

Christian Marriage

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CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

TO those who seek to join their lives in Christian marriage this little book is written, in the hope that through reading it they may understand more clearly the thing they do.

Christian marriage is an enterprise which may well make one pause. Only the absurd courage of a great love will dare to take up its obligations. It sets out to be not only life-long, but of such a quality that it can suggest to onlookers the patient, self-sacrificing, passionate and creative love of Christ for His Church. It is natural then that the marriage service should begin on a warning note, though it is perhaps leaving it a little late!—which is a reason for taking thought some while beforehand.

Marriage, says the book, should be “*enterprised . . . reverently, discreetly, soberly and in the fear of God . . .*”

Reverently—that is, with reverence for the personality of the other which one is about to influence profoundly and irrevocably; with reverence, too, for the powerful element of sex in love and the possibilities it holds for good or evil in the relationship; with reverence also for the vows to be taken and the steadfastness needed to keep them in the spirit as well as in the letter.

Discreetly and soberly—that is with discernment and with one’s eyes open. It is a fallacy that “falling in love” should always lead to marriage. It is

possible and indeed very common for two persons to fall in love temporarily or in some respects, who are totally unsuited for living, working, playing, developing together. If, for instance, a lover does not still look the part when imagined as fellow-worshipper or as the parent of one's children, it is probable that the love is not the marrying kind.

And in the fear of God—because His laws are our best good, and when we disobey them we break ourselves. So we enter on a new way of life in fear and in faith, knowing how many perils beset us and how dearly we need God's help.

"Duly considering the causes for which marriage was ordained—(and these are in ascending scale) the establishment of the home, the well-being of the family, and the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other."

It is important to note that marriage was *ordained*, i.e., chosen by God as the best way for men and women to live together. It is not an invention of civilization, or of the moralists, or of ministers. Marriage was instituted by God as the basis of His creation—the life-long union of one man and one woman. They establish a home, they produce and nurture children, they are strength and delight to each other.

The last is the most important of the three; there may be a marriage without home or offspring, but it cannot be called a marriage without physical and spiritual love between the two persons. It is this

man-woman relationship that matters. It must be sound enough to stand the strain of an "intruding" family, it must last long after the children are grown up and gone out into the world. It is the secret of a real home, it is the basis of the family's well-being, it is the answer to our second greatest hunger. To miss it in marriage is to go very hungry indeed. Whatever other considerations there may be urging one to marry, if this "helping and comforting" and deeply sexual love is missing then all the other reasons in the world cannot add up to a "yes".

But even such love must be examined to see if it has the iron in it that will stand the strains of marriage. For married love must be willing to accept responsibility for others, endure limitations for their sake and undertake a permanent relationship.

The service then proceeds to a solemn injunction on all present to declare, if they know, *"any just cause why these two persons may not be joined together."*

One feels it is a solemn moment as the minister waits in silence for a confession or a declaration, but for most people it is too late and dramatic a time to choose for what should have been done long before. But early on in the courtship this question should be earnestly asked.

There are of course, the legal impediments of an existing marriage, too close relationship and certain physical defects (such things as impotence or venereal disease).

In the first case deception could mean in the long run only unhappiness, and no responsible person would risk involving a beloved in a bigamy case.

In the second case, the point at which relationship makes marriage undesirable or not permissible is open to debate, but it seems clear that intermarriage does not improve the stock. There are some definitely illegal connections, and others less certain where the advice of a medical man might be sought.

As for the third case, it is a crime to marry knowing one has venereal disease. The only course apart from jeopardising one's partner and one's children is to persevere with treatment, and postpone marriage until one is pronounced clear. Impotence is not often discovered before marriage, but if it is known a doctor or psychiatrist should be consulted. The law does not regard a marriage as valid if physical union cannot take place.

But quite apart from such definite impediments to marriage, most lovers feel themselves unworthy of the love and trust of their partners. Many things may make a person ashamed to approach marriage, and may even tempt him to think the beloved would give him up if all the facts were known—such things as an ungovernable temper, a past love affair, slavery to some habit or some drug, a family "skeleton", a bad sex record. If these things matter, they matter to both the man and the woman. It is better to clear the cupboards together, knowing that true love will

suffer without diminishing, and will bear any disappointment provided it is not deceived.

