

Make Your Marriage Last

Here's how to make your marriage solid and truly fulfilling.

By Roderick C. Meredith

"But she won't even listen to reason," the shaken husband lamented. "My wife says it's all my fault and now she's considering leaving me. I know I have been domineering in the past, but now we can't even seem to talk about it. She's down on me, down on the Church, down on everything."

An extreme case?

Not really. A great number of marriages, *even in God's Church*, are threatened by this kind of emotional impasse. Marital partners have come to the place where they can no longer reason with each other. People are so absorbed with their own private hurts that they can't see the big picture and get their minds, their emotions *and their marriages* back on the track toward the Kingdom of God.

Why?

Why marriage problems?

The real answer — and this is not just a cop-out — is that this is NOT God's world. It is Satan's world (II Cor. 4:4), and since marriage is the basis of a truly decent society, the great deceiver wants to *destroy* sound, happy marriages — just as he did before the Flood and before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Both these eras were types of our own end-time society *now!*

As Satan broadcasts attitudes of resentment, rebellion and self-will (Eph. 2:2), he certainly must zero in



Photo by Roland Rees

on upsetting marriage partners wherever possible — especially on the people destined to replace him and his demons in ruling over this world. All too often, most of us are not alert to Satan's part in causing our wrong attitudes toward God, toward the Church and toward our own spouses. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual *wickedness* [the Greek word means "wicked spirits"] in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

We must constantly put on the

"whole armour" of God, not just part of it. A day without prayer and Bible study, not meditating regularly on the big goals in this life and beyond, too many months without a prayer-filled period of fasting before God and WHAM! Satan overpowers us with negative attitudes, cynicism, selfishness and bitterness.

Satan is perversely brilliant. If he perceives that your marriage is, or can be made to be, your Achilles' heel — your weakest point — he will strike directly at that target. You must realize this and be prepared. You must be willing to fight for your marriage as you would fight for your very life, for indeed, your life now and your eternal life and reward in God's Family depend on the success of your marriage, now.

Yes, your marriage *is* just that important.

God's will regarding marriage

The book of Malachi, written long after Israel's first captivity, is directed to modern Israel today. Of all people, we in God's Church need to HEED this inspired instruction!

Asked why God wasn't hearing prayers, Malachi answered: "Because the Lord was witness to the *covenant* between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by *covenant*. Has not the one God made

and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? **GODLY OFFSPRING.** So take heed to yourselves, and *let none be faithless to the wife of his youth.* For I **HATE DIVORCE**, says the Lord the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless" (Mal. 2:14-16, Revised Standard Version).

The point here is that God hates divorce! He instituted marriage as a profound *covenant* relationship, picturing the eternal relationship between Christ and the Church.

Anyone who tampers with that relationship — be he judge, priest, psychologist, counselor or one of the marriage partners themselves — is tampering with something sacred to God. And He hates divorce. He warns us clearly of His great purpose in instituting marriage — so that in this stable, loving atmosphere, "Godly offspring" would be produced, potential sons of the great Creator.

Yet, when we get our feelings hurt, it seems that this awesome understanding simply flips out of our minds. But we in the Church of God should know better. We, of all people, cannot plead ignorance.

Restudy Matthew 19:3-9. Jesus here answered the Pharisees' question about putting away one's wife for "every cause" by referring back to "the beginning" — to God's purpose in establishing marriage. Did God originally intend that there be divorces?

After reminding them that it is *God* who created us male and female, Jesus 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 not man put asunder" (verses 5-6). Our Creator intended that man and wife "cleave" together, that they henceforth be regarded as one flesh. Man was not to "put asunder" this union, ordained by God from creation.

Divorce never intended

That was God's plan. Anything else was only something God *permitted* the weak, carnal nation of Israel

to do, but not something He ever really intended.

Jesus, when asked why Moses "commanded" ancient Israelites to give their wives divorces under certain circumstances, replied, "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so" (verse 8).

So "in the beginning" God *never* intended that there be divorce!

It was only as a concession to unconverted Israel that God allowed divorce in certain cases. And, as we in God's Church well know, Christ greatly limited even these allowances. Under the New Testament, converted men and women have access to the Holy Spirit, the power to overcome the human selfishness and rebellion that ruptures marriages in the first place.

God's will, therefore, for the truly converted person, is that there be **NO DIVORCE!**

Once a Church of God couple have accepted each other's past mistakes and have lived together for a few months or years, even the threat of a divorce is an admission that 1) one or both of them have never been converted, or 2) that one or both of them are no longer filled with and led by God's Holy Spirit and, unless real repentance occurs, are on their way out of God's Church!

What to do?

Truly converted people should fear and reverence the God who made us male and female and who gives us life and breath. And we should fear to even allow our minds to entertain the threat of divorce if things don't go smoothly in our marriages.

That is the starting point. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 1:7). Many of God's true people are far too concerned with self-satisfaction and "looking out for No. 1" to patiently, humbly serve their God-given mates even under adverse circumstances. They are too selfish to put up with each other's faults and pray their hearts out that God will intervene and strengthen and save their marriages.

