



PREMARITAL COUNSEL

from the Bible

Biblical Premarital Counsel

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen 2:24).

In an age of rampant promiscuity and immorality, young people ought to “take heed to themselves, lest in the slippery period of their age, the lust of the flesh should impel them to many crimes. For, at this age, greater licence everywhere prevails, so that no moderation restrains youths from shameful conduct.” (John Calvin). There is much ignorance, confusion, and rebellion against God’s good institution of marriage today. As such it will be good for all wedding couples and all who intend to marry to get ready for the big day by paying attention to the doctrine of marriage as taught in the Bible.

Divine Institution of Marriage

There is a real need today to return to God's original intention and purpose for marriage and restore the sanctity of marriage. This is because sin has brought a great deal of distortion and destruction to male-female relationships and the marriage institution. There is rampant lasciviousness and promiscuity today. Pornography is just a click away. Premarital intercourse, cohabitation, abortions, divorces, sexual crimes etc. are on the rise.

The Bible commands, *“Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart”* (2 Tim 2:22). Young people have to beware of sexual lusts and all forms of sinful desires. Those already married should heed this warning as well, *“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge”* (Heb 13:4). So first things first: What is marriage?

A Covenant Relationship

Marriage is a sacred institution created by God (Gen 1:26–29). God created the man and the woman together. Man was made from the dust of the earth and the woman from man's rib (Gen 2:20). *“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. ... And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man”* (Gen 2:7, 21–22). Note that it was God who brought the woman to the man. It was something good.

God is Matchmaker and Marriage Counsellor. As such, He must always be in the picture in a marriage relationship. Marriage is thus not a bilateral but a trilateral relationship. Three is not a crowd when God is the third. *“Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how*

can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Eccl 4:11–12). The problem today is that God is taken out of the picture. A breakdown in marriage is usually due to a breakdown in one’s personal walk with God.

Calvin said that marriage “is a covenant consecrated by God.” Malachi 2:14 speaks of marriage as a covenant: “*Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.*” What then is a marriage covenant? A marriage covenant is a solemn agreement before God between a man and woman to be each other’s loyal and loving companions for life. A covenant has rules. These rules are set by God. If we want a blissful marriage and be blessed in our marriage we must play by God’s rules. A marriage breaks down when we break the covenant by violating His rules.

God's rules are found in His Word. All courting couples as well as married couples should be studying the Bible constantly and together. Here is wisdom: *“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee”* (Ps 119:9–11). *“Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever”* (Deut 4:40).

For Companionship

In Genesis 2:18–25, we find God creating marriage. In the Garden of Eden, God saw that it was not good for man to be alone. *“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.”*

(Gen 2:18). So He made for Adam a helper—a companion—a wife. He beautifully designed and carefully made a woman, and presented her to him (Gen 2:22). A perfect fit!

Woman was created to be man's helpmeet, i.e., a helper suitable for him but not inferior to him. Both men and women are created equally valuable by God. Although they are equal as human beings, they each have their respective and distinctive roles. The man has his God-given role as leader and head of the household; the woman was made to help the man to fulfil this role. Ephesians 5:22–33 says, *“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it ... So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.*

For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church ... Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.” Such a spiritual and harmonious partnership will result in great productivity. Indeed, one will chase a thousand, and two will put ten thousand to flight (Deut 32:30).

However, when the God-given pattern for family unity and harmony is turned upside down—when the woman wears the pants and the man dons the skirt—confusion and chaos in the family arise. When male and female roles are distorted or reversed, you will find broken marriages, broken families, and broken societies. Marriage is not a necessary evil, but a necessary good within God’s ordained plan and purpose. Society is only as strong as the marriage/family bond. But pornography, adultery, polygamy, homosexuality etc. will destroy marriage and family and bring about society’s downfall.

For Procreation

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen 1:27–28).

Newly-weds, when they are married, leave their parents to set up a new family unit. *“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen 2:24).* This is not an abandonment of parents, but rather the establishment of a new family which comprises father, mother and children. Persons who marry should be interested in children, and should plan to have children. *“Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward” (Ps 127:3).*

A Lifelong Commitment

“But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:6–9). The word “cleave” (Gen 2:24, Mark 10:7) in the original is a very strong word for joining or binding. It has the idea of soldering two metal pieces together to form one piece. It is a permanent fixture.

