

THE DIVINE DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

By

Dr. E. Harold Henderson

Dr. E. Harold Henderson was for 25 years, from 1972-1997, the principal English language speaker on LifeWord Broadcast, an international radio outreach of the Baptist Missionary Association of America. Dr. Henderson was the Writer of Adult Sunday School Quarterly (Baptist Publishing House, Little Rock, AR) for 39 & ½ years. He authored four books and numerous religious periodicals.

© LifeWord Broadcast Ministries
Conway, Arkansas
Reprinted by permission

Prisoners Bible Crusade
2212 Stonecypher Road
Lucedale, MS 39452

CONTENTS

	THE AUTHOR OF
MARRIAGE	Page 1
	THE NATURE OF
MARRIAGE	Page 3
	THE PERMANENCE OF
MARRIAGE	Page 5
	THE TERMINATION OF
MARRIAGE	Page 7
	THE PRESERVATION OF
MARRIAGE	Page 9

THE AUTHOR OF MARRIAGE

Marriage and the home are the most basic of all human institutions. Most all social scientists, as well as leaders in religion, agree that the stability of a society can be measured by the stability of the homes of that society.

The desire to choose a mate and establish a permanent home seems to be built into the human spirit. All cultures known among men, whether primitive or developed, have some type of marriage relationship and established home life.

It is somewhat surprising, therefore, to find no formal discussion of marriage and the home in Holy Scripture. There is sufficient information given by divine principles

and practical illustration, but there is no formal presentation of a Bible doctrine of marriage and the home in a single passage. Chapters one and two of Genesis describe the institution of marriage and the home in society. Revelation, chapter nineteen, foretells the Marriage of the Lamb, when Christ receives His bride. Between those two passages, there is sufficient teaching for us to know all we need to know to discern the mind of God on the subject.

One thing stands out distinctly in the biblical record: **MARRIAGE IS ORDAINED OF GOD**. Both Old and New Testaments are in unanimous agreement at that point.

Genesis 2:21,22 attributes the origin of marriage and the home to God's personal act. The passage reads, "*And the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him an help meet for him . . . And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from the man, made he a woman, AND BROUGHT HER UNTO THE MAN. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*"

Proverbs 18:22 relates marriage to a good mate as the special blessing of God upon one's life, saying, "*Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and OBTAINETH FAVOUR OF THE LORD.*"

Jesus spoke of God's decree in establishing the marriage relationship, saying, "*Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore GOD HATH JOINED TOGETHER, let no man put asunder.*"

Did you catch the phrase, "*God hath joined together*"? That is the positive biblical recognition that marriage is ordained of God.

Matthew 19:3-12 is the record of Jesus' discussion of the subject of divorce practices current in that day. It was brought about by this question: "*Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?*" Jesus condemned the then-current practice of divorce and remarriage on the basis of these three principles: (1) The original purpose of God in making humans male and female was with marriage in mind. (2) The original marriage union was established when God personally brought the woman to the man and pronounced the design of permanence on their union. (3) The nature of the marriage union is such that the two people are no longer two, but one flesh. From that discussion of the problem of divorce, one can discern the mind of the Lord Jesus on the place of God in marriage.

God made humans male and female with the marriage relation in mind

Consider what Jesus taught about the design and purpose of man and woman. (1) Jesus had no problem with the origin of the human race. He stated simply, God "*made them at the beginning.*" (2) Jesus held to the original and permanent

distinction of the sexes. He declared humans were "*male and female*" from the very beginning. (3) Jesus attributed the difference in sexual structure as the basis for the permanence of the marriage union, saying, "*FOR THIS CAUSE shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh.*"

There are several reasons why God made humans male and female. (1) The purpose of God in making humans male and female was social: man needed a companion to share with him and to fulfill him. (2) The purpose of God in making humans male and female was spiritual: man needed someone with whom he could share the personal knowledge of God. (3) The purpose of God in making humans male and female was biological: man needed a counterpart to share the conception and birth of children that the human race could be propagated. (4) The purpose of God in making humans male and female was benevolent: man was not made to be alone and needed a companion to bring himself to fullness.

