

new **Horizons**

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addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

*This issue focuses on
marriage and its
many challenges*

CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

With around two thousand Christian denominations vying for your attention, it's easy to miss the important issues of life and religion. It's our hope that through *New Horizons* our readers will come to understand the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by His apostles in the clearest of terms - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond

Who We Are

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* is an international association of independent local assemblies - Christians who meet together for worship, instruction in the faith and fellowship. Each assembly is self-governing according to Bible principles, but co-operates through our Conference with other like-minded assemblies to work towards agreed evangelistic goals

These goals are within the framework of the commission set for his church by Jesus: "...going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptising them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). He further commanded that we "...Shepherd...[and] feed my sheep".

To these ends we publish Bible-based literature - eg our bi-monthly e-mail Newsletter OUTREACH, the NEW HORIZONS magazine, the BIBLE BASICS on-line home study course, and the 32-lesson Study Course. The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships and scattered brethren

We cordially invite all independent fellowships of whatever size - and individuals - to associate with us in this worldwide ministry. Our *Statement of Beliefs* and a *Publications Catalogue* is available from any of our addresses or from our web site www.cgom.org. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications

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If you would like a copy of our *Statement of Beliefs* please request it from any of the addresses listed

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new Horizons

Issue No 88

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Too many marriages are falling apart. Underpin yours - and make it a success - with strong foundations

Church calendars overflow with wedding appointments. Blushing brides daily adorn the feature columns of small towns and cities. The long-lived traditional marriage is still desired by most young people despite the so-called "sexual revolution". The "golden" or "diamond" anniversary celebrates solid achievement - and by any standard such marriages can be resounding successes.

Yet marriages continue to flounder. Divorce is at an appallingly high level - even among Christian partners. And the resulting anguish for children, parents, relatives and friends is lamentable. Marriages even of only short duration crack and fall apart. And at the other end of the age spectrum partners of long-standing part company via the divorce courts.

Why? Is there some basic fault with the very concept of marriage? Are we expecting too much, or not enough, from marriage? Or could it be that marriages are based on wrong foundational principles?

Dispassionate investigation of the traditional monogamous union confirms in the long run that it cannot be surpassed. When it "works" it really works. All the factors of stability, security, mutual support, love, personal fulfilment are the fabric of the ideal marriage. So what goes wrong?

Why don't even half of all western marriage unions last a lifetime? Why do so many couples quit?

Let's look at some of those elements of marriage which give it a sure foundation. Let's look at some factors for success based on God's Word.

First, what about that highly extolled virtue romantic love?

Romantic Love

"In the beginning it seems as though the lights will never dim... Every

silly, silly cliché seems to have been written just for you: mouths go dry, lights flash and life is as supernaturally pretty as a chalk butterfly." That's how one psychologist de-

scribes the concept of romantic love. She continues, "Today it is considered more or less immoral to marry for any other reason".

It gives marriage a rosy glow. Every mundane task tackled together has a romantic aura. Washing up, decorating, shampooing the carpet, mending the burst water-pipe - all are enveloped in a haze of delight.

Alas, such ecstasy tends to fade. Ten years on, perhaps ten weeks, the romance is swamped in a morass of worldly cares. There's the realisation that both partners have firmly entrenched personality traits that seem irreconcilable. Time, once your own, must now be shared with a growing family. Then there are your partner's special friends and interests, and

what is often viewed as an unreasonable attachment to parents. There are differences of approach both religious and philosophical which before marriage endowed an air of mystery, but which later provoke contention and controversy. Financial constraints: reduced income, extra mouths, mortgage, keeping up with the neighbours, pensions - all increase the pressure. And, ultimately, there's the decay in outward physical appearance and abilities.

So romance fades.

If romance is the sole binding strand then the reasons for staying together appear invalid. Once blissful hours in one another's company become dull and intolerable. Cracks can no longer be paved over. And many couples seek to recover the romance in a soap-opera style clandestine "affair". Indeed many marriage counsellors encourage such "therapy"!

The result? Before long, more often than not, the agony and trauma of divorce seems the only cure.

