

Marriage and Separation

Facts You Should Know

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Marriage and Separation Facts You Should Know

God's word is the imperative guide for the Christian. It is the source of true spiritual life. Jesus Christ said in Matthew 4:4, ". . . It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Here, then, is the promise of life from the very lips of Jesus Christ and it involves the entirety of the word of God. Jesus Christ was the God of the Old Testament (I Cor. 10:4).

The Source of Life

In Deuteronomy 8:1–3, He stated, "All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." So, events and the various circumstances that befell ancient Israel, as an example of what is happening to us today, is to reveal the intents and purposes of the heart; that is, to find out whether or not we intend to live by the whole of God's word.

The word to which Christ made reference is terrifyingly incisive. In Hebrews 4:12 we read, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The word of God does not permit us to delude or deceive ourselves. We are told by the One who enunciated the word of God that we have the responsibility of listening to and hearing what is said. "And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God. But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears . . ." (Luke 9:43–44). It is the responsibility of the ministry to make that word plain. It is your responsibility to act upon it. While God may not reveal all the truth at a given time, when it does come to us we are responsible for responding to it. This was why Jesus said, "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it" (Matt. 7:24–27).

God's word is not a philosophy; it is absolute. For if there is no authority in God's word, then there is no authority at all—only the opinions of men. Tragically, the majority will follow the easy way, the way of human reasoning, the opinions of men. Jesus admonished, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13–14). If we want eternal life, we must sincerely look for it!

Spiritual Storms of the Last Days

Enmeshed in the terrifying times in which we live, some who have understood the revealed truth will not be able to weather the storms of the last days. People who do not weather the spiritual storms of the last days will generally justify their failure. Self-justification is the way to remain comfortable with the self. What counts, however, is not what we say, but what we do. Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 7:21–23: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

It is the duty of the ministry to proclaim fearlessly the truth of God and to be honest in that proclamation. Paul wrote, "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are [being] lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (II Cor. 4:1–4). What we see here is that in spite of hearing an honest and sincere proclamation based on the word of God, there are those who have given themselves over to the god of this world—Satan. The Greek tense for "lost" is in the progressive form and means "being lost." So, there are those who are being lost because they refuse to evaluate the self; they prefer to evaluate others in order to maintain a comfortable feeling. The implication here from the context is that people who heard the truth of God uttered to them have given themselves over to satanic deceptions and their thinking has become obscured. They are missing the mark because they cannot see clearly any longer. The god of this world has blinded their minds so that they are unable to perceive the truth. They are busily engaged in the matter of self-defense, unwilling to admit where they need to repent and change.

It is a human proclivity to feel we are always right in what we do. The Bible tells us, "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits" (Prov. 16:2). God is able to see through our human deceptions. Notice again, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 16:25). Yes, indeed, "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts" (Prov. 21:2). We can justify our every deed, but God looks on our motives. God requires that we do right. He tells us, "He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him" (Prov. 14:2). Do we honor God in the way we live or do we despise Him?

A man is known by the fruits he produces in the same way a tree is known. Jesus explained it when He said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:15–20). In the above example, Jesus spoke of false prophets, but the same principle is true regarding any kind of conduct that is contrary to the law of God. There are fruits of the Spirit and fruits of the flesh. Notice Romans 8:5–7: "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Carnal mindedness, then, is to continue to manifest the wretchings of death.

Marriage and Separation

The word of God is impressively direct in the matter of marriage and divorce. Is the Bible equally direct in the matter of marriage and separation? Notice what Paul wrote in I Corinthians: "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife" (I Cor. 7:1–11). Here is a direct command from God that the wife is not to depart from her husband, but if she is rebellious and departs anyway, she is not free to remarry. She is, instead, to be reconciled to her husband. To really understand what is meant by Paul's statement in I Corinthians 7, let us go back to the beginning.

What Is Marriage?

In Genesis 2:18 we read: "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." At the very outset of man's creation,

marriage was a institution of God. Here the man was alone—not a good situation. So, God created two parts—a male and a female. God said one part was not sufficient; it took two to complement and fill out His creation. God created one, then created another one—the first one supplies a need for the second one as the second one fulfills a need for the first one. Both are vitally essential to each other as helpers of one another.

Marriage is a covenant. Notice how this is illustrated in Ezekiel 16:8: "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine." God's marriage to Israel was a covenant agreement, so a marriage is a covenant. It is a covenant between two parties that make up a whole. Marriage is, then, an institution created by God which involves the uniting of two parts. It is instituted by means of a covenant—a marriage agreement—and a vow, illustrated when God said, "yea, I swear unto thee." This is why we speak of the marriage vow.

