

Deacon/Elder Lecture Outlines

Lecture 18

How to Build a Better Marriage

I. Introduction

- A. Marriage problems are perennially among the most common problems in society. Divorce rates are shockingly high in most Western countries.
- B. But why are marriage problems also common within the Church of God? Because people tend to be more "themselves" in marriage. There are fewer pretenses, less "putting on a show."

So it is often in marriage that our true commitment to Christianity -- to the way of love that Jesus taught -- is displayed. And if our lives are still more self-centered than Christ-centered, our marriages will have problems.

- C. As leaders in the Church of God we can and must grow in the mind of Christ that will enable us to build our marriages into deeply committed, loving relationships that glorify God.
- D. In so doing we will reap marvelous rewards, both now and through eternity.

II. SPS

This lecture will explain how you and your spouse can build a better marriage God's way.

III. Need

- A. Marriage is a God-plane relationship designed to teach us the fundamentals of devoted love, the kind of love God has for us.

God is love. God has given us His laws to show us how to love Him and to love one another. Marriage and family provide a living laboratory in which we can learn to put others before ourselves and learn true godly love.

God's Family is a ruling family -- a kingdom. To be born into this family we must first learn, in this life, to be in absolute agreement with the authority

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of the Head -- God the Father -- and to use whatever authority we may be given to serve others as Jesus Christ did.

In short, we should be learning to serve others with the wisdom, mercy and love of God. Christians are learning both to lead and to follow in godly love. Both of these attributes must be learned by both husband and wife. Marriage teaches us these things if we conduct our marriages God's way.

- B. ||| Our personal example in our marriage is important, for it will set the pattern in our congregations.

We can preach all we want to, but our actions and the examples our marriages set will speak louder than our words. Hence our marriages should not reflect the ideals and ideas of this world, but the principles of harmony and love, which come only from God's way.

- C. In addition to considerations about the future, our own present happiness will be greatly enhanced by building a happy marriage now.

IV. Keeping the Spiritual Focus

- A. God is a family!

The human family is a type of the God Family. To function successfully it must be based on the law of love by which the God Family lives. Human concepts and social customs of themselves are not a reliable guide to the Christian family.

The Church is to become the Bride of Christ. As individual members of the Church we must be submitting to Christ in every facet of our lives, "bringing every thought into captivity." The closeness of the marriage relationship demands that we let the mind of Christ be in us, esteeming our mates better than ourselves.

The pattern of the perfect marriage is set by Christ and the Church.

- B. Marriage requires 100 percent from both parties.

Even though God has given husband and wife different administrative roles, marriage is not a master-slave relationship.

It is a partnership in which each partner is willing to go all out to serve the needs of the other. Each is ready to make whatever personal sacrifice is necessary to promote the well-being of the mate.



This involves submitting one's own will to the will of God so as to maintain a constant attitude of outgoing concern. A fundamental principle governing our relationship with other Christians is described in Ephesians 5:21 as "submitting to one another in the fear of God." Nowhere is this more necessary than in marriage.



Husbands who assume that all submission in marriage is to be done by the wife simply do not understand the full implications of the sacrifice Christ made for His bride-to-be in giving Himself totally for her.

C. Your marriage can advance or impede your spiritual growth.

In I Peter 3:7 we are given evidence of the direct connection between marriage and spiritual development.

"Heirs together of the grace of life" reveals that not only our physical happiness but also our blessings from God are dependent upon our capacity to love and serve our mates. It is clear that one party's spiritual condition can have a direct effect on the spiritual health of the other.

When Peter says, "that your prayers may not be hindered," he applies the broad spiritual principle that we cannot effectively communicate with God while there is a barrier between us and a brother (Matthew 5:23-24).

Two people, working in partnership, can provoke each other to good works and spiritual growth or they can drag each other down. So our attitudes and actions in marriage are an integral part of our spiritual development.

V. God's Government in the Home

A. Why is government necessary?

Have you ever asked yourself why there must be government in the home? If both husband and wife were perfectly compatible, cooperative and in harmony with each other, would authority be necessary? Is carnality the reason that authority is needed? Absolutely not.