This tells us that marriage is supposed to be a lifelong union and lifetime commitment. Hence the vow, “till death us do part”. Divorce should never be an option for the Christian; it should never be in the Christian’s vocabulary. Married life may not be easy, and staying married may be difficult, but God says He is there to help. Jesus tells us, *“With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible”* (Matt 19:26). When the husband and his wife grow more and

more like Christ as they live together, their marriage would become sweeter and sweeter. God makes it possible. It is no wonder that the great German reformer Martin Luther said, “The life of a married couple, if they are in the faith, deserves to be rated higher than those who are famous for miracles.” Indeed, a blessed and successful marriage is better than miracles.

A Heterosexual Monogamy

Genesis 1:27 tells us that God created man “male and female”. Take note that it is between a man and a woman, and take note of the singular—*one* man and *one* woman. Only one Eve was made for Adam, not many. Thus, a marriage should be monogamous. Also, it should only be between a male and a female. Homosexual relationships are an abomination to God: “*Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination*” (Lev 18:22, see also Gen 19:1–24; Rom 1:23–24).

Yes to Courtship

Traditionally, parents were deeply involved in finding a spouse for their children. Abraham for example initiated the search for Isaac's wife and did so according to God's will and covenant that he would have many children (Gen 15:4–5).

There is wisdom in parental involvement. Calvin said, "Wherefore the wantonness of youths is to be restrained, that they may not rashly contract nuptials without consulting their fathers." In the past, children were happy to have their parents involved. Now, this is not about prearranged or forced marriages, but marriages where parental counsel is sought and children's consent obtained. There is this mutual trust between parents and children. This good relationship and interaction is premised upon God's command for children to honour their parents and to heed their wisdom. Proverbs 1:8–9 says, "*My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament*

of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.”
When parents are loving and careful guardians of their daughters, suitors will come with honourable intentions.

Know that matchmaking and courtship was instituted at the beginning when God made for Adam a wife and then brought her to him. Even now, God is involved in bringing a man and a woman together in holy matrimony. God is the perfect Matchmaker for sure and one can never go wrong when the believer seeks God’s will and wisdom in finding a spouse.

Now, biblical courtship should not be confused with pagan matchmaking where marriage is forced upon children based on the superstitious or unilateral decisions of parents. Parents should be involved in their children’s marriage but they should not force their children into marriage. On forced marriages, Calvin rightly said, “Let no father compel his children to such a marriage as seems good to him except with their good will and consent.” Parents must

know that although it is their office “to settle their daughters in life, they are not permitted to exercise tyrannical power and assign them to whatever husbands they think fit without consulting them.” Children likewise should be mindful of their parents and not make independent decisions without consulting them. There should be mutual regard.

It ought to be emphasised that only believers should be sought for a spouse. The very first criterion is that the other party must be truly born again, just as Abraham declared that Isaac’s wife must not be a Canaanite but a believer of the same faith (Gen 24:3–4). Calvin warned against starting a close relationship with an unbeliever, “but if we approach nearer, so that a greater intimacy should arise, we open the door as it were to Satan... Those, therefore, who mix with idolaters, knowingly and wilfully devote themselves to idols.”

Finally, in determining who is to be one’s spouse, according to God’s specific will, the

Co-operative Will of God comes into play. In the case of Isaac and Rebekah, the servant's prayer for a sign (Gen 24:12–14) was answered immediately (Gen 24:15). God is very pleased to co-operate with His children when they pray and He can answer them immediately especially when they are in crucial situations and need His help.

No to Dating

Dating is a 20th century invention and phenomenon. It comes from the modern age of rebellion against authority. Young people want to be free from parental supervision, free to sow their wild oats. They want to experiment with sex and to experience sex with as many partners as they can in their quest for a suitable mate. They think that good sex equals good spouse. It is utterly selfish and carnal, dangerous and destructive.

God's Word, Not World's Way

It is important for men and women to know how to conduct themselves in courtship so as to maintain a healthy relationship. 1 Thessalonians 4:3–4 says, *“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.”*

In a courtship, one should conduct himself or herself in a chaste manner. Motives in a courtship must be pure and kept pure. The motive is not to exploit each other's body but to edify each other's life. A healthy courtship is one that causes the couple to grow in faith, not in lust. It is a time when two believers seek God's will and direction for their lives. Proverbs 3:5–8 says, *“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.”*

Abstain from Fornication

Fornication comes from the Greek word *porne*. That is where we get the word “pornography”. Fornication refers to all kinds of immoral sexual behaviour, and pornography stirs up all kinds of perverse sexual desires. Since we are living in a pornographic age, it is vital we heed the commands of 2 Timothy 2:20–22 which says, *“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the LORD out of a pure heart.”*

Courting couples should keep their bodies pure and chaste. They should not play husband and wife before they are properly married and should avoid all forms of sexual immorality. Note the command to *“flee ... youthful lusts”*.