The Church of God marriage ceremony includes these words: "Since marriage is a divine institution, and we are asking God to join you as husband and wife, it is fitting and right that each of you should faithfully promise, before God, to accept the sacred marriage covenant, according to the divinely imposed or ordained conditions imposed by Almighty God. Do you then, (his name), faithfully promise and covenant with God in the presence of these witnesses [of which one is God] to take (her name) to be your lawful wedded wife, to cleave to her unto death; to love her, to cherish her, to honor her, and provide for her?" Remember, God is a witness to these vows. The ceremony continues: "Do you (her name) faithfully promise and covenant with God, in the presence of these witnesses to take (his name) to be your lawful husband for the remainder of your natural life, and, as God has ordained, to submit yourself unto him as unto the Eternal; to be subject to him in everything, and to reverence him?" Marriage vows are not to be taken lightly. They involve a solemn promise before God that the participants will fulfill what they have promised.

Importance of Vows

Marriage is bound by a vow or covenant. In the sight of God we are expected to fulfill our vows. Ecclesiastes tells us, "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay" (Eccl. 5:4–5). So important are our words that Jesus said, "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:36–37). These words of Jesus are perhaps a reference to Numbers 30:1–5. This text reads: "And Moses spake unto the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the Lord hath

commanded. If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth. If a woman also vow a vow unto the Lord, and bind herself by a bond, being in her father's house in her youth; And her father hear her vow, and her bond wherewith she hath bound her soul, and her father shall hold his peace at her; then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she hath bound her soul shall stand. But if her father disallow her in the day that he heareth; not any of her vows, or of her bonds wherewith she hath bound her soul, shall stand: and the Lord shall forgive her, because her father disallowed her." Only a father can disallow the vow of a minor daughter. If she vows and he holds his peace, then she is required to perform her vow.

Deuteronomy 23:21–23 adds to this stern requirement: "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the Lord thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the Lord thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the Lord thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth." We have already commented on Ecclesiastes 5:4–5. Notice now verses one through three: "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words." And verses 6–7: "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God." These texts tell us that when we come before God, especially at the time we recite marriage vows, we had better be sure we mean what we say. To utter hasty words, then later seek a way out, is sin. Do not try to say, "It was a mistake." ". . . Neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands."

The word of God says we are going to be held accountable for what goes out of our mouths. When we make a commitment, God hears and holds us liable. God hears our vows. "For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name" (Ps. 61:5). We are to remember our daily promises as well. Notice verse eight: "So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows." One who "regrets" his vow is one who utters foolish vows. We must not be deceived by regret. Regret for a vow is generally a manifestation of human carnality surfacing. Consider Proverbs 20:25: "It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make inquiry." Yes, it is foolish and rash to make a promise to the Lord before counting the cost. The time to evaluate is before. The Moffatt translation says, "Tis perilous to say

rashly, 'This is sacred!' and then reconsider your vow." Is not marriage a sacred institution bound by a vow?

Who Can Be Loosed or Separated?

The New Testament tells us some can be loosed from the marriage vow. Who, then, can be loosed in the sight of God? Paul says widows and widowers can be loosed. "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord" (I Cor. 7:39). In such a case a widow or widower is free to remarry. Are there any others who can be loosed? Yes indeed, but there is a restriction. Notice I Corinthians 7:12–15: "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace." This text does not say the one married to an unbeliever is free to remarry. It simply states the believer is not under bondage—not under bondage because the believer has no control over the non-believer. What is the bondage spoken of here? We will examine this later.

Some Specifics of Marriage

The Bible reveals some specifics about marriage. Jesus said in the state of marriage two become one. "And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" (Matt. 19:4–5) If the two are bound together as one, it would be injurious to separate them. In the same manner as it would be injurious or lethal to sever a limb from the body, it is injurious or even possibly lethal to separate one marriage partner from another. This is because by means of a divine miracle God bound the two together as one. Marriage is a type of Christ and the church. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:30–32, "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." One who is a member of the church—the Body of Christ—cannot separate from Christ and expect to enter into the kingdom of God. The hope for salvation is to be a member of that body. If we say I Corinthians 7:15 teaches that separation between believers is acceptable in the sight of God, then we are announcing that the marriage symbol between Christ and the church is not the example for Christians today, and that we can gain salvation without being a part of the church of God. But Paul

clearly states, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (I Cor. 12:27). Genesis 2:18 states, "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." Marriage is, therefore, an act of completion, exactly in the same manner as our relationship with Christ. We are complete in Him (Col. 2:10).

If we are complete in Christ, how can we be complete outside of Him? And if the uniting of two in a marriage relationship is completeness, how can a separation be anything other than a violation of that completeness? This is why Jesus said in Matthew 19:6, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man [or woman] put asunder." No man, including the civil authorities of the land, can set aside a marriage joined by God. The Bible does not contradict itself (John 10:35). I Corinthians 7:15 does not say it is permissible to divorce and remarry. The believing wife who leaves her husband is commanded to remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband (I Cor. 7:11). Marriage is bound by the law of God. I Corinthians 7:39 means exactly what it says when it states, "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." Paul emphasizes this in Romans 7:1–2: "Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband."

