tend to rise, the sooner a married couple can start on the 'property ladder' the better, but we need to calculate carefully whether we have a steady enough income to make the monthly payments. If not, and especially if our job situation is uncertain, it may be better to go for rented accommodation, at least for a while. If it is just impossible to find separate housing, then we may have to start our married life



by living with our in-laws. This is not ideal, because 'leaving father and mother' is part of the definition of marriage made by the Lord in Genesis ch 2, and while we need to care for our parents, on both sides, it is better if we are physically separated from them to give us freedom to create our own, new family. So we should take the earliest opportunity to become independent.

There are many practical arrangements for a wedding, which usually involves booking with a Registrar, and organising a service, a reception, a wedding dress, etc., all of which takes time. In Christadelphian meetings a mature person will often be appointed to advise the couple about the duties and responsibilities of marriage in this period before the wedding.

This time of waiting can be frustrating, but it is valuable, because it gives us time to reflect, to get to know each other, to learn to take decisions together, and to be sure we are truly committed to making a marriage work. We will need a lot of patience in the years ahead.

AFTER THE WEDDING

A wedding lasts for a day, but marriage is for ever. It takes effort to achieve the sublime union the Bible holds out as the fruit of a happy marriage. We will need to work at our marriage to make sure it lasts

Our society attaches huge importance to 'successful' sexual intercourse. The tenderness, the release of tension and the feeling of warmth and peace that lying together can bring to married couples is undoubtedly a wonderful expression of the 'becoming one' that God spoke about. It is a beautiful gift from God. There is however a spiritual dimension to marriage, which is more important. In 1 Corinthians 6 v 15 Paul says union with a harlot makes a man one **body** with her. But the union of a man with his wife he calls one **flesh**. So there is a difference. Intercourse itself does not produce the bonding implied by 'one flesh'. When the heady, hormone-fuelled first phase of 'falling in love' is over, the relationship between husband and wife will slowly mature into a deeper and richer attachment based on both physical contact and shared experiences. The partners will gradually develop a confidence in each other. There will be a certainty of loyalty, of sympathy, of support and concern.

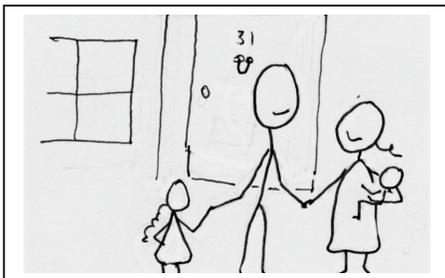
A wife or husband becomes a shoulder to cry on, a fund of advice, a tower of strength, a mother or father figure, a Personal Assistant, a carer when sick, a sharer of jokes, of books, of country views and room cleaning and nappy changing and the hundred and one chores that make up human existence. LOVE is the keyword in scriptural marriage. Erotic love is there, yes, but also the other sorts of love that Jesus reminded Peter about in John 21 v 15-17 - the love of a friend, and the self sacrificing, heroic love of the Samaritan for the man that fell among thieves. It is in the early years especially, as two people from different backgrounds and with different family values and expectations learn to submerge their own interests before that of the new family, that true Christian love will be needed.



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MARRIAGE IS THE BEST ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

God commanded Adam to be fruitful and multiply. Having babies was intended to be based on a stable and happy marriage between two partners. Note, Jesus says that in the beginning God intended monogamy ("two shall become one flesh"). Polygamy (more than one wife at the same time) is wrong. If a speedy "replenishing" of the earth had been the sole objective, God would have allowed many wives. Polygamy was tolerated in Old Testament times, but in the New Testament one man to one wife is the rule (see 1 Timothy 3 v2, 12).



Man's children have the longest growing-up period of all the animals. The stability and security of scriptural marriage allow them to develop life skills and a conscience through discipline, example and teaching, over a period of many years. Surrounded by the love of father and mother, (and grandparents) children will

learn to show love themselves. Hearing father pray, they will know how to pray themselves. Seeing quarrels forgiven, they will forgive too. Learning to obey Mum and Dad, they will in time come to obey God.

God decided two parents are needed to share the burden of bringing up children. It is too much for one person alone to earn a living for the family as well as to feed, clean, educate, and discipline them. Social studies show that juvenile crime has at least one of its roots in one-parent families (we must pay tribute to the lonely heroism of widows and widowers who do their best for their youngsters, wearing themselves out in an effort to fill the gap after the death of their partner.) And ideally they need to be the **same** two parents, for step parents never have quite the same love for children that are not their own.

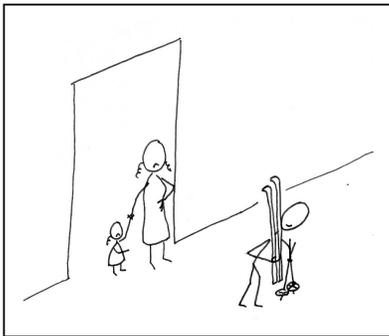
Children need role models to copy as they grow up. They form their ideas of the duties and relationships in a marriage by observing Mum and Dad, so that a child who has not known a father will have difficulty creating a balanced marriage when he or she grows up. In our society, a huge number of people live together without getting married. This frequently means that after a short time they split up and leave their children to grow up in a single-parent family. And even when partners are legally bound by marriage, too often this is allowed to end in divorce, with financial hardship as well as grief and insecurity for the children. How thankful we can be if we grew up in a Bible-based family home, enjoying the peace and support and security that God intended. As disciples we have a tremendous responsibility to keep our marriage strong, so that we can face the problems of life together right into old age, and set our youngsters on the path to a happy future.

