

Marriage

Marriage is the relationship between a man and a woman. In God's plan for human beings it was to be the central building block of society. The relationship between male and female, man and woman, was to be the means by which the species was to be maintained, but also to be the environment in which the children produced in that marriage should be brought up, in what Paul the apostle calls "*The nurture and admonition of the Lord*". Of course in the time of Adam and Eve there was no understanding of the Lord Jesus, but nevertheless it is quite clear that Adam would have passed on some concept of the God, with whom he had walked in the Garden of Eden, to his children. How else would Cain and Abel have understood the requirement to bring a sacrifice to God?

Marriage is also the example of the union between the Lord Jesus Christ and His church, which is one body, and as is one of the ways in which Christians are able to show the highest possible potential of God's ultimate will for His people as the Church of Jesus Christ

God had seen that it was not good that man should live on his own and therefore provided him with what the Bible tells us is "a help". The word help is the same word used in psalm 127 which says "*My help comes from the Lord*". The idea then is one of assistance, of support, of comfort and of friendship, as all these aspects form part of the help a wife provides for her husband, and surely a husband for his wife too. The Bible also tells us a man "*Should cleave to his wife*" and the word "cleave" means to adhere, to stick, or to stay, giving the idea of permanence. The idea of permanence is even more strongly expressed in the phrase "*They shall become one flesh*". It seems that the marriage union is intended to be very permanent in that there is no longer, in some ways, two but one, and that the one should not be divided. In the marriage ceremony, at least one that is used in the UK, the promise is "Until death do us part" so the only separation is when the flesh of one or the other ceases to have life in it. We have, right at the beginning of the Bible, the principles and reason for the marriage relationship. So many people seem to need help and guidance in marriage, and look for some sort of teaching or formula which will assist them in having a happy marriage, or possibly putting right a marriage that has run into difficulties. There is however no prescription for a successful happy marriage, no contract can be drawn up which will ensure that if both parties stick to it all will be well. Human beings are much too complicated and life too challenging for that sort of idea to work, and no person has that ability within themselves to keep to any such agreement. The real secret, at least for the Christian, is that the closer their relationship is with the Lord Jesus and the more their real life is genuinely "not I but Christ", the better their married relationship will be. Charles Wesley, probably the greatest hymn writer of all time, in one of his hymns has the phrase "Oh make me all like thee": the more the Christian wants to be like the Lord Jesus in his life and living so will the love of God work out in all his/her relationships, the most important of which is his/her marriage. The Lord Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, would come to those who receive the Lord Jesus and lead them into all truth. Christians therefore have this wonderful Comforter to lead us into all truth and show married couples the truth of how to live together, love one another, and bring up their children.

For the non-Christian it is difficult to see how any marriage could possibly ever be as it should be without the involvement of God in the lives of the married couple. In the book of Ephesians Paul talks about the situation before we become Christians and uses the phrase "Without God, in this world". This means that every society with its culture and tradition has had no real influence of Almighty God in it at all. Some countries, of course, have a Christian heritage with a history of revival and the Christian church being very much part of its culture. There is Christian influence, at least a Christian type morality, but unless each person has received the Lord Jesus they still cannot know His love in their lives and are still "Without God in this world".

It's quite clear that the God of creation, the God of the Bible, is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and that His involvement with the people of the world was with the Children of Israel, they were His people and He was their God. All other societies, cultures and traditions therefore have been built without the Almighty God and are the result of the working of the "god of this world, the spirit who works in the children of disobedience". Satan set out at the beginning to ruin the lives of human beings by separating them from God, making them independent by using their own judgement as to what is right and wrong. It could be suggested that all the structures of the societies and cultures of this world, however different, are designed by satan, in many different forms and guises, and still continue to ruin and damage human lives. It is quite clear that the financial systems of all cultures, which control so much of what goes on in the world, do not have their origins in God; for example, neither communism nor capitalism are what God intended, but then neither are the financial arrangements which work in most cultures. This also applies to the way that "Marriages" or the relationships between men and women are arranged. What God intended to be a holy and blessed union has been debased and the sexual relationship which is part of the union has been misused in almost every possible and conceivably perverted way. Even to read the book of Genesis it is easy to see how quickly immorality became part of human lives and the problems that developed when men were led astray by their own lusts. It may be a hard thing to look at the society in which we/you live and the things which are considered normal in that culture, and see how far away they are from the things which God intended at the beginning, and how much damage that has caused to human souls. Just take a moment to think of your own culture and the things you consider normal, but yet, by not complying with God's intentions do damage to the souls and lives of people. Also realise these things do provide pleasure, the misguided pleasure of 'sin for a season', which is why they seem attractive and in many ways seductive. That is why they are part of the culture and why it is so hard to persuade people to give them up, as they don't want to lose their power and pleasure.