As the wife is bound by the law, so is the husband. In I Corinthians 7:27 we read, "Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife." So, the husband is bound by the law also. The Greek word for "bound" is *deo*. Its meaning is made clear in a number of passages. Notice Matthew 12:29: "Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house." Here we see the man is bound, that is, restricted, so that he no longer has freedom of movement. He is bound up. As the man is bound up, so is the husband and wife, as *deo* is used in both cases. Another example is John 18:12: "Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him." With Jesus they were taking no chances of His escaping, so they bound Him. Acts 12:6 gives another example: "And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison." Peter was likewise bound so that he could not escape. Then notice Revelation 20:2. Here we read Satan will be bound: "And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years." A husband and wife are equally bound by the law. What law? The only spiritual law that has anything to do with marriage is the seventh commandment. Read it in Exodus 20:14: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." How does the seventh commandment apply to the binding of a man and wife?

In Matthew 5:32 Jesus said, "But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever

shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." One who puts away his wife for any cause other than fornication is responsible for her conduct both physically and mentally. Please read our article entitled, "The Faith Once Delivered About Marriage and Divorce." Whatever state or condition that prevails after the wife is put away is the husband's responsibility. Why? Because those bound by God cannot in His sight be separated. And, secondly, God made the one for the other, a need that is a part of their makeup. It is inherent in the seventh commandment that the guilty one who puts away his wife or the wife who puts away her husband, apart from any reason other than fornication, is liable in the sight of God. A couple is bound by the law because it is a law of duty and responsibility. Malachi writes, "Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously" (Mal. 2:14–16). God hates separation and divorce! When a wife makes an unauthorized departure, as Paul relates in I Corinthians 7:10, it is a sin. It is a sin because it is confiscatory; it is the theft of the rights of a mate. I Corinthians 7:3–5 says it is the duty of both the husband and wife to render sexual privileges to the other. If there is any withholding, it is but for a brief period of time. One who puts away a mate or leaves when there is no lawful cause assumes a responsibility over a property that does not belong to him or her. We become upset when someone walks in and takes possession of something we own. This is because such an action is confiscatory. One who leaves or puts away his or her mate unlawfully is guilty of this same kind of confiscatory outrage.

I Corinthians 7:3–4 states: "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife." The Moffatt translation says, "The husband must give the wife her conjugal dues, and the wife in the same way must give her husband his; a wife cannot do as she pleases with her body—her husband has power, and in the same way a husband cannot do as he pleases with his body—his wife has power." Then the Moffatt translation continues in verse five: "Do not withhold sexual intercourse from one another, unless you agree to do so for a time, in order to devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again. You must not let Satan tempt you through incontinence . . ." The Bible says married couples are to render what is due. "Due" is the Greek word *ophilo* which means "a debt." "Due benevolence" in I Corinthians 7:3 means carrying out the discharge of a debt. This debt is incurred by the marriage vows. In Romans 13:8 *ophilo* is also used. Notice the text: "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." The general relationship within the church is the debt or love to one another. It is an obligation we incur when we enter into the Body of Christ. In the same manner, the entering into a covenant

relationship in marriage brings on the same obligation of incurring the debt of love. This love includes sexual relations, a powerful influence in binding the marriage and enhancing it throughout the years.

In a sense, marriage can be compared to a harvest. Consider Paul's statement in I Corinthians 9:7–10: "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof! or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope." The word "should" in verse 10 means "ought" in the Greek. As a farmer plows in hope, looking forward to the pleasant fruits he deserves, a married couple ought to reap the deserved benefits of their hopes and dreams. If a farmer quits just before the harvest he will derive no benefits. The same is true of a couple who decides to "quit." All their hopes are dashed. This is especially true if one of the partners is wronged by the other's abandoning the relationship. When Paul used the word "ought" in I Corinthians 9:10, he implied that the benefits to be derived were the result of a debt that is due. We would not think of taking leave of the fifth commandment and expect to continue in God's good graces. Then, neither should we think we can take leave of the seventh commandment and remain in God's graces. We owe it to our mate to be faithful to the seventh commandment and to work out whatever difficulties we have in order to remain together, rather than depriving the other of the aspirations and dreams anticipated by plowing in hope. It is all a matter of responsibility. That is what the character-building process is all about. It is a duty that is also a debt.

We find the same thing in Ephesians 5:28. It tells us here that husbands ought to love their wives. It is a debt that is owed. It was this same obligation to duty that Christ manifested when He laid down His life for us. Read it in Hebrews 2:17: "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." The word "behoved" is the Greek *ophilo* and means it was a duty, a debt upon Jesus, an indebtedness. He did it willingly for our benefit. In I John 3:16 we also find the word "ought." "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." This example is perhaps the supreme duty of mankind, laying down our lives for one another. The problem with couples who cannot solve their problems is that one or both of them have not really laid down their lives. They are too busy defending "their rights." Not having relinquished their rights at baptism, they never really became submissive and yielded to the law of God. They are not flexible and teachable. They view marriage as competition to uphold their own way, rather than recognizing the duty incumbent upon them to submit to one another in the fear of God (Eph. 5:21). In marriage the debt of submission is owed during the entirety of one's natural

existence. Couples who are bound in the sight of God have no right to free themselves from this debt. It is all a matter of maturity, of growing up.

