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the message for yourself

A Letter To My Sons

A father instructs his sons in the
Bible principles of right conduct
between a man and a woman

by Don Styles

A Letter To My Sons

"My sons receive the instruction of wisdom,
which to the young man gives knowledge and
discretion that thou mayest walk in the way of
God and keep the paths of the righteous"

by Don Styles

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Foreword

In the early 1960's, a young people's magazine was produced in southern California called "The Radius". It continued for a few years serving a useful purpose in the Brotherhood

As a reaction to declining moral standards, one whole issue was devoted to the subject matter of this present booklet. The exhortation was titled "The Way of a Man With a Maid" and was fairly well received being distributed throughout ecclesias in North America and to a lesser extent in England and Australia.

In spite of authoring the piece, I was never happy with the overall balance of that work feeling more emphasis should have been placed on positive aspects of the subject. Several times firm resolve to do it right was not fulfilled. Now my own four sons are at an age where the scriptural principles on courting and intimate relations need to be clear in their minds. Watching them try to live godly lives in the midst of this age of deteriorating morals made one realize that if ever there was a time to produce the following material, now is the time.

It is difficult to believe that in two decades standards could fall so far so fast in a society that gives testimony to God on its coins, in its constitution and in its public pronouncements. Yet the decline has not stopped. I am amazed at how many people feel they can do what they want with their bodies without any regard to the standards of God. We live in an age when it is imperative to state clearly divine teaching otherwise we will sin and not even realize we are doing wrong.

The world presents the singles scene and the gay life-style as an acceptable mode of conduct with no apology for what is going on. Our young people must feel everybody is going to bed with the opposite sex but themselves. Thankfully that is not yet the case. There is still a poorly publicized minority which is determined to be chaste until marriage. But our youngsters hear little of that. What they do face is a tidal wave of wickedness in the media and a world that threatens their determination to become dedicated disciples.

We need to help them by unambiguously declaring God's way of holiness. Yet even more importantly we need to provide them living examples of principles in practice, family units in which right attributes of character are being developed, marriages in which oneness is a reality and love is part of the daily situation.

Godly lives can be lived even in our day, but they won't be lived by accident. Good marriages and spiritually fruitful families are a result of God's blessing combined with our enlightened effort and much sacrifice of selfish desires.

While the way of the flesh holds the offer of momentary pleasure, the way of God offers lasting satisfaction now and everlasting life in the age to come. "For the upright shall dwell in the land, but the wicked shall be cut off from the earth."

Don Styles
Franklin, Michigan
January, 1987

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Dear Boys,

It seems only yesterday you were all young boys running around the house devising your share of mischief. Now you are young men ready to embark on an adult life. In some ways, time has flown by so quickly. Truly the Psalmist said "Man's days are as a shadow that passeth away."

Nostalgic memories flood into my mind. I remember proposing marriage to your mother during a Bible campaign in a sleepy Ohio town. I remember bringing David home to a tiny house in southeast Texas. I remember watching Dan proudly playing the clarinet in the winter concert at school when suddenly the end fell off his instrument and clattered on the floor. I remember waiting hours in the hospital for Matthew to get stitched up after Jonathan accidentally dropped a piece of four by four from the tree fort right on his head.

Like all parents, I could tell many a story of the past, but right now I'm thinking of the future for you boys and that's what has prompted me to write this letter to all of you.

Today's world is different from when I was a young man. Oh, yes, we had a few high school scandals and some classmates who got into big trouble; but compared to today, our world was tame. Thirty years ago parties would sometimes get wild but now it seems the normal one is a wild party. The number of teenage pregnancies and unmarried mothers has skyrocketed since my day. Books that you read as school assignments would not have been printed a few years ago let alone be used in high school. Some films that would not have been permitted in cinemas are regularly seen on prime-time TV. Nowadays the barriers have been removed, standards have melted away and inhibitions have broken down.

I guess the big difference between then and now is the openness of everything today and the percentage of youngsters involved. These days the situation is more black and white than it was when I was your age. In one way, that's not all bad. Sometimes sin is easier to avoid when it is out in the open, when it can be seen raw and undisguised.

In The Short Term Things Have Changed

There are a lot of reasons for the decline that has occurred so rapidly. Some people blame medical advancements like the development of birth control pills. Some say the legalization of abortion is a big factor. Since earliest times, a great inhibition to improper man-woman relationships has been the fear of an unwanted child. Remove that fear and promiscuity has broken loose.

The human race went for thousands of years with the same natural barrier to unbridled passion and all of a sudden conditions changed just when you were approaching adulthood. That is an obvious difference from thirty years ago; there are other changes, however, which are not so evident but equally as significant.

Another legal decision that has affected you is the supposed protection of the right to freedom of speech. The liberty to express a variety of views on almost anything is a blessed privilege. But some people have taken advantage of it to publish all kinds of pornographic material in magazines, books and on film. It's almost as if they try to outdo one another in the graphic portrayal of the most intimate, in some cases the most deviant, of situations. They don't care what this garbage does to your mind and morals. All the producers want to do is make money.

Economic Liberation

Surprising as it may seem, a very big item affecting morality today is the change in our economy. It is evolving from a heavy-industry, manufacturing-oriented system, to one that is service-oriented and office-based. That modification affects the moral conduct of men and women to one another! You know why? Because there are a lot of good jobs available for women.

They pay enough for a woman to support herself and her children without being married. A lot of women presently have a choice they did not have before. They may desire a child but not care to get married. Or they may seek a divorce and custody of their children or they may want to live with a man without any legal commitment on his part. Many women can now afford to do those things which thirty years ago were impossible for them because they could not make enough money to support themselves and their children.

You have seen the effects of this on some of your school mates. How is a mother going to insist her children have high morals if she has a live-in boy friend or a friend who spends the night occasionally? How can she speak against promiscuity if she never did marry her child's father?

The economic situation also affects the way men think. Fathers realize that by walking out on their wives and families they are not subjecting them to a life of poverty. Even if the woman does not find a job right away, some well-meaning social welfare program will come to her aid. Actually, this type of situation can only get worse as our economy continues to underwrite the financial independence of individuals. Frankly, I don't know of any other time or place in history when so many had the economic freedom which they have in the Western world today.

Affluence and Advertising

There is another relevant monetary factor I should point out to you. We live in an affluent age. There are a lot of people who have the time and the money to do the things they want and to buy things they don't really need but want to have. People have a weekend cottage or a boat. Your friends buy shoes or shirts because they are in fashion not because the old ones are worn out. They pay more for clothes because of the designer names that are on them.

This pattern of living and spending develops an "I do what I want" attitude to life. If we feel like a pizza, away we go to purchase it because we're used to satisfying our appetites. The whole atmosphere is one of minimal self-denial and frequent self-indulgence. This has a very insidious impact on our ability to deny ourselves when it comes to the area of boy-girl relationships. If one is accustomed to indulging himself in other areas of life, he is not likely suddenly to become a person of virtue and self-control when it comes to the man-woman relationship.

Notice a further moral handicap that is part of the economy in which we live. Advertising has a big impact on our thinking and our lives. You know how funny some of the advertisements are and how catchy some of the musical jingles sound. And you have probably noticed the overtones of boy-girl romance that are in so many commercials. People producing them are trying to sell products. They are trying to get the attention of us the audience; if they can use a pretty girl or a suggestive phrase to catch our eyes and ears, they will do it. In some instances, the situations portrayed or the poses of the people are a reflection of the moral atmosphere of our day. In some cases, they are on the leading edge of advancing decadence and actually contribute to the acceptance of that moral decline. So watch out for the commercials and beware of the erosive impact they can have on your standards.

Humanistic Materialism

One last important item I should point out to you is the basic philosophy of humanistic materialism that has dominated educational and intellectual thinking for years.

