

**SPOUSE BUILDING . . .
. BE SUBJECT TO ONE ANOTHER**

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**SPOUSE BUILDING . . .
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"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..."

(Eph 5:21-25)

SPOUSE BUILDING . . . BE SUBJECT TO ONE ANOTHER

Part 1

Introduction:

Spouse-building is one topic in the group of topics dealing with the family. The other sections are the family, parenting, sexual problems, focus on young people, and care of the elderly. All these topics are interrelated. This section will focus on the marriage relationship and how it changes through the years.

"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." Mark 10:6-9

From the beginning, man and woman together completed the purpose of God in creation. They are different in ways that fit together and help one another. The unity of one flesh includes a oneness of purpose, a oneness of spirit and a oneness of family. The sharing of this intimate relationship, the moving beyond self to love another is a beginning of understanding the unity of Christ with the Father, and of the church with Christ. To leave mother and father is a passage to independence and maturity. The new creation formed by the one flesh shares in God's creative act to allow God to work through the family. God acts in the joining together of man and wife in a covenant between persons that God established and sanctioned. Discussion: In what ways has God established and sanctioned your marriage?

Part 2

Problem Description:

How does a Christian marriage work?

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ... Eph 5:21-25

For Discussion: Read the following passage from Love is a Choice.

SUBMISSION

"Another aspect of denial and magical thinking that needs examination is the additional dimension regarding wifely submission found in certain conservative churches. Kay Marshall Strom's

"The Christian wife is taught that the husband is the head of the house, as Christ heads the church."

excellent book, In the Name of Submission deals in clear, terse language with one of the ugliest of abuses, wife battering. Without mentioning codependency by name she sets down very clearly its causes and effects, particularly on the children. "The Christian wife is taught that the husband is the head of the house, as Christ heads the church. So far so good. There is no better formula for successful marriage than found in Scripture, and a tribe with two chiefs and no Indians won't function long. But when a man (whose father probably, according to the statistics, was also a wife-beater) would promulgate an abusive relationship, he'll find plenty of false evidence in Scripture to support his abuse. It's not hard.

In 1 Corinthians 7:4 he need only accept Paul's teaching that the husband rules over the wife's body - ignoring the rest of that verse, of course, that says the wife rules over the husband's body. In the same chapter, verse 10, Paul declares that a wife should not separate from her husband, Yet, how few women are counseled in the rest of the same verse - but if she does . . . Paul left the door open for extreme cases. Ms. Strom counsels wisely that the abusive husband is almost never going to change unless the wife takes drastic steps to force a change. Separation with the ultimatum "You must undergo treatment before I will return" is just about the only successful means a wife has of easing abuse. Are the children warped by a relationship in which the husband mistreats his wife? Every time. The wife is called upon to be subject to her man (Ephesians 5:22 quoted above), but hardly any one notices that in 5:21 Paul has used exactly the same word to call every Christian into similar submission to every other. Neither is the wife-beater likely to take seriously Paul's admonition to husbands in Ephesians 5:25 to love his wife protectively and sacrificially."

Part 3

Spiritual Wisdom

Spiritual Wisdom with Biblical References Reading from The Lies We Believe by Dr. Chris Thurman Marital Lies:

Lie #1: "It's All Your Fault." Secular Truth: It takes two to tango. Marital problems are rarely one person's fault.

Theological Truth:

Romans 2:1; You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgement on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgement do the same things.

Lie #2: "If it takes hard work, we must not be right for each other.

"Secular Truth: Hard work in marriage is the norm, not the exception. It means you and your partner need each other's help to work out personality flaws and weaknesses.

Theological Truth:

1 Corinthians 7:28; But those who marry will face many troubles in this life.

Lie #3: "You can and should meet all my needs. "Secular Truth: No one person can meet all your needs. Your needs can best be met through a variety of sources.

Theological Truth:

Philippians 4:19; And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Lie #4: "You Owe Me. "Secular Truth: Your spouse doesn't really "owe" you anything for what you do. You do what you do because, at some level, you choose to do it. You aren't owed anything for what you choose to do.

Theological Truth:

1 Peter 5:5; Clothe yourself with humility because "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Lie #5: "I shouldn't have to change."

