

# A Marriage Partnership Centered on Christ

Doctrinal Conviction of Pastor-Teacher Paul B. Phair

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It takes three, not just two to make a marriage work; the husband and wife of course, but also a key third person, Jesus! Jesus is to be at the center of the marriage relationship we enter into in order to lead and empower us to fulfill our vows to the honor of God and to the enrichment of one another, to our possible children, and to so many others.

As each one of us has a God-shaped vacuum which only Christ can fill, so too, the marriage of two people is incomplete without Jesus Christ. It is He who can also fill and shape a marriage into fulfillment as together they pursue life's highest purpose.

And what is life's highest purpose? Simply stated it is living for Christ. Individual Christ-followers have been forgiven of their failings through personal faith in Jesus Christ. He has made them new people to serve Him. As Scripture says, we have been forgiven and rescued by God's grace when we placed our faith in Christ alone. And now He has created us anew in Christ, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Jesus said that the goal of our lives is to "seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously" (Matthew 6:33 NLT). He also urged, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength" (Mark 12:30 NLT). Furthermore, the apostle Paul said "our aim is to please [our Lord] always in everything we do" (2 Corinthians 5:9 TLB). We accept Jesus' invitation to place His yoke over our shoulders to learn from Him and devotedly follow the plans He has for us (Matthew 11:29, GW).

If living for Jesus Christ is the purpose for our lives individually, then clearly God would lead us to partner with a spouse who would pursue that purpose with us. If Jesus Christ is to be the center of our individual lives, then He is to be the center of the marriage to which we enter. When we commit ourselves to a person in marriage, we do so to form one unit. It is then that our individual purpose in life becomes our united purpose in a marriage relationship. As a husband and wife we are designed to function as a team to minister in this world for Jesus Christ. Therefore, we value partnering with a spouse who will take on Jesus' yoke beside us and to pull with us as we together follow His purposes for our lives.

Ephesians 5 says that the husband is to love his wife as Jesus loved the church. What is the *goal* of Jesus' love? It is to present a holy people to the Father. If you will truly

love your spouse with His kind of love, then your highest ambition will be to contribute to your partner's Christian maturity. In like manner, you will long for a spouse in your life who will be furthering your faith and godly character. You will not settle for any other kind. Furthermore, you can be sure that if God purposes for you to be married, that He will provide that kind of partner for you.

If you strive to follow Jesus, here are some **reasons why choosing to date and then marry a maturing, earnest Christ-follower will be the pathway of blessing for you:**

### **1. You will have the potential for maximum intimacy in your relationship**

- 1.1. God intends for you to experience intimacy in your marriage in three areas: body, soul, & spirit. No doubt you are entering into marriage for the purpose of experiencing intimacy; therefore give yourself the opportunity to experience the maximum intimacy God intends for your life.
- 1.2. You can share the core and best parts of who you are with your spouse, and your partner has the capacity to truly connect with you at the deepest level.
- 1.3. You have the capacity to experience the intimacy of reading Scripture together and talking together with God, sharing your joys and concerns together with Him, and seeking His direction.
- 1.4. In times of crises you can lift your burdens together to God in prayer rather than shouldering the spiritual load alone.
- 1.5. Often when a believer in Jesus marries one who is not, the believer hopes and prays for years that his or her spouse will come to personal faith in Jesus. Occasionally this does occur; many times it never happens, bringing great heartache and years of tension.

### **2. You will have a partner who strengthens your faith, character, & ministry**

- 2.1. We all need people in our lives who will motivate us to love God and others more fully and to live a life that honors Him and blesses others (Hebrews 10:25; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). Our spouse ought to be one of those special people in our lives who encourages us to fulfill the greatest purposes of our lives.
- 2.2. Scripture counsels us to "guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life" (Proverbs 4:23, NLT). Intimately partnering your life with a spouse who shares your same affections for Christ that you do can help sustain and fuel your love for Christ. There is a very real danger that a spouse, who is at best indifferent to what you presently hold to be precious, could over time, drain away your warm love for Christ. "... do not let anyone lead you astray, for 'bad company corrupts good character'" (1 Corinthians 15:33, NJB & NIV). May Jesus never say of us as He has said of others, "... this is what I have against you: you do not love me now as you did at first" (Revelation 2:4 TEV).
- 2.3. King Solomon was once the wisest person on the face of the earth, yet he chose to disobey God's command by marrying women who didn't love and serve the one true God. Over time, his unbelieving wives eventually influenced his heart and life away from God. Solomon did not sustain a life of faithful devotion for the Lord as his father David had done (1 Kings 1:1-3; 4:29; 11:1-6; also see Nehemiah 13:23-27).

- 2.4. When you marry a devoted follower of Jesus you will both have a common foundation upon which to determine your values and priorities in life.
- 2.5. When God answers your prayers, both you and your believing spouse can celebrate and give thanks to God, rather than experiencing the skepticism of an unbelieving spouse who doesn't see the hand of God in life's events.
- 2.6. When you both love the Lord, together you will delight to make public worship a priority, along with fellowshiping with others of like faith. You will also be able to harmoniously devote a portion of your time to ministry to others.
- 2.7. When you both strive to grow in faith, you can share the joy of trusting God by giving to Him growing portions of His financial blessings to you. You can celebrate in your kingdom investments and compassionate care for others.