Now that may seem a big idea for you to grasp but you face its effects every day in school. When the football coach said 'No swearing!' but had no answer when one of the players grumbled "why not?", you saw its effects. The reason for not swearing is God's standard against using His name in vain and against speaking filthy words. Take God's standards out of the picture and why not swear on a football field?

The whole approach you get in history and science classes is permeated by humanism and a belief in organic evolution. The subjects are addressed as if this is man's world, as if everything develops and functions without the existence of God. Any moral standard presented is based on relative values worked out by man. Totally absent is any reference to absolute principles revealed by God.

Admittedly there is some advantage to us in this situation. Because religious teaching is left to the home, we can instruct you in a correct understanding of Scripture without a school teacher contradicting us on Bible interpretation. But there is a great danger too. The predominant attitude is that man can define right and wrong for himself; that view is disastrous. For "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer.17: 9). Given a chance, man will define morality to justify his own natural desires. That is precisely what we see around us.

Young people who are sleeping around with just anyone will say: "Nobody is getting hurt!" "She's on the pill!" "We're both willing!" "It feels good!" "What's wrong with doing something that feels good? Anyway it's an act of love, what's bad about love?"

Those who are living together will say they are more loyal to their roommates than most married people are to each other. Young women who are having children out of wedlock will tell you: "I can support my child, where's the problem? I'm not ready for marriage, but I want to be a mother." Those getting divorces will say "It's better for everybody this way."

Man's heart is deceitful! He will do wrong and call it right. He will manufacture all kinds of rationales for doing what he wants. All around us we see people setting their own standards, feeling free to do so because they believe the scientific community has explained away the very existence of God. That is humanistic thinking which is an underlying philosophy in the educational and so-called intellectual segments of our society.

Obedience Never Easy

Much has changed during the past thirty years. Medical discoveries, legal decisions, economic trends have all contributed to the moral laxity of your environment. The humanistic philosophy has hurt, too, as it becomes more embedded with each passing generation. While you cannot do anything about such general conditions, it does help to be aware of what is going on around you.

While changes have occurred, I'm not sure things are harder to deal with now than they used to be. It has never been easy for servants of God to live according to His commands. It seems they have always lived in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, trying to live God's way while the world around them was going the way of the flesh.

In The Long Term Things Have Stayed the Same

When you were little boys, you heard about Sodom and Gomorrah; you remember that Lot fled the destruction God rained on those cities and that his wife turned into a pillar of salt. Now that you can read the narrative for yourself and are old enough to realize what was going on, you must be shocked.

Conditions in those ancient cities were much worse than we experience today. Yet to some extent you can see similar trends in our own society. "Pride, fulness of bread, abundance of idleness ... [and disregard of] the poor and needy" were conditions that accompanied the lewdness of Sodom (Ezk. 16:49), If we could go back to live there for a few weeks, we might well be amazed at the similarity to what we see developing around us.

As I just pointed out, an arrogant denial of God is wide-spread in our society. So too is affluence, abundant leisure time and a selfish concern for oneself. Even the gross sin of homosexuality that caused Lot to vex his righteous soul is coming out into the open around us as an acceptable life-style.

While Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not have Sodom to contend with, the moral environment around them was not good. They lived as strangers and pilgrims in the midst of the Amorites and Hittites whose cup of iniquity was rapidly filling up. A glimpse of conditions is supplied by Shechem's treatment of Dinah who was a daughter of Jacob. Dinah was visiting other young women in a nearby town when the local prince "saw her, took her, lay with her and defiled her" (Gen. 34:2).

You all remember what happened to Joseph in Egypt. We may think we are tempted by aggressive women around us. But how would you like to be a slave who was ordered by your owner's wife to lie with her? The world has never made it easy for the people of God. I am sure there are times you face ridicule or disdain when you reject the forward woman; Joseph faced prison.

The Daughters of Moab

Consider, too, the record of Moab luring Israel into worshiping Baal-Peor. "The daughters of Moab ... called the people [of Israel] unto the sacrifice of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods" (Nun. 25:1-2). Why did the women do the inviting? Why not the princes of Moab?

Scripture assumes we know the answer without stating every detail; but just in case there is any doubt, the Lord alludes to these women in Revelation 2:14 as having enticed Israel "to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." Israel had been called to *worship* with Moab; an integral part of their worship feasts was open fornication.

No wonder false religion kept on holding an appeal for Israel. All the years they were in the land, they were surrounded by carnal religions. At times, many in Israel adopted the iniquity of paganism as their own worship. The remnant of faithful ones, the type of persons we want to be, always had to resist the easy, sensual way that encircled them and also surrounds us.

New Testament Times

Circumstances of the early ecclesia were much the same if not worse. Listen to the words in I Peter 4:2-4:

"[do not live according to] human passions but by the will of God. Let the time that is past suffice for doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness,

revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. They are surprised that you do not now join them in the same wild profligacy, and they abuse you" (RSV).

Does that sound familiar? Drunken carousing sounds like some of the parties they brag about in school. Licentious passions are what you hear recommended as the way to let yourself go and enjoy it. If you don't do it. "they are surprised" and they will make fun of you.

You can see that nothing has changed; what you are going through our fellow believers experienced 2,000 years ago. In some ways, the more things change the more they stay the same. Until Christ comes, the true believer will be a stranger in the midst of a world devoted to self-gratification.

In this situation, there is a key attitude you must adopt if you are to do right in a world going wrong. You must see the man-woman issue as a matter that is between you and God.

Between You and God

When the world tries to justify improper conduct between a man and a woman, they reveal they do not have a clue as to the correct perspective in this entire matter. Whether or not we love the other person, whether or not society approves, whether or not anyone is hurt is irrelevant to the right or wrong of our behaviour. This is an issue between God and ourselves, not the other person and ourselves; it is between us and God. That is why the terminology of holiness is associated with right conduct, and uncleanness is associated with wrong conduct in relations between a man and a woman.

Consider I Thessalonians 4 to see the point clearly stated. Verse 3: "For this is the will of God even your sanctification that you should abstain from fornication." "Sanctification" speaks of something that is holy, set apart to God. "Fornication" refers to improper intimate relations.

In subsequent verses, the Spirit of God continues to stress this point. "That everyone of you should know how to possess his vessel [control his own body] in sanctification and honor; not in the lust of concupiscence [passion of lust], even as the Gentiles which know not God [that is, you should not act like pagans]" (vs. 4,5). Sanctification and honor are words that express issues between God and man, yet here they are applied to the relationship between a man and a woman.

The emphasis continues: if we sin, let us beware for "the Lord is the avenger of all such ... for God hath not called us unto uncleanness but unto holiness" (vs 6-7).

We may or may not hurt another person by transgressing these commands of God. We may or may not break the laws of the society in which we live. Those considerations are minor, however, for the primary issue is between God and ourselves. "He therefore that despiseth [right conduct], despiseth not man, but God" (v. 8).

Those are strong words boys! We do not want God to think we despise Him. Yet there it is! The world may treat the boy-girl relationship in a cavalier manner, but we need to see the issue clearly. The sins of fornication, adultery, unbridled passion, or deviant behaviour are not primarily sins against society or another individual; they are sins against God.

Not a New Teaching

There is nothing new about this fact; it is a concept that goes back to the earliest point of divine revelation. Consider the incident alluded to earlier involving Joseph. He was obviously a talented and honest young man for Potiphar had entrusted all his financial affairs to Joseph. He was also handsome and this ignited the fire of passion in Potiphar's wife.

"And it came pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and *sin against* God?" (Gen. 39:7-9).

Just when one expects Joseph to say, "sin against my master", he says "*sin against God.*" The dominant consideration in Joseph's mind was not the offence against Potiphar, but the offence against God that was involved.

