

Keys To A Blessed Marriage

Rick Railston

Recorded September 2, 2017

Over the last few years Satan has been more active than ever in attacking God's people. I think we can draw from that that we're getting closer and closer to the end of the age. It seems to me God has removed a level of restraint from Satan, allowing him more freedom to attack us and to get into our heads. I believe He is doing it as a test for all of us. My observation is that one of the greatest targets for Satan is to get involved in our marriages and to try to divide those marriages. If he can get involved in the marriage, he can not only affect the husband and wife, but he can affect the children and grandchildren and the rest of the church. In all too many cases he has succeeded in dividing husbands and wives to the place that they're not one any more. They're two. He provokes them to disrespect one another. He provokes them sometimes to be just outright mean and nasty to one another. He provokes them to be very carnal in their marital relationship and how they treat each other and he wants them to exclude God from the marriage, that God is no longer a part of the marriage. He wants them to avoid exercising His spirit in the marriage. That results, obviously in carnality.

The question is how can we claim to be Christians, preparing to teach others in the world tomorrow when we can't make our marriages work and when our marriages are in shambles or in bad shape? You know, the solution to Satan's attack, whether it's on marriage or in other areas, is very, very simple. We know in 2 Corinthians 11:3 that there's a simplicity in Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:3. *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (KJV)*

The principles of God are very simple and very easy to understand, however they are difficult to put into practice. Why? It's because it goes counter to our human nature. Humanly we don't want to. The answer is simple. We know what we need to do, but we find it difficult because of our human nature.

We are going to talk today about the keys to a blessed marriage. You could say also principles to a blessed marriage. I know some out there who are single are going to say, oh, here comes another sermon on marriage. What does that have to do with me? The principles apply to single folks just as much as married folks for a couple of reasons. One is that you might get married down the road, so this is something you would need to learn before you got married. Even more importantly it applies to single folks as well as married folks, because all of us want to become a better potential bride to Jesus Christ. These principles apply in our lives so that we can become a better potential bride to Jesus Christ. These principles help us in our relationship with God and Christ. These principles aren't mine. They come from the Bible. They come directly from God's word. Sometimes you can substitute Jesus Christ in the place of the word mate and these principles apply directly.

1. We have to put our mates first ahead of ourselves, just like we want to put Christ ahead of ourselves.

This is the first principle we are going to talk about. If we want to have a successful marriage or if we want to prepare to be the mate of Jesus Christ, God says, “Don’t worship anybody but Me. Don’t put anybody ahead of Me.” In a marriage we can’t put another human being ahead of our mate. Let’s go to Matthew 7:12, a very important scripture. It is something we all know, but we have to ask ourselves: Do I apply this in my marriage?

Matthew 7:12. *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. (KJV)*

This is the second great commandment. So, whatever you would like your mate to do to you, kindness, gentleness, understanding, affection, whatever it might be, do to them also, or do to them in advance. That’s what the scripture says. Now let’s go to Ephesians 5:21. We know Ephesians 5 talks a lot about marriage. We are going to be coming back to it several times. This is the key scripture in a marriage. It’s something all of us need to do, yet it’s counter to human nature.

Ephesians 5:21. *Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. (KJV)*

It’s a very simple command. The Greek word for “submitting” is Strong’s number 5293 and it means *to subordinate*. That means to put yourself under something else. It also means *to obey or to be subject to*. So, this tells us that to have a successful marriage we need to put our mate ahead of our self, always striving in a marriage to give more than we get. If we have that attitude of giving, it will come back in spades to us.

It also says “in the fear of God.” The word “fear” is Strong’s number 5401 and it’s the Greek word “phobos,” where we get our English word phobia. If people have phobias, they have various fears of certain things. Zodiates in his Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament says this: *a deep sense of accountability to God and Christ*. So, we’re told we need to submit in our marriage one to another out of a deep sense of accountability to God and Christ. We are responsible. We are held accountable. We should be very afraid if we do not submit one to another. We should be afraid if we don’t put our mates ahead of ourselves. That’s what this Bible says. God’s word says if we put ourselves first, there will be serious consequences that we will have to pay for down the road.

Now we are going to look at three scriptures that tell us what we should be doing all of the time in our marriages and frankly all of the time in our lives, but particularly in our marriages. Let’s go to Philippians 2:3. I am going to quote this out of the New King James Version. Apply this between a husband and a wife.

