

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."—John 13:34-35

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Perfect Love

By Linda Schreiber

Do we place unnecessary walls between ourselves and our brothers and sisters in Christ? A mature love can breach those walls.



JESUS GAVE US A COMMANDMENT in John 13:34-35: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

And again later in this discourse to His disciples He repeats this command twice: “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). “These things I command you, that you love one another” (John 15:17).

Jesus felt it was so important that He repeated this command to His disciples at least three times. He said that if they loved each other as He loved them, everyone would know that they were His disciples. We know that love is the fulfilling of the law, and that God’s law is based on love.



God is love (1 John 4:8). That powerful phrase has only three words, but do we comprehend what they say? God is the epitome of love. Everything He does is motivated by love. Love is His essence. We think love is a feeling or something we show others. But God actually *is* love. Love is the reason behind everything He does. If we want to have the mind of the Father and of Jesus Christ, we must learn to think the way They do. Love is what motivates God.

As Paul wrote: “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:1-5).

The mind of Christ

We can only be of one mind the way the Father and Son are if we understand what Their kind of love is.

Paul tells us in Philippians that our minds need to be like Jesus'. We cannot have pride in our minds if we are to even begin to reach the kind of mind Christ had. Giving His life for His friends required a complete lack of self-centeredness. Jesus and the Father have perfect love.

John, “the apostle of love,” wrote: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love” (1 John 4:18, New American Standard Bible).

The Living Bible puts it this way: “We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly; his perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what he might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what he might do to us, and shows that we are not fully convinced that he really loves us.”

In the New International Version this verse says, “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”

God is the epitome of love. Everything He does is motivated by love. Love is His essence.

The Bible tells us that perfect love eliminates fear. The word *perfect* (from the Greek *teleios*, Strong's 5046) has the meaning of something with complete character, mental and moral, full of age. In other words, we might say that it is mature love. Mature love is not afraid or fearful of being punished by those who are supposed to love us. In other words, if we believe someone loves us, we will not have to worry that he (or she) will strike out against us, and he in turn will not need to fear that we will strike out against him.

The apostle John hit on the basic reason God's people do not always show perfect love. John tells us that perfect love casts out fear. Fear of something prevents us from doing what we know we should.

Do we have this kind of love among us?

At first you might say, “Why of course we do!” I would like you to consider if there is anyone who is supposed to be your brother who you might fear under certain circumstances? We must, of course, be practicing righteousness and mature love ourselves.

John tells us that those who do not do righteousness are of the devil and not of God. John also tells us in this same scripture that if we do not truly love our brother, we are also not of God. “In

this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10).

Who is our brother?

Now the question “Who is our brother?” might come to mind. Jesus showed us who our brother was in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). We are to do good to all men, no matter what. I think most of us understand that we are expected to treat people with love.

We are to have a special love for those God has called. They are our brothers and sisters. Do you love your physical family? Most people would say yes. We have a special bond with our family. We should have a special bond among the brethren. All those the Father has called and who practice God’s way are our brethren. They are our family.



Do we place unnecessary walls between ourselves and the rest of the family? Do we think that because we are part of a certain group or organization—or even because we aren’t a part of a group or organization—that we are somehow exempt from Jesus’ commands to love each other? Do we say we love the rest of the Body but do things that show otherwise? How would Jesus treat His brothers and sisters? Would He feel that because they were not under the same corporate name that He should avoid them?

We have a special bond with our family. We should have a special bond among the brethren.

How will we answer Jesus when we are before Him? Will we be able to say that we loved all of our brethren without reservation? Will we be able to say we treated them all with the same love and without prejudice? Or will we be guilty before Christ of duplicity and lack of love for His and our own brothers and sisters?

Verse 15 of 1 John 3 tells us: “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

The Living Bible puts it this way: “Anyone who hates his Christian brother is really a murderer at heart; and you know that no one wanting to murder has eternal life within.”

The word *hate* may seem like a strong word here. You may think it means an intense hatred of someone or hating so much that you might want to hurt or kill him or her. But this word does not mean that kind of hate. This word is from the Greek *miseo* (Strong’s 3404), which means “to detest (especially to persecute); by extension, to love less: KJV—hate (-ful).”

