

Studies On Christian Marriage

by Rod Farthing

As you know, in recent years there has been much discussion about the family in American society. This has been particularly true in regard to husband/wife relations. Many things have been said and written, from the alarming divorce rate to the need to define or redefine the roles for both husband and wife. If we have been made aware of nothing else we have come to understand that a marriage is a very fragile institution unless it has been built on the firm foundation of biblical principles. In the next few letters we want to examine briefly what the Bible says is expected of Christian people in the family setting, starting with the role of the husband in the marriage relationship.

If someone asked you, "According to the Bible, what is the husband's responsibility in marriage?" what would you say? This is what Paul said: "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 the 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. 'For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (Ephesians 5:25-33).

Husbands, love your wives! This is God's command to the Christian husband. When Paul tells husbands to love their wives, he is calling for them to display a continual, purposeful decision to always act in her best interest! Paul feels that so strongly that he says the husband should love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25). Therefore, the husband should continually give himself up for the sake of seeing to his wife's best interests. This passage makes it clear that the Christian husband should seek his wife's welfare in two broad areas.

First, the husband must seek his wife's spiritual growth. We are told that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her in order to make the church holy, radiant, and blameless (Ephesians 5:26,27). We are also told that husbands are to love their wives just as, or in the same way, that Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25,28). Therefore, there has got to be some sense in which the husband labors to make his own wife holy, radiant, and blameless. In a spiritual sense, if a man's wife is holy, she has been set apart for God's service; if she is radiant, she is filled with the evidence of God's presence; and if she is blameless, she is fit to face the judgement of God. In short, the Christian husband must live his life in such a way that he is prepared to give an account to God for the spiritual progress of his wife. This means that by his own example and life he will encourage her to continually sharpen her spiritual life through private devotion and public service to Christ and the church, and he will be willing to discuss spiritual matters with her. This also implies that he himself must learn and grow in Christ in order to help his wife.

Second, the husband must seek his wife's physical and emotional welfare. Just as the husband would feed and care for his own body, he must feed and care for his wife (Ephesians 5:28,29). When Paul spoke of a man feeding his wife he implies that the man will strive to provide for his wife's material and physical needs. Furthermore, when Paul refers to caring for a wife, the expression he uses in the Greek literally means to "keep warm." Therefore, to care for his wife a husband must cherish his wife

so that emotionally she feels the warmth of his love and faithfulness.

The test of love: Treat her as a co-heir of life eternal. 1 Peter 3:7 says, "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, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." Often times the real test of a husband's love for his wife will be seen in the fact that he treats his wife with the same respect that he would treat another brother or sister in Christ. Sometimes a husband will forget and take his wife for granted and begin to treat her in ways that he would not dream of treating someone else. The Christian husband, however, is called to remember that his wife is a co-heir of eternal life with him and should treat her with the appropriate respect. One convenient way for a man to test the way in which he is treating his wife is by testing himself against Paul's definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. The Christian husband should periodically ask himself the following questions in relation to his wife: Am I patient with her? Am I kind to her? Am I not envious of her? Am I not boastful around her? Am I not sinfully proud around her? Am I not rude to her? Am I not self-seeking? Am I not easily angered at her? Do I not keep a record of wrongs against her? Do I despise evil and rejoice in the truth? Do I protect her? Do I trust her? Do I display hope in her? Do I persevere with her?

Naturally, the command for a Christian man to love his wife and the test of that love are ideals that he must strive for. Even so, these ideals must not be taken for granted. The Bible makes it clear that our relationship with God is determined by our relationship to people and for the Christian husband that begins with his response to his own wife on a daily basis (1 John 4:20,21).

May God bless you as you contemplate these important truths concerning the Christian family.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND STUDY

1. According to Ephesians 5:25,28 a man is to love his wife in what way?
2. According to Ephesians 5:26,27 the Christian husband is to help his wife become holy, radiant, and blameless. What does it mean to help her become holy? radiant? blameless?
3. According to Ephesians 5:28,29 a husband is to do what for his wife?
4. According to Paul the husband is to feed and care for his wife. What does it mean to feed her? care for her?
5. Peter said that a Christian man should treat his wife as a co-heir of what? (1 Peter 3:7)
6. What questions should a Christian husband periodically ask himself in order to evaluate the way in which he is treating his wife? (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

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There are some things that people who are not Christians, or Christians who are not fully yielded to the Lord, will never understand. As Paul states, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

This is probably nowhere better seen than in the Bible's teaching concerning the responsibility of the Christian wife. For those who are fully yielded to the Lord, the wisdom of God's word is assumed and born out in practice. Those less than yielded tend to bristle at God's teaching in this area. Regardless, the Bible has always stood the test of time and still stands as a guide for what is best for the Christian wife.

Let us first read what God says concerning the Christian wife, then we will examine briefly the implications of these teachings. (1) "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 Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything (Ephesians 5:22-24). (2) "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" (Colossians 3:18). (3) "Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderous or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God" (Titus 2:3-5). (4) "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 talk by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry 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. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear" (1 Peter 3:1-6).

We detect immediately that the basic responsibility of the Christian wife, whether her husband is a Christian or not, is to submit herself to her husband. This obviously raises a host of questions: What is submission? What are its limits? Why is this the wife's basic rule? What is the value of the wife submitting to her husband?

What is submission? As the Bible uses the term, it seems to suggest "voluntary subordination to the authority of the husband." This points immediately to the wife's full equality with her husband. If she were inferior to the husband, he would be in a position to demand her submission. That, however, is not the case. As a full equal, the wife does not yield her equality, but she does voluntarily defer her authority to the husband (cf. Philippians 2:6-8). Submission, therefore, is not the husband's demand but the wife's choice in bestowing honor upon her husband! It is, therefore, an act of grace in which the wife shows she values her husband more than she does herself.