Philippians 2:3. *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem ... (NKJV)*

The Greek for “esteem” means *to consider*.

3b) ... others better than himself. (NKJV)

Continue in verse 4 from the King James Version.

4) Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. (KJV)

Then it goes on to tell us that the mind we should have in our marriage is the mind of Jesus Christ. How much more should we apply this to two people who love each other and are bound together in marriage than just to the general public? We should do it to them, but even more so in our marriage. Now let’s go to a second scripture in 1 Peter 5:5. Peter talks about the same subject that Paul did in Ephesians 5 that we just quoted.

1 Peter 5:5. *Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject ... (KJV)*

That’s the same word in Ephesians 5:21 above, submitting.

5b) ... one to another, and be clothed with humility: ... (KJV)

It takes humility to subordinate ourselves to somebody else, but in a marriage we should do that to our mate.

5 continued) *... for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.
6) Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: (KJV)*

The key here to any submission one to another is humility. If you don’t have humility, you can’t apply these scriptures or these principles. Let’s go to the third scripture in Romans 12:10 out of the New King James Version. It takes humility to do what we just quoted in Philippians 2:3-4 and 1 Peter 5:5-6 and now in Romans 12:10.

Romans 12:10. *Be kindly affectionate to one another ... (NKJV)*

In a marriage that should happen every minute of every day.

10b) ... with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; (NKJV)

How much more should that occur in a marriage? When you give preference, that means the other’s views, the other’s desires, the other’s needs, the other’s wants are

given preference by the mate. Once that stops happening trouble starts. These last three scriptures, you see, show us that we should honor and esteem our mates more than ourselves, looking out for one another, taking each other's back, doing what is best for the other in humility, thanking God that we even have a mate, a wonderful mate that He has given us.

Since the man is the head of the family, he has to take the lead in doing this. It's his responsibility to take the lead, set the example of preferring his wife before himself. The burden on the husband is to make decisions that are in the best interest of the wife, to put her first and even make those decisions when it goes against something that he would like, or he wants and he does it to make her happy. He does it to please her.

Yet, in the marriage counseling that I do, I've seen men not love, not respect, not honor their wives. They bark at them. They criticize them. Let me tell you there is no excuse for a man to be overbearing or harsh. The church sadly emphasized ruling with a rod of iron in the '50s and '60s and '70s. Some men took that as a license that they could just dominate their wife and bark at them and say whatever they wanted to them and the wife just had to take it. There is no excuse for a husband to behave that way, absolutely none. Rather, husbands should be kind and gentle and patient with their wives, as God and Christ are with us. We don't want to be abused. We don't want to be screamed at or yelled at. God doesn't do that with us, so why should we do that with our mate?

Then the wives shouldn't whine or complain when they don't get their own way, rather doing their very best to make whatever decision he makes work, to make it successful. Even though maybe that would not be the decision they would make God expects the wives to pitch in and do their best to make it work.

You see, when you put the other first, wonderful blessings come from God. It is just a natural, spiritual law that comes from God. You will find, and I'm sure you have already, that when you make your mate happy and fulfilled guess what happens? You feel happy and fulfilled. We need to plan every day to make our mate happy. Dorothy's father was just a wonderful man, a wonderful father-in-law. He died at age 94. When we were close to getting married, he walked up and put his hand on my shoulder and said Rick, let me tell you one secret to a happy marriage. He said a spoiled wife is a happy wife. I told him I'll take that to heart. He was so true. We need to spoil our mates in the sense we go above and beyond to make them happy, to make their hearts sing.

You look at the core problem of marriages and of all types of problems you get down to the core and what I find is when marriages get into trouble, the biggest problem is they have lost respect for each other. Once you lose respect for your mate then Satan comes right in and stirs that pot and then the sparks begin to fly. You see, when we lose respect for our mate, we don't put our mate ahead of ourselves. We get selfish. Let's go back to Ephesians 5:33 out of the New King James Version. In this verse Paul is making two very, very important points.

Ephesians 5:33. *Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself ... (NKJV)*

He says you have to do that, husbands. You have to love your wife at least as much as yourself. Other scriptures indicate we should do that even more than ourselves.

