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"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (II Corinthians 6:14).

The Right Companion

Lesson Subject: God has set standards for marriage relationships.

L63. Date: February 1988. **Text:** Genesis 24:12-15, 48; II Corinthians 6:14-16. **Topic:** Family; Marriage.

Happy Valentine's Day! What an excellent time to study Bible principles on how to marry the right partner.

If you think, "This study is not for me; I am already married," or "I do not intend to marry," then be assured that the study is for you. You can help guide younger people whom you can influence in these Bible principles on selecting a partner for the marriage covenant. Here is a lesson for young and old, married and unmarried.

Marriages may be "made in heaven," according to the old proverb, but they have to be worked out here on earth. It is essential that one marry the right partner. But how does one know who will make the right partner?

God has set out principles in Holy Scripture which should govern whom one marries. The marriage union will have joy only if it meets those standards. The comments which follow will be based on the lesson text, but will go far beyond it. We will seek to identify the principles for selecting the right partner for marriage.

I. MARRY A PERSON WHO SHARES YOUR COMMITMENT TO CHRIST

A. That principle follows the divine principle of not being unequally yoked. It is as logical that light be joined to darkness, righteousness be mixed with unrighteousness, Christ be in fellowship with

Satan, the believer agree with the infidel, or the temple of God be filled with idol gods, as for a Christian to purposefully commit his life to a non-Christian. God says, *"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers"* (II Corinthians 6: 14). Such an unequal union will bring sorrow and regret. It violates the first principle of marriage.

B. That principle prevents a spiritual separation. God asked through His prophet Amos, *"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"* (Amos 3:3). Of course they cannot. It would be like riding two horses going in opposite directions. The pleasure would be brief (even though exciting!) and the end would be painful. Jesus warned, *"No man can serve two masters. . . . Ye cannot serve God and mammon"* (Matthew 6:24). The home is a spiritual, as well as a physical, relationship. The foundation for a happy marriage is cracked from the start if there is not a mutual faith in God.

C. That principle follows the Bible example. When Jacob came to the age to consider marriage, his father Isaac counseled, *"Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan"* (Genesis 28:1). Why not? There were lovely young women among the Canaanites who would have been glad to marry Jacob. But the Canaanites were pagans who worshiped false gods. The difference in religion was the one great reason that such marriage was prohibited.

The Jews who returned from the Babylonian captivity married pagan women. Ezra required them to divorce their pagan wives and send them away (Ezra 9:1-3; 10:1-19). Religious difference was sufficient to break a marriage already consummated. It is sufficient to keep such a marriage from being entered into in the first place. Be warned!

D. That principle obeys the command of God. God forewarned Israel concerning her actions after she had conquered Palestine and driven out the pagans who were living there: *"Thou shalt make no covenant with them, . . . neither shalt thou make marriages with them. . . . For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly"* (Deuteronomy 7:2-4). How much more concretely could the Lord express it? God commands that a Christian marry a Christian. I suggest further that one marry within his faith for the sake of real harmony in the home.

II. MARRY THE PERSON TO WHOM GOD DIRECTS YOU

A. Make your marriage the object of sincere prayer. Do not pray, "Lord, give me someone to marry." Pray instead, "Lord, show me the person

who would help me live a happy life in Your service."

Look at the prayer of Abraham's servant as he went to seek a bride for Isaac (Genesis 24:23-27). Pray about the right partner. Ask God to identify him/her. Expect God to do it, and He will. You will end with these words of praise: "*Blessed be the LORD God, . . . I being in the way, the LORD led me*" (Genesis 24:27). God still answers the prayer of an honest person who wants His will to be done in marriage. Try it and see!

B. Marry only when you have God's approval of all your marriage plans. Ask God if you should marry, whom you should marry, when you should marry, and how to testify of Christ in your marriage. God said concerning a widow, for instance, "*She is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord*" (I Corinthians 7:39). Just so, you are at liberty to marry whom you choose, "*only in the Lord.*" That means that you can select your marriage partner as long as God approves. To do otherwise is to sin against God.

C. Recognize that some people are the wrong companions. A permanent union with some people will hurt you. A young lady might say, "But he will change after we are married." The wise response is, "Yes, he will change; he will get worse!" God changes people; marriage does not. The person who is not the right kind of person before marriage will not be the right kind of person after marriage. Be warned!

III. MARRY A PERSON WHO MAKES THE COMMITMENT FOR LIFE

A. The decision to marry should be personal and unforced. The pleas of the lover, a desire to get away from an unpleasant home situation, and an unwanted pregnancy are not reasons to hasten into marriage. Even in a time when marriage was arranged between parents without love being considered, "*they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go*" (Genesis 24:58). To marry in haste or under pressure will almost certainly guarantee sorrow later. "*Till death do us part*" is a very long time to endure an unpleasant union.

B. Do not consider divorce as a possible alternative. God said, "*The woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth*" (Romans 7:2). Again, He said He hated divorce (Malachi 2:16). To enter marriage with the thought, "If it does not work out, we can get a divorce and no one will be hurt," is certainly inviting the breakup of the home. Burn that bridge behind you. Make this resolve: "I am committed to this marriage union whatever the future may hold." That is what is meant in the vow, "for better, for worse," is it not?

C. Show the spirit of Christ in dealing with your partner in marriage. If the going is rough do not sin, do not revile, do not threaten; commit the whole affair to God as Jesus did (I Peter 2:21-24). Your marriage can be healed.

IV. MARRY A PERSON WHO HAS A MATURE LOVE

A. Happy marriages are based on the commitment of true love. Love does not seek its own advantage but the good of the beloved (I Corinthians 13:4-8). It involves putting into action the desire to bring the beloved's life to its fullest possible happiness and fulfillment. A person with a marriage partner who has that commitment is going to have a blessed marriage. Love is more than feeling; it is commitment.

B. True love grows with time. Imagine meeting your bride (or groom) on your wedding day after the wedding was already arranged! Isaac did (Genesis 24). But the Bible reports, *"Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her"* (Genesis 24:67). He grew to love her more and more.

Have you observed two people who have lived in the marriage covenant for many years? They begin to look alike! Their actions or their expressions grow to match. That is the way the true devotion of love grows. Later love may not be as passionate as at first, but it is deeper and greater.

C. True love seeks the good of the beloved. It seeks to serve, to enrich, to give for the sake of the loved one. Many people are in love only with themselves. They demand service to themselves in the name of love. But the love which is the basis of marriage is unselfish and ready to serve.

Marry only when all is cleared with the Lord. Jesus recognized that some people should not marry (Matthew 19:12). Paul chose not to marry for the kingdom of God's sake (I Corinthians 9:1). But when God has approved whom, when, and all the plans about your wedding, enter it with full assurance of His blessings.

QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to be "unequally yoked" in marriage?
2. What can a person who is already married to an unbeliever do?
3. What is the warning of Deuteronomy 7:3, 4?
4. What limitation is given to marriage in I Corinthians 7:39?
5. What should one do if he loves a person who is not a good marriage companion?

6. Why should marriage be entered without thought of divorce?
7. How does I Peter 2:21-24 relate to problems in marriage?