

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Two teachers will do Bible study together about one important aspect of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. We will use a very easy Bible study method called the five steps method. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. The second series of 6 Bible studies is about 6 important relationships: Christian love, Christian friendship, the Christian men-woman relationship, the Christian marriage relationship, the Christian parent-child relationship and unequal yoke-relationships. Today's Bible study is: A DISCIPLE DEVELOPS A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE. The fundamental question is "WHAT CHARACTERISES A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE?"

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read Ephesians 5:22-33. Let us take turns to read one verse each.

(T) Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. (S) 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. (T) Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. (S) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (T) to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, (S) and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (T) In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. (S) After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church - (T) for we are members of his body. (S) For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. (T) This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church. (S) However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in this Bible passage. "Which truth in this passage is important for you?" or "Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?" Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is in Ephesians 5:25 and 22. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church... and Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord". Marriage must be very important to God, because he compares it with the relationship between Christ and the Church. Christ and the Church are the example for every Christian marriage and every Christian marriage is a visible expression of Christ and a testimony about Christ to the world! Christian marriages should bring glory to Christ!

(T) An important truth for me is in Ephesians 5:31. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." Marriage is a very important social happening, because that is the time two young people leave their parents and begin a new family together! Marriage closes the stage of being a child at home and begins the stage of being an independent adult in society.

(S) **STEP 3. QUESTION**

Let us try to understand all the truths in this passage and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. "Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask?" Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1st Question. What exactly are the specific characteristics of a Christian marriage?

Let us take turns to explain them.

(T) The first characteristic of a Christian marriage is that marriage is God's idea and institution.

In Genesis 1 and 2, God sees man's need for a life partner and he took the initiative to create a woman for man. God also took the initiative to institute the marriage relationship. Already *before* the man and woman fell into sin, God established the marriage relationship as a relationship of leaving their parents, a relationship of unity between *one* man and *one* woman and a relationship of sex only inside this relationship. God also maintained this institution *after* the man and woman fell into sin.

Both the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 19 and the apostle Paul in Ephesians 5 repeat God's marriage institution as a continued institution on earth. Moreover, in the Old Testament in Jeremiah 3, marriage serves as a picture of the relationship between God and man. In the New Testament in Ephesians 5, marriage serves as a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. Although through the years the cultures in the world have changed God's original marriage institution, God still calls all people and all cultures in the world to return to his original marriage institution!

(S) The second characteristic of a Christian marriage is that marriage is monogamous.

Although we read about important people in the Old Testament who had more than one wife, the Bible clearly *teaches* that this practice was against God's institution of marriage in the beginning. Polygamy in the Old Testament only caused problems like jealousy, discrimination and idolatry. God never changed his original plan of Genesis 2:24, that "a man should be united to *his wife*". God does not say *his wives* in the plural! Jesus repeats this command and says in Matthew 19:5 that "the *two* will become one flesh". He excludes all other people from the unity of the marriage relationship, especially from the sexual unity of the marriage relationship. God forbids polygamy. He forbids having a concubine. He forbids adultery. And he forbids flirting with any other woman.

(T) The third characteristic of a Christian marriage is that *marriage is for life*.

Although in the Old Testament, *Moses permitted* people to divorce because of the hardness of the people's hearts, he did not agree with divorce, but only regulated an evil practice that already existed. Jesus clearly *teaches* in Matthew 19 that this was not the way in the beginning. Jesus commands, "What God has joined together, let man not separate"! The prophet Malachi says that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). The Bible allows divorce only in two cases. God allows divorce in the case of marital unfaithfulness. Marital unfaithfulness includes sexual immorality, spiritual immorality like occultism and extreme violence of the partner. In these three cases a divorce is allowed. God also allows divorce in the case of a non-Christian couple, where one of the partners later became a Christian and the non-Christian refuses to live together with the Christian. In this case a divorce may be allowed. But because the relationship between God and his people is a covenant relationship, God intends the Christian marriage relationship to be a faithful and lasting relationship. God desires that a Christian marriage should last for life.

(S) The fourth characteristic of a Christian marriage is that *marriage is temporal, only for this life on earth*.

Jesus says in Matthew 22:30 that at the resurrection, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage. Then the Christians will be like the angels in heaven. Therefore, marriage is God's institution *on earth* and not in heaven. After death there will be no marriages. The eternal value of marriage on earth may be sought in its value to train character, to reflect and proclaim Christ and to beget children. The spirits of Christians, their Christian character and their relationship to Christ remains forever!

(T) The fifth characteristic of a Christian marriage is that *marriage is normal, but not the best for everyone*.

Marriage is regarded as normal for Christians and Christian leaders. But both the Lord Jesus in Matthew 19 and the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 have special words for those who remain unmarried. God calls some people to remain unmarried either for a certain period in their life or even for their whole life in order to do a special work for God in his kingdom. God calls these people to serve him with undivided devotion! In Isaiah 54, God gives a special promise for people who remain unmarried. He promises that he can make them very fruitful in the work of God's kingdom!

(S) The sixth characteristic of a Christian marriage is that *marriage is a relationship that should be established publicly*. The three indispensable elements of marriage are: to publicly leave your parents, to be united to one another and to become one flesh. A man and a woman prepare to leave their parents by announcing their plan to get married and by preparing for the marriage ceremony. At their marriage ceremony, they definitely leave their parents. At the marriage ceremony, the families of both sides as well as all the Christian brothers and sisters and other friends witness that these two people promise to be married to one another for their whole life, to love one another, to be faithful to one another and to help one another through all the circumstances of life.