No two people could ever be in more perfect harmony than Jesus Christ and God the Father (John 14:9, 17:11, 21-22), but they are not equal in authority (John 14:28, I Corinthians 11:3). God is not the author of confusion (I Corinthians 14:33). He is the author of authority. Absence of authority is anarchy.

It is not workable. Someone is in charge -- even in the Kingdom of God.

B. God made man the head of the family.

God has equipped both husband and wife perfectly for their respective roles in marriage. Though physically different, men and women have equal spiritual potential and capacity for rulership in God's Family. The masculine and feminine characteristics, including personality, emotions and physical features designed by God are intended to be perfectly complementary in marriage.

As stated above, government in the home is essential. God appointed the husband as head of the family. But the God-given responsibility of the man in the home is denied by much of society today. And, assuredly, many men have shown themselves unsuccessful in fulfilling their responsibility.

But converted men and women will find rich fulfillment in the respective roles God has given.

The cardinal rule that a Christian husband must remember in his relationship with his wife and children is stated by Jesus in Matthew 20:27, Authorized Version: "And whosoever will be chief among you let him be your servant."

Let's understand the role each partner should fulfill in building a solid, stable marriage and foundational home life for the rearing of children.

VI. The Husband's Role

A. Stay close to God.

If you want to be a strong and loving husband you must be in regular contact with God, who is your source of strength and love. You must continually maintain a close relationship with Him.

Beware of the many pressures that your job, social obligations, entertainment and a host of other things can put on you to neglect prayer and Bible study. The responsibility of leading a family is too heavy to carry alone.

If you are not submitting yourself to Christ and dedicating yourself to growing in His way of life, you will be creating a barrier to your wife's ability to be submissive and responsive to you.

B. Love your wife.

The Bible greatly emphasizes and commands husbands, "Love your wives" (Ephesians 5:25-29). There is an important reason God specifically commands men to love their wives. It is because men naturally tend to fall into habits that can cause them to ignore, exploit or even abuse their mates.

Certainly such is the case in marriages in this world. Although, the "women's liberation" movement is not God's way, it is men's abuses of women that have been chiefly responsible for bringing about the movement.

In many cases wives can cite real problems husbands have in marriages. Men can be and have been oppressive, unkind, intolerant, rough, condescending and abusive to their wives. We ministers who counsel marriages often see such examples even in God's Church.

The solution to these evils is not "women's liberation." It is, rather, to apply God's directive that husbands are to love their wives.

Notice Ephesians 5:25-29 in more detail. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it."

Loving your wife involves giving of yourself. A husband must give of his time, of his personality, of his words, of his deep feelings. Many husbands neglect conversation in their marriage. Talk to your wife. And listen to her when she talks. Without constant and regular communication about every aspect of your lives, you will drift apart. Don't allow hobbies and personal interests to consume large amounts of time and prevent you from spending precious time sharing your thoughts and feelings with each other.

How did Christ love the Church? He gave His Word, the Bible, with all its instructions, corrections and inspiration, to the Church. He gave His life that we in the Church might live and have life more abundantly. And He guides and directs the Church with lovingkindness and tender mercies for the goal of salvation, setting every example Himself for us to follow.

God's Word continues: "That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious

church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. So 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."

God further defines how a man should love his wife. He should love his wife as he does his own body. Every man and wife are one flesh, and the husband's thoughts ought to be directed toward the welfare of his wife. We all take care of our own physical bodies. We protect ourselves at work and are careful about accidents. We ought to love our wives the same way. We must be totally concerned for their whole being. And a husband's reward is immediate in this respect.

Once again, God's Word says, "He that loves his wife loves himself" (verse 28). The real blessing that husbands enjoy is that all the love they pour out to their wives comes right back to them.

Jesus Christ is totally faithful in His promises. And He is totally faithful to the one and the only true Church--His wife.