To love less, detest or persecute. Are we getting the picture? Do we realize that we are to love all of the family? This doesn’t mean we cannot have a special affection for some of our brethren. We will have those who we are closer to than others, but we should have an abiding love for all of our

*What kind of love will you have?
What kind of love will we all have?*

brothers and sisters. We should love the Body, the Church, the Bride of Christ. This includes all those whom God will and has called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

Jesus tells us in 1 John 3:16-18 that we should love the brethren so much that we are willing to lay our lives down for them. It also tells us that we should show our love by what we do and not only what we say. In other words—practice what we preach.

God nowhere in His Word tells us it is all right to treat some of our brethren with love and ignore others. God nowhere tells us we can place barriers among ourselves. God nowhere tells us we can place barriers between others.

It is not wrong to organize ourselves in order to preach the gospel. It is wrong to separate ourselves from our brethren and to impose separations on others. We should never have to fear each other. Satan wants us to fear each other. God wants us to love each other. What kind of love will you have? What kind of love will we all have?

Let's all begin to profess and to practice "perfect love."

Recommended reading

If you'd like to read more about United Church of God, *an International Association*, please visit <http://www.ucg.org/booklets> for more free literature.

Held Together by a Spiritual Thread

By Jean Jantzen

God has called us to be part of something bigger than ourselves—family—a Church family now, then God's family at the return of Jesus Christ. Life in our Church family can prepare us for that millennial family.



“The bond that links your true family is not one of blood, but of respect and joy in each other’s life. Rarely do members of one family grow up under the same roof.”

—Richard Bach

IT WAS 1980. We moved to a small town in northeastern Alberta. Bonnyville, population 4,000, was the land of lakes, aurora borealis, 40-below, picturesque, frosty, white winter mornings and summer evenings that never ended. The brethren were scattered among little farming communities. We had been in the Church 10 years. A couple of larger families, including ours, made weekly Sabbath services possible. Previously, the group met for a monthly Bible study.

We did not spend time criticizing or finding flaws. Time was precious.

All of us were so different—a “motley group” I called us. Sixty-nine brethren held together by a spiritual thread, the Holy Spirit. We didn’t have much else in common. Dutch, English, French, Ukrainian, American idiosyncrasies, and distinctly different personalities were all thrown together into the melting pot of the Church. The minister said there were 12 types of personalities. And our group had them all. It was like God threw a broken puzzle into a box and waited to see how it would all work out. We had to learn how to put the pieces together. How was it ever going to work?

Celebrating the differences

Developing strong families and relationships take work and meaningful time spent together—talking, laughing, caring, sharing, empathizing, singing, playing, helping, getting to know one another. It means putting away childish competition, jealousies, envy, criticism, strife, and instead focusing on our shared glorious goal. And in Bonnyville, it meant celebrating our differences. Learning to love each other for who we were, being accepting of others.



Each Sabbath families traveled long distances to church, even in 30-below-zero winter weather to be with one another. We always made sure we talked to every member, sharing our concern and interest, no matter what age, nationality, personality or disposition. We invited and were invited into one another’s home for a Sabbath meal, sharing stories, joy, daily struggles—really getting to know each other. We did not spend time criticizing or finding flaws. Time was precious. Winter evenings after a Sabbath potluck we’d play volleyball as a family. There’d be winter camp during the holidays. In summer, we’d spend warm Sunday afternoons picnicking and tubing lazily down the river, children and adults building friendships. There were evenings we spent sitting around a blazing campfire singing to the strumming sounds of a guitar.

We grafted the young singles, the widower and the single moms into the fabric of our own families. We allowed God to stitch us together, weaving us into loving, thoughtful, beautiful tapestry He could use in His family. After our five-year sojourn in Bonnyville, we were a real Church family, having grown to love every single person within that family.

What kind of family will you have?

We could have let our differences divide us and become a bickering, unhappy family, but instead we became a loving, unified and caring family. The choice was ours.



What kind of Church family do you want? Ask yourself, when was the last time you spent time with your brother, invited him for a meal, shared in his goals, dreams and struggles?

We read in 1 John 4:20-21 “If anyone says ‘I love God,’ but keeps on hating his brother, he is a liar; for if he doesn’t love his brother who is right there in front of him, how can he love God whom he has never seen? And God himself has said that one must love not only God but his brother too” (The Living Bible).

Yet familiarity can breed contempt. Unless we are on our guard, even in the Church, we tend to think knowing others well gives us the right to be critical, to make negative comments, be argumentative or make generally gruff and unfriendly remarks, just as we might to members of our own family at home.