33b) ... and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (NKJV)

The King James Version for “respects” says “reverence.” The husband, you see, has to love. The wife has to respect. They both should love each other. They both should respect each other. The Greek word for “respects” here is Strong’s number 5399 and it is “phobio,” a slightly different word than what we read in verse 21 as fear. Zodhiates says this means *morally to fear or morally to honor*. The wife should honor the husband. The husband should love the wife, but if you put all of the scriptures together as we go through this, they both should love each other. They both should honor each other. You see, respect goes both ways and respect must be earned daily. For a mate to respect the other they have to be treated well with love and kindness and know that their mate is going to put them first, their mate is going to take care of them.

I have seen too many women openly criticize their husbands in public in the church and make fun of their husbands, kind of laugh at their husbands whatever it might be at that moment in time. That is a scary place relative to the latter part of verse 33 above. It doesn’t seem to bother. Again, it can go both ways. Or some become quietly cold and you can see that. If both don’t show love or respect for each other in public, I scratch my head and wonder what goes on behind closed doors. If it’s that out in public, what is it in private?

You see, it’s so much easier for the wife to respect her husband if the husband loves his wife more than himself; very easy to respect that. It’s very easy for the husband to respect the wife if he knows she puts him ahead of her. If that’s the case, it’s easy to respect each other. You see, when your mate sees that you become more like Jesus Christ, if you can look in the eyes of your mate and see Jesus Christ behind those eyes, then respect and honor will come, but it comes as a result of our behavior, how we treat one another.

It’s sad that many mates don’t know how to be kind and gentle with each other. I have talked to several people. They grew up in a family when they were kids that the father and mother showed no affection to each other. The father and the mother barked at each other. The father and the mother competed with each other. There was no good thing that they could latch onto. I remember talking to a man. I have mentioned it before. When he heard his dad coming in the driveway, he ran under his bed, because he knew when he walked in the door the first thing he would do is start yelling and screaming at his wife and taking out his frustrations on her. He said then, after the explosion with the dad and he stormed off into the bedroom or whatever to change clothes, his mom spent the rest of the evening getting back at the dad. When you grow

up in an environment like that, how on earth can you know how to be kind and gentle and affectionate to your mate? There is no manual for marriage. There is in the Bible. We know that, but for the average couple there is no manual out there. The manual they learned from is what their parents did.

So, you see what we have to do is before we get up in the morning, before we greet our mate in the morning or at the end of the day when the husband or wife walks in the door, think what can I do to make my wife's or my husband's heart sing right now? What can I say? What can I do to give joy to my mate? You see, the first principle is we have to put our mates ahead of ourselves.

2. We must never do anything to harm our mate.

There has to be a level of trust there to where the wife and the husband know that their mate would never do anything to sabotage them, to harm them, to hurt them. You see, God doesn't do that with us, does He? Let's go to Romans 8:28 and apply this example to a marriage. This is the way God treats us and it's perfectly logical, given what we understand in God's word is this is the way God wants us to treat each other especially in a marriage.

Romans 8:28. *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (KJV)*

So, in a marriage each mate has to know that all things are going to work for the good, because my mate loves me more than he or she loves himself or herself. We should be that same way toward our mates.

I don't know how many of you have heard of Steven and Cokie Roberts. Cokie Roberts used to be a correspondent on television. I think she worked for NPR for several years. They write a newspaper column together. It appears once every week or two in our paper. They've been married a long, apparently a very successful marriage. They say this, You can tell the health of your marriage by the number of teeth marks on your tongue. These come from biting down hard and avoiding the impulse to be hurtful or cruel." Then they go on to say something very profound. "Words never said don't have to be taken back or explained away." Bite the tongue. When Satan provokes and you just want to say something out of carnality or meanness or revenge or whatever, bite the tongue, because it's coming from Satan, not coming from God. You see, the only way to be truly happy and fulfilled in a marriage is to make your mate's life a joy in Christ, a joy in God, to make your mate's heart sing and be happy to where every minute is just a joy to be together. You feel comfortable. You feel safe. You feel loved. You feel protected.

Our goal in our marriage should be this. Let's go to 1 Thessalonians 2:19. This was Paul's goal as an apostle. This should be the goal of every elder in the church. This should be the goal of every mate in God's church. Paul is asking a question.

1 Thessalonians 2:19. *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? (KJV)*

He answers it. He says, my goal as an apostle is to see you at Christ's coming with a crown on your head. How much more should this be true in a marriage that the goal of each mate is to see their mate, their wife, their husband stand before Jesus Christ at the marriage supper with a crown on their head? That should be the goal. We should evaluate ourselves and ask the question, am I helping my mate be in the Kingdom of God by my example, by my words, how I treat my mate or am I a hindrance to their spiritual growth? Have I become a stumbling block to their spiritual growth? We must never do anything to harm our mate physically, spiritually and do everything to assure within our power that our mate becomes the Bride of Christ.