In some relationships it is wise and desirable to keep full knowledge from the other person, but in adult love one cannot treat the other as a child, a fragile lily or a condemning judge. Our real desire is to be completely known, and loved all the same. We do not want to fix up a picture of ourselves that is too good to be the true one; we want to know and understand each other and begin as we mean to go on, with full confidence between us.

One other impediment not often fully considered is that of fundamental disagreement in faith. This does not mean differences in denomination, or in doctrinal belief, or in actual way of life—none of these things need matter; but it is not less than a tragedy when people marry who have directly opposing views on life, its origin, its meaning and its true, basic aim. It will mean at best that they will be strangers in the most important areas of thought and feeling, and at the worst that there will be constant friction or a weak giving in. A Christian may, of course, fall deeply in love with a person who has no interest in God at all, but that does not mean that marriage must necessarily follow. For many who, in such a situation, have suffered bitterly, it was not to be thought of.

At this point, reached now in the service, but really arrived at some time previously, the deliberations leading up to marriage cease. The problems

of choosing a mate, of considering whether this choice is wise, of speculating on how well suited the partner is, of wondering what is best to do—these are all decided. It is like dressing for the day; the weather, the occasion and the extent of one's wardrobe may cause quite a long debate with oneself on the most suitable clothes to wear, but once the street door is shut and one is out on the pavement this problem is no longer relevant. It is decided for good or ill, and the business of living the day well now takes up all one's attention.

The *Marriage Vows* then follow. First come the questions, followed by the "I will", and then the detailed promises repeated by each in turn. These vows are exactly the same for the man and the woman, for they are two equals entering equally into a partnership. The promises are for permanent, binding, faithful, exclusive love. They cover misfortune and ill-health; they allow for no break except death. They leave no loophole, and they are made in the presence of the Church and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Many people do not intend to make their union so absolute and seek a civil marriage, which requires no more than the simple acceptance of the man or the woman as husband and wife. This is honest. Those who desire Christian marriage should understand what it is they are committing themselves to. Nor for that matter do they need to be afraid, formidable as it may appear, for marriage—lifelong union

of one man with one woman—is the human pattern which is able to produce the most beauty and maturity. It is according to God's holy ordinance, which means we are so made that the disciplines and joys of marriage can bring us greater satisfaction than can other more casual connections.

The promise is "*to love, comfort, honour and keep*" each other; to love with the body and with the spirit the body and spirit of the other; to comfort, that is be a strength to the other; to honour the other as belonging first to God; to keep and to hold fast this lover, and this lover alone, for good. The nature of married love, and especially its expression in terms of the body, is a mystery not often solved without some suffering and misunderstanding. In fact, many couples never find the perfect experiences they looked for, and they become disappointed and frustrated. This unhappy state can be avoided, and true mutual fulfilment and happiness achieved, but not without patience and understanding and a spirit of "give-and-take" on both sides.

Marriage is a great adventure, and there are many rich prizes to be won. Some of them are distant prizes because this adventure is in the setting of a life-time journey. Any worthwhile adventure makes heavy demands upon all the resources of our personalities. Happy marriages don't just happen. They have to be worked for. Preparation for marriage should include frank discussions on the sex factor involved, so that emotional and intellectual difficulties

can be ironed out. It is a good idea to go through a suitable book together (see "Recommended Reading" on back cover), so that serious blunders and misunderstanding may be avoided. Sex is certainly not the only factor in marriage; yet it is a very important one. All lovers should study their art, for it is an exacting and rewarding one. It is exacting in that at every stage of the sexual act the desires and feelings and emotional attitudes of your partner must be taken into account. Sexual intercourse is the climax of a complete abandonment of each one to the other, and it can never be truly satisfying unless the satisfaction is mutual. As in Christian life generally, there are no "rights" where true love is the ruling motive. Love is at all times "very patient, very kind." (See I Corinthians 13, Moffatt.)

Marriage is an adventure in growing together. The "honeymoon" is a useful convention which recognises the need for mutual adjustment as far as the physical intimacies are concerned. Actually complete harmony, with the full satisfaction it brings, often takes months or even years to achieve. Here again complete frankness is essential. Each should tell the other what pleases and what disgusts them, and take the trouble to follow every hint given.

