

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

88.1 What Does the Bible Say About the Causes of Marital Unhappiness?**Part I**

Scripture: I Corinthians 7:10-11

I have been given the incentive to talk about marriage. This is needed because for many people it is a vexed subject and one they would rather avoid. It is to them a gloomy subject calling for more wishful thinking than they are able to put together. After all, that is exactly what we do when we find out that two people are going to be married, we wish them our best. We do this even though it is becoming increasingly more difficult with the understanding that marriage, as we have known it in the past, is in big trouble. This is not to say that we do not appreciate the excitement and charm of a wedding day. Weddings are, indeed, happy events. People have a way of looking just out of this world and the enchantment of the occasion puts everyone in a good mood. The newlyweds roar off in the best car they can put their hands on and even the most skeptical person has to want to believe they will live happily ever after.

My purpose in all of this has to do with the reasons which cause discontent to emerge in the marriage relationship. People who get married very often do not have the slightest notion what they are getting themselves into and they should be made aware about the real truth concerning marriage and the potential it has for permanence. This truth ought to come from the one who designed marriage in the first place. It has always been meaningful to me that Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding feast which can mean that He is able to perform a kind of miracle in everyone's marriage providing He is given the opportunity. Christianity teaches that Jesus is able to help us with the greatest problems we have in our lives, and for some people that will have to mean He can help avoid disaster when it comes to marriage.

Last year a man by the name of Andre Bustanoby wrote an article which appeared in the June 20 issue of **Christianity Today**. The article was entitled, **When Wedlock Becomes Deadlock**, and began with these words, "The most recent figures on marriage and divorce in the 1975 World Almanac show that for every two marriages in the United States there is one divorce. It has been

estimated that desertions, called the poor man's divorce, equal the number of legal divorces, pushing the total of terminated marriages to almost two million a year. This means that divorces and desertions together equal the number of new marriages." Now, of course, this business of leaving one's mate is not new. In the passage we have before us this morning we have the clear teaching of the Word of God having to do with this occurrence. This is the way the Bible puts it, *"But to the married I give instructions, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband, but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband and that the husband should not send his wife away (or leave his wife)."* It ought not to happen for a wife is bound by her husband as long as he lives. (7:39) But it was happening and it was happening where both parties were Christians, and that is the reason for the provision which was made.

Our concern this morning is not with the provision of an allowable separation between believers; rather, it is with the fact that two individuals who have made a confession of faith are not able to, with a modicum of common sense, determination and resourcefulness born of dependence upon the Lord and the power of His Spirit, realize the kind of permanence God had in mind when He designed marriage. Why do sweet marriages turn sour? Why do a man and wife come to regard one another as stranger's even though they live under the same roof? Why did the February 1971 issue of Look magazine devote the entire issue to the theme, "The future of the family is uncertain." Just in passing, the family with all of its breakdown is still here, and it was rather the future of Look Magazine which proved to be uncertain! Nevertheless, the question is posed and it remains. Although it is beyond the scope of this discussion to consider all of the sources and causes of marital difficulty, let us consider some of those which bring derangement into an otherwise Christian home.

I. FAILURE TO OBSERVE THE LEAVE AND CLEAVE PRINCIPLE:

Matthew 19:4-6

In the passage before us Paul talks about giving instructions to those who are married with the words, *"not I but the Lord."* (7:10) What he is saying is that Jesus had already spoken on this matter and that what he now draws to their attention is not at all in conflict with what Jesus taught. This teaching of Christ is recorded in Matthew 19:3-9. Jesus said, *"Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, for this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to one wife, and two shall become one?"* These words form a very basic principle and insight into the

marriage relationship. It suggests that two people join together to begin life together on a new and somewhat exclusive basis. They start a new lifestyle, the old one is now a thing of the past. They leave one family to start a new family. People who get married should be able to stand on their own two feet. They should be able to make decisions for themselves and support themselves, generally speaking. If they are not able to do this, they are probably not ready for marriage. The man who has been a pampered son must learn to quit clinging to his mother, or his ever willing to help father. The blushing bride may feel dreadfully helpless without mother at her side, but she will have to serve a few less than perfect meals and learn. It is not at all a matter of any less respect or recognition for one's father or mother, it is just that the married couple must learn from the start that their dependence is upon each other, and the Lord of course. Family ties and obligations should not be ignored.

From my own experience in counseling with people it seems to me that a young couple ought not to plan beginning their days together as residents in the home of either parent. Of course, if it is a home where Jesus is given His place, such an arrangement may be workable, but generally speaking, the shorter the stay, the better for all involved. The question of elderly folks or the widowed being taken into the home often arises. I personally feel that it is the responsibility of son or daughter to provide the best care possible for a parent in this condition. If it calls for them entering the home, this should be the case, but under all circumstances there will have to be a common and kept agreement in the matter and the privacy and tranquility of the home should not be disturbed. There is no question that marriages fail because of family involvement. Another disturbing involvement can be that of the old gang. I think when we enter marriage the predominant place of the old gang will have to change. You just don't continue to live as if you were still single. Husbands and wives must learn to close the door behind them and leave old and cherished relationships outside. Leaving leads to cleaving, that is good Bible teaching and it works. They will be closer to one another for it.

II. FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSES OF MARRIAGE:

Genesis 2:18-25

When Abbe Dimnet visited America He wrote, "The whole world considers marriage as the fundamental condition of happiness. But whereas people in America are unshaken in their conviction that this is the principle upon which they ought to build, they are astonishingly vague about what should be deduced

from that principle...the deeper realities are not investigated.” (Ernest Dimnet, **My New World**, N. Y., Simon & Schuster, 1937). The unshaken conviction Dimnet wrote about forty years ago is surely a thing of the past. Many people no longer feel marriage is all that important or useful anymore. Ignorance of the deeper realities has taken its toll. Now what are some of these realities? Here we can find the Bible very helpful. People who are serious in their quest to know what marriage is really all about ought to consult the Bible before they listen to what the marriage counselors are saying.

The passage in Genesis is a description of man's first encounter with woman. We can learn some significant things from this meeting. First, when Adam looked at Eve, he recognized a tremendous **affinity** with his wife. Up until that encounter he had experienced a relationship of sorts with things around him. Read the text carefully. Adam had an awareness of those things which surrounded him, the trees and the animals, the sun and the sky, these were the interests which filled his life. Yet, while he had a relationship and responsibility toward these things, there was not any experience of mutual affinity. When he encounters Eve we read that now there is one, who is *“flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone.”* (Gen.2:23) She was not a tool to be used in the tilling of the soil nor was she a plaything to amuse him when his work was done in the coolness of the evening. She was not a thing but a person and because she was a person, there would be communion, understanding and an exchange of interests. It was beautiful in the sense that for the first time in the experience of Adam, there was someone who was capable of affinity with himself. There was a sameness and an equality of personhood. I believe that here we can begin to see at least the potential for permanency in marriage. It is because of the affinity between man and woman.

The passage not only speaks of Adam's sense of affinity, but also of his awareness in terms of **diversity**. There is an explanation of the richness of that diversity. There was no tuxedo in the first marriage, nor was there a wedding gown. They beheld one another in nakedness and were not ashamed in the recognition of the difference between them. (Genesis 2:25) There was a difference physically, which fact need not be labored, and this difference was an outward manifestation of emotional and other tremendous differences which exist between the man and woman. This diversity creates as much potential for permanence in their relationship as does the affinity they have with one another.

This affinity-diversity in human relationship within the marriage bond is important from a sociological perspective, from a psychological perspective, and from a spiritual perspective.

Sociologically, God is building His kingdom. Now, He is not making it out of stone and brick, stained glass windows or steeples. He is fashioning a kingdom out of people. When we take the family unit and break it, there is going to be a lopsided emphasis from that time forward in the experience of those who remain. Children growing up within that framework will have the influence of either male or female dominance, neither of them complimenting one another. From God's point of view both are necessary and the psychology of today readily affirms this. What results is not the wholeness God intends. Children grow at their best when both male and female contribute to their lives and offer the complimentary qualities which will make their lives whole and secure.

All too often one partner in marriage will assume voluntarily a passive role feeling the other is so much wiser and stronger. This is not God's mind in the matter at all. Both have much to contribute even though one may appear to have all of the influence.

Psychologically, this matter of affinity-diversity is important. Oh, it's wonderful to have friends, but it is far different to know the relationship of a husband or wife. You need someone when you are weak and when you are strong. You need someone with whom you can be both weak and strong. How wonderful that there is someone with whom you are able to be so candid and open. One reason for marital discord is the hesitancy one has to be open and honest in such times. This hesitancy is usually not the guilt of either, but of both parties. One is hesitant because of insecurity which has come from past rejection and the other is without the ability to forgive or give up the right to condemn in some way. Rather than an encouragement toward candor, there is really an encouragement of disguise and dishonesty. The pattern of marriage is woven of both strength and weakness. The closer we come to experience these strengths and weaknesses openly, the more we will be able to help each other change for the better. Amos 3:3 reads, *"Can two walk together except they be agreed?"* Because there is this affinity between us, we can understand, while in our diversity we can help. The New Testament enlarges on the word *"helpmeet"* in Genesis 2:18. It goes much beyond helping one another in common ways. It means being influential and adding to the deepest aspirations of one's being. The fulfillment of many a person has been lost or never realized because there was no one to

help. The help of someone who understands and encourages is tremendous and marriage is the place of such noble endeavor. Our personalities are fulfilled in this way.

Spiritually, lastly there is the **spiritual** purpose of the way God has made us. God has great confidence that the proper ingredients are there for a permanent relationship. The teaching of the Christian faith is that Christ has restored the marriage bond to its original unity and permanence with the words, *“What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”* Paul, in underscoring this truth compares the marriage contract with the union Christ has with His Church. The terms of this relationship are therefore quite clear. Marriage is a prototype of the way we think of Christ and the Church. How can we think of that relationship? We can think that it is through thick and thin that Christ is with His own, He is with them in their good times as well as bad. He remains faithful when the church is at its worst, when it is a disgrace to His name, and when it is glorious. How easy it is to quit. Amazing however, God never quits on His people, God has woven into our makeup the potential for permanency in marriage and it is with this in mind that He suggests that the relationship a man has with his wife is like the one Christ has with His Church.

These thoughts come when selfish views and conduct in marriage are at an all time high, and relationships at an all time low. There is no use in beating around the bush about marriages being on the skids. One reason is because people do not cleave to one another as husband and wife. The word is to cling. This is what people do who understand what God's Son had to say about marriage. They do not cling to one another in desperation. They cling to one another because they have the confidence that God wants them to face life together and that they are better off living that way. They understand that the sameness they share, as well as the differences they have, will enable them to live jointly as if they were one. They know God has not prescribed marriage to make us miserable or to restrict our fulfillment in life. The failure to cleave and to understand the deeper realities of marriage are two causes of breakdown. The Christian faith is not only wonderful because it brings salvation to individuals, it brings salvation to families also. Let us repent and believe the Gospel.

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