We have to remember our brothers and sisters in Christ have differences in education, income, attitudes, temperaments, personality, tastes and opinions. Does that mean they are on a lower level of conversion? Haven’t we read it is not wise to compare ourselves among ourselves? Besides, aren’t we to bear one another’s burdens? Should we not learn to appreciate and respect the differences? God does! Why do you think He created such diverseness in the human, flora, animal and insect kingdom? So why do we think a brother should be a carbon copy of us? Life would surely be monotonous.



What of the stranger who enters our midst, a new member, a babe in Christ? Might we have prejudices, discriminations, judgmental attitudes of which we are not aware? Can we accept someone different from ourselves? Do we welcome them? Or do we become jealous or bossy, like a spoiled child when a new baby arrives in the family? These patterns of behavior should be left behind when becoming an adult.

How do we approach members’ unconverted mates? Are they not sanctified in God’s eyes too (1 Corinthians 7:14)? Remember the warning that we are not to oppress the stranger within the land. This admonition was given to the Church in the wilderness (Exodus 22:21; Matthew 25:38; Acts 7:38). They are to be loved and accepted, too, for who knows if they may not be converted by our example.

Are we apt to show favoritism towards the more affluent brethren?



“Dear brothers, how can you claim that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ...if you show favoritism to rich people and look down on poor people? If a man comes into your church dressed in expensive clothes and with valuable gold rings on his fingers, and at the same moment another man comes in who is poor and dressed in threadbare clothes, and you make a lot of fuss over the rich man and give him the best seat in the house and say to the poor man, ‘You can stand over there if you like or else sit on the floor’—well, judging a man by his wealth shows that you are guided by wrong motives” (James 2:1-4, The Living Bible).

Christ was willing to die for His brothers. We should also be willing to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. So let’s examine ourselves on how we choose to treat those in our Church family. Woven with the spiritual thread of the Holy Spirit, we can become a righteous spiritual tapestry, pleasing to God the Father and our elder brother Jesus Christ.

He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother

Written by Bob Russell and Bobby Scott
Released by the Hollies and Neil Diamond in 1970

The road is long, with many a winding turn,
That leads us to who knows where, who knows where.
But I’m strong, strong enough to carry him.
He ain’t heavy—he’s my brother.

So on we go, his welfare is my concern.
No burden is he to bear, we’ll get there.
For I know he would not encumber me.
He ain’t heavy—he’s my brother.

If I’m laden at all, I’m laden with sadness,
That everyone’s heart isn’t filled with gladness
of love for one another.

It’s a long, long road from which there is no return.
While we’re on our way to there, why not share.
And the load, it doesn’t weigh me down at all.
He ain’t heavy—he’s my brother.

Have You Performed Your Vow Today?

By David Treybig

How does “I do” become “I don’t anymore”? Several common misunderstandings contribute to neglect of the marriage vows.



STANDING BEFORE A LARGE CROWD of friends, another young couple solemnly exchanged wedding vows. The minister asked the groom, “Do you faithfully promise and covenant with God in the presence of these witnesses to take so-and-so to be your lawful wedded wife—in sickness and in health, in good times and in difficult times, for as long as you both shall live?”

He then asked the question of the bride. Both joyfully said, “I do.”
But did they?

In much of the Western world many couples do not honor their vows by staying together as husband and wife. The tragedy of divorce dismantles a significantly high number of households. The pain of failed marriages is experienced all too often. Although every failed marriage has its own sad tale, several common misunderstandings contribute to the problem.



Marriage not just a physical relationship

Debates over mankind’s origin don’t help. The common—and erroneous—view that Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution explains our existence is confusing and detrimental to marriages. The theory classifies man as part of the animal kingdom. Though this theory places man at the top of a hierarchy of animals because of his superior skills and abilities, such thinking degrades humanity and hides the fact that God created us to be part of His Kingdom.



We humans often live up to the expectations of our parents or other influential figures. If we are taught or influenced to believe that we are no more than animals, should we be surprised that many of us act like animals? Although a few species of animals mate for life, most do not

remain faithful to one partner throughout their lifetimes. When the females of the species go into heat, they have sex with any opposite-sex member of their species that happens along. Driven by their sexual urges and not realizing their ultimate potential, some people live their lives in a similarly promiscuous fashion.

