

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn about the practical life of the Christian community. Two teachers will teach from the Bible about the Christian ceremonies. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today's teaching is: **THE CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE AND MARRIAGE CEREMONY**.

(S) **POINT 1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE**

The first characteristic of a Christian marriage. Marriage is God's idea and institution.

Genesis 1:27 teaches, "God created man in his own image, ... male and female he created them". When God planned to create the universe, he devised the way in which all species would continue to exist and multiply. God created the different sexes and he has a specific purpose for that. Together the man and the woman express the image of God. Together in marriage they form the smallest family unit, the very foundation of every society. God created sex in order to make the husband and wife a strong unity, in order that they enjoy marriage and in order that the human race continues to exist.

In Genesis 2:18 God says, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him". So God created the woman to be man's helper. In Genesis 2:24 God teaches, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh". No society or culture, but God himself created the need for marriage and instituted the marriage relationship. Already *before* the man and woman fell into sin, God established the marriage relationship as a relationship of leaving parents, a relationship of unity between *one* man and *one* woman, and a relationship of sex only inside this marriage relationship. God also maintained this institution *after* the man and woman fell into sin. Both the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 19:4-6 and the apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:31 repeat God's marriage institution. Thus, the God of the Bible requires that marriage in every nation and culture should follow what the Bible teaches about marriage!

In the Old Testament in Jeremiah 3, the human marriage serves as a picture and reminder of the relationship between God and man! And in the New Testament in Ephesians 5, the Christian marriage serves as a picture and testimony of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Christian Church. Although through the years cultures in the world have changed God's original marriage institution, God still calls all people and all cultures on earth to return to his original marriage institution!

(T) **The second characteristic of a Christian marriage. Marriage is monogamous.**

Although we read in the Old Testament that some important men like Abraham and Jacob and king David had more than one wife, the God of the Bible clearly teaches that this practice was *against his clear command and marriage institution* at the creation. Polygamy in the Old Testament caused many problems like jealousy, discrimination and idolatry. God never changed his original plan. In Genesis 2:24 God did not say that a man should be united to *his wives*, but that a man should be united to his *one wife*! God used the singular! Jesus Christ repeated this command and said in Matthew 19:5 that the *two* will become one flesh. The God of the Bible excludes all other people from the unity of the Christian marriage relationship and certainly from the sexual unity of the marriage relationship. The God of the Bible forbids polygamy. He forbids having a concubine. He forbids adultery. And he forbids flirting with any other woman. The God of the Bible demands that all men respect women and respect his marriage institution!

(S) **The third characteristic of a Christian marriage. Marriage is for as long as one lives.**

Divorce is on the increase everywhere in the world, but Jesus Christ clearly teaches in Matthew 19:3-6 that at the creation God did not permit divorce. Jesus commands, "What God has joined together, let man not separate"! In the Bible 'marriage' means that the God of the Bible joins one man to one woman *for their whole life*! In Malachi 2:16, God says, "I hate divorce and I hate a man's covering himself with violence".

However, due to sin in the world, the Bible allows divorce only for three reasons:

One. Marital unfaithfulness in sexual matters. That is, the guilty partner has committed sexual immorality.

Two. Marital unfaithfulness in spiritual matters. That is, the guilty partner gets involved in another religion, idolatry, occultism or mistreats the partner with physical violence.

Three. Marital unfaithfulness due to being unequally yoked together. That is, one partner becomes a believer after marriage and the non-believing partner refuses to continue the marriage relationship. Divorce in the Bible is allowed only when the guilty marriage partner is sexually immoral, spiritually immoral, extremely violent or intolerant of the Christian faith. The guilty partner remains answerable to God!

(T) **The fourth characteristic of a Christian marriage. Marriage is temporal - only for this life on earth.** In Matthew 22:30 Jesus Christ says that at the physical resurrection, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage. In heaven and on the new earth, Christians will be *like* the angels in heaven – they will not be married. On the new earth, there will no longer be sexual needs. But the social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual relationship with one another will be far more meaningful and perfectly satisfying, because Christians will live directly in the visible presence of God!

Therefore, marriage is God's institution *only for this present earth*. The eternal value of marriage on this present earth may be sought in its value to train character, to reflect and proclaim Christ and to beget children.

