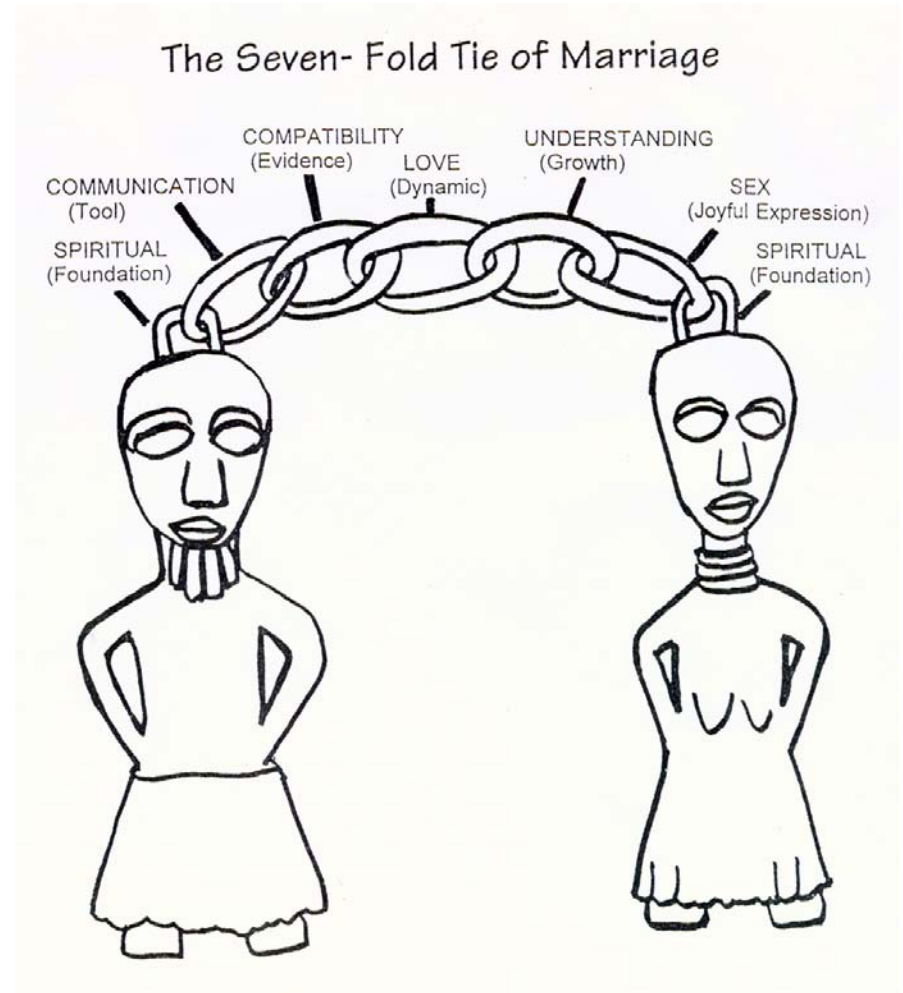


MINI BIBLE COLLEGE

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

(Part 1)

Study BOOKLET #6



Chapter 1

The Law of Marriage and Family

Many years ago in America, a man was having mechanical trouble with his old car, so he pulled off to the side of the road. A well-dressed man, who was driving by in a fancy car, stopped to help the man whose car was broken down. He got out of his car and opened the hood of the broken automobile. The broken car was a Ford, a popular model of cars in America. The well-dressed man started working on the engine and soon had it fixed. The man who owned the old car asked the other, “How do you know so much about a Ford?” The well-dressed man replied, “I am Henry Ford. I made this automobile, and I am the owner of the company that produces these automobiles.”

Just as we would expect Henry Ford to be able to tell us how to fix one of his cars, we can expect God to be able to tell us how to fix a marriage, because He created marriage. This presentation of the principles of marriage and family is based on Scripture. It assumes that since God is the One Who created marriage and family, God is the One Who can tell us how to fix a broken marriage. God can also tell us what a marriage is, the purpose of a marriage and His blueprint for marriage and family.

What Did Jesus Teach about Marriage and Family?

We who are disciples of Jesus Christ should always begin every study by asking, “What did Jesus teach on this subject?” When the religious leaders asked Jesus about marriage and divorce, He replied with another question: “Have you never read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female?” (Matthew 19:4). Jesus was saying in principle, “If you want to understand marriage as it is, you must go back to the beginning and study marriage as God intended to be.”

God’s Blueprint for Marriage

“In the Beginning, God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.’ ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; populate the earth and subdue it.’” (Genesis 1:26–28)

All through the creation account, God looks at what He creates and says, “It is good.” But when you get to chapter 2, you find the words, “It is not good.” What was not good? It was not good for man to be alone. “So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was

taken out of man.’ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they two will become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:21–24)

God saw that man alone was incomplete. The Hebrew wording in the text suggests, “I am going to make a completer for him.” That is what helpmeet, or “helper suitable for him,” means in the Hebrew — “a completer”. From the beginning God gave us role definitions for marriage and family. A man is incomplete without a woman. A woman is designed to complete a man.

The creation account is repeated in chapter 2, and a third time in Genesis 5:1–2, with an emphasis on God creating man male and female. Be sure to make the observation, that in Genesis 5, God does not call them, “The Adamses,” but “Adam.” Since the word “Adam” means, “man,” this is teaching in a subtle way that a man and a woman joined together in Holy matrimony are one whole man. This is another way of saying that the two are designed to be one.

Persons, Partners, and Parents

What we see so far in Scripture is a law of life. We could call it “The Law of Marriage and Family.” For this plan to work, God has to have two adequate parents. For them to be adequate parents, they must have an adequate partnership. And in order to have an adequate partnership, they must be adequate persons.

When He created Adam and Eve, the partnership God designed was not two parasites trying to suck all the life they can

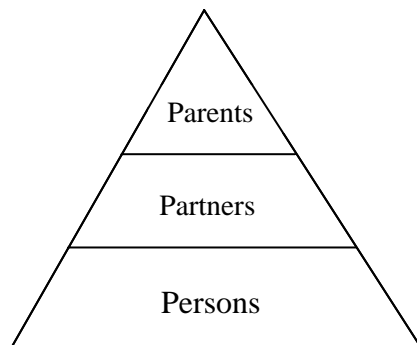
from each other. Nor did the plan call for a person and a parasite, where one person is sucking the life out of the other. The plan was — and is — two whole persons who are building life in each other and building a life together as God intended when He created man and woman. This principle is just as true today as it was at creation.

However, this blueprint is under severe attack today. For example, the accepted blueprint for the relationship between a man and woman today says that a woman has to prove her equality with a man by doing everything a man does. The theory is that if she does not have the same role and function as a man, she does not have the same worth as a man.

The male chauvinist proclaims the supremacy of men, while feminists proclaim the supremacy of women — as if the relationship between men and women were an either/or situation. According to the biblical blueprint, the male-female relationship is a both/and relationship of oneness. If these two were exactly alike, one of them would be unnecessary. God deliberately created us uniquely male and uniquely female because each complements the other. The culture is determined to diminish the differences between the sexes by making the role and function of the male and female exactly the same. But, there is a beautiful diversity and a wonderful purpose in the way God created man male and female.

One way to illustrate this basic law of marriage and family is to picture a pyramid divided into thirds. Across the bottom third

write “persons,” across the middle third write “partners,” and in the top third write “parents.”



To build a pyramid, you cannot begin with the top third held the pyramid. In the same way, it is not the plan of God to begin building a home with two adequate parents who do not have a God-ordained partnership. Furthermore, it is not the plan of God to have the middle third of the pyramid without the bottom third. The foundation of the partnership that makes good parents is two adequate persons. The bottom third of the pyramid is foundational. Likewise, the vital part of a marriage is the two persons who make up that marriage.

The Place to Begin

There are four problem areas in every marriage. In a marriage between John and Mary, problem number one is John. Problem area number two is Mary. The third problem area is John

and Mary with all their compatibility issues. The children of John and Mary are the fourth problem area of their marriage.

If John has fifty problems, and Mary has fifty problems, their marriage has a hundred problems before they approach all the problems they have as John and Mary. If John decides that he wants to work on his marriage, he should begin with problem area number one - himself. Mary should begin with problem area number two - herself. If you are incapable of acknowledging or accepting the fact that you are part of the problem, no marriage counselor in the world can help your marriage. But if you solve the problems in your life, you have solved a lot of the problems in the partnership.