3. We must never keep a record of wrongs in our marriage.

Again, the simplicity of Jesus Christ but it's hard to do, given our human nature. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 13:1-7. I am going to quote this out of the New International Version. I believe as we get to the verse we want to focus on it is a better translation. We call this the love chapter. Notice what it says.

1 Corinthians 13:1. *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.*

2) If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

3) If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. (NIV)

Going on in verse 4 apply this in a marriage.

4) Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

5) It is not rude, it is not self-seeking ... (NIV)

Everything we've talked about is humility, putting the other ahead of ourselves.

5b) ... it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. (NIV)

Notice how it words the last phrase.

6) Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7) It always protects, always trusts ... (NIV)

Husbands and wives should never behave in a way that causes their mate not to trust them.

7b) ... always hopes, always perseveres. (NIV)

We have to ask ourselves, are these statements true in my marriage? You see, if we hold onto our mate's faults, shortcomings, sins how can they ever come out from their past? How can they ever come out from under the mistakes they have made? My mom did that to my dad. I can remember in my twenties talking to my mom and she would bring up things that dad did back in the first one, two or three years of their marriage. In her mind it was like it was yesterday. She could rattle them off, too. My dad was imperfect. He made mistakes, but she just kept a record of wrongs and to her death would not let it go, would not forgive and also would not forget. Sometimes one mate is really trying to change, really trying to overcome, trying to grow. If their mate keeps bringing up the past and doesn't focus on the change in the present, then guess what? They are prohibited, hindered from overcoming and growing because the one mate keeps bringing up what they did years ago over and over and over again. It makes it difficult for them to get rid of the past, move on from the past and to change. The other won't let them change, because they bring up the past. They just won't let go. Let's go to Romans 14:13. If we don't forgive and forget, then this applies and we don't want to be there. It talks about judging in the sense of condemning.

Romans 14:13. *Let us not therefore judge one another any more: ... (KJV)*

Paul is talking generally, but apply this to a marriage.

13b) ... but judge this rather, that no man [no one] put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. (KJV)

How about in his wife's way or her husband's way? It should apply so much more in a marriage that we should not be a stumblingblock. We should be a help, a servant in the marriage. We are going to have to answer to God if we became a stumblingblock to our mate's efforts to change. If we won't let go of the past, if we keep bringing up the past, we become a stumblingblock in our mate's ability to change. Then God will say to us someday I can't allow someone in My kingdom who keeps a record of every wrong that's ever been done. How can we help others, how can we encourage others to change in the World Tomorrow if we have as spirit beings this permanent memory, record of everything they've done wrong and we keep throwing it up at them, ruling with a rod of iron? You did this. You did that over and over and over again. God won't allow somebody in His kingdom that has that train of thought or has that motivation. God says we must forgive and forget. Let's go to Matthew 6:14. You see there is a severe penalty, an eternal penalty if we don't forgive and forget. Christ talked about this in His very first recorded sermon.

Matthew 6:14. *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: (KJV)*

God does the forgiving, not a priest in a little cubicle. Christ is saying His Father is going to forgive you to the extent you forgive others.

15) But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (KJV)

None of us want to be in a situation where God says to us, "I am not going to forgive you, because you didn't forgive your mate. You kept throwing it up at her and I'm not going to forgive you as a result." If our sins aren't forgiven, what's the end result of that? It's the lake of fire. Not only must we forgive and I have been on the receiving end of this. I'm sure you have too and I've seen it where people say, "Yes, I forgive you," but they say it with gritted teeth. They say it because they know they have to say it, but in their heart it's just not there. Not only do we have to forgive we have to forget. We have to just push it away. What does God do? He says I'm going to remove your sins as far as the east is from the west. If you look at that phrase, it means infinity. It means forever. It means eternity as far as the east is from the west, because they will never come together. If one goes this direction and one goes that direction in a straight line, they're not coming back together. God says, not only do you have to forgive, but you just have to not remember it anymore, not bring it up anymore, not think about it anymore. It is easy in principle. It is hard to do because of our human nature.