KEEPING A MARRIAGE STRONG

There are several reasons why marriages end in divorce or 'splitting up'. Most often the basic cause is our evil human nature, which tempts us into the sins of selfishness, pride and lack of self-control. Here are some practical suggestions for believers to avoid the dangers.

Maintaining companionship

As the primary purpose of marriage is companionship, we must make sure we spend as much time as possible together. To be absent from our partner for long hours, especially in 'prime time', for example at weekends, or when the



children are home, will lead to feelings of neglect and loneliness. A manager, always away from home on business. A wife, working all day on Saturdays and Sundays and leaving her husband to look after the children. A husband who never gets home from work until after the children are in bed. A young brother with a family who is frequently away on trips to give Bible talks at distant ecclesias. All these are in danger of neglecting their duty of companionship.

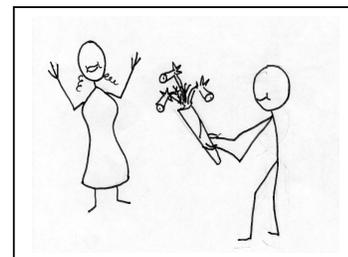
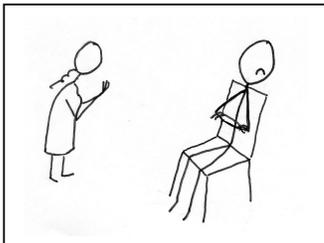
It takes wisdom to establish the priorities. We need to pay for food and clothes and furniture, of course, but it may be better to forget about the extra money we might earn from a second job, and make do with second hand furniture, if it gives us more time at home. The wife may need to consider whether the money from her part time job is costing the family dearly - her children need her to be there when they are small, and her spouse needs her support. The case of the young brother who goes off to other ecclesias to help them with Bible talks, or who spends hours hunched over his computer keeping up to date with his correspondence, is an interesting one. He probably considers it his duty to be working long hours for the Lord, caring for his brothers and sisters. Now, it is quite true that Jesus says we need to “hate” our family (including parents, wives and children) in order to be his disciples (Luke 14 v 26). But he means that, in proportion, we must love him **more**. If it comes to a straight choice (and it does sometimes, for example when we have an unbelieving father who tries to keep us from going to the meetings), we would always have to put our duty to Christ first. However, we also have a duty to instruct our children in the way of the Lord, which means being at home to read the Bible with them. The husband has a duty to see that his wife is “washed with water by the Word” (Ephesians 5 v 26), which means stopping in to look after the children so that she can get to the meeting to receive spiritual meat. And the family of the young brother has a higher priority than his brothers and sisters. The right balance is always God first, then our family, then the brothers and sisters, and last the people of the world outside the ecclesia.

Watching out for Selfishness and Pride

Human nature says “me first”. We live in an age obsessed by “human rights”, and being “equal”, and having freedom to develop our own careers and interests. We get caught up in this atmosphere of selfishness. The media are full of it. We insist on our own way, and if we are thwarted, we start to shout, or sulk, or refuse to speak, or walk out and slam the door. The problem is, once we start to stick up for our rights, pride jumps onto the running board and takes over the

wheel. We speak angry words, in haste, and even though we realise afterwards we behaved badly, we cannot bring ourselves to apologise. The quarrel escalates. A wedge has been driven into that happy unity with which we started off, and we feel miserable.

In this situation, our scripture training should tell us what to do. After all, both of us (if we are believers) have the same Master, in heaven. Christ is the real head of our household, and his rules bind us both. He teaches us to put others first. To do to others what we wish they would do to us. We must think up the little deeds of kindness, the surprises that make life sweet. If we have offended, we must ask forgiveness. When insulted, we must turn the other cheek. Christian love is the key to a happy marriage, and reading **1 Corinthians 13** is the perfect antidote to selfish behaviour. There Paul in his inspired wisdom says that love



means not being puffed up with pride. It means suffering long the irritations of our partner without retaliation. It does not gloat over the bad things they do, and call everyone's attention to them, but rejoices in good and kind and noble deeds, and gives praise for them. And if Jesus says we should forgive our brother seventy times seven times, how much more our husband or wife!

Being positive

They say 'the grave of marriage is made up of little digs'. Solomon warns of the misery of dwelling with a wife who nags – "It is better to dwell in the wilderness", he says, "than with a contentious and angry woman" (Proverbs 21 v19). It sounds funny when he puts it like this, but the reality is that it is too easy to fall into the habit of constantly criticising our partner, nagging him or her for not doing what we asked, or doing it wrong, or doing it late. Simple psychology shows that this negative approach is wrong. If when we offer to help wash the dishes we are told we are not stacking the dishes properly, or the water needs changing, or we have put the spoon in the wrong drawer, we will be less likely to offer next time. People respond much better to praise than to criticism. Sometimes we need to look firmly in the mirror and ask ourselves "Would I really like to live with this woman?"

