

Dynamic Christian Living

by

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CHAPTER FOUR -

The Christian View of Marriage

"Marriage is honorable" (Hebrews 13:4)

THE home is not simply to be regarded as one among the many institutions of our complicated social order. It is a part of GOD's original plan for man. This is an important truth which is being lost sight of in our day, and consequently needs our thoughtful attention and emphasis.

The home holds a position of greater importance than any of the institutions, organizations and societies to which we belong and it should have the first place in our thinking. Let no relationship of life, no matter how important, crowd out the home. Employment, social organizations, religious interests, political connections - all of these have their place and each calls for its measure of loyalty and interest. But they are and must always be secondary. The home comes first.

Perhaps we ought to explain why we include religious interests, as well as other matters, as taking a secondary place to the home. Of course we do not mean that the home will keep us from doing the Lord's will. JESUS Himself said that the man or woman who puts father and mother, children or home above obedience to Him, is not worthy of Him. We are not suggesting that we should put anything before CHRIST, but we do say that having put CHRIST first, we shall find that our responsibility in the home is the highest responsibility in life, always understanding of course, that the Lord may definitely lead otherwise.

So often those who are active in the church, or in other phases of Christian work, neglect their homes and their children, and let them go to ruin spiritually, excusing themselves on the grounds that they have been too busily engaged in the Lord's work to care for the home.

We cannot believe that the Lord leads anyone to let his own children go to hell while that person is out trying to win other people's children to CHRIST. What about the American home? Is it what it ought to be?

Well, when one thinks of all the modern inventions and improvements which have been incorporated into our homes all designed for more pleasant living, one might be prone to expect that American home life was at a high level. There are electric refrigerators in our kitchens, radios in almost every room; modern heating, plumbing and even air conditioning units are

reasonably common; and yet spiritual, national and social leaders are deeply troubled in our day because they recognize that the home has to a large extent failed.

It is obvious then that it takes more than four walls and elaborate furnishings to make a home. Character is not produced by the things a family possesses, but is wrought out in the crucible of the experience of true home life. We realize that all of our inventions and improvements have failed to improve the home.

Sad to say it is not what it was a generation ago.

Home and the life which centers in it, has lost much of its meaning in recent decades. Someone has, in a cynical mood, suggested that in modern life one can easily do without a home. A modern girl is said to have answered a real estate agent who wanted to sell her a house, "A home? Why do I need a home? I was born in a hospital, educated in a college, courted in an automobile, and married in a church. I eat at a restaurant. I spend my mornings on the golf course, my afternoons at the bridge table, and my evenings at the movies. When I die, I'll be buried from the undertaker's. Why do I need a home? All I need is a mailing address and a garage."

Of course, this is an over-statement intended to be humorous, and yet it rather sharply delineates the trend of much modern thinking about home-life.

It is a truism that the home is the backbone of civilization. Our hopes for the future rest in the home, for there the men and women of tomorrow are now being reared and trained. It may be possible for some of the adults of our generation to live upright and useful lives apart from Christian faith (although one doubts even that effort as being very effective) because they are living on the moral momentum imparted to them in the homes of their godly and earnest Christian parents.

If they, then, have not the kind of a personal faith which imparts the same virtues to their children, and they in turn will have far less to pass on to the following generation, there will obviously be a rapidly growing deficiency in the moral character of our children and our children's children. That process has not only begun but is already well on its way to its awful harvest.

The head of our Federal Bureau of Investigation, J. Edgar Hoover, and others who have been deeply concerned about the problem of juvenile delinquency, have recognized all this to be true, and have urged upon parents the need of sending their children to church and Sunday School, thus getting them back into the old ways - the good ways - of a Christian influence. They urge the reestablishment of old-fashioned home life. They are keen in their analysis of the situation, and say that the problem is not so much one of juvenile delinquency, as of parental delinquency. The fact is that the home has failed.

Consequently it is most appropriate and timely that we study in our next four chapters the foundation principles of the home and seek to learn what hinders and what helps in its development.

We do well to make much of this matter. We can thus help our young people with a very urgent

and up-to-date problem. Times of war bring a sharp increase in marriages. Any kind of home is hard to find and conditions make real homes impossible to a great many of our people. They live in trailers, tents, wooden shacks, yes, in almost every manner of shelter in order to have a roof over their heads.

Any place - yes, even these places - can become, in a sense, a home, though not fully so. However, we must prepare to keep alive in the thinking of all of our people a true concept of home lest the present confusion cause them to forget and to lose their interest in real home-life when it is possible. Let us keep ideals alive, though they may not carry them into practice until a later day.