Let me share a story that illustrates this: A man went to his psychiatrist with lettuce and three eggs on his head, and a strip of bacon on each ear. The doctor invited him to come in and sit down. The man sat down very carefully so the eggs would not slide off his head. The doctor said, “Do you want to talk about it?” And he said, “Yes, doctor, I want to talk to you about my brother. Now, my brother, he really has problems.”

Pastors and marriage counselors meet people like that every day, people who will not acknowledge the possibility that they can be part of the problem. As Jesus said, “You have a log in your eye, and you are going around looking for specks in other people’s eyes.” (Matthew 7:3, paraphrase) Hypercritical people are experts on what is wrong with everybody else, especially in their homes and marriages. They place the blame on everyone else and it never

occurs to them that they could be part of the problem even when it is obvious to everyone that they are the biggest part of the problem.

The greatest marriage counseling in the world is found in the Bible. In this booklet, we will look at some of the marriage counsel the Bible offers. As we do, we will discover some patterns and principles. One such pattern is this: every time the Bible addresses a marriage, it isolates the two partners into persons. It then addresses the man about his role. When it does, it tells the man what his responsibilities are in the marriage. When it addresses the women, the Bible instructs the woman about her responsibilities in the marriage.

For example, First Peter 3 begins by addressing women, particularly women whose husbands are not obeying the Word. For the next six verses, Peter does not say anything to or about the husband. Instead, he instructs wives on a variety of matters, including purity, dress, and submission. He is telling the women to begin with problem area-number two. They are to ask God to make them everything he wants them to be and do in their marriage.

Then, Peter addresses the husbands about problem area number one. The Bible always addresses issues both realistically and practically. Scripture even addresses children about their roles and responsibilities toward their parents. The Bible is realistic when it does this because; the only one you can do anything about is the person for whom you are responsible - yourself.

It takes some married people a long time to learn this, but in the final analysis you will learn and then say, "I cannot do anything about my spouse." You really cannot. At the judgment seat of God, you will not answer for your spouse before God. You will not be responsible to give an account for them. Instead, you will be accountable for the one person for whom you are responsible. You will be accountable for yourself. You will be wise if you begin that ultimate accountability now by being responsible for the only person in your marriage you can control.

There are many times in counseling sessions with married couples that a pastor cannot meet with the husband and wife together because he will be like a referee presiding over their fights. He would be wise if he met with each person individually. After helping each person address their problems, he could then move on to their partnership and compatibility issues. If the individual persons are not believers who are related personally to Jesus Christ, the priority of the pastor is to lead that husband or wife to salvation and a relationship with God through Christ. Marriage counseling can be a very fruitful evangelistic tool for a spiritual counselor or pastor.

A husband was told by his pastor, "Marriage is not a fifty-fifty proposition; it is not even two people one hundred percent for each other. Marriage is two people one hundred percent for God." The husband went home and told his wife, "The pastor said, 'Marriage is one hundred to nothing. I'm the one hundred and you are the nothing.'" Some people have a hard time acknowledging the

hard reality that the “persons” are the foundation of the marriage pyramid. This is where marital problems begin and this is where the solution to marriage problems must begin. When they do accept that reality, they must then realize that the one person with whom they must begin is the person they can do something about - they must begin with themselves.

What Marriage Means to God

If you come to this study of marriage and family asking, “What’s in it for me?” the answer is that there is a lot in it for you. Next to salvation, a happy home is the most wonderful thing in the world. But if you really want to get a biblical perspective on this study of marriage and family, you should ask, “What’s in it for God?” What does marriage mean to Him? Why did He institute marriage? Why did He create us male and female? The answer is that God wanted to populate the earth with good people.

Psalm 128 is one of the greatest and most eloquent expressions of this divine plan. “Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours.” (1–2) Many people would like to put a period after the third word of verse 1: “Blessed are all.” Today, many people preach universalism, which in part says that since God is a loving God, all people are blessed. But the Scripture does not teach that. This is one of the “blessed man” psalms, a theme in the Book of Psalms. These psalms teach that the blessings of the blessed

man are not a coincidence or an accident. They are the result of faith and obedience to God.

The emphasis of this blessed man psalm is to show us how God uses the blessed man, how the blessed man fits into God’s scheme of things. The psalmist continues, “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. ... May the LORD bless you from Zion all the days of your life; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem, and may you live to see your children’s children and peace upon Israel.” (128:3, 5–6)

This is a profile of the way God works in the world. He works through the law of marriage and family. He finds a man who will believe in Him and walk in His ways, and He blesses that man. When He brings a woman into that man’s life and completes him, He makes that man a father. As a result of these two persons becoming partners, they produce a family. These children are with them for about twenty years, being nurtured and prepared to face life. This family unit becomes part of Zion (the Old Testament spiritual community), to impact their city (Jerusalem), their nation (Israel), and ultimately the world.

In the Old Testament, the word Zion is the equivalent of the New Testament concept of the church. How does God work in the world? Followers of Christ tend to think that He works primarily through the church. God and Christ do work through the church, but a church is made up of family units. The most basic unit in the world

is the family. God uses the family unit to impact Zion. (the church) As these family units come together into the spiritual community, they impact the city and the nation and ultimately the world. Now if things are not right in the world, if they are not right in the nation, if they are not right in the city, where do you find the problem and affect the solution? You address and solve the problem where God is placing the solitary in families. (Psalm 68:6)

Years ago a magazine dedicated an entire issue to the problem of children and crime. The various experts who wrote the articles explored different possibilities. Could it be the government's fault? Could it be the fault of education? Or is culture the problem? Some writers even questioned churches, synagogues, and mosques. These institutions may very well not be doing what they are supposed to do. But ultimately, all the sociologists and juvenile court judges and social workers who contributed to these articles came to this one conclusion: The problem is the family.

The Man's Responsibility

According to the Bible's law of marriage and family, the responsibility starts with the man. As I consider the problems of marriage and family today, I believe the greatest problem is men who will not accept the responsibility to be what God wants the man to be as the head of his home — the spiritual priest of his home. According to Psalm 128, the blessing of God in this world begins when a man believes in God and walks in His ways. When a man

fears God and walks in His ways, God has a foundation on which He can build His family pyramid. He can put the law of marriage and family in place because He has found a blessed man. God can now join this blessed man to a blessed woman and they can have blessed children. God can now impact a home, a church, a city, a country, and the world. It all begins with a blessed man.

The unprecedented breakdown of marriage and family today, however, has left young adults without role models to follow. I could tell you about a dozen men who have asked me to be their father because they did not have a father. One very large mean looking young man who had been married for several years made an appointment and said to me: "I do not want to have children until I know how to be a father. Will you father me for a while?"

Couples in premarital counseling have said to me, "We are so worried about having a successful marriage. So many marriages are ending in divorce, and we have never even seen a good marriage. Our parents split up and we do not even know what a Christian marriage and family looks like. How can we be sure that we can have a happy marriage and family?"

So, how do you build and nurture a happy home? Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, uses one of his favorite words when he writes in Psalm 127, "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up

late, eating the bread of anxious toil, for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.”

These two verses are a capsule autobiography, or dieing words of wisdom of Solomon’s life. This short Psalm is an abbreviated version of his great sermon called, “Ecclesiastes.” His favorite word in both these summaries of his God story is the word “vain”.

Solomon was the quintessential and classic workaholic, yet he tells us here that it is possible to work in vain. He must have worried about many things, but here he tells us that it is in vain that we rise up early, go to bed late and eat the bread of anxious toil. He also tells us that it is possible to build in vain. Solomon was a great builder. He did not only build a temple; he built cities and parks and stables. One time he built a fleet of ships only to go out and say hello to a queen. There was no end to his building.

It is possible to worry in vain because you can worry about the wrong things. It is possible to work in vain because you work for the wrong things. It is possible to build in vain because you build the wrong things.

Then Solomon turns to the subject of children. What do his previous comments have to do with children? Everything. Solomon realized that he built everything except the lives of his children. Now the wise king says, “Children are an heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full

of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.” (3–5)

This psalm is a great negative application of the law of marriage and family. Solomon is saying, “Do not do what I did because I worked in vain and built in vain and worried in vain. What you really need to concern yourself with is your children.” He concludes this Psalm with a profound metaphor in which he tells us that parents are to their children as a bow is to the arrows of a mighty warrior. The amount of thrust and direction with which his bow shoots out arrows, depends on the amount of thrust and direction with which the arrows leave his bow.