We have to focus on the positive aspects of our mate and not the things that happened in the past that were negative. You see, we need to encourage Godly behavior in our mates. The Bible talks about not letting the sun go down on your wrath. The reason for that is when the sun comes up in the morning, you want a fresh day. You want to flush all of that aside. Put it away. That's easy to say. It is hard to do, but it can be done. In your mind you just say, "Look that was yesterday. We both screwed up. We both said things we shouldn't have said or did things we shouldn't have done. We have apologized to each other. We've repented and today is a new day. We're going to start fresh." Every day should be a fresh day. The point is when your mate sees Christ in you, it encourages them to change also to be like your example. That leads us to the next point.

4. We must exercise the holy spirit in our marriage.

We have to exercise it every single minute of every single day. The minute we stop exercising God's spirit guess what? Satan is there. Our human nature is there. Either God's spirit pushes away Satan and our human nature or it doesn't. By exercising God's spirit we can put away Satan and put away our human nature.

I have been in the church over fifty years. You look back on the history of marriage in the modern day churches of God. Some people married for the wrong reasons. They wake up five, ten years later and say, "I shouldn't have gotten married." Others got married of self-imposed pressure, meaning "I don't want to be single the rest of my life and so this guy or this gal is here. Maybe they're not ideal, but they're better than the alternative, so we're going to get married." They got married for the wrong reasons. Others were subject to church matchmaking. That happened in the ministry. It happened in local churches. I talked to a lady a few years ago and she said there was this guy that was probably twenty years older than her, yet they were both single in this

small church. There were matchmakers in the church and they kept saying to both of them – you ought to date so and so or you ought to take her out or you ought to do this. She would be ideal for you or he would be great for you. It just went on and on and then the minister got involved and promoted the matchmaking. They got married and it was a bad marriage from day one and finally ended in a divorce. So, you see people get married for the wrong reason sometimes. If you are in a marriage like that it's a greater challenge. Yes, it is. Some of you have found out just because somebody attends church doesn't mean they're a spiritual giant. In some cases it doesn't even mean they're converted just because they attend church.

There's great news. All of this can be overcome by exercising the holy spirit, even two people who are diametric opposites can come together as one if they exercise the holy spirit. Let's go to 2 Timothy 1:7. We need to focus on this scripture, because God is telling us all things can be overcome if you exercise His spirit. In a marriage it takes two obviously.

2 Timothy 1:7. *For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power ... (KJV)*

That's power to change, power to be like Jesus Christ, power to overcome, power to forgive, power to forget.

7b) ... and of love ... (KJV)

"Hey, I don't know if I love this guy anymore or I'm not sure I love her anymore." Well, if God's spirit is exercised, we can love our mates, because God's spirit is a spirit of love. God is love.

7 continued) ... and of a sound [converted] mind. (KJV)

Notice what Christ says about this same spirit in John 16:13. This was Christ's last night as a human being. He was trying to impart critical information to the disciples that they would need going forward after He was no longer with them. He was telling them they were going to have another helper.

John 16:13. *Howbeit when he [it], the Spirit of truth, is come, he [it] will guide you into all truth: for he [it] shall not speak of himself [itself] ... (KJV)*

If it's a trinity, how does that work? The spirit, you see, is the power of God.

13b) ... but whatsoever he [it] shall hear [from the Father], that shall he [it] speak: and he [it] will shew you things to come. (KJV)

So, we are told here this spirit of truth will guide us into all truth. The Greek word for "guide" is Strong's number 3594 and it means *to show the way or to teach or to lead*. It doesn't say it's with a whip and a chair, beating you with a rod of iron. No, it leads and

guides God's way. Notice what it says here; it guides us. It shows you things to come, but it guides us into all truth. It says all truth, not just truth in the scripture, which is a very important aspect of this. God's spirit guides us to read the scriptures and understand the truth, but it also guides us in examining ourselves, seeing ourselves not as we would like to see ourselves or we hope we are like this or that, but as God sees us. You see, the holy spirit, if exercised, allows us to turn the spotlight on ourselves and see ourselves as God really sees us. It gives us the truth about ourselves, our thoughts, our conduct, our words and then we can begin to have a basis of change. It does not drive us with a whip and a chair, as I said. It leads. Let's go to Luke 4:1 and see what the holy spirit did with Christ as it does with us and it does through the mind.