It seems in the "West", the UK where I live is part of that, things go from bad to worse and we are rapidly approaching the situation "As they were in the days of Noah", and we look at the fulfilment of the word of our Lord Jesus in that these are the end times. There seems to be no, or very little, check of the human conscience on immoral behaviour, and men and women feel free to do whatever they want to do. The book of Hebrews has the phrase "the pleasures of sin", and of course there is some pleasure, at least short term, in the immoral things people do. There is the "fulfilling of the desires of the flesh and of the mind", and yet the "wages of sin is death" and such activities cause damage to the human soul, when the heart has to be hardened to do something immoral. When a man and a woman commit adultery, in their heart of hearts they know it is wrong, but they continue enjoying the pleasure, in spite of their conscience. They have to harden their hearts to commit the sin, and their conscience becomes quieter until it cannot be heard at all. That is the spiritual death such behaviour causes, and of course moves us further away from God and His will

for our lives. There are also the diseases which are prevalent in the world and have only come through immoral behaviour, which have brought premature death and suffering to millions.

Having said that there is no prescription, no magic formula, for marriage, it is possible to look at the Bible and see the principles God lays down, to inspire the reader to look at his/her own life and encourage them to seek the Lord Jesus to increase their faith and allow Him to work in them that which is of His good pleasure. God often sets out the principles we are to follow early in the Bible, and the first marriage we encounter from the start is that of Isaac, Abraham's son of promise. Abraham's servant was sent with clear instructions not to take a wife for Isaac from the Canaanites among whom they were living. The Canaanites practised dreadful abominations and idolatry, and there was no desire in Abraham for his son to have a union with any idolater. The same was to apply to Jacob, Isaac's son who inherited the blessing, and we are told that it grieved Isaac and Rebekah that Esau, their other son, took wives from among the Canaanite women. The Children of Israel were not to take wives from the tribes around them but only from the Israelite women, and for priests the requirement was even more strict, as God demonstrates His will that all relationships between men and women should be holy and that elements should not be introduced into the relationship which will cause either partner to go away from the Lord and have any part in serving other gods.

So Isaac took a wife from the right origins and when Rebekah came to him he took her and *"She became his wife and he loved her"* (Genesis 24.67). It is only the second mention of the word love in Genesis, and the first in the context of any relationship between a man and his wife. So in the beginning "He loved her". Isaac is the representative of the Lord Jesus, being the son of Abraham the picture of God the Father, so from the outset the principle of marriage is of a husband loving his wife, and this fits in with the revelation Paul the apostle gives us in Ephesians "Husbands love your wives even as Christ loved the Church". Isaac was comforted by Rebekah and it is amazing to think that the Lord Jesus can find comfort in His relationship with us. 'Rebekah' means captivating. She won Isaac's heart and he belonged to her for ever. Abraham took more than one wife, so did Jacob and King David, but there is no mention of Isaac ever having another wife, he was captivated by Rebekah and he loved her. Perhaps there was something in Isaac from his experience of almost being offered up by his father Abraham. Isaac had submitted to being placed on the altar Abraham had made and perhaps had understood the principle of sacrifice and of the laying down of His life. He could therefore possibly love Rebekah, or begin to love her, as Christ "loved the church and **gave Himself for it**". The ability to lay down a life for another is a rare thing but that is the standard of true love. We are told "by the mercies of God to present our bodies a living sacrifice" to God and perhaps for both husband and wife once they have learned how to do that then they begin to learn how to lay down their lives for one another. Paul the apostle's definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13 supports that whole principle. "Love seeks not its own", in other words it is not selfish.

Rebekah was of course a virgin; she had never known another man. In Israel a father was to keep the tokens of his daughter's virginity. Virginity is very important. That is why the Lord Jesus gave Himself for the church so that He could "present it to Himself without spot or wrinkle", completely washed from all sin. Virginity in both partners in a marriage is very important as then they can be fully given to one another, become one flesh, having never been joined to another. The Lord Jesus of course can wash away and forgive sins and does so in cases where there have been prior relationships. However it seems that virginity is very cheap these days, and young men and women are too quick to have a sexual experience and throw away the preciousness of their virginity. The media provide

huge pressure with their adverts and “soap” type programmes, setting a bad example to young people who then apply peer pressure to one another. Much better to wait for God’s choice and timing of a life partner.