Our children are the arrows and we parents are the bow from which our children are thrust out into the world. When we realize the challenge this presents to us as parents, we must go back to the opening two verses and be reminded of the statement that we cannot build a family unless the Lord is the builder.

Another beautiful metaphor illustrates this truth that we cannot, but God can build a marriage and family. He gives to His beloved in his sleep, according to Solomon. As long as we stay awake and try to help God put energy in our bodies, God cannot restore us physically. But, when we become passive and go to sleep, God can become active and restore our tired bodies, minds, emotions, and spirits.

A Quality Marriage

As our pyramid illustrates, quality parents are a result of godly persons who have entered into a God-ordained partnership. For the marriage to remain strong — and thus for parents to be effective in raising their children — God must be central to the marriage relationship. We can never perform in our roles of spouse and parent unless God helps us.

This is clearly seen in Matthew 19, where Jesus was questioned about marriage and divorce. He acknowledged that Moses permitted divorce, but that was for the protection of women whose husbands were putting them out in the streets. In those days women had no rights. They had no settlement. So out of compassion for those women, Moses gave the Israelites the decree of divorce, but that was never the intent of God, according to Jesus. God's intent in the beginning was that there would be no divorce.

Then one of the apostles — and I imagine it was Peter — said, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.” (Matthew 19:10)

Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given” (11) — meaning, only those whom the Holy Spirit enlightens and helps can understand and apply this teaching. Without God's help, Jesus was saying, it is impossible to be an adequate marriage partner.

Solomon and Jesus are telling us, that without God, it is impossible to build our homes. We labor in vain without Him. We

ca not be adequate parents without God's help, and we ca not be adequate partners without God's help. The whole teaching of Scripture is that we ca not be adequate persons without God's help. That which is born of the flesh is simply flesh, according to Jesus. (John 3:6) The flesh is human nature unaided by God. Jesus also told us, that without Him, we can do nothing. (John 15:5)

If you would like to have a marriage in the sight of God, a marriage put together by God, a marriage brought together by God, and a marriage kept together by God, a marriage that will fulfill God's purposes, then pray this prayer:

“O loving Heavenly Father, bless this house.

Bless our house with the light of Your presence.

Energize with the love of Your Spirit

The relationships that make this house a home.

Heal us as persons, that we might have a wholesome partnership,

And be wise and loving parents.

Show us how to access Your grace all day, every day.

We pray that everything we do here in this house

Will be done in Christ, by Christ, and for Christ.

May the light, the life, and the love of the risen, living Christ

So empower us and control us

That we will be Christ's representatives
When we come in, when we go out, and
Especially as we live together within these walls.

Make this home a symbol of hope
That will point to the One
Who put this home together in His Word,
Who brought it together through His Spirit,
And who keeps it together by His grace.

In Jesus' name, Father, bless our home. Amen."

Chapter 2

A Marriage in the Sight of God

There is a passage in the Gospels where we find clear teaching from Jesus on the subject of marriage and divorce. I have already referenced this passage but I must return to it now because it presents Jesus quoting Moses and gives us the Old and New Testament answers to the question, "What is a marriage in the sight of God?"

"Some Pharisees came to Him to test Him. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?'

'Have not you read,' He replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh" so they are no longer two, but one? Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.'

"Why then,' they asked, 'did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?' Jesus replied, 'Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.'

"Jesus' disciples then said to Him, 'If that is how it is, it is better not to marry!' Jesus said, 'Not everyone can accept this statement, Only those whom God helps.'" (Matthew 19:11)

Marriage is a Providential Relationship

The first of the seven dimensions of this relationship, as I explained in chapter 1, is that there is a providential dimension to the relationship between a man and a woman. In the creation chapter of the Bible, we see the Creator bring a male and a female together into a "oneness". Jesus defined a marriage in the sight of God when He declared, "Whom therefore God has joined together let no man separate." A marriage is a marriage in the sight of God when we can say the Lord joined a man and a woman together. Divine guidance should then be the basis of our decision to marry.

The relationship is providential because God put the relationship together when He gave us the blueprint for that relationship in His Word. God brought this couple together when He made them one flesh, and Jesus tells us that only God can keep this man and woman together.

Because each partner brings his or her own problems into a marriage relationship, the challenge is to see ourselves in our marriages—the roles, functions, and responsibilities we are mandated to assume. We need to see the contribution we are supposed to make to the marriage and be concerned about whether or not we are making that contribution. Conversely, we need to accept responsibility for the problems we bring to the marriage.

Marriage is a Permanent Relationship

From the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 19, we see that marriage is of necessity a permanent relationship. Why is marriage to be a permanent relationship? The answer can be summed up in two words: children's rights.

Remember the illustration of marriage Solomon gave us in Psalm 127? The parents are to the children like a bow is to an arrow. The amount of thrust and direction with which children go out into life depends upon the bow from which they have been thrust. Now, if you were the devil and you wanted to destroy the family, what would you do? Would not you cut the string on that bow? Would not you want to break that bow? That is exactly what Satan is doing.

He is busy trying to destroy the families, cutting the string on that bow.

The law of life God designed for marriage and the family is one of the oldest and greatest laws of God in the Bible because it creates a home that automatically gives children about twenty years of nurture before they go out into the world and face life. They need that nurture and security. When you cut the string on this bow, when a marriage ends, you rob children of the nurture, security, and direction God intended when He wrote the law of marriage and family in the first two chapters of the Bible. This is one of the biggest problems children have today. A seventy-eight-year-old counselor who has counseled adolescents for a life time said, "For the first time in my counseling experience, the biggest question I am being asked by kids is, 'How can I keep my folks together?'"

This is why Jesus said a marriage has to be a permanent relationship. Your children are only as secure as your marriage, and they know that intuitively. If you want to see a look of terror on the faces of your children, glance at them when you are having a fight with your spouse. When they see their father and mother fighting, they feel less secure. On the other hand, if you want to see happiness on their faces, show affection; kiss your spouse in front of your children. They may tease you if you do, but do not let that fool you. They like that! When they see displays of tenderness and affection, it looks to them as if your marriage is doing fine, and that gives them security.

Sometimes people are in their second or third marriage before they come to faith in Christ. When they come to faith, they are in another marriage and have children from previous marriages. How does Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce apply to them?

Jesus always passed the law of God through the prism of the love of God before He applied the law to the lives of people. The difference between Him and the religious establishment of His day was that He never lost sight of the fact that the law of God came out of the heart of God's love for man. The intent of the law of God in Scripture is to express the love of God for man. God wants us to have it as good as we possibly can. That is why He gave us His Holy Word. He was not trying to see how unhappy He could make us by making up a bunch of rules. He wants us to be happy. There is always a purpose for every law of God in the Scripture, and it ultimately comes down to man's well being because God loves man.

The Pharisees, the religious establishment, lost sight of that spirit of the law. They enjoyed catching people who had slipped and broken even one part of the law. But Jesus never lost sight of His Father's purpose when He gave the law through Moses. Jesus consistently focused the issue, "Why did God give that law? In what sense does this law express the love of God for man and man's well-being?"

The purpose of the law of marriage and family, for example, is that we might have a happy, Christ-centered home. We read in the creation account that it is not good for a human being to be alone and

that motivated God to place the lonely in families. (Psalm 68:6) He does not want us to be alone. (For more information on this subject, see chapter 6 of this booklet.)

Marriage Is An Exclusive Relationship

Not only is marriage to be a providential and permanent relationship, according to Jesus and Moses, it must also of necessity be an exclusive relationship. The oneness between a man and woman is exclusive in at least two senses. Moses wrote: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother..." Jesus agreed with Moses when He gave His definitive statement of marriage and divorce (Matthew 19:5) Marriage excludes the parents of the married couple. Now, this does not mean you can not have a good relationship with your parents once you are married. But it does mean that you will not live in their home anymore. And if you are a woman, your father is no longer your spiritual head; your husband is.

Marriage is also exclusive in an intimate sense. Jesus taught that marriage is like a contract between a man and a woman. A condition on which that contract is based is exclusiveness. When the exclusiveness is violated, the marriage contract can be considered null and void. It does not have to be, but it can be. God did not design marriage so that anyone has to live with a spouse who will not live in that relationship exclusively. God does not ask you to do that. If your spouse will not live with you exclusively in this relationship,

then you can declare the contract null and void, according to Jesus, because marriage is an exclusive relationship.

One day a man came to see me who worked at a hotel near the ocean, not far from where I was a pastor. He had met a girl during the summer and he loved her very much. They had a fiery, pre-marital physical relationship all summer. When the summer ended, she went back to college, but she would come and visit him on weekends when she could. Then one weekend she did not come to visit. She called him on the phone and told him she was not going to visit anymore.

