

THE ESSENTIAL OF A HAPPY MARRIAGE

Text: Ephesians 5, 22-33

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(Some practical applications and thoughts based on the above wedding text, which is like a diamond set in the Scriptures, signifying those qualities which make a marriage lasting, precious, and enduring.)

After many days of preparation and eager anticipation two young people step before the Lord's altar to be joined together as husband and wife and to receive the Lord's blessing for a life of happiness together. Their families and their friends have come to share this happy occasion with them. This is undoubtedly one of the mountain-top days of their life. As they are about to take this important step it is well that they consider what God in His Word tells us about the essentials of marriage. Since many today have such utterly false conceptions of marriage, this holy estate has fallen upon evil times, in which separations, divorces, and broken homes are altogether too much a part of the common scene of life.

The home is a divinely ordained institution. It is no mere human arrangement. It is not by chance that people live together in families rather than alone. God already made the Garden of Eden a home.

Back of the home lies marriage, The days of courtship which reach their climax on the day of the wedding, are days of happiness and joy, and that joy should continue throughout married life. If marriage does not yield joy, a richer, fuller life, it is not the fault of marriage, but of those who are in it and fail to fulfill its conditions. Marriage constitutes the closest possible relationship on earth between two people. Parents and children are closely united, yet the Lord says, that a man is to leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife and the two shall become one flesh. After marriage a husband's first duty is to his wife and a wife's to her husband. The two are to live for each other. In view of the many un^{happy} marriages, let us on the basis of the best possible advice of God's Word thoughtfully consider:

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Marriage is not, as many today would like to believe, an institution which has resulted from human experimentation between the sexes. It was God Himself who instituted marriage when He said: "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him". This is so obvious that it hardly requires elaboration. Man, of and by himself, does not even have the capacity to propagate his own kind. Besides, he also lacks certain qualities which are basic, if life is to be beautiful and reach its highest fulfillment. Therefore God created woman and endowed her with certain qualities which man does not possess. He gave her to man that she might complement him - supply that which is lacking.

Marriage as a way of life is indeed popular today, but the institution of marriage, as God ordained it, is despised and trampled under foot. Let us look at marriage and reevaluate it in the light of God's Word. It was God's will that a marriage be formed between one man and one woman. "To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." 1 Cor. 7,2 This arrangement was to be life-long. The apostle says: "The woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth". Rm. 8,7 And Jesus says: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder". Mt. 19,6 Many who enter into marriage today have no thought of doing so until death parts them. If it does not satisfy their selfish cravings, they feel they have every right to dissolve it.

God looks upon this union between a man and a woman as being so intimate and so real, that husband and wife are called "one flesh". This bond welds two together so closely, that no part of the husband's personality, nor that of the wife's remains uneffected. Marriage is not simply living together as two roommates might, but it is becoming "one flesh" with another person. To disrupt this union by sinful act is sinful.

God stated that marriage was for the purpose of companionship ("It is not good that man should be alone". Gen.2,18); for mutual helpfulness "I will make him an help meet for him." Gen. 2,18); and for the orderly population of the earth ("God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply." Gen.1,28) Besides these primary purposes, God also intended marriage to be a reflection of the intimate fellowship that exists between God and His people. Christ is likened to the bridegroom of the church, and the church is called His bride.

God did not set men adrift on the sea of matrimony, but has provided them with chart and compass. If God's directive's were always followed, Marriage would be the beautiful and happy estate that God intended it to be. Let us look at some of these directives. The Lord says: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it".

Marriage is based upon love. Never was there a greater love than that which Christ had for the church. So great was His love for it that He layed down His very life for it. The enduring reality of marriage is so strongly emphasized in the Bible and so dignified by it, that this holy union is compared to the union that exists between Christ and His church. No man would dare to presume to make that comparison, but God has made it for our instruction. This example of the unselfish love of Christ is to be a guide for husbands in their relationship to their wives. So intimate is this relationship based on love, that the two become one flesh. Two incomplete halves are fused into one.

A man's approach to marriage should not be one of selfishness. The man who gets married with the thought of getting as much out of it for himself as he possibly can, is ruling out happiness for himself. God says that husbands should love their wives. In love they will carry out their God-given responsibility to "nourish and cherish" their wives, as the Lord nourishes and cherishes the church.

We realize that those who enter marriage today face special problems and are subjected to many social pressures. Life is much more complicated today than it was a generation or two ago. It is difficult to find a decent place to live at a reasonable cost, to furnish a home, and to keep it up. Young people who want to get married often find it impossible to maintain the standard of living which they crave on the husband's earnings, so as a result both go to work. No longer is the husband nourishing the wife and maintaining the home. Both are trying to earn enough to reach their goals, which they have set for themselves. Now, we don't want to appear to be unkind toward those who find themselves in such a position, if it is a real necessity. But no matter what the present economic situation may be, no matter how great the problems, it still remains a fact that in God's plan it is the responsibility of the husband to support his wife, to maintain the home. Any changes in this arrangement are likely to have an unwholesome effect upon the home. When both parents are gone

from home regularly, even though the excuse may sound noble, the adverse effects may be much more damaging than the salutary purpose hoped for. If father and mother are not spending as much time as they should in giving their children the attention, training, and love that they need; when a child may be stuck for hours in a play pen or in the care of a baby-sitter, why should parents later be shocked, if the child gradually develops phobias, mental and emotional problems, is immature, or even retarded?