What are the limits of submission? Notice that the Bible does not say that a Christian wife is to submit to each and every man. In fact, it says quite the opposite! In terms of personal relationships, the only man out of 5 billion that she is called on by God to voluntarily submit to is one man--her husband. This obviously frees her from the tyranny of the senseless abuses of countless insensitive, egotistical, and immoral men. She does not have to stand for that!

Why is submission the wife's role? There is a divine moral order revealed in Scripture that must be taken seriously. Paul writes, "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of every woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3). Just as God and Christ are full equals (John 10:30), yet for the sake of unity and the accomplishment of the divine will, Christ voluntarily submitted to the Father (Philippians 2:5-8), so it is with the husband and wife united in God's image. The husband and wife are full equals, yet for the sake of unity and the accomplishment of God's will in the family unit, the wife voluntarily submits to the husband. In this sense, the wife's submission is also like that of Eve whose main task was not to do her own thing, but rather to help her husband accomplish God's will (Genesis 1:18).

What is the value of the wife submitting to her husband? (1) The primary value is that it offers her an opportunity to express through her relationship to her husband, her own allegiance to Christ (Ephesians 5:22). The act of submitting herself to her husband is one means of submitting herself to the Lord. (2) Since it "is fitting in the Lord" for the wife to submit to her husband, it gives her an opportunity through her relationship to her husband to reveal her confidence in the wisdom of God's word and thus help insure that God's word is not maligned (Titus 2:5). (3) Such behavior, when children are involved in the family unit, actually gives the wife the privilege of modeling the mission of Christ while allowing the husband to model the role of our heavenly Father. Isn't it interesting that we are told in Scripture to imitate God (Ephesians 5:1) and Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1)? For the child, however, the old adage is true: a child will learn what he lives. How fortunate is the child whose dad will, through his authority in the home, model the heavenly Father and whose mother will, through her submission in the home, model the Lord Jesus Christ.

Submission as discussed in the Bible will normally work itself out naturally in the Christian home through the co-operative efforts of a man and wife who together want to do God's will. Each of them understand that, "In the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman" (1 Corinthians 11:11). If their marriage is going to reflect the divine oneness that God intends, they know that they must be dependent upon each other: the wife must be dependent upon the husband's love (Ephesians 5:25-33) and the husband must be dependent upon the wife's submission to voluntarily bestow on him the honor of "head of the house" (Ephesians 5:22). And, after all is said and done, we must all remember that we are "to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ!" (Ephesians 5:21). May God bless you as you think on these things and as you offer your life in submission to Christ and to others for Christ's sake.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND STUDY (40)

1. What is the wife's basic responsibility? (Ephesians 5:22-24)
2. What is the wife's basic responsibility if she is married to an unbeliever? (1 Peter 3:1)
3. How many men is the Christian wife to submit herself to? (Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18)
4. What is the divine moral order revealed in 1 Corinthians 11:3?
5. Why did Christ submit to the Father and why is it important for the Christian wife to understand? (Philip 2:5-8)
6. Name three things of value in the wife's submission to her husband. (Eph 5:22; Titus 2:5; Eph 5:1; 1 Cor 11:1)
7. In a Christian marriage the man and wife will understand that they are dependent upon each other (1 Cor 11:11). In what ways are they dependent upon each other? (Ephesians 5:25-33; Ephesians 5:22)

A Home That Runs- "Strong Up the Middle"

1. When we first planned this series on the home, I was excited about the similarities between the home and baseball- Before last weekend when the Cubs swept the Cardinals- Please don't tease- I'm a little sensitive.
2. One similarity is one of the axioms of baseball: To win consistently, a team must be "strong up the middle". You baseball fans know what I'm talking about, but let me explain for the benefit of the Non-believers. IE The middle of the field- C, SS, 2B, CF is where the majority of the balls will be hit- therefore they are the key positions.

3. A family works the same way. Lots of players- children at home or away, in-laws, siblings, But there's no escaping the fact the key positions in a winning family are husband and wife.4. This relationship is in the middle of all the others- it is where the action is. So we begin the series on the family here.

(By the way, if you are not married, don't tune this out. You will learn things you can use in the future in your life or being able to help others. Next week we will focus on solid singles.)

5. Big risk: Julie reminds me that every time I try to preach on the family our relationship takes a nose dive.

TS Look at the plan, the pledges and the power of marriage.

I. THE PLAN FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE.

Where can we find a game plan? In baseball you learn "the book" by hanging around the old timers. (IE Righty vs. Righty) So I have invited some old timers to share Top 10 things I wish someone had told me about marriage:10. One of the two should be able to cook a little- at least macaroni and cheese.

9. Marriage is not necessarily made in Heaven.

8. Husbands should stay out of the laundry room.

7. Going to a marriage counselor shouldn't be a last resort.

6. Two really can not live cheaper than one.

5. Things don't always work out the way you planned.

4. If Momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.

3. A little tenderness goes a long way.

2. You really are marrying into a family and it would be good if you liked them.

1. It does matter how you squeeze the toothpaste.

Where do you find "the book" on marriage? Old Timers? TV Sitcoms?

God cared so much about the family that he provided some foundational guidelines for it in the first book of the Bible.

Genesis 2:18-25 Four fundamentals that produce a family that is strong up the middle are described in Vs. 24,25.1. Severance- (Leave)

Marriage is a beginning and an end.

Your family of origin is no longer primary. God intends for you and your spouse to rely on each other!

IE REBEKAH leaving home to marry Isaac.

Those who fail to cut the ties eventually pay the price.2. Permanence (Cleave)

"This is my new home, and will be until death parts us."

This permanence brings security- for spouse and children.

Permanence isn't an endurance test, but the most fulfilling relationship a person can have, next to a personal relationship with God.

