

GETTING READY FOR MARRIAGE

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on July 12, 1970 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

Getting ready for marriage means far more than reading a manual relating to certain of its physical aspects. When a man and woman are united in marriage they enter into a life contract which must not be violated. It is to be entered into neither lightly nor unadvisedly. It is incredible that one should be schooled for fifteen to twenty years to qualify for business or the professions--while spending almost no time at all in preparation for marriage.

Read the current advertisements, and you will believe that a happy marriage depends upon flying to some far-off tropic isle for a honeymoon, upon living in one of the luxury apartments with every known form of labor-saving device, upon having the latest model sports car, and upon the avoidance of dishpan hands, bad breath, perspiration odor, and the like. Whatever advantages may result from these prescriptions by self-appointed domestic doctors, the fact remains that for protracted and increasing happiness in marriage, young people need Christ and his teachings, first of all.

The future of our country and the future of the church depends upon stalwart Christian homes, consecrated Christian families, and the exaltation of the Christian principles concerning marriage, parenthood and the home. The application of Biblical principles is in accordance with the best results of sociological research, as has been demonstrated in countless homes. Our Christian faith is the greatest guarantee of the attainment of the highest possible happiness in marriage.

Dr. Walter A. Maier, world-wide speaker in the Lutheran Hour a generation ago, in his book, *For Better Not For Worse*, told this meaningful story: "In the year 1789 mutineers from the English government ship BOUNTY, together with a group of Polynesian men and women, settled on lonely Pitcairn Island in the South Pacific. A ten-year orgy of drunkenness and debauchery, supplemented by continued bloodshed left only one white man with a group of natives. Isolated on that tiny speck in the vast Pacific, his thoughts turned to the Bible salvaged from the wreck of the BOUNTY. In the study of this book both the sins of the past and the promise of the future were vividly impressed on his disquieted mind. That was the beginning of a remarkable transformation. Nineteen years later, when a whaling-ship accidentally reached Pitcairn Island, its astonished sailors found a community of thirty-five English-speaking people of high morality. Marriage vows had been introduced and faithfulness to these vows was rigidly observed. Where lust had reigned, virtue was now enthroned. The power of the Book had once more prevailed."

Foundations On the Scriptures

It was God who made the race "male and female." (Gen. 1:27). It was God who commanded: "Be fruitful and multiply." (Gen. 1:28). It was God who said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." (Gen. 2:18). It was God who brought the bride to her husband in the first marriage. (Gen. 2:22). It was God's word that declared for all ages: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh." (Gen. 2:24). It was God who said, "Unto the woman ... thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." (Gen. 3:16).

It was Christ who said, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery, and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery." (Matt. 19:9). It was the apostle Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, who wrote, "Unto the married I give charge, yea not I, but the Lord, that the wife depart not from her husband (but should she depart, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband); and that the husband leave not his wife." (I Cor. 7:10-11). He further wrote, "... I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." (I Cor. 11:3).

In a longer passage the apostle Paul said, "Wives, be in subjection unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for it ... Even so ought husbands also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself: for no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as Christ also the church; because we are members of his body. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and the two shall become one flesh." (Eph. 5:22-25, 28-31).

Because it is so easy to make mistakes in marriage, because marriage plays so major a role in the happiness of those involved, and because of the effect that marriage has upon one's eternal destiny, I would like to suggest seven important principles to be considered by young people as they approach marriage.

Principle Number One

Carefully select the environment in which you will live during the late teens and early twenties. With only the rarest of exceptions (an occasional mail-order marriage, or a computer arranged marriage) everyone married someone he knows. He usually marries someone with whom he goes to school, or someone with whom he works. Since this is so universally true, it is wise for a young person to put himself in an environment during the years when marriage choices are normally made where his associates will be other young persons who have the qualities that would make for a good marriage. By putting himself in such an environment he takes a long first stride toward marital success.

Principle Number Two

Thoroughly prepare for marriage. During recent years I have had a growing conviction that we who teach young people are not adequately preparing them for marriage. We need to place greater emphasis than we do upon certain important prerequisites to marriage. The young man needs to be given extensive training to enable him to earn a living and to provide for the needs of his family. The young woman needs to be given extensive training in the skills that are required in the carrying on of a home. This means that her mother (and perhaps the school) should carefully train her in the ability to cook, the ability to keep a house clean and neat, the ability to purchase economically, and the ability to repair clothing, and the like, Without these skills the young man and the young woman are not really prepared to enter marriage.

More important is the internal preparation of attitude. It is extremely important that each young person come to marriage with a deep, genuine, unselfish concern for the good of his or her marriage partner. In addition to physical attraction, romantic love, there must be a deeper, more permanent kind of love--an unselfish desire for the good of the other person. A young man dedicates himself, as he takes the marriage vows, to do all within his power to make the life of his bride as rich, happy and meaningful as he possibly can. The bride similarly has the same responsibility to her husband. Only when there is this real love for each other is a young couple ready to marry.

