

CHRISTIAN HOME AND FAMILY LIVING

by

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CHAPTER ONE

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Genesis 1:26-28; 2:21-25; Matthew 19:1-12

It is not good that man should be alone . . . (Genesis 2:18).

The first months that Marlene and Ken were engaged dragged by. They were wonderfully happy but the wedding did seem far off. It seemed a little silly to be making plans so early, but it was all Marlene could talk about. It had to be a big wedding. Her mother wanted it that way and so did Marlene. It must be perfect—the best. Cousin Sue had a church wedding which they had observed carefully, a bit critically perhaps, and there were several things they would want to do differently.

While her mother worried over it a bit, Marlene dreamed about that greatest of all days in a maiden's life. Sometimes she imagined herself a ravishing bride in shimmering satin, sometimes in velvet, then again in silk organza, or slim and lovely in Chantilly lace with long tapered sleeves and a Sabrina neckline. She never laid the dream away.

The time finally came to work in earnest to make the beautiful wedding dream come true. Such shopping and planning, and anxious checking of every detail! Nothing and no one must be overlooked. There were appointments and parties and last minute changes. Marlene fairly sparkled with excitement, the world was full of sunshine and her heart was full of joy.

Then the day that had seemed far away was suddenly there. How excited everyone was! All the world loves a bride and a wedding. A wedding is a joyous occasion. Friends and relatives, dressed in their best, hurried to the church. The music began and one by one the attendants took their places. Marlene stood tensely in the anteroom awaiting her cue from the organist while her father waited somewhat uncomfortably in his formal suit.

Almost as soon as it began, so it seemed, this most wonderful thing that could happen to any girl was over. The color, the music and flowers, the pretty bridesmaids and smiling guests blurred into resplendent incidentals as the happy bride, eyes shining like stars in the soft glow of candlelight, walked quickly down the aisle with her husband. "It was perfectly lovely," the guests murmured as they offered their best wishes, "too bad it must be over so soon . . ."

Will their love remain as beautiful as when, with radiant faces, they turned from the marriage altar? That is the question that hovers over every new home in this age when the sanctity and permanency of marriage are broken every day.

A generation or so ago marriage was held more sacred; the comparatively few who obtained a divorce did not find it easy in the face of frowning public opinion and stringent laws. Today divorce laws are admittedly in a muddle. Divorce can be obtained for almost any reason if the grounds are technically correct. And the social conscience of America feels little shock at the alarming number of marriages that fail every year.

Starting from about the time of the First World War until some six years ago the cycle of broken marriages increased from one in every ten to one out of every three and one half, or two out of seven. California led the nation with a ratio of one divorce for one marriage which was likely due to its migratory constituency. What people would not do in their home towns they would dare to do beyond the Rockies. Happily the rate has receded in these last years to a ratio of one divorce out of five marriages, which still adds up to between twelve to fifteen thousand divorces a year in Cook County, Illinois, alone.

Mr. Harry X. Cole, Chairman of the Matrimonial Law Committee of the Chicago Bar Association, which is currently reviewing the divorce situation in the area, in contributing the above statistics also said that Chicago is much concerned about this serious problem. He spoke with appreciation for the new Miner law which requires a "cooling off" period of sixty days before any divorce action can be filed with the court; of the lawyers in Chicago who are doing a tremendous job of reconciling divorce seekers, and of the many fine judges who cooperate to save thousands of marriages from becoming divorce statistics. The Roman Catholics have a Chancery Office to which lawyers refer divorce applicants, and many a social worker and minister of the Gospel hurries to save a home almost every day. In Michigan the Friend of the Court has the special task of looking into every case with the purpose of reconciliation.

The main reason for the high divorce rate, according to Mr. Cole, is that young people are not prepared for marriage. He is confident that if they were trained for marriage the divorce rate would drop to almost nothing. He would recommend beginning more courses in the schools and making the present ones more thorough. He considers the situation serious enough to warrant compulsory courses to be given by trained psychologists or marriage experts for those contemplating marriage, and would even insist that applicants be made to pass a test before getting their licenses. It is certain that there is much to be done.

