



CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

Lesson 17

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP (3) — MARRIAGE

Marriage is the coming together of two separate lives, in the most intimate of all human relationships. When Jesus was asked about marriage, he replied, quoting from Genesis 2:24:

"Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:4-6).

It is clear from this that marriage is intended by God to be a life-long commitment. Jesus went on to say, "I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." (Matthew 19:9)

God requires us to do all things "decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40). It is therefore proper for a marriage to be witnessed and recorded by the community in which we live, so that it is then recognised by both God and man.

Choice of partner

When God made His creatures male and female, He gave them a strong natural instinct which draws them together for the purpose of reproduction. In the case of mankind, His higher creation, He has made us thinking, intelligent beings. He wants us to take a responsible attitude towards our natural instincts. He expects us to make a sensible choice of one partner for life, and to behave with loving care towards our husband or wife and any resulting children.

At the present time these high standards are frequently ignored by men and women, and this cannot be pleasing to God. It is natural that we should respond to the sexual instinct that God has given us, but we must do so in a responsible way.

With this in mind, Christian disciples should make their choice of a partner from among those who share their love for Christ, one who is prepared, as they are, to obey Christ in their lives, and who will share all their hopes for the future. Sharing a home, children, and all the intimacies of married life with one who has no Christian standards can be very difficult. Choosing the wrong marriage partner will create an influence in the life of a disciple which may turn him or her away from their faith. The Apostle Paul was convinced about this, and had some strong words for the Christian brothers and sisters in Corinth. He writes: "*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For ... what fellowship has light with darkness?*" (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Paul's reference to 'unequal yoking' is an image from the way two animals work well together (for example, when pulling a plough). They work best if they are compatible. If the animals are very different, they will both be uncomfortable in the yoke, and little useful work will result. This is what marriage is like when two people with different standards, ambitions and objects in life attempt to share their lives. They continually disagree with each other and there will be tension, stress and conflict.

A friendship between a man and a woman may develop into 'falling in love', and they become drawn to each other. Though the attraction is often physical at first, as they get to know each other better they may discover that they have interests in common, and these interests draw them even closer. A disciple of Jesus, however, has already pledged himself or herself to serve the Lord. If the new friend is also a servant of the Lord, then each can encourage and help the other. Such a union can be a great blessing, and give joy not only to the couple themselves but to friends and relations, and to God Himself in heaven above.

It follows that a Christian should avoid being drawn into an affair with someone who does not share the most important and most valuable thing in this life—our relationship with God through Jesus. It is far easier to avoid this situation before it develops too far than to draw back later. When deeper feelings and emotions have been aroused, pain, heartache and bitterness may result if the affair ends.

These may seem tough words, but their wisdom is beyond doubt. A marriage between two people who are not in sympathy about the most important things in life can lead to disaster, but a union of two believers in Jesus Christ is blessed by God. Any children of the marriage are also blessed because they can grow up in a godly and harmonious atmosphere. It is better to remain single and serve God well, than to enter into a relationship that cannot help us to serve God better.

Unbelieving partners

While it would be wrong deliberately to seek marriage with an unbeliever, it may happen that a man or woman does not learn about the gospel of Jesus Christ until after he or she is married, and the partner has no wish to share his or her new found faith. In such a case the Apostle Paul instructs us:

“If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband” (1 Corinthians 7:12-14).

In that situation, a disciple must be patient with the unbelieving partner, exerting a good influence by what he or she says and does, and always trying to set a good example. This might result in bringing the partner to Christ.

Children

Usually, marriage produces children, whom believers see as a gift of God. Being a parent brings much joy and also trials and responsibilities. “Children are a heritage from the LORD” (Psalm 127:3). They are receptive to God’s word and we have a wonderful opportunity to teach them about God’s ways. If it is not possible to have children, there are still opportunities to teach other people’s children the fear of the Lord. Christadelphians have many resources to help in teaching children of all ages about the Bible and its wonderful message.

Love and respect

True Christian husbands and wives will treat each other with constant love and respect, sharing the responsibilities as well as the advantages and pleasures of marriage, and not making unreasonable demands upon each other. They will make sure that the cares of marriage, and the claims of family and home do not make it difficult to give proper attention to the service of God (read 1 Corinthians 7:1-10). If marriage is entered into by brothers and sisters of Christ with good understanding, and after prayerful consideration, it will have God’s blessing. The marriage will be a help on the way to God’s kingdom.

In Ephesians 5:22-33 (please read), Paul explains that the relationship between husband and wife is a symbol of the relationship between Christ and the believers:

“The husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”.

Even the most faithful of disciples are still human and imperfect, and problems will arise in every marriage; but the certainty that Jesus loves them and forgives their sins will help husband and wife to treat one another in the same way. This is the best foundation for a successful marriage.

When Christ returns, his faithful followers, who will be raised to eternal life, become the Bride whom Christ will ‘marry’:

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory! For the wedding of the Lamb (Christ) has come, and his bride has made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7,8).

Questions

S1. Explain in your own words what Paul says about the relationship between husband and wife in Ephesians 5:22-33.

S2. What responsibility do believing Christian parents have towards their children? (See Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-21)