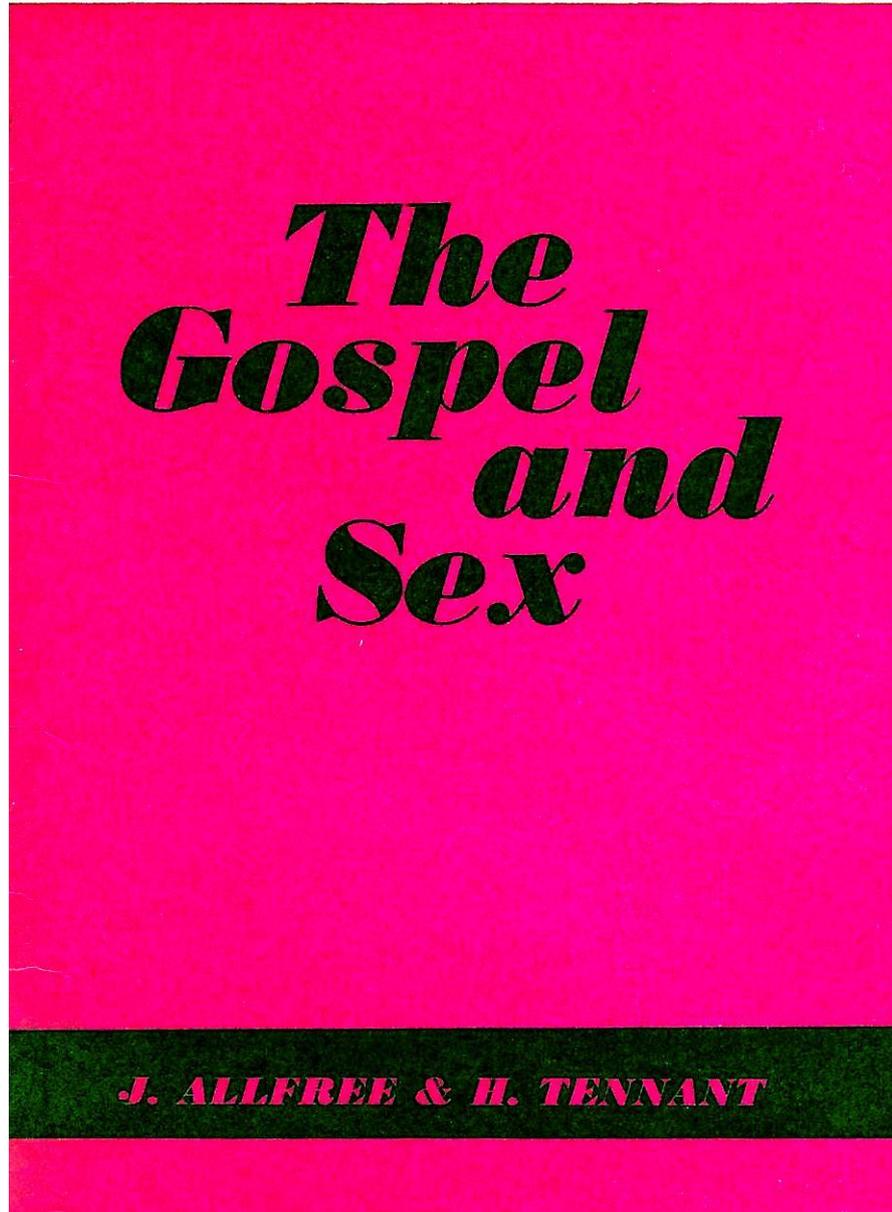


Reproduced by kind permission of The Christadelphian Magazine & Publishing Association,
Birmingham, UK. All rights reserved.

This Christadelphian publication is currently out of print. The original was in a different
format, formatting and page numbers changed accordingly.

Please read all literature alongside your bible, so that you can see the accuracy and truth of
the message for yourself

LIVING THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL



The Gospel and Sex

"My beloved is mine and I am his."

Some of the world's most beautiful descriptions of the relationships between men and women in love are contained in the Bible. By any standards, we would find it hard to surpass the spirit of courtship which breathes through these ancient words:

*"My beloved speaks and says to me:
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away;
For lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth,
The time of singing has come,
And the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.
The fig tree puts forth its figs,
And the vines are in blossom;
They give forth fragrance.
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."**

Or, again, how could the completeness of belonging to one another in the bonds of marriage find better expression than in eight simple words - *"My beloved is mine and I am his"*? These are Bible words: they touch upon one of life's most precious experiences. There is a charming simplicity and a moving wholesomeness which elevate the treatment of the subject, and give a seemingly insight into the feelings of those concerned. Nothing, perhaps, could seem further removed from the blatant treatment of the same subject by press and radio, in books and on television in our "daring", "frank", "revealing", "free" twentieth century. Are we the better for the change from the alleged prudishness of the Victorian era? Is the standard of Christianity an unnecessary discipline? Should men and women by mutual consent be free to choose whether or not there should be rules to bind the most intimate of relationships between members of the human race?

The writers of this booklet invite you to look at "sex", as our modern jargon has it, through the eyes of the Bible. Then, you can judge for yourself. We are convinced that there is no better point of view and, which is more, there is no surer way to a happy, healthy courtship, marriage and family life. The Bible knows its subject and there is every reason why it should.

How it all began

"But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female'. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'."