Another point. If we want something done – a new washer on the dripping kitchen tap, the rubbish taken out to the bin, or even a hot cup of cocoa – we need first to explain plainly what we mean. Ladies especially go wrong here. They drop hints, expecting their husbands to read their minds, and then go into a huff when nothing happens. Men are simple folk, and need to see clearly the problem to be dealt with. Then, when the job is done, even if it is not perfect, we need to be profuse in our thanks and praise. Men like to feel they are heroes. It works both ways; even a modest meal of beans and potatoes has taken time to prepare, and wives too need a hug and a 'thank you'. We all need to feel appreciated.

Sometimes we feel envious of our husband, enjoying the stimulus of meeting people in the office, and the satisfaction of bringing the money home, while we are stuck with the washing and taking the children to school. We act grumpy, and ask ourselves why we have to cook yet another dinner. But marriage is a partnership. We share the load. Think what a privilege it is to be able to bring up the children in the fear of God, to see them grow in knowledge and care for others as they follow our example. Our husband spends himself working long hours to make it possible to feed and clothe the family, but our contribution is just as important as his. We must keep alive the warm flame of love that brought us together in the first place, and make time, however tired we feel, for our partner to feel wanted and respected and welcome when he comes home. Our effort will be rewarded. If he walks in and has to stand listening to a long tale of woe about what the neighbour said in the lift and "I haven't had time to cook dinner – you will find some pizza in the fridge" – he will not look forward to coming home. But if he is met at the door with a hug and a kiss, and asked how *his* day went at work, and sat down to a steaming plate hot from the oven, he will be home on time every night.

The Marriage Bed

It is normal and natural and essential to the continuation of the human race that men and women should have a strong desire to make love to each other. The institution of marriage was intended by God to channel these desires towards one particular partner. As Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 7v2, "because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband". It follows that we have a duty to allow our partner to satisfy those instinctive drives. Indeed, if we withhold our bodies, constantly excusing ourselves through tiredness or, worse, as some kind of 'punishment', we will endanger our marriage. Paul continues "Let the husband render to his wife the affection due to her, and likewise the wife to her husband ... do not deprive one another", he continues, "... so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control"(v 3-5). He is warning us that frustrated desire may end up tempting our partner to find satisfaction outside the marriage, and commit adultery, to the ruin of both. The peace and unity that follows making love is a precious gift from God, and not to be neglected.

Avoiding Temptation

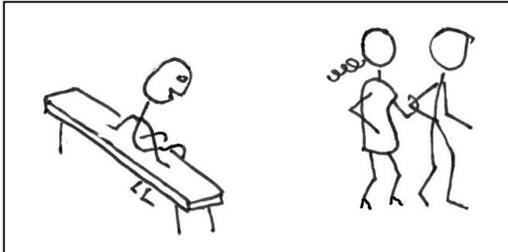
A woman can wield extraordinary power over a man, reducing even the strongest to soft clay.

"Adam was not deceived" (writes Paul), Eve persuaded him to eat the forbidden fruit. The love of a forbidden woman led Samson to disgrace, and David to spiritual ruin. Because respectable people indulge in affairs all around us, we may come to believe there is nothing wrong with a little excitement, even that we are missing out on the fun. We can be swept off our feet by fluttering eyelashes or flattering words, and persuade ourselves it is all harmless, and we can handle the situation, until suddenly we realise we cannot put our feet down and touch the bottom. The glamour of the affair is deceptive. Any liaison involves a cruel deception of our marriage partner, and when discovered, to reproach and shame. The covenant has been broken. The loyalty and trust have gone, for ever.

Solomon has sound words on the subject. "When wisdom enters your heart," he says, ". Discretion will preserve you...to deliver you from the immoral woman, even from the seductress who flatters with her words; who forsakes the companion of her youth (her husband), and forgets the covenant of her God (her marriage vow)". "Her house", he concludes, leads down to death, and her paths to the dead" (Proverbs 2 v10-19). "Rejoice with the wife of your youth", he insists a few chapters further on, "Always be enraptured with her love. For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress? For **the ways of man**", he reminds us, "**are before the eyes of the Lord**" (Proverbs 5v18-21). We may hide our activities from our spouse, but God sees even in a dark bedroom. And again, "Whoso commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding: he who does so destroys his own soul" (6v32). Solomon warns us against the female temptress, but there are plenty of male seducers, too!

Because our worldly neighbours and workmates have no conscience towards God, the risk of temptation from them is great. Provocative dress, suggestive talk, parties where alcohol loosens our inhibitions - these can be a fatal snare

for the feet of the upright. We are particularly at risk of being tempted if we are suffering from a feeling of neglected companionship, or under the influence of injured pride, when we are inclined to say to ourselves "I will show him/her that I can still make friends with the other sex!" Again, we have to stand back and view our actions as God does from heaven. Are we allowing 'the old man' of the flesh to overcome our Bible-taught conscience? Draw back, before it is too late.