Many turn to the newspaper "agony aunt" for guidance. A thousand do-it-yourself marriage counselling books and tapes crowd the bookshop shelves. Perhaps most of those who see the impending crash of their marriages will clutch at such and for a time "work at it". Indeed it's widely recognized, and true, that even the best marriages need sustained effort to preserve them intact.

Often, though, the emphasis of such books is on recapturing the romance of marriage. All the worthy aids are promoted: the candle-lit meal, the bouquet of roses, the new dress or

**Spend
a Lifetime...
together**

hair-style, the romantic night out, making yourself “more interesting”.

Romance, of course, ought to persist and be nourished in every marriage. It's essential for all-round success, and marriage cannot thrive in its absence. But romance is the “icing on the cake”.

Let's look at some of the other factors vital to a successful marriage.

Mutual Support

An ancient wise saying extols the virtues of joint commitment and companionship. “...two are better than one” said King Solomon, “...because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up. Again, if two lie together they are warm; but how can one be warm alone? And though a man prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him. A three-fold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

In the context of marriage the implications of this are clear. A husband and wife totally committed to one another can provide mutual support in times of stress, both from internal challenges and from without. A third strand, divine help or perhaps a child or the extended family, can increase the resilience of a growing family. So, when the inevitable illness strikes, or economic reverse (we all have our “winters”), the family can rally to provide material help and an emotional boost. Properly viewed, illness or economic adversity is a shared experience which in the family setting can bind and not destroy. Unlike mere co-habitation there's not the same temptation to “throw in the towel”.

Heart-rending disappointment stemming, for example, from the collapse of a mutually-cherished project can

be smoothed and overcome by the combined resilience of two people in close harmony. And the interplay of minds united in common purpose can provide strong impetus towards the achieving of family goals or a shared vision. Two, indeed, are better than one!

Traditional marriage with its lifetime commitment provides a contractual bond not possible in a more permissive arrangement. To encourage permanence frail human nature needs the framework of exchanged vows. And perhaps they should be written down, witnessed and signed! Without such a framework couples have a convenient bolt-hole to escape personal responsibility if they so wish when the going gets tough. As it inevitably will.

Companionship

True love and marriage is a partnership. It is companionship. In the first unveiling of the marriage bond God said “It is not good that a man should be alone” - an observation that belongs equally to women. Eve was created a companion for Adam. And vice versa. The husband is termed “...the companion of her youth” (Proverbs 2:17) and the wife is “...your companion and your wife by covenant” (Malachi 2:14).

The Hebrew word for “companion” expresses a close personal relationship. In marriage a man and a woman are to become intimately united in body, purpose, thoughts, goals - “one flesh”.

Few marriages, sadly, implement this concept. All too often the idea of partnership, of companionship, of the combination of husband-wife mind-power, of a shared dream or vision is ignored and the union is impoverished. But when the marriage begins with the sure understanding that

companionship is a vital pillar of the relationship, then this concept becomes a powerful force which encourages a permanent bond.

Every Christian man and woman considering marriage ought to thoroughly discuss with one another (and possibly with their pastor) this important principle. It must be up-front in their preparations for marriage.

Then, when adversity strikes, they will understand that together they can share the misfortune, sustain the wounded spirit and gain the victory. The interplay of two minds united in common purpose is vital to overcome adversity.

Build A Dynasty

Romance, certainly, is a factor in a lasting and happy marriage. Mutual support and companionship are vital. But there's a third factor which must have prime consideration before a marriage begins. Indeed it must rank near the top of the list of priorities in a marriage covenant.

A most distressing aspect of marital breakdown is the vexed question of “division of property” (using the word in its wider sense). This includes, vitally, the welfare of the children. It includes the division of the previously shared home. It includes sharing chattels brought to the marriage from two family inheritances, and what was once termed “dowry”. It includes the redistribution and dispersal of the material goods to the next generation.

Such effects of a resort to divorce, however, are not limited to the immediate and personal emotional distress of two people and their children. The hurt and distress and confusion ripples onward in ever-increasing circles to touch parents, grandparents, friends - and future generations.

Indeed the stability of a nation can -

be sure to nourish romance!

companionship forges a permanent bond in marriage

has - as a result come under threat!