The important thing is that men and women do not bog down in careless living because of trying or disturbed circumstances, but rather that the noble aspirations for real home life may become deeper and keener as the realization is deferred. Such a consummation is not easy to bring about; and that is just why we ought to do our best to keep alive in the thinking of all of our people, GOD's standards for the home.

We begin right in the study of any subject when we turn to the Scriptures. So we now turn to the Bible to find what it teaches about marriage. We shall find that the instruction is plentiful and to the point.

Concerning marriage, we learn first

I. Its Origin - Ordained by GOD (Genesis 2:18-24)

This is a passage of real import and should be carefully considered. Nations and states have their marriage laws and there are certain civil requirements which must be met. It is important that young people recognize that marriage is a legal contract which involves property rights and which also concerns their personal beings and their personal legal relationships. These angles should not be considered from a selfish viewpoint of what one can get for self, but it is proper and right that we be intelligent about such matters in order that married life may be well ordered. Some who marry are much too careless and ignorant of these matters.

But true marriage from a Christian viewpoint is far more than a civil contract. It is the fulfillment of an ordinance which GOD Himself established from the beginning for the welfare of man. Let us consider how marriage came into existence.

Adam, soon after creation, gave names to the animals (which, incidentally, testifies to his intelligence and ability) as they passed before him one by one. As he looked on them and named them it became evident that there could be no full and true fellowship between man and any beast, that there must be a "**help meet**" for man, one of his own kind, with similar qualities of personal being and capacities for personal relationship with him.

In that connection we note the abnormality of those who find companionship with an animal fully satisfying.

Now please understand me. I believe right-thinking people have a proper love for animals. Of

course some have a greater affection for them than others. It is true that an animal provides a measure of companionship, especially for the very young and the very old as well as for those who must live alone.

But let me suggest that if one finds this relationship fully satisfying something is obviously wrong.

Not so long ago I heard again that well known story of the man who having been grievously disappointed in his relationship with his fellowmen, said that "the more he saw of human beings, the better he liked dogs." Sometimes when life has been hard and the road has been rocky, when we have had to meet and contend with the awful rudeness of our day, we are inclined to more highly appreciate the faithfulness and the genuine affection with which a pet in the household will greet us. Of course we recognize that, as we give thought to it, as being the impulse of the moment, and not the result of careful thinking.

A dog or horse, or any other animal, can certainly not come up to the level of a human being. So we suggest again that if you find that companionship of that kind fully meets your need, you are doubtless the one who has slipped to a lower level. You had better begin to seek the companionship of human beings, especially the fellowship of Christians that life may get into its normal channels again.

Because man needs this human companionship in a fine, intimate relationship, marriage was ordained.

Marriage then is the normal thing for any man or woman. Please understand that we are not thereby inferring that every man or woman who is not married is not normal. The plain fact is that in our complex and confused modern life it may not always be possible for individuals to find or to meet the one with whom they may fall in love and to whom they may be married. Such persons may also have to forego that which they would normally desire and which would be right and proper for them because of other responsibilities.

Let us say this - it is far better not to be married than to be married to someone where the true relationship of love does not exist. But of course all this does not change the fact that marriage is in the sight of GOD a normal and proper thing. He ordained and established it. Adam needed a help meet unto him and GOD provided Eve.

GOD always adequately meets every real need of man. So He now created out of Adam's own flesh one who was to be his true companion. Perhaps no one has expressed the thought of what took place here better than Matthew Henry. He said, "Man was dust refined, but woman was dust doubly refined - one move further from the earth. She was not taken out of his head to top him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected by him, and near his heart to be his beloved."

One could almost wish that kind and orderly statement could be posted in every household, or taught to every husband and wife. So often there is friction and disorder in the home because of a woman who insists on being the head of the house, when GOD has ordained that the man should take that place. It is equally true that trouble comes when the man as the head of the house thinks that that means that he is to be some kind of a boss, to keep his wife down, and to trample on her.

The Lord knew what He was doing when He ordained marriage. He gave Adam a help meet-one suited to him, and able to give him that fellowship, friendship and help in living which he needed. This was GOD's plan and it was good.

So GOD ordained marriage, placing it on a high and holy plane. But man always has to tamper with GOD's arrangements. He never touches them but what he besmirches or spoils them. He has done a particularly effective job of ruining the marriage relationship. Consequently we have special need to be reminded of our second point, namely, that marriage is not only in its origin ordained by GOD, but is in.