The command to “flee” does not mean a one-time fleeing but a continual fleeing from sin and temptation. It is like the metal and the magnet. The further the magnet is away from the metal, the lesser its power to attract it. We need to stay clear and keep far away from such immorality so that we might be clean vessels fit for God’s use. Courting couples should avoid any physical contact that stirs lustful thoughts and feelings. They should pursue after godliness, which is *“righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”*

Obtain Sanctification

Sanctification comes from the Greek word *hagiazō* which means “to make holy”. It is the process by which a believer becomes more and more like Christ. It is the constant pursuit of personal holiness and moral perfection. Courting couples should aim towards spiritual maturity and Christlikeness, and that means their courtship should be conducted in a godly

and honourable way that glorifies God.

1 Thessalonians 4:4 says that the man “*should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.*” The “vessel” here refers to the woman (cf. 1 Pet 3:7). The man must have honourable intentions when courting a lady. He should not do so in such a way as to defile, pollute or contaminate her. The man must treat a woman gently and gentlemanly. There should be godly behaviour and proper conduct in a courtship. The man ought to excise all lustful desires and exercise great care in preserving chastity. The woman on the other hand should present herself not as a sex object to be exploited, but a chaste treasure to be protected. Be careful how you dress.

Holy Word, Not Hollywood

Traditional courtship which is parent-centred is today replaced by the try-your-luck, score-your-points “dating game”. “Dating” is all about the world and not the Word. 1 John

2:15–17 warns, *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”*

The way of the world is all about *“the lust of concupiscence [i.e., inordinate sexual desires], even as the Gentiles which know not God”* (1 Thess 4:5). It is about polluting and not protecting the fairer sex. 1 Thessalonians 4:6 warns, *“That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.”* To defraud is to steal, to take away something that belongs to another. In this case, it defrauds a father of giving away a virgin daughter, and her future husband is defrauded of a virgin bride. The godly ideal and divine standard is for the bride to be presented as a chaste virgin (cf. 2 Cor 11:2). Contrary to God’s way, the way

of the world as presented by Hollywood is both exploitative and corruptive. It is the way of the thief and robber.

Believers should marry believers and not unbelievers. 2 Corinthians 6:14 commands, “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*” There is nothing spiritually in common between a Christian and an unbeliever. In Deuteronomy 7:4, God forbade the Israelites from marrying the Canaanites, “*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.*” The unequal yoke will result in a backsliding, or even a falling away from the faith.

Danger of Unequal Yoke

The tragedy of Solomon’s marriages is a case in point: “*But king Solomon loved many strange women, ... And he had seven hundred wives,*

princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart.... And the LORD was angry with Solomon” (1 Kgs 11:1–9). God split his kingdom because of his sin.

Another bad example was Ahab who married a very good looking but a most wicked woman in Jezebel (1 Kgs 16:31): *“And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him.”* At the end, it was said of Ahab, *“But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up” (1 Kgs 21:25).* God was blasphemed and good people died because of his unequal yoke. It is dangerous to be unequally yoked.

Beware the Beauty and the Beast

The sin of the unequal yoke is both great and grave. It destroys faith and invites the judgement

of God. So, when you choose a spouse, make sure he or she is a believer. 1 Corinthians 7:39 speaks of marriage “*only in the Lord*” (i.e., only a believer). It is also prudent to marry a godly believer and not one who is carnal and worldly. Be wise in your choice.

In choosing a wife, physical beauty should not be the main criterion. Proverbs 31:30 says, “*Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.*” Calvin said, “marriage is a thing too sacred to allow that men should be induced to it by the lust of the eyes. ... [O]ur appetite becomes brutal, when we are so ravished with the charms of beauty that those things which are chief are not taken into account.” Thus the woman we look for should be one who possesses the qualities of a “*chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and*

quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Pet 3:2–4).

Beware the Jezebel—she is a beauty but also a beast. A potent and deadly combination!

Father’s Privilege

“But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry. Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better” (1 Cor 7:36–38).

1 Corinthians 7:36–38 concerns the father and his daughter. The father has the privilege and responsibility to give his daughter away in marriage. The Apostle Paul here says it is good for a father to give his daughter away in marriage,

but it is better if he does not if there is no necessity to and if the daughter is pleased to remain single. According to Paul, marriage is good, but singlehood is better. Since time is short and the Lord will come back soon, it is better to devote oneself single-mindedly to the service of the Lord, *“So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better.”* (1 Cor 7:38).