By the same token each husband must be totally faithful in mind and body to his one and only true wife (Matthew 5:27-28). Violations of Christ's enlarging of the Seventh Commandment will work havoc with your marriage. No man can get away with lusting after other women. To look on another woman for the purpose of lusting, or after lust has started, is adultery. Each husband must guard his mind against lust-provoking situations brought on by this world's advertisements, magazines, TV shows, movies.

Close companionship and conversation help in this regard. The more a husband and wife share life together, the more intimately involved they become. This will help a great deal in keeping each faithful and endeared to the other.

C. Be a good provider.

God says, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (I Timothy 5:8).

While wives may work outside the home and earn a portion of the family income, or even all the income for a temporary time while the husband cannot, the primary responsibility for providing for the family falls on the husband.

It should bring you deep satisfaction and joy to be able to provide adequately for your wife and family. This will allow her the freedom to devote as much time as needed to her responsibilities.

D. Encourage and inspire your wife.

Most wives want to please their husbands! Yet if in spite of her best efforts she never hears any compliments or receives any thanks, a wife can become discouraged. Taking your wife's labors for granted is unwise and unfair. After all, she probably looks primarily to you for approval and appreciation. If you neglect to give her appreciation she must conclude that she is a failure. Yet, with a little thought and care, you can give the encouragement and appreciation due her. But you must get your mind off yourself and consider all she does for you. Think about how life would be without her.

Instead of measuring your wife by comparisons with the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31, try measuring yourself by the husband's attitude toward his wife. In verse 28 it says, "Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her."

Obviously the children have learned how to compliment their mother from the good example of their father. This praise only inspires her to even greater heights.

When you feel you need to point out a fault to your wife, be careful to follow Christ's example in the way He deals with the Church. Be sure you are not making a mountain out of a mole hill. Be sure you are taking the lead in admitting your own shortcomings and changing them. And be kind, patient, tender and forgiving in your approach.

In Colossians 3:19, God instructs husbands, "Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter [harsh] toward them."

Once you have pointed out the fault and she has acknowledged it, gently do what you can to help her overcome it, just as she would for you. But be patient. And don't keep harping on the subject as

this will only discourage, frustrate and exasperate your wife.

Tell your wife how much you appreciate her and all that she is to you. Acknowledge her strengths and achievements instead of focusing on the shortcomings she may have. Do unto her as you would have her do unto you.

E. Seek her counsel.

Although the husband is the head of the house, he should seek his wife's counsel on most if not all family matters. Her counsel should be encouraged and welcomed, and her advice weighed heavily before conclusions are reached. God says, "In the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14). Your wife should be your chief counselor and advisor.

Where God's love is present, there will be no "battle of the sexes" or competition between you and your wife. You are still the head of the house. Accepting her advice does not mean she is "usurping your authority," or that you have "relinquished the reins of authority" to your wife. Be big enough and wise enough to acknowledge right advice -- to see it, admit it and accept it. And why not praise your wife for the good ideas she offers?

F. Keep up your personal appearance.

Before you married your wife you were probably very conscious of your appearance whenever you were with her. No doubt you wanted to make a good impression. Now perhaps you have let down.

Good grooming and maintaining an attractive appearance are even more important in marriage. This is another means by which you express love to your wife. It reflects an attitude of true outgoing concern. It shows respect for your wife. Don't assume that she doesn't care how you look. She does!

VII. The Wife's Role

A. Stay close to God.

It will be difficult for you to submit to your husband as God commands unless you stay in the right attitude. Be sure you are looking into the spiritual mirror of God's law through Bible study and prayer. It is easy to get bogged down in

housework and other time-consuming projects to the detriment of your spiritual life. Don't let this happen. Always put first things first and stay close to God.

B. Be submissive and responsive to your husband.

In Ephesians 5:22, God says, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." This could be paraphrased another way: "Wives, fit in with your husband's plans."

God created woman as a helper for her husband (Genesis 2:18, AV). This is her primary function as a wife. The Hebrew word for "help meet" literally means "corresponding to, a counterpart" and could better be translated "perfectly fitting" or "exactly compatible." This wife is and should be the perfect complement to her husband.