However, this "growing together" concerns many factors not obviously related to sex on its physical side. Mental and emotional adjustments are just as necessary and demanding as the purely physical ones—perhaps even more so. Indeed, no

matter how thoroughly you have endeavoured to get to know each other in courtship, you will find that in the daily routine of life, and with the coming of children, new facets of personality are continually being revealed. Growing together doesn't mean growing towards a sameness in mental and emotional make up. Men are naturally more inclined to think out a problem in the light of what they call "cold logic". Women are more generally guided by how they feel, or by what is known as a "woman's instinct". Men tend to lack appreciation of the peculiar concerns and difficulties that their wives come up against in running a home and bringing up a family. Women sometimes fail to appreciate the mental and physical demands of their husband's trade or profession. Men usually like to have a few special friends of their own, and women usually need some activity or interest apart from their husbands and homes. These are some of the things which will demand patience, understanding and that spirit of "give-and-take" about which we spoke. And unless little problems and irritations are worked out together *as they arise*, the process of mutual growth and understanding is in grave danger of being permanently halted.

Complete fulfilment in each other finds its expression in the sex act. As minds and spirits become more attuned, so will intercourse become more and more charged with a depth and richness and spiritual tone which cannot be experienced by

those who indulge in sex merely for its own sake. Love that goes no deeper than the physical is mere animal-like passion, which can readily turn to revulsion and even hatred.

The ring, given and received, symbolises the complete and life-long union which we have been describing.

This is followed in the Service by *prayers*, which invoke God's help in keeping them "*in perfect love and peace*", pointing to a relationship in which each develops towards maturity at a greater pace than he or she could alone—a relationship in which the powers and qualities of the two seem multiplied together rather than merely added. Where two different temperaments are learning from each other there is bound to be a certain amount of struggle and perhaps painful tension: but the greater the complexity of interest the richer will be the ultimate harmony. It is suggested that we kneel for these prayers—indicating that in this most important step we need and desire God's blessing and help.

These lovely heartening prayers bring home to us how desirable it is that two people whose lives are joined should be at one in their approach to God. To be separated in the greatest spiritual mysteries is to miss the best in marriage, and the best in the Christian life. But where both face in the same direction (though they may differ widely in details and externals of belief and practice) then the life of faith is full of promise.

The solemn injunctions and prayers to prevent

man breaking this new union just made before God are apt to sound out of place on the wedding day. That anyone could upset the new love now reaching its climax seems impossible. Yet it happens, with suffering for all. From the very beginning then it is good to establish complete confidence, to be frank about emotional upsets, to keep old friendships and make new ones, to work and play together as well as separately, to take care over the outward signs of love and never to take for granted what is always, as the prayer has it, "such an excellent mystery".

May God save us all from an irritable or dull or cold marriage (which means being ourselves even-tempered, interesting and warm-hearted) and grant that in the fellowship of marriage we may learn fellowship with God Himself and with His whole family.

One last word about this fellowship. Your wedding has been housed within the Church solemnised by its minister, witnessed by its people. So if ever you need help, comfort or advice you will find it in the Church. There is always a minister or a Church member who would willingly share their knowledge and experience if they knew it would be welcome. It is not a matter where anyone can *offer* help, and often the need for it becomes apparent only when it is too late. All of us have difficulties in marriage of one kind and another; all are surmountable if taken in time. Trust the Christian fellowship here offered to you and do not hesitate to claim its help.

THE MARRIAGE SERVICE

At the day and time appointed for the solemnization of Matrimony, the persons to be married standing together, the Man on the right hand and the Woman on the left, the Minister shall say,

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the presence of this congregation, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony, which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of Man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is between Christ and His Church. This holy estate Christ sanctioned and adorned with His presence, when He wrought His first miracle in Cana of Galilee; and is commended of St. Paul to be honourable among all men. Therefore, it is not by any to be enterprised, or taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, but reverently, discreetly, soberly, and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained.

It was ordained for the establishment of the home, for the well-being of the family, and also for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity; and it has been consecrated by the faithful keeping of good men and good women in every generation.