In titled families each generation takes pride in its inheritance, and in preserving it for future generations. They can trace their ancestry by clear lines on a genealogical chart and by family portraits to many generations past. They thrill to exhibit the family home and lands and heirlooms, and proudly cite highlights of their history back to the early Colonial period - or even to the Conquest! They are part of an enduring dynasty. It imparts pride, status, security, authority and stability.

But divorce in the modern world dissi-

patates family inheritance. Divorce divides family loyalties. It shatters the substance of a potentially sound building block of any society. Break up a home and creative energy is diverted from productive activity. Children are confused, their potential limited. The family suffers, the community suffers, the nation suffers.

On the other hand *you can build a dynasty*. By lifting your eyes beyond an introspective notion of romantic love or mere personal fulfilment. By consciously establishing your small family unit as a foundation stone of a future "house". By instilling in your family a pride of achievement and vision. By setting aside short-term desires and building now for the future. By these means you can build an enduring dynasty and your marriage will take on greater stability.

The idea is much neglected in our day. Yet anciently it was written into every godly marriage. So important is it that the Creator legislated detailed laws of inheritance when establishing His model nation of Israel some three thousand five hundred years ago.

Marriage can survive for a time on romantic love, but all too often and too soon that bubble bursts. An enduring marriage demands more substance. For an enduring, fulfilling

marriage each couple must strenuously weave strong bonds of mutual interests and companionship. There must be a compassionate legal framework for the union. And essentially the guiding vision of combining two different historic human streams into a single mighty river flowing into the years ahead. *An enduring dynasty.*

A Vital Dimension

But this is not the whole story.

There is yet a further dimension to marriage that must not be omitted if lasting success is to be achieved. For, to resolve the challenges that arise in marriage can at times require help that transcends human counselling abilities. There remains an element to marriage which alone imparts true stability and perspective.

Because marriage is not merely a human institution.

The Creator God instituted monogamous marriage. Does He have any say in who you should marry? Or even if you should? Is marriage simply one life-style among many? What about 'singles'? Ought you to marry outside your "race" - or your religion? Is God concerned about such ground-rules for marriage? Do they

matter?

What does God think of divorce? Is there any place for divorce as a "solution" to an unravelling Christian marriage? And are there inspired guidelines for solving the challenges of married life?

Future articles will address such questions.

Crash Course

In sum, if you want to spend a lifetime together

- Before marriage make sure you spend enough time getting to know your prospective life partner
- Always nourish the romance in your marriage
- Learn to share goals and interests
- Develop close bonds of companionship
- Focus on the long-term: build an enduring dynasty
- Be prepared to work together diligently for marriage success
- *Above all, ensure God is at the head and heart of the marital table*

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CALLING ALL INTERNET USERS!

The Outreach Ministries website lists over a hundred Bible-based articles which address issues frequently on the minds of Christians. You may download any, or request print copies. There is, too, a section of on-line audio sermons, links to associated groups, back issues of *New Horizons* and an on-line magazine for our younger readers.

**Be sure to take a look at
www.cgom.org**

University of the Home

A properly conducted marriage is the ideal setting to raise a family. Too often, however, children can disrupt family life simply because parents are at a loss to know how to deal with them. This article, *University of the Home*, gives some Biblical guidelines. It is available - free - from any of our addresses

Quotations from the Bible in New Horizons are from translations which clearly express the meaning in modern terms

Can anyone improve on the marriage option?

The last half century has, in the Western world, witnessed a seed-change in attitudes to human sexuality. And not least among professing Christians. Fifty years ago, for example, divorce was rarely addressed—especially by ‘the authorities’, secular and religious. Then into the churches came increasing numbers of divorced men and women. Usually Christian divorcees were not considered to be fit to hold church office. A re-think on the Bible teaching led to a more positive and relaxed approach.

More recently marriage has been undermined by society — aided and abetted, at least in the UK, by Government policies. Youth has observed and learned from their parents that marriage is considered by society to be of little importance; just ‘a piece of paper’, and to be dissolved at will. The result? Up to fifty percent of young people in some countries are happy to live together without formalizing the relationship in marriage. [See Panel] Though many retain the aspiration to marry ‘sometime’.

In Perspective

Today’s mature generation (by age)—fifties up—can recall a more settled era. Divorce was rare and often a stigma. To ‘live in sin’—no matter how stable—was the road to hell and was unusual. The couple involved were the subject of whispered gossip. Not any more. Today arrangements like this are generally viewed as ‘normal’.