Secular Truth:

Marriage requires change. People who refuse to change stagnate themselves and their marriages.

The important issue is deciding what we need to change about ourselves and what we don't.

Theological Truth:

Hebrews 12:14; Make every effort to live in peace with all and to be holy.

Lie #6: "You Should be Like Me."

Secular Truth:

Every person is unique and can't be a carbon copy of anyone else. It would be boring if it weren't that way.

Theological Truth:

1 Corinthians 12: 18-19; But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be?

Part 4

Practical Help

How to build up, not tear down.

Reading from: A Book for Couples by Hugh and Gayle Prather

"How to build up, not tear down."

Magic Rules for Ruining Any Discussion

1. Bring the matter up when at least one of you is angry, Variations: Bringing it up when nothing can be done about it (in the middle of the night....)
2. Be as personal as possible when setting forth the problem. Variations: Know the answer before you ask the question. While describing the issue, use an accusatory tone. Begin by implying who, as usual, is to blame.
3. Concentrate on getting what you want. Variations: Overwhelm your partner's position before he or she can muster a defense (be very emotional, call in past favors, be impeccably reasonable).
4. Instead of listening, think only of what you will say next. Variations: Do other things while your partner is talking. Forget where your partner left off. In other words, listen with all the interest you would give a bathroom exhaust fan.

5. Correct anything your partner says about you. Variations: Each time your partner gives an example of your behavior, cite a worse example of his or hers. Repeat "That's not what I said" often. Do not accept anything your partner says at face value.
6. Mention anything from the past that has a chance of making your partner defensive. Variations: Make allusions to your partner's sexual performance. Remind your husband of his mother's faults. Compare what your wife does to what other women do, and after she complains, say, "I didn't mean it that way."
7. End by saying something that will never be forgotten. Variations: Do something that proves you are a madman. At least leave the impression you are a little put out.

Discussion: Rephrase or rewrite the above "suggestions" to express positive ways to talk over problems.

Part 5

Communications

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others.

Philippians 2:1-4

Problems in communications come from several sources. The first is differing assumptions. In marriage, the patterns of living were learned from the parents. Husbands have assumptions about wives from their mother; wives have assumptions about husbands from their father. In the different stages of life and marriage, time-release problems may appear as the couple has different assumptions about that period.

For example, when the first child comes, the wife may have different assumptions about how a father shares in the parenting than the husband does. Later, when the husband and wife have retired from full-time work, how they relate and what they do together may become a problem. The wife may want to travel while the husband wants to garden. Second, the patterns of communication may differ. The patterns of communicating as learned from their families may be different. Also, the male communication style is often different from the

female style. In fact, talk between the sexes may be very different, "cross-cultural" communication even when both parties grew up in the same town and went to the same church.

A Good Knock-Down Drag Out Fight Differences in attitudes toward conflict itself show up in daily conversations. Gail hates to argue. If Norman becomes angry and raises his voice, she is deeply upset. "I can't talk to you if you're yelling," she says. Why can't we discuss this like mature people?" Norman can never figure this out.

A Good Knock-Down Drag Out Fight Differences in attitudes toward conflict itself show up in daily conversations.

To him, being able to fight with someone is evidence of intimacy. In contrast, the less monotonous discussions that she values as a sign of intimacy are anathema to him.

They just wear him down, whereas he feels fine after a good knock-down, drag-out fight - which leaves her feeling weary and defeated. He regards such fighting as a form of ritual combat and values it as a sign of involvement, since only those who are intimately involved with each other argue.

Silence is Golden - or Leaden A theme running through Mirra Komarovsky's classic study *Blue Collar Marriage* is that many of the wives interviewed said that they talked more than their husbands ("He's tongue-tied," one woman said of her husband; "My husband has a great habit of not talking," said another). More wives want to talk, and have their husbands talk, about problems. In contrast, more husbands withdraw in the face of troubles ("when I don't feel good, I light out and don't dump my load on them"), emotional stress, or a wife's "demands". Yet there is no question but that these husbands are "dominant" in their marriages. Taciturnity itself can be an instrument of power. Komarovsky quotes a mother who says of her husband, "He doesn't say much but he means what he says and the children mind him."