These are the words of Jesus Christ and they tell us that the first man and woman were *made* by God. The mutual attraction was implanted by God. Not only were they made by God, they were made for each other and their experience was to be shared by their posterity. The relationship was designed to meet man's need of companionship and support:

"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

Man and woman were made in order that they might live together to their mutual satisfaction and

* A list of Scriptures appears at the end of the booklet.

happiness. To do so, they would leave their separate family circles and form a new bond:

"A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife."

"Joined to his wife" is not simply the physical link between a man and his wife. It is deeper than that. The union is an expression of the willingness and promise to share life together. The marriage bond is unique and God intended that it should be for life:

"What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

One of the purposes of marriage is that man should be "*fruitful and multiply*". Children should be conceived and born in wedlock. The Bible does not countenance "unmarried mothers" and irresponsible fathers as a natural and acceptable basis for bringing children into the world. Why not? Because family life should be the environment in which children are brought up:

"These words which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart: and you shall teach them diligently unto your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house."

"Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you."

The family is the Bible unit. Neither the twentieth century world nor any other has found a better workable alternative.

To preserve the distinctiveness of the marriage bond and to ensure the strength and joy of family ties, a husband living according to the first laws of God was forbidden to cast desirous eyes on any other woman than his wife: "*Neither shall you covet your neighbour's wife.*"

Illicit desires can lead to harmful relationships and wrongful indulgence. Adultery was forbidden on the grounds of offence against God's provision for human happiness in marriage. It creates a breach in the wall of family life and can cause deep injury to children born out of true wedlock into uncertain and troubled homes.

In the eyes of the Bible, therefore, "sex" is not an experience to be sought for in isolation from the other human relationships of marriage. It is designed as part of the life-long bond between a man and woman who, having come to live together for mutual support and comfort, share the innermost things of their hearts one with the other and find satisfaction in expressing their love and self-giving in the most intimate of human associations.

Sex is God-given

"Sex", then, was provided for in the beginning by the all-wise Creator. He it was who planted in man that inner desire which can culminate in separation from parents, in moving from the home of one's birth into a new family circle, a new life - an unknown adventure - with a member of the opposite sex. To have normal sexual feelings is nowhere condemned in the Bible, nor is the ultimate exercise of these desires in love within the bonds of marriage. What is condemned is the unbridled thought which ranges beyond the limits which God has laid down for man's well-being and happiness, and the promiscuous or passing intimacy with one or more partners outside the relationship of true marriage. "Trial" marriage, "experimental" sex and other forms of permissiveness and all forms of perversion are sin. Sin is violation of God's law and provision. It is interesting to note that when the Bible shows disapproval of sinful behaviour of any kind, it often uses terms which speak of improper or loose affairs between man and woman.

Similarly, when God wishes to convey comfort or assurance, there is no language more fitting and no relationship more apt than those which are found in the love of man for woman, of parent for child, and of family for the precious association known as "home". The spirit of these words is unmistakable:

"As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him."

"Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?"

"As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you."

"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."

What comfort and assurance would there be in these words if God were like the "unknown" fathers of illegitimate children, or to be compared with the "unmarried" mother who wishes to be rid of her child? Surely, it is clear that God's provision for human love and marriage is designed to be a reflection, however faintly, of the love which God bears for mankind and of the desire He has shown to provide security and family life of the highest kind in the fellowship of Christians with Himself through the Lord Jesus Christ .

"Be fruitful and multiply"

Under favourable circumstances, the various forms of life on earth are self-perpetuating. There is a built-in mechanism for reproduction which ensures continuation of the orders of living things. Modern science has probed the secrets of procreation and can tell us much - often in highly technical language - to assist our understanding. The Bible gives the same fundamental information in remarkably simple language:

"The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth."

In one way or another, this generation produces the next. Some forms of life reproduce themselves simply by dividing into two or more separate living parts. This is called asexual reproduction. Other forms require the co-operation of male and female members of the species in order to produce new members. In some cases, co-operation is a matter of fact affair, with rather remote involvement of male with female; for example, in some fishes the female deposits her eggs and the male releases the fertilizing sperm as he swims behind.

The desire and ability to reproduce sexually is a cyclical event, dominated by chemical substances called hormones, which are released into the blood stream by certain glands. Thus, in birds, this can be restricted to once a year, though there are exceptions, but in most quadrupedal mammals it occurs more frequently, being governed by the time of ovulation in the female. Many animals perform the sexual act simply under the influence of these hormones, but in others there is obvious pleasure from the act which serves as an added incentive to reproduce.

In these matters, man is both like and unlike the lower animals. Like them he has a chemical powerhouse in which hormones play their part and, particularly in the female, produce a cycle of activity of varying intensity. Unlike them, man has processes of higher thought and intelligence whereby he can bring about a unity of mind as well as of body when he engages in sexual activity.

The stimulus of hormones is harnessed to love and tenderness which find expression in the intimacy of personal contact. It is true, however, that man can degrade this relationship, sometimes below that of the beasts. It should be remembered that man is able to excel, the beasts are not. Nature reaches its pinnacle in man; he should therefore elevate his sexual activity to match his superiority of mind.

Not an act of worship

However, we must not imagine that the act of sex in man is an act of worship. Many heathen and idolatrous religions have associated sex, often prostitution or homosexuality, with the rites connected with their gods. The God of the Bible is not the god of heathendom. He does not indulge in the acts attributed to heathen gods, or the gods of Greece or Rome. Whilst for the Christian, therefore, sex can be ennobled by a purity and communion of thought, it is not essential to his worship and full life as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. We call to mind that the Lord Jesus Christ himself was unmarried. Thus, the inability of a man or woman to find a partner need not of itself be a bar to spiritual growth, and for some it can be a means to it.