You can help your husband by fitting in with his plans. Thus you enable him to accomplish more and grow faster. This will be a blessing both to you and your husband. Your submission to your husband is a reflection of your respect and obedience to God.

Follow your husband not only in the letter of the law, but in the spirit of the law. Try to understand his perspective and do your best to support it. Sometimes submitting to your husband and complying with his wishes will seem to you a hard thing to do. But as long as your husband's wishes are "in Christ," be sure you carry them out. This is part of character.

It is easy to justify a lack of cooperation or wrong attitudes toward your husband by finding fault with him. Naturally, he will have his faults. He is human. But don't let this justify in your mind your failure to submit to the authority that God has placed in the home.

C. Encourage and inspire your husband.

We all need compliments from time to time, and your husband is no exception. Let him know you appreciate him, and compliment him on work well done. Let him know you are solidly behind him in his efforts in work, study and planning family matters. Show him you have confidence in his ability to lead and guide the home.

But on the other hand, some wives go to a wrong extreme and make the mistake of pushing their husbands in order to "keep up with the Joneses." This will not encourage or inspire your husband to greater effort. In the end, it will destroy both him and you. Resist covetousness and lusting after status symbols. Be content with what you have.

Rather than push your husband, give him confidence, letting him know you are standing behind him in his efforts, even when you must go through difficult times together.

Although you want to encourage and inspire your husband, never condone his error or sympathize with him when he is wrong. There may be times when he will be in a wrong attitude toward others. It is at this time that you can be of great assistance to him. Do not sympathize with him at this point. Rather, encourage and inspire him to see God's will and to be in the right attitude.

Don't harp on or nag your husband, but gently and lovingly give him the advice or suggestions he may need in any situation.

D. Keep up your personal appearance.

Your appearance is a direct reflection on your husband as well as on yourself. Be conscious of proper grooming. Stay neat and clean. If possible, take time to freshen up before your husband arrives home. A woman's hair is given to her for a glory, and it is important that you take care of your hair so that it adds to your pleasant and attractive appearance.

Dress to please your husband as well as yourself. Learn the style of clothes he likes and put particular emphasis on that part of your wardrobe.

E. Be a good homemaker.

This world has many cares and troubles from which your husband, like the rest of the family, needs solace. Be sure your home has a pleasing and inviting atmosphere for the whole family. Keep the home neat and clean.

A home that is cluttered and unkempt only adds more frustration for everyone to an already harried day. God has placed the home under your jurisdiction, and your management of it for the welfare of your family is an important task.

VIII. Keep on Building Your Marriage

A. Improve your marriage.

The state of your marriage will directly affect your spiritual progress. It is difficult for a man to be an effective leader if he does not have a happy home life. Your example will be seen -- it cannot be hidden from others.

Give particular attention to constantly improving your marriage and making it happier. Go out of your way for one another. Be thoughtful and courteous in every way. Think on how your marriage relationship can be improved.

B. A happy marriage takes work and cooperation.

You will need to get together and discuss the state of your marriage from time to time.

Remember, you are both heirs together of the grace of life. Do not let your marriage degenerate, but continue to work for an ever better one. And know this: Your prayer life will suffer and you run the risk of spiritual disaster if you are not maintaining a happy, strong, close-knit marriage (I Peter 3:7).

We all know better -- it's not that we don't know what to do. But are we doing it?

Wives, you know what to do and how to please your husbands. You know how to submit to them as you ought. But do you do it?

Husbands, you know how to love your wives and make them happy. You know how to show kindness, consideration, tenderness and selflessness. But do you do it?

C. Follow the good examples of good marriages.

You know where you fall short. Take this information, as well as all the good literature available on the subject, and get to work now and build a better marriage.

IX. Conclusion

God has given His Church marvelous understanding of His plan. He has shown us how marriage itself pictures our ultimate place in His Family.

Don't let this blessing slip through your fingers by underestimating the value of your marriage. Let Christ live in you and be reflected in your love and care of your mate.