Part 6

Understanding one Another

For those men and women considering marriage, the need to understand one another is important before the wedding, even before the announcement of engagement. Dating and remarriage relationships may hide information and avoid confronting differences.

Communication problems may become serious concerns after the wedding. To understand

their significance, you must first have a clear perception of what are the causes of divorce.

I am grateful to George Gallup who has made available these results of polls reported in 1989 (sample size 989 adults).

The major problems in most divorces are not profound, intractable difficulties, such as physical abuse (which sparked 5% of divorces) or drugs alcohol abuse (which

Typical Causes of Divorce!

caused 16% of breakups). Infidelity is a cause of only 17% of dissolution's. The overwhelming cause of divorce is "incompatibility," which is responsible for 47% of divorces. Related to that were arguments over money, family, or children (10%). (Another 5% cited no cause.)

However, stated differently, three-fifths of marriages (57%) failed due to poor communication, or to poor conflict resolution skills.

"The problems that ultimately lead to the breakup of a marriage become apparent quite early in the relationship. More than one-third (38%) who have divorced reported that they were aware of the problem at the time of marriage or soon thereafter," said the Gallup study.

Consider some of the myths and misunderstandings that occur before marriage as given in Fit to be Tied by Bill and Lynne Hybels.

- ☛ Pressure - Society's underlying message - that there is something wrong with people who are not married or in serious dating relationships - pushes single people to fret and flirt and market themselves. Too often they hurl themselves at the first candidate who comes along.
- ☛ Loneliness - Marriage will end my aloneness. See John 14:27
- ☛ Put me back together - Marriage will heal my brokenness. But whole healthy marriages cannot be built on foundations of brokenness. Spouses cannot be expected to be life preservers.
- ☛ Double Your Pleasure? - Probably the most widely believed of all the marriage myths is this one: Marriage will ensure my happiness... .
- ☛ Settling down - The mistaken assumption is that a wedding will automatically change a person. But that seldom happens.
- ☛ Not for Everyone - The final myth about marriage is that it is God's plan for everyone. It isn't. The Bible acknowledges that some believers choose not to marry. In Matthew 19:21 Jesus defends those who "have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven." 2 Cor 6:14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

The practical wisdom of God's word applies to brothers and sisters considering marriage. Good communication should precede the engagement. Perhaps counselling and mentoring are needed to help a couple talk through and not ignore their assumptions about marriage and how they work through problems. In *Fit to be Tied*, Bill and Lynne Hybels discuss four reasons for spiritual compatibility.

Four reasons for spiritual compatibility.

1. The first probable reason for demanding spiritual compatibility is to ensure that the marriage partners will share a common treasure, to make sure that every husband and wife share that which is most precious to them with their spouse.
2. The second probable reason God insists on spiritual compatibility is to enable spouses to build their marriage from a common blueprint.
3. The third reason God calls for spiritual compatibility in marriage is so both spouses can, through prayer, tap into a common strength in the face of these inevitable adversities.

Part 7

Accommodating Individuality

Toxic faith is a destructive and dangerous relationship with a religion that allows the religion, not the relationship with God, to control a person's life.

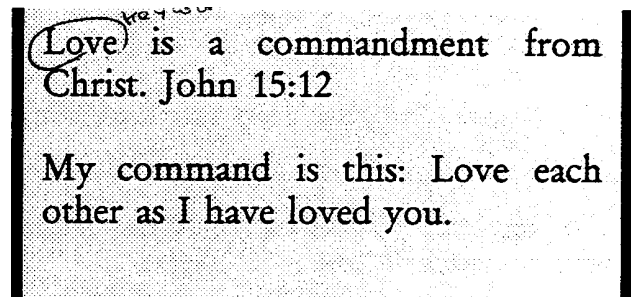
Our hope is that you have gained clarity on some issues. But more than that, our desire is for you to have gained some perspective on how to approach Scripture, how to let Scripture approach you, and how to hold others accountable for "rightly dividing" Scripture, as well as you have seen, the Word of God is like a powerful sword. It can be used as an instrument of grace by bringing reminders of God's love. It can bring order to our lives. In the wrong hands, or wrongfully used, it can be used to put weights on people and shame them into performing someone's agenda in the name of God.