Such behaviour, however, has long been a hidden aspect of European and American culture. Indeed in medieval times it was not always possible to say who was married and who were just ‘living together’. The established Church for centuries had tried

to muscle in on marriages, to always have a priest preside over them and to have the ceremony ‘churched’. That was not always the case.

Marriage had, throughout history as in Bible times, been a family affair, arranged between the two families with or without the consent of the couple, and not requiring the services of priest or rabbi. The ceremony, when there was one, was sometimes in the home of one of the parties and went unrecorded. Such an arrangement today would be labelled by some as ‘co-habitation’.

The Church—Roman Catholic and Nonconformist—triumphed and it came to be accepted that a ‘man of the cloth’ had to be present to bless the union. As State power grew and society more complex, they too sought control by commanding civil registration of every marriage. Only in recent times has it become possible to marry outside a church building. Anywhere goes—hotel, beach, registry office, hot air balloon; all are fine as long as properly State-registered.

The Marriage Process

That a man and a woman should be joined as a single person stems from human beginnings. As our children mature they are to separate from their parents and focus on their relationship with their spouse. The focus in a family—the only permanence—is the relationship between husband and wife. Children move on. The husband–wife relationship is the very first divine institution.

Common experience recognizes that a man and a woman, with few exceptions, need each other, that it isn’t good to be alone, that each complements and completes the other. In Bible terms, marriage is a ‘*covenant of companionship*’. And despite times of near anarchy mankind in general has recognized the need for regulation of each unique union.

In most cultures there is what used to be termed the ‘betrothal’ (‘be true’). When the two were betrothed it was a binding commitment to be joined as one. It was the first step in the marriage. Today it is known as an ‘engagement’. Gifts were exchanged and a public declaration made, a celebration given with friends and family. The whole neighbourhood knew of the arrangement and respected it.

In some cultures, during the time between betrothal and wedding the covenants or contracts were drawn up—sometimes verbal, usually written. But there was the implication of permanence, and the betrothal period was imbued with the same restrictions as post wedding, the main restriction being that they remained sexually faithful to one another. To betray the commitments of betrothal was a reason for ending the relationship—unlike the modern engagement which too often is broken off for trivial reasons. The length of the betrothal varied—in Bible times it has been estimated to be up to a year, but could be much shorter.

Then comes the wedding celebration which varies in form from culture to culture, but which always includes a further public statement of commitment and the move to a shared home. There is no clear Bible pattern for the form of a wedding ceremony.

Sex Without Responsibility

Western society has degenerated in all matters sexual. The demise of moral instruction (as in Sunday Schools or secular education) has spewed on to our streets children with the morals of alley cats. Unrestrained youths, some barely out of nursery school, promiscuously prowl the corridors of our schools, our High Streets and our villages. Teen pregnancy is at an all-time high, usually burdening society with the cost of their irresponsibility. Pregnancy takes two, however, and the male

rarely shoulders responsibility. In old-fashioned medieval English terms, both parties are 'fornicators'. In the Bible it is *sin*.

The term means someone who has a sexual relationship without commitment or responsibility. Such are 'bed-hoppers' seeking to express their unrestrained lusts wherever opportunity affords. The term applies equally to lusting teens and to the married.

Anciently, as in Corinth, religion was often allied with 'temple prostitutes'. Men in the process of their worship went from one of them to another: it was fornication (Gk *porneia*, I Corinthians 6). Sexual relations without commitment is what is utterly condemned in the Christian Scriptures and is as pertinent today as then. Today, though, there is not the excuse of a required religious rite!

Law of Life

Such promiscuity, then and now, has dire consequences: unwanted pregnancy (surprise, surprise); sexually transmitted disease; sterility; abortion with all its physical and emotional hazards; the heartbreak of family disruption and, too often, divorce and its consequences.

While there has never been a perfect society, yet modern Government, fuelled by foolish liberalism, has failed to learn the enormity of policies which undermine chaste family life. For that is at the heart of the sexual revolution. The promotion of grotesque notions of sexual equality and failure to encourage marriage and the two-parent family through education, financial breaks and adequate support services have destroyed family life and, together with overgenerous welfare, poured alcohol-fuelled feral children onto our streets. Officialdom also actively promotes sterile sexual relationships in our schools.