The present standards and values of marriage and the family are in confusion.

The courts are bogged down with complicated laws; no two states have the same laws. The divorce question has vexed the church for years, and marital study committees are the order of the day. The public is deluged with statistics and articles on such topics as: "Are Teen Marriages Working Out?" "Divorce and Annulment"; "Inter-faith Marriages"; and the recurring, "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" The many books on the market on modern marriage and family affairs point to the gravity of the situation.

Parents, who should be the most concerned, are either too busy with material things, or ignorant of their responsibility to prepare their children for marriage, and herein may be the crux of the problem.

Who are in a better position or have greater opportunities than parents' to make young people aware that the most perfect wedding is no guarantee of a successful marriage? It is but the dawn of wedlock; the marriage itself must still be achieved. Marriage takes far more serious and detailed preparation than a wedding. Few young people understand this, or even know the why and how of marriage.

For most, marriage means living all the time with the one it was fun to date. All too many find it disillusioning, especially when dates involved always going places and spending money. The blending of two differing personalities, even though brought up in the same locality, the working together harmoniously toward a common goal for the mutual enrichment of life, and to the praise of the Lord, are quite another thing.

We must have a correct view of marriage. The teachings of the Bible on marriage are plain, and should be well known by every Christian. The place to start the study of marriage is in the Old Testament. All the New Testament teaches about it was born in the crucible of the Old and should be interpreted only in the light of the Old Testament.

Marriage is a divine institution and not the result of experimentation or mere natural attraction. The existence of marriage and the family plan had its foundation in the will of the Creator. We read in Genesis 1:26, 27 that God said, "**Let us make man . . .**" and "**male and female created He them.**"

He made "**a woman, and brought her unto the man,**" and in the most exquisite setting in the Paradise cathedral Adam and Eve, radiant with God's image, were joined in holy matrimony. The Creator pronounced the blessing and stated the purpose of marriage (Genesis 1:28; 2:18).

R. Veenstra in his book on Christian Marriage tells us that marriage was made to be a reflection of the image of God in that the Triune God said, "**Let us make man in our image and after our likeness.**" Even in the state of perfection it was not good for man to be alone and God created Eve to complement Adam physically, emotionally and spiritually. The creation of both man and woman was in His image (Genesis 1:27).

God made man and woman distinct personalities—the one of masculine strength, the other all feminine loveliness—and made them "**one flesh**" (Genesis 2:24). Adam was quick to recognize this design of the Creator (Genesis 2:22, 23). Marriage is, by the nature of its creation, and by divine command, to be a physical, spiritual and permanent union of one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24).

After the Fall when rebellion, lust and avarice distorted all human relationships, marriage took on various forms and problems.

Deviations from the original monogamous marriage are found in the numerous instances”

- Of polygamy and concubinage in the Old Testament;
- Of polyandry, which is thought by some to be the origin of the strange custom of the levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).
- Brides were sometimes procured by stealing (Deuteronomy 21:10-13; Judges 21);
- Commonly obtained for a price, or with labor (Genesis 24:53; 29:20 31:15; 34:12; Exodus 22:17).
- Caleb’s daughter was a gift to a valiant warrior (Judges 1:12-15).

Deviations from the original order of marriage led to much sin and misery and laws had to be made in consequence (Exodus 21:7-11; Leviticus 18:1-18; Deuteronomy 4:1-4).

As time passed, polygamy lived on in divorces and remarriage. T. A. Kantonen in *The Family under God* says that in Jesus’ day divorce was a burning contemporary issue because of the high divorce rate in the large cities of the Roman Empire, and also in Palestine. It was a favorite rabbinical theme. Marriage was considered by some to be divine order, by others it was thought of as a necessary evil. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 became a loophole for those desiring a different mate. Some allowed divorce for various and minor forms of incompatibility on the basis of the words, “**Some uncleanness**” found in the Deuteronomy passage. Others said that adultery was the only permissible ground.