Luke 4:1. *And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost [Spirit] returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, (KJV)*

It is a gentle urge, not a kick in the fanny. You see, what the holy spirit does is give us self-awareness. It opens our eyes to ourselves to see how we come across to others. That's so important. In a marriage we see what kind of mate we are. The holy spirit will reveal to us our faults, our shortcomings, our sins in our marriage. What the holy spirit does even more importantly is to show us how we compare to Jesus Christ. The holy spirit reveals God's scriptures to us, so therefore we have an image of Jesus Christ. He's up here. We're down here. It shows us how we are relative to Jesus Christ. We make the comparison. We examine ourselves and then we see, "Oh, I have to change this. I have to change that. I have to change this other thing in my marriage." It helps us examine ourselves. We quote 2 Corinthians 13:5 before Passover that we should examine ourselves.

2 Corinthians 13:5. *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? (KJV)*

This should go on every day in our marriage. We have to exercise God's spirit daily in our marriage or we will go on the rocks, like a ship collapsing on the rocks. Let's go to 1 Timothy 4:7. He is drawing an analogy of exercising the holy spirit to physical exercise. We can learn from this. Paul says to Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:7. *But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.
8) For bodily exercise profiteth little: ... (KJV)*

The New International Version says "bodily exercise is of some value" in this life. It gives us better health.

8b) ... but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. (KJV)

The Greek word for “exercise” here refers to the exercise of athletes in the games, like the Olympics. So, Paul is drawing a direct analogy between physical exercise and exercising God’s spirit. You see what Paul is saying, exercising the holy spirit is like exercising a muscle. The more you exercise it, the stronger it gets. We take in air. We take in food. We combine them for energy. It builds more muscle. The more we exercise, the bigger the muscle gets, the stronger the muscle is, the more endurance it has. You see, he’s saying that exercise, whether it’s the holy spirit or the muscle, makes it stronger. Unlike food providing the energy to build a muscle, the holy spirit in us when we exercise it grows as a gift from God. The more we exercise the holy spirit, the more we are given the holy spirit. The less we exercise the holy spirit, we don’t get any more and it starts to go away. It becomes less and less. The leading voice of the holy spirit that leads us into righteousness becomes softer and softer and softer as our carnality and as Satan grows stronger and stronger in our minds. We need to understand what we find here in 2 Corinthians 4:16. You see, the holy spirit is given to those who exercise it. Notice what this says. It’s an important principle.

2 Corinthians 4:16. *For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. (KJV)*

What does he mean by that? Well, after you go through your twenties guess what? The outward man or woman starts perishing. We start a slow downhill slide until we die. Our cells don’t replenish as easily. We lose muscle mass. We lose bone mass. We lose mental capabilities in a slow slide. So, that’s what he’s talking about. Our outward man is perishing. It’ll go away some day, yet the inward man is renewed day by day meaning if we exercise God’s spirit guess what? He will give us more. It is renewed every day. If we don’t exercise God’s spirit, then it just diminishes over time just like our physical bodies diminish over time.

What are the fruits of exercising God’s spirit in a marriage? Let’s go to Galatians 5:22, but let’s emphasize the words and the fruits that are applicable specifically and importantly to a marriage.

Galatians 5:22. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love ... (KJV)*

Love for your mate. Love is outgoing. Love is giving.

22b) ... joy ... (KJV)

Making your mate’s heart sing, bringing joy into the family, into the household. When you walk in at the end of the day, do you bring joy or gloom? Do you bring happiness or fear?

22 continued) ... peace ... (KJV)

No fighting, no throwing things. I remember when I was a young lieutenant in the Air Force, some of the additional duties they gave all of us young guys were the duties that

the older officers didn't want to do. One was to be on duty all night as the officer that goes in and investigates if something goes wrong on the base. I was there at headquarters on my cot trying to sleep. The phone rings and there is a dust up at a house on the base. So I get in the police car and we motor over there. It's about two in the morning. I walk in and I see a plate of spaghetti on the wall. It is stuck to the wall. The dish is down broken on the floor. The husband is there with this "I know I'm in trouble" look on his face. He had been drinking and he was very quiet, very humble. The wife was there and she was just drunk out of her mind. She said he hit me. She starts parting her hair. It's all sweaty and everything, trying to show me a little scratch about a quarter of an inch long. They had gotten into this enormous fight. You know what? When he walked in after his duties that day, he didn't bring joy in the household. When she met him when he walked in, she didn't bring joy in the household. They started drinking and then the worst of the human nature comes out. Pretty soon words get exchanged and then things get thrown and then maybe even blows occur because they obviously aren't converted, don't have God's holy spirit.