When Isaac took Rebekah we have to assume there were sexual relations. That is what consummates a marriage, and a marriage is not a marriage until that has taken place. That is how men and women become one flesh and right from the beginning we are told that “Adam knew Eve and she conceived”. The whole meaning is one of intimacy and of closeness, in fact the whole anatomy of men and women makes it such and that was always God’s intention. There are many species which do not have any sort of intimacy and closeness in coitus but that was not God’s intention for human beings.

Adam and Eve were not ashamed before The Fall, but when sin entered in they knew they were naked, it was a matter of conscience, of knowing their state, and they hid themselves. Most humans have an awareness of being ashamed at our nakedness and that is why we wear clothes, and in almost all cultures the “most private parts” are covered. Sadly these days as our society becomes more depraved people become shameless. That is different from not being ashamed, as shamelessness involves hardening against the shame we naturally feel and behaving in such a way that we don’t seem to care. Such shamelessness is at the root of much immorality. A man should be given to one wife. As Hebrews tells us *“Marriage is honourable in all and the bed is undefiled”*, so that relationship can be without shame. Shamelessness enables a much more open attitude and what is misguidedly called freedom with bodies and so permits all sorts of permissive behaviour. As we have seen earlier consciences can be overridden, hearts hardened, and once that takes place the lusts of the flesh are without check and will manifest themselves in all sorts of immorality. This applies not only between men and women but with immorality between men and men, and women with women, as described by Paul in Romans chapter 1.

It should be pointed out, as a warning, that fornication, any form of immoral sexual or pseudo-sexual activity, provides a vulnerability to demonic possession and/or oppression. These things can bring about an obsession and often discernment and deliverance in the name of Jesus Christ is what is needed; hence the command to flee fornication. He that is joined to a prostitute is one flesh with her, and again such activity leaves permanent damage to those who take part in such things. The Lord Jesus can forgive and deliver, but better never to go there at all. If people are finding it hard to receive the Lord or to get free in their lives, it may be that they are held by previous activity in this area of immorality, and they need to repent and be forgiven and delivered.

As we have seen already, these things are part of the strategy of satan to take what God intended to be holy and intimate and use it to damage human souls and lead them away from righteousness. The apostle Peter tells us to “Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul”. The word ‘war’ means to encamp against, and implies spiritual conflict and is from where we get the English word strategy. The encampment against our souls restricts our freedom towards God. The deception of course is that the immorality may seem great at the time and everyone talks about freedom from convention and being free, but the reality, spiritually, is in fact the opposite. Paul the apostle talks about *“Not coming under the power of anything”* and *“All things are not edifying”*. These two comments go hand in hand. Fleshly lusts war against the soul and they quickly demand more, and therefore soon have us in their power as the craving which is developed needs more and more fulfilment. Drug addiction is a good example, but sexual activity can also become an addiction and dominate a person’s life. The internet these days caters for such need, as does a whole industry, leading people into all sorts of increased cravings, leading to child abuse and criminality and all sorts of strange perversions. They are departures from *“The natural use of the woman”* described by Paul in Romans chapter 1. None of these things edify, they do not build up and strengthen the soul in

righteousness and in its relationship with God. They are a long way from the “*Bed is undefiled*” of which the Bible speaks, and bringing these sorts of perversions, around which a whole industry in the supply of paraphernalia and equipment has grown up, to the “*Undefiled bed*” will of course make that bed defiled and the relationship unclean and unholy.

We have read that Isaac was comforted by Rebekah and perhaps that is the secret of marriage altogether. There is no mention of any physical satisfaction nor of their sexual relationship but rather the beneficial effect the marriage had on Isaac and the needs of his soul. This would have come from all aspects of their married relationship not just the physical part. This is an extract from the modern Church of England marriage service which puts it rather well:

The gift of marriage brings husband and wife together in the delight and tenderness of sexual union, and joyful commitment to the end of their lives. It is given as the foundation of family life in which children are [born and] nurtured and in which each member of the family, in good times and in bad, may find strength, companionship and comfort, and grow to maturity in love

People talk about having a soul mate in marriage, and perhaps that is what Isaac found and why he never found the need to take another wife. In modern times, particularly at least in Western society, too much emphasis is placed on the physical side of relationships when indeed it only plays a small part.