Moral teaching—the Maker's instruction manual for successful living—is for all mankind. It is for the street urchin, for every teen, for all mankind of whatever

faith. Stray from the Creator's teachings and disaster, personal and national, follows.

The essence of this divine instruction is 'the Law' (*Torah*, instruction). Throughout human history this has been God's guiding principle for every aspect of life. The Government and the people who ignore the divine instruction will bear the natural consequences. God doesn't have to do anything!

Since the 'age of innocence' in Eden ended, the human race has been largely left to its own devices, its own reasoning. The exception is God's model nation of Israel. The 'Law of Life' was incorporated in detail in their national constitution, with accompanying appropriate penalties. It no longer exists.

All governments are held responsible for good governance—and no better model than the legal system divinely given to the nation of Israel. Those who do not commit to the divine covenant in Jesus are indeed 'a law unto themselves'. It is not for Christians to judge them but to be an example to them of the divine way.

For Christians, the divine Law is 'written in the heart' through the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. Of all people we are answerable directly to our Creator and Saviour. [Request the free article *The Law of Life*]

Co-habitation

Given the negative example of modern society, Government failure and the impotence of the established churches, it's not surprising that youth simply ignore marriage and live together without 'tying the knot'. Such relationships are rarely permanent. They certainly are defective in Christian terms, ignoring the fundamental purpose of this foundational divine institution.

However, this 'semi-permanence' in a world of sexual freedom is surely preferable to the lewd and loose morality that stalks our nation. Co-habitation (living together without formal commitment) *cont'd p.8*

Is Cohabitation Harmful?

In a recent article in *Psychology Today*, the publication warned against cohabitation of couples prior to marriage. The article pointed out that "couples who move in together before marriage have up to two times the odds of divorce, as compared with couples who marry before living together. Moreover, married couples who have lived together before exchanging vows tend to have poorer-quality marriages than couples who moved in after the wedding. Those who cohabited first report less satisfaction, more arguing, poorer communication and lower levels of commitment."

In spite of these observations, the article stated:

"Thirty or 40 years ago, cohabitation was relatively rare, mainly the province of artists and other questionable types, and still thought of as 'living in sin.' In 1970 only about 500,000 couples lived together in unwedded bliss. Now, nearly 5 million opposite-sex couples in the United States live together outside of marriage; millions more have done it at some point... Some evidence indicates that women have less control over the progress of the cohabiting relationship. She may assume they're on the road to marriage, but he may think they're just saving on rent and enjoying each other's company... Cohabiting men may carry their uncertainty forward into marriage, with destructive consequences. A 2004 study... found that men who had lived with their spouse before marriage were on average less committed to their marriages than those who hadn't...

"Cohabiting relationships, by their nature, appear to be less fulfilling than marital relationships. People who cohabit say they are less satisfied and more likely to feel depressed... While the precarious finances of many cohabiters has something to do with it, [another factor is] the inherent lack of stability. Long-term cohabitation is rare: most couples either break up or marry within five years... As a result, cohabitation is not an ideal living arrangement for children. Emotionally or academically, the children of cohabiters just don't do as well, on average, as those with two married parents, and money doesn't fully explain the difference... Cohabitation rates may be skyrocketing, but Americans are still entirely enchanted with marriage. That's a sharp contrast with some Western societies -- Sweden, France or the Canadian province of Quebec, for example -- where cohabitation is beginning to replace marriage... In the United States, 90 percent of young people are still expected to tie the knot at some point."

reprinted from CEG Newsletter

All too many marriages in our Western society are crumbling. Whatever this portends for national stability, it's clear that it means heartache for thousands of couples - and their extended families. It means distress for uncounted children. What begins as an exciting dream too often ends in heartbreak.

Is there a way to avert such tragic loss through divorce? What steps can you take to ensure your marriage is fruitful and not merely hanging by a thread “for the sake of the children” or the relatives - or even the church? (Marital distress isn’t limited to non-Christians”!)