Once we reorient our thinking on the rock-solid basis that marriage must last for life, we should go all out to build on the following keys and

practice the real meaning of marriage.

A character-building institution

In our "instant gratification" society, even many Church members fail to understand that marriage should be a *character-building institution*. The strength of a nation's marriages is representative of the strength of the whole society — of its stability, its values, its respect for laws and traditions, the hope of its posterity.

Godly marriages affect the attitudes, safety and security (physical, mental and emotional) of the children and grandchildren involved, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, friends and associates. All these people are impacted by the example set by *you and your mate!*

Through Malachi, God showed that "Godly offspring" are a major purpose of marriage. In an atmosphere of love and stability, giving and sharing, humbling the self and worshiping the Creator, Godly offspring are sure to be produced. But from an atmosphere of selfishness, cynicism, rebellion and division can come no such result.

So it behooves us to make our homes reflect the Christianity we profess — citadels of peace and kindness, where each partner in the home serves the other, is patient and forgiving if the other slips up, and where everyone is intent on doing God's will rather than demanding his own "rights."

Marriage and the home are perfect vehicles through which to fully express Jesus' wonderful teaching that "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Each partner must genuinely *give* of himself. He must openly, enthusiastically, lovingly *share* his plans, hopes and dreams with his mate. He must strive to be more sensitive of the unspoken needs and aspirations of his partner.

A loving husband must mentally and emotionally "get inside" his wife's head. He must listen to her stated and implied goals and hopes and show her that he genuinely wants the best for her. He may not always be able to bring all her dreams to pass, but the fact that he *cares* will go a long way toward making her happy.

A loving wife should listen perceptively to her husband and sense his moods and unspoken needs. She should try to encourage him, enrich his life and show him that she sincerely wants all his proper hopes and dreams to come true.

She must show that she is truly, lovingly with him in heart and spirit. No man could ask for more.

A picture of Christ and the Church

In Ephesians 5:21-33 the spiritual reality marriage pictures is put in sharp focus. "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. 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. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing" (verses 21-24).

Both man and wife are to recognize that their union literally pictures Christ and the Church. So in their marriage, they are to learn and act out the total submission of the Church to Christ, and the total love and concern of Christ for the Church.

Marriage is not a 50-50 proposition! Each partner must be 100 percent determined to do his or her God-ordained share. And 100 percent determined to be totally faithful in his or her marriage.

If we will not even exercise the character to remain faithful in our marriage union during this short physical life, what assurance does God have that we will submit to Him and remain faithful to Him throughout all eternity?

Think about it.

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (verse 25). This sacrificial love of Christ is to be emulated by the Christian husband, who will give "till it hurts" in constant appreciation of his wife's role as a dedicated help and companion. A man must consistently think of his wife as part of himself, equal with him, and so "love his wife even as himself" (verse 33).

Paul concludes, "And the wife see that she *reverence* her husband"

(verse 33). In the inspired Greek original, this word *reverence* is used elsewhere for reverence to God Himself! In our society, where people do *not* respect their elders, their elected officials or anyone else, even a truly converted woman will need to strive for and pray for the character to reverence her husband as the God-ordained head of the family. But the joyous results will be worth it!

All Christians must constantly be "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (verse 21). So even though he is "head," and ulti-

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mately responsible for his family before God, a wise husband will listen to his wife and take her advice on countless occasions. He will be patient even if she does not perfectly obey and follow his leadership in every situation. He will quickly recall that *he* does not always quickly and perfectly submit to the leadership of Jesus Christ. We are all made of dust. We are all weak. We all need patience, understanding, mercy and encouragement to do better.

LOVE — genuine, patient, outflowing concern — is the answer. This will strengthen the marriage covenant, which pictures the lasting faithfulness of Christ and the true Church and so *must not be broken*.

You CAN do it!

Those truly converted must never permit themselves to go down the dark corridor of carnal human rea-

soning that leads to the conclusion: "It is impossible for us to remain married!"

Why?

Because, with *very few exceptions*, God commands us not to divorce our mates. Because God hates divorce and has shown us that marriage is to picture our lasting faithfulness to Him.

The solution?

Since God commands all of the above, He is responsible, as our merciful Father, to give us the help and strength we need to master any problems in our marriages. In fact, He promises: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13). God will not fail!

Therefore, if we fear God and understand that we must save our marriages, we'll go to Him with fervent prayer and even fasting. We'll go to God's ministers for help, counsel and correction. We'll work, we'll overcome, we'll fight to save what we know is precious to God!

We'll humble ourselves, submit ourselves to our mates, talk it over, pray it out and, with God's promised help, *save* our marriages.

Jesus promised, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). The true Christian believes that promise and will go to Him constantly and boldly for the help to do what He has commanded us to do.

Of course, if your mate rebels against the truth, becomes hostile and *leaves* God's Church, you are no longer bound. But even here, you have a responsibility to love, help and encourage him or her as long as there is hope! For, in certain circumstances, one mate could virtually drive the other out of God's Church by his or her own mule-headedness.

