

# The Perfect Marriage

## The Higher Purposes of Marriage

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 28-Dec-02; Tape #590

In the United States, marriage has been under assault for many years—the last 50 years I would say. Maybe we could say that the real beginning of the assault on marriage began with the Kinsey Report that came out in the early 1950s.

Very quickly, after that, the sexual revolution got into full swing. Early on, in this latest erosion of family values, it was the sexual freedom movement—sex, drugs, and Rock and Roll—that came in the early 1960s. We had people "shacking up" with multiple partners before marriage—adultery (which has happened forever), and venereal diseases of one kind or another.

Then came an easing of the divorce laws where you could get a "no fault" divorce in many states. Feminism reared her head and began to put women outside the home, striving to be equal to men. Abortion made the consequences of illicit sex—sex outside of marriage—and some sex inside of marriage—easy to get rid of. There was the onset of A.I.D.S. in the early 1980s and the coming out of the closet of the homosexuality in full force.

So many other S.T.D.'s, have come in the wake of all of this. I don't know how people live, with all that is out there, and the so-called freedom that they have to have multiple sex partners. I just have to say that probably we should give credit to the medical institutions that they've been able to at least put a blanket over it and make the symptoms more bearable.

But, as you read reports about sexual diseases and those sorts of things, it is just amazing that we don't have mass death all over the United States and around the world.

And now, within the past couple of years, the big thing has been homosexual marriage, which is an oxymoron. No such thing is possible. You will see why by the end of the sermon I hope. Such a thing is totally antithetical to the idea of marriage at all.

Also let's not forget to add that there are huge problems simply inherent in two different people trying to create a life together. We all have our problems. We all have our "baggage," and when we try to make a marriage work we have got to work those things into the mix as well.

As we near the end, those who are married as well as those who desire to be married, seem to have the deck stacked against them. Even in good times, marriage has its difficulties. It is not an easy proposition. There are things like communication problems. A husband is too busy working to hear his wife saying whatever she wants to tell him.

There are many problems in every marriage, whether you have enough, or you have too much. There are in-law problems, where the in-laws may meddle in the marriage. I hope that there isn't too much of that out there. I don't have that problem.

There are children problems where (as was the case with Jacob), there is a favoritism problem. Or, maybe they're neglected, and it causes division in the marriage.

There are all kinds of problems that can crop up in a marriage, as well as each mate's unique set of sins and weaknesses that must be overcome. These add to the complexities of the marriage.

But, marriage is a very important and vital part of most our lives. It is not something that God has commanded us all to do, in fact there are places in the bible where Paul specifically says, "*If you don't have to get married, don't. I would prefer that you were all like me!*" He was able to spend all of his time in service to the work. That's fine if one can do that. He mentions that if you have the control to do that, great! God will work out your salvation with you in that manner.

But for the most of us, the route of marriage is the one we're most likely to take. And, after baptism, the decision to marry is the most important decision we can make—the one we should consider most deeply, not only before we jump in, but as we go through it. Just because we take a vow at the beginning of the whole process doesn't mean that we have finished the marriage process. It is something that we should be refining and growing in throughout the whole experience.

In my past two sermons, *The Perfect Husband* and *The Perfect Wife*, I talked about the husbands and the wives separately. This time, I want to look at the marriage institution itself, and the relationship between husband and wife. I hope that by doing this I can put a finishing touch on this little series on marriage.

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Now in this verse (and the next one we'll get to in just a moment) there are some very important points—very foundational, basic points given for marriage.

This is the first point—God created mankind, both male and female, in His own image. I want to emphasize—in *His own image*.

*The Perfect Wife* message covered the equality between man and women before God—they both have the same potential. This is important not just because marriage is a union of equals before God. We've seen that God placed husbands in the position of authority—first among equals. That's what the marriage union is. They are equal in potential, equal in many areas of skill and ability, but that doesn't mean that they are the same. Men and women have different inclinations, different skills and abilities—all the while not making one better than the other.

They both have the same potential as children of God. They can both get to the same place. Just because one is a man doesn't mean that he will have a higher position than his wife will in the Kingdom. I've heard ministers remark that probably, in most cases, the wife might have the higher position in the Kingdom. Who knows? I don't know.