Divorce is such a part of our society and thinking- eliminate it from your speech and then from your thoughts. Close the escape hatch!3. Unity (Weave) "become one flesh"

Unity doesn't mean complete agreement on everything- that won't happen!

It does mean that you are glued together- one flesh.

What is the glue in your relationship? Common hobby? House? Kids? Business?

The real glue of marriage: OUR BELIEFS

[1] Our belief about marriage- we believe til death parts us

[2] Our belief in God- our relationship with Jesus, desire to help each other grow in the faith and belief that He knows best

[3] Our belief that God has a purpose in our being together. Our marriage has been far from perfect, but these beliefs have served as the glue and I recommend them to you.4. Intimacy- "Naked and

unashamed" Intimacy means knowing what is there and accepting what is there when all the covering is gone- Physical, Emotional, Intellectual, Spiritual
Intimacy is one of the greatest needs of a human being.

Show me a marriage where one of the partners can't be "naked without shame" and I will show you a marriage in danger of being rocked by an affair.

We all long for intimacy, and if you are married, God intends for you to develop that with your spouse. Christians being married and just tolerating each other is unacceptable. We must work toward intimacy! (1 Cor. 7:3-5)

How is your marriage in those 4 areas? Severance, Permanence, Unity, Intimacy?

Some may be thinking, "My marriage isn't so hot, but you don't know my situation..." OK, but remember

II. THE PLEDGES OF AN ENDURING MARRIAGE.

Do you remember hearing on your wedding day something like...

Will you take this woman to be your wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love her, honor her, and keep her in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others, keep yourself only unto her so long as you both shall live? AND, do you remember saying "YES"?

No one remembers, but you had to say that to get married!

There is a reason that is in the ceremony: It is because:

1. Marriage is saying "Yes" to an imperfect person.

Your spouse may not be easy to be married to, but that is part of the deal. They may suffer from the same malady- few of us are easy to live with!

If you traded in your spouse, the next one would be just as imperfect- just in different areas.

You knew going into marriage that they weren't perfect, "better or worse" but you may not have known what "worse" meant.

How about this? Familiar ring? I, take you, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death parts us. Remember that?

2. That is in the ceremony because; Marriage is saying "Yes" to an imperfect situation.

Isn't it odd, marriage is supposed to work no matter what the circumstances and we agree to that when we sign up for it?

Given those flaws, (Imperfect person and situation), how is it even possible for a marriage to work?

What is the secret? Simply: LOVE.

IE I love lots of things: My Wife, Baseball, Chinese Food, Mexican Food, Italian Food, Fried Food, Sweet Food...

IE Man was watching basketball on TV- his wife was trying to talk to him, but he was engrossed.

Finally she yelled, "I think you like basketball more than me." He protested, "That's not true, I love football more than you, but not basketball!"

Greek words for love were more specific:

eros- gratifying love, something that pleases me.- Romance- Attraction

Characteristics of eros

1. Self centered- "You meet a need in my life so I love you."

2. Based on feelings- "I feel good about you, and I feel good about me when I am with you."

3. Conditional- "If you continue to meet my needs, I will continue to feel this way."

agaph- The kind of love God has for us and the kind we are commanded to have for one another- You can't command someone to have eros! Characteristics:

1. Other centered- Desires to meet the needs in others lives.
 2. Based on Commitment- "Feelings come and go, but I am here to stay."
 3. Unconditional- "I choose to show love to you, even if you can't or won't meet my needs."
- Somebody said, eros is what makes babies, but agaph is what changes the dirty diapers.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

III. THE POWER OF A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE.

1. In order to build a strong marriage, agaph must become dominant. Eros is important to marriage, few would get married without it, but it is not strong enough to sustain marriage.

Where does this agaph love come from?

2. God is the source of agaph love.

1 John 4:16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

You can't express this kind of unconditional, unselfish, committed love unless you have experienced it and God is the ultimate source of this love. CONCLUSION:

One lady told her preacher, "We didn't know what were doing when we got married. Now we know and we would like a chance to do the wedding again." I think there are others who would echo that sentiment and today I am going to give you the opportunity to renew your vows to your spouse.

Would all of the married folks please stand and face each other and join hands.

(Please reply "I DO")

Men, do you reaffirm your pledge to this woman as your wedded wife, to live together according to God's design of holy marriage? Do you renew your promise to love her, cherish and comfort her, honor and keep her in sickness and in health, and to forsake all others so long as you both shall live?

Ladies, do you reaffirm your pledge to this man as your wedded husband, to live together according to God's design of holy marriage? Do you renew your promise to love him, cherish and comfort him, honor and keep him in sickness and in health, and to forsake all others so long as you both shall live?

Men repeat after me: "I recommit myself to love you my wife.... for better or for worse... for richer or for poorer... in sickness and in health... to love and to cherish... until death parts us... as God has ordained."

Women repeat after me: "I recommit myself to love you my husband.... for better or for worse... for richer or for poorer... in sickness and in health... to love and to cherish... until death parts us... as God has ordained."

Now would the rest of you stand as well...

Ephesians 5 quotes the passage from Genesis and ends by saying "This mystery is great, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church." I want to invite you to make holy vows to Jesus today.

"From this day forward....."