Principle Number Three

Take time to marry. We are all familiar with the old adage, "Marry in haste; repent at leisure." Millions of people have come to know through years of marital unhappiness the truth of this old, familiar saying. Therefore, it is imperative that a couple know each other extremely well before entering into marriage. Over a relatively long period of time the couple should know each other in all kinds of different circumstances. There must be time for the discussion of an infinite variety of subjects, time for reaction to many different events, time for the couple to know their own real attitudes and feelings toward each other.

At the same time, I would emphasize that over-long courtships are not wise. In this day of sex stimulation in music, on television, in magazines, and in the movies, long courtships place temptations and pressures upon the couple which can become dangerous. Ideally, it would seem that a couple ought to spend the better part of a year in a serious courtship before entering marriage, though no arbitrary time can actually be set. A few weeks is obviously too brief a time; a few years is probably too long a time.

Principle Number Four

Marry someone with a background similar to your own. When two young people marry they are going to spend endless hours together the rest of their lives. They will eat literally thousands of meals together, go thousands of places together, and share an intimacy of relationship that exists with no other person on earth. In the process of living together there will be several million decisions, some of slight significance and some of major significance, which they must make together. This is the real tension spot in marriage. Even at best it is not easy for two people to think alike and to see things alike. When their backgrounds are different the complications are compounded. Therefore, it is extremely wise that young people try to find life-partners whose backgrounds are as similar to their own as possible.

Accordingly, it is significant that the young couple be relatively the same age, with the husband being a little older as the ideal situation. It is also desirable that they be of the same national background, so that they will have general habits of thinking and behavior as nearly alike as possible. Similarly, the racial background ought to be the same. When the racial line is crossed, it is extremely difficult for the couple themselves, for the families, and for the children to fit into a dual racial situation. This is not saying that one race is better than another. It is saying that marriage goes more smoothly when the races marry within themselves.

It is also important that the educational, economic, and social background be as nearly alike as possible. It is unfortunate particularly if the wife has a great deal more academic education than her husband, who is designated as head of the family in God's teachings. There can be serious problems if there is a wide disparity in economic background, especially if the bride has lived on a rather luxurious level which her husband cannot continue to provide for her. Still another area of major significance is the need for the couple to be united religiously, on which we shall speak again in a moment.

Principle Number Five

Marry someone with similar ideals and goals. It is obvious that if a couple is to live together happily without friction they must be going in the same direction. Only when they have similar ideals and life goals can they expect their marriage to be an ideal one. With

the same ultimate goals, the same basic values, and the same general principles to guide them the marriage offers great hope of being a happy experience.

Principle Number Six

Seek advice from thoughtful family and friends. In many parts of the world the age-old custom is for parents to choose the child's marriage partner. This is unthinkable to the American mind. Here the pendulum swings to the opposite extreme. Many young people feel that they want to make their own choices without any help or advice from others. This is unwise, for young people have never been over the road before and are not experienced in the making of such major choices. A wise young person will seek advice, then make up his own mind.

We need also to remember that there is something about romantic love that seems to blind one to reality. It is extremely difficult to be objective in one's decisions when one is "in love." For this reason it is wise to ask thoughtful friends to help one evaluate a possible choice. Of course, ideally the young person should talk with parents about his or her choices. Parents should not try to dictate, but supply information, viewpoints, questions and helpful guidance as a young person makes his own ultimate decision. Others can often see what a young person cannot see in connection with the ultimate success of a contemplated marriage.

Principle Number Seven

In the New Testament we read, "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord. And touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you." (II Cor. 6:14-17). We also remember I Cor. 7:39, which reads, "A wife is bound for so long as her husband liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is free to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord."

Both in Old Testament and New Testament times God has been concerned that his people marry others of like faith. When a Christian marries a non-Christian his loyalty and service to Christ usually suffer. When a young couple finds that there are differences of religious faith between them my suggestion is that there needs to be a careful study of the scriptures to determine what God's will is. Then, both need to follow the Lord's teachings together. This needs to be done before marriage rather than after. Be united in Christ, then be united with each other in marriage.

Conclusion

Choosing a life-partner is the second most important decision in a person's life. It is important because of the intimacy of the relationship, the potentials of happiness or of regret, and also because of the tremendous influence which a marriage has upon one's eternal destiny. For all of these reasons it is imperative to approach marriage with caution and careful concern. For that reason these suggestions have been offered.

The most important decision in a person's life is the decision to become a New Testament Christian. It is to the making of that decision that we call you now as we conclude this message and offer the Lord's invitation.