Personal Responsibility

Of course there are external factors that tend to tear marriages apart—friends, relations, careers, children, pressures of society. But when a marriage begins to go wrong, most couples start blaming one another or blaming circumstances—or God! - for their situation.

It must be accepted, however, that at the heart of every marriage break-up lies *sin*. Not a fashionable word, but nevertheless true! And sin is personal. That means each of us has *personal responsibility* for our marriage. Usually, but not always, there’s sin by both partners. It may be a mix of infidelity, self-centeredness, ignorance, anger, violence, sloth, alcoholism, sexual perversion, an unforgiving spirit, hate, insensitivity, drugs, immature responses, financial mismanagement. The list could be expanded.

(*Stop and think!* Are any of these “qualities” at work in *your* marriage?)

In time, life for one or both partners becomes intolerable. And divorce seems the only answer.

Divorce is terminal. It’s an end to hopes and dreams. Months or years, perhaps decades, of shared experience evaporates. Two lives once entwined in common purpose, intent on founding a dynasty, sparkling with romance, based on mutual caring have slowly fallen apart. Somehow the challenges of life have overwhelmed shining hopes for a lifetime together. *And we are each responsible.*

Bitter Roots

Look at your own marriage. Are the seeds for its destruction already extending their bitter roots through every aspect of your life? Are there nagging concerns about fidelity?

Angry outbursts or simmering resentment? Long silences? A parting of interests? Cooling of affection? Biting sarcasm? Loss of mutual respect? If so, be aware that your marriage is on the slippery slopes to divorce!

The Edge of Divorce

But—does it matter? Can’t you just start again with a new partner? Despite the relaxing of divorce laws, it isn’t that easy. The evidence is in: *divorce solves little.*

There’s heartache often lasting years, even when divorce has put an end to prolonged physical or psychological abuse. Children generally do less well at school. New partners are elusive. The economic and emotional legacy can be horrendous. And the same destructive habits are often carried on into the next marriage with the same unsurprising result—further misery and another divorce.

Our personal destructive habits spawn a host of unstable relationships, serial marriages, unhappy children, upset parents and friends, disillusioned men and women—and burdensome taxes to pay for it all. *But the cause is not divorce!*

Is Divorce Sin?

Divorce is often the inevitable result of a fractured marriage. It’s the result of ignorance of or blatant disregard for “the rules” of marriage. A result of immature emotional reactions, of selfish pursuits, of indiscipline, of improper desire, of failure to cope with the inevitable challenges of married life. But divorce isn’t of itself always sin! (Though in certain circumstances it is.)

Don’t get it wrong. Divorce is awful. It is failure. It hurts. It is the mutual tearing up of a contract. It is destructive. *God hates it* (Malachi 2:16). And it can indeed be sinful.

On the other hand God allowed Moses to *permit* divorce (Matt. 19:8). He even Himself “divorced” Israel whom He had “married” (Jeremiah. 3:8)! And both Jesus and Paul recognized the possibility of divorce.

Because divorce isn’t usually of itself sinful most people who have before conversion been divorced and have remarried can be converted and become a part of the Church of God without “continuing in sin”. If such divorces were sin, couples would have to separate to express their repentance. But when someone repents there can be no dispensation to continue to sin!

The sin, rather, lies in *those months and years that led to* divorce. It lies in the acts of flirtation and adultery. It lies in the failure to “submit one to another”. In the nurtured resentments that fester into hate. In the lack of the practical concern—“love”—that must undergird every enduring marriage: love for your husband or wife, love for your children, love for your extended family.

Sin lies in the refusal to forgive, in uncompromising rigidity, in the unwillingness to share the burdens of marriage, in the contempt bred by a lack of mutual respect, in secret lustful thoughts, in the neglect of the

spiritual. Sin lies in the failure to “...love your neighbour as yourself” (in this case your spouse!).

Do you see this pattern in your own marriage? Sadly, all too many Christian families fall into such sin.

Christian Marriage

If the signs are there then seek wise counsel. For it usually is sin for two Christians, two baptized people in whom is the Spirit of God, to divorce!

An editorial in a Christian periodical indicted the leaders of the mainstream churches for their wholesale adultery—that is, divorcing their Christian spouse and re-marrying [Prophecy Today July 1991]. *Christians must be reconciled*. In Christian marriages, divorce with remarriage is usually a godly option *only when one partner refuses the discipline of the Word of God and His Church*. One partner—and not always the original “offending” one—reverts to being an “unbeliever” through implacable unforgiveness.