The Bible though helps us with sexual relationships. Of course It is not explicit and neither should it ever have been or need to be. It is the principles which it lays down which are important. Of course we have “husbands love your wives” and “wives obey your husbands”, but the New Testament talks about the “obedience of faith”, and obedience is at its highest not when under compulsion but when in faith, love and trust.

I Corinthians chapter 7 helps us look at physical/sexual relationship.

“*Let every man have his own wife and every woman her own husband*” is the basic rule; this is to avoid fornication. Elsewhere we are exhorted to “*flee from fornication*” so it is quite clear that fornication or immoral sexual activity, sexual activity outside of the marriage union, was not to be known in the church. Paul tells the Ephesians. “*Let it not be named once among you*”. The statement refers to fornication and any sexual uncleanness. We must remember that the cities, Corinth and Ephesus for example, which Paul had visited, were pagan cities. There would have been all sorts of devil worship, temples with awful rituals and so on, and would have been full not only of idolatry but of all sorts of immorality; so to write these things to the Corinthians was to bring in a whole new concept of marriage, morality and relationships. The Corinthians had written to Paul asking questions, as no doubt they were finding a conflict between the ways in which they had been brought up in their own culture and their new found Christian faith. Their consciences had been renewed having received the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit was working in their lives, and there was an awareness of what was holy and what was profane. That is the challenge today for Christians; are we to continue in the practices of the culture in which we were brought up or to “*Come out from among them and touch not the unclean thing*” and do what is right in the sight of God? Often the customs and traditions of culture are very strong, they have been passed down through many generations, but if they are contrary to what is right and holy, as revealed in the Bible, then Christians must follow the ways of God.

So we have one husband and one wife, each for each other, and both are to render to the other due benevolence. It means, to give back to each other the good will that is due to one another. Benevolence is good mind or good will, so means to think well of, and therefore behave in such a way that the good thinking will affect our actions. The way we think always affects our actions. You cannot think well of someone and be horrid to them; surely you cannot think well of someone and abuse them or beat them. Paul tells us “No man has ever hated his own body; and to love his wife as his own body: and if you love your wife you love yourself.” How far has mankind fallen and what level of hatred and destruction is there within society and the hearts of human beings when violence or abuse against a partner is part of any relationship? If you love someone you must surely think well of them and behave in a kind way towards that person. “Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you”. That applies just as much to the wife towards the husband, so that although the wife may not beat or be violent towards her husband, she can be a constant nagging wife and mentally and emotionally “beat” her husband and cause harm. Husbands should not nag their wives and be bitter against them. Those sorts of behaviour do not belong in a marriage; as we have seen, Isaac loved Rebekah, found her captivating and thought well of her. That kindness would have been part of their physical relationship.

Next, the phrase in 1 Corinthians 7 about bodies and the control of bodies, one assumes relating to sexual activity. *“The wife has not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband has not power of his own body, but the wife”*. The word used is ‘power’ but really means authority. To command and give orders is to be in control. The Bible transfers control of bodies to the other partner. So the husband has authority/control of his wife’s body and the wife control/authority of the husband’s body. Is this true equality? Yes, but both are to love the other and so, in sexual relations, one has the place to say yes or no to the other. That deals with abuse, control, and one or the other being treated like a slave. There must be consent by both husband and wife in their sexual relationships and both must feel ‘comfortable’ in their hearts and minds about what they are doing, otherwise one can say no to the other.

The next phrase is *“Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency”*. The instruction is not to defraud or deny one another, not to rob the other, in the area of physical relations. That puts it the other way, and means that each partner has the right to physical relations but under the control of the other. Indeed physical relationships are part of any marriage, and although the word ‘right’ is used, the expectation is that if husband and wife love each other then they will want to be fulfilled and ensure their partner is fulfilled in every part of their married life together. Paul says don’t rob one another, don’t take away this good thing **except by consent**. Consent is about agreement and reinforces the mutuality, cooperation, in this whole area of relationships. It is in the love of God, and in that love there should be, and must be, the trust and communication to be able to agree, for example for a period of fasting and prayer as quoted in this passage. That would be when both, or maybe just one partner, want to separate themselves to seek the Lord for a period. It is when the requirements of our relationship with the Lord Jesus make it imperative that we prioritise our prayer or fasting. Some men and women at times travel away from their home for the work of the gospel; such travel makes sexual relations not possible but again it is a matter of prioritising the work of God. One would suggest in a loving relationship that both husband and wife should and must have talked about all this and reached an understanding and agreement together. The emphasis is on togetherness, and Paul tells the Philippians in chapter 2 to