He sat in my office and literally cried as if his heart was broken. His heart was broken. Finally, he said to me, “You know, a relationship like this, where the feelings are so deep and so intimate, should come with some protection.” He sobbed that he did not want to put all his feelings into something that was not secure, something that could end with a note slipped under the door or a phone call — or even the lack of a note or a phone call. He was ready to hear that the marriage relationship blueprinted by Moses and Jesus mandated the very guarantees he was so eloquently describing.

God does not want you to be insecure in a relationship as intimate as marriage. That is why Jesus and Moses made “exclusiveness” a condition of the marriage contract.

Chapter 3

The Seven Links of Oneness

A devout African believer carved a beautiful symbol that profiles the relationship God intended when He created the first couple and declared them to be “one flesh”. When this talented believer made his woodcarving, he was illustrating seven ways in which a husband and wife are to be one flesh.

His beautiful carving is of a man and a woman carved out of one piece of wood. They are joined together by a chain of five double links. This chain that joins them together is joined to a link each of them has on the top of their head. Each of these links represents a dimension of the oneness God intended for a husband and wife to have. The links on the top of their heads represent the spiritual relationship they each have with God. The fact that all the other links are joined to these two links represents the fact that their spiritual relationship is the foundation of their oneness.

The first double link represents communication, which is the tool that makes it possible for them to cultivate and maintain their oneness. The next link is compatibility, which is the evidence of their oneness. The middle of these five links represents love, which is the dynamic of their oneness. The love link is followed by the link of understanding, which represents the growth of their oneness. The last of these double links that make them one flesh is sex, which is the joyful expression of their oneness. The fact that all these links

are double links presents the reality that all these dimensions of oneness are reciprocal, or involve a giving and receiving between them. When you add these five links to the links they each have on their heads, you have the seven links of oneness.

Our broadcasts on marriage and family were based on the seven dimensions of marriage that are represented by the seven links that make this man and wife one flesh. In two booklets, I want to give you a summary of what you heard on these broadcasts about the law of marriage and family.

The Spiritual Link

Bible scholars believe King Solomon was giving us an observation about marriage when he preached that a cord of three strands is not quickly broken (Ecclesiastes 4:12). A rope or a cable with three strands is hard to break because the strands intertwine and provide great strength.

When God designed the oneness between a man and a woman that is providential, permanent, and exclusive, He meant that they should be one with each other and one with their Creator. That is the way God designed marriage to be. There is a beautiful metaphor that you can still find on the gravestones of Jewish children today: “Bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God.” (I Samuel 25:29) That would make an appropriate label to write across every marriage in the sight of God today. The three strands in the beautiful

metaphor of Solomon can represent the marriage of two believers in this way: the husband, the wife, and Christ.

In the great marriage chapter of the Apostle Paul, he exhorts devout couples to separate themselves for brief periods of time that they might give themselves to prayer and fasting. He is actually addressing the sexual relationship of this couple. His reasoning is obviously that their sexual relationship and their oneness is strengthened by their spiritual oneness with their Creator (I Corinthians 7:3-5).

I will discuss physical unity later, but I would now like to make some observations about what Paul is implying in this passage about the most intimate relationship in your life. The most intimate and private relationship in your life is not your relationship with your spouse, but your relationship with God. Paul is teaching that our relationship with God is intimate, individual and private.

If the a marriage is strengthened by separating ourselves and individually getting close to God, this means we still relate to God individually even after we are a married couple. If you will think about it, when we stand before God in judgment, we must all answer to God for ourselves, not for our spouses. We will stand before the Judgment Seat as individuals, not together as man and wife. The marriage of two believers is as strong or as weak as the individual oneness the man and wife have with God. If the man has a strong faith and relationship with Christ, and the woman has the same thing, then when they come together they have something in common —

they have a spiritual dimension in their marriage that will greatly strengthen their relationship with each other.

When a husband and wife have their private quiet times of prayer, Bible, and devotional reading, this will help them make it through the difficult times. From time to time they may be upset with each other because of something they have said or done, but when they come back from their private times with God, they will be at peace with the Lord — and with each other. As they both get closer to the Lord and move through the day, they will experience a growing closeness to God and with each other.

If you are not as close to each other as you want to be, individually, get closer to God. That is the way the spiritual link of oneness is designed to strengthen a marriage. Since the husband and wife each have this spiritual link with God, I should say these spiritual links are the foundation of the marriage God has blueprinted for us in the Bible.

Chapter 4

The Communication Link

When couples meet with their pastor or a marriage counselor, one of the first problems they focus is their problem with

communication. They often begin a counseling session by saying, “We have no communication. We do not communicate.”

Communication is a dimension of marriage that can dynamically help the two to become one flesh because it is a tool that makes it possible for them to work on their oneness. As born again believers, we have oneness with Christ. Oneness with the Savior does not only take care of itself. It has to be maintained. It has to be cultivated. That is why you have to spend time daily with the Lord in prayer and Bible reading. In other words, we maintain and cultivate our relationship with Christ by communicating with Him in prayer and listening for His voice when we open our Bibles.

The same thing is true in a marriage. We must maintain and cultivate our relationship. Communication is a tool a couple can use to cultivate and maintain their oneness. Bacteria multiply in the dark, but cannot live in the light. If two people do not communicate, a lot of “bacteria” builds up between them. That’s why Paul exhorts us to “renounce the hidden things of dishonesty.” (2 Corinthians 4:2) When we are dishonest and hide things from each other, we keep the “bacteria” in the dark. Communication is like turning a light on our relationship. When we do, a lot of our “bacteria” dies. With good communication, we can then address what does not die, as the “light” of our communication becomes a tool that cultivates and maintains our oneness.

Dictionaries define communication as “a giving and a receiving of information, messages and ideas by talk, gestures, or

other means.” This definition tells us several things about communication. First, there is no such thing as “not communicating”. When people say, “We have no communication,” that is not really true. We are always communicating; the variables are what and how are we communicating? Talk? Gestures? Or other means?”

This definition of communication also tells us there are two dimensions to communication; a giving and a receiving. A woman once said, “It is as if my husband lives on a mysterious island and I have been circling that island for twenty years and cannot find a place to land my boat.”

Imagine that you and your spouse are on separate islands and you can only communicate by radio. To communicate by radio, one spouse must turn on the transmitter and send a message, and the other spouse must turn on their receiver and receive that message. Sometimes, communication problems can be traced to the fact that one or both spouses will not turn on their transmitter and send a communication to the other. And sometimes when they do transmit communication, their message is distorted and confused. Then there are those times when the communication problems can be traced to the fact that one or both of the spouses will not turn on their receivers, or when they do, their receivers are not tuned to the right frequency.

The way that a communication is received is just as important as the way communication is sent. When a turtle comes out from

under its shell, if you stomp on it, it will pull back in its shell and will not come out for a long time. We humans are like that too. Imagine that you share something deeply personal with your spouse. If that communication is not properly received, you will pull back into your shell and you may not come out for a long time.

If you cannot communicate, you have not got the tool with which to cultivate and maintain your oneness. You can not work on your relationship. It is possible to dramatically improve your communication and have this tool that makes it possible to really work on your marriage.

Unlike the relationship between a parent and a child, which from the time it begins at birth is destined to part, the marriage relationship draws two people together. Marriage is designed to be like the sides of a pyramid that merge together. A husband and wife should get closer and closer and closer. Communication gives us a tool that makes it possible for us to do that. If a couple does not have good communication, they do not have the tool God has designed to equip them to work on improving their relationship.

Communication problems come in at least two forms. One form is arguments. Some couples cannot communicate for five minutes without arguing about something. The other form is simply the opposite — silence. Now, silence does not always mean you have a communication problem, but it often does. People are different. Many people are uncomfortable with silence. To them, silence is awkward. Some are the “silent types” who do not need to talk.

One of my good friends is the quietest man I know. One day a lady said to him, “You do not have much to say, do you?.” My friend said, “When water is deep, it is still and silent. But when it is shallow, it babbles.” My friend was not being unkind to the lady. He was simply making his point.

So if you are married to one of those silent types, it does not necessarily mean that you have a communication problem. One of the most beautiful ways of being together is to have communion, which is the root meaning of the word communication. You can be so very comfortable together that you do not have to talk to be together. Silence does not always mean there is a communication problem.