The woman persisted "as she spoke to Joseph day by day" but he steadfastly refused: "he hearkened not unto her, to be by her or be with her." This woman wanted him; society put the slave at the mercy of his owners yet Joseph refused because he recognized the consequences of succumbing to seduction. The point in question was between himself and the Lord. It was not just a personal matter involving Potiphar and Joseph.

Proper conduct had been prescribed by God and for Joseph to "be with her" would have been sin against the revealed standard of the Almighty.

Back to Creation

Joseph lived about 1650 years before Christ and 200 years before the Law of Moses; how did he know what the will of God was in this matter? If we look at preceding chapters in Genesis, we find no relevant instruction until we go all the way back to Genesis 2 and the creation of woman. There is the key. On the very day of Eve's creation, the basis for right conduct of a man with a woman was set forth.

Look at two details in the record.

One woman was created for one man, not several men for one woman or several women for one man.

Secondly the manner of her creation was wholly different from any other living being. Every other living creature, including Adam, had been made separately from the dust of the ground. Eve alone was made from a part of another creature. The fact that she was made from part of Adam's own body is significant; it spoke of a unique closeness of association. When God brought her unto the man, Adam could see the point: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (v. 23). Here was a living being which was to be bound to him as a very part of himself. Divine comment reinforces the relationship: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (v. 24).

One woman was made for one man. That woman was to be regarded as a permanent, inseparable part of his very being. Therefore when one man and one woman are physically united, they are to regard this most intimate of personal associations as a uniting of two people into one for life. They are to cleave to one another for life. From that point onward, they are to establish a household and, with God's blessing, become an expanding family unit.

Scripture Interprets Scripture

If you wonder whether or not I have overstated the point, consider the use of this very passage by Jesus and by Paul. In Matthew 19:1-12, the Lord's teaching is recorded. As he instructed beyond Jordan, Pharisees sought to trap him on the divorce issue. For his response, he went back to the verses we just considered:

"Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female [one of each to complement and complete the other] 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 not *man* put asunder" (vs, 4-6).

God set the rules in this matter, not ourselves or society: "what God hath joined together." From the beginning He made His will perfectly clear: one man and one woman were to be united as one for life. They were no longer to regard themselves as independent entities free to do as they liked with their bodies; they were "no more twain but one flesh."

The cleaving together involves the intimate uniting of the two bodies. There is no doubt about that! The divine perspective is spelled out in I Corinthians:

"Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body" (I Cor. 6: 15-16, 18) .

Harlotry was a common thing in Paul's day. Women who worshipped pagan fertility gods would "devote" themselves for a time as temple harlots. Using them was viewed by many as nothing more than experiencing pleasurable sensations justified by a religion of their own invention. But that was not God's view when they physically united themselves. There may be no divine requirement for an elaborate wedding. But it is His will that when one man and one woman join themselves in this relationship, they do so with the intent of cleaving together from then on as husband and wife. It is God's intent that a oneness of body begins a oneness of life.

Joseph understood these things. Whatever Egyptian society allowed was irrelevant. Whatever his master's wife might say was of no consequence. The issue was between God and himself.

The same is true of us. These are questions where God has defined right and wrong. If we reject God's way and do what we want, we despise God not man. Given the laxity of today's moral standards, we cannot over-emphasize this fact. The issue is between God and us. It is not a matter between society or another individual and ourselves. "He that despiseth, despiseth not man but God."

The Reason for God's Way

You are taught to ask "Why?" and all of you do it quite well. Around the house you do not always get an answer. Sometimes we do not know, or we don't want to take the time, sometimes you would not understand the reason, or you will not believe it until you see enough of life's situations. Much of the time, however, we know why and take the time to explain and you do understand and usually appreciate knowing the reasons behind a procedure or instruction.

A similar situation holds true in divine matters. If you ask the reasons for God's standards, you usually can think it through or find a passage which gives the answer. Occasionally the reason does not make sense at first but will when you grow in spirituality. Or it may be we need to learn more about life before we can see the point of God's thinking. There is a certain wisdom which comes with experience. At times, we simply are not told or cannot figure out the reason for divine action so we leave those matters to the Kingdom when we hope to ask about them in person.

But usually it is very helpful to think about the 'whys' and this is true of God's commands regarding the way of a man with a woman.

The God-Ordained Family Unit

We have already seen that you won't have to think long about the implications of Genesis 2:23-24 before you realize that it states the commencement of the family unit. God's intent is clear: a oneness of body should start a oneness of life. A man leaves his parents; he takes to himself his wife for the rest of his life; their children remain with them until they depart to marry; that is the cycle of the family unit. Therefore, with the creation of man and woman, the family was established whereby the development of the race would be carried on in a structured manner.

You have probably taken the family for granted, but there are other ways that God could have ordained for the propagation of the race. He could have decreed that it was perfectly right for men and women to come together in casual relationships and for the women to raise children by themselves. He could have designated this matriarchal structure as the right way of multiplying the race, but He did not. He could have ordained that it was acceptable to have several partners during a lifetime, that it was perfectly all right to marry and divorce, but He did not. He could have ordained that men and women should live apart in separate communal groups selectively co-habiting for purposes of conception with the progeny being raised in child-care centers. He could have appointed this as the right way of reproducing the race, but He did not. He could have left us free to do what we choose in this matter, but He did not. God did not take any of those options. Instead, God determined the family unit as the means whereby He desired the race to be developed and organized.

A Godly Seed

Once recognizing the divine ordination of the family unit, one is bound to ask "Why? Why families?", The answer is found in Malachi 2:15. Through Malachi, God was condemning contemporary practices of the Levitical priests. God had "been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously" in divorcing her to marry another.

Their sin was open defiance against the will of God revealed from the very beginning: "Did not he make one?" (v. 15). Once again allusion is made to Genesis 2:24 and the creation of Eve. God made one woman for the man, not several. "Yet had he the residue of the spirit." There was ample spirit-

power left to make more than one. Making the one woman for the one man was therefore an intentional divine procedure. "And wherefore one?" Why make one of each and ordain that they should be one flesh for life? Why make the family unit the basic structure for propagating the human race?

Families - Good for Children

"That he might seek a godly seed". Here is God's reason for families. It is the best natural unit for the character development God desires. Look at how it can benefit you if we all do our parts properly. You must honour your mother and me; you must show us respect and follow our rules. You had no choice in having us as your parents and by the grace of God we will continue to remain your parents. You can't arrange parents like you do teachers.

This whole situation is preparing you to respect and obey God. You have no choice as to His existence; He is God and there is none else. He does not change. Therefore in honouring your parents as a child you are being prepared to obey God as an adult.

Furthermore, in growing up in our family you have learned the meaning of faith. You trust mother and me to protect you, provide for you and look out for your welfare. Therefore it is not hard for you to believe that God, our heavenly Father, will do the same for you.

In addition, you are learning that you cannot have your own way all of the time. You have to be quiet when others are still sleeping; you must share space in the house with your brothers.

If the family is running right, you will also learn tolerance, forgiveness, and longsuffering along with obedience, faith and unselfishness. These are all characteristics you will need to become "a godly seed" and are reasons God established the family unit.

However, children are not the only ones helped by the divine method.

Families - Good for Parents

Think about what the family structure can do for parents if they follow the will of God. They are responsible for the spiritual development of their children. Therefore they must know scripture themselves in order to teach their children. In addition, they must monitor their own conduct that a good example might be set for their children to imitate. Parents come to understand patience as they deal with a child's learning processes over many years. This helps them appreciate the longsuffering of God in dealing with our slow spiritual growth during our life time. Parents learn self-sacrifice in putting the needs of the child ahead of their own. Many a night's sleep is lost by parents as they tend to restless or sick children. Therefore the family unit is intended to help mother and father develop good attributes of character.