Separation and Divorce Permitted?

Why, then, did God allow separation and divorce in the Old Testament? Jesus gave the answer. "They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so" (Man. 19:7–8). Hardness of heart or unconversion—carnality—is the cause of all our problems. It is that very hardness of heart that has been problematic from the beginning. "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). We are carnal by nature. We have fleshly minds. We are defiant and rebellious. We continually find fault with others instead of with ourselves. This is the primary cause for all the problems in the world today and most certainly with many marriages.

Who is allowed to separate, according to the New Testament teaching? Paul wrote, "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace" (I Cor. 7:15). If the unbelieving departs, the believer is no longer held accountable for the covenant agreement, the sacred marriage vows. Why? Because the unbeliever walked out. God does not hold the converted one accountable for that which was precipitated by the unconverted. The believer is not under bondage. What bondage? The sacred duty of marriage discussed in the preceding paragraphs. This does not free either one to remarry. The subject here in I Corinthians 7:15 is separation, not divorce and remarriage. The word "bondage" here refers to the duties of marriage. The Greek word *douloo*—to be in bondage—never refers to divorce in the New Testament. These duties of marriage were promised at the marriage ceremony. What does God say about what we promise? Read it in Psalm 15. Note particularly verse four: "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved."

Source of Today's Evil

Satan, the god of this world (II Cor. 4:4), is the one responsible for the current popularity of disobedience toward God. This disobedience is manifested in the

unwillingness to be faithful to the marriage vow. Satan, "as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour" (I Pet. 5:8). We are warned to be sober, to be on guard, lest we fall prey to his machinations. We are told to resist by being steadfast in the faith, not to allow Satan to work on our minds so that we may try to justify disobedience to God's commands. If we are hard and adamant, indifferent in our relationship with our husbands or wives, we are wide open for the diabolical ploy of the devil. I Corinthians 7:5 takes this into consideration. "Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency." Notice what Paul tells us in verse four: "The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife." Here Paul's instruction is that there are to be expected regular marital relations as a general rule, the exception being a break for a short period of time due to spiritual reasons. This break is of an extremely temporary duration. If it is prolonged, Paul says we are subject to the evil influence of the devil.

Hardness of Heart

Estrangement, whether within the marriage or as a result of a separated condition, is a sin as great as separation itself. Both are the result of a hardness of heart and an unwillingness or inability to live up to the Christian commitment. When God instituted marriage, the two became one (Gen. 2:24). This is why Jesus Christ stated, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6). Putting asunder includes both separation and divorce. This is also why Paul stated, ". . . Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, [in a state of rebellion against the instruction of God] let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife" (1 Cor. 7:10–11). Separation leads to adultery. Jesus Christ said so in Matthew 5:32: "But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery. Separation causes adultery. Separation is a violation of the law of God—the seventh commandment. Those who truly follow God love His law. David wrote, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97). Those who love God's law hate vain thoughts because vain thoughts are opposed to God's law. This was why David said, "I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love" (v. 113). But what is human nature really like?

Human nature in its rationale attempts to void the law of God. Physical Israel, as a nation of unconverted people, hardened their hearts to the requirements of God's Law. They simply could not live up to its expectations. So Jesus explained, when asked about the permission to divorce during the Old Testament period, ". . . Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8). Here is a clear inference that human nature tends to void God's Law. Because

of the hardness of their hearts Moses permitted them to divorce. But for those who are converted, this provision no longer applies. Because we have been given access to the Holy Spirit, we have the power to live up to God's requirements. Any true Christian should be able to work out all marital difficulties and keep his marriage intact. Those who are unable to do so should seriously question whether they are really converted and have God's Spirit. Human nature can be very hard and volatile, full of hatefulness and resentment over real or imagined grievances. Such reactions stem from the basic heart and mind (Mark 7:20–23, Gal. 5:19–21). David knew the proclivity of men to attempt to void God's Law. He wrote, "It is time for thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void thy law" (Ps. 119:126). Men determine in their own minds that the law of God does not apply to them except as revised from a human perspective. They accept whatever is their own devising. They restructure God to suit themselves so it is not a difficult task to restructure His law. They refuse to be taught and corrected by it. Romans 8:7 states, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." The first requirement, therefore, for success in one's relationship with God, as well as with one's mate, is to be willing to admit guilt. Rather than accusing the other party, we must be willing to admit our own faults, to confess them to God and to be honest and straightforward. The Bible tells us, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (I John 1:8–10).

