

You can have a successful marriage by . . .

Building Your Marriage On a Spiritual Foundation

Under the headline “Foundation on God,” a Saturday edition of the *Abilene Reporter-News* carried an Associated Press story about a building company in Texas that puts a Bible in the foundation of each house it builds, as well as writing appropriate portions of Scripture on the framework of the house. One of the builders explained that their purpose is to “give praise and honor to God in everything.” His wife said, “In Scripture we have found peace and order in our home and our family, and that’s of course what we want for these families [who buy the houses].”¹

They have the right idea. Since God is the originator of marriage, and since He is the One who has the authority to guide our marriages, it seems reasonable to conclude that God should provide the foundation of our marriages. When you get married, your marriage should be built on a spiritual foundation.

THE NEED FOR A SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION

A marriage might be built on another foundation. Some people build their marriages on the foundation of worldly success. They marry in order to advance in life. Others might build their homes on the foundation of family tradition. They believe their job in marriage is to perpetuate the family line or continue the family business. Others hope to build their marriages on nothing but erotic love. Their only thought in getting married is to fulfill their sexual desires. Then, if the sexual relationship in marriage becomes

boring, they will leave the marriage and seek sexual fulfillment elsewhere.

The best foundation for a marriage is a spiritual foundation. Such a foundation can withstand the negative effects of time, the traumas of the transitions of life, and the disappointments that accompany living together. A spiritual foundation will enable two imperfect people to forgive each other for their shortcomings and allow them to live together happily in spite of their imperfections.

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR A SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION

How can you build your home on a spiritual foundation? Literally placing a Bible under your house will not achieve this goal; rather, scriptural teaching and godly thinking must undergird your daily life with your spouse.

Be United in Christ

To begin with, you must be united in Christ. If a home is divided religiously and spiritually—if the man and the woman in the marriage worship with different churches, for instance—trouble lies ahead.

Negative effects of a religiously mixed marriage. What problems result from a religiously divided home? First, during their lifetime the husband and the wife will, because of their religious differences, spend a great deal of time apart from one another. If the woman, for instance, is a Christian and goes to worship services faithfully but her husband does not, then they will not be on the same path spiritually. Religious differences are likely to involve other differences as well—discrepancies in values and moral standards, for example.

¹Michael Graczyk, “Foundation on God,” *Abilene Reporter-News* (26 August 2005): C1.

In addition, religious differences result in problems for the children in a family. When the mother and the father disagree religiously, what will the children do? They may divide their time between their parents' churches. They may choose one church over the other.² Either possibility has disadvantages; the children will surely be confused, torn in different directions as they try to determine how they should worship. They may ultimately choose to be affiliated with no church at all.

How to be united in Christ. Obviously, it would be far better if the couple were one spiritually. It is never a good idea for a Christian to marry someone of a different faith. If you are about to marry someone who has a different faith than yours, you need to find a way to unite your family religiously. How? Read and follow the Bible, God's Word. The Bible teaches that you must believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of your sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30), confess your faith in Christ (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9, 10), and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16). Obey these commands, and you will be saved and added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47). The New Testament describes the church that Jesus built (Matthew 16:13–20; see Ephesians 5:23–25). Be active members of that church, and you will please God, bless your children, and help your marriage succeed.

Live as Christians

If you are united in Christ and are determined to build your home on a spiritual foundation, how do you go about it? Above all, both husband and wife should do their best to be spiritual people—that is, to be people who live as God would have them live. A tract that was widely used years ago was entitled "A Better World Begins with Me." The Christian husband and

²Sometimes the children of a religiously mixed marriage follow one parent's lead into the church, as did my wife. When that happens, the Lord is pleased; but even then the result is religious division between the children and one parent.

wife should each resolve, "A better home begins with me." If two Christians are doing their best to live the Christian life,³ then the marriage should succeed.

Accept God's Family Structure

You need to follow God's directions regarding the structure of the home. Following His divine plan will prevent or solve many problems.

Christ is the head of the man. Both the husband and the wife must recognize that Christ is the head of the home. Paul said that the man is the head of the woman but Christ is the head of the man (1 Corinthians 11:3). That makes Christ the head of the household.

