

Thoughts on Marriage

(Sister Cheryle Rhodes)

We are faced with so many intrusions in our daily walk as we try to live a Christian life. Everything we stand for and try to do is under attack by outside influences. We are bombarded from every side, in every aspect of life, with little or no relief offered by the world. (This is not surprising to most Christians.) Over the past several years I have had numerous people come to me sharing problems they were having in their marriages. Most of them seem to have already reached the same conclusion: they needed to get a divorce or their spouse wanted one. It has been a desire of mine to study the topic of marriage, first by looking at God's Word, by reading the works of our ministers, other godly men, and listening intently to messages from the pulpit. My purpose in writing this is so I could help others understand God's will for His children concerning marriage as I endeavor to share what I have learned about marriage discussing what has happened to this Godly union in today's world and comparing it to what it was originally meant to be.

There are so many negative effects on marriage during our time, all which make it increasingly harder for marriages to survive. I'd like to begin by mentioning some "worldly views" of marriage, because there has been a drastic change in the positions and opinions on what constitutes a marriage today. Marriage has traditionally been seen in our society as the coming together of a man and a woman, but today it is even the union of a man and a man or a woman and a woman. Not all the world seems to see a need for heterosexual marriages anymore and they now hold what is called a more "liberal" view. (I think it is an ungodly view!) At one time this view was looked at with contempt, but it is not so now, as a "same sex" or homosexual union today is more and more accepted as a tolerated or even an accepted life style. Even the negative terms that were once associated with these types of unions are seldom used any more and the politically correct expression used now is "alternate life style." As more and more of these sorts of unions are seen in public, I believe that many people in the world will become so satiated with it that I suspect in time they will have no opposition to it at all. Eventually, I can see society totally recognizing it. Only a remnant of Christians who stand true to God's word will be able resist this abomination. (See Lev. 18:22)

Another view the world holds is that marriage is only a temporary arrangement. There doesn't seem to be a need for any long term commitment in marriages today, but we see this everywhere, not just in marriages. Its effect on marriage is very real! Everyone seems to look at marriage individualistically, considering, "What can I get out of this?" Which I believe stems from the selfish attitude of people today. Once they deem there is no reason to benefit by staying in the marriage, they leave. We must stop looking at marriages as individuals! However, perhaps this is due to the fact that we live in a temporary society. We use things and when they break...we throw them away. What ever happened to the notion of fixing things in need of repair? Plus, with the age of technology, look at what has happened. We have accelerated the American Dream to the point where we move from one thing to the next with no regard for what was. You buy a piece of equipment and within months, or less, your item is outdated. We upgrade, replace, and progress from one thing to the other. Sometimes I feel like I am on the battle front with an echoing voice bellowing "Advance! Advance!" The good ole days are over and there is no going

back! Our fleeting existence is momentary and tomorrow will be so unrecognizable to any of us living today. Is this really what we want?

Another characteristic seen in marriage today is that there seems to be a growing need for everyone to “be happy.” Many suppose that their spouse’s main job is centered on making them happy. When the happiness is trifled with or diminishes, the marriage ends. I have heard many times people say, “I just wasn’t happy any more!” or “I know God wants me to be happy.” So, while their spouse is left hanging, children are split up or have to be separated from one or the other parent, this selfish person goes off to find new happiness, which is generally short lived, too. I believe this is mostly based on immaturity and selfishness. Happiness is not something we get from someone else; it is a more internal expression. Still there are some who never grow up and live from one day to the next looking for their next thrill.

“I fell in love” is an expression you hear people say frequently. This falling in love has always scared me, because if you can “fall” into love, you can also “fall out” of love just as easily. I am not saying that falling in love is bad, but it should not be the motivating factor in getting married. In the Bible there are three words used for love to distinguish between the types of love. This “falling in love” type of love is expressed in the word *eros*. It basically means a fleshly sort of love or desire. It is probably the main reason many marry today. The second form of love used is *phileo* which means to be fond of, which while it is not the best sort of love to base a marriage on, it is definitely helpful if you are fond of the person you marry. Being fond of someone says that you share interests with them and that you like being in each other’s company. Then you have the love word *agapao* which is the kind of love you should desire when choosing a spouse.

