

Reigning Grace

And The
Marriage
Relationship

"6 Studies on Positional Truth"

Reigning Grace and the Marriage Relationship

Six Studies on positional truth
designed to assist and strengthen all relationships

Patrick J. Griffiths



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“For Christ and His Church”

AUTHOR

Dr. Patrick Griffiths is an energetic teacher with a passion to shout the supremacy of God in all things, by finding, celebrating, and declaring that Jesus Christ is enough in this life and in the life to come. This is achieved through the systematic study of God's Word, an activity Pat has dedicated his life to. He was saved at the age of 17, immediately enrolled in Bible College, and subsequently pursued an M.Div, Th.M, and a D.Min degree. For over 25 years he has taught students of all ages and has mentored many for the next generation of vocational ministers. His heart lies in the local church and her mission to carry this message of grace to every tongue, tribe, people and nation.

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INTRODUCTION



The Bible speaks to a single *Story*. It is a *Story* that has God as the author. It is not simply a story, among many and equals, but rather **the** *Story* from which all other stories find their meaning. At the center of the *Story* is Jesus Christ the Beloved and only Begotten Son of God the Father. His primacy is portrayed through pictures and promises. These overtures to the Son's arrival are shadows given to point His people back to the *Story's* author and theme.

The shadows are woven into the very fiber and fabric constituting life. In the midst of this rich tapestry rests the marriage covenant. It is a covenant agreed upon between two people and those two in union with God. The New Testament speaks of this union as a shadow of Jesus Christ and His Church (Eph. 5). **The one pictures and promises the other. Jesus Christ is the means and the end of the marriage union. In His absence the shadow lacks the foundation and goal for meaning.**

Because many miss this imagery and significance, they are ill-equipped to enter into covenant with another who would become their spouse. Promises made with good intentions leave hearts empty. Failed expectations prevent the frustrated and discouraged from rising above their circumstances and embracing the hope that rests firmly in Christ.

George Barna notes how, "Born again Christians are just as likely to get divorced as are non-born again adults. Overall, 33% of all born again individuals who have been married have gone through a divorce, which is statistically identical to the 34% incidence among non-born again adults."¹

If this is true, then what difference does a profession of faith in Christ Jesus make? Does Jesus Christ really matter? **It is my firm conviction that Jesus Christ does matter.** The problem does not lie with Christ but with our erroneous understanding as to what forms the foundation for the Christian life, especially in the relationship of marriage. This foundation is the only means for persevering (Matt. 7:24-27, "A wise man built his house on the rock") and prospering (Psalm 127:1, "Unless the Lord builds the house").

Unfortunately, we have forsaken the foundation of the Christian life and have recklessly cast ourselves into the abyss without securing the only means of deliverance. Because of this negligence many people have relationships resembling lifeless plastic plants, not rooted in anything of substance. A real plant pulsates with life because it is embedded in nutritionally rich soil. Given consistent light and water, it will grow. The real plant can get dirty, its leaves will need trimming, it will require sunshine and water, but it is alive and it will grow. In order for our lives and our relationships to live and grow, they must be firmly rooted in the soil of who Christ is, what He has done, and who His people are in Him.

Often pre-marital and marriage conflict “counseling” focuses on behavior modification. Such counseling reduces the “problems” in marriage to a list of what to do and not to do. Such direction is shallow and mechanical. It is very much like the plastic plant noted earlier. It might look good, but there is no life supporting it. Unfortunately, Christian “counseling” can be as anemic as its secular counterpart. It is the premise of this study that all relationships, and especially that of marriage, must first be firmly rooted in the truth of Jesus Christ before any attempt is made to apply the teaching on marriage found in the New Testament.



Frequently, New Testament commands or imperatives are viewed apart from their biblical context. All the **descriptive** commands of the New Testament are always preceded by the reality of who Christ is, what He has done, and who His people are in Him. This is often referred to by biblical theologians as the **indicative/imperative dynamic**. In context, the imperatives are **descriptive of one’s position in Christ**, not a prescription for behavior. **What’s the difference between a description and a prescription?** A description provides a detailed account of someone or something. It seeks to picture in words an object or idea. A prescription provides direction with the intent of fixing something that is broken. In our context, if the commands are descriptions, then they provide a word picture of what a believer looks like. If they are prescriptions, then their intent is to fix what is broken. **Commands cannot fix anything. Commands are consequences of a life fused to and changed by the cross.**² Only God, manifested in the flesh working through the cross, can fix it. Thus, the idea of the command being descriptive and not prescriptive forms the substance of how they are to be viewed. On this singular thought hinges much of how we approach the marriage relationship. We commonly understand the word prescriptive in the context of medicine. If the commands are prescriptive, then they provide a direction of a remedy or of remedies for a problem. Thus the problems of marriage are addressed through the prescribing of the New Testament commands addressing the



relationship. **However, if the commands are descriptive, then they describe something that already exists or can exist because of something else. They stand as consequences of a relationship with God and not the cause for one's relationship with God and within the context of the marriage covenant.**

Another way of considering this idea is the difference between a diagnosis and a prognosis. When anyone visits his or her doctor with an ailment, the doctor offers an initial diagnosis. Their diagnosis is on the evidence of the condition. From the diagnosis, they offer a prognosis. The prognosis flows from the diagnosis. It is their projected outcome of the disease or noted condition. In the case of fallen humanity, both the diagnosis and the prognosis are fallible. No doctor can predict with 100% infallibility the outcome of any condition.

Our English word “prognosis” comes from the Greek word *prognosis*. It means, “To know beforehand” and describes God. Diagnosis is determining what it is; prognosis is the likely outcome of the diagnosis. The outcome of His initiating action is . . . and unlike our fallible outcomes, God's outcome is infallible. Thus, based on the diagnosis of who you are in Christ, the prognosis are all of the commands and imperatives. Such commands and imperatives describe the outcome of God's work in saving sinners.

Perhaps another way of explaining this idea is to see the method taken by the writers of the New Testament Letters. Often the first section or half of a Letter is identified as indicative truth. Truth that is objective and established by God. The second section of the Letter is often noted as the ethical or moral consequences of the objective ideas. Stress is often laid on the “what I'm to do because I'm a Christian” imperative nature of the second section. Yet a better way of reading the New Testament Letter is to see the first section as the diagnosis and the second section as the prognosis. The diagnosis tells us what is true. The second section tells us what will now happen because of the underlying condition. For example, if you go to the doctors for a head cold and he says you have an infected sinus and bronchitis, which is the diagnosis. The prognosis is, take this antibiotic and you will get better. The prognosis is, however, fallible. You might not get better. Even the diagnosis is fallible since it comes from a fallible source. But when the New Testament tell us God is a God of great mercy (i.e. the diagnosis), the outcome of this is you are born again (i.e. the prognosis) and both of those actions are infallible because God is infallible (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Thus, to look at the commands of Scripture outside of their context is to have a plastic plant. When we look at the commands of Scripture embedded in positional truth, that is, the truth of what we are in Christ, then the commands come alive within us.

We all hope that our marriages will reflect the relationships depicted in Ephesians 5:22-23 and Colossians 3:18-22. However, we often fail to consider the verses cited are embedded in the truths expressed in the previous chapters. The marriage passages present the consequence of a foundational understanding of our position in Christ, what we refer to as “positional truth.” Unfortunately, we want the results of positional truth without understanding positional truth. **In effect, we want a Christian marriage without Christ.** We cannot have the fruit of positional truth without the supporting tree. It is only as we take the marriage relationship and plant it deeply into Christ and His cross-work that this relationship and all relationships will truly live and “grow.”

WHAT WE WANT ARE
THE RESULTS OF
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**WE WANT A
CHRISTIAN
MARRIAGE WITHOUT
CHRIST.**

You are invited to enter into this journey. You are invited to see Him; to see that the only **hope, healing, and wholeness for any and all relationships is found in Christ and in Christ alone.** When believers awaken to the riches of who they are in Christ and who Christ is in them, their understanding of these truths will blossom in all areas of life and is capable of bringing life to perceived hopelessness in all relationships.

Once the seed of the relationship has been embedded into the soil of positional truth, there are necessary activities that assist the plant in growing to full maturation. Watering, weeding, sunshine and trimming are all part of the process of nurturing and cultivating healthy relationships. Yet it must not be forgotten that, “Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain” (Ps. 127:1). This same principle is found in 1 Corinthians 3:6 and 7 which state it is God who causes the growth.

This study will not instruct you in how to “fix” relational problems. It will not give direction regarding finances, communication, intimacy, parenting or any other issue that can or might cause conflict. These are secondary studies and although necessary, they cannot precede or replace this foundational study (See further Volumes 2 and 3). These truths serve as a firm anchor for healthy relationships. It is believed that in Christ, hope and contentment can be found, even if relational problems are never resolved. This is often forgotten when embroiled in an emotional situation. Our reaction to conflict is directly related to our attitude and perspective. The intent of this study is to align our perspective with God’s and thereby find rest in Him regardless of our circumstances or emotional state knowing our story is part of His *Story*.



Throughout this study we will be using the term, “Positional Truth.” At the heart of this idea is that of “position.” Before an individual believes in the Lord Jesus Christ for their deliverance from sin and to God, the Bible describes them as being **positionally in Adam**, in sin. After an individual believes in the Lord Jesus Christ for their deliverance from sin and to God, the Bible describes them as being **positionally in Christ**, in righteousness. Once this great transfer takes place, God no longer sees you **in sin**, but **in Christ**. Thus, in His eyes, the individual is as holy, right, and accepted as Jesus Christ is before the Father. So . . . when we speak of “positional truth” we are referring to the believer’s righteous standing before the Father **because of being in Christ**.



As you study these areas, feel free to comment, interact and discuss. May God use these short studies to renew our minds for the purpose of life transformation inside of the marriage relationship?

¹ <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=170>

² “Imperatives minus indicatives equal impossibilities.” This is a short read between Tullian Tchividjian and Justin Taylor. It is well worth the time to read.

<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2010/05/26/an-interview-with-tullian-tchividjian-on-gospel-and-law/>

1

It is the Lord Christ Whom You Serve

(Colossians 3:18-4:1)

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, **as for the Lord rather than for men**, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance.
It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. (Colossians 3:23, 24)

YOU + YOUR SPOUSE + JESUS CHRIST = BIBLICAL WORSHIP & TRUE JOY

It is notable how every relationship is portrayed in Colossians 3:18-4:1. The statements we make in this study are true for all relationships, even though we are using marriage as our area of application. The relationship one has in marriage is built on the relationship one has in Christ. Our marriage relationship is to be a **consequence** of our relationship with Christ.

Modern Western medicine has had the tendency of treating symptoms without treating the underlying cause. Pharmaceutical companies make enormous amounts of money by medicating the population. We are slowly realizing the reason why certain sicknesses exist is because of underlying problems and the only way to fix the symptom is to treat the problem.



We are all in a process of change. Belief must always precede behavior. What you think (causation) always precedes what you do (consequence).

The marriage relationship is no different. People have problems in marriage and often they treat the symptoms, but ignore the underlying problem.¹ We might say to an individual, “You really need to obey your husband,” or “you really need to love your wife,” but such counsel is a Band-Aid when they really need a heart transplant. Today, I would like us to start a **heart transplant through mind renewal** (cf. Rom. 12:1, 2; Eph. 4:23).

On a personal note, in the early years of my marriage, I read a lot of books on marriage. I was concerned my marriage was not everything God expected . . . or at least I expected . . . or at least what I thought everyone else expected of my marriage. I found these books could not give me what I wanted. They were basically making me want to be married to the author rather than to my wife. So I stopped reading books about marriage. **It was not until I learned the truth about Christ and the nature of His work, that I have found contentment in my marriage.** Since that time we have experienced difficult circumstances and yet our love and loyalty for one another has never been greater.



In preparation for this study I once more visited books about marriage and for the most part I am saddened by their content.² One author wrote the following concerning being a wife:

“Functioning as a professional in all areas of marriage is the essence of being a creative counterpart.”³

If I were a wife, I would be completely frustrated with my inability to measure up to someone else’s idea of an ideal counterpart. Friend, there has to be a better way and the intent of this study is to show the better way. Let us begin by noting Colossians 3:18-4:1. Colossians 3 is one of several paragraphs in the Word of God that speak directly to the marriage relationship (1 Cor. 7; Eph. 5:21-33; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).