Families - Good for Husband and Wife

In addition, there is great spiritual advantage in one man and one woman cleaving together for life even if they never have children. If a marriage functions as God intended, husband and wife help each other develop in godliness. The wife has a life-long companion who comes to know her well and who is concerned for her eternal welfare. Her husband should therefore be able to help her grow in character development or come to her support in times of spiritual depression. At the same time, the husband has someone uniquely devoted to him, to care for his needs, to stand by him

when others go against him, to encourage him when he despairs at the difficulties of life, to be a help suitable in assisting his walk to the kingdom.

Families - The Right Natural Unit

You need to recognize the divine objective in this matter, boys. It is God's intent that we should become like Him: God-like. At present, man is created in His likeness in some respects, having an ability to appreciate beauty, to exercise imagination and so on, but we are a long way from being wholly like God. We are to work now at developing a similarity of *moral attributes* - holiness, graciousness, mercy, longsuffering to name a few - in the hope of receiving His nature at the judgment seat. At that time, the faithful will be made immortal and incorruptible.

The great goal of our lives from God's point of view is to become a godly seed and your one wife is to be a "help, meet [or suitable]" to the achievement of that end. The kind of wife you should be seeking is one who will help you live - for ever.

On the other hand, the husband is to be the saviour of the wife (Eph. 5:23). This does not mean saving her from starvation or abuse (although the godly husband will do that), it means saving her for ever in helping her gain an entrance into the glory of God's kingdom. Prepare yourselves to be that kind of husband.

You can tell from the experience of your friends that the one-parent situation, the home thrown into confusion by divorce, the home left empty by a working mother, does not provide anything close to an environment that is conducive to spiritual growth. A far better environment is supplied by a stable two-parent family with both parents concerned about the development of good character in their children.

I will agree that not many families serve the function God has in mind, but that does not change His will, nor alter His commands. From the beginning, He ordained that a man should leave father and mother, establishing a new household with his wife to whom he would cleave for life as one who had become part of himself. A secure family unit would thereby be formed which is the ideal natural structure for developing those attributes of character found in one who is a seed of God.

That is one of God's reasons for one man and one woman for life.

A Foretaste of Eternity

A second reason is noted from a careful reading of Ephesians 5:22-33. At first, it may appear the relationship of Christ and the ecclesia has been patterned on that between husband and wife. However, a point that begins in verse 31 indicates something even more important than that: because "we [the believers] are members of his [Christ's] body, of his flesh and of his bones. *For this cause* shall a man leave his father ... [yet another quotation of Genesis 2:24]." Because of the permanence of the union of Christ and the ecclesia, a man should cleave to his wife and reckon himself one with her.

But how could that be? Events in the garden of Eden preceded Christ, he wasn't born yet, and they preceded the community of the saints that is still being formed. The full union of Christ and the faithful will not be a reality until the Kingdom. How then could Christ and the ecclesia be a reason God established marriage?

Speaking in human terms, it is evident that, before creating the world, God first conceived the union He wanted to see exist between Christ and the ecclesia. In other words, in drafting plans for this seven-thousand year epoch, He first settled on that matter. Then He ordained a natural association which would provide a foretaste of the spiritual one. That sample of eternity is supplied in the loving companionship of a man and a woman for life.

Therefore the similarity in the Christ/ecclesia, husband/wife relationship is not just a useful parallel, it is a matter of deliberate design on God's part. In marriage, we are to experience a foretaste of eternity; we are to know the love of heart, the blending together of minds and the permanence of union that the redeemed will enjoy with the Lord, for ever.

Now look at verse 30: "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." The climax of this magnificent association between the Lord Jesus Christ and his ecclesia is expressed in the language of uniting two bodies into one, the very form of words used in I Corinthians 6:15-16 for the physical intimacy of man and woman. It is evident, therefore, that the most intimate of physical bonds is designed to reflect the closest of spiritual relationships.

It is no wonder the words holiness and sanctification are associated with the physical union. It is no wonder God abhors the misuse of what He has intended should be part of a foretaste of eternity.

Consequently there are great spiritual objectives behind God's commands governing the conduct of a man with a woman. Once they are appreciated, restrictions on satisfying the natural drives He has built into our bodies are no longer seen to be arbitrary divine edicts but are welcomed as an integral part of His plan of salvation.

Other Considerations

Realizing God's objectives also helps us recognize other implications of His restrictions. The fact one man is to be loyal to one woman for life should be a continual exhortation that the believer is to be loyal to one Lord for life. The ecclesia is not to be flirting with other masters, other supposed revelations, creeds or methods of redemption but is to be firmly and continually committed to the one Lord who has called us in one hope, having united us in one body (Eph. 4:4-6).

Furthermore, by limiting the satisfaction of our physical desire to just one person, God has provided a means of cementing the marriage relationship. This point is probably better appreciated by those who have been married awhile. In the course of family life, conditions occur which can drive a wedge between husband and wife. Unless something happens to reverse the situation, they can gradually grow apart to such an extent that the marriage exists in name only. What often happens in the world is that one or both of the partners find someone else, a "lover", with whom they satisfy their physical needs. This serves to enlarge the split between husband and wife usually making it permanent via divorce.

However, if God's way is followed, the couple will restrict physical intimacy to one another. By so doing, a gap that was growing between them will be bridged. Differences that were driving them apart will be overcome as they are drawn back together by the needs that God has built into their bodies. God's restrictions thus serve continually to regenerate the family unit that it might serve His intended goal of developing a people to Himself.

There is another aspect to what I have just mentioned that I should point out to you. If the physical intimacy of marriage is intended to bind the union together, then one should not selfishly limit that aspect of marriage. This very point is made in I Corinthians 7:2-5:

"Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife to the husband. 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."

In today's world, we are accustomed to such graphically direct language that we may miss the point stated in these verses unless they are closely read.

The words "fornication" and "body" assure us the subject is physical intimacy of man and woman. The admonition of the Spirit is that both husband and wife should see to the satisfaction of each other's physical needs. Therefore, neither is to use this aspect as a tool to manipulate their partner. The whole area is covered by the canopy of "benevolence". Both are to consider the other lovingly, being neither over-demanding nor frequently refusing the other. Both must remember God has restricted their partner to this one relationship as the only one in which these God-given desires can rightly be satisfied. Therefore, in marriage, not only is "the bed undefiled" but it is also to be a frequent means of renewing the united life in the spirit of "benevolence."

Understanding God's objectives in the marital relationship should help you develop enthusiasm for the right way of a man with a maid. It is important that you see the positive purpose of God otherwise you may feel resentful of the restrictions He has placed on our conduct. This is especially true in a world of declining standards like the one in which we live.

A Package of Emotions

To this point, you may feel the comments I have made all relate to the actual physical union and do not address the preliminary acts of affection: touching, hugging, kissing, petting. Yet notice Galatians 5:19.

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,"

We know about adultery (wrong conduct after marriage) and fornication (intimate relations before marriage) but what about "uncleanness, lasciviousness"?

Note, too, Mark 7:21-22:

"Out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications ... *lasciviousness*"

And II Corinthians 12: 21:

"And have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and *lasciviousness* which they have committed."

It is evident from such passages that, in addition to the consummation of the physical act between a man and woman, we need to consider the whole set of emotions in this regard which must be rightly handled before God.

If you don't know what lascivious means look it up and you will find it refers to that which "tends to excite lustful desires." It refers to actions, words, pictures which are characterized by "lust, lewdness or wantonness."

You see. God has built into us *a package of emotions* which He wants used correctly. The physical union of a man and a woman should not exist in an emotional vacuum. It is intended to be the pinnacle of an entire range of feelings with which we have been endowed.