I Corinthians 7

Commentators are in general agreement as to the meaning of I Corinthians 7. For example, *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* informs us that the phrase "but and if she be separated" (v. 11) should be considered as a parenthetical expression and what follows it is in direct connection to what precedes it. This points to some possible cause of divorce occurring contrary to the command of Christ. What Paul is saying is that such a separation is not an exception to the law, but contemplates a case which may occur in spite of the law. What this means is that sometimes human weaknesses lead some to find a necessary respite. Sin indeed it is, but sometimes in order to get things straightened around some may use this temporary expedient. Why? Because of hardness, indifference, or a lack of conversion. Human nature being what it is, Paul made the church aware that some would opt for this temporary solution. That is why the provision is there; it is not an exception to the command of Christ. The *Experimental and Critical Commentary*, by Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, pulls no punches and calls such a separation sin. These commentators recognize that marriage signifies the mystical union between Christ and the Church. What this means is that if separation is acceptable in the sight of God, then we do not have to have a spiritual relationship with Christ in order to make it into the kingdom of God! But Paul makes it clear—this is not the case.

An examination of the contents of I Corinthians 7 clearly demonstrates the binding nature of the marriage agreement. Verse one, Paul's statement that it is good for a man not to touch a woman must be understood in the light of verse 26. Verse 26 calls attention to "the present distress," obviously referring to a set of circumstances that was then extant. This set of circumstances was such that it could make a marriage relationship difficult. Regardless of these circumstances, there are spiritual principles that always apply to marriage. When one takes the marriage vow, he or she promises in covenant with God, in the presence of witnesses. Couples are not compelled to make these promises; they do so voluntarily. What do they promise in these marriage bonds, this mutual covenant they make with one another? For one thing, "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband" (v. 3). "The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife" (v. 4). As previously noted, these two texts are a reference to the marital relationship. This is why separation is confiscatory. The one who departs has confiscated a possession or right that does not belong to him—a violation of the mutual agreement with the other to become one. This is the means of procreation, the way by which God is expanding His own family. To withhold marital relations other than for a brief period for spiritual reasons is to defraud the other party, as Paul states in verse five. Such responsibilities cannot be fulfilled in a separation. The whole underlying context here is the sanctity of the marriage contract.

Because of "the present distress," Paul advises the unmarried and widows (v. 8) not to marry, but if they cannot restrain themselves it is better to be married than single. But notice what he tells the married. "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband" (v. 10). The marriage covenant is a binding relationship, a covenant agreement to remain together regardless of the times or circumstances. But, if she in a state of rebellion against the law of God separates, here is Paul's command, "But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife" (v. 11). Here we have two commands that are absolute—the wife is not to leave her husband, and the husband is not to put away his wife. A violation of either of these is sin! If the woman departs, she must not add sin to sin and remarry. She must remain separate or be reconciled to her husband.

Paul does not set a time limit on the length of a separation. He recognized that in this human option there must be room given for repentance, a period of time for conversion to prevail, work done to get things straightened out. Remember, each of us will be judged before God. He knows our innermost thoughts and motives. It is too easy to blame the other party in such a circumstance, rather than to hold ourselves personally accountable. The day is going to come when we will stand before Christ. Will we be able to stand before God in union with His laws and commands, wholly submissive, yielded, teachable, right-spirited, right-hearted? Or will we be the defiant, selfish, arrogant ones? We had all better learn now. It will be tough to hear Christ tell us no in that day! Christ indeed is able to read hearts and

minds. We do not see Him face to face now, but we will in that day and what will He say to each of us?

There is only one separation in I Corinthians 7 that does not hold the converted party responsible. This is found in verse 15: "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace." What bondage is Paul talking about here? The answer is found in verses three through five—the marriage agreement, the binding of the two into one. Paul does not contradict what he stated in verses three through five and especially verse 39. What he is simply saying is that if the unbelieving departs the converted party is not held responsible for the marriage breakup. An unbeliever can be one who understands God's instruction but refuses to live up to it, as Paul illustrates in I Timothy 5:8. Such a one who denies the faith is in the same category as an unbeliever. The force of the marriage agreement is such that if the unbeliever chooses to remain, then the converted party is to remain also (vv. 12–14).

In I Corinthians 7 marriage and divorce are not even under consideration. This chapter deals with the subject of marriage and separation, not divorce and remarriage. It is concerned with the sacred covenant of marriage, and the vows that proceeded out of the mouths of those who have entered into the married state. There is no justification for divorce and remarriage in this chapter. When the unbeliever departs there is no longer any obligation on the part of the believer to make the marriage succeed. To the believer Paul emphasizes in verse 27, "Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife." The only way one can be loosed from a wife is by her death (v. 39 and Rom. 7:2–3). So, I Corinthians 7:27 refers to a widower. Again, keep in mind Paul's instruction is related to "the present distress." But, if someone decides to go ahead and marry under the circumstances, they have not sinned. The reason: A widower and a virgin are free to marry. In the case of the former, because the wife has died, and in the case of the latter there has been no previous marriage. Paul's instruction, then, based on "the present distress," is that it is best not to marry, but if they do they have not sinned. Paul simply wished to spare them the problems that would arise if they were married in such trying times.