Agape love is the love which most resembles the love God has for his children and while all three types of love are important, without the *agapao* love, the marriage is sure to fail or have major difficulties. The world has the whole meaning of love confused because they do not understand this third type of love. Love is not just a feeling or a fancy; it is an action word, a verb. If you love someone, you do things for them. We can only know true love when we know the love that God has for His children, the love Christ has for his bride.

Let’s look at several other reasons for divorce. Incompatibility for instance is another cause that leads couples down the road to ended matrimony. Couples become incompatible when they realize they can’t or don’t get along. This is generally present in marriages when the couple has a lack a fondness for one another. As I previously mentioned, people are basically selfish, so when they don’t get their way...they leave. Incompatibility reminds me of children at play, fighting over this and that, neither wanting to give in or compromise. Let me interject that I don’t think compromise is always the answer either. Couples need to have a relationship that creates the best possible union for both of them, which I believe can only come about by following God’s word as a blueprint. A lack of understanding of this union is the pivotal problem in marriages today. I will discuss this union later in detail.

With incompatibility comes sexual incompatibility. One of the main reasons couples get together is generally physical, or sexual. Once the attraction is gone, the marriage is over. Can you see how the love *eros* fits in here? A marriages based on physical attraction only will have great difficulty surviving. Sexual incompatibility leads to another reason people divorce:

unfaithfulness. The grass is always greener elsewhere, and when the temptation presents itself...lust is conceived and infidelity is born. If a marriage is based on physical attraction, what will happen when someone better looking comes along? Also, let's face it; time makes us old, flabby, wrinkled, and even unattractive? When you truly love someone, these outward traits do not affect how you feel toward them, they can even enhance the love. There is something to say for a wrinkled brow and grey in the hair.

Let's not forget intellectual incompatibility which is a mounting issue today with a growingly number of women becoming educated. We have "come of age" and want our equality. The feminist movement has undermined the whole structure of our society. "Women have reversed their rolls by entering the work place created an atmosphere of uncertainty, conflict, lack of leadership and authority, instability, and a lack of harmony not only in the home but in our culture as well." (p 112) This leads to further difficulty because expectations about household tasks and child rearing come into play. Who is responsible for what now? With both parents working the wife is no longer home all day to care for the home and family, and now that her day at work has her exhausted, she wants more help from her spouse. The husband has worked hard too so he is not up to the task either. Then added to this problem many people have a dilemma when they are forced to consider personal or career goals that can also alter their life dramatically. This all leads to conflict and eventually to a marital separation. Women were not created to be heads of households. Feminism has undermined the father's authority in the home. It is totally rebellion against God!

I remember seeing a movie many years ago when Ryan O'Neal was still considered handsome by some which was called "Irreconcilable Differences". Now there is a reason to end a marriage. You and your spouse just have personal differences that you can't or won't work out, so you end the whole thing. Where is the effort? Is anything worth working for any more? I have to have it my way, you have to have it yours, no one will give, so we quit! I wonder who thought up this term, irreconcilable differences. It doesn't seem possible that there would be any differences that were so severe between two people who once said "I do."

Communication is also a growing problem that encourages divorce. With more and more devices for staying in touch with others, how is it that we seem to have a lack of communication existing today. People just don't talk to each other any more. Are we losing the gift of conversation? I have witnessed people sitting right alongside one another and texting messages back and forth on their cell phones instead of talking. With computers so available, people very seldom write handwritten notes to one another any more. Perhaps there is something to say about the speed in which our words can travel, but I want to hear the voice of the person I love or clutch a love letter in my hand. There is something impersonal about a cell phone text or an email. So lack of communication definitely warrants attention when we look at the reasons marriages fail.

We need to also consider "how" people communicate with each other orally. Many books have been written about how people don't listen to each other any longer. Everyone wants to talk...no one wants to listen. Most people in a conversation aren't listening while in a conversation, they are thinking about something else or they are only listening enough to ask, "What can I say, what can I add to this topic, how can I interject something, etc?" I have also observed how many people try to control the subject of a conversation, so they can dominate it. It all goes back to the

selfish, self centered, ego centric nature of man. People who love one another should listen intently because they are interested in the other person.