Whilst, then, in marriage sexual activity is the means to procreation, is the sex act to be reserved solely for the purpose of having children? Or, to put the question another way, is it always to take place under such conditions that pregnancy may result?

The twin nature of man's experience - the physical and the mental - may lead us to an answer. This experience serves two purposes: procreation from time to time where physical conditions permit, and the satisfying of the sense of possession and love whereby man and wife are bound together, without necessarily seeking or wishing to procreate at that time. The Bible describes this latter aspect of the sexual union indifferent ways, for example:

"Then Isaac brought her into the tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her."

"For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control."

Clearly, therefore, the divine provision found with the normal, healthy married couple is for union to occur with greater frequency than is needful for or intended for begetting children. This raises a question which married couples must answer for themselves: Should steps be taken, by whatever means, to avoid the possibility of conception except when the actual intention and desire is to have a child? Comment must be made on this subject but it falls more naturally under the wider context of

Sex in Marriage

Let us get some facts straight first of all. Marriage is not sex and sex is not marriage. One of the scourges of our age is that the subject has been given undue prominence by an appeal to the baser instincts, often promoted by the motive of commercial gain by sellers of fashion and other goods. Marriage is the whole of the shared life together. It is the fusing of two independent ways of life into a partnership in love with common aims and a willingness by each partner to give of self for the mutual good of both. We have already made it clear that Bible marriage envisages a home and family relationship of which sex is but a part. From this it follows that a wholesome, happy marriage reaches its finest joys in the bonds of minds with high ideals, unselfish devotion and a love which stems from pure desire, reciprocal respect and honour, rather than in the climactic ecstasy of mere physical association, though it may experience that as part of its full expression.

That is why marriage for money, for sexual appetite, for social status or whatever, will fall short of the marvellous potential of which a human being is capable. The following counsel expresses the spirit of these things:

"Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord ... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Even so, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife, loves himself. Let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

Marriage after this pattern will realize the joy and complete integration which God intended. Anything less, any disproportion of activity or desire, will not attain the happiness which is within our grasp.

It follows, therefore, that the seeds for a successful marriage have a variety of qualities. There must be mutual attraction. Outward beauty alone is no guarantee of happiness, however, neither to the one who possesses it nor to the beholder. Nor are common ideals, Christian or otherwise, sufficient grounds in themselves for marriage, though they will contribute greatly to its success. Ideally, there must be a fully mutual appeal of the one person for the other, and a corresponding willingness to possess and to be possessed for life.

Whilst perfection of the marriage relationship, whether physical or otherwise, remains an ideal even in the best marriages, there are means whereby the imperfections can be minimized. From the professional experience of one of the authors - a family physician - it can be said that where a real companionship exists, founded upon oneness of mind and outlook, the physical side of marriage is almost always satisfactory. Supremely, the true marriage of two sincere believers has the most favourable circumstances in which to produce also a happy physical union. When, therefore, the Bible directed believers in Christ only to marry "in the Lord", that is, to marry a similar believer, it was not simply seeking to ensure a sound spiritual basis to family life, but it was also contributing to married happiness in every sense, including the physical unity associated with marriage.

A higher love

Is it to be assumed, then, that unity of mind and outlook will remove all unevenness's of sexual relationships, especially those occurring during the early part of marriage and, perhaps, in later life? Of course not. But, the Christian life brings Christian qualities to bear upon all that the Christian does. He is guided by a higher love than is found in the finest merely human companionship. This love *"is patient and kind; is not jealous or boastful; is not arrogant or rude; does not insist on its own way; is not irritable or resentful."*

Thinking on these lines will transform any situation. Try it in the human situation of love, even in the most intimate sense in marriage, and discover whether it is not the key to greater happiness. A thoughtless or rough husband will thereby find considerable guidance for his behaviour in sexual as in other matters. A cold, unsatisfying or forgetful wife will learn something to her advantage from the same precepts.

This is not to say that Christians do not have problems in their marriages, and in particular with this side of marriage. Marriage is the blending together of two human beings, and human nature is pretty difficult material to work with. On account of the physical make-up of the partners or because of the cyclical bodily changes or of differing emotional influences, the man and his wife may have completely different attitudes towards sex. A very common problem, familiar to every medical man engaged in family practice, is the marriage in which the woman does not have the desire to partake

in sexual activity to the same extent as her husband. The reasons may not be far to seek: tiredness after an exhausting day coping with home and children; a more reserved temperament with a corresponding lack of responsiveness; an over-eager husband with a lack of tenderness and understanding; or, simply, the fear of conceiving another child. In such circumstances, a wife may seek more and more to avoid her husband and to ward off his advances. He, on the other hand, feels that he is not wanted and may be in danger of seeking satisfaction elsewhere with disastrous consequences to their marriage.

A careful re-reading of the Scriptures on page 4 will help a great deal. The secret of understanding lies in seeking to look at problems from the other partner's point of view. It is essential to consider the needs of each other and to seek to satisfy them. Little is gained by speaking of "rights" or by making "demands". Love does not insist on its own way. A quiet talk with one another in the spirit of patience and sympathy will find a way to mutual satisfaction and to full harmony of marriage.

A married man or woman must not seek to find an outlet for sexual desire outside the marriage bonds. Wayward thoughts must be dismissed even when they require very little to provoke them. The Bible makes it plain that illicit associations are shameful and sinful:

"Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous."

A man or woman should seek to preserve the marriage vows with the same instinct by which we seek to save our lives. Marriage is part of ourselves: the injury we cause to it, we cause to ourselves.