Introduction

Consider with me this initial thought concerning Colossians 3:18-4:1. Depending on your present mindset you will read this paragraph from a certain perspective and with certain presuppositions. Within the paragraph there are a series of commands (all of the following underlined words are commands/imperatives in the text). If your mindset is toward the treatment of symptoms this is what you will see (Remember the prescriptive/descriptive idea? [cf. p4]):

- Wives **submit** to your husbands (3:18)
- Husbands **love** your wives (3:19)
- **Do not be embittered** against them (3:19)
- Children **obey** your parents (3:20)
- Fathers **do not exasperate** your children (3:21)
- Slaves **obey** your masters on earth (3:22)
- Masters **grant justice and fairness** to your slaves (4:1)

Such a “prescription” might cause us to say, “Eureka, we found it. Herein is the solution to our problematic relationship.” We might walk away believing the problem is our wife

not submitting, or our husband not loving, but I believe the issue is greater than the lack of these **fruits** (key thought). To see the command/imperative in the absence of what is true is to look at the symptoms and not the underlying cause.

Chapters 3 and 4 in Colossians **show the consequence or result of positional truth** (cf. p6). Almost without exception the listing of Christ-like characteristics in chapters 3 and 4 are relational in nature. The truth of grace operates in the arena of relationships and this is nowhere more pronounced than in the family unit.

What must not be forgotten in looking at **this paragraph of commands is that it is all working from what is true**. This foundational truth stretches all the way back to 1:27 and following. Notice the following thoughts.

- Christ in you, the hope of glory (1:27). All of who He is (1:15-19) is now working for you, not against you (Rom. 8:31)
- In Him you have been made complete (2:10)
- We have been buried with Him and raised up with Him (2:12)
- We have been made alive with Him (2:13)
- He has forgiven us all our transgressions (2:13)
- He defeated the devil and his cohorts (2:15)
- No one is to act as our judge in regard to spiritual disciplines (2:16)
- We have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world (3:20)
- We have been raised with Christ (3:1)
- We have died with Christ and our life is hidden with Christ in God (3:3)
- Christ is our life (3:4)

It is because of all these truths, this present reality, this glorious **position in Christ**, that we now have the “Therefore” of 3:5. We should consider the members of our earthly body as dead; why, because **We died with Christ**. Look what verses 5-17 are saying. It is because of chapters 1 and 2 we have the exhortations of chapters 3 and 4.



All of these commands are nothing less and nothing more than spiritual **fruit**. And yet when we focus on the fruit, or lack thereof, we are focusing on the symptom and not the underlying cause for the fruit.

WE WANT REAL SOLUTIONS TO REAL PROBLEMS, SO THE QUESTION IS, “WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO?” AND THE ANSWER IS, “CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK.”

We are wired to want to do. We want real solutions to real problems, so the question is, “What do we have to do? How can we make this work?” And the answer is, “Change the way we think.” Let us begin by reflecting on four short statements forming the bedrock for any marriage relationship.

We begin by noting where the Book of Colossians begins before leading us to the imperatives.



We must understand Christ is to be the centerpiece of our lives (Col. 1:15-18; 3:1).

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For **by Him** all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created **through Him and for Him**. ¹⁷ **He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together**. ¹⁸ He is also **head** of the body, the church; and He is the **beginning**, the **firstborn** from the dead, so that **He Himself will come to have first place in everything** (Col. 1:15-18).

Therefore **if you have been raised up with Christ**, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1).

This is the tree from which the fruit of Colossians 3:18-4:1 is born. The tree producing this kind of fruit is planted in the soil of Jesus Christ. **We no longer need anything we do not already have in Him**. Christ is really the only one who matters. The circumstances of life are highly volatile and any relationship can be highly unpredictable. The one thing that is constant is Jesus Christ as the centerpiece of our lives. He is the anchor that keeps us from drifting.

If we do not know Jesus Christ as our own Savior from sin, death and hell, then Christ is not the centerpiece of our relationships. It is only as **we accept Him as our one and only Savior** that He becomes the acknowledged centerpiece of our lives and of our relationships. This leads us to our second short statement concerning our foundation in Christ.



We must understand we have died and our lives are now hidden with Christ in God (Col. 1:27; 2:12, 20; 3:3, 4).

. . . to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory** (Col. 1:27).

. . . **having been buried with Him in baptism**, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead (Col. 2:12).

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as (Col. 2:20).

³ For you have died and **your life is hidden with Christ in God**. ⁴ **When Christ, who is our life**, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory (Col. 3:3, 4).

What does this mean? Simply put, “The shadow can no longer hold us in bondage.” “He must increase, and we must decrease” (John 3:30). Regrettably, we live as if the shadow, (i.e. a nice house, a good job, obedient children, a comfortable existence and a wonderful spouse) is primary, when in reality it is only a shadow of the greater truth concerning Jesus Christ and God as Trinity. Shadows can never provide, they can only point. If we understand the Bible correctly and see life from God’s perspective, then we come to understand we deserve nothing short of damnation.

Our American ideology cultivates a spirit of entitlement that is flawed and dangerous. It has infected all of our relationships, especially marriage. It is because of this unsound ideology we live with discouragement and discontentment. Most of our frustration in marriage is due to **failed expectations**. We believed the person we married would be able to meet our needs and fulfill our wants. Unfortunately, we have placed too much emphasis on the shadow rather than the substance. **The shadow can only point; it can never provide**. When we look to the shadow, we will place a burden on the shadow it was never designed to carry and we will inevitably destroy the shadow. Realistically, as wonderful as our spouse is, they can never do for us what only God can (Remember, “First things First”). **Our focus is wrong. The issue is one of perspective.**

Listen carefully to Bob George in his work, *Victory over Depression: How to Live above your Circumstances*.

Like our emotions, unrealistic expectations toward life and other people aren’t unusual. **We come into this world with the idea that everything and everyone is here to make us happy**. By nature we are self-centered [emphasis added].⁴

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OF JESUS CHRIST.

Unrealistic expectations arise when **we don’t face life as it really is**, but instead look at life and people as we think they *should* be [emphasis added].⁵

Misplaced dependencies result when a person depends upon someone or something other than God for his happiness, self-worth or meaning in life. Misplaced dependencies naturally follow unrealistic expectations. If you expect your spouse to meet all your needs and make you happy, then you will depend upon her for your happiness.⁶

When we get all twisted up and bent out of shape, it is because we believe our rights have been violated and we have been mistreated. **Our problem is we do not see ourselves as dead.** The part in us that is having a problem is our completely self-centered old nature. We must see ourselves as dead to self and alive in Christ. This leads us to the third short statement that is to form the bedrock of our marriage relationship.



We must understand the marriage relationship is not about us and our needs, but about Him and His glory (3:17).

Whatever you do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father (Col. 3:17).**

New Testament scholar A.T. Robertson correctly notes the following, “Sociological problems have always existed. Paul puts his finger on the sore spot in each group with unerring skill like a true diagnostician.” (A.T. Robertson’s *Word Pictures in the New Testament* on Colossians 3:17). We are inherently selfish, self-centered, and self-serving.



This thought ties the two previous points together. The obedience of fruit bearing is for His glory (Matt. 5:16). In the midst of this whole relationship, **what do you think God’s goal is? Do you think it is your own preconceived notion of what constitutes personal happiness and contentment?** Or do you believe it to be something bigger than your own understanding of personal happiness? I think it is something bigger than you and me. I believe the situation in which you find yourself is for His glory. God’s purpose in creating is for His glory [i.e. presence] to cover the earth for the joy of His people. Genuine and authentic joy is only possible in the presence of God as Trinity.

If you believe God is sovereign and capable of changing your spouse, then why does He not do it? Every time you pray for God to change your spouse, you believe He can act on their will in such a way as to bring about change. But why is God not answering your prayers? **I believe it is because He is working something in them and through them for you. Even if . . . even if you do not see it.** It is an incredibly difficult concept to grasp, but **your spouse is exactly what God would have them be in that moment for you.** God is working grace to you in the midst of your marriage relationship. And what He is working will ultimately bring Him glory. This leads us to Paul’s fourth short statement preceding the various imperatives.



We must not focus on what God is or is not working in our spouse’s life, but rather focus on God and live expecting God to work in us and through us His fruit to our spouse (3:24).

Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. **Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men**, Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. **It is the Lord Christ whom you serve** (Col. 3:22-24).

“Here, **ye have neither lands nor property; ye are servants or slaves**; be not discouraged, ye have an inheritance in store; be faithful unto God and to your employers, and Christ will give you a heavenly inheritance.”⁷

A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin, age 5, Ryan, age 3. The boys began to argue over whom would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. “If Jesus were sitting here, He would say ‘Let my brother have the first pancake, I can wait.’” Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, “Ryan, you be Jesus!” This is how we often are in marriage. We want our spouse to be Jesus.

Our focus in marriage should not be to expect our spouses to submit to our every wish and desire or our husbands to love us in a manner we appreciate, but rather for God to work in us and through us His love to them. Yet our vision is to go even further than this. Our vision is fixed on Him who is the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2). We believe God will make us the kind of husband and father He wants us to be for our wife and children.



APPLICATION: (Making the Transfer)

We are dead to ourselves and the world and we are alive in Christ. **The listing of the commands is what the resurrected life looks like.** Hence, they describe not prescribe the Christian life in Christ. **Paul never separates our performance from our position.** If we look at the above mentioned commands in the absence of what has already been taught, it will lead to bondage and failure.

Our choice (as husbands) to love, expressing itself in acts of love, is the outworking of His life in us and through us to our wives. We choose to love and act accordingly because He is willing us to choose and act.

This thinking makes our choosing a “delightful duty.” It excites us to know God is working in us and through us in the context of the family unit. We know we are not able to love our wives as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25), but we know of One who can and will and His name is Jesus.

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Often in the family relationship, we stop with what we see. All we see is a wife, or a husband or a child, yet the passage pushes us beyond the immediate and temporal and calls us to someone higher. Remember the earlier reading of the paragraph and the emphasis on commands? Let us now see them from a different perspective. Let us consider them from God's perspective. Let us consider the commands, knowing that it is the Lord Christ we serve.

- Wives submit to your husbands (3:18)
 - **AS IS FITTING IN THE LORD**
- Husbands love your wives (3:19)
- Do not be embittered against them (3:19)
- Children obey your parents (3:20)
 - **FOR THIS IS WELL-PLEASING TO THE LORD**
- Fathers do not exasperate your children (3:21)
- Slaves obey your masters on earth (3:22)
 - **WITH SINCERITY OF HEART, FEARING THE LORD**
 - **WHATEVER YOU DO, DO YOUR WORK HEARTILY, AS FOR THE LORD RATHER THAN FOR MEN**
 - **IT IS THE LORD CHRIST WHOM YOU SERVE**
- Masters grant justice and fairness to your slaves (4:1)
 - **YOU TOO HAVE A MASTER IN HEAVEN**

Our service to the Lord is through people and those people are often the ones closest to us. When we understand how our lives are swallowed up in His, then when we serve our wives, children, employer and peers, we are actually serving the Lord. Because we have separated and compartmentalized life, we fail to see Him in all things. Yet, He is there. Colossians 3:24 reminds us of what is ours **in Christ.**



²⁴ Knowing that **from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance.** It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. (Col. 3:24).

What a joy it is to know Jesus Christ is completing His work in us and through us to those around us. It is with joy we as husbands love our wives, and as fathers seek to encourage our children. Our joy is found in knowing that **in as much as we serve them, we serve the Lord.** Herein is the secret to our contentment.

Perhaps today you find yourself struggling as a wife, husband, parent, child, employee or employer. Friend, your struggle is simply a symptom.

The real issue is rooted in . . .

- Not seeing Christ as the centerpiece of your life
- Not seeing yourself as dead and your life hidden with Christ in God
- Your own self-centeredness and not seeing His glory as the end of all relationships
- Looking at your spouse instead of focusing on Christ and His work in you



Laying hold of this truth will not resolve every relational conflict, but it will give you a platform for peace and rest and it will enable you to really love your spouse. The relationship you have with your spouse is a life long relationship that is like the plant described earlier. If it is embedded in the soil of positional truth, it is alive and has the potential to grow.

¹ Most books written that appeal to improving one's marriage approach it from a pragmatic perspective. They are almost exclusively written from a "cause-effect" formula. They offer what is observable, down-to-earth, and will "potentially" work toward remedying the problem. Such "fixes" are temporal and a-biblical. They are **not anti-biblical**, only outside the scope of biblical revelation.

² It is not my intent to denigrate books on marriage. I would encourage outside reading, but I would read any and all works about marriage with my "eyes wide open."

³ Linda Dillow, *Creative Counterpart* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1977), 15.

⁴ Bob George, *Victory over Depression: How to Live above your Circumstances* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 43.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 44. See also Brennan Manning, *All Is Grace*, pages 192-194. "God loves you unconditionally, as you are and not as you should be, because nobody is as they should be."

⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

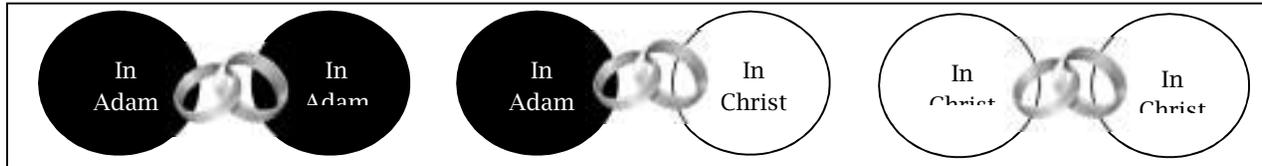
⁷ *Adam Clarke's Commentary on Colossians 3:24.*

2

Now the Deeds of the Flesh Are Evident

(Colossians 3:5-9; Galatians 5:19-21)

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry
(Colossians 3:5)



This study focuses on what your identity is and who you are in either **Adam** or **Christ**. In any given relationship there is the potential for one of three combinations as it relates to natures and identity. You might have two unsaved people marry, you might have one saved and one unsaved person marry, or you might have two saved people marry. These various combinations determine the context of how one will relate to their spouse. One's identity is determined by one's nature.

From our previous studies we learned how those who believe are located, positioned, or placed **in Christ**. And

NATURE = IDENTITY

those who are without Jesus Christ are still located, positioned, or existing **in Adam**. This "position" creates one's identity. Our position is also intertwined with our nature. Our nature, position and identity are inseparably linked. This identity is who we are before God. If we are still **in Adam**, then all of who Adam is determines who we are before God. If we are now **in Christ**, then all of who Christ is determines who we are before God.



The nature of man is that which animates the individual. Our nature is what "colors, shapes, controls, governs, and influences" the immaterial elements within each of us. This nature controls who we are as an image bearer. The nature colors one's intellect, volition, and emotion. It is the immaterial part of each individual that makes them who they are.

The control of one's nature in defining who they are is like a medical procedure called conscious sedation. Conscious sedation means you are not completely out, but you cannot remember anything when you recover from it. Whatever they gave you makes you incoherent and should someone talk to you, they would hear answers of complete nonsense. The drug colors your intellect, volition, and emotion. That drug is, in a sense, functioning like your nature.



With the fall of Adam, every one of his descendants has been imputed with his fallen nature. **Imputation means** what debt or resources were Adam's are now yours. This fallen (i.e., Adamic) nature controls our intellect, volition, and emotion. This is what Genesis 6:5, Psalm 51:5, and Romans 5:12 state.

Then the LORD saw that **the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually** (Gen. 6:5).

Behold, **I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me** (Ps. 51:5).

Therefore, **just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned** (Rom. 5:12).

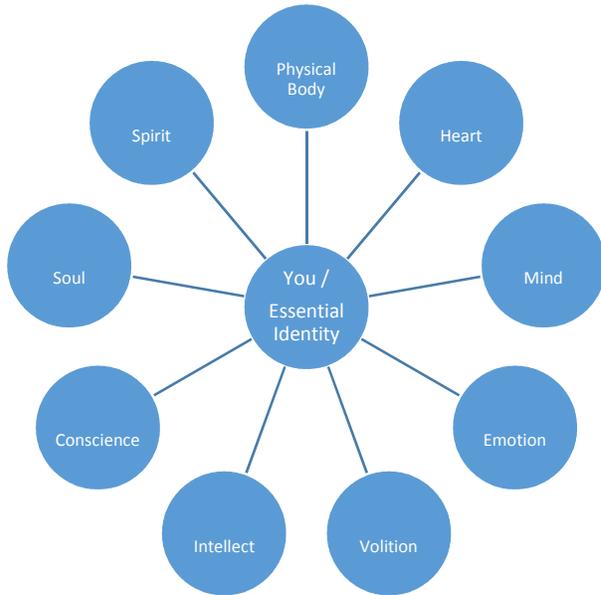
In the larger scheme of things, this old nature is non-redeemable. The nature does not change. The only way anyone can break free of their fallen nature is to receive a new nature. When a person receives the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, they receive a new nature, a nature that is holy, perfect, and blameless (Eph. 4:24). This new nature becomes the governing principle in the life of the believer; **just as the old was so now the new is**. In addition, this new nature becomes the believer's new identity before God. The old nature still exists, but it no longer has any authority over them (Rom. 6:14) and no longer represents one's identity before God. The New Testament speaks of humanity being **in Adam**. What exactly does this statement mean? As we have already noted you have an identity. Your identity is either **in Adam** or **in Christ**, but it is not both. An unbeliever's identity is **in Adam** and a believer's identity is **in Christ**. **This lesson will accent what we once were in Adam**. And although our identity is no longer in Adam, we still possess this old, sinful, fleshly nature. The next lesson will accent what we, as believers, now have **in Christ**.



In the unsaved, the old nature is their identity. In the saved, the old nature is not their identity. Their new nature is their identity. Though this is true, it is important to remember that, **“What you once were, you no longer are, but still have.”** I would like to further explain and clarify this idea with the following picture.

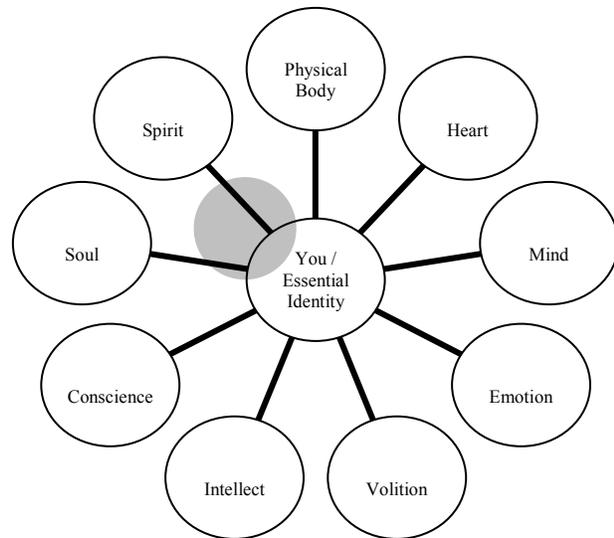
WHAT YOU
ONCE WERE,
YOU NO
LONGER ARE,
BUT STILL
HAVE.

Our old self in Adam influences every aspect of our existence. Prior to our faith in Christ this is what controlled our identity. This is what



we were. When by faith we received the work of Jesus Christ at the cross in our behalf our old self was crucified and was **judicially** killed. The authority of sin over us has been forever broken. Although our old self is judicially dead and is rendered powerless, it still exists and can express itself. But what it is and what it does is no longer controlling how God views us and how He deals with us. Our relationship with God is sourced in and maintained by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Our new self in Christ influences every aspect of our existence. Our old self still exists but is no longer in a place of authority. Our new self was received when by faith we received the work of Jesus Christ at the cross in our behalf. Jesus Christ received my old self and I received His righteousness which becomes my new self or identity. There is nothing I can do to undo what He has done. **Although the old self still exists, its ability to control me and make me something I no longer am has been forever broken.**



The Father no longer knows me after the old self. His relationship with me is firmly and forever rooted in who Christ is, what He has done, and who I now am in Him. Even when the old self expresses itself through my immaterial or material self, I am no longer identified by it. **Does God see our old self?** Yes, but the actions of the old self are never counted against us. An ongoing struggle believers have is two-fold: either they define themselves by their personal behavior and thus are driven by a performance-based acceptance



before their Father or they separate too sharply their position before the Father and their practice before people. The two are inseparably linked. The one is a reflection of the other. **Position will always change practice, but practice can never change position** (P.S. Praise the Lord!).

The purpose in spending time looking at this idea of nature, self, identity is to help you approach conflict from a biblical perspective. Problems become insurmountable when viewed from anything less than a biblical reality.



Remember Chicken Little? The story is a childhood classic. It provides a good example of how **perception creates reality** *when in reality what it perceives is wrong*. The truth of God protects you from running around like a chicken with your head cut off. Believing that the sky is falling and failing to realize the greater truths of your old Adamic nature and your new identity **in Christ** is acting just like Chicken Little. Jay Adams in his work entitled, *Christian Living in the Home*, makes the following statements:

The first and most important fact to remember about a truly Christian home is that *sinners live there*. A truly Christian home is a place where sinners live; but it is also a place where the members of that home **admit the fact and understand the problem**, know what to do about it, and as a result grow in grace.¹

Understanding our old nature in Adam still exists helps to understand the platform from which much of life is lived. Sin happens. Sin is inescapable and universal (Rom. 3). Everyone does it, yet such a confession does not dismiss culpability and responsibility. As long as we exist in our physical body we can no more not sin than the sun can cease to shine or the earth stop rotating on its axis.

UNDERSTANDING
THAT YOUR OLD
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Our union with Adam is so complete that his condemnation becomes ours. The fall of our nature is total. No part of our essence has escaped the affect of Adam's fall. Since this is true, the person you married comes with some "important" and "heavy" baggage. Thus the hard, cold reality is, the person you are married to has a sin nature. He or she will sin . . . count on it. This sin nature stains all relationships. In most relationships you can run away, hide, or avoid completely the other offending party. In marriage, such is not the case. It is therefore important that we come to grips with who we were in Adam. We will examine this old nature, this "Adamic" nature by asking and answering three questions. First . . .





What does the old nature look like (Col. 3:5-9)?

Therefore consider the members of **your earthly body** as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and **in them you also once walked**, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since **you laid aside the old self with its evil practices** (Col. 3:5-9).

From Colossians 3:5-9 we can see that the old nature can look like:

- Sexual immorality, (v.5)
- Impurity (Uncleanness), (v.5)
- Evil desires (Lust, Passion, Sensual appetites), (v.5)
- Greed [Covetousness], (v.5)
- Anger, (v.8)
- Wrath [Rage], (v.8)
- Bad feeling toward others [Malice], (v.8)
- Slander, [and] (v.8)
- Abusive speech from your mouth, [Filthy language from your lips, Filthy communication] (v.8)
- Lies (v.9).



In addition to the above listing, Galatians 5:19 add the following.

- Sorcery [witchcraft],
- Enmities [hatred],
- Strife [discord],
- Jealousy,
- Outbursts of anger [fits of rage],
- Disputes [selfish ambition, selfishness],
- Dissensions [division],
- Factions [party spirit],
 - Envy,
- Drunkenness,
- Carousing [Orgies] and things like these.

You might be sitting back saying this is what my wife or my husband looks like. It is possible for believers to exhibit such sins of the flesh, but no believer is to be **identified** by these things. **These things are not to be our identity.**

When two people have a certain level of tension, they will begin describing their spouse with certain language. Here is what I want us to see; when we describe our spouse with such language as depicted in Colossians and Galatians, what we describe is their old nature. If they are a believer, this is not their identity. When we eat we might be accused of “eating like a pig.” Although we might, in our behavior, “act like a pig,” we are, in



fact, **not a pig but a human**. A human is our nature and our identity. The same is true with reference to our spouse. They might act like their old Adam nature, but in truth this is not their identity. Their identity is who they are **in Christ**.

If we are married to an unsaved individual, then their identity is who they are in Adam. They can act morally, and live responsibly, but their core has never been changed. They are still **in Adam**. This leads us to our second question.



What should be my response to my spouse’s old nature (Col. 3:12-14)?

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity (Col. 3:12-14).

How do we handle failed expectations and disappointment? Sometimes in marriage we expect our spouses to bat 1,000% every time. But no one in baseball bats 1,000%. Now, we want to believe our averages will be better than most baseball players, but **we should expect a certain degree of failure**. This does not excuse it, but it does put it into perspective. **We are still responsible and culpable for our sinful choices**. Listen to what the apostle John says in his first letter:

My little children, **I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins**, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for [those of] the whole world (1 John 2:1, 2).

Winston Churchill said it well: “Success is never final and failure is never fatal.”² What I always find fascinating about the grace of God is that, “God expects more failure from you than you expect from yourself.”³ The New Testament is a story of disciples who failed, but were used mightily by God. Everyone fails, so do not give up on your spouse when he/she fails. **What should be our response to our spouse’s old nature?** If we respond to old nature with old nature we will have a notable “cat-fight.” Notice again the following ideas as they are found in Colossians 3:12-14.



- Display a heart of compassion
- Display a heart of kindness
- Display a heart of humility
- Display a heart of gentleness
- Display a heart of patience
- Display a heart of bearing with one another
- Display a heart of forgiveness
- Display a heart of love

Think about this list. What would happen if this were the response to failure within the home? Think about what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount.

