

**“And this Gospel ,
shall be preached...”**
Matthew 24:14

Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God

The Care and Feeding of a Happy Marriage

By Dean Blackwell

Today I would like to discuss a great blessing God has given us—marriage. I call marriage a “great blessing” because it *can* be, if the relationship is built and maintained properly. I have been happily married for nearly 27 years now, and the reason is largely because of the training I received at Ambassador College beginning in 1952.

I had gone to Texas A&M, where we had some unique classes—I studied petroleum engineering. But when I came to Ambassador College, I found some unique classes here, too. One of them was sex education. The class has some different, perhaps more technical, names on it now, but it is still the same class. When I took it we had the privilege of having Herbert W. Armstrong as the teacher. He showed us the basic principles of husband-wife relationships so we students would have the guidance we needed to build happy marriages.

So when my wife and I were married by a minister of God’s Church in Big Sandy, Tex., we didn’t have any scars in our past which could ruin our future happiness. I had received Mr. Armstrong’s firsthand instruction before. My wife and I knew the way to continually nurture a rewarding marriage relationship. I’d like to share with you today some of the keys to happy marriages. I would like to pass on some helpful things I’ve learned through the years that can make marriages a lot more joyful. Then we can be more thankful for our mar-

riages and really consider them the “great blessing” God intended them to be.

Need for Frankness and Affection

When Mr. Armstrong established Ambassador College, he knew it should be a coeducational institution. One of the drawbacks he’d noticed previously with men and families with whom he’d associated was that there was no training for wives. Wives didn’t have the same emphasis placed on their roles as the men did on theirs. Mr. Armstrong noticed that one cause of men’s failures was the absence of competent wives from their lives.

So Mr. Armstrong decided that Ambassador would train wives as well as husbands. As a matter of fact, in some of the ministerial training sessions we used to get into, Mr. Armstrong would discuss outstanding traits needed in ministers’ wives, like frankness and affection. These qualities are too often lacking in marriages today, as the women are taught to be shy and yielding and the men are taught to be forceful and aggressive. You don’t see openness, compassion, tenderness and meekness in marriages. You see yelling, bickering, emotional outbursts and immaturity. God intended for mates to express love for each other like the man and woman did in the Song of Solomon.

The movie “Fiddler On the Roof” illustrates this kind of love.

In a very moving moment, this vigorous, hard-working man says to his wife, "Do you love me?" After a pause she replies, "Why, I've been with you for 24 years. I've brought up your children..." He waits a little bit, then looks at her again and asks, "Do you love me?" She answers, "Well, don't be silly! I've lived with you all these years and we've been through a lot of tests and predicaments..." There is a pause, and then the man looks at her again and asks, "Yes, but do you love me?"

This man needed somebody to express appreciation, joy and delight. We live in an age that discourages expression of feeling. It just isn't acceptable to openly display affection.

We need this kind of expressiveness in our marriages. Half the confessions of love in the Song of Solomon came from the man, but the other half came from the woman. It should be just as natural for the woman to express appreciation and concern for the man as it is for the man to express love for the woman. Yet one of the biggest causes of failing marriages is the lack of communication—the lack of satisfaction and delight. Mates are not really sure whether the other person loves them.

Proper Leadership

When I was a young man planning to get married, I wanted to be sure that I was the head of my family. I wanted to be in authority over my wife. Maybe that's natural for a man. There's a Biblical command that the man be head of the family. But there has to be a right balance.

Mr. Armstrong has said that the husband should *dominate* but never *domineer*. Do you know the difference between the two?

I was by nature a domineering person. I didn't know it and when people told me I didn't believe it. When I was going home from college in 1953 to get married, a girl student wrote some memorable remarks in my yearbook. She said, "Now Dean, be kind and gentle and understanding toward Maxine." I thought, "What in the world! Doesn't she know me? Why would she write that? Of course I'm going to be kind and gentle!" But I wasn't that way. I didn't see myself as I was.

But finally I learned a lesson I'll never forget. We were in Israel, standing on the balcony of a Jerusalem hotel, when a man I love very much said, "Dean, I'd like to talk with you for a little bit." My wife and I had

been traveling with him and his wife for about four weeks. He told me, "I feel I need to bring this to your attention. You know, you're overbearing toward your wife. You're domineering!" Well, by then I could understand that he was right.