A matter of conscience

But, to return to our theme of problems in marital union: what about a wife's fear of pregnancy? There is no doubt that for some it is a constant and real fear. Is it right that every sexual act should expose a wife to gnawing anxiety which not only diminishes her pleasure but arouses her defensive mechanism to the detriment of both partners? On the other hand, is it right to take any steps to avoid this fear, to render conception impossible or the risk minimal? In other words, what of contraception?

This is no place in which to discuss the mechanics of this subject but it is the place to discuss principles, thereby paving the way for the exercise of every man's conscience in the sight of God.

We have established earlier that procreation is not the purpose of every occasion of intercourse in a well-balanced and happy marriage. The profusion of human "seed" in man and woman and its discharge from the person by various normal processes is an indication in itself that there is nothing "holy" in the seed as such. Venting the human seed is not akin to loss of "life" or of "persons unborn" or anything of that kind. Nor are there countless immortal souls awaiting access to the fusion of a male and female seed. The Bible knows nothing about these speculations of men. In discussing the discharge of human seed, the law of God to the Jews counselled them to wash themselves and to observe certain ritual acts as a discipline of the mind and as an indication that the seed of man, when it comes to the birth, is in need of redemption. We conclude, therefore, that the prevention of the blending of male and female seed is not of itself destroying life or any such thing.

On the other hand, are there dangers associated with the use of contraception? Undoubtedly, there can be - moral dangers. The easy availability of contraceptives has led to an increase in intimate relationships outside the confines of marriage. In these circumstances, moral constraints have been cast away, and many people today regard pleasure of this kind as legitimate. The teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ is clear: such practices are evil. Moreover, the Bible makes it clear that God repays

repeated sexual promiscuity by diseases peculiar to that form of living. Twentieth century western society has an alarming degree of incidence of such afflictions, and the prevalence is increasing, particularly among young people. For this reason, it is to be understood that whilst contraception may serve one purpose, it can bring dread consequences in other fields. Wherein modern methods of avoiding pregnancy have been an encouragement to some people to indulge in dissolute living, they have not been a blessing.

But what about the use of contraceptives by married people? Is there any danger here? There can be. Over-indulgence in sex, like any other disproportion in life, has its evils. It is possible, even within marriage, to reduce that which can be a satisfying, beautiful experience of mind and body to the unbridled gratification of lust. Marriage does not give licence to the degrading of one partner by the other, or of each by both. If contraceptives become the means of unleashing wrongful passion, then they are not serving a good purpose.

Is contraception, then, an evil? May it have any part in Christian marriage? We have already said that we consider this to be a matter of mutual conscience between married partners in the sight of God. It would, however, be hypocritical to pretend that avoidance of pregnancy by one means or another has not been practised from antiquity, long before the more sophisticated means of a modern age became available. By this is meant not the mere abstinence from intercourse. The earlier reference on page 4 makes it plain that the Bible considers abstinence as unusual and not the norm of married life. Clearly, whilst having normal relationships almost all married couples have in one way or another sought to avoid the possibility of conception. Provided that true love exists and the unity is not marred by sinful thought or intent as mentioned above, we know of no Scripture which forbids such avoidance. Medical or physical or emotional reasons may be advanced, and may be valid in individual instances, for not using this or that or, perhaps, any method of prevention, but this is not a Christian dictate.

In view of the way in which the Abortion Act is working in Britain, perhaps mention should be made of "abortion". There is obviously a difference between prevention of the mingling of male and female seed, and the deliberate termination of a pregnancy. Without entering into the many arguments which have raged around this subject, it is salutary to note that God regarded the loss of an unborn child when caused by a man's violence against the mother-to-be as a matter requiring compensation even if the woman suffered no lasting harm (see *Exodus 21 : 22-25*). It was not treated as murder. Therefore, God did not regard the unborn child as a "person". It is in God's eyes an injury against the woman and against her husband to cause the woman to abort. Taking this lead, therefore, we feel that it is not in keeping with the Christian way of life to secure an abortion except on the strongest medical grounds, e.g. when the mother's life is endangered. Personal convenience or economic reasons are not acceptable.

Before ending this aspect of the main subject, it is right that we emphasize that the normal marriage in Bible terms should produce offspring. The number and frequency may be something which most couples will wish to determine for themselves as far as possible. It would be a sad thing, however, if the order of our priorities was disturbed by a wrong emphasis on the economic difficulties of our age to the detriment of the betterness which lies in having a family of one's own. This is a living expression of that truly wonderful and deeply satisfying companionship of two persons pledged to each other for life.

Adolescence

One of the strange phenomena of modern western society is the unnatural jump which children are encouraged to make from childhood to maturity. The steady growth and development which are intended to build the bridge from one time of life to another are ignored or artificially shortened. Far

from being a waste of time, youth is a distinct time of life, a very real time, a process by which both body and mind are released from the dependence of childhood and brought to the experience and responsibilities of adult life. This transition is a process which should be enjoyed as one of the delights of life. It is sad to see the developing teenager trying to lose his very precious years by simulating the grown man in dress or in habits. Being young is a joy not to be squandered or distorted or wrinkled by premature anticipations of later life.

The changes which take place in the human body during adolescence are true, fundamental experiences. Properly understood, they are taken naturally in one's stride; when occurring in ignorance or under stress or thoughtless exploitation, they can adversely affect a formerly happy and pleasant personality. Trite or platitudinous advice on this well-worn subject would be worse than useless. Therefore, the following remarks describe some of the advantages which attach to growing up in a good Christian environment.