Notice how this is explained in verses 29–35: "But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away. But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that

ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction." Notice, this passage tells us that the married woman cares for the things of the world, how to please her husband. Why? Because marriage is a duty, an obligation. But the one who is not married is not under any bondage. There is no obligation there. One who is married is under an obligation and cannot separate from this responsibility. That is why the emphasis in verse 35 is on being able to attend to the Lord without distraction.

So, what Paul is instructing in this chapter is that the wife is bound by the law as long as her husband lives (v. 39). That is why he emphasizes the need to remain single in times of distress. It is better under such circumstances not to be under the obligation bondage that is incumbent upon the married. However, if one cannot refrain from marriage, they have not sinned by marrying. Paul wanted them to understand that even if a separation occurs, for whatever reason, the wife is still bound to the husband. Only if her husband is dead is she at liberty to marry again, but only to a believer. Paul says the bondage of marriage is absolute; there are no exceptions.

Basis for a Good Marriage

The basis for a good marriage goes back to childhood, it begins at the time a child is born. It is the result of a good example by the parents and the preparation that was put into developing a child into marriageable material. If parents foster an attitude of defiance in their marriage, the child is sure to follow that example. Paul instructs in Ephesians 6 that children are to obey their parents. Paul wrote, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise" (vv. 1–2). If a child is taught proper respect for his or her parents, it will not be difficult to transfer that honor to someone else; in the case of a daughter, to her husband. It would not be incorrect to conclude that the marriage problems of many can be laid directly at the feet of parents who did not rear them properly and did not instill Godly principles into their children's thinking. Offspring will be, to a certain extent, a mirror of the parents. They will certainly mirror the behavior of the parents. Children must be taught the ways of God beginning at an early age. We are admonished, "Train up [catechize] a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

Correction is called for in this process. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" (Prov. 22:15). Unless a child has been taught by example and instruction his or her God-given place in the home, it can be guaranteed that upon marriage such a child will generate a marriage full of problems. It may be nice to look upon a cute little child and refer to him as "sweet," but when he grows up and we hand him to someone else, what are we bequeathing? Children must be nurtured in the admonition of the Lord. And they must be disciplined with love—tough love. Remember, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes"

(Prov. 13:24). "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying" (Prov. 19:18). In the Old Testament period, rebellious children who were recalcitrant were executed (Deut. 21:18–21). Children can bring much grief to their parents. "A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him" (Prov. 17:25), but who is responsible to a great extent but the parents?

Marriage is a Responsibility

When a man and woman join as a couple they assume a tremendous responsibility. They are welding together two lives, often from divergent backgrounds. These may be divergent culturally, as well as socially. So, couples need to enter into marriage with an understanding that there may be difficulties to overcome. The major responsibility for the marriage falls upon the man. He has been given authority from God to be the head of the family (I Cor. 11:3). This authority must be administered in benevolence, love, and kindness. It must be administered with an attitude of service and concern for the wife and family. The marriage relationship is a type of the relationship between Christ and the church. Notice how Paul describes it in Ephesians 5:22–33: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the *saviour* of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband." The duty of the husband toward the wife is the same as that of Christ toward the church, and the duty of the wife is the same as that of the church toward Christ.

When Paul made allowance for a separation, he did so because he knew some couples, who were at an impasse with each other, needed a breather for a short period of time. What is clear in Paul's statement regarding separation is that it is sinful and if couples could not resolve their problems they were simply announcing to the church that one or both of them were unconverted. Marriage, like everything else, has rules that are imperative for success. Let us note a few of them.

Rules of Success

The first rule relates to the attitude one takes with himself into the marriage relationship. That is, the attitude of mind, the philosophy, the orientation. Notice what Solomon called it. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). Yes, out of the heart proceed the issues of life. But also out of the heart proceed all the fundamental traits and characteristics of the natural nature. What did Jesus say proceeded from the heart? "And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:20–23). Solomon warned us of the necessity to be aware of the heart and mind because of the evil proclivity within human nature. Our orientation, that is, how we respond, how we handle situations, what we do with circumstances that confront us, are all included. Then, too, remember the tongue is the mouthpiece of the heart. Solomon again tells us, "The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked" (Prov. 10:11). The mouth speaking for the heart merely conveys the issues of life. When someone talks, he or she expresses what is within the heart and mind. It is a fundamental manifestation of the mind of God or the spirit of carnality. The mouth of the righteous man manifests the abundance of God's Spirit. Out of it flows a right orientation, benevolence, kindness, love, compassion, cooperation. By contrast, the mouth of the wicked conveys villainy, contempt, hurt, injury, condemnation of others, fault-finding. In brief, all that is bad. What does not proceed from the Spirit of God proceeds from human carnality. The right attitude, even in the face of adversity, practices the way of peace, kindness, benevolence, all that is marvelous and good. Surely the commandment of Jesus, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34–35), must begin in the home between a man and his wife.