II. Its Control - not Subject to Man (Matthew 19:3-6)

It was because of the hardness of man's heart that Moses permitted divorce. See Mark 10:4-5. But GOD did not intend it to be so from the beginning. The Jewish rabbis took advantage of this act of Moses and by their fine-spun and liberal interpretations of it managed to make it possible for a man to divorce his wife on almost any pretext. They went so far as to say a man could put his wife out of his house and out of his life simply on the ground that she had salted the roast in a way that was not to his liking. Hardness of heart was thus supplemented by wickedness and evil desire.

They were encouraged in this by the fact that the same low level prevailed regarding the marriage relationship among the heathen nations. It still does in many places, although it must be said that some of the so-called backward people put us to shame in their fine treatment of the subject of marriage. In any case we have nothing of which to boast because we have really surpassed the heathen nations in our wild and wicked approval of divorce.

I read somewhere that eighty percent of the marriages between moving picture people lead to divorce, and yet some church members fairly worship these individuals, rushing around to see their pictures, saving autographed photographs, possibly envying them their so-called glamorous lives.

Well, one of the supposed glamour girls - in fact, I believe she had the heathenish and suggestive name of the "oomph girl," [Ann Sheridan] a divorcee, has written a treatise on marriage entitled, "*What a Wife Ought to Know*." How perfectly ridiculous!

- yes, and pathetic.

The fact that divorce had been permitted made marriage a subject of discussion among the Jewish people. Hence in our Scripture passage in Matthew 19, we find one of the Pharisees coming to JESUS to ask whether it was permissible to put a wife aside by divorce.

Our Lord makes it very clear that man has no authority to determine such matters at all, because the union of life in true marriage is consummated by the act of GOD. No man has any right or power to sunder such a relationship.

Notice that we said "true marriage." That means a union brought about by GOD for man, a

relationship formed by Him. Let it be clear that there should be no other kind of marriage, for unless marriage is real and true we have a relationship which is essentially immoral, no matter what legal sanction it may have. Let no one make that a ground to justify easy divorce, that is, because so many marriages are evidently not ordained of GOD. The point we must keep in mind is that no one should be married except under the blessing of GOD. We cannot play with such things and escape GOD's judgment.

In that connection it may be of great value to emphasize to young people the fact that Scripture very clearly urges that Christians not be yoked with unbelievers. (II Corinthians 6:14) The sad secret of the failure of many a marriage is found right at that point. We must put these principles into the thinking of our children early in life - for after love has come it is too late to reason with any real effectiveness with the straying one.

Since the whole trend of thought on marriage has been away from its sacredness as a divine institution, we need to emphasize and encourage a return to a proper appreciation of it as such. All too often marriages are mere civil agreements, hastily made before a justice of the peace.

It is also often true that although a minister officiates and the wedding is held in the church, it may be so conducted as to have little spiritual meaning. It is to be regretted that so many ministers make so little of the opportunity they have in connection with the performing of marriage ceremonies to lead young people out along spiritual lines and to help them see what it means to be thus united as husband and wife.

This may be the proper place to suggest what we believe to be a sad fact; namely, that the prevalence of modernistic or liberal preaching in the church has much to do with the breakdown of right thinking regarding marriage and the home. Modernism, which is in reality only ancient error rejuvenated and made to appear up-to-date, has always gloried in its liberty to depart from the old standard of the church and of the faith.

Some of its leaders seem, in our day, to have discovered the obvious truth that without a thorough-going Christian faith there can be no sound foundation for Christian character. Some of them are seeking to build up an imitation orthodoxy which is leading some uninformed people to believe that there is no longer any modernism in the world. The fact is that it is simply dressed up in new language, a calculating selfish viewpoint of what one can get for self, and with a slightly different turn of thought.

The discrediting of GOD's Word necessarily cuts away the groundwork for Christian character, because it gives to the individual not only liberty, but also license to depart from the moral standards of GOD. This we must recognize to be true, that the one absolute moral authority must be GOD; and if He is not acknowledged as supreme, and if His Word is not accepted as dependable, then there simply is no sufficient authority upon which to base moral behavior.

Parents who have either deliberately or unconsciously embraced the new, or supposed new, teaching of liberalism, have not only removed from their own lives that which creates the divine impulse to maintain the right kind of a home - which is a Christian home - but they have destroyed the only real basis for the instruction of their children. A fading responsibility to and affection for the revealed Word of GOD, leaves men correspondingly irresponsible toward all other authorities, and elevates the ego in an appalling manner. We do not recall who said that,

but it is certainly true. Man needs something more than modern religious liberalism on which to build a home.

So we need to encourage our young people to recognize when they think of marriage

III. Its Dignity - Sanctioned by CHRIST (John 2:1-5)

The wedding ceremony tells that marriage "is an honorable estate, instituted by God in the time of man's innocency, confirmed by the teaching and hallowed by the presence of our blessed Lord, and likened by Paul to the holy union that exists between CHRIST and the Church; and therefore is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly but reverently, discreetly and in the fear of GOD."