First of all, it is good to remember that the atmosphere in which children are brought up is created by the parents. Ill-mannered, unprincipled, loosely moralised parents are unlikely to give a good start to their family. The decline in Christian thinking and living in British homes has been accompanied by a drastic fall in moral standards, and there are few who would not acknowledge the connexion between these two parts of life. It is true that some believe that the new "freedoms" of the past decade are the result of casting off the shackles of a prudish and restrictive age. Whatever our viewpoint, the increase in the numbers of broken homes, unmarried mothers and cases of venereal disease among young people should give all of us serious food for thought. It is *undeniable* that the observance of Christian principles, or even of the Ten Commandments of Moses, would considerably reduce these unhappy circumstances. Jewish parents were given the following commands by God, and they account for the very strong family ties which persist among that people:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and talk of them when you sit down in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."

There is no substitute for good parents. The influences of teachers at school or of youth leaders or of mass teaching by television cannot stand in for the power for good in united and good homes. Parents who fail to take hold of the reins of responsibility for the upbringing of the children they have brought into the world, are undoubtedly rendering a grave disservice to the young and are abnegating one of the prime responsibilities of marriage. "Let them find out for themselves" is as dangerous in the development of children in this bewildering age as it is to throw a child who cannot swim into water beyond its depth. The Bible says that children need discipline. There is good evidence, in the world around us that the Bible is right. Discipline does not mean harsh corporal punishment or stern repression, nor does it entail cruel impositions or a denial of the joys of living. Rather is it the inculcation by precept and example of wholesome, beneficial principles. This can be helped along considerably by daily Bible reading in a loving, uncensorious, nurturing atmosphere in a freely communicative and happy home.

Healthy understanding

"Let them find out for themselves" is sheer folly when it comes to sex. Good parents pave the way for their children from the tenderest years to a simple and healthy understanding of sex and reproduction. Questions and answers are the obvious way: nothing can stop children asking questions, and parents should take the opportunities they offer with both hands. Keeping pets, sharing the excitement of expecting a new birth in the family and the judicious provision of the right level of reading material are unfailing means of getting home the right information at the right time

and of having a right attitude to it. Unseemly stories, suggestive expressions and doubtful reading material and illustrations about the home are equally certain means of breaking down the defences of young minds.

By the time sexual changes are apparent in the body and new sensations occur in the mind, young people in Christian homes will have been well prepared. At this critical time, parental forbearance is essential, especially when young people surprise themselves by upsurges of self-assertion in a very positive manner or by sudden fits of tears or other outbursts aroused by new but very powerful feelings. Understanding, sympathetic advice and scope for activity suitable for maturing persons are helpful, particularly when stress is apparent. One of the surest ways of complicating the problems which adolescents experience is for parents to pretend the problems do not exist, or equally bad, to forbid youthful activity in the home. Ostrich-like behaviour on the part of parents can be the cause of a great deal of unhappiness. The right place for dealing with problems is on home ground and young people should accordingly be encouraged to talk freely and to bring their friends into the home. There must be mutual respect throughout the family and a realization that young people are individuals and not simply an extension of their parents' lives. By this means, the whole family can pool its experiences, exchange views and share life together. Wise Christian counsel sympathetically given or made available will dispel many difficulties and nip problems in the bud before some of them bring forth bitter fruits.

A right balance

Apron strings are no substitute for reciprocal confidence and mutual trust. It is impossible for parents to monitor everything their young people do, nor is it desirable that they should attempt to do so. Well-laid principles, honestly believed and followed, are better than a thousand finger-wagging and constant suspicious checks on behaviour. This does not mean giving way to those prevalent and undesirable practices whereby parents go out for the night and hand over the home to a crowd of teenagers without any senior, responsible member present to ensure sensible behaviour. Worse still is the all-night party, when young folks are allowed to pair off in various parts of the house. Emotions and responses can be aroused which soon lead to sexual involvement and, maybe, irretrievable loss of integrity of person. There are other and more innocent ways in which young people can enjoy the adventure and pleasure of mixing with the opposite sex and of forming friendships. For parents to forbid it is to stand Cnut-like against nature's sea. To give it unbridled and provocative expression is to be overwhelmed by a flood of sorrow.

Striking the right balance is a matter of judgment which must be developed against the background of understanding between young people and their parents. Enlarging the home circle by welcoming other young people is a truly pleasurable experience, and is an excellent basis for young people's personal friendships. Not that two young people whose friendship is becoming more than a casual attachment can be denied privacy. They must not be denied it. It is only at such times - and perhaps in letters one to the other - that there is a true exchange of minds. Privacy, then, is a privilege of friendship and when it is granted in the right place, at the right time and in the right circumstances it will not place temptation in the way of innocent hearts. It goes almost without saying that long periods at night or in bedrooms or in scanty dress do not satisfy the conditions which are wise and proper.

On being young

This section deals with only part of the joys of youth and only part of the problems. It is written out of love for and long acquaintance with young people, in the family circle and elsewhere. Much has been said in recent times about the irresponsibility and selfishness of youth. Our own experience has provided an antidote to the current "anti-youth" feelings to be found in some quarters. We know many fine young people who are a credit to youth in general and all the more so when measured

against the complexities and trends of our age. The following paragraphs, therefore, are written in the hope that they will be of help to such young people, and to others who might wish to improve their standards or overcome some of the difficulties which accompany the processes of growing up.