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:43-48).

Note also Paul's thoughts in Romans 12.

¹⁹ "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. ²⁰ "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:19-21).

We are not there to be God's tool for censuring our spouse. That is not our role. Where in this list is judgment, a critical spirit, nagging, or a caustic mouth? What God asks of us is not only difficult; it is impossible. New Testament Scholar Curtis Vaughan observes, "Those in verses [Col. 3] 12b-14, which have to do mainly with relationships among Christians, fall under the regimen of 'put on'. This group reaches its climax in the mention of love, and all of them are in some way expressions of love. They point up those qualities of life which, **if present in the community of believers, will eliminate or at least reduce frictions.**" (emphasis added)⁴

Until we see ourselves as hidden with Christ in God, the relationship we have with our spouses will be marked by fatigue and failure. John 15:5 is not simply good advice; it is

what is real, “Without me, you can do nothing.” Let us not forget our dependency on God and work **from Him**, not **for Him**. The final question in our study is . . .



What should be my response to my own old nature (Col. 3:5, 8, 10, 15-17)?

This makes the study personal and intimate. It is not enough we can identify our spouse’s old nature and understand how we are to respond from our new nature. We must also come to grips with how we are to address the needs of your own war within.



First, consider the members of our earthly body as dead (Col. 3:5, 8 [Put it all aside]). Do not allow the mind to think what we were in Adam forms our identity before God.

Listen to the graphic imagery needing to be communicated by the call to “kill the flesh”.

“‘Slay utterly’ may express its force. The form of the verb (aorist imperative) makes clear that the action is to be undertaken decisively, with a sense of urgency. Both the meaning of the verb and the force of the tense suggest a vigorous, painful act of personal determination. Maclaren likens it to a man who while working at a machine gets his fingers drawn between rollers or caught in the belting. ‘Another minute and he will be flattened to a shapeless bloody mass. He catches up an axe lying by and with his own arm hacks off his own hand at the wrist . . . It is not easy nor pleasant, but it is the only alternative to a horrible death’ (p. 275).”⁵

Second, do not lie to one another (Col. 3:9). Learn to always speak the truth and live an open and honest life seasoned with grace, wisdom, and love.

Third, put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him (Col. 3:10). This is where we will go in the next chapter. We will look at 1 Peter 3:7 which I believe to be one of the most misunderstood verses in the New Testament as it relates to the marriage relationship.

Fourth, let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts for body unity (Col. 3:15). We should stop being at war with our spouse. Remember, **marriage unity is not based on personality conformity or met expectations, but grace.**

Fifth, be thankful for what we have instead of what we do not have (Col. 3:15, 17). **Comparison kills contentment.** We should never compare who we married to someone else. One thing I have learned is that the grass is never greener on the other side. In every relationship there exist two problems. The first one is you and the second one is the person with whom you have the relationship. We always take with us an old nature and we are always dealing with someone who has an old nature. Because

COMPARISON
KILLS
CONTENTMENT.

God is in control, be thankful that in all of His wisdom and grace, He believed the person we have is the one He wanted us to have.

Sixth, let the Word of Christ richly dwell within us (Col. 3:16). Get into the Word of God and have it percolate inside of us. Attend church, regularly read your Bible, discuss it in fellowship with others. Make the Word of God a vital part of our everyday life.

Seventh, whatever we do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col. 3:17, 24). As we serve our spouse know that, “It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.” Raise our sights.

Living the Christian life is so different than anything else we can think of. When a child is born there comes a point when we start to train them for independence. All things being equal, a day will come when we, in a sense, cut them loose. They are now on their own. However, just the opposite is true for the Christian. We start from a position of self-rule, self-willing and declared rebellion and we work toward dependency. Christian maturity is when we see ourselves as helpless infants cradled in the arms of Almighty God.



APPLICATION: (Making the transfer)

What I am asking you to do is to see yourself cradled in the arms of God and to make the kinds of choices that express His fruit, believing He is working His will in you and through you to those around you.

- See yourself as helpless without God.
- See your spouse as a person with a fallen nature.
- Treat them according to the text of Scripture and their identity in Christ.
- Know that you are not alone in your journey. God is always with you.
- God is the God of hope, healing, and wholeness. Do not believe the devil’s lies. He is a defeated foe and God is winning at all times.

¹ Jay Adams, *Christian Living in the Home* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 10,11

² Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), 187.

³ Loc. Cit.

⁴ Curtis Vaughan, *Colossians and Philemon*, BSC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub., 1973), 99.

⁵ Curtis Vaughan, “Colossians,” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1978), 11:211.

NOW THE DEEDS OF THE FLESH ARE EVIDENT

3

Show Her Honor As a Fellow Heir of the Grace of Life

(1 Peter 3:1-12)

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit (1 Peter 3:8)



Our spouses are a conduit for the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is time we see them as such. In the previous chapter, we noted how everyone has an old, fallen nature. For the believer, “What they once were, they no longer are, but still have.” The believer is no longer identified as being **in Adam**. When a believer behaves in a sinful way, the source of that sinfulness is their old nature. The old nature no longer is their identity. Their **new identity** is who they are **in Christ**.

YOUR SPOUSE IS
A CONDUIT FOR
THE PERSON AND
WORK OF CHRIST.
IT IS TIME WE SEE
THEM AS SUCH.



First Peter 3:1-7 provides for us an interesting statement. Peter writes to wives (vv. 1-6) and then husbands (v.7). He sums up his thoughts in verses 8-12. Peter’s message does not conflict with Paul’s. Peter recognizes that within any relationship, tension and conflict exist. Peter reminds his audience that we are not to respond in kind when the old nature is expressed. In fact, listen to his thoughts in verses 8 and 9.

To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing (1 Pet. 3:8, 9).

In any relationship, we are to respond according to our new nature, not the old fallen nature. However, I would like us to consider just verse 7 at this point. My primary point is found in the phrase, “Show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life.”

Before unpacking that thought, we need to clarify a common misunderstanding that often exists because of erroneous presuppositions. The verse says that if we do not dwell with our wives in an understanding way, our prayers will be hindered. What exactly does this mean? Does this mean every time we have a misunderstanding or are angry with our spouse or are frustrated with them or whenever the relationship between the two of us is even slightly strained, that God will not answer our prayer? Personally, I do not believe this is the case. Let me explain why. Our present sin cannot separate us from God. As far as sin is concerned, God has completely dealt with it at the cross. Nothing we do can alter God's opinion of us or dealings with us. This includes our sin. We must not forget our identity before the Father is completely sourced in who Christ is and not in whom we are.

Let us consider what it does mean to have one's prayers hindered

- **First**, as husbands we are to dwell with our wives in an understanding way. This means we are to see them as **fellow heirs** of the grace of life. This means we are to see them for who they are **in Christ**.
- **Second**, if we do not see them for who they are in Christ, we will be praying the wrong prayers and these are the prayers God does not answer. This is in keeping with James 4:3, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." **It is our ignorance that keeps God from answering the prayer we prayed.** If we do not dwell with our spouse in an understanding way, we will pray the wrong prayers and God will not answer such misguided prayers. For just a moment, think how many times we have prayed for God to change our spouse. If we were honest you would admit our requests are self-serving. Our desire is for God to make them more like us and not Him, in order that our expectations would be fulfilled or accommodated. If we do not see our spouse as a fellow heir of the grace of life, then we are focusing on their old, fallen nature and we probably pray the wrong prayers. Because the old nature does not change, every attempt we make at trying to change it is futile. When two old natures are locked in mortal combat, neither one is praying appropriate prayers.
- **Third**, our "feeling" of intimacy and the "emotional" enjoyment of our fellowship with God is inexplicably and subjectively tied into the "honoring of our spouse." Nothing can truly break our fellowship with the Father since it is immutably connected to the person and work of Jesus Christ. But much can harm our relationship with our spouse and when we do not dwell with them in knowledge and honor them as fellow-heirs of God's grace, we cease to enjoy the "feeling" of intimacy and fellowship with God.

But let us go back to the statement, “Show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life.” Do we really understand or know our spouse? This individual, if a believer, is a fellow heir of the grace of life. This verse is telling us that we are no longer to identify our spouses by their old nature, but are to **see them for who they are in their new nature**. These people are fellow heirs of the grace of life. But what does this mean? D. Edmond Hiebert provides us with an initial thought:

“In their personal standing before God, there is equality; they are accepted by God on the same basis. Wives, like husbands, believe in the same Savior, are redeemed by the same ransom, live by the same grace, and look forward to the same eternal destiny. **Recognition of that reality will end domestic tyranny.**”¹

WE ARE NO LONGER TO IDENTIFY OUR SPOUSES BY THEIR OLD NATURE, BUT ARE TO SEE THEM FOR WHO THEY ARE IN THEIR NEW NATURE. THESE PEOPLE ARE FELLOW HEIRS OF THE GRACE OF LIFE.

What Peter emphasizes is also noted by the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 11:11; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 5:23-33).

However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman (1 Cor. 11:11).

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28).

“Within the realm of salvation a re-evaluation of inherited conceptions about social rank has taken place.”² **The person and work of Jesus Christ has effectively dealt the death blow to gender bigotry and role arrogance.** Consider how this plays out in the book of Colossians. Let us go back and re-examine several salient features characterizing the believer’s new identity in Christ. Notice how Paul describes the believers of Colosse. Please read each statement.

- 1:2 Saints and faithful brethren in Christ
- 1:12 Qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light
- 1:13 Rescued from the domain of darkness
- 1:13 Transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son
- 1:22 Reconciled to the Father in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach
- 1:27 Christ in you, the hope of glory
- 2:7 Having been firmly rooted in Him
- 2:10 In Him you have been made complete
- 2:12 You have been buried with Him in baptism
- 2:12 Raised up with Him through faith in the working of God
- 2:13 He made you alive together with Him

- 2:13 He has forgiven us all our transgressions
 2:14 Canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us
 2:16 No one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day
 3:1 You have been raised up with Christ and are seated at the right hand of God
 3:3 Your life is now hidden with Christ in God
 3:4 Christ is your life

Does Colossians 1:1-3:5 reflect reality? Does it mean anything that is tangible in this life? What does this mean for you and me? If our spouse is a believer, then they are . . .

- 1:2 A saint and faithful believer in Christ
 1:12 Qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light
 1:13 Rescued from the domain of darkness
 1:13 Transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son
 1:22 Reconciled to the Father in order to present them before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach
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THE WAY WE VIEW
 GRACE AND GOD'S
 RELATIONSHIP TO US,
 WILL DETERMINE HOW
 WE VIEW OTHERS AND
 OUR RELATIONSHIP
 TO THEM.



The basis for us dealing with our spouse in this manner springs from God's dealings with us. The way we view grace and God's relationship to us, will determine how we view others and our relationship to them. Listen to how Curtis Vaughn explains the movement from Colossians 3:1-4 into verses 5 and following.

"In the preceding paragraph (3:1-4), which is preparatory to what is said here, Paul has reminded his readers of their vital union with Christ and the power and encouragement which this gives to holy living. Indeed, the believer's union with Christ is represented in those verses as the fundamental and controlling principle of the new life."³

What does this mean for you and me? Let us break this down. There are four basic ideas we need to consider as we seek to honor our spouse.



God's view of them is based on position not performance (1:2).

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father (Col. 1:2).

Every time we evaluate our spouse based on performance we are doing them an injustice. It is unfortunate, but often our very existence is wrapped up in what we do. As men, it is often found in our work. Yet what happens when we lose our job? In many ways, we lose our identity. As a mother, often your schedule and identity is found in your children and when they leave home, you find yourself lost. How can such "feelings" be prevented? What we need is to find who we are in Christ. **He is our true identity.** These other activities are blessings from God, but they do not make us who we are. It is only when we find ourselves in Him, that we will experience true contentment and peace. One of the worst kinds of mistakes we can make is trying to be something we are not.

IT IS ONLY WHEN YOU
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This principle is presented well in *The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling written in 1894. It is the story of a boy named Mowgli who was raised by wolves in the jungles of 19th century India. His friends were Baloo the Bear and Bagheera the Panther. The time came when Mowgli found himself attracted to a young female friend. The problem was that Mowgli was acting like a wolf, when in fact he was a man-cub. No matter what Mowgli did, he could not change what he was. Performance did not define who Mowgli was, only position could. Mowgli was not a wolf-boy, Mowgli was a boy.



