

Marriage Conference 2014 – Session #1
The Secret – God’s True Purpose for Christian Marriage

- 1. Renewal – transformed into the image of Christ**
- 2. Roles – living out the character of Christ**

The saved person has been born again, given new life, spiritual life, eternal life, with new capacities to understand and see into the spirit world, to see the conflict raging between God and His angels fighting the forces of evil, seeking to deceive the believer and escape their eternal demise. We have these Spirit powered abilities, some of us have even become highly educated in the spiritual life/war/world, but most of us remain in the same mental, emotional & behavioral state out of which we were saved. We are like sleep walkers, going through the motions of life, even the motions of the spiritual life, but we are asleep, standing, holding onto the door, staring in the refrigerator of our lives, thinking & believing that if we can somehow get the outside of our lives into the prescribed order, that we can make it work and produce happiness.

Eph 4-6 The struggle of the Christian Way of Life (CWL), the battle within – to leave the old way behind and renew our hearts to be like Christ; to wake up from our sleep walk that is focused on success within the material world & learn the secret of living for Christ (Phil 4:12) that enables us to be content in any/all/every circumstance of life. It is easier & much more sin natural to remain asleep.

The goal should you decide to cooperate with it is to wake up, to close the refrigerator door in the metaphor of your mind and get a clue about where to go from here. I pray this for all of us as we seek to become one in Christ and live out our marriages with intentionality.

Example:

The Christian couple came in and sat. The counselor went through the standard intro and got down to business. How can I help you? For the next hour he listened as husband and wife went through the standard laundry list of complaints that occur whenever man and women live together. As they began to wind down, the counselor said, these are fairly common complaints, clearly not insignificant, but what do you want me to do for you?

The wife said, we want you to show us strategies and methods for avoiding these conflicts and then ways of resolving them once we allow them to fester. He is driving me crazy with all of his man stuff. I concur he added, we need some resolution skills to help us with our differences.

That is very do-able if you are willing to look at the root causes of these issues, remove old habits of thinking and renew the way you relate. We can find ways for you to change each other, to tame each other and make the other more acceptable. Most marriage counseling and Christian marriage books are focused on making this happen.

If that is what you think this is really all about, he said and then fell silent. They both gave him puzzled looks. What else could this be about? The wife asked. You mean beside you gaining the most pleasure & enjoyment from your marriage? You think the plan of God’s primary purpose is to provide you with the most pleasurable personal experience possible from your marriage? That is what it is all about? Both of the counselees were stunned by this sudden confrontation by the counselor.

Wait, the husband said, isn’t that God’s job? We do what He commands us to do, and then He blesses us with happiness and prosperous circumstances? Best deal in town right? His wife was nodding the whole time.

God’s job? The counselor laughed, slapping his knee. “That is a real knee slapper guys, God’s job!”

Well yes the wife said, we go to church faithfully, sing the sacred songs, listen to the words of the minister, give our 10%, help with different mission works (our job) and God gives us blessings, keeps our loved ones safe, answers our prayers and takes us to heaven when we die. We do our job and He does His; that is how Christianity works isn't it?

The counselor sobered up quickly, realizing that these folks might not be saved or that they were saved yet like most believers had brought the law into the Christian Way of Life (CWL). Saved by grace, but live by law. After a lengthy discussion, he determined that they were saved but had come to believe that their daily relationship with God worked by rules and laws. Believer follows the rule/law and God blesses with material prosperity, safety for loved ones, etc. Break the law and pay the piper - i.e. you reap what you sow.

Smiling, the counselor said, are you guys in a hurry? Do you have a little extra time to learn a biblical concept that might help you understand God's plan for marriage? Yes, they both said.

Eph 5:14-33 - Ch. 4-6 is focused on living the Christian Way of Life (CWL); while Eph 5:22-6:4 deals with marriage & family

In Eph 5:15-21 we have a series of Imperatives (commands) and participles (accompanying behaviors) that describe life filled by the Spirit and functioning according to the word and will of God

Vs 18 – be filled (P/P/Impv) with the Spirit – state of being surrendered to the will of God, The Holy Spirit (GHS).

- Confession of sin restores fellowship; rejection of temptation maintains fellowship
- Consistent state of surrender equates to walking in the Spirit

We have five participles describing behaviors motivated by the Spirit that accompany His influence.

- **Speaking** to yourselves – psalms, hymns, spiritual songs
- **Singing**
- **Psalming**
- **Giving thanks** for all things at all times to God, The Father (GF) in the name of Jesus
- **Submitting** to one another out of reverence to Christ – allowing yourself to be influenced by the ministry of other believers when God uses them to serve your needs.
 - a. The context for discussing Christian love & marriage is love relating with God.
 - b. The context for discussing marriage & family is walking in the Spirit & the word.
 - c. Christian marriage & family is the primary expression of life in the Spirit & word
 - d. Christian marriage & family is the primary proving ground for life in the Spirit & word
 - e. Only through the power of GHS and wisdom of word, could Christian marriage have any chance of accomplishing its purpose (what is the divine purpose of marriage?)
 - f. The discussion in Eph 5 is not the advice of a wise old pastor trying to help his parishioners gain the most pleasure from the personal experience of marriage.
 - g. The discussion is about married believers surrendering their lives to the ministry GHS for Him to use their marriage as the means of building Christian character in you.