The husband is the head of the wife. The Bible then teaches that the man is the head of the woman; the woman is to submit to the man (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:22–24; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1a). Many today reject this view as old-fashioned and sexist, demeaning to and dangerous for women. Wives may feel threatened by the prospect of having to

submit to their husbands. Husbands must not pervert this biblical doctrine to use it as a weapon against their wives.

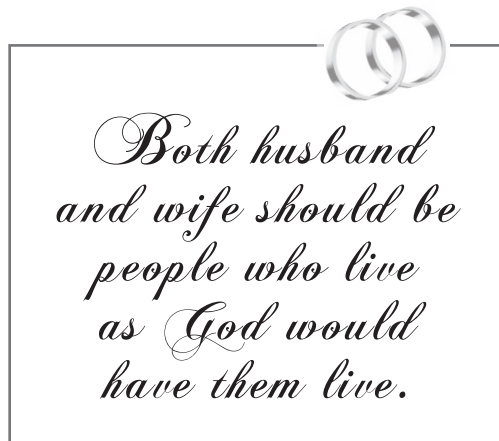
The problem is that people fail to recognize four facts about this biblical teaching.

(1) The Christian husband's authority over his wife is modified by the fact that he himself is under the authority of Christ. Therefore, he cannot scripturally treat his wife in any way contrary to the teachings of Christ.

(2) These instructions have nothing to do with superiority or inferiority; rather, they are a plan for proper function in the home. That the man is the head of the woman does not imply that he is superior to his wife, but that he has a different role to play in the marriage. God indicated that leadership in the marriage was to be vested in the husband.

(3) The man's headship is found in a context of

³This requires sincere efforts to love with Christian love (1 Corinthians 13:4–7), bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23), and grow in the Christian graces (2 Peter 1:5–7).



mutual submission. Before Paul wrote that wives are to submit to their husbands in Ephesians 5:22, he wrote that all Christians are to “be subject to one another” in Ephesians 5:21. In some sense, while the man is to lead the woman, he also is to submit to her.

(4) The man’s headship is coupled with the requirement for him to love his wife as much as he loves himself and as much as he loves his own body. He is to love her as much as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25, 28, 33). How much did Christ love the church, His bride?⁴ Enough to die for her! Likewise, the husband is to lead the home; but he is to lead in such a way as to follow the example of Christ, who died for the church.

The husband who loves his wife in that way would never deliberately hurt her or deprive her. He would do everything for her, even to the point that he would die for her! His greatest desire is for her to be happy. If the husband has that kind of attitude, the wife will not feel threatened by his leadership.

Children are to obey their parents. The Bible teaches that children must be obedient to their parents (Ephesians 6:1–3). The husband and wife who are trying to build their home on the foundation of God and His Word must, therefore, reject any parenting theory that denies parents the right to direct, teach, and discipline their children. They must require their children to obey them.

Recognize the Importance of the Church

In addition, if you want to build your home on Christ, the church must play an important role in your marriage. Christ and His church are inseparable;⁵ one cannot rightly claim to be devoted to Christ and ignore His church. The importance of the church to your life together will be seen in (1) The amount of time you give to it, (2) the amount of money you give to it, and (3) the talents you use to advance its cause.

Marriages in which both husband and wife are fully involved in the work and worship of

the church are not, of course, divorce-proof; but they are far more likely to endure than marriages in which neither partner is active in the church. The impact of attending worship services on marriage was well described in a 1980 article:

Church attendance was significantly correlated with a decreased probability of marital instability. Among couples attending church less than once a year, the divorce or separation rate was 34.5 percent; for those attending church once to several times a year, the rate was 26.7 percent; for those attending church monthly or more, the rate was 18.1 percent. In addition, couples that attended church frequently were 2.6 times as likely to have intact marriages, compared to couples that attended less than once a year.⁶

Make the Home a Religious Institution

Next, be sure your home is a place where God is glorified and the Bible is taught. The home ought to be the most basic religious institution in society. Faith is both *caught* and *taught* in the home. It is caught in that the mother and the father exemplify in their lives what faith means. It is taught in that, in the Christian home, the husband and the wife strengthen each other’s faith. Then they both teach their faith to their

⁶Wesley Shrum, “Religion and Marital Instability: Change in the 1970s?” *Review of Religious Research* 21 (1980): 135–47. Additional information is given in Glenn T. Stanton, “The Role Faith Plays in Marriage and the Likelihood of Divorce,” Citizen Link - Focus on Social Issues (<http://www.citizenlink.org/FOSI/marriage/A000000901.cfm>; Internet; accessed 31 October 2008). Stanton noted that “evangelicals who attend church regularly divorce at a rate 35 percent lower than secular couples.” He found that the difference in divorce rates is not between those who profess religion and those who do not, but between those who attend church services regularly and those who do not.