look on things from the other person's point of view; that is how it works. The instruction is only to separate for a time, for a season, then come back together again, resume your sexual relationship, so that you are not tried and tempted by satan, because of your incontinency. The word incontinency means lack of power and control. Paul's comment shows a realistic recognition that we are humans and have bodies with functions, including sexual functions, and to have normal sexual relations is fine, in the right time and place, and that not to do so may leave either partner open to temptation. We have seen that marriage is holy and the bed, sexual relations, is undefiled, and therefore physical sexual relationships within a marriage between a loving husband and a loving wife are quite normal, and of which neither partner should be ashamed.

Paul mentions satan; not that we are afraid of him, but we are told to be sober and watchful as he seeks those he can devour; eat up, is the word, take over, destroy. One word used for satan in the Bible is Apollyon, which means destroyer. Paul talks of satan "having an advantage over us". It relates to unforgiveness between people but the principle is just the same. It means satan covets God's people. He wants you. He does not have you by right, as he did not create you, and has not worked for you in that he has not redeemed you. Our Lord Jesus is our redeemer, He paid the price for us, but nevertheless satan wants you or part of you. It is clear that in this realm of sexual activity there is an opportunity for satan to take advantage of us. Husbands and wives need to be aware of this and support one another in their relationship; they need to consent together and never place either themselves or their partner in a vulnerable position, as far as the wicked one is concerned. That is why loving one another is so important, it is not an option, and it is so much better to have God's choice of partner than our own. He sees 50 years ahead when we will be old and grey, and knows how we will be then, and provides partners who will still be in love all those years later in spite of their ageing. Who knows what we will be like and look like when we get old, but God does? "Forsaking all other, as long as we both shall live" is what husband and wife promise at their wedding. God looks on the heart, not on the outward appearance. We only have to look at the sin King David committed to see the dangers of being taken in by natural beauty.

Unforgiveness has been mentioned. Paul tells husbands, "Love your wives and be not bitter against them". Hebrews talks about "roots of bitterness" and those who have them being defiled by that bitterness. A note of caution is given. The "undefiled bed" can be spoilt by either partner, more specifically here the husband in Paul's comment, having bitterness, or unforgiveness, or something else against the other. Roots can be hard to remove as can any root of bitterness, unforgiveness, jealousy and so on; so it is essential in any marriage that there is forgiveness one for the other, and none of these other things are allowed to come in and spoil the relationship. "Let not the sun go down on your wrath", we are told, or "keep short accounts". Such things in either heart can quickly spoil a relationship in every area. Hard words, lack of cooperation and so on can spill over into the physical relationship, which then becomes hard, unfeeling and no comfort for either partner, and satan is just there waiting to take advantage. In fact he already has a place in you if you have unforgiveness in your heart, towards anyone really, but most of all against your husband or wife who should be your best friend.

All this of course takes us into the having and looking after of children. It is the greatest blessing to be given children but also the most challenging to bring them up properly. But it is so much better that they are conceived in a loving marriage. A separate pamphlet on Christian Parenting has been written, please look at that, but it is enough here to say that the better and more loving and trusting

the relationship between the parents, the better the upbringing of their children will be. There are no easy answers, but a husband and wife working together united in purpose should provide a loving home into which children can come and grow up. It should be said that the “Children are holy” because of either, or better still both, believing parents, and therefore should never be initiated into any other world/pagan system or any tribal/national customs which are part of the society in which you and I live. These things can badly affect children, open them up to the powers of darkness, and should be avoided totally. Rather, children should be dedicated to the Lord Jesus, who alone is able to keep them and give them everlasting life.

There are of course issues in these times about contraception and the having of children. It is not possible again to be prescriptive as each situation will be very different. What is essential, as has been mentioned with regard to physical relationships, is consent, mutual consent and agreement. It is essential that husband and wife put aside all the pressures from their culture and family and seek the Lord together for His will. In some countries, large families are the thing and a wife who does not produce lots of children is deemed a failure. In other countries boys are wanted and girls are not good enough, so there is the need to keep producing children to get the required “son and heir”. Other cultures are the other way round. In some cultures twins are considered a curse, in others a blessing. All these things are irrelevant, what we need is the will of God. However, it is easier said than done, as the pressure can be enormous; the stigma attached to non-compliance is considerable, and sometimes a huge amount of courage is required. Even Isaac had to seek the Lord as the pressure on him and Rebekah for not having children was immense. In the end God worked for them, and will always do so for us if we seek Him. “Be strong in the Lord”.