It takes a strong will to break out of the magnetism of an affair, as only those can know who have been affected. It is much better to avoid temptation in the first place. Again, Solomon's advice is sound (same chapter). "Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right

before you... do not turn to the right or the left: remove your foot from evil" (4v25-27). It is our eyes, and then our feet, that lead us into evil, in this field. Jesus warns us "whosoever looks on a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5v28). The Greek word here implies a look that desires to possess, and that the "woman" is a married woman. As the proverb says, the "thought is father to the deed". Cultivating the unlawful desire in our mind inflames the passion, and in the end leads to action, just as hating our brother in our heart leads at last to his murder. We must look the other way. "If your right eye causes you to sin, **pluck it out**", Jesus continues. Sacrifice short-term pleasure, he is saying, rather than lose eternal life. Job, right back in the Old Testament, is a shining example to us. "I have made a covenant with mine eyes", he affirms. "Why then should I look upon a young woman" (Job 31v1)? He had promised himself he would keep his eyes looking the right way.

'Flee fornication'

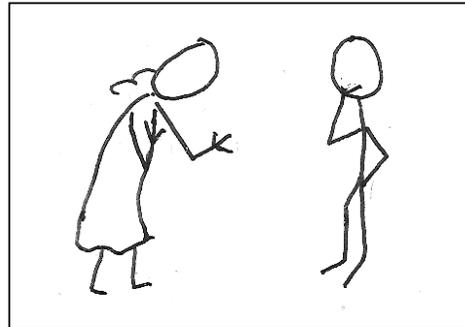
What do we do if we find ourselves trapped in a situation where we are already compromised, through naiveté or poor judgement? Again, the Bible answer is plain. "**Flee** sexual immorality!" commands the Apostle (1 Corinthians 6v18). Get out. Run for your eternal life. Joseph is our great example here. Day after day his master's lustful wife tried to tempt the handsome young Hebrew to make love to her. "How can I do this great wickedness?" he insisted, and deliberately avoided her company (Genesis 39v9, 10). So she waited till they were alone in the house, and then, no doubt as provocatively dressed as any film star, she tried again. Determined to have her way, she "caught him by the garment, saying "Lie with me!" The response of Joseph was swift; he "**fled**, and ran outside". May we have the same self-control, faced with such temptation!

FAILURE AND FORGIVENESS

We must expect that there will be disagreements in marriage. We come together from different backgrounds, and with different standards, for example

for tidiness or punctuality or use of leisure time. We have to make decisions about spending money, and holidays, and who gets up first in the morning. There are bound to be quarrels and arguments. It is inevitable. We have to learn to accept our partner has a different point of view, and work towards a solution that we can both live with. Often this will have to be a compromise or a bargain. For example, we have an unexpected 'windfall' – a payment we were not expecting. The wife needs a new dress, but the husband absolutely must have two new tyres on the car. Maybe we split the money 50-50. Or we agree that one has the benefit this time, but the other will take priority next time a bonus turns up. The husband is crazy on football, and wants to watch the world cup matches on television night after night. But his wife thinks watching sport is a waste of time. Again, a sensible compromise is needed, where each gives way a little – she tolerates his passion for football by keeping out of the way for three nights a week while he watches his chosen teams play, and he turns the set off on the other evenings and helps her put the children to bed.

What about the everyday situations where we forget to do what we were asked, or unkindly eat the last of the chocolate, or come home late so that our lovingly cooked dinner is spoilt? This is the time when we must swallow our pride and apologise for our bad behaviour, sincerely and promptly. "I'm sorry!" is a key phrase in a successful marriage. And when we are on the receiving end, we must graciously forgive, without grudging, and smile in spite of our feelings, just as God smiles and forgets when we upset Him for the seventy seventh time this week.



Perhaps we should look briefly at the worst possible scenario, where we discover our marriage partner has been unfaithful to his or her vow, and committed adultery. Anger, fear, self-reproach, despair - all these emotions sweep over us. Where did we go wrong, we ask ourselves (and sometimes with reason, for we may well have contributed to the break-down through lack of companionship, or hurt pride)? Is it the end of our marriage? Should we rush out and file papers for divorce? What does the Bible say about this sad situation?

Clearly, as in any crisis in life, the first thing to do is to ask for God's help. He knows and cares about every aspect of our life, and he may choose to open or close doors to bring an early end to our suffering. It may be our partner's conscience can be aroused sufficiently by our entreaties and the tears of the children to abandon the affair, and ask to be forgiven. In this case, we are duty bound by the law of Christ to be generous and receive them back, as God forgives our trespasses. But if he or she remains determined to have their fling, we must resign ourselves to living alone in hope of a future change of mind, and find solace in the company of the brothers and sisters, whose care at these times is a lifeline for our morale.

If the erring partner refuses to accept that he or she is in the wrong, and remains determined to continue the unlawful relationship after entreaty from the spouse, then the ecclesia needs to become involved. Following the procedure Jesus laid down in Matthew 18 v15-17, two brethren should be asked to pay a visit to the erring brother or sister, to point out the wrongdoing. If this, after a suitable interval, has no effect, then the ecclesia has to act. It is wrong for a member of the body to be living an immoral life, in public view. It brings the community into disrepute. After careful examination of the facts, and allowing due time for repentance, and when the accusations have been substantiated and the offending person has been given opportunity to speak for him or herself, the ecclesia should take a communal decision (by a vote) to withdraw fellowship (see 1 Corinthians 5 v1-5). The offender is counted no longer a member of the community, and is not permitted to join in the Breaking of Bread.