Home Improvement #2 "A Solid Foundation"

1. We desperately want marriage to get off to a good start- the average couple spends 200 hours and quite a bit of money preparing for their wedding.- But sometimes those plans can go awry.
2. Dear Abby, On the topic of disastrous weddings, mine ranks right up there at the top. While I was walking down the aisle someone stepped on my train ripping it from the back of my gown. My aunt immediately sprang from her seat yelling, "I'll fix it!" The wedding ground to a halt while she tried to reattach it. I finally proceeded down the aisle with one hand behind me gripping my ripped train. While ascending the steps to the altar, I fell. By then I was so distracted that when the rabbi reached the Hebrew portion of the ceremony, I couldn't follow what he was saying. The rabbi then exclaimed, "I'm

stopping the ceremony because whatever the bride is repeating is gibberish. So I will begin again, this time in English. So, when I was handed the goblet of wine I drank it all, leaving none for the groom. Once more the ceremony was stopped so more wine could be poured. I was so embarrassed that at the conclusion of the ceremony as we were walking down the aisle the rabbi called out, "You forgot your bouquet." Then I turned around and retrieved it. That's not all. When we arrived at our reception the chef rolled out the cart bearing our gorgeous wedding cake. It was decorated with "Happy Birthday" and someone else's name was on it.

PS My marriage turned out just like my wedding, a total disaster.

3. How do you make a marriage last for a lifetime? Judging from the number of broken hearts and fractured families in our world, the answer appears to be a mystery to many of us.

4. Amazingly, people continue to get married! Matthew 24:37,38

Prop. Since marriage is here to stay, we need to build marriages on the right foundation so they can last through the storms that will come.5. I.E. Matthew 7:24-27

6. Author George Rekers illustrates the situation in this analogy: "Someone is walking along the bank of a river. Suddenly he hears a drowning child calling for help. He dives into the water to rescue the child. While this is happening, another cry for help comes from the middle of the river, and someone else jumps in to pull that victim out. The same thing happens several times, and soon there is a whole group of rescuers pulling people out of the river. After a while they can't keep up with the number of victims that are being swept along by the current. Finally, a couple of them decide to walk upstream and find out who's pushing these people into the river in the first place and put a stop to it."

The "downstream approach" to marriage problems- we invest huge amounts of money, time and energy in psychiatrists, therapists, and counselors.

There's nothing wrong with getting counseling when your marriage or family is in trouble, but wouldn't it be wiser to take an "upstream approach?" Wouldn't it make more sense to work to prevent the problems in the first place?

7. The same couple who spends 200 hours preparing for the wedding on average spends only three hours preparing for marriage.

Weddings are easy (easy for me to say!), marriage is not!

TS- Back to Genesis- to the author of marriage and look at the foundation.I. GOD'S PROVISION OF MARRIAGE.

Adam and Eve- the only ideal couple in the world- [1] no courtship [2] she was only minutes old, [3]he was recovering from surgery, [4] she was the prettiest woman in the world, [5] no mother-in-law to come over and visit!

Foundational truths about marriage-Genesis 2:18-23

1. Marriage is from God. 2:18

Man wasn't the final creation of God- marriage was- divinely designed- God's idea!

God Himself gave away the first bride.

Marriage was a gift from God to man- still is!

2. Marriage is for our good.

Genesis 2:18 not good Adam alone was incomplete, he needed community.

Animal inspection 2:19,20- God wanted Adam to appreciate what He was about to do with the creation of Eve. Adam couldn't find any soul- companionship with any of the animals- no soul!

Surgery 2:21,22- from the rib- not the head to be above, or the foot to be below but from the side to be beside and near his heart.

Coming out of surgery 2:23- Don't think Adam had the "preacher tone", he was excited about this special creation of God. "Just right!"

Genesis 1:31 very good
In the book, "The Day America Told the Truth", it says that almost 50% of Americans today say that there is no good reason to ever get married, but you couldn't convince Adam of that! Good gift from God for Adam!

Proverbs 18:22 & 19:14

3. We need to see our marriages the way Adam saw his! We should see God as bringing the right person into our lives to help us be all that we can be.

I.E. I can't begin to tell you the blessing that Julie has been to me and the things that God has taught me through her! God's gift to me!

II. THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE- INTIMACY.

Did you hear about the lady who first married a millionaire, then a Hollywood producer, then a preacher, and finally an undertaker? That is one for the money, two for the show, three to get ready and four to go! She knew why she was getting married, many today don't know.

Genesis 2:24 they shall become one flesh = INTIMACY, CLOSENESS

"Personal space invaders"- by invitation only. It is risky to invite someone to be close, to allow them inside my personal space. Intimacy makes me vulnerable.

Intimacy can exist without marriage (single people need this too!), but no healthy marriage can exist without intimacy.

God intends for the two to become one- God reached into Adam's flesh and made two from one. The goal of marriage is for those to become one flesh again.

There is a level of intimacy that God intended for husband and wife that cannot be found anywhere else
WHAT DOES "ONE FLESH" MEAN? Three occurrences in the New Testament:

1. One flesh involves the sexual union. 1 Corinthians 6:16

God invented sex! The Puritans thought that God left the room when a couple had sex. Not so, God created sex and called it good.

God gave sex to a husband and wife as a way to celebrate their pursuit of oneness and soul communion. By the way, Sexual intimacy without emotional intimacy produces emptiness instead of closeness. Sex becomes counter productive.

2. One flesh means a God-made union. One flesh is a mysterious creation of God where He joins a man and a woman.

Matthew 19:4-6 When a couple commits in marriage God actually joins them into one new life.

One flesh- partly the sexual union, partly revering the God-madness of the union and ...

3. One flesh is a lifetime process.

Positionally, we are one immediately, but practically we spend our lives pursuing this oneness.

Ephesians 5:28-33

Lorene, a bride of 50 years, was at the beauty parlor getting her hair done. There were several younger women there also getting their hair done and they began to talk about their husbands. Or, I should say, they began to complain about their husbands: "My husband's so lazy that he won't even" and "You think that's bad, you should see my husband. He ... yaddah, yadda, yadda ..." This gripe session went on for a while and Lorene could tell that these women really needed some encouragement. So, finally, she spoke up: "Girls, let me tell you something: I've been married for over fifty years. And in the last few years, my husband has really gotten a lot better. So, don't give up!"

Don't give up, don't settle for putting up with each other! This deep soul companionship- one flesh is worth working for!