But, we'll see as we go on that maybe they will be equal in the Kingdom, as far as a position goes, because that is one of the purposes of marriage that we'll get to later. It will be interesting to look at from that perspective a little later on. What I want to stress at this point is that men and women are both created *in His own image*.

This implies that both have human equivalents of God's abilities, of God's desires, of God's goals, of God's inclinations, and so forth. God added (while creating us) a lot of these qualities of Himself and distributed them between male and female. They're not at the height of His, obviously, because there is a great gulf between what God is and what humanity is. But because He made us in His image, and His likeness, He has given us similar things—similar qualities—of His own.

We see here that we're of the God-kind. And it makes the relationships that we get into quite important. We're not dealing with just physical things.

We tend to look at our lives in a very physical manner. But the first thing that God does when He starts talking about men is put it on a spiritual plane. Immediately, His concern is that we are in His image (after the God-kind). Our relationships, then, have this God plane level to them. So, we need to take them very seriously.

I should also add here that the reason why we take these things so seriously is because the end goal of all of this is to be just like Him. Male and female, created in God's image, are on the same track to the same place. So, this relationship between a man and his wife takes on a very spiritual and important quality.

OK. Let's go on to Matthew 19: 4-6. This is a section on marriage and divorce in which Jesus answers a question posed to Him by some Pharisees about divorce, specifically, "is it lawful to divorce for any reason." Which at that time was just about the way things were going. They had read back there in Deuteronomy that Moses said that if a man wants to divorce, let him give his wife a certificate, and let her go. And so, they took that in it's most liberal meaning. But, here is His answer.

Matthew 19:4 And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made *them* at the beginning `made them male and female'...

Well! Guess what He answered that question with? Genesis 1: 27! Now this gives us a clue of what Jesus based His understanding of the marriage institution on. He based it on the very verses that we've been going through in Genesis.

Matthew 19:5 ...and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?" [We'll get to this a little bit later—this is from Genesis 2: 24.]

So what did Jesus do when He answered the question? He went back to the very beginning and showed what God's intentions were then, showing that nothing has changed.

Matthew 19:6 "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

What Jesus did (in answering the Pharisees questions about divorce) is said, "*You have got things all wrong. You're looking at this totally as a physical relationship that you can make or break at any time, and for any reason. If you go back to Genesis and see what God intended when He made them male and female, you will see that He made this a God-plane, life-long institution*"

Of course, later He goes on to give the biblical reasons for divorce. But, right now, that's not what I want to emphasize. As a matter of fact, I don't want to go into divorce at all. I'm speaking positively of marriage itself.

Jesus shows in this New Testament situation that God has endorsed the marriage relationship from the beginning as a way to produce the finest versions of what He is looking for in His children. He is looking for children in His image. That's why He made them in His image, and His likeness, and He's continuing that process by making the creation move forward. As we can see here, it is the marriage institution that plays a great role in that.

So, what is Jesus saying is, "*Look. Marriage is on such a high level that we should not take this frivolously. God made mankind male and female for a higher purpose. He doesn't want that relationship sundered, because if you do, you stop or hinder the process.*" That process, of course, is completing the creation of mankind in His image.

So, the first purpose of marriage (if we can just take this in the order in which it appears in Genesis 1: 27) is that it provides a vehicle for producing divine character.

Genesis 1:28 Then God blessed them,...

This is the second thing; it is the very next thing that happens after they were made in His image. Now the Theological Word Book of the Old Testament says that this "blessing" is—just generally, to define the meaning of the word—"to endue with power for success." And that's basically what it means in just about every occasion in the Old Testament. That's a very general definition. And we can also define it by its opposite—"To curse,"—which means "to put a roadblock, or to hinder success."

So, the blessing here is to endue with power for success. We could also say that in the context, this blessing that God gave them was their marriage ceremony.

Now I've also heard that chapter 2: 24 was also the marriage ceremony, but you have to remember that these two chapters are written in parallel. And, the sixth day takes place in chapter 2, as well as in chapter 1. Right after He talks about the blessing of the seventh day, then it goes into the history of the heavens and the earth, recapping creation. So by the time you get to Genesis 2: 24, you are at the same point as Genesis 1: 27-28, time wise. They're really parallel accounts of the same thing. But, I wanted to bring out this idea of blessing because it is important.