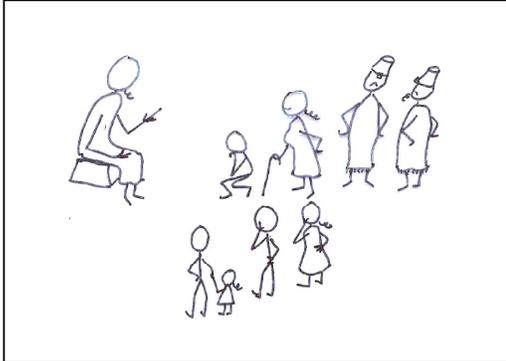
But what of the hurt and grieving spouse? Suppose, after many months, or possibly years, the unfaithful one “comes to himself” like the Prodigal Son, and wants to return. This puts great pressure on the injured party. There can be no worse example of “if my brother sin against me”, to use Peter’s phrase, than deliberately to break the marriage bond. Do we really **have** to hold the door open for an erring spouse?

Once again, the Scripture must be our guide. Christian love, in all situations, demands that we swallow our pride, and forgive an offence, deep and grievous though it is. Hosea is the classic example. His wife was not only loose-living, she even had children by other men while she was married to him. And Hosea was still expected by God, in spite of his own feelings, and the cruel jibes of his neighbours, to take her back into his bosom again. He was living out a parable of God himself, who time after time forgave Israel when she went after other gods, and then, when it turned sour, wanted to come back. We ask God to forgive us “*as we forgive.*” This kind of situation puts us to the test. He forgives all our offences, day after day, when we confess our sins. His love is an example of the love we should have for each other, healing, blessing, making free, without gloating, or humiliating, or raking over the past. To forgive like that will be to the eternal credit of one who by so doing, helps to convert a sinner from the error of his ways, and saves a soul from death.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT DIVORCE?

The legal grounds for divorce have been made easier in recent years. You may not need to prove adultery, or cruelty, although these can often speed up the case. In some countries a divorce can be obtained automatically after a few years of separation. And afterwards, both parties are free to marry someone else. An increasing number of marriages end in this way.

It is evident from the gospels that divorce was common in the first century. The Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful for a man to put away his wife **“for just any reason”** (Matthew 19 v3). Some of them would claim the right to a



divorce simply because their wife had failed to look after the house properly. It was easy to make up a suitable excuse if you wanted to marry someone else you fancied more. When Jesus insisted that this sort of divorce was sinful, even his disciples were taken aback with the strictness of his view.” If such is the case of a man with his wife”, they murmured, “it is better not to marry!” (V10) You can

understand why Jesus kept calling the people of his day an “evil and adulterous generation”. In his judgement, to divorce and re-marry for trivial reasons was to commit adultery, and many of his contemporaries were in just that position. Of course, they had Scripture “proof” for their interpretation of the Law. Moses, they pointed out, had laid down an official procedure for a man who wanted to divorce his wife “because he has found some uncleanness in her” (Deuteronomy 24 v1-4). Was not God here sanctioning divorce, they said? But Jesus took them back to the rule in Genesis, which establishes the principle behind marriage. “From the **beginning** it was not so”, he said (Matthew 19 v8). If two people have been made one flesh, he said, you cannot divide them up and make them one flesh with somebody else. Moses, under God, **suffered** divorce. But Malachi insisted, “the Lord God of Israel says that he hates divorce” (Malachi 2 v16).

In Jesus’ book, divorce and remarriage are not an option for his disciples. The only grounds he would allow for divorce (in what has become known as ‘the exceptive clause’) are **“fornication”** (v9). To judge what Jesus meant by ‘fornication’, we need to look at some scriptural uses of the word. In modern English, the word ‘fornication’ is used only in the context of premarital sex. In this respect it has changed its meaning since the days of the Authorised Version translation. In Greek, the word Jesus used was *porneia*, from which we derive the all too familiar English word ‘pornography’. You can see from within the Bible itself, that *porneia* is used for sexual sins **of any sort**, including adultery, homosexuality and unnatural sex. The man who took his father’s wife was guilty of *porneia* (1 Corinthians 5v1). So were the inhabitants of Sodom (Jude v7). So, in the Greek Old Testament, was adulterous Israel (Jeremiah 3 v1, 2,6,8). It is a general-purpose word.

Why should Jesus allow divorce in the exceptional case of a sexual sin? The answer is probably that the Old Testament had already made the same distinction. In the case of a married woman deliberately committing sexual sins, even God himself allowed divorce. He uses this language to describe the relationship between himself and Israel - “... for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery” he says, **“I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce”** (Jeremiah 3 v8). In Israel’s case, when she repents and turns to God again, he remarries her. A new marriage covenant is made, and she becomes his wife once more (v13, 14).

So in Jesus' view a breaking of the marriage vow, a flagrant violation of the oath, is the sole grounds for a divinely approved divorce. The Law of Moses permitted divorce for lesser reasons, but only for the hardness of men's hearts, just as it tolerated polygamy. It made sure that the woman involved (a Jewish woman had few rights against her husband) was given legal protection. But it was not the ideal.

Is divorce when 'fornication' occurs the right course for a believer?

Here we enter the territory of individual circumstances, where "it all depends". As we have seen from God's dealings with Israel, when a partner goes astray, a long period of appealing and waiting for repentance is essential. Hosea's wife left him more than once, but he still had to persevere, and keep himself for her. There had to be no fault on **his** side, for he represented God, who always continues to keep his promises, even when we let him down.