However, “silent contempt” is a form of communication, and can mean that you have a communication problem. If your spouse is treating you with silent contempt that means you upset him or her, and so he or she is using their silence to communicate with you. A woman whose husband often did that to her said, “You have to listen real close when he is not talking to hear what he is saying.”

We do communicate by talk, gestures and other means. Those other means can be silence, a thrown dish, a slammed door, and a fist pounding on door or wall. On the positive side, a smile, a hand on the shoulder, an embrace, or tears are forms of communication. So you see, there is no such thing as not communicating. Sometimes we are communicating through gestures and other means and without words, but those other means are very

eloquent communication. Francis Assisi once said, “In all things preach Christ. When absolutely necessary, use words.” Effective communication, whether positive or negative, does not always require words.

I had a speech professor once who came into a very noisy classroom. He went up to the table in front of the classroom and slammed his open hand down on the table. It sounded like a shotgun blast, and as he slammed his hand on the table he shouted with a loud voice, “I want absolute anarchy!” The students were hushed to silence. He then explained what he had just demonstrated for us. Seven percent of communication is words. Fifty-five percent of communication is the inflection upon those words, and thirty-eight percent is the body language that accompanies the words that are spoken. He had said, “I want absolute anarchy.” That did not control the classroom. If people had understood what he had said, that would have had the opposite effect. Instead, what quieted the classroom was the inflection upon his words. By his tone we understood him to say, “I want this class to come to order!” And that was reinforced when he slammed his hand on the table.

In Summary

Communication is not simply what is said; it is also what is heard. Communication is not simply what is said; it is also what is received. Communication is not simply what is said; it is also what is felt based upon gestures and those other means. Communication is

not simply what is said; it is the total concept that is conveyed. Communication is not simply what is said; it is also sometimes what people want to hear. All these things leave the receiver with a “total impression” of what has been communicated by talk, gestures, and other means.

Communication Problems

As a pastor, over many years, I have asked couples, “Did you ever have good communication?” Almost without exception the answer has been “Yes.” I gave many of these couples an assignment. If their problem was that they did not talk any more, I would ask them to make a list of all the reasons why they stopped talking to their spouse. If the problem was that they could not communicate without getting angry, I asked them to make a list of all the reasons why they became angry while talking with their spouse. I called these problems “communication circuit breakers”.

Over the years I collected those lists and studied them. I identified more than twenty common communication problems that turned up on most of these lists. Here are a few samples of those problems; see if any of them sound familiar to you:

1. **Not interested.** A wife recorded that she told her husband one evening, “The baby found his thumb today.” She was excited about the baby’s progress, but her husband was not paying attention to her. He was mentally still at work or was reading the newspaper. Nobody wants to communicate when they realize they are talking to

themselves. Worse yet, not listening means something more serious — not interested. It says to the woman, “I am not interested in you and the baby.” According to her, his not being interested meant that he did not love her and the baby.

2. **No initiation.** Remember, communication is giving and receiving. One day a spouse realizes, “I am always the giver. He/she never contributes anything to our communication. All they ever do is respond.” If communication is a bridge, the husband and wife should each come halfway. If one of them must continuously build the whole bridge, they become discouraged and stop trying to communicate.

3. **A contentious and quarrelsome spouse.** Solomon said that a contentious (quarrelsome) woman and a constant dripping on a rainy day are the same (Proverbs 27:15). Actually, men and women are equally gifted at being contentious. A contentious person contends or challenges everything their spouse proposes. If you bring up a new idea, the contentious person will always oppose it. It is very difficult, and sometimes seems impossible, to communicate with a contentious person.

4. **Failure to recognize your spouse’s need for solitude.** It is no reflection upon your intimacy if your spouse still needs some space for himself or herself. Do not be threatened by that reality. Remember, even though the “two become one” in marriage, there is a practical sense in which we are still two.

5. Sometimes communication problems are caused by physical, emotional, and spiritual problems in one or both of the spouses in a marriage. When that is the case, no amount of communication study will resolve those problems. The solutions to those problems must be found spiritually, physically, and emotionally often outside the relationship.

6. Health problems dramatically impact the communication and relationship of married couples. Always consider the possibility that a physical problem could be the explanation at the source of difficult communication. This is especially true when the person who is very difficult to communicate with was not always that way. Psychological problems can also negatively impact communication. If your spouse has serious emotional or health problems, he or she must find the help they need.

Scriptural Solutions

Sometimes, the underlying problem is simply selfishness. One or both partners is not others-centered but self-centered. That is why he is not interested. That is why he is not listening. When the problem is selfishness, the solution is unselfishness. The Golden Rule is the solution. Jesus instructed us to consider what we would like others to do for us and then do those things for them. (Matthew 7:12) This great teaching of Jesus can transform the communication of a married couple. Each spouse must be others-centered and be genuinely interested in the issues that matter to their partner.

Many communication problems can be overcome by asking God for wisdom. One of my favorite verses is James 1:5, which says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God.” Again and again we should find ourselves praying to God, “I do not know what to do. I need wisdom that I do not have. You tell us to ask for it, so I am asking.” You will be amazed at how at how He delights to give wisdom to His people when they ask Him for that wisdom. Therefore, when your communication challenges bring you to the place that you do not know what to do, ask God for wisdom.

How to Communicate with a Difficult Person

There is another passage of Scripture that shows us how to resolve difficult communication problems. Listen to this advice Paul gave to Timothy: “Do not have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. In meekness, instructing those who oppose themselves, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to acknowledge the truth, and that they recover themselves and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.” (2 Timothy 2:23–26)

If your spouse is a “difficult person,” it is as if he or she has been taken captive by Satan. They are in Satan’s dungeon and you can not get them out. Only God can free them.

But here is what you can do to maintain the fruit of the Spirit. Three fruit of the Spirit are mentioned in this passage: meekness, patience, and gentleness. If you maintain the fruit of the Holy Spirit, that will keep the door open for God to work through you and close the door on the devil. This will give you the opportunity to earn your hearing and eventually place before your spouse the truth that can set him or her free. Paul's emphatically warns the servant of the Lord (you) that you must not strive or argue, because that closes the door for God and opens the door for the devil.

As you prayerfully apply this prescription of Paul for communicating with a difficult person, you should always consider the possibility that you could be the one who is the difficult spouse. Jesus said in Matthew 7:5, "First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." Having a plank or a log in our eye can blind us and make it impossible for us to realize that we are the difficult person Paul is describing in this passage.

Another biblical solution, especially when your spouse has psychological or physical problems, is to pray the prayer that Jesus prayed from the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) Think: in the midst of His excruciatingly painful death, Jesus prayed that prayer for His enemies. If Jesus prayed that for His enemies, cannot you pray that for your spouse? If they are not responsible for what they are doing

because of some psychological or physical health problems, it could work miracles for you to pray this prayer of Jesus for them.

Family Communication

If you and your spouse have children, the communication factor is a lot bigger than simply the two of you. It is important to recognize the many "communication combinations" in your family and make time for each of them. For example, the communication of the husband and wife is the most important communication in a family. Another is the father and mother, which I like to describe as a "board meeting." You should not mix those two communication priorities. Make time for communication as husband and wife, and set apart other times for your communication as parents.

In addition, there are all the communication combinations between parents and children. At times you should prioritize the time and place to communicate individually with each child, and other times to communicate together as a family. And do not forget the need of siblings to communicate without their parents. In our home, when my wife and I heard our children communicating with each other, we called that the "sounds of the siblings," and it was music to our ears.

The Cycle of Life

Imagine a pie cut in three pieces. Let each piece represent one third of your lives as a married couple with children. In the

normal cycle of life, we spend about one-third of our lives being nurtured by our parents, one-third of our lives nurturing children with our spouse, and one-third in the “empty nest,” when the children have left home. This means we spend two-thirds of our lives with our spouse. The communication relationship we must prioritize is the one with our spouse, because it will continue long after our children are grown and gone. Another reason why this must be our priority communication is that all the other relationships are greatly damaged if the communication between husband and wife breaks down.

Many parents make the mistake of putting the children first. If they neglect their relationship with each other, when their nest is empty, they may realize that they have no relationship. It is tragic when marriages break up at that point because fathers and mothers forgot that they were also man and wife. Communication gives you a tool with which you can strengthen the most important relationship in your home.

Chapter 5

The Compatibility Link

Compatibility is the evidence of the oneness God designed for a husband and wife. The concept of compatibility makes many

people think of physical compatibility or infatuation. Physical compatibility is important, but compatibility not only means chemistry, it also relates to issues like our values. Are your values compatible? This is where marriages get into trouble. Sometimes young people get married and they do not even talk about their spiritual compatibility. After they get married they often discover that they are incompatible in their spiritual values.