By this blessing, God gave Adam and Eve the right and the authority to enter this union (just as a marriage ceremony does today). It gives them the right and the authority to enter into the marriage union and produce—remember "endue with power to succeed"—what God expected of them.

Now this is important. These principles, taken from the beginning of the book, are foundational to a perfect Christian marriage and this blessing gives the right and authority and the power to produce what is necessary, and what God wants to be produced. It is almost like we have no excuse.

You know in our own marriage ceremony, we come in covenant before God and man. There is a laying on of hands that sets the couple apart, showing that God Himself seals this contract—this covenant—between the man and the woman, and the preacher normally asks for blessings to come upon them—blessing the union; blessing the offspring; blessing their relationship.

And so, the people—those two individuals—that come together as husband and wife really have no excuse for not producing what God wants them to produce in their marriage.

So, for those of you who like the "Princess Bride" [an American motion picture], marriage is "*a blessed arrangement*." Marriage has God's sanction, and approval. And with it comes advantages that are in no other union, because God is involved. It is God's presence in the marriage that gives the blessing and the advantages. So in a Christian marriage we usually have all the power we need to make it work.

But, I don't want to imply that one is a failure if your marriage didn't work, because sometimes the odds are stacked highly against us. I'm not saying that every marriage is going to be perfect and work out perfectly. We are, after all, still human. What I am saying is that the power, the gifts, and the blessing are there for us to ask for and use.

So, please take this to heart. We can grab onto this blessing like the last knot in the rope. It is there like a cushion for us in this relationship, because two people are normally so different (no matter what two people they are). To really make it work, this blessing is absolutely necessary.

We're going to read Revelation 19. I thought it was very interesting that in the first chapter of The Bible, there is this idea of God's blessing on the marriage, and then—in chapter 19 of Revelation, which is only the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter from the end of the book—there is another blessing on another marriage.

Revelation 19:6-9 And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: `Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

So, we have this blessing on marriage at the beginning of the book and also on the ultimate marriage—specifically on those who participate in and make up the "wife" [bride] of Jesus Christ.

This blessing, in Revelation, gives the blessing in Genesis 1:28 its true context. You see the

marriages that we have—our physical marriages—are types of this greater Spiritual Marriage. The things that we go through under this blessed physical marriage are there to prepare us for our part in that blessed Spiritual Marriage.

Marriage is a type of union between God and man. In this case (in Revelation 19), God is Jesus Christ, "the Bridegroom," and man is the church, "the Bride," made up of many of the Father's sons and daughters.

Marriage then, teaches us how to be one with God. And we'll see this in a few minutes in one of the other purposes for marriage we will take from Genesis 1 and 2.

And so just as surely as God will bless that union between His Son and the Bride, He will also endue the physical type with the ability to fulfill its purpose—that is to come into union with God.

Genesis 1:28 ...and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth...

This is the third purpose. The second was the blessing to fulfill the marriage purpose. The third: God provides marriage to produce children.

Now the Catholics say that the only reason for marriage is to produce children. But that's not the case; it is just *one* of its purposes. And again we see that marriage is the only union so authorized and blessed to produce children. And this has all the sexual things in it. We have it reiterated in a different form in the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment—You shall not commit adultery.

Children produced outside of the marriage union are going to automatically have disadvantages. The marriage union is the one that God has sanctioned for producing children. And it was only within marriage and the family, that they're going to be produced properly to fulfill God's purpose in creating the image of God in them.

Now this doesn't mean of course that any child produced outside of marriage is not going to be called and made into one of God's sons or daughters. I'm not saying that at all. All I'm saying is that marriage provides the best and the only God sanctioned relationship for that event to occur.

We're always getting back to the idea that God is reproducing Himself. And the union of man and wife is the first step. Once they are together, and join themselves together sexually and produce a child, then that produces another individual that has the potential of being in God's family.

So, when we bear children and train them up in the way that they should go, eventually (once they get to be older) we turn them back over to God for development as His children. And, this is one of the great ironies, I think, in all of time: that God gives us the first crack at them. He places upon us the responsibility to mold and shape them into the neophyte—the beginning, the egg, the embryo—of what He can then use and mature, and bring into His kingdom as sons and daughters.