Mr. Armstrong used to come all the way from California to Chicago by train. He would spend a day or two with us and then catch another train to New York. He would ride from Los Angeles all the way to New York on a train—a trip that took several days and nights. Why? Because his wife was afraid to fly. Mrs. Armstrong would fly when she had to—she was willing to endure the fear and nervousness, etc.—but Mr. Armstrong wouldn't make her do that. He was too considerate.

When you learn to balance leadership and authority—when you dominate but not domineer—you can develop kindness and consideration.

The marriage ceremony the Church has used for years begins with Ephesians 5:21. As a young, newly-married man, I would have liked for it to begin with verse 22, the part that says: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands." But the ceremony starts in verse 21: "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."

Do you mean to tell me there are times when a man should listen to his wife? Are there times when a man should even be corrected by his wife? Yes. The wife's input and wisdom must be an integral part of decisions that are made. A man who has grown enough spiritually to recognize his wife's knowledge and appreciate it—and decide according to her counsel when it is valid—is really obeying verse 21.

God created mankind male and female and said they are to function together as a team. God created marriage and said that marriage partners should submit themselves to one another, always fearing Him. God said the husband is to be head of the wife. Therefore, in the fear of God, a man should be afraid to misuse his authority, and a woman should be afraid to rebel against God's authority.

So the biggest consideration in marriage is really the theme of the whole Bible—government, authority and balance. Mr. Armstrong got this message about proper leadership across to us very clearly at one ministerial conference when he said, "If I find out any of you men are belittling your wives, you are going to be out of a job!" That really got our

attention. For men to belittle or domineer over their wives is certainly condemnable.

Responsible Use of Authority

People must develop the responsibility necessary to properly use authority. If they don't, they will end up like the person who directs the kids across the street at school crossings. First thing you know he is out there directing traffic like a policeman. The next thing you know he is a self-appointed buck sergeant ordering everybody around. If you're not careful when you're given a little authority, you'll get carried away with it and all of a sudden you'll start overusing—and misusing—it.

For instance, Peter directed Church elders in how to use their authority: "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (I Pet. 5:3). Men can apply that same attitude toward their wives. Mates should work together as a team. But the hardest thing to accomplish with human nature seems to be maintaining a right balance.

Take one classic statement Mr. Armstrong has made: "I would never marry a woman who couldn't wear the pants. But I never would be married to one who did." To me, that is perfect balance. That hits the nail right on the head.

I counseled students for five years as a college faculty member, and it was surprising to me how many young men would get confused, and they'd come in to counsel. They'd say, "I really don't know what to do. There's one girl I really like—she's quiet, shy, meek and yielding. Then there's this other girl who's just a real challenge, you know—it's always a job for me to stay ahead of her. She's always pushing me to accomplish more. So I'm in a predicament, because humanly it would be easy to rule over the first girl, but it would be a real prod and challenge to lead the other."

Well, nobody would enjoy being married to someone who doesn't have any get-up-and-go or any backbone—someone who's as limp as a dishrag. It's a challenge to be married to someone who keeps you on your toes.

So I really appreciate Mr. Armstrong's statement. There's good counsel in it for some of you.

Subjection to Your Mate

Women's liberation has profoundly affected society, and to a degree it has affected us in the

Church and our marriages. Now you hear of people who want to take "obey" out of the marriage ceremony and write their own vows.

Mr. Armstrong said, "Show me a woman who wants a 50/50 marriage and I'll show you one who wants to wear the pants." What is a 50/50 marriage? How do you have one? Perhaps you take turns making decisions, or maybe you make decisions together. But what if you can't agree on them? Who decides what course of action you will take together?

Any of us who might have a modernistic attitude of wanting a 50/50 marriage should know that the Bible says a woman's delight and joy is to be married to one who can lead her and stay ahead of her. She needs someone she can respect—who will listen to her wisdom and counsel and yet not be henpecked. Notice Peter's dual admonitions: "Ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands . . . Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge" (I Pet. 3:1, 7).