For example, a young wife becomes pregnant and her husband tells her to have an abortion. She says, “I’m not going to do that. It goes against my faith.” He responds, “What does your faith that have to do with our problem? We cannot afford a baby. Get an abortion!” She eventually gets a divorce. Another area of values clarification that frequently leads to divorce today is the role definition of a husband and wife. It is imperative that a husband and wife agree on the roles and responsibilities each plans to assume, and expects of the other, before they make the commitment of marriage.

You must be compatible in values with the person you marry. If you are both one in Christ, and your values are based on the Word of God, think of the compatibility that gives you! Your spiritual compatibility will be the foundation upon which you will define the roles and responsibilities each of you must fulfill in your relationship. Your spiritual foundation will define spiritual and moral issues, how you spend your time and money, what you both want for your children and every other area of your life together.

The history of the word compatibility goes back to a time when people must have felt that way about life. Compatibility comes from root words that mean “with” and “to suffer.” Years ago two people were considered compatible for marriage when they decided to “suffer with each other.” That sounds like a real negative approach to life, but that was reality. Life was very hard back then. Have you ever gone into the graveyard of an old church and realized how many of those headstones marked the graves of children? In past generations, people often had big families. One reason was they knew that if they had ten children, maybe five of them would survive.

Compatibility is one of many reasons that the most important communication relationship in a family is the one between husband and wife. If you lose a child, you go through that trial together. You grieve and suffer together. But when you lose your spouse, you suffer alone. I have heard many devout marriage partners confirm the reality, that when they are right with the Lord and with their spouse, they can handle any hardship. That is a good paraphrase summary of the original meaning of the word “compatibility.”

However, today the common usage of this word has brought us to its current meaning, which is: “two people who are well suited for one another.” They have similar personality traits, values, and purposes. What people discover after they are married is that every human being has a set of strengths and weaknesses. Typically, the weaknesses do not show up at the beginning of marriage. But after

being married a while, spouses become aware of the fact that they are living with a set of strengths and weaknesses. Unfortunately, as that hard reality surfaces, many married people today are deciding, “I do not believe that we are compatible anymore and I have found someone with whom I am compatible.”

Divorce and separation are common these days because society says incompatibility is a basis for ending a marriage. In fact, in various cultures you can find all sorts of legal reasons for divorce. The Bible allows only one reason for divorce, and it is not incompatibility. It is infidelity. As I have already observed, the marriage contract has one condition and that is the condition of exclusiveness. This condition means that God does not require us to live in this relationship with someone who will not live with us exclusively.

Acceptance

Our understanding of compatibility must include the concept of acceptance. There are a lot of things in a marriage you have to accept about your spouse. He or she is not going to change. So many people are naïve; they think once they are married, they can change the traits about their mates that they do not like. Women are especially guilty of this. They are naïve enough to think, “After I marry him, I am going to charm him into the man that I want him to be.” But that’s immature thinking. After marriage, a man is going to be the person whom she married and he is not going to change.

Scripture makes fun of people for thinking they can even change themselves. For example, Jeremiah asked, “Can the Ethiopian change the color of his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.” (Jeremiah 13:23) The Bible is too realistic to tell us to change.

But, the Bible does tell us to meet certain conditions and then God can change us. If you desperately need to change, or you are convinced that your spouse must change, the only hope of that change is for you and your spouse to be born again. Through the new birth, God can change us and make us new creatures in and through Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

With that exception, people do not change. It is immature to think you can change your spouse and it is even more immature to think that changing partners will solve your problem. You will soon discover that you have merely joined yourself to another set of strengths and weaknesses. It is mature to ask God to give you the grace to accept the strengths and weaknesses of your partner for life.

As you consider your compatibility as a married couple, do not focus on the negatives, or the points of incompatibility. That kind of negativism can destroy a marriage. Instead, focus on the positive aspects of your compatibility.

A young man was born again when he is nineteen. When he told the wise pastor, who led him to Christ, that he was going to have a difficult time maintaining sexual purity. The pastor gave him some

good advice. He said, “God has a woman for you and that is the ultimate solution to your struggle with sexual purity.”

The new believer replied, “How do you know when you have met that woman?” The pastor said, “Let me tell you. Take a piece of paper and draw a vertical line down the middle of the paper. On the left side of that line, make a list of all the attributes you would like to find in a woman—spiritual, intellectual, physical, etc. etc. Then, on the right side of that line, next to the column of qualities and virtues you want to find in a wife, make a list of the qualities and virtues that kind of woman is going to be looking for in a man. Look at that list very carefully and ask yourself, ‘Am I that kind of man?’ If you are not, then you know what you have to do while you are praying and waiting to meet your ideal.”

If you made similar lists, you would know your spouse when you saw him or her, because you would know what you were looking for. I certainly did. I made my lists and memorized them. When I met my wife, I could have proposed on the spot, but I waited until the second date because I did not want her to think I was too forward! Although you may not have literally had these two lists in your hand when you met your spouse, in principle, you probably did the same thing.

Once you are married, ask yourself, “What qualities in my spouse attracted me in the first place and caused me to choose him or her as a marriage partner?” Sometimes people are married so long that they forget about what initially attracted them to their spouse.

What qualities were you looking for? How many of those qualities does your spouse still have? Then ask yourself, “What qualities in your life attracted your spouse to you? How many of those qualities do you still possess?” Now, make a list of all of the qualities in your spouse that you admire, and then make a list of the qualities your spouse admires about you.

Pr. Dick Woodward has large highly polished rock that was to be used as a paperweight that his daughter gave him. This beautiful rock has this question written on the top: “If you are not as close to God as you used to be... ” Then, underneath the paperweight were these two words: “Who moved?”

Now, ask that question about you and your spouse. If you are not as close to your spouse as you used to be, who moved? Did you move? Did your spouse move? Never forget the qualities that drew you together in the first place.

Areas of Compatibility

To help you focus your old “compatibility lists” let’s take a look at some of the important and basic areas of compatibility.

One is physical compatibility. In a good marriage, if the sexual relationship is what God designed it to be, sex is about ten percent of the relationship. But, if it is not what God designed it to be, sex can be ninety percent of the problem. So many marriages break up over physical incompatibility. How much of your physical incompatibility, if you have any, would be resolved if you were

spouse-centered instead of self-centered, or if you put that other person and their gratification at the center of the relationship?

Compatibility also involves values. The dictionary tells us a value is “That quality of any certain thing by which it is determined by us to be more or less important, useful, profitable and therefore desirable.” Everyone has values, whether we can define them or not. Once two people are married, this is an area where incompatibility really can be clearly seen. Our values determine many things, such as how we spend our time. Do you ever have any conflict over that with your spouse?

Our values also determine the way we are going to spend our money. Our money and possessions reflect the way we invest our time. So, when we spend our money, there is a sense in which we are spending our lives. Do you and your spouse ever disagree over finances? When couples clash over how they are going to spend their money, a profile is emerging that can be an accurate measure of their compatibility.

How you raise your children is another area that reflects your values and measures your compatibility. Together, you must answer the questions, “What do we want for our children? What education do we want for our children? How do we discipline our children?” When a husband and wife have very different backgrounds they are likely to have conflict when they answer these questions together.

One final area of compatibility that is especially important today is role definition. How do you perceive the role of the husband

and father? How do you perceive the role of the wife and mother? As you define your roles, I would like to ask you two questions: Are you getting your role definitions from the culture or from the Scripture? If you are getting your role definitions from the culture, how are things going in your marriage and family?

If you believe God created and blueprinted marriage, the way you define the roles in your relationship should be rooted in the Scripture. Remember, the premise with which we began these studies of marriage and family is that marriage and family is a law of life God established when He created man male and female. In His Word He has given a blueprint for how couples and families are to function. If you believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, then you should come to the Scriptures looking for the divine plan for this role definition. If a husband and wife agree to get their role definitions from God's blueprint, that will give them great potential for compatibility.

Biblical Roles

The issue of marriage role definition today frequently raises another issue, which we might call "the argument from culture." People will say that a particular Bible passage does not apply today because of the culture that existed when the Bible was written. This cultural factor invalidates the truth that is taught in that Scripture.

It is true that there are many passages that need to be culturally interpreted, such as First Corinthians 11, where Paul says

that if a woman, by having her hair short, was advertising the fact that she was a prostitute, then a Christ-like woman should let her hair grow long. If there is no such cultural custom, then the length of a woman's hair does not matter.