And so it is a tremendous responsibility. But, it begins with marriage. Marriage is the best way to turn out the ideal product for God to use once they reach a level of maturity He can work with.

Let's look at Psalm 128, which shows this very thing. We sing this psalm every once in a while. We normally sing Psalm 127, but this one is right there with it. Think of the purposes for marriage, the things we've already gone over, as I read these verses.

Psalm 128:1-6 Blessed *is* every one who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways. When you eat the labor of your hands, You *shall be* happy, and *it shall be* well with you. Your wife *shall be* like a fruitful vine In the very heart of your house, Your children like olive plants All around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the LORD. The LORD bless you out of Zion, And may you see the good of Jerusalem All the days of your life. Yes, may you see your children's children. Peace *be* upon Israel!

Did you notice how positive this psalm is? And it starts out with fearing the Lord. Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord. Now what this means is that this couple started out properly. They started out with the Fear of the Lord, and that was the basis for their marriage.

And then from this, because they began doing things the right way, they had happiness, they had blessedness, and they were satisfied. They were content, and fruitful, and had the potential to live a long time to see their grandchildren. They had the blessing of peace upon them. This is the very environment—if you go to James 3:17-18 —the peaceful environment where the fear of the Lord is the primary underpinning of everything that one does in one's family and is where the fruit of righteousness can grow. That is what God wants.

He's looking for a home for his children in which this environment will be created in order to produce children in His image—Godly seed. We don't need to go there, but in Malachi God was very unhappy with those people because their marriage relationships were so bad—they weren't producing Godly seed for His potential family.

So, this is a very important purpose—to produce the right environment for raising children, not for just oneself, but for Him. There is always this physical and spiritual back and forth between these in this relationship. We need to remember that because even though we're physical beings we have this spiritual element that God put in us to make us different from the animals.

And so there is always a higher purpose in everything that we do. We can't get away from it, especially those of us who have been called, and given God's spirit.

Continuing in Genesis 1:28:

Genesis 1:28 ...and subdue it, have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

The fourth purpose for marriage is to provide a basis for proper government.

We have the word "dominion" here. It has thrown a lot of people off. But, if you look the word

up, in any regular dictionary (like Webster's or Oxford's), it will tell you that dominion is nothing more than governing authority, or sovereignty.

God uses marriage to teach us how to rule. Marriage teaches us how it is done best. It instructs us in God's manner of governance. Remember God is a father. He has a Son who is the Head of the church. And this Head of the church has a Wife, called "the Bride"—His church. And we are parts of that Bride learning how to rule with His Son forever.

And so the institution that He created to teach us this is marriage—the very same institution that we will enter into with His Son shortly. Physical/ Spiritual. There is always that movement from the application of the physical level moving forward into the Kingdom and the spiritual level. The institution of marriage is very important.

And also I can add here that when we're in a family, we start out as a child in a family, and we learn how to be ruled. We learn how to submit. We learn all the ins and outs of what it is like to be under authority. And then later on as we grow in maturity we're given more responsibilities and go through all kinds of experiences. Running the gamut from pillar to post, we learn all these different nuances of how to rule ourselves and how to rule others. And by the time we get to be about 25 years of age we are then ready to take on the responsibility of being in a position of authority at the next level as a husband or wife.

We learn, in that role, other things that teach us about government and how best to handle situations. And we go from being 20 and 25 without kids, getting used to our new mate—just ruling ourselves and providing direction to the family as a mate—to suddenly having children now have to learn how to govern little ones.

As they grow, we learn different ways—better ways—to govern them at their different levels. There is not just one overall rule for everything. I'm not talking about situation ethics. But there are different situations that lend themselves to different approaches. And the family and our different roles within the family (while growing up) teach us how to do that.

And so it is a Godly family, beginning with marriage followed by bringing up Godly seed, that teaches us how to govern. It gives us all the necessary instruction that we need. Of course there should also be biblical instructions and that sort of thing. You can't take the family out of the Godly aspects. I'm always talking to you about a spiritual/Godly/Christian marriage.

These experiences over time become part of our character. And that is the sort of thing that we carry through the grave. They become the basic tools that we'll need when we're made spirit in God's kingdom to rule. We will have those experiences in our past to draw upon and we will be able to say, *"Oh yes. I came across something like this back at this time of my life, back when I was a human being, and I tried it this way, and it didn't work. And now I understand that if I try it this other way, it will work."* The basic tools, provided to us through God's instruction and applied in the Christian family, prepare us to rule in God's kingdom and teach the right and proper way to govern.

