

## GETTING READY FOR MARRIAGE

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on July 13, 1969 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

Many people take marriage very lightly, entering marriage without a full realization of what is involved. Some time ago I saw a cartoon which pictured a large downtown Gothic style church building through whose front doors there emerged a young couple, just married. The bride was dressed in the usual formal bridal gown; the husband was dressed in the usual wedding suit. As they rushed away to start their honeymoon the bride turned to the groom and said, "Harry, what did you say our last name is?"

Although this is overdraw to the point of humor, there is a good bit of truth beneath the surface. I recall several years ago a telephone request from a young girl that I perform her marriage ceremony. Since I did not know her, I began to ask the usual questions to determine whether I could scripturally do so. In the course of the conversation I asked, "What is your fiancé religiously?" I think I shall never forget her answer: "Well, I don't really know what he is religiously; we haven't talked about that." It was unthinkable to me that a Christian girl would become engaged to a young man, set the date for the marriage, and proceed to seek a minister without ever having discussed her prospective husband's religious faith. For that reason, and others, I declined to perform that particular ceremony.

In a recent study we carefully examined the teachings of the Bible relative to marriage. We traced our God's intended plan: one woman for one man for life. We examined the scriptures concerning the matter of divorce, remarriage and other related matters. In this study we emphasized that "prevention is far better than cure" so far as the problems that often arise in marriage are concerned. It is far better to avoid the problems than to try to correct them. The same idea has been conveyed by the old analogy: It is wiser to build a protective barrier at the top of a dangerous precipice than to place an ambulance at the bottom.

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 marries 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.

This can be most concretely said in terms of what we have come to call Christian Education. On our Christian college campuses a young person finds himself surrounded by hosts of other young people who come from Christian homes and have Christian ideals and Christian habits of life. For example, in our student body of 2142 students at Lipscomb last fall, some 941 were members of the church. Such a situation greatly enhances one's chances of marrying a Christian who will make a good marriage partner. This fortunate situation exists on all of our Christian college

### 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. Let me mention three areas: (1) Training: 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, 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.

(2) Physical preparation: Each person entering marriage should be carefully prepared in his own physical health, which means that he should have good health habits developed through the years. Then, there are such simple things as the need for an adequate wardrobe of clothing, and all other necessary personal items. Actually the need for certain tools with which to begin housekeeping is the ground out of which the idea of giving the bride a dowry originally came. It also prompted the "hope chest" in which a girl would save sheets, blankets, and other household items for the time when she might marry. This is also the reason behind our giving of gifts to a young couple at the time of their marriage. We give alarm clocks, skillets, silver, china, and other necessary items for the carrying on of the activities of a home. All of this preparation is important.

(3) Attitudes: More important than either of the above mentioned preparations 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 situations and under 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. Several years ago Dan May, one of Nashville's leading business men and a highly respected citizen, himself a Jew, was asked, "Mr. May, you wouldn't want your daughter to marry a Negro, would you?" He thought for a moment and then responded, "No, I wouldn't want my daughter to marry any Gentile." This gave it a bit broader prospective than the questioner intended, but was a comment of some Value.

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

Marry in the church ... Marry a Christian. In Genesis 24, Abraham sent to Padan-Aram to his own people in order to find a wife for his son Isaac. In Deut. 7:1-4 Moses gave the command to the Israelites that they were not to intermarry with those in the nations around them. These foreign peoples were worshippers of Baal and other gods. They were not worshippers of Jehovah.

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 time as her husband liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is free to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord."

It is somewhat difficult to know exactly what these passages mean in our time. When originally given, they obviously meant not to Marry with non-Christian pagans. Are they today restrictions on marrying those who believe in Christ, the Bible, and many of the Christian principles, but who differ doctrinally and are members of other churches? What is meant by "unequally yoked with unbelievers?" What is "an unbeliever?" These are not easy questions to answer.

However, I do know the ideal, and anything less than the ideal is hardly a good choice in so important a matter as marriage. The ideal is to marry someone within the church. To marry someone of a different church means problems, heartaches, and barriers within marriage. Especially are the problems severe when children are born. My advice is to date someone who is also a member of the New Testament church and to marry within the church. If one has already fallen in love with someone who is outside the New Testament church, but in a Christian denomination, 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.