Usually in these cases the situation resolves itself with time. The one who has "gone off" with another partner and been withdrawn from by the ecclesia, either returns, or else forms a permanent relationship where the original marriage covenant is manifestly broken for ever. Very often, after the legally permitted interval, he or she divorces the one who has been left, and remarries.

Is the 'abandoned' partner free to re-marry in these circumstances? Generally, the Bible recommendation is no, he or she should stay single. "A wife is not to depart from her husband", says Paul, "but even if she does depart, **let her remain unmarried** or be reconciled to her husband". But what if the abandoned brother or sister is young and lonely, or left with young children, and has found a friend whom they love. Can they re-marry after a divorce on the grounds of 'fornication' by their former partner? Christadelphian ecclesias vary in their attitude to these cases. Some would, after examining the facts of the case carefully, allow re-marriage. But those brethren or sisters who have determined to stay single when their partner has gone away are doing the best thing, and deserve all our support and encouragement.

What about divorcees who want to be baptised?

Most ecclesias would adopt the view that sins committed before we are baptised, are all washed away in baptism. The Corinthians, as Paul reminds them, were guilty of many sexual and other sins which would exclude from the presence of God, "... but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus..." (1 Corinthians 6 v9-11).

Can people who are withdrawn from because of divorce, come back to the ecclesia?

This is a more difficult question. Divorce (for reasons other than fornication) and remarriage, is adultery, and this excludes from the Kingdom of God. For a brother or sister deliberately to break the marriage vow is a grievous sin. But God is a merciful God, and sinners can repent and ask for forgiveness. David was eventually forgiven, even though he had compounded causing the death

of Uriah with the taking of his wife, when he confessed his sin. His repentance was abject, public (in the Psalms he wrote), and complete. But he had given "great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme" (2 Samuel 12 v14). That is the problem with marital misdemeanours - we let God down before unbelievers.

Any restoration of a person who has sinned in this way can only take place after careful consideration of the circumstances of the divorce, and the subsequent behaviour of the individual. Probably much time needs to go by before any judgement can be made. The question is sometimes asked, "Is the divorcee still 'married' to his or her original partner?" We have already seen one answer in Deuteronomy 24, the passage the Pharisees quoted to Jesus. When the woman in verse 2 had been given a divorce, even though it was for insubstantial reasons, "she goes and becomes another man's wife". She was therefore in God's view no longer married to her first husband. Again, when God says he has dismissed Israel, his symbolic wife, for reasons of adultery, he says another covenant is going to be needed before she will become his wife again. So once the marriage vow has been irrevocably broken, the first marriage comes to an end. Even so, there will be those in the meeting (perhaps even the original partner) who will remember the first marriage, and feel sore and upset at the prospect of receiving the sinner back. Much heart-searching is called for. With the same measure we use, it will be measured unto us. One day, we will be begging for the pardon of our own sins. There is no easy way out of these ecclesial problems, and we each have to make up our own minds what God wants us to do.

HOMOSEXUALITY

As part of the rebellion of our society against God's rules, homosexuality (sex between members of the same sex) has been declared 'normal', and now open same-sex relationships have become common, and even supported by law. Homosexuality is clearly condemned in the Bible. The Law of Moses said, "If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death" (Leviticus 20 v13). The New Testament agrees – "neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor homosexuals ... will inherit the Kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6 v9, 10). Brothers and sisters in Christ cannot be homosexuals. But now let us turn to a more cheerful subject!

BRINGING UP CHILDREN IN THE LORD

As we saw in the beginning, the primary purpose of marriage was companionship. But the secondary reason – providing a stable background for the bringing up of children – is a very important aspect that needs our attention.

When a marriage is blessed with children, the parents can share a new joy. Their love for each other expands into a wider circle of love, both for and from their little ones. The love of a child is entirely voluntary, unforced and freely given. It mirrors the love God receives and enjoys when we decide to become his children, and share our lives with him. Indeed, parenthood is an education.

As we try to bring up our children to be obedient and kind and truthful, we are constantly reminded of our own education in the nursery school of God. When we are saddened by the disobedience of our youngster, or cringe over the insolence of the teenager, we suddenly see ourselves as God sees us, with the same displays of rebellion and self-will. We can learn then from his patience and persistence, his forgiveness and his determination to press on.

The most critical period in bringing up a child is the first five years. It is then that its future behaviour will be determined, for good or ill. If he or she learns to obey Mum and Dad in simple household rules in this period, there is a good chance years later that the aggravations and rows of adolescence can be prevented. More important, there is a better chance that he or she will choose to obey the will of our Father in heaven.

There is much argument today about discipline. Some experts say 'the child must have freedom of expression', and others 'it needs rules to give it security'. The Bible's advice is plain – "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22 v6). God expects parents to actively *train* their children, not just sit them in front of a television set and let them find out about life for themselves.

So, from the start, the little child must be taught that some things are right, and others wrong. For example, it is dangerous to interfere with electric plugs. As soon as it starts to poke things into the wall socket, our little one should be rebuked sharply with the key word "No!" and if it persists, given a gentle slap. The tears will flow, but it has learned that "No!" means "I must not do this". We must not be put off disciplining our children because they start to cry. Solomon is definite about this – "Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his crying" (Proverbs 19 v18, margin). The tears will not flow for long. Very quickly your son or daughter will learn you mean what you say, and the reaction to "No!" will be immediate. Later, for example when they start to cross the road in front of an approaching car, their automatic reaction to "No!" may save their life.