We become aware of these processes when it is obvious to us that our bodies are developing and our minds are beginning to experience a broadening of their horizons. This is an exciting and unique time. Suddenly, we are aware of the beauty of someone who yesterday seemed but a girl and now is a young woman, or of the handsome dash of a young man whose deepened voice and strength betoken the end of boyhood. We sense a power of attraction in ourselves and are ourselves responsive to the attraction in others. A wish for friendship of a special kind is awakened in us and some of the inner feelings are strangely poignant and powerful. Our behaviour is often an odd mixture of shyness and assertion, and we scarcely recognize our old selves.

Youth is a gift from God and He knows how it can be best enjoyed. It is precious and comes only once, bringing fragile qualities, exquisitely keen emotions and deep-seated ideals. Moreover, as we become conscious of our individuality and independence, we sense that there are parts of our person and personality which are not for everyone; they are reserved to ourselves or some one person in particular.

Youth is both sensitive and vigorous: how to care for it has engaged the minds of thinkers throughout the ages. There is one way which is supremely commendable - the Christian way, the way of discipleship. Some young people have imagined that to follow Christ is to take the pleasure out of life. Nothing could be wider of the mark. True discipleship is the perfection of joy in the highest sense. Without any degree of cant or superficiality, it can be said that young people who choose the path of Christ are the happiest young people on earth. They need no artificial aid to give them a lift, or kicks or to get them "high". Their joy is realistic and clear-sighted, well-founded and enduring. To those who have joys of a different kind, whether by the artificialities we have mentioned or by following their own philosophy of life, it can be said that the best is yet in store - the deeper, wider and fearless happiness of following the highest ideals of all time and the finest leader ever known, the teaching and leadership of Christ.

In passing, reference must be made to other forces which come from the storehouse of the human heart: such powerful attitudes as jealousy, hate, envy, greed, selfishness and deceit. We are not blamed by God for having a heart which is able to devise these things; after all, we have inherited our nature from our parents. But the Bible makes us aware of the dark powers of our own minds and of the consequences which result from giving them free expression. At the same time, Bible teaching shows us a better way of using our thoughts.

Take, for example, those first feelings of love for someone of the opposite sex. They are sometimes described as "heavenly", "divine" or "fabulous". What we really mean is that the experience is extremely pleasant. But, think what can happen when we inject the poison of jealousy, envy or the other undesirable emotions of our "other" self into the human situation. We can destroy our happiness - and, that of someone else. A Christian has special signposts which help him to avoid the pitfalls of temptation which might ruin the joys of friendship or the nobler ideals to which we aspire. Good living and good thinking are not attained by chance or casual effort - the darker side of our hearts is too powerful to let that happen. No, there must be conscious effort and a sound basis. That is why daily Bible reading is an unfailing source of instruction, and prayer a means of steadying the thoughts and keeping them in contact with God. A man is known by the company he keeps: choose the right company - always. Books are a powerful influence - read the right kind of literature and daily newspaper. Take stock every day of what has been achieved. By these means, proper and

lasting pleasures can be developed in the context of the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Being in love" will be a pure, lovely and unashamed happiness.

How far?

One is sometimes asked how far it is permissible to go in love-making, even when marriage has not been promised between the parties concerned. "How far" means how far in the physical sense of physical contact with the one for whom at that time there is a strong affinity.

In answering what is a very good question, it might be helpful to ask a series of different questions: with whom? how did we meet? what have we really in common? what is the real purpose of showing in some physical way our affection? is it to catch a fleeting pleasure? is it part of what we feel in our minds - a true desire to show in some tangible way what is a true affection?

The fact is that when we have begun seriously to exchange physical affection - caresses, kisses and the like - we have begun to tap that very precious store of personal things which each of us possesses. In this, every man, and especially the disciple of Christ, needs to walk with care. "How far?", then, begins with "with whom?" We need to exercise care in the choice of companions, the friends with whom we share our leisure (a plentiful commodity in modern society). Not only are we known by the company we keep: the more we keep it, the more like it we become. Quite simply, if we choose bad company because it is bad, the Bible says:

"Do not be deceived: bad company ruins good morals."

Therefore, we must choose well when we select our boy or girl friend. An attractive form or a pretty face is not a substitute for a clean mind. The finest minds come from association with fine things: the finest things come from God.

Elsewhere, the Bible puts it another way:

"Can a man carry fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?"

Obviously, not. Therefore, bad company, bad thoughts and bad practices scar the mind, pollute the processes of thought and breed evil deeds. Conversely, good company, good thoughts and good practices fortify the mind, purify the desires and make themselves known in a good way of living. There is a general principle of Scripture which helps here:

"Do not be mis-mated with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?"

It is often too late to ask "how far?" in love making when the wrong lover has been chosen. Get the right companion and the question takes another form: How best do I show my love as a Christian lover? and what should I expect to take in return?

Love is a process

Two lovers with the same standards will find a common response to the sound principles of Christ whenever they are alone. Love is a process and not simply a passion: love needs time and not haste and thoughtlessness. First there are the overtures, the means of "getting to know" each other - conversations, the exchange of letters, the close observance (even from afar!) of the one in whom we are particularly interested, the times spent together and the exchange of confidences. These lead on to an awareness and trust, a respect and loyalty, which accompany an increasing affection. When the friendship has ripened in this way - and, especially, when we have visited each other's homes and seen something of the kind of life that is lived - how far, then, can we go?