Paul doesn't come right out and say this, but I want you to notice the governmental allusions Paul makes here in Ephesians 5.

Ephesians 5:22 Wives, submit...

There's one already! *Submit* is a governmental term; the governed surrenders, or gives in, or yields to the one who is in authority. It is a governmental term.

Ephesians 5:22-32 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. [Notice the physical/spiritual connections] For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives [Now that doesn't seem like a governmental term, but it is because it is the proper basis for Godly government. Godly government is based on outgoing concern for everyone and everything.] just as Christ also loved the church [That's how He heads it—in love.] and gave Himself for her, [There's another way that in which He showed His love for the church.] that He might sanctify and cleanse it [Now these are instructions—the way a person in authority would work to produce what he needed in the governed.] that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason [Guess what He refers to? Genesis 2: 24!] a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. [And notice what he says next!] This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

So he emphasizes the fact that the marriage union has a greater purpose. And one of those purposes, as mentioned, is to teach proper governance. Paul emphasizes the *authority* and the *loving care* of Christ, AND the *submission* and *glory* of the church. Notice the authority on one hand and the loving care on the other; and then, the submission on the one hand, and the glory on the other.

Some people think of government in a negative way. But good government is the balance of proper authority with the proper amount of love, combined with the proper amount of humility, and eventually, the proper amount of glory, of exaltation. They sometimes don't take place at the same time, but the eventual potential of what this mix produces is glory, It is not something to sneer at. These days, authority has gotten a very bad rap, and Paul shows—the whole bible shows—that this should not be. There is a proper balance to it. In the church especially, we should have a better and more proper understanding of how it all works. (I know it is sometimes not always used properly, but sometimes our perspective is wrong, and we just have

to wait and see what it produces. )

Genesis 2:24 takes place after Eve has been presented to Adam, and he says, "Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh,"

Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Now this has been called the "leave and cleave" verse. The bible shows that there should be a definite break between life as a child, and life as an adult spouse; or, life *under* one's father and mother's household to the formation of new household—a new unit.

The newly married couple, according to this verse should set up a house on their own, because to do otherwise confuses the roles and responsibilities that God is trying to work out in this relationship. If a man is under his father and mother, he can't be the head of his own house. He can't really be a head to his wife. And the wife, let's say in her parent's home with her husband, has divided loyalties. Who is really the head? Her husband? Or her father?

So it is very clear that for the marriage to work best, the couple should not stay in the home of their parents, because it doesn't produce the intended relationship. Now, if there is some sort of hardship, and the couple must stay with the parents for a short time, that is one thing. But, for the most part, a newly married couple should set up their own household.

A man should be king of his own castle, and the wife his queen, without interference from parents or in-laws. The parents can be there for advice from time to time, and to watch the children once in a while, etc. But, in order for the man and his wife to properly grow and develop the character that they need, they *need* to be on their own.

So, conversely, barring other complications, a couple should not marry if they are unable or not mature enough to set up a separate household.

If they're not ready to be on their own, then they should put off marriage until the husband can support his wife (separately from his parents, or hers); barring other complications. Paul does say I Corinthians 7, that if you can't control yourself, it is better to marry than to burn. But, that piece of advice has been abused, in times past, as well where people are unwilling to take control of themselves.

So, this is a good piece of advice that I wanted to pass on before we go on to the real meat of this verse.

Now after the man leaves his father and mother he is to be joined to his wife; this is the "cleave" part. We don't know what cleave means. It is one of those old or Middle English words that we don't use very often. I'm sure that if you picked up one of those books that define Old King James type words, this one is in it.

We use the word "cling," or "adhere," or the phrase "be joined to" as it is here in the New King James. It means "to be stuck like glue."

Now in our house there is a table out in our living room where our kids do home-school. And we

have four Windsor chairs that go around this table. I believe our son Jared loved to rock on the back of this chair, and he rocked on the back of it so much that the back of the Windsor chair came off. Now we have a stool.