A second rule is to make the object of concern the marriage relationship every hour and every day. There is no better place than in the home to practice Proverbs 15:2. This text tells us, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." "Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones" (Prov. 16:24). Words of kindness, words of understanding, words of mercy, judicious, highly selective, seasoned words work wonders in the marriage relationship. One who desires good marital health cultivates a good marital relationship. Notice this important principle: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Prov. 16:32). Yes, one who rules his own spirit, especially in the marriage relationship, is indeed a man or woman of great capacity. For to rule the defiance and resistance in our own hearts and minds is a feat far greater than any military victory.

A third rule of success in the marital relationship is the necessity to cover transgressions. Notice it in Proverbs 17:9: "He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends." What is our reaction toward our husband or wife when we find a fault? Do we condemn or indict? Do we cover or do we broadcast it? Do we build or do we destroy? A good place to begin practicing this rule of covering sin is in the home. For we all have faults, both husbands and wives. Do you really desire to please your mate? Then be more willing to be horsewhipped, so to speak, than to expose your mate in any way. Why? Because Paul tells us that our mate is our own flesh. "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church" (Eph. 5:28–29). When we begin to view one another with respect, our conscious moments will be for our mate, and we would do battle rather than denigrate our mate. But, how often are we the ones who do the denigrating?

The fourth key to success in marriage is to keep a positive orientation. Never allow marriage to develop into a negative posture. Keep it positive. Marriage, as God intended, should be scintillating, electrifying, purposeful. People will spend huge sums of money to achieve some physical objective in life, but when it comes to a successful marriage they will put very little into it. The fabric that binds a marriage is love. If Paul urged the church brethren to be knit together in love (Col. 2:2), how much more should that principle apply to marriage? Keeping a positive orientation will prevent the negative aspects of marriage, which are bound to arise, from dominating the thinking. It is simply a matter of orientation—a matter of the mind. We must have the desire; we must want to do it. The Bible clearly tells us we can restrain ourselves. Our minds and hearts do not need to be careening out of control. If we fear God enough we will do something about our marriages; we will make them successful. We must act on the word of God. James 1:22 tells us, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." Those who act on the word will be richly rewarded. Do not wait for the other party to act. Take the lead and initiate a reconciliation (if there is a separation).

Next, while there are differences that arise between married couples, keep these differences in low profile. Too many couples augment their differences rather than their similarities. Downplay the differences. Cultural and racial differences can be of a very serious magnitude. Some have married with huge barriers before them; it will be necessary to reduce these differences to a minimum. Take, for example, the proverb that says, "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle" (Prov. 18:19). When one allows contentions and dissimilarities to create such problems, he may as well try to enter an impregnable castle. So, do not create, by dwelling on dissimilarities or contentions, such a castle in the marriage relationship. The Bible says in Psalm 4:2, "O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? . . ." All that we do should be for the glory of God. Do we glorify God in our marriage relationships? One who stands before God in a marriage ceremony promises he or she will

perform certain duties. One who fails in these duties has disgraced himself and has dishonored God. It may be axiomatic, but one who behaves unseemly in the relationship with his wife will behave unseemly in his relationship with God.

The sixth point to a successful marriage is to accept trials as a challenge. If you are strengthened, rather than buffeted by trials, you have built strong character. Paul tells us nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:35–39). If marriage is a type of the relationship between Christ and the church, then nothing should be able to separate us from the love of a mate. Marriage separations, then, are failures. They result from the unwillingness of one or both of the parties to apply Christian principles of love. Christian couples who separate have no excuse, no justification for what they have done. They reflect an unwillingness to own up to their failure and to apply the Bible teaching on how to solve problems. They often spend too much time fingerpointing at their mates, failing to realize they cannot change the other party; they can change only themselves. Rather than facing their marital problem as an opportunity to overcome, they view it as an opportunity to justify themselves by finding fault with another. Paul tells us, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Trials are a challenge to overcome, not to justify the self. The cardinal principle is this: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). Yes, indeed, "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14).

Point number seven is that a successful marriage must be based on genuine love. Too many couples these days have little understanding of love. They confuse lust for love. Love is genuine outgoing concern for the other person. It is not the transitory infatuation so often confused with love, especially among teenagers. Genuine love is unconditional in its giving. It is unfeigned. Paul describes it in I Corinthians 13. Here the archaic word "charity" is used, but if the reader will substitute the word "love," the meaning will be quite clear. "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth . . ." (vv. 4–8). Apply this Christian definition to the marriage relationship, and how can it fail? In Romans 13:10 Paul writes, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." If the first neighbor this applies to is our mate, what successful and wonderful marriages we all could have. The seventh commandment does not allow for separation. Any such separation is regarded as sin. Only for a brief duration of time is it allowed in order to sort out the difficulties. It is not a back door to divorce. Christians have access to the love of Christ (Rom. 5:5). Paul says, "For the love of Christ constraineth us . . ." (II Cor. 5:14). If the love of God does not restrain us and we give ourselves over to every whim of the carnal mind, refusing to work out our marriage difficulties, we will have ourselves only to blame in the judgment day.