As they become toddlers, it will become more efficient to encourage good behaviour by little rewards and generous praise, and to punish disobedience by sanctions such as withdrawal of treats. Physical punishment will rarely be necessary. But there are some important points here. Firstly, every child needs to know clearly what the rules are – for example, your bedtime is 20.00, you tidy your toys when you have finished playing, you put sweet papers in the kitchen bin, etc. Secondly, you must be absolutely consistent in doing what you say you will do. If the child does what it is asked, the promised reward must be given, and bad behaviour must always receive the threatened punishment. Any inconsistency here will lead to huge problems later on. Thirdly, it is important to give plenty of warning of what is going to happen – "tomorrow we are going to the Breaking of Bread and you will need to take a book to read", "Dad is going to look after you tonight while I go out to the meeting", and so on. And lastly, the two parents must support each other. If one makes a decision, the other must go along with it, even if privately they do not think it was a good idea in the first place. Otherwise the children will soon

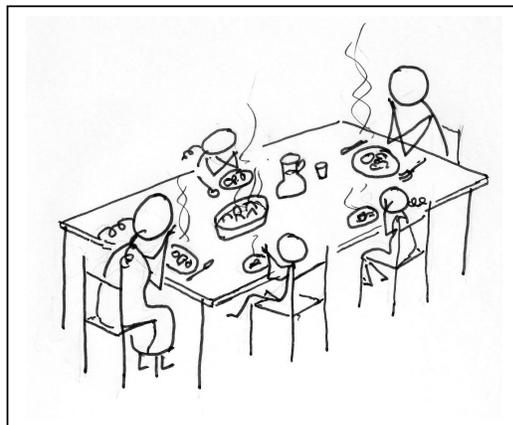
exploit the gap, and go whining to the other parent to have the decision reversed.

There will come a time as adolescence draws near when the youngster will seem always to rebel. Every request will be challenged. "The other children in my class go to bed at 22.00 – why should I have to go an hour earlier?" "Can't I have another hour on my computer game – my friend's Mum lets her play as long as she likes?" Teenagers push at the boundaries, to see if you will give way. Be firm. They actually feel happier and more secure with a clear ruling about what is expected of them. Sleep, homework and good food are important, and though they may grumble, underneath they know you are right to secure these key aspects of their school day. Of course, you can be flexible sometimes, with the same degree of bargaining or compromise you adopt with your spouse – "O.K., you can stay up late tonight, but you must come with me to visit Grandma on Saturday" – this kind of thing.

There is another aspect of bringing up children, which is vital in a godly home – teaching our children about God. The law of Moses laid a solemn responsibility upon Israel's fathers – "these words which I command you this day shall be in your heart", said Moses. "You shall teach them diligently to your children", (Deuteronomy 6 v 6,7). And Paul says the same thing - "fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6 v4).

The "admonition of the Lord" is that we should be truthful, and thankful to him, and keep our promises, and be kind to others. It covers all aspects of our attitude to 'our neighbour' and to God himself. So from the earliest age we should sit our children down with us when we do the daily readings and encourage them to take their turn in reading aloud and asking questions. When they are small, we must read to them or tell them a Bible story about the great heroes or the life of Jesus before they go to sleep. We teach them to sit quiet with closed eyes while we give thanks for our food at mealtimes. We take the children with us when we go to meet with our brothers and sisters, so that they become part of the family life of our ecclesia. If possible, we will take them to Sunday School to learn alongside other believers' children. Then they will grow up as a group that will later support each other through the teenage years when everyone at school despises them because they are 'different'. Above all, we need to remember that what really counts, if we want to bring our children to the Truth, is our own example. If we swear, or tell lies, or criticise the other members of the meeting, our children will. If we are generous, and kind and forgiving, our children will copy this too. Hard as it is, we have to sacrifice

our own interests. We, both husband and wife, have to do what is best for the **family**.



CHRIST AND HIS BRIDE

In this last chapter we look at the wonderful example of the perfect marriage, a marriage 'made in heaven'. In the Bible, Jesus describes himself as a



bridegroom, longing to be married to his bride, the church. For example, in Matthew 25 v1 he is the bridegroom who comes to the wedding. He has a 'best man' in John 3 v29 – John the Baptist who introduced the bride-to-be to her Lord, through his teaching. There is a wedding supper in Matthew 22 v2, 3, where God is the King and Jesus is the son who is to be married, and there are guests from all points of the compass.

And in Revelation 19 the bride wears a beautiful dress v7, 8. She has made herself ready to meet her lord. Let's look at some of the lessons behind this symbolic relationship, which will help us in our own marriages here on earth.

The Bride

In 2 Corinthians 11 v2 Paul says he betrothed the Corinthians to Christ. He was the matchmaker, who had introduced them to Jesus. Now he was jealous because others were trying to seduce them away from their fiancé. They were not yet married, but publicly set apart, and by the rules of betrothal, they should remain virgins until the wedding. We understand the symbols here – we too fell in love with the Lord, with his spiritual beauty, his kind heart and steadfast love. We were betrothed to him, at our baptism, and people of the world should now be able to recognise that we are set apart for him. Paul's fears that the church would be tempted away were justified – in Revelation chapter 12, John saw the bride-to-be no longer a virgin, but pregnant from her intercourse with the world. These points support our earlier findings about the importance of virginity before marriage. Just as we keep our hearts separate from the world, holy to our Lord, so we should keep our bodies holy and undefiled for our future husband-to-be.