(S) **The fifth characteristic of a Christian marriage. Marriage is normal for most people on earth, but not the best for everyone.** On the one hand, marriage is regarded as normal for Christians and certainly for Christian leaders. On the other hand, remaining single is not a curse or a punishment. Single people are as important to God as married people. Both the Lord Jesus in Matthew 19 and the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 have special words for those who remain unmarried. God may call some people to remain unmarried either for a certain period in their life or even for their whole life in order to do a special work in the kingdom of God. God may call these people to serve him with undivided devotion! In Isaiah 54, God gives a special promise for people who remain unmarried. He promises that he can make them very fruitful in the work of God's kingdom!

In some parts of the world there are Christian women, who cannot find Christian men to marry. However, instead of allowing these Christian women to marry unbelievers, Christian churches should make a greater effort to win more men to the Christian faith in their country.

(T) **POINT 2. RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHRISTIAN HUSBANDS AND WIVES**

First. The God-given responsibility of Christian husbands and wives.

Ephesians 5:22-33 teaches the responsibilities of Christian husbands and Christian wives towards one another in their Christian marriage. Their marriage should be a living testimony of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Christian Church.

The Bible commands the husbands to be the head of their wives just as Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church and to love their wives *just as Jesus Christ* loves the Christians in the Church. The Bible also commands the wives to submit to their husbands *just as the Church* should submit to Jesus Christ and to respect their husbands. The Christian marriage should therefore be a visible demonstration of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church. In this way the Christian marriage becomes a proclamation of Jesus Christ to the world. When the people of the world observe a good Christian marriage, they learn more and more about Jesus Christ Himself and about the people of Jesus Christ. They not only *hear* about God's love for them, they also *see* it illustrated in the Christian marriage relationship. They not only *hear* of the joy of a growing relationship with the Living God, they also *see* an example of such joy in the marriage relationship. The Christian marriage relationship is a powerful witness to the reality and attraction of a relationship with Jesus Christ! This is especially true when the Christian home is open and people can "come and see" (Jn 1:29) how that Christian family functions.

(S) God created the man and the woman. God also instituted the marriage relationship. Therefore, God also has the right to determine the responsibilities of the husband and the wife towards one another! The God of the Bible is the Creator of men and women and he knows how his creatures function the best. Only when a husband and wife obey these God-given responsibilities, can they have a wonderful marriage.

(T) **Second. The God-given responsibilities of Christian husbands.**

One. The Christian husband should love his wife. *To love* is to show unselfish interest in her, to wholeheartedly accept her and to help her to become her best. Christian love is beautifully expressed in 1 Corinthians 13. *Patience* is the love that can wait. It is the love that does not enforce kindness her, but can wait to show her kindness. *Kindness* is the love that helps and that does not let a chance go by to do her good. *Not being jealous* is the love that generously gives her appreciation, credit and honour where she deserves it. *Not boasting* is the love that is modest about his own merits and accomplishments and does not try to impress her. *Not proud* is the love that is humble about his own strengths and weaknesses in the relationship to her. *Not behave rudely* is the love that shows good manners and tact towards her. *Not self-seeking* is the love that unselfishly seeks her interests above his own. *Not easily angered* is the love that meekly submits to the injury and hurts she sometimes causes.

Two. The Christian husband should lead his wife. *To lead* his wife is to lead her like Jesus Christ leads the Church. The husband should *lead her like a shepherd*. He should feed her, care for her, protect her and carry her through difficulties. He should *lead her like a steward*. He should guide her in God's ways and take good care of her possessions and activities. He should *lead her like a servant*. He should serve her especially in the areas where she needs him most.

When the husband loves his wife like this it is not difficult for her to submit to his leadership. Moreover, the best way children learn about love, leadership, respect and submission is by *observing* their parents day in and day out.

(S) **Third. The God-given responsibilities of Christian wives.**

One. The Christian wife should love her husband. Titus 2:4 teaches that young mothers should love their husbands and children, be self-controlled and pure, be busy at home, be kind, and be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Also her love should be characterised by patience, kindness and the other characteristics of love mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13.

Two. The Christian wife should respect and submit to her husband. *To respect* him is to state her point of view in a gentle way and then allow God to work it out in his own way. It is to carefully consider the teaching and advice of her husband. It is to involve him in the making of her plans and to communicate the progress she is making. It is to voluntarily take the initiative to serve him without waiting for him to ask her. It is to patiently listen to him and to try to understand his problems and points of view. *To submit* to her husband does not mean to submit to him like a slave, but *to submit to him like a helper*. It is to respect him as the leader and to follow him by being the best team member of his team. As a team member, she gives him all the input, suggestions, ideas, etc. she can, discuss issues and their consequences with him and then allow him to make the final decision.