But, it was interesting to me to see where the back of that chair broke. It broke above the glued joint. The glued joint remained connected (where the seat back met the seat of the chair); it stuck; it adhered. It clung to the seat of the chair, while the back broke off.

I use this simple illustration to show you what means. When a man and his wife are joined together—are glued together—when they cling to one another, or cleave to one another—that joint should be stronger than anything else. If a break comes, one of them should break and not the joint. The joint is to be so strong that if trouble comes in the marriage, the union will survive. One or the other would be better off submitting rather than breaking off. That's what God intends with this idea of being joined one to another.

This is the first indication in *The Bible* that God intends marriage to be *one man, one woman for life*.

Romans 7:1-3 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law *to her* husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of *her* husband. So then if, while *her* husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

The law that Paul is speaking of here is not explicitly stated in the Old Testament. Did you know that? There is no law in the Old Testament that says a man and wife shall be married "until death do they part." As a matter of fact, those words aren't in the bible. Neither are the, "even as you both shall live" which are used in various wedding ceremonies. But, the principle is sure there. And, it is repeated right here.

Paul makes it very plain. Marriage is for life, except for a very few circumstances that are explained by Christ and Paul (which I will not cover in this sermon).

I just wanted you to see that this "for life principle" is definitely in the bible—in the New Testament here in Romans which establishes a great deal of doctrine in the church. There is a definite command that marriage is to be *for life*.

I Corinthians 7:39 A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

He adds that caveat there. If a woman's husband dies, while she is in the church, she is free to remarry, but "only in the Lord." That is the very best thing for her to do if she wishes.

I Corinthians 7:10 Now to the married I command, *yet* not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from *her* husband.

Mark 10:6-9 "But from the beginning of the creation, God `made them male and female.' `For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, [That's what we just read there in Genesis 2.] and the two shall become one flesh'; [Now listen to this comment. This is where I'm going for the rest of this sermon.] so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

We can see that there is a great emphasis (in *The Bible*) on remaining married—from Genesis 2: 24 through the Gospels, to the Epistles of Paul. Human beings tend toward trying to find loopholes for splitting. But, *The Bible* doesn't do that. As a matter of fact, there are so few regulations in *The Bible* concerning divorce that it takes some scholarship to figure out exactly what it is that Jesus and Paul mean when they give the reasons for divorce. It is not something really simple. I guess it could be made simple, but you really have to think it through.

God is a very positive God. And He emphasizes, throughout the book, His desire—His intent—for a man and a woman to remain married for life. But, these verses in Genesis are the core principles of marriage. Other scriptures (about marriage) in *The Bible* are based upon those we read in Genesis, as we have seen. And in the end, it comes down to this one concept: One flesh joined together by God. Jesus puts the cap on it, saying they are no longer two, but one.

When I was going through and studying this, it just bowled me over. I knew it, but I had never thought of it in the negative before. Yes, I knew that when you become married, the two become one. But, Jesus put it in the negative here: "You are no longer two." It puts a little bit different spin on it.

This phrase "one flesh" is used only seven times in the bible and we've seen six of them already today (Genesis 2: 24, Matthew 19: 5, Matthew 19: 6, twice in Mark 10: 8 which we just read, Ephesians 5: 31, and the last, I Corinthians 6: 16).

What I'm trying to do here is to get us to understand the concept of one flesh. Starting with verse 15:

I Corinthians 6:15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? Certainly not!

We all agree to that! Isn't that obvious? Wouldn't the greatest thing you could do against Christ be to try and force Him into a union with a harlot? How sacrilegious!

I Corinthians 6:16-17 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

Now, what he is basically saying is that the sexual relationship binds a man and woman as one flesh. Do you know what this word "joined" is? It is the Greek word "kolloomenos." What does it mean? "Glued," and "cemented" just as it does in Genesis 2: 24. Paul translated it literally—meaning the coming together of a man and woman in marriage binds them together like glue. So also a man who goes and visits a harlot binds himself just like that to her as well.

Now, what does he mean? I don't want us to get distracted by the sexual union. I want us to focus on the level of intimacy.

Remember in the Old Testament that writers often used the words "to know" as their euphemism for the sexual act. What we could say then is that the sexual part—the actual intercourse—is the physical sign of the greater personal and emotional intimacy that is shared even with a prostitute. Seeing another person *in their nakedness*, as it says in Leviticus 18, or going through this act—the sexual act—is such an intimate thing that it binds the two together.