### **3. You will have an influential partner to teach and model to your children what it means for them to love and follow Jesus**

- 3.1. Believers who long to one day be blessed by God with children, also long for their children to experience eternal life through Jesus who will grow to become devoted followers of Jesus themselves. Wise prospective parents know that usually God's best plan is for a child to have both a Christian father (Ephesians 6:4) and a Christian mother (2 Timothy 3:15; 2 Timothy 1:5) who will teach and model the Christian faith to them.
- 3.2. Those who love Christ and their future children will carefully choose to marry a person who will be a Christian model their child can follow. "Fathers, don't exasperate your children by coming down hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master [Jesus]" (Ephesians 6:4 MSG).

### **4. You will experience joy and peace, in the midst of sorrow, if physical death comes to your spouse before you.**

Today I received an email from a good friend, who lost his wife two years ago due to her physical death. As he expressed his sorrow at their separation and his painful loneliness, he also wrote of his toasting with other loved ones in celebration of her two earth-years of being in heaven. He also expressed that he would not bring her back even if God gave him the choice to do so. Why? Because he knows she's experiencing fullness of life and joy in unprecedented fashion. The Christ-follower who is left behind does not grieve with despair over a believing spouses' departure as do those who's former spouse did not have a saving relationship with Christ. How wonderful when both the husband and wife love Christ, and have guided their children to do the same. They are a family who will be united for time and eternity.

### **5. You will be honoring God by obeying His wise & good commands**

- 5.1. God designs His commands for our good; they always protect us from harm and provide us with a pathway to experience His blessing. Furthermore our obedience to God's commands honors Him and brings Him delight by our expression of love and trust in Him. Jesus said, "Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them" (John 14:21, NLT). Disobedience is sin which brings a guilty conscience and invites trouble into our lives. The emotional pain of a strained or broken marriage is among the worst forms of pain in life there is.

- 5.2. Throughout the Old Testament the Lord commanded men and women in Israel not to marry spouses from other nations who did not also love and serve the one true God. God's holy command was intended to preserve their remaining faithful to Him (Exodus 31:1-17; 34:15-16; Deuteronomy 7:1-4; Joshua 23:5-7; Ezra 9:12; Nehemiah 10:30; 13:23-27).
- 5.3. "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If her husband dies, she is **free to marry anyone she wishes, but only if he loves the Lord**" (1 Corinthians 7:39, NLT). Clearly, Paul taught in harmony with God's commands in the Hebrew Scriptures that God's people are to marry only those who also follow the Lord.<sup>1</sup>
- 5.4. "**Don't harness yourselves in an uneven team with unbelievers.** How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? What harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? **How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever?** (2 Corinthians 6:14-15, NJB & NLT). While Jesus and the apostle Paul both taught and modeled befriending unbelievers to influence them to come to faith<sup>2</sup>, they both teach that we are to be on guard against succumbing to the negative influences they can have on us. With the latter in mind, the apostle Paul is here commanding Christ-followers not to form intimate, personal relationships with those who remain in spiritual darkness; instead they ought to only choose Christian alliances and associations.<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier in verses 12-16, Paul addressed the situation of couples who were both unbelievers at the time of their marriage, but subsequently one of them came to a trusting faith in Jesus. What was the believing spouse now to do in this marriage when his or her spouse wasn't a follower of Jesus? Should such a Christian then divorce the unbeliever and then remarry one who is? Paul clearly states "no", "each of you should remain as you were when God called you" (vs. 20, NLT). The believer is to remain a faithful spouse to their unbelieving partner until death, unless the unbeliever demands to end the marriage because their partner has become a Christ-follower. However, if death ends such a marriage, now that the believer has a choice, she (statistically there were more widows than widowers) ought to only marry a man who, like herself, loves the Lord.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 (NLT) "Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. <sup>20</sup> When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. <sup>21</sup> When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. <sup>22</sup> When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some."

<sup>3</sup> Paul's imagery for this principle is founded on Deuteronomy 22:10 (NLT) "You must not plow with an ox and a donkey harnessed together."

primary reference Paul has in mind involved associations in idolatrous festivals and marriage with non-believers.<sup>4</sup> It is vastly more important to have in common a relationship with Christ, than common interests; Jesus is to be the center of a marriage.

- 5.5. When we wait upon God until He provides us with a believing partner to marry, we are trusting that our Heavenly Father knows what is best for us and we trust Him for His provision in His time. God loves His children supremely so that He not only provides us with the costly gift of salvation, but generously gives us everything we truly need and so much more (Romans 8:32; Psalm 145:8-21; Ephesians 3:20). God knows of your need for intimate companionship, therefore just as He provided Adam with Eve as a compassionate and good gift to fill his loneliness, He will supply you a loving and godly life-partner; if not, then you can trust that God's loving plans for you are wiser than you can see, and as you look to Him, that He will supply you with comfort, peace, and strength (1 Peter 4:7; Philippians 4:4-7, 14; 1 Corinthians 12:7-10; Hebrews 4:14-16).

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<sup>4</sup> I found two commentaries to be especially helpful on this text: Tasker on 2 Corinthians, p. 98; and Hodge, p. 294