Into this holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined. Therefore if any man can show any just cause why they may not be lawfully joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.

*And, speaking unto the Persons that are to be married,
he shall say,*

I require and charge you both (as you will answer at that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed), that if either of you know any impediment why you may not be lawfully joined together in Matrimony you do now confess

it. For be ye well assured, that so many as are joined together otherwise than God's word doth allow are not joined together by God: neither is their Matrimony lawful in His sight.

The Man shall then say,

I do solemnly declare, that I know not of any lawful impediment, why I, A.B.* may not be joined in Matrimony to C.D.†

*The Man. †The Woman.

In like manner the Woman shall say,

I do solemnly declare, that I know not of any lawful impediment, why I, C.D.† may not be joined in Matrimony to A.B.*

*The Man. †The Woman.

*If no impediment be alleged, then shall the Minister say
unto the Man,*

A.B.—Wilt thou have this Woman to thy wedded Wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?

*The man shall answer,
I WILL.*

Then shall the Minister say unto the Woman,

C.D.—Wilt thou have this Man to thy wedded Husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love him, comfort him, honour, and keep him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?

*The Woman shall answer,
I WILL.*

Then shall the Minister say,

Who giveth this Woman to be married to this Man?

The person giving the bride to the Man shall reply:

I DO.

Then the Minister shall cause the Man with his right hand to take the Woman by her right hand, and to say after him,

I call upon these persons here present to witness, that, I, A.B.,* do take thee, C.D.,† to be my lawful wedded 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 cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance: and thereto I plight thee my troth.

*The Man. †The Woman.

Then shall they loose their hands; and the Woman, with her right hand taking the Man by his right hand, shall likewise say after the Minister,

I call upon these persons here present to witness, that, I, C.D.,† do take thee, A.B.,* to be my lawful wedded Husband, 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 cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance: and thereto I give thee my troth.

*The Man. †The Woman.

Then shall they again loose their hands; and the Man shall give unto the Woman a Ring, laying the same upon the book. And the Minister, taking the Ring, shall deliver it unto the Man, to put it upon the fourth finger of the Woman's left hand. And the Man, holding the Ring there, and taught by the Minister, shall say,

With this Ring, a token and pledge of the Vow and Covenant now made between me and thee, I thee wed, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All kneeling, the Minister shall say: Let us pray.

O Eternal God, Creator and preserver of all mankind, Giver of all spiritual grace, the Author of everlasting life; Send Thy blessing upon these Thy servants, this Man and this Woman, whom we bless in Thy Name; that they may

faithfully keep the vow and covenant between them made. (whereof this Ring given and received is a token and pledge), and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to Thy laws: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Then shall the Minister join their right hands together, and say,

Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.

Then shall the Minister speak unto the people:

Forasmuch as A.B.* and C.D.† have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have pledged their troth either to other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving of a Ring, and by joining of hands; I pronounce that they be Man and Wife together, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

*The Man. †The Woman.

And the Minister shall add this blessing, the Man and the Woman kneeling:

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you; the Lord mercifully with His favour look upon you; and so fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace, that ye may so live together in this life that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting. Amen.

Here the Minister may briefly address the man and his wife, setting forth the duties of the married state, after which shall be read one or both of the following passages of Scripture: (Psalm 67 or I Corinthians 13:4-8, 13). Then shall the Minister offer suitable prayers.

After the prayer comes the Blessing and the Benediction.

Almighty God, pour upon you the riches of His grace, sanctify, and bless you, that you may please Him both in body and soul, and live together in holy love unto your lives' end. Amen.

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

Recommended Reading

- "Marriage," by David R. Mace. 3/-.
"Whom God Hath Joined," by David R. Mace.
2/6.
"Guide to Marriage," by Leslie Tizard. 12/3.
"Right Marriage," by F. R. Barry. 1/-.
"The Threshold of Marriage." 1/-.

Devotional Aids

- International Bible Reading Association Notes.
"A Diary of Private Prayer," by J. Baillie.
(Paper edition.) 4/9.
"A Private House of Prayer," by L. Weather-
head. 15/6.

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