While these things all can affect a marriage there are many other obstacles that can be a hindrance. A marriage can be hurt by: mental and physical abuse, neglect, financial problems, interferences and meddling from outsiders, and the inability to deal with each other's petty idiosyncrasies. I do not want to stay with this topic as I feel the point has been made that marriages have many hurdles to jump over if they are to survive in today's social climate. Negative influences are every where. It is no wonder the divorce rate continues to rocket. Look at these statistics: "50% percent of first marriages, 67% of second and 74% of third marriages end in divorce." So, if you are in a first marriage and still love your spouse, consider yourself part of the minority!

The negative influences are so numerous that having a lasting marriage seems impossible, but I feel there is a way to make a marriage last. The recipe is set forth in God's Word. A Godly marriage is the only answer, but before we look at the Bible, let us consider the alternative formula. Why are there so many negative affects on marriage in the first place? Why is the union of marriage under attack? Why the continual fight? Why does the battle rage so fiercely? If we know the source, we may have a better defense to wage.

Consider this statement from God's Word:

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

Satan is a real enemy; however, I am not certain that Satan has a big interest in you or me personally. I don't think he cares about your marriage or mine. He wants your marriage and life to be ruined so he can steal God's glory. He wants to cause as much chaos as possible. I have heard others say that Satan wants to increase his dominion and have as many people as he can with him in hell. Let me assure you, "we" are not his consolation prize. He does not care about you! But, let's consider what the Lord told Peter, *"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat."* It wasn't so much that he wanted Peter for the sake of having Peter, but Peter was going to be instrumental in the Lord's church and Satan wanted to have Peter in order to diminish his work in the kingdom.

Satan knows his end is hell and there is nothing he can do to alter that end, but his goal from the beginning has been to steal glory from Jehovah God. Satan knows that the Lord has His bride secure and that she was chosen before the foundation of the world. However, he knows scripture and will use it against God's people. He began twisting scripture as far back as Adam and Eve when he spoke with Eve in the garden. "Perhaps if she had consulted with her husband in the first place, she may have been better off." (p106) No, she converses with Satan, partakes of the tree, gives the fruit to her husband Adam, and you know what happens from there.

Let's look at some of the things we have previously mentioned: corrupt views of marriage, erroneous ideas of love, egocentric images of happiness, worldly thoughts on compatibility, distorted sexual opinions, and total lack of communication, to name a few, are all devices used

by Satan to create anarchy in God's system. If we think of these intrusive obstacles in our married life as Satan's tools, perhaps we can combat them more effectively. We should not be ignorant of his devices. Satan is very clever and skillful in his methods of deception.

Consider this; we are warned in 1 Corinthians 7:4-5 that Satan will try to ruin your marriage. It says, *"The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency."*

Satan will and does use any thing to diminish the glory of God. While he is absolutely powerless to affect God, he does try to distort man's view of God. He has waged war! We are in a battle, a violent struggle, and we will not win this timely fight unless we face him wearing the whole armor of God. Many Christian couples have already lost the fight and as their marriages crumble before their eyes and before their children's eyes, they may not even be aware that Satan was at the root of their demise. We must recognize our enemy! He is real and he is the adversary: the enemy of our Lord and Savior, our God.

So, how do we have a lasting marriage, with so much working against us? Is it even possible today? I believe it is not only possible, it is necessary because it is God's will in the lives of His children. If we are to have a marriage pleasing to God it must be based upon those things laid down in the scriptures. So, where do we start?

Let us first look in the Bible at the order of creation. When we go back to the book of Genesis we see that God first created man. Then he made man a woman to be his help meet. Just as Christ had a bride, Adam needed one.