III. THE PATH TO MARITAL INTIMACY. Genesis 2:24,25

1. Severance- Leave 2:24a- Notice, this was given before there were parents to leave!

Leaving needs to be Physical, Financial, and Emotional. Cut the cord!

God's answer to man's need for companionship wasn't children, but spouse!

God didn't create a group of guys to hang out with!

This relationship must become primary, more important than all others.

You can never have real soul companionship until there is no person on earth more important to you than your mate.

2. Permanence- Cleave, Joined 2:24b-

The word literally means to be glued to- I.E. Tough as Nails glue- the only way to get those boards apart is to rip them up. (Brent Qualls)

Remember that intimacy is based on security- the security that comes from knowing that the other accepts you and isn't going to leave.

By the way, this is one of the reasons why living together is so disastrous.

Of 100 couples who decide to live together, 40 break up before marriage. Of the 60 who marry at least 45 divorce. Only 15 of the original 100 make it over the long haul. All of which leads one researcher to conclude that "the worst decision a couple can make is to live together before marriage." WHY???

Letter from a woman who lived with her husband 6 and a half years before they became Christians.

After they became Christians they married, and at the time of this letter had been married about 4 years.

"It's a lot different being married than living together. I'm glad the distinction has been so clear cut for me. When we lived together we were committed as long as we were in love, but now we are in love because we are committed. This is a real difference. Our life is not perfect. Many marital problems are the clear result of our past life together. I wish we had never lived together. In our case we would have had greater respect for ourselves. We would have learned to resolve disagreements and to negotiate, rather than the style we learned of secretly evaluating each problem, asking the question "Is it worth breaking up over?"; thereby teaching us to deal with our problems with bitter acquiescence or stiff necked inflexibility, depending on our secret answer to that question. This ruins true trust and intimacy and encourages fantasies about living alone. Now we face problems and we know that the old ways are inappropriate. We don't really have any substitutes and we no longer have the old breaking up option as an escape.

God knew that you needed soul companionship- a soul mate with whom you could have true oneness and that you could never find that level of intimacy in a relationship that could quit tomorrow!

Lock the escape hatch! Never utter the word divorce!

3. Transparency- Naked and unashamed- 2:25

No embarrassment- totally honest and open with each other.

When sin came into the world this changed and they feared openness.

They began to cover up before God and before each other.

God wants marriage to be a place where you can be fully exposed and still be fully accepted. That creates intimacy, secrets and cover ups do the opposite.

4. Reverence-

Marriage is holy ground.

You can talk about baseball without talking about God, but you can't talk about marriage without talking about God, because God built the temple of marriage.

I cannot preach a wedding and not talk about the one who built it.

Marriage is God's gift and He needs to be a part of it. - 3 way relationship! Conclusion-

Provision of marriage- God's gift to you

Purpose of marriage- intimacy

Path- Severance, Permanence, Transparency and Reverence

God wants intimacy for you! With Him and with spouse.

It starts with intimacy with God.

Home Improvement- Building a Permanent Structure- Romance

1. I believe that most men suffer from RDS- Romance Deficiency Syndrome-
 2. Top ten signs that you are romantically challenged-
 10. When you bring home flowers your wife asks, "What have you done this time?"
 9. Instead of buying your wife a card you pick one out for her at Wal Mart, have her look at it and then put it back on the rack.
 8. You have taken your wife flowers that you picked up at the graveyard.
 7. The last Valentine's Day gift you bought came from the house wares department.
 6. Your idea of a compliment is "That outfit doesn't make you look as fat."
 5. You plan a romantic getaway weekend around a tractor pull.
 4. Your idea of a romantic movie is "Jaws".
 3. The closest you've ever been to a florist is \$2 roses at the gas station.
 2. Your idea of a dinner date involves a drive through and eating in the car.
 1. You're idea of a candlelit evening is two fishing poles and a Coleman lantern.
 3. Some of you would say that your marriage is stable, but there is no sparkle.
 4. You are kind of like a first down marker in football- chained together, but always about ten yards apart.
 5. DEFINITION- "Romance is that feeling you feel when you feel like your going to feel like you never felt before." Probably true, but not too helpful!
 6. God created us, making us capable of romantic feelings, BUT, feelings come and go.
 7. Kind of like the guy who said, "I never knew that puppy love would lead to a dog's life."
 8. What causes the wonderful intense feelings of romantic love to fade?
[1] Fairy-tale-itis- Unrealistic expectations- Real life men and women don't act like people in the movies. Clayton asks, "Is this a true story?" NO!
[2] Familiarity- The new wears off and he has bad breath in the morning and she doesn't look quite the same with her hair in curlers.
[3] Failure to forgive- nothing can hurt romance like resentment.
[4] Financial restraint- When we first married we had no money, but we had more money to spend on each other then than now.
[5] Forgetting to make romance a top priority- It takes work to keep romance alive. It took work to get it started too!
 9. Sadly, many people wrongly think that when romance wanes the only solution is to find a new partner.
Prop. Dying romance doesn't have to be a terminal disease.
 10. Revelation 2:4,5 This verse is addressed to the church, but it applies to marriage as well.
Special romantic getaways are not the answer, not a bad idea, but there is no substitute for daily romance.
TS I want to look at four principles that will improve your romance in marriage, you can also apply three of these to any other relationship.
- I. DEMONSTRATE UNUSUAL ATTENTION.
1. Give your mate the time and energy to let them know that you are not taking them for granted.
 2. 1 Peter 3:7 KJV says, live with her according to knowledge.
Men joke about not being able to figure out women and understand them. You may not be able to understand all women, but you better understand your wife.
 3. Rick Warren says, "Husbands, if you don't learn what makes her tick, you're going to learn what ticks her off!"