The physical proximity of the one we love has a different effect on us compared to casual contact with a friend or stranger. When you kiss your cousin, it does not send thrills through you. You can hold hands with all kinds of people in some circle game but when you reach across to hold the hand of someone special, it is entirely different. You have just dipped into that package of emotions God has built into us. Those sensations are not toys to be played with and gratified for momentary pleasure. We should not be touching, hugging, kissing and fondling just because it feels good. Indeed, the promiscuous indulgence of these feelings is lasciviousness.

When seeking a partner, we should not be philandering about and lightly indulging in all the love play that is intended as a preliminary to ultimately uniting together for life. Those things are to be confined to a friendship where there is potential for the development of marriage. The beginning stages of a loving touch, a gentle kiss are to be exercised only in a relationship that we feel may develop into a lasting one. Once that association has been established, our romantic conduct is to be confined to the one person.

You understand the difference between what the apostle describes as an "holy kiss" and one which is the exercise of our sensual desires. Indeed, there is a warmth of handshake and embrace, a holy kiss that can be shared in the brotherhood where the sensual desires are not excited. That is to be done appropriately and circumspectly, but that which involves the package of emotions which God has put into us is to be confined to those with whom there is potential for a life-long union.

A Plan Intended to Work

I know that what I have set out is a divine perspective that is virtually unknown to your friends and their parents. In reading through a lot of "Christian" material on the subject, I have found little allusion to God's objectives. Don't let that discourage you from accepting the mind of the Lord. Hopefully we are not of the darkness but of the light and in that light by His grace, we hope to walk in holiness and live to the glory of God.

God's intent is that one man and one woman should unite together for life; that they should thereby form a family unit in which they and their children should develop into a godly seed. The Almighty has graciously given us a foretaste of eternity in the binding together of two separate individuals into one.

To make His objective work, God has built into us a package of emotions. He has prescribed limits around the exercise of these feelings and the satisfaction of them. He wants the family unit to work; He wants the joining of a man and a woman to be a preview of the ultimate union of our Lord and his ecclesia. If we will reject the world's way to follow the way of God, we will realize His blessing upon the merging of two into one; we will be part of developing a godly seed, and we will experience a foretaste of eternity.

Some Bible Verses You Should Know

So far I have set out broad principles for you to consider; now I think it would be useful to look at the implications of some specific Bible passages.

Deuteronomy 22:13-21 The One-Time Harlot

If a man accused his bride of not being a virgin, an opportunity was given to her father to prove her virginity. If he was unable to do so, dire action followed against the woman:

"but if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel: then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house" (vs. 20-21).

It was not a matter of how many times the woman had done this: she was no longer a virgin. She may have had only one other man before marriage, but from God's point of view she was categorized a whore.

Most in our society would look at such words and say, "That is ridiculous, that is far too severe." As we have seen, however, right or wrong in this area is not determined by society but by God. Therefore it is God's definition that counts.

Some person may read this letter and say, "Well, it's too late for me to worry about that point, isn't forgiveness possible?" Of course forgiveness is possible! But the Lord will not pardon our sins if we persist in justifying immorality. Mercy is only extended if we confess sin and forsake the practice of iniquity.

While the Deuteronomy passage is part of the Mosaic system that ended with the cross, the phrasing is useful to us; God's view of illicit conduct is clearly evident. The occasional indiscretion is not acceptable. Committing fornication one time is playing the whore. The only course of action for a sinner is to confess one's sin, seek forgiveness and repudiate wrong practice.

Job 31:1-12 A Wise Precaution

As I pointed out earlier, there is nothing new about the right way of a man with a maid. Because of that, there is nothing new about the problem God's servants have in controlling passions of the flesh. Living before the time of Moses, Job faced temptation as much as any man and he settled on a preventive to sin: he resolved to stop the problem before it began.

In reading the passage, you will probably be unsure of the transgression he had in mind until verse nine. There it is clear Job addresses the very subject we are considering. Notice the process of sin indicated in verse seven: sin comes when the hands follow the feet, after the feet follow the heart and after the heart follows the eyes. Trouble began when he looked upon a woman. Therefore he declares "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" (v. 1). He did not want to sin; he did not care to see how close he could come to actual iniquity before stopping; he had no intention of revelling in lust with his mind let alone with his body. So he determined to stop the procedure of sin before it started; he resolved not to look longingly upon any woman but his wife. In this way, the fire of passion would not begin its destructive course. He made a covenant with his eyes.

This would be an excellent thing for each of us to do.

Matthew 5:27-28 The Lusts of the Heart

For good reason, Job was concerned about the thoughts of his heart as well as the actions of his body. Passion-filled thoughts not only lead to sin, but they can also be sin themselves. This has always been true, yet it is left to the Son of God to crystallize the stark reality of the problem:

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Consider the impact of Christ's words. Even though a married person may be restrained from the very act of sin by circumstance, social stigma, or fear of reprisal, he is counted an adulterer by fulfilling lust in his mind only. Similarly, the young man who would not actually lie with a girl but lusts after her in his heart and revels through all the pleasures of sin in his thoughts is a fornicator as surely as if he physically performed the act. Our thoughts as well as our actions must conform to the standard of Christ, for "the word of God ... is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4: 12).

In this regard, you can see the tremendous danger of films and literature available today. Most entertainment is based on the human ability to enjoy emotions by fantasizing in the experiences of another (called vicarious participation). You know enough about the adultery, fornication, uncleanness and lasciviousness that permeates TV, movies, books and magazines to realize the danger. What we see and read affects our thoughts, sometimes pretty dramatically. And what we think is important to God.

If we sin by looking at a woman to lust after her, we could be in trouble before God if we are vicariously participating in what is portrayed in films and books. We need to fill our minds with that which is pure, lovely and virtuous if we are to avoid a mental wallowing in sin.

You should note too the condemnation of taking pleasure in those who participate in sin (Rom. 1:32). I realize this does not leave much latitude for watching the entertainment of this world. Sorry about that! It is for good reason Christ follows up his instruction about mental sin with the advice to eliminate from our lives what seems essential now for the sake of gaining the kingdom later (Matt. 5:29-30).

You are sincere boys therefore I should mention a point of balance regarding this sin-in-the-heart. While most people pay little attention to their thoughts, some sincere believers have been unnecessarily troubled by Christ's statement. Surely he is not referring to the mild physical attraction we may have for some; it is normal to be attracted to certain people more than others. Jesus here condemns the person who looks on a woman for the purpose of lusting after her ('whosoever looketh on a woman *to lust* ... '). His words hardly describe the unplanned glance, free of impure motive, that surprises even ourselves. Furthermore "lust after" describes a burning desire towards another and surely does not refer to the fleeting, rejected thought a disciple may experience. Jesus' condemnation is directed towards the lust-filled individual who commits adultery in his heart and not the earnest believer temporarily troubled by the attractions of the flesh.

However, the Master's statement should not be treated lightly, for we are more likely to commit sin in our minds than fulfilling the desire with our bodies. Our Lord states there is no distinction

between the two. Accordingly, let us strive to bring every thought into subjection to Christ, realizing that the fleeting, rejected temptation is not counted as the very act, but that wilful lusting after another is considered sin as surely as the deed itself.

Matthew 5:31-32 God's Definition of Adultery

While looking at Matthew 5, a brief comment about verses 31 and 32 may be useful. The definition of adultery in verse 32 is not the world's idea.

"But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery."

Over the years, there has been discussion about the phrase "for the cause of fornication." Without considering here what that means, you can see that the standards of Western countries are not the same as God's. Society may say that people who are legally divorced for whatever reason are free to marry again. That may be society's standard but it is not God's. The piece of paper means nothing to Him. We must never forget this issue is between ourselves and God, not between ourselves and man.