We cannot afford to define people by their performance; we can only define them by their position. We are not defined by what we were **in Adam**, but by who we are **in Christ**. Bob George fittingly notes how, "Christianity is not about how well we behave but who we are in Christ."⁴

In marriage, we must view our spouses from their position and not their performance. This does not mean we can sit around and do nothing. We have responsibilities to carry out and fulfill, but it does mean that these activities do not make us who we are. We will stop being so judgmental if we learn this simply truth.

Here is the testimony of one who was in bondage to unrealistic expectations:

I struggled daily in this area because I believed I was only acceptable and valuable if I met the total needs and standards of the people I sought acceptance from. Each

time I failed to please a significant person in my life, I felt like a failure, a loser, a mistake, inadequate, worthless. I was totally devastated and I tried all the harder to please the other and to meet all their needs. When I thought I had it all figured out and I thought I was performing well, the standards would change unexpectedly and I would discover that I had not done what was expected of me. I was expected to be a mind reader and to know what the unstated standards are. I lived in constant fear of making mistakes because any error on my part resulted in anger from the person I sought acceptance from. To me, their anger equaled rejection, an indictment that I was unworthy and unacceptable. I grew tired of performing and often prayed that God would just go ahead and take me to be with Him because I was unable to meet the needs of those I loved the most. I believed I was a miserable failure!⁵



There is a flip side to this problem and it is when we impose our preferences on others. “Whenever you depend upon someone else for the things only God can provide, you put them under stress to perform.”⁶ This is nothing less than spiritual bondage. **We must never look to the creature to do for us what is only found in the Creator.**

We should always cringe when we hear of someone who was told all their life they would never amount to anything and they are failures. Such communication is tragic. That person’s identity has been built around their inability to perform according to someone else’s expectations. What they need to learn is who they are in Christ. **He is their identity.**

God never judges us because of failure or conformity (Col. 2:16-23). It is regrettable how we often evaluate people based on their ability to perform. We often evaluate a marriage as good when everyone fulfills their parts. What if there is failure and non-conformity to the cultural assumptions concerning Scriptural ideals; can such a marriage still be good? The answer is yes; it is when we stop judging people based on their failure or conformity. **Contentment and peace are not secured by performance but by position.** The second basic idea we need to consider as we seek to honor our spouse is . . .



God never sees them from a position of shortage but sufficiency (2:10).

and **in Him you have been made complete**, and He is the head over all rule and authority (Col. 2:10).

We are always working to become something we are not and perhaps never will be. God sees us as already being complete. When we live in the past, we are living from a position of deficiency. When life is marked by “What if,” or “If only,” or regret, then we are living from a position of deficiency instead of from a position of sufficiency. We are not living with the attitude of expectancy.



Your spouse is everything God wants them to be . . . today. He is working in them and through them His perfect will. **This is not to deny the doctrine of progressive sanctification**, but we must affirm how God is working in them and through them what is already true. Again the idea is this, “We do not work to gain His approval and acceptance; we work because we have His approval and acceptance. We are not working **for**, but **from**.” This tension between who I am in Christ and who I am in the world is reflected in the statement, “Already-not yet”. **It is notably undesirable but we often allow our circumstances to control our identity rather than our in Christ position.** There is a third basic idea that will assist us as we seek to honor our spouse.

YOUR SPOUSE IS EVERYTHING GOD WANTS THEM TO BE TODAY. AND HE IS WORKING IN THEM AND THROUGH THEM HIS PERFECT WILL.



God never sees them for who they were, but for what they are (2:12, 13; 3:7).

Having been **buried with Him** in baptism, in which you were also **raised up with Him** through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He **made you alive together with Him**, having forgiven us all our transgressions (Col. 2:12, 13).

And in them you also once walked, when you were living in them (Col. 3:7).

God never holds your past against you. He no longer sees you for **who you were in Adam**; He only sees you for **what you are in Christ**. Bringing up the past is one of the most ungracious actions anyone can have toward another. This does not mean the past is never addressed, but once addressed we must let it go.

Often in relationships and especially in marriage, couples do not become “hysterical” in their communication, but “historical.” Forgive it and move on. **If you do not forgive the past, you will never move beyond it.**

The old has died; the new is what lives. God always sees them clothed in the very righteousness of Christ (3:3, 4). As a believer, our spouse radiates the glory and righteousness of Christ. If we view our spouse from what they once were, but no longer are, though they still have, then we are living in the past. If we view them for who they are in Christ and from His perspective, then we are living in the present and what will be a perfect future. Only one of these two positions is “dwelling with your wives with understanding.” Dwelling with our spouse with understanding is seeing them as fellow heirs of the grace of life.



God always sees them as forgiven (2:13). This is where our opinion of God's forgiveness really takes root. **We have made forgiveness very conditional.** Because of this, we harbor ill-will toward people and will not let it go until they ask us for forgiveness. This is very ungracious and un-godlike. We have come to believe God will only forgive us when we ask Him, but such is not the case. Every sin we have ever committed or will commit is already forgiven by God. We appropriate forgiveness when we accept God's provision at Calvary. When our spouse sins against us, as far as God is concerned, it is already forgiven. And Ephesians 4:32 tells us we are to forgive others even as we have been forgiven.

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Eph. 4:32).

This does not mean when you are the offending party you do not ask the offended for forgiveness, but it does mean when you are the offended you extend to the offender forgiveness . . . even if they do not ask you to forgive them.

Have you ever had a stone in your shoe? No matter what you do, that stone is a constant irritant and a reminder of its existence. One of two things will happen. Either you will ignore the stone and develop a thick callous and lose a part of who you are, or you will take your shoe off and shake out the stone.



If we do not forgive, we will develop a callous around our soul and we will lose a part of who we are. It is time to take off our shoe and shake out the stones in our relationship. This brings us to our final idea in seeking to honor our spouse.



God always sees them as being seated at His right hand (3:1).

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, **seated at the right hand of God** (Col. 3:1).

If we saw our spouses as sitting at the right hand of God, would this change the way we view them and treat them? This is the "honor" part of 1 Peter 3:7. The idea is to hold as precious or to value. When we see them for who they are in Christ, we will value them.



What do we really value?

A group of Wisconsin friends went deer hunting and paired off in twos for the day. That night, one of the hunters returned alone, staggering under the weight of an eight-point buck.

“Where’s Bubba?” The others asked. “Bubba had a stroke of some kind. He’s a couple of miles back up the trail,” the successful hunter replied.

“You left Bubba laying out there and carried the deer back?” They inquired.

“A tough call,” nodded the hunter, “but I figured no one is going to steal Ol’ Bubba.”

Friend, what do you value? The issue of headship in Ephesians 5:22ff is one of valuing your spouse. It is to make them “feel” prized by your treatment of them.



APPLICATION: (Making the Transfer)

Perhaps today you find yourself living in the past. Friend, let it go. Today is the day you need to start living with your spouse according to knowledge. Do not see them for **what they were in Adam**, but for **whom they are in Christ**. May God graciously grant you this moment as a turning point in your life.

Perhaps today you find yourself in a relationship where you are not treated as a fellow heir of the grace of life. Remember this, even when your spouse’s old nature is expressed, it does not change your own identity in Christ. As a believer, you are an heir of the grace of life regardless of what message your spouse may communicate to you. Cling to this truth tenaciously.

¹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *First Peter: An Expository Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 194.

² Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter and Jude*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), 102.

³ Curtis Vaughan, *Colossians and Philemon*, BSC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub., 1973), 93.

⁴ Bob George, *Victory Over Depression: How to Live Above Your Circumstances* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 49.

⁵ <http://www.cwllinc.com/performance-based-acceptance.htm>

⁶ George, *Victory*, 54

4

And They Shall Become One Flesh

(Genesis 2:18-25)

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:24)

$$1 + 1 = 1$$



It is the intent of this study to **celebrate biblical marriage**. In our narrative (Gen. 2:18-25) God sets forth the nature of marriage. “This section is the foundation of the institution of marriage.”¹ The text begins with a statement in verse 18. Verses 19 and 20 provide an illustration of what He is talking about. Verses 21 and 22 describe how God brought about Adam’s wife Eve. Verses 23 through 25 give the result of God’s actions. We live in an unfortunate age when marriage must be defined, but nonetheless before we go any further let us consider a working definition for marriage.

Biblical marriage is a . . .

- divinely established covenant (i.e., contractual agreement that defines obligations and consequences),
- between two people of the opposite gender,
- for sexual monogamy, emotional partnership and race proliferation.

By defining biblical marriage in this way we are equally saying what marriage is not.

- A biblical marriage is not two people living together.
- A biblical marriage is not two people sleeping together.
- A biblical marriage is not two people of the same gender living together regardless as to its legality or social acceptance.
- A biblical marriage is not polygamy.

In our current culture, commitment is a rare commodity and an unfortunate failure. Yet commitment rests at the root of any relationship. **In marriage itself commitment functions on two distinct levels.** **First** and foremost is **a commitment to the marriage covenant.**



Without commitment to the covenant itself, the marriage relationship will fail. All relationships need to be put in their proper perspective. A commitment to God comes first, then to one's spouse, and finally to one's own self interests. **Second**, there must be **a commitment to the marriage relationship.** This side of the equation can be strongly problematic. In any relationship, it takes two. Even though a person might be committed to the relationship, in the absence of a reciprocating commitment there is no real relationship. The relationship might be **functional**, but it does not have the core characteristics of any genuine relationship. There is no warmth, intimacy, transparency, and vulnerability. It is not marked by loyalty or trustworthiness. In healthy relationships the best is always assumed and there is neither judgment nor condemnation when failure exists. In a genuine relationship, one can bear their soul and not experience shame or fear or guilt.

This does not negate the need to seek a healthy relationship with one's spouse even when it seems to have already collapsed. But it does establish the idea that even with a commitment to the marriage relationship a genuine relationship with one's spouse might not exist.

Although the scenario of an unhealthy relationship is discouraging and can lead to despair and depression, it must not be forgotten that our first and primary relationship is to the Triune God. God the Father is our true Abba in whose arms we rest. Jesus Christ the Son is our ultimate hero, friend and (if I may be so bold) lover. The Holy Spirit is our ultimate comforter, encourager, sustainer, and strength. It is our God in whom we find the true fulfiller of all our spiritual, emotional, social, and physical desires. Everything else apart from Him is but a mere shadow. **No relationship can ever do for us what God alone does.** This must never be forgotten. It is the course set and the comfort sought.

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In light of these two initial presuppositions, let us consider the text of Genesis 2:18-25 and the contributions it can make to our marriage.



God's observation (v.18)

Then the LORD God said, "**It is not good for the man to be alone**; I will make him a helper suitable for him (Gen. 2:18).

The “not good” of 2:18 is set in sharp contrast to the “good” noted throughout the creation narrative (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31, 2:9, 12, 17, and finally in verse 18). Did not God create that initial scenario in which Adam found Himself alone? Is God assessing this initial action as “not good?” The “not good” of 1:18 is not moral. It is not saying “evil or sinful.” Rather it is saying, “It is not good for the purpose of reproducing after his kind.” God is not making a moral call as to whether being single or married is good or bad. It is only “not good” if you are the only one for the purpose of race propagation.

GOD ALONE
WAS THE
SUBSTANCE.

For the purpose of “reigning” over creation and of continuing his line, Eve proved to be a suitable counterweight to Adam’s design. Again, **the issue is not companionship or community**. God was enough for Adam. The relationship between Adam and Eve was a shadow to be enjoyed, but only a shadow. God alone was the substance. Yet for the shadow to fulfill its design there must be a horizontal relationship. “Relationship is modeled after God who does not exist in isolation but is a tri-unity, surrounded by a heavenly court.”²



God’s illustration (v. 19)

“Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and **whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name**” (Gen. 2:19).

Adam’s role as mediating ruler is illustrated by the naming of the animals. It is also the means God uses to show Adam’s inability to fully carry out God’s mandate to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28).



Adam’s Education (vv. 20-25)

“The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, **but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him**” (Gen. 2:20).



God enabled Adam to see his need. Adam needed to realize his need before he would appreciate the gift. “Rather than squandering his most precious gift on one who is unappreciative, God waits until Adam is prepared to appreciate the gift of woman.”³

This verse suggests five ideas.

A. Adam could not resolve the issue of race proliferation.

The primary thought is on his inability to fulfill God's role for him without this helper. The one God would create would be his counterpart. **The one created would not be identical to him but a compliment of him.**

The word [helper] describes one who provides what is lacking in the man, who can do what the man alone cannot do. The man was thus created in such a way that he needs the help of a partner. Or we may say that human beings cannot fulfill their destiny except in mutual assistance.⁴

B. God created marriage (vv. 21-24).⁵

Marriage is God's idea (Gen. 2:18-25) and therefore right. God will not have a "better idea" sometime later. God is not going to change the pattern. No matter how much we wish to distort and redefine the family or marriage, the objective standard of God's Word declares it to be one man + one woman for one lifetime.