Many assumptions about marriage have their roots in the family and cultural patterns of our society. Just as slave owners could use scripture to defend their position, abusers of the weaker partner, usually the wife, have used scripture to defend the abuse. Not all abuse is

physical. Indeed, the victim in psychological cruelty and spiritual abuse may not realize the control and damage that is occurring. Love is a choice, a gift of the will.

Love is not a fleeting feeling. Love is a commandment from Christ. John 15:12 "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."

Toxic faith and spiritual abuse use religion and the trust people have in religious leaders, to control and dominate others. Accommodating individuality and independence of thought defends against the misuse of God's Word.



The book by Wayne Mack, "Strengthening Your Marriage" offers a Biblical study and workbook for couples desiring to research what God's Word says about marriage and their respective roles.

Even within "Biblical" and Christian literature you will find a variety of interpretations. Of course, you will be told that selfishness and self-love are two different things. But you cannot find the distinction in the Scriptures. People who like to push the self-image, self-love concept often will tell you that Jesus commanded us to love ourselves. They will turn to the two great commandments and triumphantly point out that Jesus ordered us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. But they distort the Scriptures in doing so.

Here is why:

1. There is no command to love one's self; the presumption underlying the command to love your neighbours as ourselves is that we already love ourselves. The last phrase might even be translated "as [you are loving] yourself."
2. Jesus Himself says, "On these two commandments ... ", thereby making it beyond dispute that He summed up the law in only two commandments (love God; love neighbour), not three. Yet, in spite of Christ's unmistakable pronouncement that there were two commandments, many go on declaring not only that there are three, but that unless we learn how to love ourselves we will never be able to love another. The marriage counselor will discover that the combination of native self-centredness and the added impetus given by current psychological propaganda is a fundamental problem in marriages everywhere.

There are many books and pamphlets available on marriage. The ways in which our community of faith can respond to help those couples at risk, and to reconcile those who have separated, need more discussion.

Part 8

Encouraging loyalty

Marriage Savers (Reading from Marriage Ministry Guiding Actions)

1. Through other Christians' testimony and example we/I found hope for our marriage. B.

Commitment to God

2. I experienced God's love and forgiveness.

3. I made a decision/ commitment to love: Christ, mate, self. (This wording indicates that this kind of love comes only after commitment is made, Known as agape, it is the form of love that is self-giving rather than self-receiving.)

4. I made a decision and commitment to follow Jesus as my Savior and Lord.

5. Once obedient to God, we were able to begin to love by his standards and not ours.

6. I became accountable to God for my behavior, thoughts, and actions and became aware of my accountability to others.

Commitment to Partner

7. We/I made a decision to stay together.

8. We/I made a decision to forgive mate and myself.

9. I accepted my mate as he/she is. D. Changed Myself

10. I realized that the problem was with myself.

11. I began to look at myself as needing change to be able to love, no matter what. I became aware that I needed to change, become willing to change, learned what and how to change, and began to change with God's help.

12. I made an examination of my role in our marriage according to God's Word and changed accordingly with God's help.

13. I accepted change in my mate.

Trust

14. Through Christ, I began trusting enough to increasingly put my whole self in the care of my mate.
15. I learned to communicate honestly, truthfully, and openly, in love.
16. I learned to put God and mate ahead of myself (became humble before the Lord). F.

The Process

17. We are still in the process and realize that we must share what we have found with others.

Part 9

Success stories

Arden and Sheila Larsen had separated and were preparing for divorce action. Their previous spouses had died. Both brought children from their other partner to the marriage. Together they had one son. With the help of a biblical counselor, they realized that divorce was the wrong action. Acknowledging wrongs on both sides, reconciliation began. With the help of God and using God's Word as their guide, Arden and Sheila have rebuilt their marriage and reunited their family. They have trained with the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors so they can help other couples. The National Association of Nouthetic Counselors uses the work of Jay E. Adams for its guide to counselling. The books by Wayne Mack also fit the biblical pattern of counselling supported by this group. Nouthetic is a Greek word which combines exhort, preach, admonish and confront.

The address for the National Association for Nouthetic Counselors is:

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