That’s a frightening thought. On the matter of forgiveness, and just before a discussion on divorce, Jesus said to the disciples “...So also shall my heavenly Father do to you [i.e. withdraw forgiveness] if you from your hearts forgive not men their trespasses (or, offences)”. Read all of Matthew 18:15-35. A forgiving spirit is an attitude we must cultivate daily throughout life—especially in marriage. So, *get the forgiveness habit* and help save your marriage!

Let’s be grateful that our loving Father is merciful and, upon our repentance, generously forgiving of our trespasses!

For the people of God, *marriage is a lifetime commitment*.

Change Is Essential

No marriage is perfect. For each of

us is unique—but imperfect. We come to marriage with a suitcase full of entrenched habits and ideas and prejudices built during our years of being single. Social and educational backgrounds are often diverse. Each of us has his or her own vision of the future. There’s a clash of wills on endless minor and major disputes.

But in a godly marriage we are to “become one flesh”. Our thoughts are to blend in unison. Over the years we must learn to harmonize our dreams, cope with each other’s emotional Pandora’s box, discipline our personal aspirations. Each of us is responsible to accommodate to the partner’s irritating quirks. And to get rid of our own!

And each must learn to forgive.

If you are divorced or on the edge of divorce or contemplating re-marriage - have you conquered those sins which were *your* part in the breakdown of your marriage? Is your anger now properly disciplined? Are your thoughts in sexual matters now submitted to the will of God? And have you quit fuelling those thoughts by censoring your reading and viewing? Have you, with God’s grace, put away your illicit desires? Are you willing to bear your proper responsibilities, willing to shed inappropriate self-interests (hobbies, even business), willing to be forgiving, willing to bear one another’s burden?

Maybe your special sins aren’t listed here. But whatever they are you need to work out with your partner, your minister, your counsellor, your God how you are going to lick them! *YOU* need to change!

Rules of the Game

Marriage was instituted by the Creator as the best possible way (with a few exceptions) for two separate hu-

man beings to live. It is based on the in-built physical, mental, psychological, emotional traits of male and female. *We need one another*. Man is incomplete without woman, and *vice-versa*! Said God: “...*It is not good that the man should be alone*” (Genesis 2:18).

And marriage can work!

In the melding of two separate lives as one is the true fulfilment of each. Indeed marriage is designed by God as a reflection of the perfect relationship that is to develop between Jesus Christ and His Church. Wrote the apostle Paul: “...*The marriage relationship is doubtless a great mystery, but I am speaking of something deeper still - the marriage of Christ and his Church*” (Ephesians 5:32).

For most young couples, however, marriage is no more than a game. When you tire of it you quit. When you’re losing you go. But marriage is *much more* than a game. It does indeed, like any game, have rules. And like any game, any living being, any device, it must abide by them to function properly.

The first rule is— *marriage is no game!*

Marriage is not for children. Not a playtime to be disrupted when you’re bored, or not winning, or find the going too tough for you, or when the glitter wears thin. Marriage is for real men, real women. It takes courage to commit to a lifetime of sharing. It takes courage and emotional maturity to reject the easy way of “living together” with its convenient bolt-hole of abandonment when the going gets tough. It takes courage and strength of character to face the heavy and numerous challenges of married life. Marriage needs commitment. Marriage *thrives* on commitment.

Plan of Action

So if you are on the edge of divorce—

The Best Option . . . cont'd

may fulfil the purpose of companionship. It may 'save money'. It may thumb the nose at cultural norms. It may provide an outlet for physical sex. *But it ignores the psychology of permanence implicit in the marriage bond.*

Co-habitation is in ignorance of the very purpose of marriage. Embark on life together believing you can get out when the going gets tough—as it will—makes breakdown almost inevitable. That 'piece of paper' is a major key to the very purpose of the relationship. Sadly, few are concerned about life's purpose.

Christian Marriage

Central to human relationships is the instruction the Creator gives us regarding the most intimate aspect of daily life: the marriage relationship. Get that right and we can flourish, personally and nationally.