It is unfortunate that the level of modern conversation, and certain types of television programme and magazine, have made kisses very cheap currency. Kisses between two individuals alone are of most value when reserved for the one whom time and proof have singled out as thereby entitled. She who grants kisses easily and takes caresses from all and sundry, may find she has very little in reserve by which to betoken the real feelings of love when they are aroused.

This leads us a step further. Kisses and caresses, repeatedly given and taken by two persons alone for a long period of time, lead almost imperceptibly to an irresistible desire to give expression to love in the most intimate way possible between two human beings. This expression is reserved for marriage. Repeat, *this is reserved for marriage* and should not be entered upon outside those precious bonds. By those who would follow Christ, this principle is upheld. A Christian lover, even when engaged to be married, would not wish to pursue his love-making so as to imperil and, perhaps, blight for ever, that final unique status of which each of us is possessed and which God has arranged to be exchanged in wedlock. It is not to be imagined that stolen fruit is the same fruit as that which marriage gives. It is not; it cannot be, and it can have a bitter centre. The other has increasing joy. True lovers who wish to follow the highest ideals and find the lasting and true pleasures which marriage affords, will shun those things which stimulate to undesirable limits, and will not seek time or opportunity to put unbearable tension on the brittle strands of human strength. There is a time, therefore, when "No further" is the reply to "How far?" There is a time when "How far?" has given way to ultimate possession of one by the other: that time is when life together has begun and the marriage bonds have made it plain that we are irrevocably committed to one another.

A mixture of sad experiences

Several times a year, every doctor engaged in family practice is confronted with a girl for whom life will never be the same again. Her tears express her sorrows and fear. She is afraid of parental reaction, of social opinion, of losing her job or of having to discontinue her education and she is ashamed to face the world in which she previously moved in freedom and joy. All this is followed by a lifetime of looking back and regretting the foolishness of youth. Quite possibly, a distorted attitude towards sex will result and with it an inability to find sexual happiness in marriage.

Her condition is indicative of a widespread breach of the personal chastity which should characterize wholesome living. She is the one whose sin has found her out; there are many who remain undetected. Let us make our convictions clear in this matter, too: the evil does not lie in the fact that an unmarried girl becomes an unmarried mother. It is more basic than that: the evil lies in having intercourse before marriage. Some girls are to be more pitied than blamed, and others more blamed than pitied. The same goes for the young man. But let none of us be priggish and self-righteous in this matter. None is exempt from the temptation to commit such sin and young Christians should not under-estimate the power of desire when once it is awakened. Many mighty men and women have fallen both before and after marriage to illicit associations. The outstanding example in Bible history is king David's act of adultery with the beautiful Bathsheba.

Sin is roused in only three ways: by what the eyes see, by what the body desires and by man's insufferable pride. Therefore, the surest course by which to fortify one's heart against temptation is to control the use of one's eyes, to avoid provoking the latent desires of the body to wrong uses and to learn to walk humbly before God. The first of these is difficult in an age when the mass media transmit the suggestive and the provocative. Moreover, the modern dress of women and men is designed to give accent to the appeal of the eye. It is true, of course, that we can be sexually provocative in any kind of clothes. There are, however, at the present time, degrees of near-indecency in the diminishing length of dress and the increasing exposure of parts of the body. The soundest advice which can be given to any who wish to endorse the highest principles is this: "Is the

nature of my dress and the reason for adopting it such as would cause no embarrassment to Christ and no shame to me, were Christ and I to be face to face?"

Positive thinking

But, real progress is made in this as in every other aspect of character by positive thinking. The Bible puts it this way-and, surely, there could be nothing better:

"Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious - think about these things."

Bible thinking is clean thinking. If a young man or woman will take this to heart and, in addition, follow the practical advice given on pages 12 and 13, no evil will result and, what is more important, there will be a joy and contentment of mind undisturbed by inconvenient desires.

At this point, it is suitable to mention something which troubles a lot of young people of both sexes, particularly young men. Whilst not seeking opportunity for wrongful association with a member of the opposite sex, there is ample play within the mind upon themes of that kind. These are stirred in a variety of ways not least among which are the sexual provocations which come through the impact of television, magazines, books and the manner of dress of the opposite sex. The result is the desire to seek relief of pent up feelings and this is done by physical excitation of the sensitive parts of the body. Sometimes, of course, the stimulus might come through wholly innocent means.

What is one to say concerning this subject? Obviously, it lies in a different category in some respects from the matter with which this chapter began. Some writers have treated it in a matter-of-fact way and taken it for granted like eating or having a bath. However, it is more likely than not that the thoughts associated with such practices would not find a place in the catalogue of edifying, acceptable food for thought given in the verse of Scripture quoted above. For that reason, if for no other, we should seek not to be caught up in such habits or, if already enmeshed, to escape.

The way to improvement

Little purpose is served simply by being filled with self-pity or morbid self-reproach. The way to improvement is to engage mind and body in other things. Substitution of the better for the worse is a sound Bible remedy - and, it works. To begin and end each day in prayer is medicine in itself: moreover, it gets to work at those times of our waking hours when we are most vulnerable to idle thought. Wholesome reading is the second cure. The Bible heads the list but there are many other books which give the mind something to bite on. Good companionship is remedy number three. Talking it over with someone else is a marvellous help. Choose someone who is understanding, trustworthy and approachable. Don't neglect good fresh air and the exercise which young bodies need. Set yourself high ideals, Bible ideals, and seek to live up to them by every means in your power.