C. Marriage is to be monogamous and heterosexual.

What God did in creating "male and female" (Gen. 1:27) does establish a notable pattern. God did not create two of the same gender. This indirectly speaks to the issue of homosexuality.

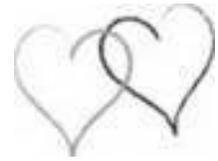
D. Marriage is two individuals becoming one (Gen. 2:23, 24).

The man said, "This is now **bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh**; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and **they shall become one flesh** (Gen. 2:23, 24).

The idea of "one flesh" expresses the complete personal community of one man and one woman as spiritual unity.⁶ The word used for "becoming one" carries the idea of "cleaving" and of "gluing" together. The imagery is graphic. **There is an infusion and co-mingling of lives.** For this reason, divorce "tears flesh." Therefore, the idea of one flesh is a graphic word picture of what the Scripture speaks of when referring to the marriage **covenant**. Yet what does this mean when it speaks of a man and a woman becoming one flesh? Perhaps there are several explanations behind this idea.

- **First**, it is the breaking of one relationship and the establishing of another.
- **Second**, it is the establishing of a new household where the husband is the head.
- **Third**, it is the refocusing of one's energies toward one's spouse.

- **Fourth**, one flesh speaks of a monogamous relationship.
- **Fifth**, one flesh comes to bear on a shared life. Two image-bearers becoming one in intellect, volition, and emotion. There are shared joys, sorrows, and problems. In a one-flesh relationship, what we do directly affects the other person. Everything about the individual is impacted and altered.



The “one flesh” language is judicially true even if it is not functionally true. When two individuals enter into covenant, they become **judicially** one (i.e. legally). This does not mean they are **functionally** one. If either one fails to pursue the relationship they will not function as “one flesh.” No matter how committed one might be to the marriage covenant and to the marriage relationship, if the other spouse does not respond in kind they are not functionally “one flesh,” although they remain judicially one. Remember the two commitments necessary in the one flesh union.



Think with me of the unity candle in many marriage ceremonies. Prior to the wedding ceremony, a large single candle and two slimmer tapers are placed in holders and arranged in the area where the wedding ceremony will be performed. During the wedding ceremony, after the exchange of vows and rings, the bride and groom move to the area where the candles have been readied. The bride takes her lighted taper; the groom takes his lighted taper. Simultaneously, the bride and groom use their individual tapers to light the single large candle between them. The bride and groom extinguish their tapers and return them to their holders. The lighting of the single candle symbolically represents two individuals joining as one, and the extinguishing of the individual tapers shows the bride’s and groom’s intent to subject their individual needs to the greater needs of their union.

In the marriage covenant, two individual lives now become one flesh. “For the first time in Scripture the words of a human being are recorded in direct discourse. The total sum of what man himself has to say in the creation narrative is an exclamatory outburst concerning his helper, “She is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”⁷ Many suggest in the statement, “She is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” we have a pledge of loyalty. Adam entered into covenant with Eve. It is in the union of these two lives we are to see the permanency of the marriage covenant (Matt. 19:6).

Therefore, they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, **let no man separate** (Matt. 19:6).

From Genesis 2:18-24 and its repetition in Mark 10:2-9 it can be seen marriage was “intended to be a lifelong integration of two lives.”⁸ The Greek word employed by Jesus in Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7 and the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:31 to describe the union between a man and a woman is “**proskollao**.” It is used in Acts 5:36 of men who have “joined” themselves to a particular movement or teaching.

The word is from “**kola**” and means “to glue in contrast to nailing, to join together tightly.” Literal examples are gluing a broken pot, to glue inlay work of gold and ivory, to steep barley in water, to close a wound. It is also used of the penetration of poison into a body. “The Septuagint used the word to describe the union created in Genesis 2:24.”⁹



The word “cleave” means “to cling, stick, stay close, cleave, keep close, stick to, stick with, follow closely, join to, overtake, catch.” Consider the graphic usage of the word in various contexts.

- Eleazar’s hand clung to the sword (2 Sam. 23:10)

He arose and struck the Philistines until his hand was weary and **clung** to the sword, and the LORD brought about a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to strip the slain (2 Sam. 23:10).

- Leprosy clung to the servant of Elijah (2 Kings 5:27)

Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman shall **cling** to you [Gehazi] and to your descendants forever." So he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow (2 Kings 5:27).

- Job speaks of bone cleaving to skin and flesh (Job 19:20)

My bone **clings** to my skin and my flesh, And I have escaped only by the skin of my teeth (Job 19:20).

- Jeremiah speaks of an undergarment clinging to a man’s loins (Jer. 13:11)

For as the waistband **clings** to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah **cling** to Me,' declares the LORD, 'that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise and for glory; but they did not listen (Jer. 13:11).

A husband is to cleave to his wife. He is to follow hard after the woman of his youth (Prov. 5:15-23). **The union that exists between a husband and his wife is mystical** (i.e., judicial), **but it is also emotional and physical** (i.e., functional). **This union is so real that divorce means “to rip in two.”**



Marriage is like the taking of individual threads that represent the parts of one's life and knitting those various parts together to form a singular cloth. When a divorce takes place the cloth is rent in two.

One of the greatest tragedies in the Evangelical church is the way we have treated divorced people. We have added insult to injury by holding them at arm's length. Those who have been divorced need our encouragement, love, and forgiveness. Divorce is far deeper than a physical tearing. It is the ripping of one's soul. We should rush to the aid of those who have or are living through the trauma of this heartache. Just as we should and must rush to the aid of anyone who is living in bondage to any addiction or having to endure the consequences of someone else's sin.



E. Marriage has a distinct identity.

1. A wife is a husband's helper (Gen. 2:18, 20).

The Hebrew word is used twenty-one times in the Old Testament. It simply means helper. A wife helps her husband. Notice the nature of this help. It is first and foremost for race propagation. Secondly, it is to be co-regent with him over God's dominion. "The woman would share the man's nature; that is, whatever the man received at creation, she too would have."¹⁰

Marcus Dods notes how, "By the formation of woman out of man, that she is dependent upon him (1 Cor. 11:8); and by her being formed of his rib, that she is neither his servant nor his idol, but his partner. With this new creature man is at once thoroughly satisfied."¹¹

2. The wife is God's gift to man (v.22 "taken from the man and brought to the man")

Most commentators recognize the word translated "rib" should be "side." Consider the following verses from Proverbs stressing the wife's value to the husband.

An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames him is like rottenness in his bones (Prov. 12:4)

He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord (Prov. 18:22).

House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD (Prov. 19:14).

AND THEY SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH

An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth *is* far above jewels (Prov. 31:10).

Because marriage is a gift, it is undeserved, to be received with thanksgiving, and to be prized. One's spouse is to be cherished.

3. The wife is man's equal (v.23 "bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh").



From Scripture we learn that the husband is the head of the wife and she is to submit to his leadership (Eph. 5:23, 24).

²² "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ **For the husband is the head of the wife**, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body" (Eph. 5:22, 23).

Yet, nowhere is it stated that the wife is inferior to the husband. She is man's equal. Both have qualities unique to their role and in their essence and position they are equals (1 Pet. 3:7). Although we struggle with the idea of headship, it is only in the area of **function and not essence**. We will explore this idea further in the study on Ephesians 5:22-6:4 and the Christian Home. In the absence of honoring this pattern, only anarchy and chaos exist.

4. The Marriage Covenant supersedes family relationships (v.24 "for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother").

The verb [leave] frequently describes Israel's rejection of her covenant relationship with Yahweh and the verb [join] often designates the maintenance of the covenant relationship. Thus, to leave father and mother and cling to one's wife means to sever one loyalty and commence another. Already Scripture has sounded the note that marriage is a covenant rather than an ad-hoc makeshift arrangement.¹²

The word, "leave" means "to depart from, leave behind, leave, let alone." Once a man marries a woman that woman is to become his partner in and for life.

5. Marriage demands complete co-dependence (v.24 "shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh")

Marriage is a covenant where each member promises to work at such a unity that their actions and attitudes are those of one "whole" person (i.e., oneness, like-mindedness, unity, harmony). **Unity means to act as "one unit."**

Verse 25 states nothing existed that would drive a wedge between Adam and Eve. There was complete transparency between them. There was no shame, fear, or guilt.

AND THEY SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH

Each of these five ideas contributes to a real relationship as they are affirmed mutually. Even in the absence of “functional” unity, these truths are still valid. Our denial or abuse does not make false what is true. It is important to remember how the marriage covenant is a shadow of something that is far richer and more enjoyable. **The shadow only exists to provide a foretaste, a foreshadowing of something that is immeasurably better.** God is our ultimate and eternal spouse to whom we are married. May He always be for us what we will never be by ourselves?



APPLICATION: (Making the Transfer)

In every marriage ceremony, we begin with the following words:

“The Bible teaches that marriage is to be a permanent relationship of one man and one woman freely and totally committed to each other as companions for life. Our Lord declared that man shall leave his father and mother and unite with his wife in the building of a home, and the two shall become one flesh.”

Who gives the bride to be married? Bride’s Father: Her mother and I.

We do well to remember the vow.

“Do you take [this woman] to be your wife; to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to understand, till death shall part you, according to the design of God in creation, and commit yourself completely to her?”

Today, it is important to once more remember the divine nature of the marriage covenant. Let us see how marriage is to reflect our union with God in Christ. May God enable us to protect and celebrate the marriage covenant.

¹ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 125.

² Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 88.

³ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴ Ross, 125.

⁵ John Davis provides similar thoughts that are worthy of one’s attention. John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 78, 79.

⁶ Ross, 126.

⁷ Hamilton, *Genesis*, NICOT, 1:179.

⁸ “Marriage, Divorce and Re-Marriage”, Richard W. DeHaan, p. 3.

⁹ Horst Seebass, “Join, Cleave to” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown [Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, c1976], 2:348-49.

¹⁰ Ross, 126.

¹¹ Marcus Dods, *Genesis* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 12.

¹² Hamilton, *Genesis*, NICOT, 1:181.

AND THEY SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH

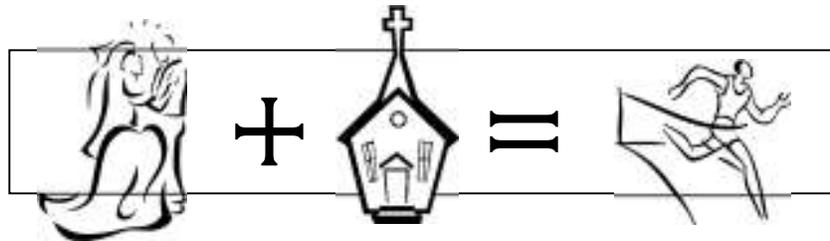
5

Not Forsaking Our Own Assembling Together

(Hebrews 10:19-25)

... not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

(Hebrews 10:25)



We live in a culture that has an abundance of venues for camaraderie and commitment. We can talk about Starbucks coffee, the Green Bay Packers, the Wisconsin Badgers, deer hunting, work, and a host of other settings that provide for us identity, unity, and loyalty. Such activities provide us with a sense of pleasure, satisfaction, and contentment. These places have, for many, replaced one's regular attendance at a Local church. All of these "activities" can be of value to the individual, but they can never replace the need for the Local church.



We live in a **culture of convenience**. In our world, the "quick fix" has become the preferred method of dealing with things. We spray away odors, bugs, weeds, and anything else that bothers us. Waste generation in 1960 was 8.1 million tons of waste per year. In 2000 it was 221.7 million tons. It is this kind of mindset that has created a separation in our levels of commitment to family, friends, church, ministry, and marriage. Yet unlike any of the above mentioned venues, the Local church exists to strengthen, protect and establish the marriage relationship.

THE LOCAL CHURCH
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MARRIAGE
RELATIONSHIP.

We live in a culture that easily disposes of what it does not want. Sentimentality and attachment are things of the past. This same mindset has crept into the Local church and affects the way we view it. The Local church is to provide for us a sense of identity, unity and loyalty. It is to provoke within us these responses. This is what she is to be for us and to us:

- She is to provide for us a sense of **identity**. (This is my church)
- She is to provide for us a sense of **unity**. (I am a part of this fellowship)
- She is to provide for us a sense of **loyalty**. (These are my people)

But are these things important? I find the asking of the question intriguing. By the mere fact that it must be asked and then answered can strongly suggest there has been a huge shift in our thinking.

