

Introduction:

1. If you were asked to describe your marriage, you would say what?
  - a. “My spouse and I have a good marriage.” While many couples might say that, that doesn’t tell us much. Some folks might say that and still have a marriage that is less than ideal.
  - b. What about the personal, close-knit nature of your relationship? I am afraid some folks don’t really have that kind of relationship—though they may claim a good marriage.
  - c. This forces us to ask: What is a good marriage? What did God intend?
2. There is unique parallel between having a good marriage and something even more important.

The Lesson:**I. The nature of my relationship to my spouse.**

- A. There are two ways marriage can be viewed. The first can be described by these elements.
  1. Marriage means committing myself to a covenant with my spouse. I understand that the covenant has obligations; I make promises that I must keep.
  2. Faithfulness means abiding by the rules of the marriage covenant. I must keep my vows.
  3. Unfaithfulness means I violate the rules of the covenant. I do not honor my vows.
  4. Repentance means I admit my violation of the rules; I promise to change.
  5. Forgiveness means she accepts my repentance and doesn’t enforce penalties on me.
- B. Are all of these things true? Would you disagree with them? They certainly are true. But would you agree that this is a rather impersonal way of looking at marriage? There is another view.
  1. Marriage is committing myself to a person. More than just to a contract, I obligate myself to her personally. I make commitments and promises to her to love, honor and cherish.
  2. Faithfulness means I keep myself to her only and seek to please her because I love her.
  3. Unfaithfulness means I have betrayed my spouse and have violated her trust in me.
  4. Repentance means I sorrow over my personal betrayal; I recommit myself to her.
  5. Forgiveness from my spouse means she accepts my recommitment, and that she renews and restores the intimate companionship I lost when I betrayed her.
- C. Let us analyze these two views of marriage.
  1. In A, though every element in it is true, it depersonalizes marriage. It means obeying rules of the marriage covenant, but has no heart in it. It is more about my relationship to rules. I want to know what all the rules are, and at what point I break the rules.
  2. In B, it is about my relationship to the person. It is about my personal commitment to love, honor and cherish her. The Bible does not leave out rules; but marriage is more than rule-keeping: Genesis 2:23-24; Song of Solomon 2:16; Matthew 5:27-28; Matthew 19:3-6; 1 Corinthians 7:2-5, 33-34; Ephesians 5:22-33. Are there rules here? Of course; but there is also a very personal relationship. The personal relationship does not eliminate rules!

## II. The nature of my relationship to my Lord.

- A. There is a parallel in marriage to a spouse and marriage to Christ. We are married (joined) to our Lord, Romans 7:4. Do we have a depersonalized view? Here is how that is described:
1. Marriage to Christ means believing a set of facts about Jesus and obeying the set of rules He has given. It means obligating myself to the standards given in His covenant.
  2. Faithfulness means abiding by the rules of the gospel; keeping my obligations and vows.
  3. Unfaithfulness means I violate the rules of the gospel; I do not honor my vows.
  4. Repentance means I admit my violation of His rules and promise to change.
  5. Forgiveness means He accepts my repentance and doesn't enforce penalties on me.
- B. Are all of these things just mentioned true? Indeed, they are. But would you agree that this is a rather impersonal way of looking at being a Christian? There is another approach.
1. Marriage to Christ (being joined to Him in baptism, Romans 6:3-4) is committing myself personally to my Lord. I am committed to pleasing Him, not *just* to keeping a set of rules.
  2. Faithfulness means I follow Jesus and seek to please Him because I love Him.
  3. Unfaithfulness means I have betrayed my relationship with Him; it is a violation of trust.
  4. Repentance means I sorrow over my betrayal of Christ; I recommit myself to Him.
  5. Forgiveness means He accepts my recommitment, and that He renews and restores the intimate fellowship I lost when I became unfaithful.
- C. An analysis of the two views.
1. In A, every element is true, but it depersonalizes my relationship to Jesus. It means I obey rules, but there is no heart in it. It reduces my relationship to Jesus to more of a relationship to rules. *"I want to know what all the rules are, and at what point I break the rules."*
  2. In B, it is about my relationship to a person—a personal commitment to love Jesus, follow Him (which means rules) and honor Him. (Some Christians never see this!) The following passages describe the second view; they do not leave out rules, but there is much more than mere rule-keeping: Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:1-4; John 14:15, 21-24.
- D. A case in point that helps us understand the two views: The Christians at Ephesus.
1. The church had a great beginning in about 55 AD, Acts 19:1-20. What devotion is seen!
  2. They were devoted to Jesus when Paul wrote in about 63 AD, Ephesians 5:1-2; 6:24.
  3. But by about 96 AD, they had lost something, Revelation 2:1-5. They still worked hard, opposed false teachers, accepted only Christ's authority, and didn't quit in the face of opposition. There is much good to be said of this church that could not be said of many churches today. But they had lost the love they had for Jesus at the first! These Christians had devolved into a depersonalized Christianity. They were commended for keeping the rules, but were about to have their lampstand removed because they forgot Jesus!

### Conclusion:

1. We must ask ourselves, "What kind of Christianity do we have? What did God intend us to have?"
2. Maybe we are like the Ephesians. Maybe we need to renew the love we had for Jesus at the first.