More recent reports reflect a similar correlation. Sociologist Brad Wilcox, coauthor of a 2006 study, confirmed that regular churchgoers are less likely to divorce: “I estimate between 35 and 50 percent less likely than Americans who attend church just nominally, just once or twice a year, or who don’t attend church at all. It is true that people who say they’ve had a born-again experience are about as likely to divorce as people who are completely secular. But if you look at this through the lens of church attendance, you see a very different story” (Stan Guthrie, “What Married Women Want,” interview with Brad Wilcox [<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/october/53.122.html>]; Internet; accessed 24 October 2008]). The results of the study are available online: Steven L. Nock and W. Bradford Wilcox, “What’s Love Got to Do with It? Equality, Equity, Commitment, and Women’s Marital Quality” (<http://www.virginia.edu/sociology/peopleofsociology/wilcoxpapers/Wilcox%20Nock%20marriage.pdf>; Internet; accessed 24 October 2008).

⁴Jesus referred to the church as a bride in Mark 2:19, as did Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:2. (See Revelation 21:2, 9; 22:17.)

⁵For instance, the church is the “fullness” of Christ, according to Ephesians 1:22, 23. Ephesians 5:23–31 describes the relationship between Christ and His church.

children. How? The constant process of transmitting faith from parent to child in the home is described in Deuteronomy 6:6–9:

These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

What is a home like today if those in it follow these commands? The family prays and worships together. The Bible is read and taught. Moral questions are answered by referring to God’s Word. Church activities are given priority over other activities. The parents try to follow in Jesus’ footsteps and give God credit for “every good thing given and every perfect gift” (James 1:17). Children naturally develop faith in such an environment. Furthermore, the faith manifested in such a home becomes the glue that can hold the marriage together, no matter what happens.

Make Spiritual Goals Preeminent

Finally, let spiritual goals determine the direction of the home. When you get married, you will have a number of goals. You want to build a mutually satisfying relationship. You may desire to get a certain level of education and to enter a specific occupation so that you can provide adequately for your family. Nothing is wrong with any of these goals. However, the members of a family dedicated to Christ have a higher goal: to go to heaven!⁷ Christians who build their homes on a spiritual foundation want their home lives

⁷Christians desire to receive the “crown of righteousness” spoken of in 2 Timothy 4:7, 8.

to help them—and as many others as possible—go to heaven. If your ultimate goal is to serve Christ and go to heaven, it will affect what you do with your life. You may decide to become a preacher instead of a banker. It will impact where you live, for you may decide to follow your profession in a mission field rather than staying near home. It may determine where you go to school, what job you accept, or where you send your children to school. In fact, every decision you make will be answered in response to the question “What will be most likely to help me and my family—and through us, help others—to go to heaven?”

That attitude was exemplified by the young man who became my son-in-law after he wrote my wife and me a letter asking for approval to marry our elder daughter. The letter said, in part:

My dad always impressed on me the importance of finding a girl that would help me get to heaven, and I’ve found that girl in Dee Ann. I’m sorry that I couldn’t speak to both of you about things that Dee Ann and I have discussed. I want to marry her and I know she feels the same way about me, if this meets with your approval, and I pray that it does, because I can’t imagine living my life without her.⁸

Indeed, every Christian ought to be looking for a mate who will help him or her to get to heaven!

To bury a Bible in the foundation of a house might have some symbolic value. It is far more significant, however, for the family living in that house to build their lives together on the spiritual foundation of the Word of God. When you get married, make that your aim.

Coy Roper

⁸Ian Shepherd, Blacktown, New South Wales, Australia, personal letter to Coy and Charlotte Roper, 2 July 1978.