In her article, “Who Goes to Church? - Older Southern Women Do; Many Catholic Men Don't,” Dalia Sussman provides us with this revealing information concerning regular church attendance:

Not counting weddings and funerals, **38 percent of Americans say they go to religious services at least once a week.** But there are big differences across demographic groups, with self-reported attendance peaking among older people, women, Southerners and Baptists, among others.

The biggest gap is between the oldest and youngest age groups. **Sixty percent of people age 65 and older report attending religious services at least once a week; among 18 to 30-year-olds, just 28 percent go that often.** Previous ABCNEWS polls, similarly, have found that religious belief and practice increase with age.

There are other factors. Nearly half of Southerners attend services weekly, substantially more than elsewhere. **Forty-four percent of women go weekly, compared to 32 percent of men.** It follows that, among Southern women age 45 and up, weekly church attendance soars to 68 percent.¹

It is a mindset that has led to a **culture of non-commitment.** This has led to a tragic decline toward the marriage covenant. Friend, hardships will confront all of us. The church is not an iron clad guarantee, but the odds are greatly increased for us when as a couple we attend a local assembly.

Why is this so? One of the divinely ordained reasons behind God giving us the Local church is for the training and sustaining of the marriage relationship. Initially let us consider three questions relating to the Local church.



What is the Church?

The local church carries the DNA of the Garden of Eden. Like the Garden, the local church is the place where we see the glory of God and how His glory expands through the making and maturing of disciples. The local church is God’s plan for fulfilling His Vision. Last week we noted how local churches are . . . **geographically defined assemblies** with the **Biblical Structure** of Elders who have oversight and Deacons who enable through service. Such churches have a **biblical message** verbalized in the gospel, visualized in acts of kindness, symbolized in the ordinances and carried out in mission communities and a **biblical mission** where the making and enabling of disciples happens in the context of the believing community through baptism and instruction resulting in new churches formed.

Apart from **gathering**, there is no church. No building or individual is a church, unless that individual is the only one in any given geographical location. Yet why do we emphasize the gathering and gospel alliances and not simply the individual? Often when I speak to this idea, someone will raise a handful of notable challenges.

First, I find everything I need in my small group [band of fellow believers] and I do not attend a local church.

Second, I have gone this far without the local church and see no need for a local church.

Third, I do not like Pastors/Elders telling me how I am supposed to live or what I am supposed to believe.

Fourth, many of the great faith stalwarts were apart from local churches.

Finally, many godly people are a part of para-church ministries and not vitally connected to any one local church.

Although it is a large concept, **I believe the New Testament speaks to the idea that Christian maturity happens in and through local church involvement.** One might grow apart from a family, but one's growth by means of a family is far more substantial than growth apart from a family.

"Why Belong to a Local Church and an Alliance of Churches?" What does it mean to Belong? "To belong, to be a part of, to participate in, to be identified with, to assist and be assisted"

So what "argument" might I offer that would show the need for you as an individual to be an active participant in and identified with a local church and why this local church should be a part of an intentional alliance for gospel proclamation?

On the other hand, to state it another way, "Why is a church and the network of churches important to God's Vision?" Just as there is one Garden of Eden, one Tabernacle, one Temple and one Jesus who is the head of one body, so also is the church one.

If the conclusion we have come to is not simply a picture but the actual place fulfilling God's Vision, then His glory fills the local church, ever expanding and joy filled.

If the local church carries the DNA of the Garden and if the local church is the inaugurated end time Temple pictured in Revelation 21 and 22, and then it is only logical and reasonable to think every believer needs to be a part of a local church. Moreover, local churches need to actively participate in the glory, ever expanding and joy filled celebration of other local churches. If God's glory rests in the church, then spreading His glory is in the multiplying of local churches and not just individual Christians.

This is why as a believing community we focus on church planting and not simply ministries that have as their focus only evangelism or only discipleship apart from local

church communities. We believe both activities [evangelism and discipleship] come from, through and are for the local church.

Now, are we making much ado about nothing? Does it really matter if I align with a local church? Why cannot we simply love Jesus, share the gospel, see people get saved, see some discipled and if they attend church great, but if not, it's no big deal."

The Church is made up of two parts.

- **First**, there is the church Global which is made up of all believers who have been baptized by the Holy Spirit in local churches making up the body of Christ (All Letters in the New Testament; 1 Cor. 12:13).
- **Second**, there is the church local which is made up of those who gather regularly in geographically defined assemblies with appointed leaders for the systematic study of God's Word with the intent of taking Christian truths global.

The global church allows us to see the magnitude of His work. It gives us great gratitude to know He is building up His body. The church moves without failure to her predetermined goal. The local church gives the global church appearance. It is the "flesh and blood," "sinew and bone," of the church global. It is how the body of Christ shows herself in various geographically defined communities.

The local church assists in the facilitating of our Lord's universal exaltation. The local church is the means God has put in play to continue fulfilling His reason for creating. It is a means of manifesting grace in a tangible, concrete way. **The importance of identifying oneself with a local church cannot be overestimated.** There are two truths about the church we ought to note.

A. The Church's conception is by Christ.

We believe that the church was begun by Christ on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This is so because of two important facts.

1. The finished work of Christ (Acts 20:28).

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, **to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood** (Acts 20:28).

2. The coming of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27).

But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but **if I go, I will send Him to you** (John 16:7).

The coming of the Holy Spirit marks a shift in the way God deals with His people. Essentially the Holy Spirit's ministry remained the same between the Old and New Covenants. However, the fundamental difference is Spirit Baptism. Spirit Baptism is the means whereby believers form the one body noted in Ephesians 2:11-23. Just as the nation of Israel identified who the people of God were under the first Covenant, so also the church identifies those who are the people of God under the New Covenant. There is only one "people of God." The people of God began with Adam and Eve and will end when the last person to believe is received in the family of God.

We cannot afford to underestimate the importance of any Evangelical local church. As that church represents the people of God, we must see them as those for whom Christ died.

B. The Church's foundation is on Christ (1 Cor. 3:10, 11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6).

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. **For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ** (1 Cor. 3:10, 11).

Christ is referred to in Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Peter 2:6 as the chief cornerstone. "The cornerstone (or foundation stone) concept is derived from the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation, **important since all other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire structure** (emphasis added)."² As the foundation stone (1 Cor. 3:11), Christ is the essential ingredient in the building and maintaining of any and all local churches. He is the one piece in whose absence everything would collapse.



Why is the local church necessary?

The local church is to be a Christ-Exalting, Word-Centered, Grace-Based, Global-Impacting Fellowship. She exists to shout the supremacy of God in all things (Rom. 11:36) by finding, celebrating and declaring He is enough in this life and the life that is to come (Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 4, 5) through the systematic study of His Word (2 Tim. 2:15) and to share this message with every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Matt. 28:18-20; Rev. 5:9). The achievement of this grand mission is possible through the ministry of local churches. This lofty goal is accomplished through divinely ordained means. There are five we will consider.

A. The local church is necessary for the organization of believers (1 Cor. 14:33).

After addressing various gifts and members within the body in chapters 12 through 14, Paul makes the following comment.

For God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints (1 Cor. 14:33).

God is not the God of disorder, and it makes sense that confusion is out of His declared will. Would this not make sense to believe the “prince of peace” produces peace? The local church enables us to push past our sense of fierce individualism and helps us embrace a sense of community. Individualism and community are conflicting views of the nature of humans, society, and the relationship between them.

Church Historian and theologian Robert E. Webber, makes the following comment as to the harm individualism does to the community of faith.

We call Evangelicals to turn away from an individualism that makes the Church a mere addendum to God’s redemptive plan. Individualistic Evangelicalism has contributed to the current problems of churchless Christianity, redefinitions of the Church according to business models, separatist ecclesiologies and judgmental attitudes toward the Church.³

Our individualism as a people creates autonomous ministries. A local church has only one ministry. It has various expressions as the targeted audience changes, but there is only one ministry. We must move away from a “me” mindset and develop a “we” mindset. It is as we become committed to the common vision that our strength will be seen and felt. Much harm has been done to the witness of Christ in the community and in the world by the abnormal celebration of the individual which produces schism and civil war. It is our pride that produces division (Prov. 6:16-19; 13:10).

The organization of believers is necessary to prevent confusion. It provides leadership and augments growth. The need for organization is evident in Acts 6 with the selecting of workers and in Acts 13 in the sending forth of the first missionaries. There is to be a vital link between global ministry and local church direction.

C.S. Lewis notes how believers are to live in community and not as independent and isolated entities.

God can show Himself as He really is only to real men. And that means not simply to men who are individually good, but to men who are united together in a body, loving one another, helping one another, showing Him to one another. For that is what God meant humanity to be like; like players in one band, or organs in one

body. Consequently, the one really adequate instrument for learning about God, is the whole Christian community, waiting for Him together.⁴

We must guard ourselves against and be protected from our rebellious self. **It is in the strength of the community that we find deliverance from our egocentric existence.**

B. The local church is necessary in providing proper fellowship for believers (Heb. 10:25).

...not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near (Heb. 10:25).

It is extremely important that new Christians (all Christians) have good fellowship. The Church provides this. In good fellowship, believers receive . . .

1. mutual **encouragement** (Rom. 1:12),
2. mutual **edification** (1 Cor. 12:14-27; 14:12)
3. The sharing of **joys** and **burdens** (Gal. 6:2)

It is as we identify with the people of God and the God of the people that others see us as Christians (John 13:34, 35).

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34, 35).

C. The local church is necessary for the teaching of believers (Eph. 4:11, 12).

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11, 12).

A good church provides needed training and teaching so Christians can grow in their own spiritual lives and minister to others. There are three reasons noted in Ephesians 4:11 and 12 as to why God gave the Church the gift of teacher/teaching.

1. The saints might be perfected

The purpose of instruction is for the saints to get along and work smoothly together.

2. The ministry might be accomplished

The idea is not that of an office, but of ministering. It is equipping the saint for servanthood, for a life of discipleship, for ministering to others.

3. The body might be built

The word “edifying” is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 14:12.

So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, **seek to abound for the edification of the church** (1 Cor. 14:12).

The purpose of teaching is for the body to be built. Growth is to be the natural consequence of study. The primary teacher must always be the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20, 27).

²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. ²⁷ As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and **you have no need for anyone to teach you**; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him (1 John 2:20, 27).

God has given gifted men to the church, but they must never take the place of the Holy Spirit in the life of individual believers.

D. The local church is necessary in providing an opportunity for group worship

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight (Acts 20:7).

On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come (1 Cor. 16:2).

²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ **not forsaking our own assembling together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near (Heb. 10:24, 25).

With many of these ideas there are no direct or specific verses, but the overwhelming “flavor” of the New Testament is for His people to regularly gather for the purpose of worshiping God. Worship is to be both personal and public. Group worship, singing, and praise are both honoring to God and helpful to our growth. Corporate worship is a public declaration of one’s private devotion.

E. The local church is necessary in providing us an opportunity for service

The church provides us with a place where we can use the gifts God has given us. This is seen in 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Peter 4:10. This idea is also supported with the many “one another” verses throughout the New Testament.



Why Should I be identified with a local church?

This is a valid question. The thought is one of association. Rick Warren in his work, *The Purpose Driven Life* says, “You are called to belong, not just believe.”⁵ The “why” of identification is wrapped around the “why” of existence.

A. You should identify yourself with a local church for organizational reasons (1 Cor. 14:33).

The local church is to be the most efficient and effective means of ministering to the largest group of people possible. It is through His people that He will build His church. The local church is a means of Him ministering to His people hope, healing, and wholeness.

B. You should identify yourself with a local church for fellowship (Heb. 10:25).

God’s ongoing ministry in you and through you is for His people around you.

C. You should identify yourself with a local church for systematic and intentional instruction (Eph. 4:11, 12).

It is through the systematic and intentional instruction of the Local church that God will protect His people from error and unscrupulous spiritual mercenaries. The local church and its Elder led leadership provide a system of checks and balances in the handling and ministering of God’s Word. The Elders of this fellowship are, in many ways, the gatekeepers.

D. You should identify yourself with a local church for corporate worship

There is something special when the people of God gather for corporate worship. I believe this is intentional and intrinsic.

E. You should identify yourself with a local church for ministry opportunity

You have been gifted by God. You are special to the overall expression of Christ in and through His people for the edification of His people and for the evangelization of those who are yet to come. The local assembly needs your giftedness. You are His gift to fellow believers.

F. You should identify yourself with a local church because no one is an island unto himself or herself

Christians are built for community. Humanity's default setting is self-centeredness. We are, by nature, creatures of self-interest. Identifying ourselves with a Local church places us in a context of self-sacrificing love. Remember the work entitled, "For Whom the Bell Tolls?"