4. Anything you love you study! I.E. You read the journals (investing), attend the seminars (how to be a better coach), you study the Bible if you want to love God- therefore pay attention to your mate if you want to love him/her.

5. Philippians 1:9 love grows with knowledge

6. Do you remember the attention you gave each other when dating? That attention said, "You are important to me!" You've got to keep doing that! (Rev. 2:4,5)

7. What are some ways that you can love with knowledge?

[1] Make meaningful time for each other.

[2] Focus on conversation- eye to eye without paper or TV- that is how you communicated when you were dating!

[3] Take an interest in what interests your mate- Phil. 2:4

Obviously you don't have to share all his/her interests, but try some!

8. HARRY TRUMAN- The older folks in the congregation will know the love story of Harry and Bess Truman. But did you know that Harry had to court her a long time. He asks Bess to marry him in 1911. She's said no, and kept saying no until 1919. It took him over eight years to win her hand. When Bess Truman died in the early 1980's, as they were looking through her house, they found over 1200 letters that Harry had written to his wife. He never stopped paying attention to her.

9. BOUQUET STORY- A man was riding a bus in the South. It was a hot summer day and the old man was sitting with a bouquet of flowers on his lap. A little girl was sitting just across the aisle. She kept looking at the fresh flowers. He could tell that she enjoyed them. Just then the bus stopped and He impulsively put the bouquet of flowers in her lap as he got up and left the bus. He turned and said to her, "Here, you take these flowers, I was going to give them to my wife, but I think she would want you to have them. I'll tell her that I gave them to you. " Then the old man slowly got off the bus, walked across the street and through a small gate to a cemetery.

He never stopped paying attention to his wife!

10. Romance blossoms when your mate feels cherished- demonstrate attention.

II. COMMUNICATE MUTUAL APPRECIATION.

1. The words you speak are very important!

Give strokes, not pokes. Little digs will bury a marriage!

2. Imagine if Eve had said to Adam, "Do you really love me?" and he had replied, "Who else?" or "You're the only girl in the world for me!"

3. Good, strong, romantic marriages are full of love talk- sweet appreciative words! (I.E. Jimmy and Dorothy Waddle's example-)

4. Song of Solomon 1:9 That may not seem like much of a compliment, but they understood that only the finest horses would be chosen for this task! Solomon was saying, "Out of all the women in the world, you are special to me."

So guys if the romance isn't flaming, go home from church today and tell your wife that she is a great mare! See if that helps! (Calling her an Old Nag may be counterproductive!)

5. Ephesians 4:29 Speak words that build up instead of tear down!

6. JOHNNY LINGO- They still tell the story in Hawaii, of the man who lived there many years ago, by the name of Johnny Lingo. In Hawaii the custom was that when a man wanted to propose marriage he had to pay the father of the bride a price of three cows, unless she was very, very lovely. Then maybe four cows. Well., Johnny Lingo was the wealthiest man on the island. He was also the shrewdest trader. There was a man on the island that had two daughters, one as rather homely, but the other was very attractive. Johnny Lingo came calling and everyone knew that he would want that young girl.

Everybody was excited. Could he get her for just three cows, could the dad hold out for 4 cows? But

Johnny Lingo asked to see the older daughter. The father thought he had made a mistake. But he said no, he would like to see the older one. And she came out and Johnny said, "I will give you 10 cows for her." The father thought he was crazy, but quickly consummated the deal before Johnny could change his mind. Everyone laughed. But Johnny said, "We're going on a two year honeymoon. And left the island. When they came back in two years and everybody remembered and spotted Johnny Lingo, but they couldn't recognize the woman that was with him. She was so charming and carried herself with such grace and confidence. And she was winsome. And then they realized, that was his wife. And in Hawaii to this day, they will call a very special woman a 10 Cow woman.

Guys if the horse thing doesn't work you can always try this one.

(I can envision a couple of our high school guys mooing when an exceptionally pretty girl walks by!)

7. People blossom under affirmation- it is a form of verbal caressing.

8. What kind of words does your mate hear from you? Is it You always, and You never or sweet words of appreciation?

Demonstrate attention, Communicate appreciation and ...

III. CELEBRATE PHYSICAL AFFECTION.

1. If you see a couple that you don't know holding hands in a restaurant, don't you just assume that they are dating?

2. God created our bodies to need to be touched.

I.E. Studies have shown that babies need human touch to grow and prosper!

3. Proverbs 5:18,19 LIVING BIBLE? Be faithful to your own wife!

Touching is to the soul what food is to the body! Too many marriages are malnourished!

4. A word to the husbands- Husbands need to learn the importance of non sexual touching. That is not an oxymoron, there really is such a thing!

Women find affection important in its own right, rather than affection that is leading up to something else.

The simplest and most readily mastered expression of affection is a hug!

HUGGING IS HEALTHY- Hugging is healthy, it helps the body's immune system, it keeps you healthier, it cures depression, it reduces stress, it induces sleep, it's invigorating its rejuvenating there's no unpleasant side-effects, hugging is nothing less than a miracle drug. Hugging is all natural, its organic, naturally sweet, no pesticides, no preservatives, no artificial ingredients, and 100 percent wholesome. Hugging is practically perfect. There are no movable parts, no batteries to replace, no periodic checkups, low energy consumption, high energy yield; inflation proof, none fattening, no monthly payments, no insurance premiums, theft proof, nontaxable, none polluting, and of course, fully returnable.

By now some guy is squirming in his seat saying, "I'm just not the affectionate type." Maybe not, but I bet you were when you were dating or she probably wouldn't have married you! (Rev. 2:4,5)

5. A word to the wives- Wives need to learn the importance of a joyful and meaningful sexual relationship with your husband.

(Embarrassed? Me too! But this needs to be preached.)

1 Corinthians 6:19-7:5 These verses are important instructional verses for our perverted society. They teach

[1] Sex is a legitimate need- It is good not bad! A gift from God!