In the Bible, marriage was never a secret affair. In ancient times, the pledge to be married included the choice of a marriage partner (Genesis 21:21), sometimes, the giving of a compensation gift to the family of the bride (Genesis 29:18, 34:12) and the giving of gifts to the bride and the groom (Genesis 24:59,61, 1 Kings 9:16). The wedding ceremony was a public affair. It included some of the following elements: the bride and groom wore wedding garments (Psalm 45:13-14); they were accompanied by bridesmaids and friends of the groom (Psalm 45:14, John 3:29); they went in a marriage procession to fetch the bride and accompany her to the house of the groom (Matthew 25:1-13); there was a marriage feast, sometimes for a whole week (Matthew 22:1-14, John 2:1-10, Judges 14:17). The most solemn part of the wedding ceremony was establishing a marriage covenant of which God himself was a witness (Malachi 2:14, Proverbs 2:17, Ezekiel 16:8)! That is why Christians marry in the presence of God and all the Christian brothers and sisters of the Christian community. Only after the wedding ceremony, the marriage was consummated (Genesis 29:21-23, Deuteronomy 22:13-21).

(T) The seventh characteristic of a Christian marriage is that *marriage is determined by the relationship between Christ and the Church*. The Bible commands the husbands to be the head of their wives just as Christ is the head of the Church and to love their wives just as Christ loves the Christians. The Bible also commands the wives to submit to their husbands just as the Church should submit to Christ and to respect their husbands. The love and the submission that is demanded is not a worldly kind of love and submission, but nothing less than the love of Christ and the submission of the Christian Church! Marriage is a visible demonstration of the relationship between Christ and the Christian Church. Marriage thus becomes a proclamation of Christ to the world. By observing a good Christian marriage, the people of the world learn more and more about Christ and the people of Christ. They not only hear about God's love for them, they see it illustrated in the marriage relationship. They

not only hear of the joy of a growing relationship with the Living God, they see an example of such joy in the marriage relationship, etc. The marriage relationship is a powerful witness to the reality and attraction of a relationship with Christ! Every Christian marriage can become a missionary endeavour, especially when the Christian home is open and people can "come and see" how that Christian family functions.

2nd Question. What are the God-given responsibilities of the husband in a Christian marriage?

(S) God created the man and the woman. God instituted the marriage relationship. Therefore, God also has the right to determine the responsibilities of the husband and the wife towards one another. This is especially true in a Christian marriage. God knows how his creatures can function the best in a marriage relationship. Only when a husband and wife obey these God-given responsibilities, then they can have a wonderful marriage. The God-given responsibilities of the husband towards the wife are especially to love her and to lead her.

"To love" is to show unselfish interest in her, to wholeheartedly accept her and to help her to become her best. Love is beautifully expressed in 1 Corinthians 13. *Patience* is the love that can wait. It is the love that does not enforce kindness on her, but can wait to show kindness. *Kindness* is the love that helps and that does not let a chance go by to do her good. *Not being jealous* is the love that generously gives her appreciation, credit and honour where she deserves it. *Not boasting* is the love that is modest about your own merits and accomplishments and does not try to impress her. *Not proud* is the love that is humble about your own strengths and weaknesses in the relationship to her. *Not behave rudely* is the love that shows good manners and tact towards her. *Not self-seeking* is the love that unselfishly seeks her interests above your own. *Not easily angered* is the love that meekly submits to the injury and hurts she sometimes causes. Etc.

"To lead" his wife is to lead her like Christ leads the Church. The husband should *lead her like a shepherd*, feeding her, caring for her, protecting her and carrying her through difficulties. He should *lead her like a steward*, guiding her in God's ways and taking good care of her possessions and activities. He should *lead her like a servant*, serving her especially in the areas where she needs him most.

3rd Question. What are the God-given responsibilities of the wife in a Christian marriage?

(T) The God-given responsibilities of the wife towards the husband are to respect him and to submit to him. "To respect" him is to state her point of view in a gentle way and then allow God to work it out in his own way. It is to carefully consider the husband's advice. It is to involve him in the making of her plans and to communicate the progress she is making. It is to voluntarily take the initiative to serve him without waiting for him to ask her. It is to patiently listen to him and trying to understand his problems and points of view.

"To submit" to him does not mean to submit to him like a slave, but to submit to him like a helper. It is to follow him by being the best team member of his team. As a team member, she gives him all the input, suggestions, ideas, etc. she can, discuss issues and their consequences with him and then allow him to make the final decision. When a man loves like this and leads like this, it will not be difficult to respect him or submit to his leadership in the family!

(S) **STEP 4. APPLY**

After brainstorming with one another and recording a list of **possible applications**, consider which possible application does God want you to turn into a **personal application**.

(S) My personal application is the following. I have gained a new understanding in the meaning of submission. "Submission" is actively helping the husband with suggestions, plans and practical service, without threatening his leadership responsibility in the family. I want to teach kind of submission.

(T) My personal application is the following. I want to be a leader like Christ. I want to serve my wife where she needs me most, to care for her health and spiritual well-being and to protect her and carry her through the difficulties she faces.

(S) **STEP 5. PRAY**

Let us take turns to pray about one truth that God has taught us in Ephesians 5:22-33.

Dear Father in heaven, please help all Christian wives to be submissive in the biblical way. Help them to make good suggestions, to give advice, to help make plans, to practically help their husbands to accomplish the best possible task they do for you. Help them to be the best possible team member and not threaten their husbands in their position as leaders.

(T) Dear Father in heaven, I commit myself once again to love and lead my wife in the way you want me to do it. Forgive me when I lead her without love or love her without leading her. Help me to be like a shepherd, steward and servant to my wife and my children. In Jesus' name. Amen!

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Consider how you could improve the exercise of your responsibilities towards your wife or your husband.

Second. Prepare next week's Bible study from Ephesians 6:1-4. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. See the workbooks "Go and make disciples" and Internet on www. etc

Third. Listen on short wave radio every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY to "Discipleship training on the air".