Genesis 2:18 says, *"And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."*

Then we are told in verses 21-24, *"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 instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."*

God caused Adam to sleep as he took a rib from his side, and from this he made a woman. The word woman actually means "taken from man." A woman was taken from the side of Adam, as was the bride of Christ to come through His side. While on the cross, Christ's side was pierced and out from His side came blood and water mingled. (p190)

Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh...and they became one flesh. This is beautiful to the eyes of the believer. The believer knows what it means to become one. We have oneness with Christ, as Christ and the Father are one. So from the beginning man and woman were to become one and live together as one and we are given instruction in the scriptures as how this is to be

accomplished. God ordained marriage as a covenant between man and woman and He revealed His own covenant with His own bride. “The next time you attend a wedding and watch the two join hands in matrimony to become one, think about this covenant. Once the young women lived under the submission of her father and mother, now she was going to be under that of her husband. The young man was also under the submission of his parents but now he would be a leader in his own home. They were two, now they are one. They each have a place in the home. The wife is the body of the husband; he is the head, just as Paul used the analogy of Christ being the head of the body.”(p 212) Now that they are one and have left father and mother, it is important that they do not put either of their parents before their spouse, and it is equally important that they do not assimilate themselves into one side of the family or the other. They are now an independent family. Holding the unity of their family is of prime importance. Let me add also that parents who intrude into this unity should know that this is a sin on their part!

If we believe the Bible to be the word of God and that it is “*profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*” (Timothy 3:16) then we need to know what it says about marriage. Obviously a godly marriage is to be desired.

Considering the woman’s responsibility first let’s look at Ephesians 5: 22 “*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.*” Now I realize this is not as tolerable as it once was, but it should be to those within the Church. But what does this mean? Many try to interpret it as “women become their husband’s slaves.” Now if they mean that women are to be treated as chattel, then I would say that I don’t believe this is what is taught at all. Yet, I better clarify what I mean. As Christians we are servants of Christ, and I do not see anything amiss if we consider this application as we look at woman’s duty to their husbands.

A woman is to be beneath the husband in authority, she is to respect him. A Christian woman should realize this before entering into a marriage, because one of the things she should ask herself when she is considering a proposal, she must ponder, “Can I submit to this man?” (p 110) If she doesn’t feel she can, then she should not be joined with him in matrimony. The Bible teaches that we are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Perhaps one of the things to contemplate is that being unequally yoked may lead to the wife’s inability to submit to her husband. There are other reasons for not being unequally yoked, such as the problem that will surely develop when the man tries to be the spiritual leader in the home. If he is not a believer, he will not be able to provide this leadership for his wife and family. It is possible that a woman can actually make up for the deficiencies of man. You probably have heard the term, “my better half”. Well, this is exactly what the wife is to the man and the man is to the wife. We are only a half of the One that makes up the marriage. “Men and women are to compliment each other, but she is never to usurp authority over him. This is true in the church and also in the home.” (p 105)

Eph 5: 23 says, “*For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.*”

Being the head of the wife is a great responsibility. He is to be her savior. He protects her, guides her spiritually, does what ever he must to be certain that she is cared for in every way. This is not a type of suppression, because of his love for his wife he will never be a tyrant or bestow power to himself becoming a dictator; neither will he trample upon his wife’s feelings. If he does either,

then he is no longer living by the Spirit. Look at the rest of the verses in Ephesians 5:24, *“Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing”*. The husband’s power must be tempered with love. He cannot claim power over his wife without love; it is to be a leadership of love. Also, if he betrays that love through infidelity, he loses his authority in the marriage because he has broken the unity in the marriage. Unity is broken if either partner commits adultery.

It is equally important that women realize that the woman doesn’t decide what to submit to, it says *in everything*. “I would even carry this submission so far as to say that a woman should not even act independently of her husband.” (p 124) I realize how unpopular this may sound, but only so because of the influence the world has had on the marriage union for so long. In times past this was not always so. Submission is a part of the woman’s discipleship. She submits to please the Lord because He has exhorted her to do so.

So women are to submit, but it says that husbands are to love. I think women are expected to love their husbands, even while this isn’t mentioned, it is understood that she does and will. So let’s see what we are told about husbands loving their wives.

Vs 25 “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.”