Although most people agree that a committed relationship with one person is ideal, television shows and movies continue to glamorize and portray indiscriminate sexual relations and divorce as normal and even desirable. Such entertainment, coupled with disregard for our spiritual potential, takes a toll. Marriages pay a dear price for such confusion and aberrant messages.

From the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8), God's plan has been to expand His family (Ephesians 3:14-15). Jesus Christ came to earth to help us attain our spiritual potential—"to become children of God" (John 1:12). Those who respond to this high calling will be invited to the greatest marriage in the history of the universe—"the marriage supper of the Lamb." When Jesus returns He will take as His bride those who have made themselves ready through "righteous acts" (Revelation 19:7-9).

The apostle Paul understood that God instituted marriage between human beings as representative of the great marriage to Christ and a way for us to better understand the loving relationship between Jesus and His devoted followers, who comprise His Church. Paul taught wives to submit to their husbands "as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22) and husbands to love their wives "just as Christ also loved the church" (verse 25). Concluding his explanation of godly marriage, Paul wrote: "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (verse 32).



Marriage is not simply a physical relationship that exists on a human level. It is a God-plane relationship. It was instituted by God to help us prepare for an eternal relationship with Him and His Son, Jesus. (If you wish to know more about God's plan for humanity, please request our free booklets [What Is Your Destiny?](#) and [The Gospel of the Kingdom.](#))

Understanding love

Another misunderstanding that threatens marriages relates to love. Many people don't know what real love is. Assuming that love just mysteriously happens and they have no control over it, some believe divorce is the solution when problems appear. It seems too many forget their vows to stay together in the good times and the bad.

Writing to members of the Church in Corinth, the apostle Paul described how true love works. "Love suffers," he explained. And not only does it suffer, it "suffers long" (1 Corinthians 13:4). Some people apparently have never understood that love entails considerable patience, bearing with another's human weaknesses and faults. Paul's instruction is not meant to condone abusive behaviors or immorality but to teach us that the little irritants of living with another human being—their likes and dislikes and foibles—need to be tolerated.

The biblical definition of love does not cast humans as victims of a capricious, uncontrollable emotion.

As Paul wrote: “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” (verses 4 to 8).

The biblical definition of love does not cast humans as victims of a capricious, uncontrollable emotion. Instead, love involves conscious choice—and its depth and breadth are demonstrated most fully not in good times, but through difficulty.

Immature love is an emotion that focuses primarily on personal gratification—what someone else can do for us. Godly love, the kind of love that Paul and other biblical writers describe, focuses on what we can do for others and how we can make ourselves more loving and lovable. (If you would like to know more about this kind of love, please request our free booklet [The Ten Commandments](#).)

Marriage and commitment

When we understand that marriage is a covenant (Malachi 2:14), that understanding should have a positive impact on the longevity of our relationship with our husband or wife. Though we commonly speak of exchanging wedding vows, many forget the three-party covenant involved in marriage. They lose sight that the marriage covenant is a solemn agreement that includes not only one’s mate but God Himself.



When we make a covenant with God, He expects us to honor that commitment—even on the days we wake up feeling no longer “in love.” Wise King Solomon explains: “When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed—better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God” (Ecclesiastes 5:4-7).

Emphasizing the personal responsibility each of us must take in fulfilling our vows, King David wrote a song that included this phrase: “Vows made to You are binding upon me, O God” (Psalm 56:12). He concluded another psalm: “So I will sing praise to Your name forever, that I may daily perform [honor] my vows” (Psalm 61:8).

If you are married, consider these important questions. Do you understand that marriage is a God-plane relationship? Do you realize love is something we do rather than *only* something we feel? Finally, have you performed your vow today?

Recommended reading

We need to understand much more about our relationships with our Creator and each other. The booklets [What Is Your Destiny?](#) and [The Gospel of the Kingdom](#) will help you comprehend your Creator’s purpose for you. To better understand the Bible’s guidance for building better relationships with one another, request [Making Life Work](#) and [The Ten Commandments](#). All are available free of charge.

The Gift That Keeps on Giving

By Michelle Grovak

Most of us, at one time or another in our lives, have experienced an event considered a miracle. Whether we believe or not, miracles are a gift from God which carry meaning throughout the rest of our lives.



ONLY OUR FATHER KNOWS HOW MANY miracles He performs on a daily basis. He works miracles in our lives to deliver us from peril. Sometimes a miracle strengthens our faith. And, very often, a miracle is an answer to an impassioned prayer for help. Miracles can turn a life-threatening situation into a reason to celebrate God's goodness and mercy.