Romans 14:13-14 Watch the Conscience

At first glance, you may feel this passage has little application to dating or romance. While it is true the immediate topic addressed concerns keeping of days and eating of meats, there are principles stated which you will find particularly relevant to your situation. You have been raised to be serious about discipleship and hopefully so have the girls you will date. Therefore either of you may have feelings of guilt about certain actions which would not arise if you were the untutored children of the world. Romans 14 deals with such matters of conscience.

One principle that is clarified is that we sin if we do something we think is wrong whether or not the action is wrong in itself. For instance, if we are convinced it is sin to eat meat, then we transgress if we take meat. "There is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth [or thinketh] anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean" (v. 14). Similarly, if we feel an action *might* be wrong but go ahead and do it anyway, that, too, is sin for "he that *doubteth* is damned if he eat because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (v. 23).

You can see, I am sure, how this principle applies to affectionate behaviour of all sorts. If one is doubtful about going out and petting, for instance, it is sin for him to do so for "he that doubteth" is condemned if he so acts. The crux of the matter is that even though something may be permissible for one person, it is not for us if we feel guilty about acting in such a manner.

The second principle alluded to is the sin of causing others to act against their conscience. This is commonly done among young people in complete ignorance of the wrong they are committing. For example, a young man is out with a girl who has been raised strictly and is convinced any kissing or petting is sinful unless people are intent on marriage. Having a deep affection for the girl and seeing nothing improper with such action, he urges her into conduct she feels is wrong. In so doing, he causes the girl to sin and transgress the will of Christ himself; for "whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6 RSV). There can be no mistaking the severity of Christ's view of such action.

God's way can place quite a strain on our self-control. It is difficult and unpleasant to control one's own emotions because of another's inhibition. We obey now, however, in hope of receiving honour, glory, and immortality in the Kingdom. So beware of the pangs of conscience, both of your own and of the one you are growing to love.

I Corinthians 11:3 Be a Leader in Righteousness

The man is designed to take the initiative in the physical aspects of a romantic relationship. But he is also to be the head of the woman as Christ is head of the man and the ecclesia.

The world has so muddled these matters with its emphasis on women's liberation that you will find many assertive girls and many fellows who are utterly confused about their role. However the principle of God is clear, you are to take the lead. This is not to be a lead into sin but into righteousness and true holiness as Christ leads the ecclesia. You are not excused from this duty simply because you are not married. The standard remains the same: "the head of the woman is the man".

Do not leave it to the girl to be constantly saying, "No, I think we are going too far". Be the leader in holiness in the development of a deep and lasting love that will help you both on the way to the kingdom.

Galatians 5:19-21 An Issue of Life and Death

There can be no doubt about the seriousness of God's teaching regarding transgressions in the male-female relationship. In cataloguing the works of the flesh, they are listed ahead of even idolatry, hatred and murder:

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like."

While society may view sins of passion as readily excusable weaknesses of the flesh, scripture plainly reveals "they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." In fact, it is because of their "fornication, uncleanness ... [that] the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience" (Colossians 3:5-6). If this action provokes the wrath of God upon unbelievers, how much more will His anger be against any believer who walks in such sin. Remember, too, the warning cited earlier: "This is the will of God ... that ye abstain from fornication ... he therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God" (I Thessalonians 4:3-8),

I Peter 2:12 Examples to the World

"Conduct yourselves properly among the Gentiles, so that although they may slander you as evildoers [because of a refusal to worship Caesar and local gods], yet they may by witnessing your good deeds glorify God in the day of visitation" (I Peter 2:12 Ampl. N .T.). The duty of displaying the life of godliness to the world is one that imposes a great responsibility on the believer in Christ. As you well know, a person is not exempt from this duty merely because he is young. You should be setting an example of godly living for your associates.

In addition to being honest, kind, merciful, just and devout, you should set a standard of holiness, moderation and restraint in your relationship with girls.

Sadly, such an example is not set by some of our young people. Every young person would do well to consider the reputation he or she has among associates at school or work. Is one known as "fast", always ready for a "good time", or "out to score" on a date? Or is one known to be considerate, modest, full of virtue and decency? I fear the former labels are borne too often by our young people.

Now it may well be that a young person will be ridiculed, slandered or considered "out of it" if he follows a pattern of good deeds. I realize social rejection is hardest to take when one is young. But all need to remember we are to fear Christ's estimation and not that of our worldly-wise acquaintances. When we stand for judgment, the opinion of others will certainly seem a very small thing. Therefore we must heed the call of Christ to exemplify godliness to the world and not to be just "one of the crowd."

I Peter 4:2-3 Follow Christ, Not the Flesh

Throughout Scripture we are warned to forsake our natural instincts and follow the will of God instead. The point is made just before the last verse considered: "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (I Peter 2:11) . The flesh versus God: this is the basic warfare we must fight, striving always to conquer the carnal mind.

The same exhortation appears in I Peter 4: we are to live the rest of our mortal days "no longer by human passions but by the will of God" (v. 2 RSV).

There is a warning in these words that rules out casual hugging, kissing and petting. People who do such things are simply gratifying their fleshly desires. In many cases, the person does not particularly care who they have as long as they have someone with whom to indulge their passion. Little or no affection is involved; there is only the satisfaction of human lust. Such action is merely done to fill our carnal appetites.

Note, too, the use of "lasciviousness" in verse four. You will remember a synonymous term is "wantonness" which means "sensually unbridled." Surely, this is an accurate description of the promiscuous (done with just anyone) kissing and petting that goes on. Such lustful behaviour is wrong. Remember "we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye, through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live"(Romans 8: 12-13) .Therefore, let us always strive to overcome the desires of the flesh that we might live to Christ and be made according to his glorious nature when he appears.

I must not neglect to point out that there certainly is a fitting and right place for acts of affection. As couples grow closer in their bonds of love for one another, they will express this affection in a physical way. The process is a gradual one. Just as deep love develops gradually and not all at once, so the physical expression of romance will develop gradually to the peak of the marital relationship. This, however, is entirely different from casual love making.

But, beware of self-deception; you may tell yourself that your actions are born of true feeling, but our Judge searches the heart and knows whether such is the case. So let us be honest and not rationalize our motives. You should ask yourself if your kissing, petting etc. originates in unrestrained lust or in a deepening love.

Applying the Principles

For a letter, this is a bit longer than most and I do not expect you to read it all at one sitting. In fact, it would be better to take the relevant passages of Scripture and think about them carefully rather than just giving them a cursory glance.

There are some additional aspects upon which I should comment. Even though the principles have been set forth from the verses considered, and despite the fact that you are pretty good at seeing the implications of scriptural points, there are some areas which call for further thoughts.

Going Too Far

The way most young people get into trouble is by going a bit farther each time they are alone together. Of course, there are those who have little principle and almost immediately indulge their desires and enter into sin. However, speaking of the average young believer who wants to follow Christ, they can find that the deceitfulness of the flesh has prodded them step-by-step into going too far, and they sin in both thought and action.

My advice is to exercise caution about spending too much time alone even if you feel you're with the person you want to marry. Furthermore, study carefully the clear principles of Scripture and determine to follow them. If you feel you're getting too involved in a relationship, take some positive steps to keep in the right way. It may be useful to talk the matter over with a family member or respected friend, or take the problem directly to your girlfriend. After all, if you are considering her for a life-long companion, surely you can share your concern in mutual openness and trust. This topic is a serious one, for young people can so easily mar their standing before the Lord by lack of restraint. Therefore resolve to submit your thoughts and actions to the way of Christ working towards a marriage that can be established upon a good and honourable foundation.