Part of "glorifying God in your body" is a right sexual relationship in marriage!

Kids need to be taught WAIT for sex, not NO.

Timing is everything- That is true in hitting a baseball- Only one guy has hit the ball out of Busch Stadium-not McGwire- not a household name- Mike Laga- foul ball, swung too early!

The right timing for sex is in the confines of a loving committed marriage

[2] Sex is a spiritual responsibility in marriage.

Sex should not be treated as a bargaining chip.

This is one need that cannot have legitimately met anywhere else but marriage and it is not met in marriage unless both partners enter willfully and joyfully.

How often do you think about food when you go on a diet? Don't put your mate on a forced sexual diet!
(7:5)

THE MESSAGE:

IV. CULTIVATE PRAYER.

1. 1 Corinthians 7:5 There is only one thing more intimate than sex and that is prayer.

2. Prayer brings you into harmony with God and into harmony with each other.

1 John 1:7

3. Real romance comes from being in one accord with each other- united- Prayer can help accomplish that.

4. FRANCIS SCHAEFFER- I'm sure many of you have read books by Francis and Edith Schaefer. Do you know how they met? Years ago as a young man he went to a seminar in a small town. The speaker gave message entitled, "Why I Know that Jesus is Not the Son of God and the Bible is Not the Word of God!" Francis thought, "I'll be the only one here to disagree with this." And as soon as the speaker was through, he stood up and challenge him. He defended the deity of Christ and the authenticity of the word of God. He sat back down, and immediately a young lady stood up and she too defended Jesus Christ. As soon as they were dismissed France's went over and said what is your name. She said, "Edith." He said I would like to walk you home. She said, "I have a date ." He said, "Break it!" And she did! And there started one of the most beautiful marriages in the kingdom of God for over 50 years. A marriage built on their absolute loyalty to Jesus Christ.

5. Pray for each other!

6. Pray with each other. (For each other and the kids!)

This is not an area that Julie and I have had much success in. We are still working in this direction. Difficult- Tammy Wiley had trouble, but after hearing the testimonies of women of faith she began doing this.

Conclusion:

1. Romantic feelings aren't the root of a good marriage, they are the fruit.

2. Agape love is the root. When a wife knows that she's got that kind of love from her husband and a husband knows his wife loves him this way, they can keep falling in love over and over again.

3. MENDELSSOHN- I'm sure you have heard the music of Mendelssohn. Did you ever hear the story of his grandfather Moses? A short man in stature, and deformed; he was born with a humpback. He went to a Hamburg on business to meet a merchant. The merchant had a beautiful daughter named Frumpshe. And Moses fell helplessly in love. But Frumpshe wouldn't even looking at him, because his figure was so distorted. He tried to see her for several days without success. It was time for him to leave, so he tried one last time. So he walked up the steps to her apartment. He tried to talk her, but she just kept looking at the floor. Finally, he said, "Do you believe that marriages are made in heaven?" And she said, "Yes I do, do you? " (Still looking at the floor). He said, "Oh yes!" When a little boy is born God picks a woman to be his wife. And when I was born God picked a woman to be my wife, but God said she will be humpback." And I said, "Oh no Lord, a humpback would be a terrible tragedy for a woman. Please give me the hump! And let her be beautiful." And for the first time Frumpshe looked up into the eyes of the man she would later marry. Because she knew he would always cherish her.

4. Friends, that's what God wants to have happen in marriage. He wants you to know there is a person

in this world who will always cherish you.

5. Maybe you don't know that. What you need to know most this morning, is that God cherishes you. Even if nobody else in the world wants to put their arms around you tonight, God does! And God will!

Home Improvement #7 The Sense of a Fence1.

I read the story of a woman who was a little too close to the third story window one day and accidentally fell out of a window. As luck would have it she fell right into the bed of a dump truck that was going down the street. She kind of got stuck and couldn't get out, and she could not get the driver's attention, so it just took off down the street with her in the bed of that dump truck. And it drove past some foreign diplomats who saw her and remarked, "Another example of those wasteful Americans, that woman looks like she's got another good ten years left on her.

2. I heard about one guy who told his wife than when she turned 40, he was going to trade her in on two twenty year olds. She said, "Good luck, you're not wired for 220!"3. We live in a day of throw away marriages and recyclable partners-

The Bible has a word for that, hard word, unpopular word- ADULTERY

4. As a whole, our society sees nothing wrong with sex before marriage or outside the bonds of marriage. (Say "no" to drugs, and "Be Safe" to illicit sex)

(2 sources of information- "The Day America Told the Truth" and a study by Rutgers University "The State of Our Unions" released June 7, 2000)

31% of Americans admit that they are having or have had an affair.

62% of adult Americans see no problem with somebody having an affair.

Of high school seniors- 66% of boys and 58 % of girls think that living together before marriage is a good idea that helps you find out if you can get along.

By the way, the facts don't bear that out- of those who cohabit- only 1 in 6 relationships last 3 years; 1 in 10 lasts 5 years; and if they do marry they are more likely to divorce than if they had not lived together.

5. The media glorifies adultery- I.E. Does anybody remember the 1995 movie "Bridges of Madison County" with Clint Eastwood? He didn't shoot anybody in this one, but he does commit adultery with a farmer's wife while he has the kids at the state fair. In a letter given to her children after her death Franchesca explains that this love affair gave her the strength to endure the remaining years of her marriage. Try that one on your spouse sometime. She also offers them this bit of advice, "Do what you have to, to be happy in this life."

Thus, with adultery, as with pick up basketball, " no harm, no foul."