Engagement First

If a father chooses to give his daughter away, then there should be a period of engagement. The Bible speaks of “betrothal” where a couple makes a promise to marry before the actual wedding (Deut 20:7). Here, parents are involved and God’s will is sought. Engagement comes about upon proposal, when both sets of parents and children agree before wedding plans begin. There must be consensus. The engagement is not marriage and the man and the woman are not yet husband and wife. They should not be living together nor have any sexual relations

with each other. Cohabitation in the days of the Reformation was a criminal offence—the penalty was imprisonment for three days.

Wedding Next

The wedding should follow soon after the engagement. Wedding invitations should be sent in the name of both sets of parents. The parents, not the wedding couple, are the ones who invite. The wedding should reflect godliness and not worldliness. The service is to be a sacred and solemn ceremony since lifelong vows will be made before God and man. This is not the time for jocularities or frivolity. The bride's wedding gown should reflect chastity and modesty and be white in colour.

A Christian Home

Now that you are husband and wife, you are going to embark on a new journey with new experiences and challenges. You no longer walk alone or do things alone—you now have each

other to think of, to consider, and like it or not, you are stuck with each other (super-stuck) for life, “till death us do part”. As Genesis 2:24 says, *“Therefore shall a man ... cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”* This cleaving speaks of an inseparable union that must last a lifetime. How to have a happy, healthy, harmonious married life? God tells us how in Genesis 2:18 when He said, *“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.”* It is vital to understand what the role of man is in the family and why God made the woman for the man. Many marriages break down because people reject their God-given roles as husband and wife. Take note of these three principles:

Husband the Leader, Wife the Helper

The husband is the leader and the wife is the helper. The best partner and helper the man can have is the woman. The woman is not man-made but God-made. Our God is perfect Maker

and Matchmaker. *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above”* (Jas 1:17). Proverbs 18:22 says, *“Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.”* As such the husband should regard his wife as someone very important and very precious. She is going to help him be the spiritual leader God meant him to be.

God has conferred authority upon the man to lead. As Christ has authority over the Church, the man has authority over his wife. 1 Corinthians 11:3 says, *“But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man ... For this cause ought the woman to have power [i.e., authority] on her head.”* 1 Timothy 2:12–13 says, *“But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve.”* When the Bible forbids a woman to teach, that does not mean she does not or cannot teach in any and every situation. We know that the Bible commands the older women

to teach the younger women, and mothers are required to teach their children (Tit 2:3–5). The teaching prohibition here has to do with *authoritative* teaching that comes from a divinely ordained ministry given to the man by God whether it be at home or in the church (cf. 1 Tim 2:7).

Husband the Provider, Wife the Homemaker

The husband is the provider and the wife the homemaker. If the man is the leader, then he must also be the provider. The head of the house must work hard to provide for his family. This is taught in 1 Timothy 5:8, “*But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*”

The duty of the woman as a wife and mother is to be the homemaker. This is taught in 1 Timothy 5:14, “*I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house,*

give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.” Titus 2:5 calls on the young women “To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”

When the children come, parents should do their best to teach their children. Proverbs 22:6 says, *“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”* The father teaches, but the mother teaches even more since she is there in the house fulltime, to “guide the house” and is the “keeper at home.” Do not despise this good work of being a full-time mother and teacher at home. Proverbs 31:27–28 promises a blessing for full-time homemakers, *“She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.”*

Husband the Lover, Wife the Follower

Husband is the lover and wife the follower. Husbands are commanded to love their wives. Ephesians 5:25 says, “*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.*” Verse 28 says, “*So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.*” Adam said, “*This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh*” (Gen 2:23). It is to the man’s benefit if he takes good care of his wife. The love the man must have for his wife must be total, 100%. That was how Christ loved His Church—He gave His life for her. Likewise the husband must love his wife that much—he must be willing to lay down his life for her. When a man loves his wife this way, he will keep himself from committing adultery and will not think of divorce.

Wives are commanded to submit to their husbands. Ephesians 5:22 says, “*Wives, submit*

yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.” The submission entails obedience. Consider what 1 Peter 3:5–6 says, *“For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.”*

The wife’s attitude towards her husband must be one of deep respect. Respect him and the decisions he will make. This does not mean the wife cannot express her thoughts and feelings, but she should let him have the final say. If a decision is not contrary to Scripture or ethics, submit to him, and let him take the lead. He is ultimately responsible and accountable to Christ. Christ is his Head and Christ will lead and guide him. She follows him because he follows Christ. This is the biblical pattern that makes for a happy marriage.

“Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; That walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: Thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD” (Ps 128:1–4).

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