Petting

The term used to refer to, and I'm sure it still does, the free range of one hands on the opposite sex. To many couples, this seems an exciting indulgence without the risk before God of physical union. But what have we read about the thoughts of the mind and emotions of the heart? Are they not just as important in God's sight as physical actions? Is any young couple bold enough to say that they have "petted" but not lusted, and lusted strongly after each other? We have read from the words of Jesus that if a person commits the act in the heart, it is counted for the very deed. His words suggest a guide that if it would be fornication to have intimate relations with the person, it could possibly be the same with respect to petting. This principle alone completely rules out much of the petting that goes on today.

You should also remember a point developed earlier. The restriction of physical intimacy to husband and wife for life serves to cement the divinely ordained family unit. In keeping with that objective, God designed the woman so that she must normally be prepared to enjoy the physical union by loving embrace, by kissing and by intimate caress. In other words, by necking and petting. Had God made the woman to be aroused as rapidly as the man, the physical union would seldom serve the intended purpose of binding and holding together the marriage. Therefore what young people so often feel is a "safe" form of sensual gratification is actually indulging in a part of, and in some ways the most important part of, the marital oneness intended for husband and wife.

The Engaged

It is a principle of Scripture that the betrothed are considered differently from those just "going together." Under the law, for example, engaged couples were treated much like the married. Deuteronomy 22:23-29 is a good example.

Consider the phrasing of verse twenty-three: "If a damsel that is a virgin is betrothed unto a husband." Note that while the couple are not married (the woman is still a virgin) the betrothed man is termed a 'husband'. The law goes on to state that if some other man should lie with this engaged woman in the city (the woman willingly submitted as she did not cry for help), they both should die, the man "because he hath humbled his neighbor's wife" (the woman is referred to as 'wife' of her betrothed).

As an adulterous partner was slain (Leviticus 20:10), so this woman was put to death for unfaithfulness to her intended. She was punished as if she was a wife.

Contrasted to such a law is the action taken toward a person who was not engaged. "If a man find ... a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lie with her," neither party was slain but they were required to marry for life (Deuteronomy 22: 28-29). Thus a definite distinction is made between the betrothed and those not engaged with the former considered very much like the married.

Clearly, then, the Lord regards engagement as a transition period from deep friendship to marriage. The betrothed stage affords time for a couple to come to know each other better in all aspects of their relationship. In an increasing union of mind, heart and spirit, they have the opportunity to grow towards the married state and prepare for the culmination in the physical union when they will become "one flesh." During this period, you should remember your role of being a saviour to your beloved. Lead her in righteousness; cultivate her interest in the Word; deepen her desire to worship the Almighty; encourage her interest in godly service; build her awareness of and confidence in the grace of God. In every respect prepare yourselves that you might become a united couple in the Lord for life.

I must add a strong word of warning; today an engagement has lost much of its meaning. Such commitments are often entered loosely and broken just as readily. There is great danger in thinking that simply being "engaged" justifies taking a wide range of freedom with one another. But consider this: being engaged or being in love does not make everything lawful before God. His standards are based on holiness, sanctity and union, not on human emotion. This principle is proven in the wedding-night incident we cited earlier from Deuteronomy 22. You will remember a husband found his wife had consorted with someone else before their marriage. In that instance, it made no difference whether or not the woman was betrothed to the man with whom she lost her virginity. It was the simple fact of having relations with one person and marrying a second that condemned her. She may well have protested she was "engaged" to the first man at the time of their act, but they later found they were incompatible and decided not to marry. The appeal would have been in vain, however, for God does not forgive fornication on such a basis. Keep this point clearly in your minds; many believe that as long as they are in love and do not feel guilty anything is permissible. As I have shown, that is not the case.

One other point should be mentioned in this connection. When it is evident a couple have had relations before their wedding (from the early arrival of a child), a definite appearance of evil is given. An example is set that will weaken the resolve of many and could easily encourage some young couples to serious sin. Thus being "engaged" may lead to serious sin if the couple is not careful to exercise self-control and restraint.

Fornicators Who Marry

In alluding to fornication, I have only mentioned the situation of having relations with one person and marrying another. However we must not overlook a second circumstance: the couple having no serious intent to marry who have relations with one another and are forced to wed because the woman conceives. This is shockingly common among even more "respectable" groups, and I dare say occurs at times in the brotherhood. Is there much difference in this circumstance and the one where no child is born with the couple separating to marry others? While one couple is forced to marry and the other is not, the attitude of mind when the act was committed is the same; the spirit of harlotry pervades them both. Both have disdained the will of God; both have walked after the passion of lust by playing loose and free with their bodies. The fact the couple marries after the woman's conception does not justify their misbehaviour. Forgiveness is not based on expedient cover-ups but on repentance that is real and contrition that is of the heart before the Father of mercy. Beware of lapsing into the attitude of many that as long as one marries the girl when she conceives, no harm is done.

Forgiveness

In all of these matters, we must never forget the hope of mercy from our Lord. If there ever was a passage which assured us of the possibility of forgiveness it is II Corinthians 2:6-8:

"Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him."

The person in question had been guilty of a most serious form of fornication.

"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife" (I Cor. 5:1).

He had been disfellowshipped (5:5, 11); but in the course of time, he realized his sin and expressed repentance therefrom. Consequently forgiveness was extended and fellowship restored for such is the grace of God.

From this case, and from others in scripture, we find consolation and hope offered to the transgressor. God is faithful and just to forgive the sin of fornication if the offender confesses his error, sincerely repents and changes from sinner to servant through the strength that will come from the Lord and His Word.

Let us not think we can flaunt the Lord in this matter, however, and expect to presume on His mercy. While we know forgiveness is possible, it comes only to the truly repentant with Christ himself being the final judge in each individual case. So then, the warning against sin includes the message of divine grace that cleanses a wayward believer from the defilement of transgression.

If a believer who sins has hope of forgiveness, how much more can the unbeliever, walking in ignorance of God's law, look for mercy. It may well be that some reading this letter will realize for the first time the laxity and immorality of their life style. Beforehand, they were ignorant of God's edicts, but now their sins are exposed by the light of the Word. If such individuals repent of their actions and henceforth faithfully follow Christ, they have certain assurance of forgiveness. You will

remember our Lord's words to the woman taken in adultery: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8: 11).

After warning the Corinthian ecclesia that "neither fornicators ... nor adulterers, nor homosexuals (CRSV) ... shall inherit the kingdom of God", Paul reminds them that "such were some of you." Not one, but several disciples at Corinth had once lived in moral depravity. But now that they had repented and turned to Christ, Paul could declare, "but ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God" (I Corinthians 6:9-11). Everyone of them had received mercy and stood cleansed from all their past transgressions by the blood of Christ. So let not the unknowing sinner despair when he first realizes his impure ways. The mercies of our God are great. He is willing to forgive those who repent and are baptized for the remission of sins.

Clothes, Talk and Dancing

After the lofty divine principles we have considered, this next point should need little comment. Suggestive clothing and loose talk have no place in the life of a disciple. Tight-fitting skirts, low-cut dresses, and clothes that leave little to the imagination are the order of the day. Even men parade around in trousers and swimming trunks that are purposely designed to be revealing. Dressing in such attire can be nothing more than an open invitation to improper thought and action. Obviously, such immodest clothing should not be seen among us.

In addition to what we wear, our conversation must also reflect our high calling. Dirty jokes, risqué stories, and a double-entendre are so common about us we are actually surprised when a conversation in the world is free of vulgarity. Such talk reflects a lack of spirituality and should not be heard from the mouth of a sanctified servant of Christ. Unholy conversation has the effect of stimulating our baser instincts and can leave our minds dwelling on unprofitable thoughts for hours. Engaging in this talk with one of the opposite sex is especially dangerous, for it can readily break down the natural and spiritual barriers against sin. Thus for several reasons, our communications must not include the rot and grossness so prevalent around us, but must conform to the holy and lofty position to which we have been called.