God made humans male and female that they might each match the other

The man and the woman is made to match each other physically. God's wisdom designed their bodies differently that they might each find a counterpart in the other.

God's wisdom designed their social needs differently that each might compliment the other. The woman needs the man's strength and persistence. Man needs the woman's tenderness and emotion.

Watch children at play. The boys pretend to be men and protect the home. The girls pretend to be women and care for the children. Those expressions in children are not a result of the influence of our social structure. They are the expressions of the will of God instilled in human beings from birth.

Genesis, chapter two, recounts that man was formed first. God made man in such a way that it was "*not good that the man should be alone.*" Therefore, God took the next step in His plan. He announced: "*I will make an help meet for him.*" God created the woman not because He saw His first human was incomplete but because He purposed to do so all the time.

What is meant by the statement that Eve was a "*help meet*" to Adam? The term used in the Hebrew text of the verse might be translated "one to answer back." In the present social situation, that suggests the wrong meaning. It means one to complement him, one to fulfill him, one to be his "other half." God made all men with the need for that "*help meet*" in a loving wife.

God established the marriage union

He brought the first couple together in marriage (Genesis 2:22). He put His sanction on the permanence and intimacy of the marriage union (Genesis 2:24). He established marriage as a permanent institution in human society (Genesis 2:24).

Several years ago I took my family to the annual Indian exposition in Anadarko, Oklahoma. Representatives from many Indian tribes gathered in their beautiful

regalia to show off their heritage in various ceremonies. I bought a little Indian doll for my daughter. It was dressed in a lovely buckskin dress, moccasins, a papoose on its back, etc. I thought I was getting an item of Indian handwork. On the long drive home, she was playing with the doll in the back seat of the car. She took the buckskin dress off the doll and to our surprise discovered wording printed on the back of the doll. It read, "Made in Japan."

There are many people who select a partner, get married, and establish a home without particular thought of God. They are surprised to look into the Bible and discover that stamped on every true marriage are the words, "Made in Heaven." Yes, marriages are made in heaven. Not in the sense that God personally selects one's marriage partner, but in the sense that marriage was ordained in heaven before it was witnessed on earth.

Live in your home and share your marriage relationships with the awareness that marriage is designed of God for the good of mankind and the glory of God. Let your marriage and your home bear the imprint "Made in Heaven."

THE NATURE OF MARRIAGE

What would you answer if you were asked this question: "What is the essence of marriage?" You might reply, "home," or "love," or "security," but those answers would be insufficient. The Bible declares that the very essence of marriage is **union**. Surprising, isn't it?

That union is the essence of marriage is indicated in the biblical record of the first marriage in human history. Genesis 2 recounts the incident. God made woman to be man's companion (verses 18, 21, 22). The man responded, "*This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman for she was taken out of Man*" (verse 23). God decreed, "*Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh*" (verse 24). Note the terms "*leave*" and "*cleave*" and "*one flesh*." They indicate the original intention of God that marriage would involve union between the husband and wife.

Union in marriage is further stressed by Jesus' discussion of the dissolution of the marriage relationship. He quoted from Genesis 2 and then applied the meaning of the scripture in these words: "*Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder*" (Mathew 19:4-6). Note the words "*leave*" and "*cleave*" are repeated with emphasis. Hear Jesus say, "*they are no more twain (two), but one flesh*." He added a third statement of emphasis on the marriage as a union of two as one, saying "*God hath joined together*." Jesus taught union as the essence of marriage.

Ask any marriage counselor what is the heart of all marital problems. He will reply, "The beginning of every problem is the loss of the sense of belonging together as one." Therefore, this second study in "The Divine Design For Marriage" will stress the element of union in marriage.

Marriage forms an inclusive exclusive union

Thank God for that devotion of one married partner to the other which exclaims in breathless wonder, "You are mine, and I am yours forever!" That is the way it should be. Each belongs to the other as a part of one's own self. That is why a man can love his wife as his own body and the wife can reverence her husband (Ephesians 5:28,33). Each is part of the other and is incomplete without the other. That is the kind of union God intended and established in marriage.