Point number eight is that in order to be successful, we must think success. We must never think failure or defeat. Do not accept defeat. Separation is a defeat, a weakness. It results from not taking Christ and the law of God into the marriage relationship. The Bible tells us, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it . . ." (Ps. 127:1). Marriage couples are building a house, but without God they are building it in vain. Those who take God into their marriage have unlimited help at their disposal. Look what the prophet Isaiah wrote, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear . . . None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity" (Isa. 59:1, 2, 4). Too many couples try to solve their marital problems without God and Christ in their marriage. The key to success is calling upon God and being willing to change when faults are revealed. Anything other than this is nothing but vanity, the prophet says. God refuses to hear those who practice and sustain a wretched attitude toward their mates. Those who insist on their own way, who trust in the flesh, cannot achieve success in a marriage. Thinking success means to place our trust and confidence in God and Christ, and to be willing to change when we see we are wrong.

In order to be successful, the duty of the husband, while being a concerned and loving head of the household, is to serve his wife and family. He sacrifices his life for that of his family. His primary duty is to support his wife and family economically and to manifest the love and consideration due them. Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Who are his greatest friends but his wife and family? This is where love begins. How can a man shower love and affection on friends outside the family when he cannot even render this service in the family? John wrote, "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The relationship between Christ and the church was first manifested in Christ's love toward us. The marriage relationship should be based on the same premise. A husband who does not provide for his wife and family certainly has little love for them. The wife reciprocates because of this loving concern for her, in the same way the church worships and obeys Christ because of what He does for it. God made a commitment to those He called, both in the Old and New Testaments. When we take the marriage oath, we make a commitment to our mates. God is character. His word is good. How is ours? Are we faithful to our charge? God's character is such that "the Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deut. 7:7-9). We must emulate God in the same manner in our marriage relationship.

The final point, number nine, is that in order to be successful in marriage we must be willing to see the self for what it is. Human nature demands relief from feelings of guilt. Most of the time this is accomplished by blaming someone else for what goes wrong. This is certainly true in marriage. Many couples, instead of admitting faults and working together to solve marital problems, spend vast amounts of time justifying themselves at the expense of their mates. Often, the end result is separation and divorce. God warns husbands particularly about this tendency to be heartless. This is why Paul admonishes Christian husbands, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). Bitterness against one's wife often turns to treachery. Malachi warns, "And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand. Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously" (Mal. 2:13–16). It is the husband's duty to provide for his wife and to love her. As Christ loves the church, the husband's duty is to provide comfort, assurance, dignity, esteem, and love for his wife. He cannot do this if he is selfish and self-centered. A Christian husband will examine himself in order to evaluate his performance. He will not be spending his time evaluating and criticizing his wife all the time, discouraging her, making her feel worthless and useless. Does Christ treat the church this way? Of course not! And neither should the husband treat his wife this way, if he is examining the self and seeing himself for what he is. What is the Christian instruction to the husband and wife? To the wives, Peter writes, "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the [conduct] of the wives; While they behold your chaste [conduct] coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement" (I Pet. 3:1–6). And what does he say to the husbands? "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered" (v. 7). Add to this Paul's instruction, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their

wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church" (Eph. 5:25–29). And to the wives, Paul says, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing" (vv. 22–24). In verse 33, Paul adds, "Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband." You can be sure of this: If husbands and wives really worked on the above admonition they would have little time to be finding fault with one another. They would be examining themselves to see if they were living up to these requirements.

Paul commands, "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband" (1 Cor. 7:10). It may be largely the husband's fault that such should take place. If so, he must examine himself and correct what he has done. If the woman is at fault, she must do the same. Most likely such a case is the fault of both. In this case both must examine themselves and be willing to change. Stop blaming the other! You cannot change the other person; you can change yourself only. Every woman should examine herself in the light of Proverbs 12:4, "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones." It is her duty to uphold him in the same way he defends, protects, and provides for her. Proverbs 31:10–31 describes such a woman. Read it often. "Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands" (Prov. 14:1). The bride of Christ has made herself ready, we read in Revelation 19:7. This is what the Christian wife should strive to do in her marriage.

What is conversion? It is the control of the heart and mind. It is the subjugation of the self. Conversion is required in order to enter into the kingdom of God. For some couples, conversion is required to make a successful marriage. Whatever our status, we must all be sure we take heed to God's instruction and be profitable servants in those responsibilities that have befallen us or that we have taken upon ourselves. It is good for us to remember it is first the husband's duty to initiate the solution to the family problems. Remember the example of Christ with the bride—the church.