In general, the Christian response to moral decline has been limp. However, the standard remains unchanged from the guidance offered in the Christian Scriptures—the only source

ever revealed of the will of our Creator. The responsibility is personal.

Sound Education

Young Christians, and children of godly parents, must be taught the value of self-restraint. They need guidance from parents, school and church as to godly behaviour in relation to marriage and sex.

The notion of permanence must be instilled. Only by bi-lateral commitment to stay together 'till death do us part' can the purpose of marriage be properly fulfilled.

Why Marriage

Our children should be encouraged to follow the marriage process: wise selection of a partner, *betrothal* (seen as binding preparation for marriage), the outworking of *detail* (finances, contract *etc*), then the formal joining together in a joyful public wedding ceremony and celebration.

Christians, those men and women with the Spirit of God, are to commit to a lifetime monogamous relationship—or, for those so gifted, to celibacy, that they may be joyfully dedicated to a work for God. **Ω**

Divorce...cont'd

—what can you do? Here's an outline of some steps you might consider:

- Commit yourselves to staying together—for life
- *Accept that you share the responsibility for the distress in the marriage*
- Identify the positive reasons for staying together
- *Recognize that sin is the basis of the failure of your marriage*
- Work together to identify the problems, perhaps with a counsellor, or your pastor
- *Map out clear plans to tackle the main challenges*
- Discipline yourselves to win each

challenge

- *Commit your marriage to the Creator God, exercising faith daily*
- Remember—there is always a way to meet each challenge!
- *Above all, model your marriage on the way of life revealed in the Scriptures, especially laying the foundation of faith in Jesus Christ.* **Ω**

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Already—Christmas ads on television!

**But is Christmas really for Christians?
Request the free article:
The Feast of the Nativity**

The Last Seven

Christians, almost universally, worship every Sunday. And annually there's Easter, Christmas—though such are not found in the Scriptures. One observance that is familiar and also written large there is Pentecost.

Pentecost is one of seven annual Bible feasts—the names of which are, apart from serious Bible readers, virtually unknown.

Yet Jesus, the apostles and the first Christians did observe them. And they would be abhorred by their prevalence in this supposedly enlightened twenty-first century.

Many Christians are becoming aware of these facts, and are now following the Scripture lead and observing them. If you would like to learn more please contact any of our offices.

***What are the Biblical alternatives to Sunday, Christmas, Easter, Saints Days, Hallowe'en?
Read: God's Holy Days
Why Observe Sunday?***

Holy Days 2011

Pentecost	June 12
Trumpets	Sept 29
Atonement	Oct 8
Tabernacles	Oct 13-19
Last Day	Oct 20

MiniStudy

Why Marriage?

And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him... And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her to the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:18, 22-24)

Marriage is being replaced with a myriad of lifestyles. And, with today's dismal record of marriage failures, it is understandable. If the odds of success were less than 50%, would you make an investment or fly a plane? Over 50% of marriages end in divorce. An estimated 65% of men are in affairs, and 40% of women. Does that make marriage a risky venture? No wonder 9.7 million people in the USA are cohabiting (sinning). We are a product of our upbringing and society. If we keep doing what we're doing, we'll keep getting what we've got, only worse. Can the institution of marriage be fixed? How can you beat the odds? — *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you..."* (Hosea 4:6 KJV). We need to know "Why Marriage?"

- man and woman were created with specific instructions : *" So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it:..."* (Genesis 1:27-28) Woman was created as a counterpart to man, not in an adversarial role but as an aid and companion (Genesis 2:18 above). They were made to balance and complement each other
- specific instructions are given to each:
 - 1 *to the woman:* (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 savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing"*
 - 2 *to the man:* {Ephesians 5: 25} *"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; 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 loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes 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 parents are to teach children about God and marriage! (Deuteronomy 11:19) *"And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sits in your house, and when thou walk by the way, when thou lie down, and when thou rise up."* This is a grave responsibility, but too often ignored
- the Biblical instruction therefore remains: *"That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor;"* (1 Thessalonians 4:4). *"Should know how"* indicates an effort must be put forth to understand the purpose of marriage and its rules. Would anyone enter into such an important contract without good advice, counsel, knowledge, and wisdom?

Steve Kieler

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