But the marriage union is not only inclusive, it is exclusive also. There are three classes of people who are excluded from intrusion into the marriage relationship, according to the Holy Bible.

(1) Parents are excluded from interfering in the marriage of their children. The Bible states this truth three times: "A man shall leave his father and his mother when he marries, and shall be permanently joined to his wife." God gave that principle in the institution of marriage (Genesis 2:24), Jesus repeated that principle in a discussion of divorce (Matthew 19:5), and the apostle Paul quoted that principle when showing the relation of Christ and the church by the husband and wife (Ephesians 5:31). Such a repetition of the principle, from such august authorities, should settle the issue once for all. Parents must not interfere in the married lives of their children.

(2) Other lovers are excluded from intrusion into the marriage relationship. Such an intrusion of another lover is called "adultery" in the Bible and was punishable by death according to Old Testament law. God gave the guideline in these specific words: "*Thou shalt not commit adultery*" (Exodus 20:14). One man for the woman for life. God's design is the exclusion of all lovers but one.

(3) Other marriage partners are excluded from intrusion into the marriage relationship. Polygamy has been practiced by various cultures throughout human history, even by some people whose names appear in Holy Scripture. It was never a part of God's plan for marriage. Sorrow and trouble have always followed when man went beyond God's design and took more than one wife. God forbids it.

Marriage forms a divine union

The Bible indicates the divine nature of the marriage relationship in saying "*God hath joined together*" (Matthew 19:6).

The divine approval of the marriage union includes all true marriages. Marriage is not just a Christian ordinance. It is a human institution ordained of God. God recognizes the marriage of non-Christians the same as the marriage of Christians. Of course, it is much better for both married partners to be believers, but they do not have

to be Christians to have a valid marriage before God. He has decreed that a man and woman should mate for life in the bonds of holy matrimony. Their union is the more secure and blessed if it is a union in faith as well as in marriage, but the marriage union is recognized as valid in either case. Marriage is a divinely ordained relationship for all people.

Marriage forms a natural union

People marry because God put it in their nature to seek out a partner and enter into a marriage arrangement. God planned marriage to answer a need He built into the human spirit.

There are a few people who should not marry. Jesus recognized that some people are incapable of marriage because of the circumstances related to their physical and psychological make-up from birth; some have been made incapable of marriage by interference of men; some have refrained from marriage for the sake of service in the kingdom of God (Matthew 19: 10-13). However, Jesus made it clear that those cases are exceptions and not the rule. If a person does not marry, that is no reflection on him nor cause for embarrassment. The vast majority of people should marry, however, for that is the way God made the man and the woman.

Marriage forms a physical union

The physical union of a husband and his wife in the marriage relationship is according to the design of God. The repetition of the words, "*They shall be one flesh*" (rather than, "they shall be one spirit"), indicates the physical aspect of marriage is ordained of God. Therefore, there is nothing base or vulgar or unspiritual about the intimate relationship of a husband and wife within the bonds of marriage.

The apostle Paul taught that so proper was the physical union in marriage that neither husband nor wife should consider that one's body belonged to one's own self but rather to the married partner. Abstinence from the physical union in marriage should be (1) by common consent, (2) for spiritual exercises, (3) for limited periods of time, and (4) with the intention to renew physical union when the set time has passed. Read I Corinthians 7: 2-5 very carefully to observe those teachings.

Marriage forms a spiritual union for Christians

Christians are to marry, but they are not to marry carelessly. God is involved in their lives, even in their married lives. Therefore, they should be married "*in the Lord*" (I Corinthians 7:39). The Christian should marry a Christian for the purpose of establishing a Christian home to the glory of God.

Marriage is not a Christian sacrament. It is a divine ordinance set in human society. When marriage is initiated, experienced and consummated according to the principles God sets forth in Holy Scripture, it brings blessings to people and glory to God.

Look on your marriage as ordained by God. Look on your children as the gift of God. Look on your married partner as part of yourself under God. Let all relationships in your marriage be under this benediction: "*God hath joined together.*"

THE PERMANENCE OF MARRIAGE

The expression "till death do us part" is common in the traditional wedding vows. It indicates the intention of the bride and groom to enter into a permanent relationship in the marriage. Such a vow is not commanded in Holy Scripture, but the intention of God that marriage be for life is evidently there.