That can happen in the church if we don't exercise God's spirit every day. When a husband comes in from work, what should be on his mind? All of the troubles he's had for the day, all how he's bummed out about this or bummed about that or the wife is greeting him with a scowl because the lawn needs mowing or this didn't happen or the plumbing broke or the kids were bad or whatever it was. There's no joy in the house. Guess what? It goes downhill from there if we don't exercise God's holy spirit.

22 continued) ... longsuffering ... (KJV)

This means to put up with. Sometimes we have bad days. Sometimes we get selfish. Sometimes we're in pain. Sometimes we focus just on ourselves and so the other mate has to put up with it rather than escalate it into World War III; ICBMs going over as they lob them at each other.

22 continued) ... gentleness, goodness ... (KJV)

As I said earlier, some kids growing up in a household don't know what gentleness is because they were never treated with gentleness. They have to learn it from God's spirit. You see, it's so simple. We need to display these characteristics, these fruits of God's spirit every day, every minute of our lives. We have to do it especially toward our mates. If both mates exercise God's spirit, all marital problems can be solved. I don't care how different you are. I don't care if maybe you should never have gotten married in the first place. If you exercise God's spirit, both parties; it takes two, all marital problems can be solved through the power of God's spirit.

5. We need to make our marriage God centered.

This is the most important principle. God must be at the center of our marriage. If it is not, the marriage will fail, or the marriage will not be as good as it could be. God should be at the center of our individual lives, therefore God should be at the center of our

marriage. It won't be as successful. It won't be as happy. It won't be as fulfilling if God is not at that center.

You see, when we became baptized, we made an agreement, a covenant with God that we would put Him first and we would follow Him no matter what. We read Luke 14 and counted the cost. We said, "I've counted the cost. I'm going to follow you unto death." When we say that we're going to follow God unto death that means we're going to follow His commandments and His laws unto death, even if it means our death. Therefore, we must pay very close attention to God's instruction regarding marriage. To the woman God emphasizes something in Ephesians 5:22-25. We have to ask ourselves why. He says wives you have to recognize that the husband is the head of the family as Jesus Christ is the head of the church. Wow! He's saying that we know Christ is head of the church. We know Christ has authority in the church and he says the husband is in the same position with regards to the wife.

Ephesians 5:22. *Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.*

23) 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. (KJV)

The husband should be the savior of the wife's body, protecting her, looking after her, not allowing her to get in danger, putting himself in harm's way if it comes to that.

24) Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. (KJV)

If you say that to a young girl in high school or college, they would laugh at you. "That's old fashioned. That's the way it was maybe a hundred years ago, but it doesn't apply to me." Why such emphasis? Well, we all have difficulty submitting, because it's contrary to human nature. God is saying, "Wives, I want you to submit to your husbands, even though it is contrary to the beliefs of the world you live in or contrary to your human nature. I want you to do that." So, women must be subject to the husband, not just when you agree. It's easy when you agree. Not just when it's convenient, but when it is inconvenient. Not just when you want something, so you play up to the mate and suck up to the mate and then you want something. Okay, then you agree. Not just when whatever the decision is happens to be pleasing to you. The point is, you see, all of this is a test of character for the woman. As we are to humble ourselves before God and Christ, and we are to submit to one another, would the woman at the end of the day humble herself to the husband? That is the issue and God watches.

It's a test of character, but that puts a huge burden on the husband to make sure that he makes Godly decisions and not carnal decisions, not selfish decisions. It is the husband's job to make it easy for the wife to submit to him, not hard but easy. Behave like Jesus Christ. Give to the other. Serve the other. Make it easy for the wife to submit. If he does that, the wife will honor and respect and submit. To the man God says and the emphasis here in verse 25 is interesting.

25) Husbands, love [agapao] your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; (KJV)

Christ died for the church. Everything He does is for the church. He is saying husbands you better have the same attitude and the same approach. Continue in verses 28-33.

28) So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. (KJV)

If you love your wife and make her happy, you're going to have a better life.

29) For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

30) For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

31) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother ... (KJV)

This means under their day to day supervision. Sometimes that doesn't happen in the church and every time I've seen it, it results in a calamity.

31b) ... and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. (KJV)

It means unified, happy, at peace.