Movement in time to music can have a remarkable effect upon the human psyche especially when one is paired off with a girl. Inhibitions can give way and behaviour can result that is far from a person's normal standard of conduct. Combine this emotional condition with an atmosphere that is seductive or is wild and disorienting and you are asking for trouble. Yes it is true that David danced before the Lord but it is also true that Israel danced to their own destruction around the golden calf. The latter is what prevails in our society and marks out why dancing is an Applying the Principles unsuitable activity for the saint.

Books, Movies, Magazines and Television

In our "highly developed" civilization, books, magazines and television play a dominant role in the lives of most people. As we noted earlier, all of these media use human passion as an important theme.

Printed material on the bookstalls today describe in detail the most intimate of situations. Realizing fully what they are doing, the authors relate such actions in words designed to arouse the emotions of the reader to a fever pitch. I fail to see how anyone can read erotic literature without filling their thoughts with impurity and lust. In this state of mind, a person could hardly look at a woman (or a man) without thinking of their bodies, and could easily commit fornication or adultery in his heart.

The evil effect of this rubbish is so certain and so strong that it must be left alone. To the sincere young person this should present little problem, for the dominant motive in voluntarily reading such literature is to revel in lust and immorality. A person desiring to follow Christ has other motives guiding their conduct.

Some movies are even worse than the printed word on which we have just commented. They go beyond mere description and actually show unclothed individuals performing intimate scenes. They leave nothing to the imagination and have an overwhelming effect on the lusts of the audience. Such films are to be avoided just as strictly as the books and magazines we have condemned. Even the supposedly censored movies and many TV programs suggest and display intimacy far beyond any reasonable standard of decency. In addition, they laugh about harlotry, portray adultery as a normal, acceptable way of life, and show fleshly indulgence of all sorts as harmless, enjoyable pastimes. A disciple should be totally disgusted at the distortion of right and wrong; he should never enjoy it. Considering these facts, it is impossible to see how such programs are acceptable to Christ as entertainment for his servants. Sources of relaxation can be found in something decent, but surely not in the brazen presentations that abound around us.

I certainly look forward to relaxing and enjoyable times. But they can be had without compromising the principles of God. The association of those of like faith whether in meetings or informal get-togethers can be happy times. Furthermore the laughter on those occasions will be a lot more sincere than the hollow, forced kind you hear in the world. And as you know, there is genuine pleasure in the everyday association of family life. Working together on various projects, or traveling to different places has often resulted in some fun times. We have found that family and married life based on godly principles has been far more enjoyable than the racy indulgences the world counts as pleasure.

When it comes to courting a girlfriend, you can find many things to do together without attending places of worldly entertainment. There are obviously the meetings, gatherings, study days, youth weekends and Bible schools which you should make a central part of your lives. Find the sports that you enjoy playing together; take some walks together; help her with her projects and get her to help you with yours. Start up a project which you know you can work on together. Enter into the activities of her family and bring her around to join in with ours. Consider, too, the possibility of helping out some of the older members by visiting them or taking them shopping. Because the world around us fills its time with vanity, we are tempted to do the same; however, with a little determination, you will find there are all kinds of enjoyable alternatives.

The Gay Situation

Thirty years ago, your grandfather was 47 years old and did not know about homosexuals. He had worked for 35 years in a trade known for its disproportionate share of alcoholics and philanderers so he did not lead a sheltered existence. Yet the gay condition was sufficiently rare and secretive that it was out of public view.

How times have changed! As I understand it, San Francisco has a higher percentage of gays than any city in the *world*. Apparently the United States is the world leader in this problem. The situation is such that some religious people are saying the Bible allows the deviant life-style as a viable alternative to a normal man-woman relationship. That's utter nonsense! Look at the following scriptures:

"God gave them up to dishonourable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed

with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their persons the due penalty for their error.

"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness ... Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die" (Rom. 1:26-32 RSV).

"Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals ... will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you" (I Cor. 6:9-11 RSV).

"Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure man ... has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 5:5-6 RSV).

Scripture could not be more emphatic. Homosexuality, lesbianism and other forms of bestial behaviour are iniquity before God. The current rationale of some priests and ministers was obviously anticipated in the words "let no one deceive you."

Some may call perversion in this regard a sickness; do not be deceived by this either! God is our judge, not man, and He calls it wickedness. Some may say people are born with a predisposition to be gay. We are all born with a predisposition to sin in general and some sins in particular. That does not turn wrong into right. Some have particular problems with temper, laziness, timidity and other traits. We may need special help to overcome certain problems; God knows our need and will supply it. A particular weakness does not allow for iniquity in that area.

While things are already bad, they could get worse. Sodom sunk into the very depths of perversion. God's wrath upon that place is still apparent at the bottom of the Dead Sea. From the remains of Pompeii in southern Italy, it is evident deviation was a rampant sin in that first-century Roman city. Again God poured out His anger upon them in sudden destruction from above.

Let no one deceive you, the perverted conduct of the lesbian and the homosexual is abomination before God which He is visiting with judgment even now and certainly will in the future.

Marrying an Unbeliever

By this point in your Bible study, you should be aware of those verses which directly command against marriage to the unbeliever. Israel was forbidden to marry the idolaters of Canaan (Deut. 7:1-6); widows are warned to marry only in the Lord (I Cor. 7:39); believers are cautioned not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (II Cor. 6:14) . These are all clear passages in revealing the will of God regarding marriage.

After considering the great scriptural principles related to marriage and family that have been pointed out, you should see additional reasons for the restriction on whom you marry. You should realize the incongruity of expecting a godly seed to result from a union with an unbeliever. It is hard enough to raise children in the Truth when both parents are committed to that objective. A believer openly disregards the divine design by taking a partner who will not instruct her children in truth and righteousness. Furthermore how will your wife help you to be saved if she is not wholly dedicated to the Hope of Israel? The husband is to be a saviour of his wife as Christ is of the ecclesia; the wife is to be a help suitable to her husband's development into the moral likeness of God.

Once you realize our Lord's objective in marriage and understand it can be a preview of eternity, you should know what kind of partner to seek. You want someone who not only accepts the Truth but

who also is wholly committed to it. There is much more to finding a companion in the Truth than obeying an ecclesial rule. It is a matter of honouring the basic goals God has ordained for the family unit and the marital union.

A Wedding to Come

The ecclesia is not yet the bride of Christ: it is termed his betrothed. The wedding awaits the return of the Lord and the approval of the faithful of all ages. Then will come the time when mortals shall become immortal, when the voice of the heavenly host shall swell in praise as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thundering's, saying: "the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." And so will come the blessed day of fellowship of redeemer and redeemed. This longed-for union is phrased a wedding, a marriage of the bridegroom with his beloved. How holy, then, is the uniting of a man and woman today when we consider the loftiness of the occasion to which it points forward. What great beauty, love and joy are intended for the married couple in all aspects of their lives, a union for life designed to provide a foretaste of eternity.

Having our thoughts drawn forward to this great marriage of Christ and his redeemed, we long for that day to come when death shall be swallowed up in victory. We yearn that we might be a member of the virgin-community our Lord lovingly takes to himself. May each of us strive for that honoured position, setting aside the perverse sensuality of the world, forsaking adultery and fornication, fleeing revelling's and lustful indulgence, letting ourselves live rather in holiness, purity, and joy, rejoicing in the beauty of the right way of a man with a woman. My prayer is that we all, through the abundance of God's mercy, may be participants in that great marriage of the Lamb which will commence everlasting life with our Father and His son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace be with you.

Deep love in all the ties that bind,

Dad