The benefits of miracles are greater than an one-time event. A miracle is the gift that keeps on giving and giving and giving. Think about it. Miracles performed hundreds of years ago have been recorded in the Bible for our benefit. Peter was released from the chains of prison without the help of men. Daniel spent the night with lions whose mouths were closed by angels. Thrown into a blazing furnace, three young men walked unharmed.

The stories of supernatural deliverance pop into our minds when we need them most.

The effect of miracles resembles the ripples in a pond after a rock is thrown in with a notable "Kerplunk!" The ripples continue to make circles until they reach the shore. Deliverance arrives through healings and the arms of an angel.



Personal miracles

How many people have been inspired by the miracles of Jesus? The book of Matthew explains how His touch healed Peter's mother-in-law who was bedridden because of a high fever (Matthew 8:14-15). As soon as Jesus touched her, she climbed out of bed and cared for the people there.

This event reminds me of a healing in my own life. Joel was just a newborn 23 years ago. I was home caring for him one day when suddenly I became ill with a 104-degree fever. I experienced a burning pain in the right side of my lower abdomen. It was what they used to call "childbed fever." All I could do was lie in bed and hold Joel close to me. Then, I realized my body heat was causing his to rise also.

When our minister arrived, I was delirious. I was sobbing. After he anointed me and prayed for my healing, I said, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). The minister then advised us to get to the hospital fast and left. Within fifteen minutes after being anointed, my fever and all pain disappeared. Truly it was the gift that keeps on giving as I look back on that wonderful healing. When I remember that day, it reminds me of God's personal love and caring for me.

I tell my son-in-law Sam that God must have special plans for him (as He truly does for us all!). Sam has benefited from divine intervention several times. One of the most dramatic occurred when Sam was a teen. Riding his bike, he was struck from behind by a fast-moving car. The next thing Sam knew, he was being catapulted high up into the air. He remembers doing back flips over and over before he started to fall to the ground. It all happened so quickly, but as he started to fall, Sam distinctly remembers feeling strong arms cradling him and lowering him gently to the ground. He landed softly and suffered only a few bruises. The driver later said he'd been driving at *70 miles per hour* when he hit Sam. This powerful story can inspire us to continue in our Christian journey even though there are bumps along the way.

Riding his bike, he was struck from behind by a fast-moving car. The next thing Sam knew, he was being catapulted high up into the air.

Not all miracles are quite as spectacular. Many miracles are quiet ones. Some, the unbelieving might call coincidences. *I prefer to call them God-incidences.* They are mini miracles that quietly say, "Yes, you are going on the right path."

"I have blessed this undertaking"

On our first anniversary, Michael and I returned to where we had honeymooned in Saugatuck, Michigan. We were browsing in a quaint shop we had visited the year before. It was our anniversary day, June 28. We were looking for a gift for each other fitting to mark our first year. (May I back up for a minute to say that Aimee Zahora performed "Pachelbel's Canon" as the processional at our wedding. For a couple of years, each time my sweet husband would hear the notes of that song, his eyes would moisten with tears.) Back at the gift store, as we were searching out the perfect keepsake, we were delighted to hear "Pachelbel's Canon" begin to play in the store. He looked at me. I looked at him. The sound effects seemed just like a musical production on the silver screen!

Was it simply a coincidence that this music began after we entered this store on our anniversary? Well, maybe. We were convinced otherwise when Michael looked at his watch. To the minute, it was the same time Aimee had begun playing the music on the piano at our wedding a year ago. We know that was our Father's way of saying, "I have blessed this undertaking." Our family has been through a lot in the past five years. Sometimes it's good to reach back and relive that musical moment God orchestrated for us.



Our loving Father does the same for little ones too. When Joel was six, he decided to become an entrepreneur. His age and limited resources didn't phase him. His business? Recycling aluminum cans for a penny a piece. We'd walk the almost deserted, curving roads near our house in the country. Grape Creek Road was little used. You hardly ever saw a car. Two would be considered a traffic jam. But people did throw cans out the window from time to time. And I believe after walking miles and miles for days and days, Joel had

earned about \$2.