32) This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

33) Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; ... (KJV)

Why the emphasis to the husbands? Love your wives. It's because human nature is such in a man that men quite often don't have the ability to show love to their wives in a manner in which the wife can receive it. Showing love to your wife is not buying a power drill for her. It is showing it in a way that she can understand and receive. It must be learned and it must be led by the holy spirit. He must demonstrate this love to the wife not when she behaves as he wants her to be, but as she is every day, because he married her as she is. Now she should be changing to be like Jesus Christ, yes, but he needs to show love as she is, not when it's just convenient for him or when he wants something or when she happens to please him to show love then, not just when he happens to be feeling good that day and it's easy to show love. It's a test of character and God is watching. Remember the critical verse that we read earlier, verse 21.

21) Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. (KJV)

We should fear to undermine our mate, to backstab our mate, to criticize our mate behind her back or harshly to her face. We need to fear to hurt or betray one another. Fear God because there has to be an answer to that. If we truly have God's love,

everything we do for our mate will be for his or her benefit, not their harm because that's the way God treats us and we want to follow in His footsteps.

Let's conclude now. We need to take these principles with the utmost seriousness because they are in God's Bible. They are there for our instruction. They are there for our learning. Yet ultimately these principles apply to everyone, because aren't all of us preparing to marry Jesus Christ at some point? Therefore, all of us need to be a mate that is acceptable to Jesus Christ. If we don't take these principles seriously, our salvation could depend on it. We can keep the Sabbath. We can pay tithes. We can go to the Feast, keep the holy days. Yet if we act like Satan in our marriage, we're not going to be there. There are people who somehow seem to think when they walk in the door they can turn the key and behave carnally and nobody will know. Their marriage doesn't demonstrate the love of God in the marriage. Somehow they think that's okay with God and they can be in God's kingdom.

Let's look at the age we live in in 2 Timothy 3:1-2. We have to overcome this. We are promised through much trial will we enter the Kingdom of God and this is one of the things that we need to overcome.

2 Timothy 3:1. *This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.*
(KJV)

This means spiritually dangerous times.

2) For men shall be lovers of their own selves ... (KJV)

Dorothy and I were walking down the sidewalk the other day and we saw all of these selfie sticks that these kids are carrying. They stick their iPhone or whatever at the end of the stick and they take pictures of themselves. They are just carrying them around. It's like the whole world is interested in where they are at that minute and what they're doing and what they're wearing and all of that. If that isn't a fulfillment of verse 2 here, I don't know what is. Continue in verse 5.

5) Having a form of godliness ... (KJV)

People at church can seem oh so nice and oh so converted and oh so Godly.

5b) ... but denying the power thereof: ... (KJV)

Denying the power of the holy spirit to change our lives, to change our minds, to change how we treat one another.

5 continued) ... from such turn away. (KJV)

You see, selfishness is at the heart of a troubled marriage. We see here – lovers of their own selves. Many marriages are no more than a battle for who is in control, a day

by day, minute by minute battle. A few years ago at the Feast I went over to a house that was rented by a church member. There was a couple there that was dating. They got into a little dustup after services. I was kind of a fly on the wall and watched this little dustup. There was an argument. It was starting to get a little heated until the guy walked away. I can't even remember what it was about; where they were going to, what they were going to do, something like that. The woman looked at me. She was not making any secret about it and said that it was a battle for who's in control. She was referring to she was going to be in control or they weren't going to date much longer. I thought to myself, where have you been in the church and what Bible have you been reading and do you even have God's holy spirit if you say something like that? The whole purpose of God's word is to have love and more concern for the other people and humbling oneself, yet you're fighting about who's in control before you even get married. I see people in constant conflict; where to go, argument; when to leave, argument; what to spend money on, argument; who gets the final word. It's a ferocious battle. It should not be in God's church.

As I said in the beginning how can we claim to be Christians and how can we teach others in the World Tomorrow if we can't make our marriage work, if it's nothing but trouble? It takes two. I understand that. We can only change ourselves. We can't change anybody else but ourselves. If we change ourselves, and the other has God's spirit, and will see the change, it will be encouraging to them. You see, we're in spiritual jeopardy if we are not changing daily to be like Jesus Christ.

The point is that all of us, whether we're married or whether we're single, need to bear down. We need to focus on loving and serving our mates, obviously loving and serving all people, but particularly our mates and making our marriages God centered and God pleasing.