(T) **POINT 3. THE CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE CEREMONY**

The Christian marriage ceremony is a public social and religious event. God condemns just living together without marrying. The Christian marriage ceremony officially and publicly ends the stage of being *single* and begins the stage of being *married*. The following truths are important for the Christian marriage ceremony:

(S) **First. Marriage is an event in which you publicly leave your parents and cleave to your wife, before you become one.** In Genesis 2:24, God says, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” What God said in Genesis 2:24, Jesus repeated in Matthew 19:5 and Paul in Ephesians 5:31! Therefore this principle is very important in the Bible. The Christian marriage is a very important social and religious event, because that is the time a Christian man and a Christian woman leave their parents and begin a new Christian family together! The three indispensable elements of the Christian marriage are: to publicly leave your parents, to be united to one another and to become one flesh.

One. Marriage means leaving your parents. A man and a woman prepare to leave their parents by announcing their plan to get married and by making practical arrangements for their marriage ceremony. This is usually called *the engagement*. At their marriage ceremony, they definitely leave their parents.

The couple should leave their parents emotionally. From the marriage onwards, the man and the woman should love one another and prefer one another more than their parents.

The couple should leave the authority of their parents. Ephesians 6:1-3 teaches that as long as they were still children and under age, they obeyed and respected their parents. But Ephesians 5:31 teaches that when they marry, they are adults and should leave their parents. From their marriage onwards, they continue to respect their parents, but are no longer under the obligation to obey their parents. Of course, they always remain under the obligation *to obey God* in everything. Respecting parents is not the same as obeying parents. For example, parents and parents-in-law have no authority over their former children. The mother-in-law has no authority over the wife of her son.

The couple should leave their parents financially. The married couple should have their own bank account and should manage their own finances.

The couple should leave their parents spiritually. If their parents are not Christians, the married couple should no longer tolerate the religious beliefs and ceremonies of their parents in their own home. The Christian couple should only serve the Lord Jesus Christ in their home.

The couple should leave their parents socially. If possible, the Christian couple should find their own home or room to live separate from their parents. They may even exchange rooms with another Christian couple. All these aspects of leaving parents are a visible sign to the parents and to everybody else that married people are no longer dependent on their parents, but have begun their own family.

(T) **Two. Marriage means being united to one another.** The Christian marriage ceremony should be a public social and religious ceremony during which the Christian man and the Christian woman make a marriage covenant with one another. They promise one another to be faithful and committed to one another for their whole life until death separate them.

In Malachi 2:13-16 God says that he himself acts as the Witness between you and the wife of your youth that you will not break the marriage covenant with her. During the marriage ceremony, God Himself makes the Christian man and the Christian woman into *one* and warns them not to break faith with one another in a divorce. The Christian marriage ceremony should be public. Your parents, friends and the Christian brothers and sisters of your church should witness that you promise to God and to one another that you will remain married to one another for your whole life, that you will love one another, that you will be faithful to one another and that you will help one another through all the circumstances of life.

(S) Three. Marriage means becoming one. The Christian marriage ceremony marks the beginning point where the husband and the wife may become one in every aspect. They should become one spiritually, socially and physically. The marriage ceremony is God's acknowledgement that the man and woman may begin their sexual unity. The sexual unity is pleasing to God only within the boundaries of the marriage covenant. That is why God forbids every form of sex *before* marriage or *outside* marriage.

(T) Second. Marriage is a public social and religious festival.

In the Bible, marriage was never a secret affair. In ancient times, *the pledge to be married* included the choice of a marriage partner (Gen 21:21), sometimes the giving of a compensation gift to the family of the bride (Gen 29:18, 34:12) and the giving of gifts to the bride and the groom (Gen 24:59,61, 1 Kings 9:16). The wedding ceremony was a public affair. It included some of the following elements. The bride and groom wore wedding garments (Ps 45:13-14). They were accompanied by bridesmaids and friends of the groom (Ps 45:14, Jn 3:29). The groom and his friends would come to the house of the bride and the bridesmaids would go out to meet them (Mt 25:1-13). They went in a grand marriage procession all the way from the bride's home to the groom's home for the wedding festivities to take place there. The invited guests were allowed to join the procession if they carried lamps or torches, due to the dark roads at night. There was a marriage feast, sometimes for a whole week (Mt 22:1-14, Jn 2:1-10, Judg 14:17). The most solemn part of the wedding ceremony was establishing a marriage covenant of which God himself was a witness (Mal 2:14, Prov 2:17, Ezek 16:8)! Only after the wedding ceremony, the marriage was consummated (Gen 29:21-23, Deut 22:13-21).

(S) ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Teach new believers how Christians ought to marry.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".