Brides, too, are to be reminded that it takes more than a pretty face and a good figure to fulfill the requirements of marriage. However important it may be for a wife to keep herself neat and attractive and to perform her household duties diligently, it is much more important that she follow the injunction of the Scriptures: "Wives, be subject unto your husbands as the church is subject unto Christ".

These words require some explanation, especially in this day of Biblical illiteracy. As the church, out of love and gratitude to Christ, is subject to Him, so also should wives be to their husbands. That word "subject" is a word that has made many a woman revolt. But why? Christians are subject to Christ, but there is nothing cruel, degrading or slavish about it. It is a subjection of love, of appreciation, of gratitude "as the church is subject to Christ". The woman who has a faithful husband, one who loves her, supports her, cares for her, and tries to make her happy, has every reason to be grateful to God. and she ought to acknowledge her husband's God-appointed place in the home.

It is not uncommon for some women to show no appreciation, no affection toward their husbands, who love them and are faithful to them. Many women, like men, are selfish too. They take for granted that whatever they can get out of marriage is their due. They refuse to assume the responsibility of wives and mothers. They often complain and are dissatisfied, because their work is so commonplace, such a drudgery. That is not the attitude of the church to Christ. Wives are not merely to regard their husbands as a convenient meal ticket, but as one whom they should strive to help and make happy.

It is God's arrangement that the husband should be the head of the house even as Christ is the Head of the church. A wife should be willing to accept that God-given arrangement. The husband, of course, is expected to be the kind of stable and mature person, whom the wife can look up to as the head of the home. The Bible knows nothing about happiness for the woman, who usurps authority in the home, who cannot look with respect to her husband as the head of the household.

For the fullest, closest union it is necessary that two young people take more than physical attraction into account. There is such a thing as a natural, physical attraction, but two people ought to be mentally and spiritually suited for each other also. Today, with the information and entertainment media stressing the physical side so strongly, many have the impression that this is a prime consideration. When questions such as: Is she beautiful? Is he popular? Can he show you a good time? are all important, and Christian character and principles are overlooked, one is making a most serious mistake. Consider how Satan used Samson's infatuation for Delilah's beauty to ruin him. As a Christian make your choice of a spouse in the sight of God. Seek His will, His guidance, His blessing in making your choice.

Many do not realize that for a happy, successful marriage it is of such importance that the two also be united spiritually by faith in Christ. Only when husband and wife can worship Christ, their Savior, together, trust in Him, pray together, welcome Him as the unseen Guest in their home, only when they follow Him and serve Him, can their be the fullest, most intimate union. Only then can two lives truly become one. A mixed marriage, a marriage in which two are not united in faith, is generally a poor risk. Statistics show that about 7 out of 10 mixed marriages end in divorce, and any gambler will tell you that 7 failures out of 10 is awfully bad odds.

God wants husbands and wives to be so closely united that nothing except death or unfaithfulness to the marriage bond will disunite them. After two people marry, they may discover that they are ill-suited for each other. The husband may be cruel, course, a poor provider. He may continue to pursue his hobbies, his outside interests without taking his wife into consideration. The wife may be nagging, thriftless, a poor homemaker, a burden, yet the Word of God is very definite in stating, that the ties once formed may not be broken. When two clasp their hands at the marriage altar and vow to God that they will keep and cherish each other until death unclasps their hands, the one takes the other into sacred keeping till the end of life.

In view of the sacredness and life-long duration of this relationship, how important to give this serious step the utmost, God-directed consideration! Your whole future, your happiness is at stake! Your religion, your soul's salvation may be at stake!

If marriage has been entered into in accordance with God's will, then there is hope for a happy, successful marriage. As a marriage ought to be entered into in accordance with God's will, so it must also be continued. Each one must continue to love and cherish the other through good days and evil. Each one in love should submit to God's will.

In the best marriages there at times are differences. The important thing is how you handle them, what you do about them. Little things that irritate have a way of growing and assuming a significance that is altogether out of proportion. Fatigue, annoyances, poor housekeeping, unwise spending, bad habits, an insecure income, a slighting remark, unreasonable demands -- all these may be sources of conflict. Here is the opportunity to put your Christian principles into practice, to be forbearing and forgiving. How fortunate if both have good wearing qualities, if they have the kind of traits, attitudes, and temperaments that make living easy together. Couples who practice self-control, who make good adjustments, in short, who practice good, Christian virtues, are not only mature, but they will have the blessings of God resting upon them. They will resolve all differences before the day closes, and start each new day in the strength that God supplies.

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