It also needs to be recognised that the world is in a time of rapid change. Medical advances mean that child mortality rates are much lower, almost worldwide, than they ever have been. This means that most children will survive and all need feeding, where even 50 years ago far fewer would have survived. Large families may be unsustainable financially, with food, clothing, schooling and so on. A practical and realistic approach is recommended, with both husband and wife looking at the issues together and finding a mutual and sensible understanding of what is possible and what is not. Husbands need to show due benevolence, good thinking, towards their wives, and understand the consequences of wives continuing to produce children which they cannot look after, cannot properly feed, and this to the detriment of the wife’s health. Sometimes the wife needs to show benevolence to the husband and realise how much a child may mean to him. This has to be done before the Lord Jesus and in the light, as He is in the light. It is the only way. Then agree and go ahead with what is agreed, loving one another.

To close we can look at the Bible passage in 1 Peter chapter 3

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel;⁴ But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.⁵ For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection

unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.⁷ Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

Wives are to be subject to their own husbands. The word 'subject' or 'subjection' does not mean servitude or slavery. It is a military term used to put troops in the proper chain of command ready for the battle. Paul in 1 Timothy:2 says that a woman should not usurp authority over a man. It means that she should not take up her own arms or fight her own battles. Man is the head of the woman for her spiritual protection, and without that protection is vulnerable to the work of the wicked one. "*Eve was first deceived*", Paul implying that women are more vulnerable and more easily deceived than men, so God has provided them protection through the headship of their husband. This allows a woman to operate fully and properly within the church knowing that she is under the proper authority and therefore safe from the wicked one. That is what being subject really means and is not an excuse for a man to treat his wife like a slave.

The wives of non-Christian husbands should remain with them, to win over the husband to the Lord Jesus by the manner of her behaviour, rather than continually preaching at the husband. We assume that would apply to a Christian man married to a non-Christian wife. If the believing wife/husband leaves their non-Christian partner, they are to remain unmarried (1 Corinthians 7 again); in other words, not to be joined to another partner and participate in sexual relations.

A woman's beauty is that of her heart and not in the clothes and makeup she may wear. Modest clothing is what Peter requires, and definitely not some of the extremely suggestive clothing now being worn by famous people in the West, which appears in newspapers and magazines. This merely encourages others to wear provocative clothes, leading to all sorts of immorality. Neither should a woman be hidden away behind a veil, but allowed to demonstrate in her face, for all to see, the beauty of the quality of her inward spiritual life. The woman is not to be in fear, or terror may be a better word, of her husband, that prevents her living naturally and normally with him. Maybe that puts a huge responsibility on the man, never to produce or require such fear in his wife. "*Husbands, love your wives*".

Husbands should live with their wives in a clear love and understanding of the responsibilities of marriage. They should give honour to the wife. That means thinking of her better than themselves, really respecting the wife and showing appreciation for the qualities of her life and the blessing it brings. The husband must realise that the wife is the weaker person, generally so physically but usually emotionally too. That is where love and support comes in, and with it an understanding that the wife is just as much an heir of the grace of life which comes from the Lord Jesus. The wife has the same Spirit, the same love of God in her heart, and the same gift of eternal life, with the same responsibility to serve the Lord with all her heart. He is not to have dominion over her faith. "*In Christ there is no male or female*". Why are we told all this? So that our prayers are not hindered. If the relationship between a Christian husband and his wife is not right before God, if they do not show due kindness to one another, if they don't honour and love each other and maintain all of that in

every part of their lives including physical and sexual relations together, it affects and hinders their prayers. The Lord looks for unity, that is where the blessing is commanded. If there is not the unity of love in heart and purpose between a husband and wife, it will affect their relationship with the Lord Jesus, making their prayers less effective both for their needs and those of their family, and for the needs of others outside the family. Is that one of the reasons why so many struggle to see the Lord meeting their needs, as the problems within the marriage relationship are hindering their requests?

We return really to where we started, giving no formula for marriage but saying that it depends on our relationship with the Lord Jesus. This relationship with the Lord Jesus is the most valuable thing in our lives. It keeps us, protects us, strengthens us, and brings us through into life eternal. Nothing in our marriages must affect that relationship. The better our relationship with the Lord Jesus is, the better our marriages will be, and so we will go from glory to glory, ready to be part of the bride of Christ at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Hallelujah.