But many Bible passages are "supra-cultural," meaning they are not to be interpreted in light of the culture in which they were written. We are to interpret our culture by the Scripture. We are not to let culture interpret the Scripture. Scripture was given to establish godly culture. One such passage is Genesis where God created the woman as a helper, or completer for man. The man was incomplete without the woman. The woman was incomplete without a man to complete. The man and woman joined together are called "Adam". (Not "The Adamses.")

Without a wife, a man is only a fragment of what he is meant to be. Without a husband, a woman is certainly incomplete. But God brings the two together and they become one whole person. That is supra-cultural (not affected by the cultural context), biblical role definition.

The Marriage Model of Peter

Another "supra-cultural" passage is found in the third chapter of the First Epistle of Peter. In the previous chapter, Peter made reference to the fact that, before we became believers, we were like sheep going astray. But, "now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." (2:25)

Then he begins chapter 3 with some advice to women who have husbands who are not obeying the Word. He writes: “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 words by the behavior of their wives.” (3:1) To husbands he writes: “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.” (3:7)

The key phrase in verses 1 and 7 is “in the same way.” In what way? Peter is referring to those words, “the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” In their writings, both Peter and Paul consistently present a model for husbands and wives. That model is Christ and the Church.

Peter is pointing to Christ and the church and he is asking husbands and wives, “Do you want to see God’s supra-cultural blueprint for the roles of a man and wife? Then look at the way Christ shepherds the Church. Husbands, shepherd your wives, as Christ is the Shepherd of the Church. Wives, do you want to know your role as a wife? Then look at this model of Christ and the church. As your husband shepherds you, as he is as Christ to you, be as the church is to Christ in your relationship with your husband.

That is the spirit in which Peter writes this passage. He is essentially writing: “Wives, let your husband be like Christ to you. Let him shepherd you. Let him love you as Christ loved the church.”

That is really what submission means for wives — to let their husbands shepherd them the way Christ shepherds the church.

The reason we do not see this model in the marriages of so many believers today is not that women will not submit to the shepherding of their husbands, although that problem exists. The primary obstacle to this marriage model being implemented and exhibited today is that men will not be as Christ to their wives. They will not be the priests of their homes. They will not assume the responsibility to lead and shepherd their wives and families.

The Marriage Model of Paul

In the fifth chapter of Ephesians, Paul holds up a blueprint for the role definitions of husbands and wives that parallels Peter’s blueprint. Paul writes in verse 21: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Observe that Paul calls for mutual submission. Husbands and wives must submit to one another because by nature we are self-centered. When some devout couples read that the two are to be one, they spend many years asking, “Which one?” In order for two to become one, to make a marriage work, both the husband and wife must submit to one another. That is the essence of love.

Paul continues, “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.” (22–24)

Obviously, Paul is doing the same thing Peter did in his inspired marriage counsel. Peter and Paul hold up the paradigm of Christ and the church and they both write their role definitions for husbands and wives using Christ and the church as their model. This model of Christ and the church had nothing to do with the cultures of Asia Minor or Rome. These blueprints for marriage revolutionized the corrupt and sinful cultures of their day. We must remember that Jesus did not teach His apostles and disciples to accommodate the values of their cultures. He challenged them to revolutionize their cultures.

Now, the assignment given to the women in Paul's marriage counsel requires supernatural grace. But the assignment given to the men requires much more supernatural grace. For we men are commanded to love our wives "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." (25) In exactly the same way Christ loves the Church, husbands are to love their wives and families. Just as Christ gave Himself for the church, husbands are commanded to give themselves for their wives and families. Jesus commanded men to "Be even as God is... perfect." (Matthew 5:48) Paul wrote to the Colossians that our only hope is the miracle that Christ lives in us. If Christ lives in us, it is possible - even natural - for us to be just as Christ is, as we love and give ourselves for our wives. (Colossians 1:27)

Women, if you had a husband who loved you and your children in exactly the same way Christ loves the Church, would it be

so hard to let him shepherd you? Would it be so hard to let him be the head of the home and let him assume the responsibility to lead the home?

In some ways, the women get off easy. Peter essentially writes to wives, "Let your husband shepherd you, and be sweet about it." That is really what Peter means when he writes "that they may be won over ... by the behavior of their wives. A quiet, gentle spirit is precious in God's sight." Be sweet about submitting to your husband. So many women submit on the outside but resist on the inside. But Peter writes, "No, let your submission be genuine; let it be from the inside. Be sweet about it. And be silent. Simply live out the Word before your husband. If anything ever will challenge him to stand in his place, it will be when he sees you standing in your place."

Remember that Peter is addressing these words to wives who have husbands that are not obeying the Word. This may mean these husbands are not believers. It could mean that their husbands are believers but they are not being to their wives as Christ is to the church. There is a place in which a husband and wife are to stand in a marriage according to Jesus, Peter, and Paul. We should remember that Peter is addressing these words to wives who have husbands that are not standing in their assigned places.

In Summary

Essentially, Peter is telling these wives that they are not to push their husbands into place, preach them into their place, or pull them into place. By the grace of God, they are to stand in their places. He is not telling these wives that his prescription will always lead to the conversion or the changed behavior of their husbands. His counsel is that if anything will solve their problem it will be the example they are to their husbands that can challenge their husbands to stand in their rightful place.

Chapter 6

The Love Link

The spiritual dimension is the foundation of the oneness God has designed for a husband and wife. Communication is a tool with which a married couple can cultivate and maintain their oneness. Compatibility is the evidence of their oneness. Love is the great dynamic of the oneness God designed when He declared that the two are to be one flesh.

This is a good question for couples to ask themselves before they enter into a marriage: “When you say, ‘I love you,’ to one another, what do you mean? Do you mean, ‘I have this need and you meet that need better than anybody I have ever met?’ When you say,

“I love you,” are you really saying, “I need you?” If that is your interpretation of the concept of love, you do not have a biblical perspective on the meaning of this word “love.”

When you say, ‘I love you,’ do you mean, ‘Your well-being is as important to me as my own well being?’” That is better, but it still does not define biblical, Christ-like love.

The biggest problem in marriages is selfishness. Conversely, the greatest dynamic in marriage is unselfishness, other-centeredness, or the ability to put the other person at the center and think about how you can meet his or her needs. When you discover the biblical definition of love, you will see that Christ-like love is the greatest dynamic in marriage because the love of Christ makes it possible for us to be genuinely unselfish.

Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35) Marriages can be revolutionized when that one teaching of Jesus is applied. When many people get married, they are takers. They are trying to take from each other to meet their own needs. If both are takers and neither one is a giver, neither one is getting anything. But, Oh, how things change when they realize it is more blessed to give than to receive!

If you have not learned to be others-centered, do not have children. Just as the commitment to be married should be based on divine guidance, devout couples should not have children until the Lord leads them to bring children into their marriage and into this world. Having children is the most unselfishness thing a couple can

do. Over the twenty or twenty-five years they are nurturing their children, they must give and give and give without any return. If they are good parents, when the children leave their home, they get married and then give to their children. That is a proposition that requires unselfishness.

I am one of what may be a vanishing species today. I was blessed to have a devout mother who believed in God's blueprint for marriage and family. My godly mother had eleven children. One day I asked her, "If you had it to do all over again, would you have all us children?" She replied, "Yes, I would, but before I did, I would decide that I was not going to have a life of my own." Maybe it sounds odd to you that my mother would choose to not have "a life of her own".

One of the absolutes of the twenty-first century young adult is their right to "get a life" and live that life. That's why many women are offended by the thought that they are to complete a man. Men are also just as offended by the thought that they should love their wives and give themselves to their wives just as Christ loved and gave Himself for the church. How can you get a life and live that life for yourself and still give yourself for your wife and family? The answer is that you cannot.

It was said of Christ "He saved others, but Himself He could not save." (Matthew 27:42) To love with the love of Christ you must sacrifice your life for those you love. My mother loved her husband and children with the love of Christ. That's why she had no life of

her own. But, she was happy! She was married a long time, and not once did she read a book on marriage. She simply read the Bible. She was a happy wife and mother because she found the dynamic of her marriage in her Bible.

The "love style" she chose to live contradicts the attitude of the "me" generation. So does this statement of Jesus: "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) Or this teaching of Jesus: "The only way to find your life is to lose your life." (Luke 9:24) A missionary who was martyred for his faith wrote: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he can never lose." Deliberately sacrificing your life for another, or others, is the greatest love there is. That is precisely the kind of love you see in the role definition of the man and woman who are joined together in the marriage that is blueprinted in the Bible.