Let us read again the words of Jesus in Matthew 19: 4-6, by which He indicates the intention of God that marriage would begin a permanent relationship between a man and his wife. Jesus said "*Have ye not read . . . for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh; Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*" Now, let us examine those words to find principles which indicate the permanence of marriage.

Indicated by the union of marriage

The permanence of marriage is indicated in the nature of the union thereby established. A man and a woman, though two separate people, become one person in the marriage relationship. The Bible declares repeatedly, "*They two shall be one flesh.*" (See Genesis 2:24; Malachi 2:15; Ephesians 5:31).

The husband and wife actually become one before God. The nature of that union indicates it to be permanent. A man might as well cut off his head as to divorce his wife. A woman who divorces her husband amputates a part of herself in that act. The union is real and permanent.

God looks upon the husband and wife as one. That is why the believing wife sanctifies the unbelieving husband, or the unbelieving husband sanctifies the unbelieving wife. The faith of one makes the marriage relationship holy because the two are one. (That is not to say the faith of one saves both, for each person must trust Christ for himself. It rather means God blesses a relationship in which one of his dear children is living in devotion to Him.) Marriage removes the "you" versus "me" attitude and replaces it with a spirit of "us" and "we." God said, "*They are no more two, but one flesh.*"

Indicated by the prohibition of easy divorce

The permanence of marriage is indicated by the prohibition of commonly accepted grounds for divorce. The divorce practices of Jesus' day were scandalous. The problem was based on a misapplication of a principle stated in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. "*When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it comes to pass that she find*

no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house" (verse 1). It became necessary for someone to tell what kind of "uncleanness" (or "impropriety") was sufficient grounds for divorce. The interpreters had a heyday out of that. Some said if a woman burned a man's food, it was sufficient grounds for divorce. Others said that if a woman talked loud enough that the neighbors could hear her, it was grounds for divorce. The ridiculous interpretations abounded until, as the questioners said to Jesus, men were putting away their wives *"for every cause"* (Matthew 19:3). Jesus rejected such practices.

A provision for divorce was made by Moses because of the hardness of the hearts of men, Jesus said, but God never intended such abuse of marriage. The institution of divorce by the Mosaic decree was for the protection of an innocent wife who might be driven out of her house by a hard-hearted husband. It was not intended as a legal loophole by which one might change marriage partners.

God intended marriage to be permanent. He who would obey God must seek to preserve his marriage intact, with its principles unviolated, for life.

Indicated by prohibitions against dissolving marriage

The permanence of marriage is indicated by the prohibitions against breaking it. God writes across each marriage union these words, *"Let not man put asunder."* He forbids divorce except in extreme circumstances.

The apostle Paul expressed the principle in these words given by the Holy Spirit: *"Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed . . ."* (I Corinthians 7:27). That means the Christian is to remain in the marital state in which he now lives.

But what about divorce laws? Our laws of the land permit divorce on almost any grounds. Yes, they do. But they go beyond the expressed will of God in being so liberal. Most of the divorce laws were written by men who were thinking in social terms rather than in biblical terms. The laws reflect the demands of society more than the decrees of God. The Christian must not go beyond the laws of God, as a good Christian. A thing may be legal, but may not be spiritual (I Corinthians 6:12). The Christian must live by the laws of the thrice-holy God, and not by the laws of a degenerate society.

Indicated by the seriousness of the sin that destroys it

The permanence of marriage is indicated by the seriousness of the offence which warrants termination of it. What offence did Jesus say would be just and proper grounds for divorce? Here are His exact words, as recorded in Matthew 19:9, *"And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."* The offence which is of sufficient seriousness to permit the

termination of a marriage is adultery.

Someone is sure to ask, "Is adultery really that serious? We hear of a married person carrying on an 'affair' quite regularly. Why is it so serious?"

Adultery is serious because it violates the clear command of God. Exodus 20:14 reads, "*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*" It could not be said more distinctly than that. Immorality of every kind, including "affairs" by married people, is gross rebellion against the expressed command of God.