Husbands are to nourish and cherish their wife. How can any woman not want that? But look what this is compared to; he is to do so even as the Lord the church. Let’s consider this. Christ died for His bride. When I think of the love that Christ had for His Bride, the church, I think of a love that surpassed all others on earth. He gave His life for her. He looked down on her and saw her ugly condition. She was totally unlovable! He left His place in Glory and came down to take her place and pay her penalty for sin. He laid his life down for her while suffering on the cross. Then he arose and sat down on His throne in heaven with plans to come down and take her home with Him some sweet day. What love is this indeed! We all know this as the greatest love of all, it is our hope.

Husbands, can you love like that? You may never have to die for your wife, but you should be willing to protect her at all costs.

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”

Christ left his throne in Glory. We are one with Christ as He is one with the Father. Christ submitted to His Father in all things as wives are to submit to their husbands in all things. Christ subordinated Himself to the Father’s will in salvation; the Spirit subordinated Himself to Christ

and the Father. A perfect pattern has been given to us; we are to follow this example. I challenge all our brethren to so love their wives.

Look what 1 Peter 3:1-6 has to say, *“Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.”*

As I looked at this verse I wonder why the description, *“Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel”* was included here. All of this only creates vanity. Woman should dress modestly. Dressing otherwise can only lead to trouble. Why would a Christian woman want to dress in such a way as to cause another man to lust after her? Why would we want to put a brother in such an uncomfortable position? Women should desire to be as described in Proverbs 12:4 *“A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband.”* Why? Because it says, *“she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.”* Haven’t you observed that in the world today? We should not, however; detect it in God’s church.

There is more in Proverbs 31:10-31, but I am not going to quote it all here, but I want to ask the question again, *“Who can find a virtuous woman?”* It is getting harder and harder to recognize her. Can she still be found? I believe so, and is it something that every sister in the church should strive to be? What husband would not want to be married to a woman that his heart could trust in and know that she will do him good all the days of her life.

Before we leave this topic of marriage let us look at the relationship between Christ and His bride. If we are not clear about this relationship, we will not be able to understand the relationship in the marriage covenant. God so loved the world that He died for her. He demonstrated His love in practice, not in word only, but in His actions. Many people write about love, but don’t demonstrate it in their lives.

It reminds me of one of my favorite childhood country singers, John Denver. He wrote beautiful songs, catchy tunes with great lyrics, yet he beat his wife. This is not love. Love is demonstrated in our actions. One true test of love is to see how much love is shown when things get tough. 1 Corinthians 13 says that *“love never faileth.”* Christ demonstrated His love when He purchased His bride with His blood. Did Christ consider Himself in His actions? Think of all He endured. He left His throne in heaven to be stoned, buffeted, jeered, spit upon, and then faced death, and He faced it alone. His thought was for the good of the church and the will of the Father. Just as the husband’s thoughts should be for the good of the wife and family under God’s leadership.

Christ called His bride out of the world and set her apart for Himself. *“The man chooses a bride and sets her apart from all others.”(p153)* Once he picks his bride, he has no reason to look at

another woman. Once a man and woman marry, they are not free to do as they once did. Now they are to consider each other first, because they are one. All that Christ did, he consider the will of the Father. "It is so hard to understand this "oneness" as it is a mystical union." (p183) Just as the Father and Son are one, so are the husband and wife.

I have saved the biggest problem people have staying married for the closing. I am convinced that couples do not know one another well enough to stay together. This lack of closeness causes problems in that it creates doubts. If we truly want a good marriage we need to get to know our husbands. We might also ask, "How well do we know God?" We need to know Him; after all, He is our Husband and our Friend. The more we know God, the more we understand our relationship to Him as His bride, the more we will live according to His word. This will lead to better marriages. We are living in a time when it is important to show the world what it means to be a Christian. There is not better time than now to show the world the example they need. One way to do so is to show them what a Christian marriage really is. We can only hope to have a godly marriage is we study His word and follow His instructions. It is my prayer that more and more of God's people will turn to His word and seek His will in their marriage; striving to have marriages that honor Him.

Please note: Materials used in my study on Marriage: The KJV Holy Bible (quotes are in italics); Life in the Spirit by Lloyd-Jones (ideas taken from his book are designated with page numbers); discussions with and messages from Elders of our faith, including my husband and son.