I call this quality of love the dynamic of the oneness. To summarize: The spiritual relationship the couple has with Christ individually and together is the foundation of the oneness; communication is the tool that maintains the oneness; compatibility is the evidence of the oneness, and love is the dynamic that drives the oneness.

So, what is love?

"What do you mean when you say to her, "I love you?" As I have asked men that question, I have been amazed at how men will

stumble to find the right words, or be unable to explain what they think love is. The truth is, when we marry young, we may not know the first thing about love. When a young man says, “I love you,” to an attractive young woman, what he probably means is, “I love me and I want you.” If that is all a man means when he tells his young bride he loves her, that leaves his wife insecure, because later on the husband may find someone who meets that need better than she does.

The Love Chapter of the Bible

Let me share with you what I believe is the greatest statement ever written about the love of God and of Christ. It is recorded in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, a passage with which you may be familiar. Love was not Paul’s primary subject when he wrote these inspired words to the Corinthians. He was actually writing about spiritual gifts, and it was to put spiritual gifts in perspective that he wrote this inspired chapter about love.

Love Compared (1-3)

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” (1-3)

In the first three verses of this great chapter, Paul writes that love is incomparable and irreplaceable. He essentially writes, “Nothing I am, nothing I have, nothing I do, and nothing I ever become, have, or will do can take the place of love in my life.” In Paul’s day, those who lived in the Greek Corinthian culture were famous for their eloquent oratory and their emphasis on intellectual pursuits, especially philosophy. The believers in Corinth also highly regarded spiritual gifts, especially the gift of tongues. That’s why Paul compares love to eloquence, tongues of angels, and having all knowledge, to prioritize the incomparable and irreplaceable love of which he is writing.

Paul then mentions the gift of prophecy, which he will later call the greatest of the spiritual gifts. (I Corinthians 14:1) He also compares love to faith and he concludes this chapter telling us that faith is one of the three greatest eternal values. As the greatest missionary the church has ever known, we realize how important faith is to Paul. Yet he writes that if we have faith without love, we are nothing. As Paul compares love to these values the Corinthians highly esteemed, he concludes: “None of these can replace love in your life, because of what love is.”

Love Contrasted (8-13)

“Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail. Whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we

prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (8-13)

At the end of this chapter, Paul summarizes his comparisons of love when he shares with us that there are three things that really last, that are eternal values: hope, faith, and love. But, he concludes that the greatest of these eternal values is love. Hope is a lasting value because it leads us to faith. One day our hope, or the conviction that there is something good in this life, is given substance when it leads us to faith. (Heb. 11:1) Faith is one of the lasting values because faith leads us to God. But, when we discover love, we have not discovered something that leads us to something that leads us to God. We have discovered God, because there is a quality of love that is God. That is why love is irreplaceable and incomparable. God is love. (I John 4:16)

Love Clustered (4-7)

“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in

iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

In his devotional classic, The Greatest Thing in the World, Henry Drummond wrote of verses 4 through 7, “In these verses, the Holy Spirit passes the concept of divine love through the prism of Paul’s inspired intellect, and it comes out on the other side as a cluster of virtues.” Fifteen virtues are focused in these four verses of First Corinthians. If you examine these virtues, you will find yourself examining a cross section of divine love and an analysis of the very nature of God since we are told that God is love. (I John 4:16)

It is very difficult to define God or the love that is God. With great wisdom, and in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul is telling us how divine love behaves. He is essentially saying, “If you have this love of which I am writing, this is the way you will find yourself relating to the people who intersect your life.” In another inspired letter, Paul tells us that this quality of love is the fruit, evidence, or proof that the Holy Spirit lives in us. (Galatians 5:22) In these four verses in the heart of this love chapter, Paul places that love under a spiritual microscope.

I would like to challenge you to do something. Carefully consider these fifteen virtues that express this divine love. As you do, put your spouse, your children, and others at the center of each of these virtues that express the fruit of the Spirit coming out of your life. People have an uncanny ability to turn this passage around and

think, “Now, that is the way my spouse and other believers should love me.” No, Paul is saying, “This is the way you should love your spouse and others.”

Many years ago, when our first child was two years old, I secretly observed as she went into our church nursery. I was shocked when she grabbed a plastic toy from the hand of a baby and said, “Jesus said we’re supposed to share!” Clearly, she had not yet learned the true meaning of the love Paul is profiling for us in this chapter. We adults are more sophisticated about it, but we often do the very same thing. When we study this passage on love, many of us think, “This is the way my spouse should love me!” As you look at these virtues that express divine love, do not think about how your spouse is supposed to love you. Ask yourself, “Am I loving my spouse in this way?” Now, let’s look at these virtues one at a time:

Love “suffers long.” The Greek word Paul used here means that love is merciful. This love never avenges itself. Love does not “get even,” even when it has the right and the opportunity to do so.

Love “does not envy.” A word that is synonymous with the Greek word Paul used here would be the word “generous.” This describes the unselfish commitment of one person to another—a sanctified altruism. Are you fiercely committed to the proposition that you are going to unselfishly give of your time, energy, and whatever else it may take to see that all the needs and desires of your spouse are going to be met? That is what the word that is translated “does not envy” means in the original language.

“Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up.” This is translating a Greek word that means the person loving this way is not boastful. He or she has no need to impress other people. They will not have inflated ideas of their own importance because this love makes them humble. They will be the direct opposite of the proud and arrogant of this world.

The Two Dimensions of Divine Love

All these virtues have an outward and an inward dimension. Outwardly, love behaves this way because there is an inward reality that produces that outward expression of love. We see this in verse 5: “Love does not behave rudely.” Outwardly, love does not behave improperly. It behaves politely, courteously, and in a proper manner because inwardly it does not seek its own way.” Thanks to that same inward reality, this love is not easily provoked. (5) It is not touchy, it is unflappable because it is not driving its own agenda and insisting on having its own way. It is difficult to anger a person who loves and is other’s-centered. That is the outward expression of the reality that inwardly they are not consumed with selfishness, ego, pride, and attitude that says it is my way or no way.

Love “thinks no evil.” This is translating a word Paul used that means love does not keep score, or that this love does not keep a record of the love object’s wrongs. Do you keep score on your spouse? If you do, that is not coming from the love of Christ in your heart. The reason why this love outwardly does not keep score is that

inwardly it “rejoices not in iniquity.” This means that the person loving with the love of Christ is not pleased when the love object fails. If the love object fails, the lover is grieved. He or she does not want the love object to fail. Inwardly he or she is pleased when the love object succeeds. That’s what “rejoices in the truth” means. Being pleased when the truth prevails in the love object’s life is an expression of the love of Christ.

Verse 7 tells us that love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.” When the love object does fail, the lover keeps it quiet. That’s what “bears all things” means. Love has the faith to see and believe in the potential of the love object. This does people so much good!

When I was a teenager with very little apparent potential, my pastor did this for me and it meant so much to me. He used to say, “I believe in the ultimate you.” At the time I did not, and I did not know anybody else who did either. It meant so much to me that he did. At first I thought he might be joking, but he was not. He really believed in me. He “believed all things.”

Because love has the faith to see the potential in another, it hopes all things, which means it joyfully waits for the fulfillment of what it sees and believes. And then, while it is believing and waiting for the fulfillment of what it sees in the love object, it endures all things. It can take anything. The Greek word used in the original text means “to persevere while believing and waiting.” All this is expressed outwardly because inwardly the lover has this sanctified

confidence. Their confidence is not in the love object as much as it is in what it believes Christ can you in, with and through that love object.

Finally, Paul assures us that “love never fails.” We fail to love, but love never fails. The one loving knows that the love with which he or she loves will never ultimately fall powerless or without affect upon the love object. In other words, the lover can say to the loved one, “Nothing you ever say or do can make me stop loving you, because I am loving you with the love of Christ and that love is tough. It endures all things.”

In light of these fifteen virtues, look at your spouse and ask, “When I say I love her (or him), what do I mean?” If the Holy Spirit is in you, you have the capacity to love your spouse with this cluster of virtues. This is the dynamic God designed to drive the oneness between two people who have the marriage God had on His heart when He made Adam male and female. Without this dynamic, your oneness is a fragment of the Spirit of the law of marriage and family. But if, by the grace of God, you have this dynamic, that love can make your oneness everything that God intends for it to be.