One Sabbath we decided to take a family walk. I explained that since this was his business, he should not be picking up cans on the Sabbath. I told Joel that God would bless him if he honored the Sabbath. Little did I know how closely God was listening. After about three quarters of a mile, we had branched off and were walking up a hill that would take you to Westville if you walked several miles. It was the nearest town of about 2,000 people. I noted that Joel was looking at cans along the road but not reaching for them. Suddenly, he jumped and yelled excitedly. There along the road in plain view lay a brand-new dollar bill. Upon closer inspection, we realized it was a \$20 bill. No one will ever convince me this was just a coincidence. The \$20 was long ago spent on childish whims. But the \$20 miracle keeps on giving as a reminder to honor God's Sabbath.

Whether it's a dramatic healing, the arms of an angel, music provided at just the right moment or money from heaven, I think the best part of a miracle is the lasting effect it has on everyone touched by the story. I have written of just a few of the miracles touching my family over the years. I am certain each of you has miracle memories you can recollect and retell. So dust those memories off and put them to use for the betterment of yourself and others. *Supernatural blessings from God, miracles, truly are gifts that keep on giving.*

Not all miracles are quite as spectacular. Some, the unbelieving might call coincidences. I prefer to call them God-incidences.

Additional reading

Miracles truly are a gift from our loving God. Be sure to request your free copy of [Who Is God?](#) And if you'd like to learn more about the Sabbath, be sure to request [Sunset to Sunset—God's Sabbath Rest](#).

Lead Us Not Onto Temptation Island

By Melvin Rhodes

A titillating television show pushes the bounds of propriety even further while presenting only the seamy—and steamy—side of the story.



THE PREMISE IS SIMPLE. Four “committed” couples are flown to a tropical island and immediately separated and sent to opposite ends of the island. There they mix with attractive members of the opposite sex especially chosen for their temptation value.

During the following two weeks each of the original eight people must go on five dates with the hired tempters.

Cameras are there to record it all in weekly episodes. Adding to the voyeuristic interest is the producer’s use of videotapes sent back from the other end of the island so each islander can see his or her partner’s behavior, in some cases provoking anger and jealousy.

Temptation Island was one of the latest hit television series in the United States, boosting its network’s ratings to a record high for a single show. Many people probably watch it just to see the scantily clad sexy young adults who are the stars of the program. Most viewers are soon hooked on the series, watching to see which couples stay faithful and which do not.

New twist on selling sex

The series is controversial, condemned by parents, pro-family organizations and religious groups. Seldom mentioned is that the couples participating in the series are not married but were living together before they journeyed to “Temptation Island,” which is really Ambergris Caye, off the coast of Belize in Central America.



Whatever the intentions the effect of the show is to encourage promiscuity. Soap operas have done this for years. The difference is that most people realize soaps are fiction, but this show is fact. It portrays a promiscuous way of life as exciting and fun. It legitimizes the destruction of relationships purely for sex.

The irony is that the participants are obviously searching for meaningful long-term relationships, just like everyone else.

Whatever the intentions, the effect of the show is to encourage promiscuity.

The program does great harm in this area, not just for those on the show but for its viewers. With a constant emphasis on physical appearance and pleasure, at the expense of everything else that's involved when two people commit themselves to each other for life, loving relationships are made far more difficult if not impossible.

This is the point we have come to at the beginning of the 21st century: All too many people in Western countries seem *incapable of remaining in a committed lifelong and loving relationship*, even though *most people profess to want one*. They have little idea how to achieve their desired goal. Shows such as *Temptation Island* only make it more difficult.

Prophesied obsession

The constant emphasis on sexual adventure that is a daily feature of television programs and movies is a startling reflection of the apostle Paul's prophecy about society "in the last days." "For men will be lovers of themselves," he wrote. They will be "boasters," "proud," "unloving," "without self-control," "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

Of course, people have always broken God's laws that define morality, but the rampant pursuit of sensual pleasures with so little regard for the consequences seems to have reached unprecedented levels in the modern West.

No recent precedent points to where these trends may lead. Almost all cultures down through history have had marriage customs and laws to protect the unique relationship of marriage. Although divorce under certain circumstances was permitted in ancient Israel, Jesus said this was anything but the ideal (Matthew 19:8). This had not been God's intention, although He permitted Moses to allow divorce "because of the hardness of [their] hearts."

Few have a concept of fidelity, defined in Collins Standard Reference Dictionary as "faithful devotion to duty, obligations or vows."