This was the problem with which the Pharisees came to Jesus on the coasts of Judea beyond Jordan. Their questions occasioned the teachings of Jesus on marriage, divorce and celibacy found in Matthew 19:1-12.

Little did the Pharisees know that Jesus alone could give an authoritative answer. He was present when marriage was planned and instituted, and had now come to earth that sinful men and women might be renewed after the image of the Triune God (Romans 8:29; Colossians 3:10). Jesus told the Pharisees that the principles of the first monogamous, for “as long as you both shall live” marriage, are still in effect. Paul, too, following his Lord, based his teachings on marriage as it was established in the beginning (Romans 7:1-3; I Corinthians 6:15, 16; 7:10, 11).

Jesus came as the manifestation of forgiving love, and this kind of love (Matthew 18:21ff; I John 4:10, 11), must also be seen in the marriage relationship. The tragic story of Hosea is one of forgiving love for a people whose apostasy is likened to adultery (see also Jeremiah 3:1). It is with forgiving love that Christ wins and continues to love the Church as His Bride (Matthew 9:15; 25:1ff.; Revelation 21:2,9; 22:17). Children are, from early childhood, conditioned for their own marriages by seeing tender, caring, forgiving and self-giving love between their parents.

Christian love in marriage issues in “the propagation of the human race, the furtherance of the kingdom of God, and the enrichment of the lives of those entering this state” (Genesis 1: 28; 17:1-8; Psalms 127; 128). Many are disturbed by the adulation of sex as we see it today in music, literature, the public press, advertising, ways of dress and in the world of entertainment. Everything must be “sexy” to have appeal. Neither must we go to the other extreme and be ashamed of sex. Only its misuse is wrong.

God created the sexes to His greater glory. Through the sacredness of sex highest human love is expressed and God's children are born into the world. It is the way God called "**good**" for building the human race. He could have done it another way, but He chose to make parents co-creators of children with Him (Psalm 127:3; Isaiah 29:23; 49:5).

It is natural, right, basic and best that children are prepared for their own marriage in the home. Mr. Harry X. Cole agrees that parents must first of all set an example that is sweet, good, loyal and cooperative. They must bring their children up in a church affiliation, and exercise parental control over things which may impair high ideals; for instance, by toning down television shows with bad and troublesome connotations of home and marriage, and making sure that their children see the beautiful and good things in life.

A recent survey of teen marriages with their high divorce rate revealed that parents give their daughters every material and educational advantage but not preparation for marriage. Therefore, daily life must be organized on the basis of love, and children should be taught that "**Thou shalt love . . .**" is a divine command.

It is parents' duty to teach the sacredness, the purpose and appreciation of sex to their own children. Home is the practical training place for all that is involved in housekeeping and homemaking, in home management and in the care of children.

The church has a solemn obligation to teach the way of marriage and of the family under God in these tempest-tossed times, and the school must fill in where families fail. Many high schools and colleges offer courses on the family and homemaking. However, these courses, and the lectures available from time to time, may never substitute for home training. Moreover, they offer comparatively little and come too late. They can, and should be, only a supplement to home preparation. Home has the advantage of extensive, intensive and prolonged preparation for marriage.

The teachers are parents who have a divine appointment for life to achieve a marriage that is all beautiful harmony because it is lived in and unto the Lord.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Can you prove that marriage is intended to be a monogamous, permanent, physical, spiritual and practical union?
2. How did sin affect marriage?
3. What danger is there in inter-faith marriages? What are its usual effects on the children?
4. Define the purpose of marriage.
5. Does your church have a stand on birth control? If so, what is it?
6. What do you think is the cause for the high divorce rate in our country? What is basically wrong?
7. How and where must we prepare to build a successful marriage?

8. Evaluate: Family and homemaking courses in schools; marriage counseling by pastors; learning together during courtship days; involuntary teaching by parents; purposeful preparation initiated by parents in the home.
9. Read the Book of Hosea. What is its message?
10. Discuss the teachings of Jesus on marriage as found in Matthew 19:1-15.
11. How can the love of Christ for His Bride, the Church, become a pattern for marriage?

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