God looked upon adultery as being as serious as murder. He pronounced the death penalty upon both in the Old Testament law. The one who commits adultery against the married partner (for adultery is not only with someone, it is also against someone) has forfeited his right to live as a member of that marriage relationship.

Such a serious offence being necessary to warrant termination of the marriage, and other excuses being insufficient, indicates God's intention that marriage be a permanent relationship between husband and wife.

Indicated by God's purpose

The permanence of marriage is indicated by the original intention of God in establishing the institution of marriage and the home. God's original intention was one husband and one wife committed each to the other for life. That intention is recognized today when the couple vows to live together in honor as husband and wife "till death do us part." What a beautiful sight is viewed in the home as God intended it to be. Here is a husband and wife loving each other, fulfilling each other, sharing life together. Here are parents loving their children and rearing them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. No wonder the Holy Spirit used that to picture the relation of Christ and church (Ephesians 5:22-23). It is the most beautiful picture to be seen in the world of men.

I always counsel with a couple before I perform the marriage for them. One of the areas of which we speak is this subject of the permanence of marriage. Divorce is so common and widespread today that there is always the danger of a couple entering into marriage without realizing it is, under God, a lifetime commitment "for better" or "for worse." Once in a while a prospective bride or groom will say, "We decided to try it. If it doesn't work out we can always get a divorce and no one will be hurt." It is not true. Someone is hurt in every divorce. God knew the needs of man and woman before He instituted marriage. He designed marriage to meet those needs. Blessed is the couple which is committed to permanence in marriage. God will honor such a commitment with His special blessings.

THE TERMINATION OF MARRIAGE

There is a grievous plague sweeping our nation today. It is striking in thousands of homes and causing great suffering. Men women, and even innocent children are

hurting because of it. I speak of the plague of divorce which is destroying homes every day.

Divorce has reached epidemic proportions in our nation. Statistics reveal that one marriage in every three will end in divorce this year, and the problem is increasing each year. It is not unusual to find periods when the number of divorces in an area is equal to or even exceeds the number of marriages in a given period.

What can be done about it? The only solution I see is a return to Bible principles concerning marriage. An investigation of the teachings of the Bible concerning the institution, nature, permanence, preservation and termination of marriage will help build immunity against the social disease of divorce. That is why this series of studies is dealing with "The Divine Design for Marriage."

What was the original design of God concerning marriage?

The Bible is so specific, there is no room for doubt. God intended that one man should be married to one woman for life. He did not design any way other than death to terminate that union. God's Word says, "*The woman which hath a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he liveth: but if her husband is dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband*" (Romans 7:2). There are no other biblical methods recognized for dissolving the marriage contract.

The "one man and woman for life" is an ideal. It does not work out so perfectly in human society. Man is depraved and does not always live up to the design God has for him. That failure in man (not failure in the purpose of God) brought about the problem of breaking the marriage bond. Divorce came because of human sin, not because of God's design.

Why was permission for divorce ever given?

Divorce was instituted to protect the innocent, not to give people an easy way out of an unpleasant marital relationship. You will find that provision recorded in Deuteronomy 14:1-4. It was included in Holy Scripture as an act of mercy.

A man who was displeased with his wife would simply drive her out of his house. She was destitute when that happened. A woman could hardly make a living for herself by secular labor in that culture. If she had no father to which she could turn, she was in dire distress. She could not marry again for she was the wife of her first husband, and remarriage would merit the death penalty. How could an innocent wife be protected under such circumstances?

Moses instituted the "bill of divorcement" procedure in order to formally break the marriage. That meant the woman was no longer the wife of her husband. She could marry another without invoking the wrath of the law. Divorce was instituted in order to permit remarriage. It was to protect the innocent. That was a compromise of the ideal, however, and not the ideal itself. Jesus said God had not intended it to be that

way from the beginning. Man's sin, not God's design, made divorce an institution among men.

What principles govern the termination of a marriage by divorce?

Please remember, as we answer that question, that divorce is the admission of failure. It carries a stigma with it. It is not what God desired nor deigned. The marriage contract may be broken in honor only by death. Divorce is the result of man's sin.