In Eph 5:32 – Paul stops in his discussion about the roles in marriage to explain that he is not really talking about the human side of marriage (marital advice), he is describing how marriage is the means of and the stage upon which two believers form a dynamic image of Christ and the church.

- He has been preaching this in the churches; the wives & husbands have been coming up after the sermon saying, this is not really working like you say it should.
- They are focused on getting the best/most out of their marriage for themselves, not on how their marriage can form an image of Christ and the church to bring many to Christ.

- Paul stops in the middle of describing how Christian marriage forms an image of Christ and the church to say, I am not giving marriage advice about how you can induce & manipulate your mate into giving you what you want, I am trying to tell you that when you surrender to GHS and the word, your marriage begins to be a ministry.

The discussion found in Eph 5:22-33 (submitting & loving) is more than just commands to believers to behave in specific ways in their marriage. The lifestyle and relationship described is a result of living surrendered to GHS and the word of God. As with other high reaching commands (Jms 1:2) i.e. count it all joy, these imperatives are exhortations to live beyond normal human capacities, to do the impossible (be grateful for all things at all times) & live your marriage with supernatural power and wisdom.

1. It is easy & apparently natural to look at life on the surface.

1Sam 16:7 for man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.

Samuel, with the job of anointing the next king of Israel, was led to the house of Jesse to be shown who God wanted him to anoint. Even Samuel, the greatest prophet of Israel got caught up into the outward appearance, the externals, the circumstances and the materialistic view.

- It is our tendency and temptation to look at the outer appearance of a thing, rather than its cause or purpose – we seem to be most affected by the material world.
- Even those who are spiritually advancing tend to see the outside and neglect the inside.

Isa 53:2 For He (Christ) grew up before Him (GF) like a tender shoot, like a root from parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

- Jesus didn't have an attractive appearance that would cause others to be attracted to Him
- He wasn't pretty and He wasn't entertaining to keep everyone charmed and engaged
- He was filled with love, grace and mercy that only the discerning could see & recognize.

1 Cor 4:5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

- Stop judging – comparing different leaders, speakers, ministries; focused on the exterior – Apollos was the more attractive & better speaker.
- Judging, evaluating ministries based on visible results – numbers
- Motives – the realities beneath the surface – inner reasons for our outside choices

God evaluates us based on the inside, not how we look on outside or what people think

2 Cor 10:7 “You are looking at things as they are outwardly. If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we”. NIV – looking only at the surface

- Outward/human focus = war by the flesh, speculation, oppose God
- Opposite of every though captive to Christ – captive to self/pleasure\
- Looking on the outward appearance of a man/woman

2. God arranges the outside of our life to transform the inside – our hearts

Rom 8:28 – God causes all things to work together for good – all things

Jam 1:2-4 – see your adversities as opportunities to grow

- a. Misunderstanding – God arranges our circumstances (good/bad) because of what we deserve based on our behaviors.
- b. Misunderstanding – our circumstances are determined solely by sowing/reaping
 - God’s plan includes sowing/reaping but transcends normal human life
- c. Having bought our debt, pronounced us +R, adopted us into His family, placed us in union with Christ and made our bodies His temple, God has placed us in a realm that transcends deserving or not deserving – transcended deserving
- d. Beneath the surface of the circumstances of our lives, God is using everything to transform us into a person who believes, thinks, feels and behaves like Christ.
 - Uses relationships to reveal sin patterns that need to be changed – marriage
 - Uses finances to reveal fear based beliefs that need changing – we believe that financial prosperity is a reward for being faithful – not for anyone in NT.
 - Use health issues to reveal our mortality & fear of death
- e. God’s grace, forgiveness & provision in any/all circumstances reveals His heart
 - Learning His word & watching Him honor is the belief system of the New Man (NM) in Christ.
 - Relationships reveal our idolatry (dependence on people over God), so that we can repent of it and make God our first priority – NM love for God.
 - Adversity reveals our Old Man (OM) beliefs to be removed & then is the opportunity to practice believing the NM, habituating the Christ like life.

3. Christian marriage is God’s most personal and intense method of revealing our Old Man (OM) beliefs that need to be changed (i.e. the battle within) if we are to become like Christ.

The Battle within – (transformation) we break habitual use of Old Man (OM) beliefs that cause us to place the temporal, people, material, circumstantial life first ahead of God, replacing Old Man (OM) beliefs with New Man beliefs (NM) that puts God and His values as first in our life.

- Everything God does in our life is about empowering us to see & win this battle
- Marriage exposes more of the real you than any other relationship in life
- Takes us beyond pretending so that who/what your truly are is clearly seen,
- Our inability to obey the divine mandates to submit & love reveal human inadequacies and our unwillingness to be confronted and/or change what is in our hearts.

4. Christian Marriage is intended to make a team to help one another fight the battle within each self and corporately to help others win in their own life.

Ephesians 4:15 “but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love”.

- a. The goal of marriage is not consistent compliments, but total trust and honesty.
- b. Honest criticism from one’s mate out of love is more valuable than all the flatteries you could ever receive from anyone else – help you become like Christ.