Do not be discouraged if, because you are already caught up in the habit, you do not succeed in overcoming it in a single heave. A man we knew gave sound advice when talking about how to conquer bad habits. Set yourself a limited objective, he used to say, a target you can reasonably hope to attain, and gradually lengthen it until your habit is weakening and you are getting on top of it. There is a depth of understanding behind that advice. Try it.

An economic problem

Now to another matter. Marriage these days is far different from the simple, public acknowledgement of Old Testament times, when a man and woman had little courtship as we know it, and were married as soon as convenient after the decision to marry had been taken (read Genesis 24 for one of the most exquisite records in Scripture). Today, economic circumstances make for long

courtships, in most cases at any rate. When the initial phase is passed, the friendship merges into companionship based on love and mutual desire. If nature's course were followed, marriage would not be long delayed once the two hearts were beginning to beat as one. But nature and economics are not always good friends, and a long period often elapses during which financial preparation is made for setting up home. This does not interrupt the meetings of lovers, indeed it tends to make them more fervent and filled with longing.

Whereas, therefore, nature's course would have resulted in physical union, this is put off by the frustration of circumstances. A number of voices from various quarters, including leaders of religion in some cases, have begun to say that pre-marital intercourse between two people pledged to marry is natural and proper. Bible teaching is plain: marriages are sealed by this final act of giving and receiving. It is known as "*two becoming one flesh*". That is marriage - at least on the purely physical side. To anticipate it is to undermine the protecting wall which safeguards the uniqueness of married life. Moreover, and we cannot say this too strongly, the experience of pre-marital union is not the experience of union within the marriage bond; it lacks the essential qualities of mind which signify that two persons are living one life in one home. Union reflects the separation of two people from all others and the establishment of a nerve centre from which the mutual happiness springs. Therefore, we are not simply waiting for the marriage lines to give sanction to complete union; we are waiting for the right conditions for such fulfilment.

Finally, in this chapter of sad experiences, we must needs refer to acts which modern society condones contrary to the direct counsel of scripture. We refer to sexual activity between members of the same sex. Undoubtedly, there are mentally sick people in whom abnormalities of behaviour are sometimes found. They need sympathy and special treatment. It is not of them that we write. Our words are directed against the deliberate fostering of monosexual behaviour which is altogether contrary to the decrees of God. Read Genesis 19 and see for yourself. Read Romans 1:24-32 and see whether or not such a way of life is likely to lead to contentment of mind and happiness. Man is made for woman and woman for man in these matters; and marriage is the basis of it all. Anything else is wrong.

But supposing . . . ?

But, supposing someone has been involved in one or other of the sad experiences we have described, or others which are related but have not appeared in our comments? Is there no way of redeeming the position? Are we cut off from God for ever? Does God condemn us for a single act of folly or for a habit which we want to break? Of course not. God wants us. However black the past has been, be assured that you can be washed clean of all past sins and start life afresh as a sanctified member of the household of God.

When Jesus was here, his company was sought by people of ill-repute. Not because he condoned their sins, but because he made them want to forsake them. Surprising things happened to what must have seemed to be incorrigible sinners. Turn up *1 Corinthians 6:9-11*, if you would really like to know what a difference it made to some people including the immoral, and adulterers and homosexuals. When the teaching of Christ comes in and we espouse the desire to serve him, then evil ways drop off and we can make a new start. That is what repentance is about. That is why baptism in water was chosen by Christ as the simple ritual act for every adult believer. As water washes the body, so Christ cleanses the mind.

Cleansing is not restricted to those who are beginning to serve Christ. It is offered to those who, having begun to serve him, fall into sin and want to be restored. Forgiveness is freely available for those who fully repent.

True repentance will be followed by forgiveness and a new way of life. Christ improves everything he touches and the ordinary experiences of life are no exception. The affairs of men and women take on a new perspective. Courtship develops a fresh beauty; marriage has an added dimension; and, life has a fuller meaning, purposeful and full of hope. Human marriage is seen to be a reflection of something far greater, the relationship between Christ and his church. The love of Christ for her, and her complete dependence upon him are a model on which marriage, true marriage, is based. But, whereas human marriage is simply for a lifetime, discipleship is for ever. Moreover, when the Lord Jesus Christ comes back to the earth in the day when God's kingdom shall be established over all the wide face of the globe, the bride of Christ will be blessed with the beauty of everlasting life which she will spend with him in endless joy.

Scripture References

Scriptures quoted or referred to are given below. Most of the Scriptures are from the Revised Standard Version.

Page	
1	Song of Solomon 2:10-13
1	Mark 10:6-8
1	Genesis 2:18
2	Mark 10:9
2	Genesis 1:28; 9:1
2	Deuteronomy 6:6; 5:16, 21
3	Psalms 103:13
3	John 14:1-2
3	Isaiah 66:13; 61:10
3	Genesis 1:12
4	Genesis 24:67; 1 Corinthians 7:4, 5
5	Ephesians 5:21-33
5	1 Corinthians 7:39
5	1 Corinthians 13:4, 5
6	Hebrews 13:4
6-7	Leviticus 15:16; Deuteronomy 23:10
8	Deuteronomy 6:5-7
8	Hebrews 12:5-8; Proverbs 13:24; 19:18
10	Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:1
11	1 Corinthians 15:33
11	Proverbs 6:27
11	2 Corinthians 6:14
12	2 Samuel 11
12	1 John 2: 15-16; Genesis 3:6
13	Philippians 4:8
14	Matthew 19:4-6; 1 Corinthians 6:16
15	Matthew 9:10-13; Luke 15:12
15	1 Peter 3: 21; 2 Corinthians 7:1
15	Ephesians 5:21-33