Few have a concept of fidelity, defined in *Collins Standard Reference Dictionary* as "faithful devotion to duty, obligations or vows." This includes the marriage vows. The Bible, God's instruction book for mankind, gives us the Ten Commandments, which include the Seventh Commandment, "You shall not commit adultery."

Adultery is sexual relations with someone other than one's spouse. The Seventh Commandment specifically prohibits a married person from having sex with someone who is not the person's spouse, but in principle it covers all forms of sexual sin.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:18, "Flee fornication" (King James Version). He comments that "he who commits sexual immorality *sins against his own body*"—a warning of the possibility of sexually transmitted diseases and of the anguish of broken relationships.



A contestant in the *Temptation Island* show cried when he saw pictures of his partner's intimate involvement with another man on the other side of the island. Why would anyone want to hurt the one he loves? When this kind of sin is repeatedly indulged in with various partners, eventually people are devoid of feelings and find it almost impossible to form a lasting relationship.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:22 Paul tells us to “abstain from all appearance of evil” (King James Version). This includes the popular practice of living together, even if not sexually active. It gives the *appearance* of fornication, which is condemned in the Scriptures.

Changing times and definitions

With the rapid decline in morality that has affected Western countries since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, even definitions of words have changed. An 1828 dictionary barely mentions sexual activity in its definition of *promiscuous*: “Mingled; consisting of individuals united in a body or mass without order; confused; undistinguished...; common; indiscriminate; not restricted to an individual; as promiscuous love or intercourse...”

The Collins dictionary (1982) emphasizes the sexual application of the word: “showing little or no taste or care in choosing; specifically engaging in sexual intercourse with many persons casually; without plan or purpose; casual.”

A new definition was cited by the Centers for Disease Control in announcing AIDS figures on World AIDS Day in December 2000. According to CNN television news, the CDC defined promiscuous as “having six or more sexual partners a year.” The 1828 definition was “not restricted to an individual,” meaning that having even one partner outside of the marital relationship meant one was promiscuous. Now one must have at least six partners a year to be defined as promiscuous.

Lead us not into temptation

In Matthew 6 Christ gave us a model prayer that includes the words “do not lead us into temptation” [or “Put us not to the test,” Revised English Bible] and “deliver us from the evil one” (verse 13).

Satan is the evil one Scripture describes as “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). That's significant terminology. When Paul wrote those words 2,000 years ago he understood that Satan can powerfully influence our attitudes, moods and emotions.

Today we can understand a completely different, additional significance of Paul's description of Satan as the prince of the power of the air. Television, radio and the Internet come to us through the air or via cable or telephone lines. As with many other inventions, we can find good and evil in each of them. Christians must choose the good and turn from evil (Psalm 34:14).

Watching such moral and mental sewage violates the instructions of Scripture.

Shows like *Temptation Island* should be the furthest thing from our thinking. Instead, we should be asking God to help us focus on the good things of life and avoid temptation.

Watching such moral and mental sewage violates the instructions of Scripture. Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:8 that we should only let our minds dwell on “whatever things are pure.” He ends the verse by saying: “If there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” Watching shows like *Temptation Island* only make such behavior seem more acceptable, normal rather than ungodly.

Regrettably, the show’s economic success no doubt will encourage other television producers to produce more programs like it or exacerbate the downward moral spiral by producing shows that are even worse. We already have plenty of mental pollution; we don’t need any more.

What is particularly sad is that people’s lives are so empty and devoid of meaning that they seek one titillation after another. It is even sadder, in many cases, that they don’t know any better. This is the world they have grown up in, often without any spiritual instruction. Jesus taught us to “mourn” for this spiritually diseased and sin-sick world (Matthew 5:4) and the suffering, including hurt feelings, that people are subjected to through disobedience to or ignorance of God’s laws of true love.

Jesus also taught us to pray to the Father, “Your kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10). When God’s Kingdom comes, the world will be “full of the knowledge of the LORD” (Isaiah 11:9).

That time is still ahead of us, but you can learn now how to have a happy, lasting, loving marriage—and how to avoid the emotional pain of casual relationships such as those depicted on *Temptation Island*. For sound biblical advice on how to have a successful marriage and family life, please write for our free booklets [Making Life Work](#) and [The Ten Commandments](#).

Yes, TV Gets Sleazier Right Before Our Eyes

A just-published study from the Kaiser Family Foundation shows that, yes, sexual content in television programs has risen sharply in the last two years.