(1) Jesus allowed for divorce in the case of adultery. He said that whosoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, unless the cause of the divorce is adultery itself. (Read Matthew 19:9). That suggests that an adulterous relationship by either husband or wife breaks the marriage bond and permits the innocent party to divorce and remarry.

To divorce where there is no adultery and to marry another person is to commit adultery. Jesus said, "*Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery,*" Mark 10:11, 12. The only reason Jesus gave for divorce was the sexual unfaithfulness of one's marriage partner.

(2) The apostle Paul seems to add desertion of a believer by an unbelieving partner as grounds for divorce. Here are his words, "*If a brother hath a wife that believeth not and she be pleased to dwell with him let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean: but now they are holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace*" (I Corinthians 7:12-15). The clear impression seems to be that the desertion of a Christian by a non-Christian married partner releases the Christian from the bonds of the marriage contract.

(3) Divorce for the reason of adultery is permissible, but it is not mandatory. Adultery breaks the marriage bond to such an extent that the innocent party can dissolve the relationship. There is no sin, however, if the innocent partner wants to live with the other partner in prayer for the reestablishment of commitment to the marriage contract.

(4) Either a man or a woman may sue for divorce, when there is unfaithfulness (in the form of adultery) on the part of the other. Mark 10: 11,12, Jesus spoke of a man "*putting away*" his wife and of a woman "*putting away*" her husband. To "*put away*" is the equivalent of "divorce" in our modern word usage.

(5) The divorce procedure under the Mosaic law was a matter of sufferance, not approval. God did not desire men and women to divorce. He permitted it, but He did not give it His blessing. Each person should realize the the divorce route is not God's intended purpose for any person.

What principles govern remarriage of one who has been divorced?

The teachings of Jesus make these points clear.

(1) The innocent party in a divorce brought about by the sin of adultery is free to remarry without guilt. That is evident from the words of Jesus in Matthew 19:9. Remember that divorce was originally instituted to permit remarriage, and the right to a "scriptural divorce" without a right to a "scriptural marriage" is unknown in Holy Scripture.

(2) Neither party is free to remarry in a divorce where marital unfaithfulness has not occurred. Jesus said, "*Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery*(because she will marry again); *and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery* (because she did not have a proper reason to end the former marriage)." See Matthew 5:32 and Luke 16:18.

(3) "Trial marriage" is fornication and is forbidden by God. The union of a man and a woman in sexual relations is approved of God only in a marriage bond that is intended to be permanent. There is no biblical basis whatever for the idea of a trial marriage.

Those principles briefly set forth the teachings of the Bible on the subject of the termination of marriage. They have been so tersely stated here that you may not have understood them clearly. Please do not be content to settle the issue with your own opinions, nor the opinions of the unregenerate society around you. Go to the Bible, the Word of God, and hear what He says on the subject. God alone is the authority.

God instituted marriage. It is a high and holy estate as He designed it. Marriage is held in low esteem today because depraved men and women have perverted it and prostituted it. Devote yourself to God that in your marriage relationships, as in all other areas of life, you might hear His "Well done."

THE PRESERVATION OF MARRIAGE

Anything that is worth having is worth working for and defending. It takes diligent effort to build and maintain a good business. It takes continuing research to keep abreast of needed advances in medicine. It takes unceasing vigilance to preserve freedom. And it takes daily investment to keep a marriage fresh and meaningful.

This is the fifth study on the theme, "The Divine Design for Marriage." We have investigated the Author of Marriage and have seen God as the Originator and Sustainer of the institution of marriage. We have sought to understand the nature of marriage and have realized it is the union of one man and one woman for life. We have searched the scripture for information on the premanence of marriage and have discovered God intended it to be a life-long commitment. We have discovered biblical guidelines concerning the termination of marriage and have found the provision for divorce is based on man's depravity and not on God's desire. Now, let

us examine the ways a husband and wife can preserve their marriage. An understanding of those principles will help your marriage to follow the Divine design.