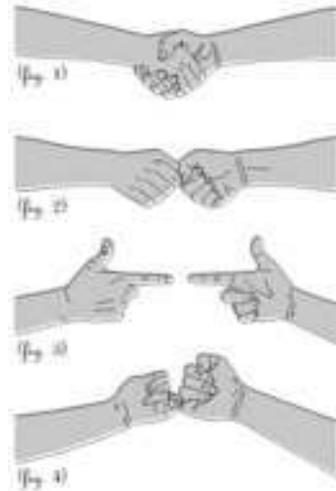
*No man is an island, entire of itself
every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main
if a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less, as well as if a [peninsula] were,
as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were
any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind
and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls
it tolls for thee.⁶*



As a fellowship, we are part of one another. If God should in His providence lead you away from your local church family, please by all means possible and necessary **find another fellowship** as soon as possible and become identified by it, united with it, and loyal to it.



Why Should I join a local church?



Perhaps the better question is, "Why not join a local church?" Before considering that question, let us address our initial question. The Local church has done a disservice to the body by making membership something other than what God intended. It is not admittance into a society with archaic passwords and secret handshakes. It is not about the church owning you. It is not the abandoning of individual identity or freethinking. It is not going back into bondage, the forsaking of Christ-like liberty and freedom. Membership is not going back under the "law." Membership is not a criterion for spirituality, nor is it a means of dividing the people of God. You are no more or less spiritual because of membership. Membership as we know it is not taught in the Bible. However, before we start getting too excited, neither is our order of service, how we receive an offering, a children or youth ministry or a host of other things. Things like membership help carry out the ministry entrusted to us by God during this era in history.

But let us ask the question, "What is membership?" Membership, when properly practiced, identifies those who have publicly said, "This is my church." Membership

says, “I believe privately what this local assembly proclaims publicly.” Membership says, “You can count me in.” It says, “I will throw in my lot with those whose sole passion is to exalt Christ.” Membership says, “I desire to be a part of something that is bigger than me. I want to take the message of Christ and Grace to every tongue, tribe, people, and nation.” Membership places the individual into the community of faith and under the oversight of God appointed Elders. Membership might say more than this, but it does not say less.

The Church is to be a vital part of the Christian growth process and the marriage relationship. The Church assists in strengthening, protecting and establishing marriages. The local church can provide:

1. Instruction: Through the systematic study of Scripture our minds are renewed. We are married the day of our wedding but learning to be the husband or wife God intends us to be is a lifelong process. Instruction in the Word is of great value in aligning our thinking with God’s mind.
2. Accountability: Identifying with a local church enables people to develop honest and transparent relationships with other believers. Such friendships provide encouragement in trying times and exhortation when needed.
3. Celebration: Our culture no longer celebrates longevity of marriage. Hollywood makes marriage look like a disposable commodity. No fault divorce has made ending a marriage easy. Marriage is to be celebrated and the local church values and supports the marriage covenant.
4. Perspective/Purpose: Our own personal happiness is secondary to God’s eternal purposes. He has built His Church to further His program and all believers are part of this plan. When both husband and wife are seeking Christ first and foremost, the marriage relationship is strengthened.

This list is not exhaustive but only a sample of the importance of identifying with a local fellowship. The Church is vital to a strong healthy growing marriage. Do not forsake her.



APPLICATION (Making the Transfer)

Please turn with me to Hebrews 10:19-25.

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **let us** draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies

washed with pure water. **Let us** hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and **let us** consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, **not forsaking our own assembling together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near (Heb. 10:19-23).

The Old Testament sacrificial system was only a “shadow” of the good things to come (v.1). The inherent limitations of the Old Testament sacrificial system reminded the worshipper every year of their sin (v.3). This inherent limitation made it impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (v.4). The temporal nature of the sacrifice demanded daily repeating and its temporal nature prohibited it from taking away sins (v.11).

It is because of what precedes that, “we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus” (v.19). The author of Hebrews summarizes His preceding thoughts with three exhortations.

- Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith (v.22).
- Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering (v.23).
- Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works (v.24).

What does a sufficient sacrifice look like for the sins of His people? It looks like verses 22 through 24. The people of God draw near, hold fast, and stir up one another because Jesus “opened up for them the partition that existed between them and their heavenly



Father” (v.20). Where are these activities to be taking place? They are to be a real part of any local church assembly. We are here to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. We are here to encourage one another to hold fast and to draw near. **The local church is to be a part of our identity, unity, and loyalty.** May you respond to the Holy Spirit’s promptings to align yourself with a geographically defined assembly that has a biblical structure and mission.

¹ This ABCNEWS/Beliefnet poll was conducted by telephone Feb. 19-20, [2004] among a random national sample of 1,008 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Fieldwork was conducted by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

² <http://www.answers.com/topic/cornerstone>

³ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God’s Narrative* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2008), 180, 181.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Collier Books, 1943), 144.

⁵ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 130.

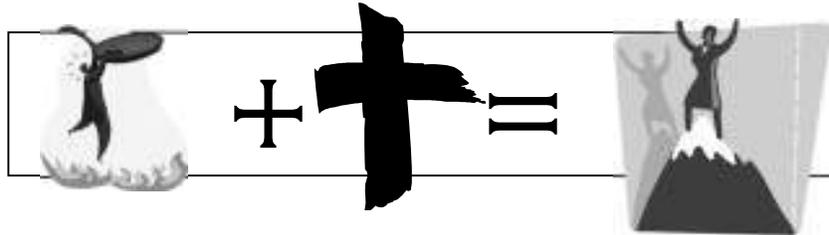
⁶ John Donne (1572-1631), from *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, Meditation XVII

6

Learning to Live Triumphantly in Life

(Pss. 115:3; 135:6)

But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases (Ps. 115:3).



Before beginning, let us note a word of caution, there is an understanding of living triumphantly that is impossibly contorted. We think of triumph and victory as “winning” and something free from pain, discomfort, or struggle. However, this is not the biblical understanding of such a thing. Problems are a part of every relationship. If we have no relational problems in our marriages, then one of you is not necessary or one of you is a corpse. Life is problematic and marriage is no exception. The “key” is to understand how the vertical controls the horizontal and not the other way around. There is nothing any Christian can do to undo what God has done. No Christian need ever worry about their standing before the Father. The person and work of Jesus Christ forever settles our relationship before the Father. Our “issues” are all horizontal. How do we live His victory by resting in His finished work? Such rest is possible as we consider the following ten truths.

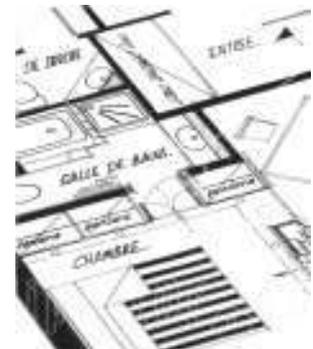


God is in control of the details.

But our God is in the heavens; **He does whatever He pleases** (Ps. 115:3).

Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps (Ps. 135:6).

Know God is in control. This forms the ultimate bedrock truth on which all of life revolves. The “problems” we face are part of *God’s One Story* and He has written into the *Story* our life. He writes the *Story* and has written into the *Story* both transgression and condemnation. Fortunately, He also includes redemption.



Although we might struggle over God’s involvement in the details of our lives, it is encouraging to realize He is intimately and personally involved in every area of life. There is no part of life that God has not woven into something bigger and more beautiful.

Often His involvement is providential through secondary causation. Secondary causation simply means He acts indirectly and in ways that are almost imperceptible to the human eye and logic. Often with secondary causation, He uses natural means to accomplish His purposes. No matter what, we must see God above all things. Think of Isaiah 6. It was in the year King Uzziah died that Isaiah saw the Lord “high and lifted up.”

When surrounded by terrible times we must not allow ourselves to focus on the circumstances. We cannot change our circumstances, but we can have rest and peace when we learn to focus on Him.



There is a purpose behind all the details that make up an individual life (Rom. 8:28).

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now, for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials (1 Pet. 1:6)



Because God is in control, the events of life are part of His *Story* (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28). Never think that somehow the events of life and the choices made are isolated or unconnected. Life is a continuous chain from start to finish and the various events within it are the individual links.

Because God is in control of each individual life, there are no wasted moments or events. God is working in us and through us His perfect will. This includes the heartaches and the sorrows. Do not be deceived into thinking otherwise.



Life is problematic (Rom. 3:23; 6:23).

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

As long as we are abiding in our flesh, we will have woe. **Failure, however, is not fatal.** Do not focus on what appears to be the problem. Chances are what you think is the problem is a fruit and not the root. It is foolish for us to think life will ever be problem free. No matter whom we are, how much we possess, or where we currently live; **if we cannot be happy with who we are in Christ and what we have in Him, then nothing this side of heaven will give us rest.**



God never makes a mistake or has an accident.

We are not mistakes. We are not accidents. Our choices have consequences. The consequences can be immediate and far-reaching, yet somehow God is working all things out for His glory and our good (Rom. 8:28).

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

What we might deem as a “waste” God is using to manifest His glory and grace in us and through us to those around us.



Perspective is everything.

If we focus on our spouse or ourselves, we have missed it by the proverbial mile. If we see God as being in control and we keep our eyes on Jesus, then our problem becomes an opportunity for grace to be seen (Heb. 12:1, 2). Listen to the following observation by Michael Wells in his work, *Sidetracked in the Wilderness*:

The enemy would never have us fighting the battle where the front lines actually exist; he will always bring something to our attention that has **nothing to do with the real issue.**¹

There is another problem with not fighting the battle on the proper line: We can unknowingly aid the enemy in his work to destroy other believers. When someone is acting in a way that is displeasing to the Lord, and we continue to bring it to his attention, what are we doing? We intensify the problem by helping the enemy place the person’s eyes on something other than the solution. If we want a loving husband, a loving wife, an obedient child, honest employees, a respectful employer, a faithful friend, a spiritual pastor, what must be done? The only hope that we have is to place their eyes on the Savior who can deliver them from vexing behavior. None will find deliverance anywhere else [except] in Christ.²

It is only as we focus on Him that we can have contentment in the midst of our most grueling trial. Often in relationships we want something other than what we have, yet what we have is what God wants us to have. What we want is not something we will have this side of heaven. Again, it is a matter of perspective. How do you view the problem?



God's grace is always sufficient (2 Cor. 12:9), and He will always provide a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13).

And He has said to me, '**My grace is sufficient for you**, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me (2 Cor. 12:9).

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, **but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also**, so that you will be able to endure it (1 Cor. 10:13).

Do not ever think that what we face is the end. Our life and its circumstances are points in a line leading us to God. Discouragement, despair, and depression are different points on the same line. We must not allow ourselves to dwell there.



Declare your dependency on Him through prayer (Mark 9:24).³

But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, '**Lord, save me!**' (Matt. 14:30).

Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "**I do believe; help my unbelief**" (Mark 9:24).

Prayer is **not an act of discipline as much as a declaration of our dependency** on Him. Prayer says, "God, I need you." God has chosen to work through prayer in the accomplishing of His will. Lean heavily on Him through this channel of grace.



Read His Word (Ps. 119:11).

Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You (Ps. 119:11).

God's mind and perspective is clearly stated in and through His Word. God gives wisdom freely, but we have to read His Word in order to hear His voice.



Be thankful for who He is, for what He has done, for what you have, for who you are, and for where you are at.

...**always giving thanks for all things** in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father (Eph. 5:20).

...**in everything give thanks**; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thess. 5:18).

Ephesians 5:20 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18 reveal to us and through us the fruit of gratitude. If we choose not to be thankful, we will become bitter, angry and critical. What is true for us is equally true for the other individual.



There is always hope, healing, and wholeness in the finished work of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 2:14).

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place (2 Cor. 2:14).

Never believe the devil's lie that all hope is lost. There is always an end to every trial encountered.



CONCLUSION

Do not view these ten truths as a "magic formula" or a kind of "good luck charm." They are simple truths God wants us to know. Learn to rest in what you know to be true. Do not allow your experiences to shape your theology. Interpret your circumstances by your theology. Remember, Jesus Christ is enough.



¹ Michael Wells, *Sidetracked in the Wilderness*, 179

² Michael Wells, *Sidetracked in the Wilderness*, 180

³ For further assistance in the areas of prayer and Bible reading see ROOTS and/or THE FAMILY LIFE CURRICULUM. Both resources enable personal prayer and Bible reading.

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Waukesha Bible Church
262-542-7177
www.waukeshabible.org