The Psalmist sees a picture of Jesus' wedding in Psalm 45. The bride is arrayed in "gold of Ophir", v4, and in "robes of many colours", v14. In Revelation 19 v8 John sees the bride "arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright". All are symbols of the inner beauty that Jesus delights in – the faith and meekness and righteousness of the saints. Solomon advises us that when we choose our partner it should not be on the basis of glamorous looks. "Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain", he says, "But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised!" (Proverbs 31 v30).

The queen in the Psalm has to "forget her own people also, and her father's house", v10. Many of us had to do just this when we were baptised, breaking with a family who disagreed with our decision. But it is a principle that applies

to all marriages. When we marry, we start a new family, and although we have to respect and care for our parents, the claims of the new family have to take precedence over old loyalties. Too often the wife, faced with a decision where her mother has different views to her husband, will bow to her will. She must be firm, and support her husband, who is now her head. Indeed, Paul is telling her she must at all times treat her husband as she would treat Christ himself. We would never dream of criticising the Lord Jesus when we meet our brothers and sisters in the Truth. No more must we join with other wives in complaining about our husband. There is a powerful exhortation on this subject in 1 Peter 3 v1-6. Sarah, says the apostle, called Abraham “Lord”, even when she was only speaking to herself. It shows the attitude she had, which is an example to follow.

THE BRIDEGROOM

The king in David’s wedding psalm is described as “fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips”, v2. But Isaiah 53 says Jesus “has no form or comeliness, and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him”, v2. The point is, as men saw him, Jesus was a horny-handed carpenter from Nazareth, and they could not conceive of him as the king of Israel. But we saw under the surface. We chose to follow him for his beautiful character, his unfailing love and truth and grace. So it should be when a girl seeks a husband in the Truth – his likeness to God in character is more important than his appearance.

The most glorious description of Jesus as bridegroom comes in Ephesians chapter 5 – compulsory reading for every husband. Jesus, says the apostle, is head of the church, and the church is subject to him (v23, 24). In our culture wives reject the idea that their husband is their head. But the Bible teaches differently. Husband and wife are complementary to each other. They make the perfect team. But when the discussion is over and it comes to the final say as to what is best for the family, the husband has the responsibility of leading the way. Paul says we should take as our example the relationship between Christ and the church. As the bride of Christ we would not dream of criticising him or undermining what he asks us to do. We accept his authority. So it is in Christian marriage.

But lest husbands should think they are at liberty to rule harshly over their wives, Paul immediately sets before us the example of the tender love of Jesus for his disciples. He gave himself for the church, says v25. He set himself “to cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present to himself as a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (v26, 27). We can think of the humble way Jesus girded himself with a towel and went down on his knees to wash the apostles’ dirty feet. That, Paul is saying, is the way the husband should love his wife. He does not wait for her to run round to attend to his needs; he gets up and waits on her! But there is a spiritual dimension, too. Jesus enacted a symbolic washing, a preparation for the Kingdom, helping his bride to grow in grace before God as she is cleansed and purified by the word of God. That is the duty of every husband – to ensure his beloved has the opportunity to read and understand the Word of God – to explain the daily readings to her, and to stay in with the

children so that she can go to the Bible study with the brothers and sisters. Every husband will be asked in the Day of Judgment how he prepared his wife for the Kingdom.

That reference to 'spot and wrinkle' in verse 27 is intriguing. No girl wants spots or wrinkles to spoil her complexion. But this is actually a quotation from the Song of Solomon (4 v7). In this great love poem describing the intoxicating desire the king has for his beloved, and she for him, we have an expression of the depth of Jesus' love for each of us. He wants us to share his kingdom. And by his own death he has wiped away the stains and blotches of our sins, so that we can live for ever with him in the tranquil beauty of the Garden of God. That all-consuming, undying love they share is a pattern for every marriage in the Lord.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- 1) God introduced marriage a) for companionship and b) for bringing up godly children**
- 2) Marriage means one man to one woman, for life**
- 3) Sex between two people who are not married to each other is a sin. This includes pre-marital sex**
- 4) Marriage begins after a vow made before witnesses**
- 5) Believers must not marry unbelievers**
- 6) Choose a partner after prayer for guidance, and on the basis of a godly character, not appearance**
- 7) To ensure a long, happy marriage we must**
 - a. maintain companionship**
 - b. watch out for pride. Use self-sacrificing love, showing patience, kindness and forgiveness**
 - c. avoid situations that will lead to temptation**
- 8) If a partner breaks the marriage vow the other must exercise patience and forgiveness in the hope of restoration**
- 9) Divorce in order to remarry is forbidden by Christ**
- 10) Our duties to our children include teaching them to know right and wrong, to obey rules, and to know about God. We achieve this by discipline consistently applied, and by our example**
- 11) The symbolic marriage of Jesus to the Church is a beautiful pattern for earthly marriages**

Bible quotations are from The New King James Version