The writer has occasion to perform a number of marriage ceremonies. He always reads the service with a sense of sacredness which not only surrounds the marriage of the couple standing before him but the preacher as well. He has noticed that even those who may be a little careless or who have possibly been covering up their nervousness by a bit of joking or wisecracking (why do we have to be so foolish!), are hushed into real solemnity as this paragraph of the ceremony is read slowly and with the greatest possible meaning. It means something to be married.

Our Scripture here presents the interesting and important fact that at the very beginning of His public ministry, JESUS chose a wedding feast at which to perform His first great miracle. He shares the occasion of joy with His people. But it seems to me to be especially significant that this first occasion for the public exercise of His miraculous power was a wedding. It was His choice - indicating His interest. He was there to help and to bless.

There is something transforming in the holy love which makes a true marriage and which is the foundation of the kind of a wedding that our Lord can bless. Poets and painters have tried to express this fact with some measure of success. There is a picture entitled "The Garden of Eden," the thought of the title being not the sin and judgment which took place there, but the blessed fellowship which Adam and Eve had before falling into sin.

The artist presents no quiet garden where the roses bloom in the moonlight. No, the picture is that of a public park in a great city; the little square pressed in on every side by drab lines of houses. The day is raw and drizzly and there is at first glance nothing in the picture but that which suggests discomfort. But what do we see? A young man and woman evidently of the middle class are walking homeward or possibly out for a half holiday together. They look into each other's eyes. As the light of love glows in that look, the whole picture is transformed.

Seeing just such a look we have been thrilled again and again. In fact, one never loses the sense of joy in observing the look in the eyes of the true bride and bridegroom as they meet to be united in marriage. It is simply something (if one may borrow an expression from our teenagers)

"out of this world." There we see that there is something so essentially beautiful and transforming about real love that it puts the foolish, silly, superficial thing which is commonly called "love" where it belongs - on the scrap heap. In fact, it isn't worth even that place. It ought to be buried.

JESUS was present at Cana to rejoice with and to bless those who there exchanged their vows of marriage. Notice what the Scripture says: He was "**called**." The meaning is that He was an invited guest. He was not there just by chance.

He was there at the request of those who were to be married.

My friend, did you invite Him to your wedding? You who are about to be married, will you and the one to whom you are to be married bow your knees and ask Him to be present? You can be sure He will come - and ah, it will be a blessed occasion because He is there - be sure of that too. Should He not be the unseen guest at every wedding, whether in the home or in the church, whether the occasion be a simple or an elaborate one, whether hosts of friends attend, or only the witnesses? Always and everywhere, JESUS CHRIST should be recognized as the One who stands there to bless and to unite the two lives for His own glory.

Fellow ministers, may I suggest that we seek to cultivate this sacred atmosphere in every reading of the marriage ceremony. Let us not be guilty of rushing into the study or into a home, quickly going through the brief marriage ceremony, accepting the fee, and slipping hastily out. One of the most helpful wedding ceremonies I know is that of a former Chicago pastor who has combined the best parts of several of the traditional ceremonies and added to them two or three prayers which he offers at appropriate points in the ceremony. This is most effective and delightful, and above all, it is honoring to the Lord. We can all do likewise and make even the humblest marriage performed by us a time of sacred joy.

All this means, of course, that the ceremony should be a Christian one, with prayer a vital part of it and the will of GOD paramount in the thinking and acting of all. Then, indeed, GOD may and will join together two whom no man can put asunder. This is the way to really found a home to prepare for the days to come.

Life will certainly press in quickly upon the young couple who have taken the marriage vows, and it will not be long before certain sorrow will come to stand beside the blessings and the joys. It is then that true love shows in real value and meaning. It is then that one thanks GOD that the home has been founded on the teaching of GOD's Word, and is the uniting of two that have been brought together by the Lord, and have for each other a deep and abiding affection which cannot be overcome by any circumstance or trial of life.

We think the poet expressed this surpassingly well in the following words:

"Love wore a threadbare coat of gray
And toiled upon the road all day.

Love wielded pick and carried pack
And bent to heavy loads the back.

Then, though meager fed and sorely tasked
One only wage love ever asked -

A child's sweet face to kiss at night,
A woman's smile by candle light."

I do not know who wrote these lines and I have taken a little liberty in changing them slightly. But do they not sweetly and beautifully express what we want in a home? Let us help our dear young people to see the truly Christian view of marriage and we shall prepare them to establish homes of beauty and blessedness.

~ end of chapter 4 ~