6. Contrary to common belief- Adultery is a big deal! Why?

[1] Adultery Dishonors God- God created sex to strengthen marriage and help seal the covenant and reach intimacy- soul mate. God is not pleased when sex is used to break the covenant rather than cement it.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;

Hebrews 13:4 Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

[2] Adultery Destroys People-

David and Bathsheba- Uriah, Infant son, David's family was a mess as a result

Adultery made God's top 10 list of rules for a healthy society! Why? The family is the building block of society. Communities cannot survive when families don't function and marriages can't last without commitment and trust.

I think Dear Abby understood that. Several years ago a man wrote her in the paper and said, " Dear Abby, I'm having an affair with two different women and I can't marry them both. So tell me what to do, but don't give me any of that morality staff. " Abby wrote back and said, "Dear Sir, the only difference between humans and animals is morality. Please write to a veterinarian!"

When sex is treated lightly, inevitably people get treated lightly and they get hurt!

Proverbs 5:3,4 The lips of another man's wife may be as sweet as honey and her kisses as smooth as olive oil, 4 but when it is all over, she leaves you nothing but bitterness and pain.

Proverbs 6:32 But a man who commits adultery doesn't have any sense. He is just destroying himself.

The Indians used to teach their children this parable. On the top of a cliff was a brave and he saw a rattlesnake. The snake was up there where it was cold and where he was easy prey for the hawks and the eagles. And the snakes said would you please carry me down this cliff where I'll be safe? But the man said you are a dangerous poisonous snake, why would I carry you. But the snake promised if you would do me this favor I will be your friend, and I will not bite you. And so the brave picked up the snake and put them inside his coat and carried him safely down to the bottom of the hill. And when he got to the bottom of the hill the snake gave a vicious bite to the abdomen of the brave. And as he fell under the weight of the poison and was about to die, he said, "But you lied! Why did you bite me?" The snake said, "You knew who I was when you picked me up." The Bible says, friends, "Don't be misled." When you play around with adultery you're playing with fire. And you're going to get burned! (Prov 6:27) And people are going to get hurt. And God is going to be dishonored.

7. You may think you are immune to sexual temptation, but let me remind you of what the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 10:12,13 You will be tempted, but you can overcome! Prop. Each of us needs to build a fence around our marriages or future marriages! HOW???

TS I want to read an Old Testament story and suggest four rules that will help.

Genesis 39:6-12 I. TAKE A STAND BEFOREHAND!

1. Before the crisis came, Joseph had already committed himself to living by God's standard!

The heat of battle doesn't lend itself to making good decisions!

2. 1 Peter 1:15,16 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

"Holy" set apart for special use by God.

3. Have you ever committed yourself to sexual purity?

Wedding vows? "Keep yourself only unto her so long as you both shall live?" 4. Psalm 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. II. NEVER GRIN AT SIN.

1. I love Joseph's refusal- "How could I do this great evil and sin against God?" Pretty impolite!

Couldn't he just say, "I'm not in the mood, I'm afraid we'll get caught..." 2. Adultery starts in the head, not the bed! Keep your thoughts clean.

3. In football, the team that controls the line of scrimmage usually wins the game. In the battle for sexual purity, the line of scrimmage is the mind.

4. Refuse to fantasize about how great it would be to be with that caring guy or that beautiful woman. Control your thoughts!

5. Let me share three verses that you might ought to memorize-

Psalm 101:3 I will set no worthless thing before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not fasten its grip on me. (Movies, Internet)

Romans 16:19 ... I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. (You don't need to know everything! music lyrics)

Job 31:1 "I have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin? (I will control what I look at and think about.) III. DON'T INSPIRE THE FIRE.

1. Gen. 39:10 Joseph not only refused to lie with her,. he also refused to be with her. He drew a line way before the physical sin itself!
2. A Sunday school teacher was teaching the 10 commandments to a group of 3rd graders. One little girl asked what adultery was. The teacher was taken back and then said, "When you are married to someone that person is very special and you should never act like you're married to someone else."
3. There are some things that are out of bounds-
Sexual innuendoes, prolonged stares, lingering touches, flirting
4. Romans 13:14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

Sometimes we get into trouble by our carelessness!

5. I was blessed this week by hearing of a man who was attracted to a woman in his work place. He admitted it to his wife. She admitted having a similar problem at work. They both decided to change jobs. They valued their marriage too much to inspire the fire.IV. BETTER TO RETREAT THAN TO BE BEAT.

1. Flight is better than fight when it comes to sexual sin.
2. Gen 39:12- he fled and she grabbed his coat as he fled.
3. Russell Boatman- You fight sexual temptation with your hat- grab it and run!"4. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Conclusion:1. Sexual temptation calls for drastic action-

For years and years those of us who watched Wide World of Sports on Saturday saw the poor ski jumper. Remember him? "The agony of defeat." He was going down that ski slope so smoothly and all of a sudden tumbled four or five times and had a hard spill knocking a cameraman and spectators to the ground. Do you know the true story about that jump? He went off on purpose. What nobody ever knew was that the ice had become so hard that he realized that he was going to jump past the safe landing slope area. If he had continued to jump he would have landed on the hard flat surface which could have been fatal. He chose to go off the jump and fall there rather than make the jump that could have cost his life. It was a drastic hard choice. But it saved him.

2. Saying "No" to adultery isn't easy and it may even cause some emotional pain- (Joseph spent the next couple of years in prison!) but it is worth it.

3. One question we haven't touched on- "What if I have committed adultery?"[1] Confess your sin to God- don't blame your mate or any other person!

[2] End the adulterous relationship- cut it off completely! Deal with it drastically! No phone calls, remove yourself.

[3] Begin to rebuild your marriage.

4. John 8- woman caught in adultery- Jesus offered grace when he said, "Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more!"Jesus offers grace to you and a better way to live.

5. Will you commit yourself to Jesus and to living His way?

Rod Farthing

ARM Regional Development Director

"Remain faithful unto death .." Rev. 2:10B