Don't try to cram your tastes down your partner's throat, and don't try to overlord the person. I've seen cases where a man would marry a woman and within months the woman looked and acted totally different. The man had enforced his tastes on her. He tried to remake her into the kind of woman he thought would please him, and only succeeded in destroying her self-respect and drive.

We all have different tastes. My wife doesn't like the same kind of music I do. She doesn't like the same sports I do. There are areas where we have the same interests and areas where we don't. But that's no big deal. The point is that the husband should dwell with his wife according to knowledge, and be the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church (Eph. 5:23). How is Christ the head of the Church? "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (verse 25). Christ, the head of the Church, loved it so much He gave His life for it.

A lot of men, either symbolically or literally, give their lives in marriage. They go out and face all kinds of pressures in the world. Most men live several years less than their wives, due to high blood pressure and heart failures. Christ gave Himself for the Church. So the husband should have a giving, self-sacrificing attitude for his wife.

Notice verse 26: "That he might sanctify and

cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” In other words, it’s the husband’s responsibility to lead his wife spiritually. He should see that they study and pray together, not as an overlord but as an example and a leader.

How many of you ladies have been duped by society’s ideal man—a dark, curly-headed, handsome, flashy dream boat? That’s ridiculous! The real “dream boat” is somebody who is going to be a Christian leader, who is going to be kind to you and be the kind of husband God commands him to be. How many girls look for a spiritual leader who will sanctify and cleanse them with the washing of water by the word? Not browbeat or intimidate them, but study the Bible with them, pray with them and lead them.

“That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (verse 27). The man’s desire as the leader should be to bring his wife to that condition.

Keys to Happier Marriages

I have a list I carry with me to remind me what I am supposed to be as a husband. Whenever I have a little time, I take this little sheet of paper out of my wallet and remind myself of what I’m supposed to be and do. Maybe you can apply these points, too.

(1) *Husbands, love your wives* (Eph. 5:25). God commands you to be expressive. Let your wife know you love her. It’s a good idea to commit yourself to telling your wife every day that you love her. Let her know you appreciate her and consider her half of your success. On the other hand, the two top jobs of a wife are to encourage and inspire her husband.

(2) *Dwell with your wife according to knowledge* (I Pet. 3:7). “Husbands, love your wives, *and be not bitter against them*” (Col. 3:19). God commands you husbands to rule your natures and emotions and to control your tongues. The word “bitter” in Greek means “belittling.” That’s of Satan, not of God. Don’t be at odds with your wife.

(3) *Accept your wife’s natural differences from you*. God made men and women differently and saw that everything was very good (Gen. 1:31). Neither sex is greater than the other. They mutually excel each other—they blend together into perfection. *Vive la difference!*

(4) *Husbands, be the head of your wives*. Lead—be an example. Be in authority and dominate, but don’t domineer. Appreciate and respect your wife and listen to her counsel and wisdom.

(5) *Remember to be a peacemaker*. Develop self-control and compassion. Remind yourself of this duty from day to day.

(6) *See to your wife’s health*. The husband is to a large degree responsible for the wife’s physical well-being, just as the wife is to a large degree responsible for the husband’s physical well-being. Make sure you both get the proper diet and sufficient exercise. Good health will bring you both much happiness in the long run.

(7) *Study the Bible and pray together*. How long has it been since you’ve applied this suggestion? The husband should lead his family spiritually as well as physically.

(8) *Schedule a big date alone at least once a month!* Mark it on a family calendar—make time for it among all your other family activities.

(9) *Set aside time to talk*. Communication problems are a main cause of marriage failures. Schedule a time when you’re not in a hurry so you can discuss improving the home, family problems and how you can help each other grow.

(10) *Value your wife’s input*. Notice a quality of the virtuous woman: “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness” (Prov. 31:26). Your wife should be your help-meet in every way. If I were a girl and I didn’t know a man appreciated my character and thought highly of my wisdom if he just thought of me physically—I would be highly offended. Don’t be too high and mighty to accept good judgment from your wife. Be subject to one another.

(11) *Don’t let the sun set on your wrath*. Don’t let problems magnify and roots of bitterness grow. God’s way is to get things settled day by day: “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:34).

These points have been a help to our marriage for more than 26 years. Perhaps they can help yours too. I hope we can all have happier marriages and be able to be more thankful for them in the future.