An analysis of 1,114 prime-time shows aired on the major television networks and cable channels in 1999 and 2000 shows that 75 percent contained talk about sex or depictions of sexual activity ranging from flirting and kissing to intercourse. A similar study only two years ago tabulated sexual content in 66 percent of prime-time programs.

Researchers found that sexual content was highest in movies, with almost nine of 10 containing references to sex. Comedies and soap operas weren’t far behind, with sexual references in 84 percent and 80 percent of such programs, respectively.

Meanwhile, only one in 10 shows discussed personal responsibility or risks associated with inappropriate sexual behavior. Sadly, the message of such shows is coming through loud and clear.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

The Greatest of These Is Love

By Patrick Kansa

THIS MONTH BRINGS US TO AN ANNUAL HOLIDAY with some very recognizable imagery: flying cupids with bows ready to fire, long-stemmed red roses and candy for sale in the local stores. The holiday, of course, is Valentine's Day. Today, it is generally seen as the premier day to profess our love for a special person in our life. This is, of course, encouraged by the greeting card and candy companies. According to ACNielsen U.S., the week of Valentine's Day is the single largest week for candy sales. According to the National Retail Foundation, similar statistics exist for greeting cards (second only to Christmas in 2002) and cut flowers (more sold than any other holiday).

It is obvious that today there is a very commercial aspect to this holiday. But what are its origins? A cursory glance through any encyclopedia will point out that the day is also known as St. Valentine's Day, named for a man who was martyred in A.D. 270. He then came to be associated with the union of lovers under stressful conditions. But further research reveals the true origin of the holiday.

The origin of Valentine's Day is in Rome, in a pagan feast day known as Lupercalia (the feast of Lupercus). This was celebrated in mid-February, to give reverence to the god of fertility, and to celebrate sensual pleasures. This festival survived until the end of the fifth century, at which time it was outlawed by Pope Gelasius. However, he wanted another festival with which to replace it, since he knew people would be reluctant to give up their old ways. It was at this time that the bishop Valentine was chosen as the patron saint of the new celebration.

In this way, the pagan celebration, and supporting beliefs, were covered and disguised, making it more acceptable to the religious leaders of that day. But what does God tell us of actions such as these? "Take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after that they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way" (Deuteronomy 12:30-31).

This does not mean, however, that we cannot express our love for each other. In fact, Christ Himself commanded us to love each other: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34).

So, then, how can we, in proper ways, show our love? In our lead article, ["Perfect Love,"](#) by Linda Schreiber, a powerful example is shown—the love of Christ. His love for God is a perfect example for us to follow, as is His love for us. Also highlighted are examples that Jesus gave to us for loving our brothers.

In ["Held Together by a Spiritual Thread,"](#) Jean Jantzen delves further into that same subject. When we come into God's Church, we become part of a larger spiritual family. However, just as in our own families, relationships may not always be smooth. This article explores some of the situations that can arise between brethren in the Church, God's guidance for truly loving the brethren and a wonderful example from the author's own experiences.

And what of the love of husband and wife? Marriage is a gift from God, yet so many marriages today end in divorce. [“Have You Performed Your Vow Today?”](#) by David Treybig discusses some of the misunderstandings that can lead to a failed marriage. In the course of the article, you will see that marriage is more than a simple physical relationship, why love must be patient and who the third person involved in a marriage vow is.

In [“The Gift That Keeps on Giving,”](#) Michelle Grovak highlights another gift that God gives because of His love for us: the gift of miracles. Through several examples from her own life, the author shows how miracles can have a lasting effect in our lives and the lives of those around us.

To conclude this month’s issue, we have an article that examines a recent television show that served only to further push the boundaries of television. [“Lead Us Not Onto Temptation Island,”](#) by Melvin Rhodes, examines how such programs damage our society. He shows that these societal changes were prophesied, and how society’s view on promiscuity has changed over time. However, with God’s guidance, we can overcome the societal pressures, and refocus our thoughts and energy on God’s coming Kingdom.

As you read through this issue, please keep in mind that these articles are only exploring a few of the many facets of love, whether it be God’s love for us, our love for one another or the ways in which “love” is expressed in society. For further information and reading on these topics, please visit our main Web site (<http://www.ucg.org>), or that of another UCG publication, *The Good News* (<http://www.gnmagazine.org>). A history of Valentine's Day can also be found on the History Channel website (<http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/valentine/main.html>)