People of this generation think of sex as cheap. Like I said before, since the *Kinsey Report*, the doors have just been flung wide open as far as sex goes, and people think that 5, 6, 7, 8 sexual partners is no big thing. And you hear these sports guys—these basketball players and football players—writing in the memoirs for all the world to see that they've had 20,000 or so sexual partners (because of all of these "camp followers" that are around the back doors of the locker rooms).

That is cheap.

God doesn't think of the sexual union of man and wife as cheap. To Him it is so precious that every time one does this, He binds himself to the other person. We don't necessarily think of it this way, but, I think that we should start. It makes marriage all that more precious.

Obviously, here in I Corinthians 6, Paul is making a higher spiritual point concerning our relations with Christ, and with the world. Yet, he never strays very far from the physical application of it. The "one flesh" principle is absolutely vital to a Christian marriage.

I Corinthians 6:18-20 Flee sexual immorality. [Now this is to the Corinthian church, and they were full of sexual problems. So, obviously he was going to address it.] Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? [You don't own your own body.] For you were bought at a price [Who owns it?]; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

I Corinthians 7:2-4 Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*. And likewise the husband

does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.

Now without using the term "one flesh" again, Paul explains how this principle applies to marriage. He says, "You are not your own" (I Corinthians 6:19). And he says, "*You don't have authority over your body, but your spouse does*" (I Corinthians 7:4)

Now this is a major understanding. Once married—once joined as a unit—the individual people in the marriage (husband and wife, male and female) are subsumed within the bond. A better way to put this (for those of us who understand things like sports): The team is what becomes important, not the individual players.

Do you understand where this one flesh idea is leading: Absolute togetherness; working, living, breathing as a unit; as one.

This is obviously the ideal. I don't want to embarrass anybody, or to make anyone think that they haven't come up to snuff if this isn't happening in their own marriages. This is what God wants with the "one flesh" ideal. A man and his wife are to be so committed to the relationship, so much in love with each other, so willing to work together, that they function as one.

Now remember the marriage relationship is a type of something greater! What does God want of us? *To be one spirit with Him?*

The marriage relationship (where we come together as one flesh) is a training ground for us to learn how to be one with Him. And if we're not going to be one flesh with the one closest to us, how are we going to be one spirit with God?

Do you understand the absolute importance of coming to understand this about marriage? It is another one of those labs—spiritual labs—for us to be prepared to be the Bride of Jesus Christ our Savior, and to be one with God.

And so we learn how to work in tandem as a team with this other being that God has given to us as a mate. We learn to pull like a yoke of oxen in the same direction for the same purposes, and then to the same ultimate glory.

That is what this "one flesh" means. So we can ask ourselves "how are we doing?" Are we pulling together? Have we agreed to something like a 50/50 marriage? Do you know that God would condemn a 50/50 marriage? What it really means is that you're only meeting the other person halfway. God says to give *everything* to it; so much that you no longer even own yourself. The other one owns you. And you own them. That is giving up a lot, but it is also receiving a lot.

So it is very interesting! I just want to pick up one thing, in Song of Solomon 6:2-3, to show you this principle in this parable of Christ and the church. It is something the Shulamite comes to realize after having gone through some very traumatic experiences. In chapter 6, verse 2, she has just gotten back from her night on the town, as it were, when she's been beaten and abused. She says:

Song of Solomon 6:2-3 (THE SHULAMITE) My beloved has gone to his garden, To the beds of spices, To feed *his flock* in the gardens, And

to gather lilies. I *am* my beloved's, And my beloved *is* mine. He feeds *his flock* among the lilies.

She came to this realization that he was doing everything for her benefit. And because she was his, and he was hers she would do everything for him. She came to this proper understanding.

So this is about as good as it gets, humanly speaking. The perfect marriage is one in which each partner is 100% committed to the other and to the relationship. Each mate is striving to the utmost to live according to the will of God by showing true love—outgoing concern—for the other.

The perfect mate in the perfect marriage is the perfect Christian giving his all to develop his character both in himself, and in the other.

Proverbs 5:18 Let your fountain [can be interpreted as your offspring] be blessed, And rejoice with the wife of your youth.