Learn to serve

A real Christian must be more than willing to go all out in an effort to turn even a seemingly hopeless marriage around. As the old saying goes, "It takes two to tangle." You'd better be willing to admit *your* mis-

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the Jews, Book II, chapter XV, Book III, chapter X.)

Is there biblical proof that the word *even* in Exodus 12:18 refers to the end of the 14th day of the month and not to its beginning? I thought each day begins at "even" as God counts time.

The Hebrew word translated "even" in Exodus 12:18 means "dusk, evening, eventide." The evening mentioned here could just as well refer to the end of the 14th as well as its beginning. We must look at the context to see the intended meaning of this verse.

Exodus 12:15, 19 and 13:6 all show there are only seven Days of Unleavened Bread. Scripture shows that the seven Days of Unleavened Bread do not begin on the 14th but rather on the 15th of the first month. Leviticus 23:5-6 clearly states: "In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the Lord: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread." Beginning with the 15th for seven days, ending with the 21st day, no leaven was to be eaten (Ex. 12:19-20).

Another proof the Days of Unleavened Bread did not begin with the Passover is given in Numbers 28:16-18: "And in the fourteenth day of the first month is the passover of the Lord. And in the fifteenth day of this month is the *feast*: seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten. In the first day shall be an *holy convocation*; ye shall do no manner of servile work therein."

The Passover was not a holy convocation in which no servile work could be done. Instead of God's people coming together, the Passover was observed separately by families in private homes at night (Ex. 12:21-22). And instead of resting from servile work during the remaining daylight portion of the 14th, the Israelites busily spent the time getting ready to leave Egypt the following night (verses 33-39).

It was the night following the 14th that Israel left Egypt. "And they departed from Rameses in the

first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the morrow after the passover the children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians" (Num. 33:3).

Here, then, is the sequence of events: At the beginning of the 14th "in the evening," or as the Hebrew could be rendered, "between the two evenings" (Ex. 12:6), just at the time the 13th of the month was ending and the 14th was beginning, the Israelites killed and roasted the Passover lamb, and ate it with unleavened bread. They remained in their homes until the morning, which was still the 14th, when they went out and made ready to leave Egypt the next night, the beginning of the 15th.

The 15th, then, is the first day of the seven Days of Unleavened Bread, when only unleavened bread was to be eaten. Unleavened bread was eaten at the Passover meal (Ex. 12:8), but the entire day was not made a feast day and there is no command that leaven could not be eaten following the Passover night. The seven Days of Unleavened Bread end with a Holy Day on the seventh of these days (Lev. 23:4-8).

Thus, the Passover is not the first of the seven Days of Unleavened Bread. These days begin with the 15th and end with the 21st day of the month.

I noticed that Abib is the name of the first month of God's calendar (Ex. 13:4) and that Zif and Bul are the second and eighth months (1 Kings 6:1, 38). Could you give me the names of the other months?

The names you mentioned are Hebrew in origin. Babylonian names were given to the months when Judah was taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. These names are still in use today, beginning with the first month: Nisan (Abib), Iyar (Zif), Sivan, Tammuz, Ab, Ellul, Tishri, Heshvan (Bul), Kislev, Tebeth, Shebat, Adar. There is nothing wrong with these names since they are also used in the Bible (Neh. 2:1, Esther 3:7). The calendar itself was not changed after the captivity, only the names. □

Your Marriage

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takes and concentrate on discussing *them* with your spouse if you want to defuse a volatile situation.

Sometimes it's hard to be humble. But God says, "Only by *pride* cometh contention" (Prov. 13:10). So learn to swallow your pride and say those two all-important words to your life partner: "I'm sorry." Then open up the lines of communication and demonstrate that you are genuinely, deeply sorry for your mistakes in the marriage. You've got to talk to each other. You must *communicate*! Concentrate on *your mistakes* rather than accusing or pointing the finger at your mate. Then pray fervently that God will soften your spouse's heart and restore the affection and love that was once there.

With God's help, set an example of sharing, giving, loving — and repent of your selfishness and your past mistakes. Let's admit that we *all* make mistakes. It's almost never "all" the other person's fault! Before any marriage crisis becomes too serious, call on God's ministers for hearty counsel. Pour out your heart to them. Tell them what the problem *really* is, not just your side of the story. Then diligently follow their advice and keep coming back for follow-up counsel until your marriage problem is solved.

The challenge of marriage is learning to serve even when you're tired. It's learning to forgive even when you normally wouldn't. It's learning daily patience, kindness and deep empathy for another human being. These marriage experiences prepare you to be in God's Kingdom, God's Family, probably better than any other normal set of experiences could. It is not good that man should be alone.

Marriage is a fearsome responsibility!

We **MUST** build and save our marriages, for we are in the Church of God, and we have available to us spiritual resources that this world knows nothing about.

So let us glorify God in our marriages, and *make no more excuses*. Let us *obey* the command of our God, who is building in us character to last for all eternity! □