To preserve your marriage, allow room for error

No one is perfect. Marriage does not improve a person in that area. On the contrary, many of the imperfections noted in a person before marriage seem to be magnified after marriage. Living with a person reveals all aspects of his or her character. The virtues appear more clearly, but the defects become more vivid also. How many people have remembered with the regret the innocent vow, "I'll change him (or her) after we have married" only to discover such a change is impossible.

Recognize the strengths and weaknesses of your married partner. If you determine you cannot live with those weaknesses, do not marry.

But what about those problems which arise after marriage? There are two suggestions. (1) Meet all problems with a spirit of loving desire to help. The Bible says, "*Above all things have fervent charity (love) among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins*" (I Peter 4:8). (2) Keep a spirit of forgiveness for wrongs, real or imagined. Again, the Bible says, "*Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*" (Ephesians 4:32).

Your home and marriage can keep its sparkle and joy if you will not demand perfection in your partner but allow room for error.

To preserve your marriage, keep God at its center

Remember that God established marriage and only with Him can it work out with joy. He set up the institution and gave a guidebook of rules on how it should be lived. Just as you would read carefully the owner's manual of a new car, so you should seek the mind of God in the Bible to learn how to live in marriage.

The place of the Bible in the home is indicated by two primary passages of Scripture. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 reads, "*And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up . . . And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.*" Joshua 1:8 repeats that command with this added promise, "*For then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.*"

The Bible tells what should be the relationship between the husband and wife, the parents and child, the family and God, the family and the world and every other human relationship. Yes, to have a happy home, you must keep God at its center.

To preserve your marriage, build your married lives together

It is surprising how much two people can live apart while living in the same house, eating at the same table, sleeping in the same bed and rearing the same children. It is surprising, but it is possible for people to grow apart while they live together.

Have you noticed the number of people who live together until middle age then suddenly divorce? There is a reason for it. They have grown apart through the years of their marriage. When the children are grown and gone, the parents are left with an "empty nest", and they have almost nothing in common.

Parents should not "live for their children" as some say they do. Husband and wife must live for each other under God. They must develop and maintain mutual interests besides their children. They must keep the joy of being together. The day will come when they will have only each other. Lives that are built together while the children are being reared will produce happier children and a marriage that will endure when the children are gone.

To preserve your marriage, intend permanence in it from the beginning

I have a rule I follow concerning marriage ceremonies. I will not marry a couple unless I have had the opportunity to counsel with them extensively about their lives together. Occasionally, I will not marry a couple after counseling with them, for I discover they are approaching marriage with the wrong spirit.

A certain couple was discussing their approaching marriage. I was sharing with them some of the problems I saw ahead and trying to prepare them to deal successfully with them. The bride-to-be said rather lightly "That doesn't bother us. We have agreed that we will try married life and if it doesn't work out we will just get a divorce and no one will be hurt." That was one of the marriage ceremonies which I refused to officiate.

Intend permanence in your marriage. Burn your bridges behind you. Leave no opportunity, even in your secret thoughts, of divorce. Your marriage will have a much better chance of survival.

To preserve your marriage, cultivate the quality of self-giving

Our generation has largely lost the true meaning of love. Love is equated with sex, a sensual thrill, or some romantically conceived emotion. Love is emotion, of course, but it is more than emotion. Love is the giving of one's self for the sake of the beloved. That is the kind of love God has toward man and is the kind of love that must exist between husband and wife for a marriage to be happy.

Marriage is not a "50-50" proposition. It is a relationship in which each partner gives 100% of himself (or herself) to the happiness of the other. A 50-50 arrangement will lead to book-keeping, accusation, self-pity, and trouble. A 100% arrangement will lead to happiness in each as he (or she) sees the other realize the full joy possible in the marriage relationship.

A husband and a wife who are each devoted to bringing the other's life to its fullest possible bloom will have a marriage which is a reflection of heaven on earth.

This series of messages has been designed to help you have the kind of marriage which will please God and bless you. The instruction has been based on Bible principles. God instituted marriage, and the Bible is the "book of instructions" on how to make it work.

I counsel you to devote your personal life to God. Commit yourself to your marriage partner in devotion to God. Live your life, public and private, as God's willing servant, and true happiness will be your reward.