



*Courtship &
Marriage*



*A sermon by Ostis B. Wilson
delivered to young people in Oregon in 1976*

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Courtship and Marriage

In regard to the lesson on courtship and marriage that I have been requested to give this afternoon to the young people, I am reminded of a young sister in one of our congregations some years ago, who married an unsaved, worldly young man. Naturally, it was a divided house, because he wanted to go after the ways of the world and wanted her to go with him, which she could not do and please the Lord. She wanted to go after the ways of the Lord, in which he was not at all interested. Consequently, there was a constant tug-of-war between them. After she had borne that conflict, the trials and pressures that are associated with such a condition for some years, she said very earnestly to Opal, “Oh, why don’t our ministers preach and teach more about this?” She had been advised and counseled about this but did not listen. You won’t either. Do not think that I am sophisticated, egotistical, and naive enough to think you will give much heed to what I say here today. I am not. I know better than that. That is just not the course of things in this day and time.

Children are taught from the time they enter school to “Assert yourself. The world is yours if you can take it.” They grow right up with this idea instilled in them, with a determination to chart their own course, to take their own way, to do their own thing, resenting any restraint or discipline from their parents, teachers, preachers, or anyone else, because they cannot “take the world” unless let alone

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and given a free hand. This is the doctrine in which they are trained, grow up with, and it is the influence and spirit of this age but it isn't working good. We don't have to take a second look at conditions around us—moral standards and the divorce courts and all of those things to see that it is not working good. This is true in all the areas of life but more particularly in this special area of courtship and marriage, where good, solid, sound advice, and guidance are needed more than in any other area of life. My hair is real grey now and I am not young any more. I began my ministry at the age of 20. In more than 45 years of ministering, and dealing with people, I have had occasion to counsel with several considering marriage. Out of all of them, I can only call to mind now, one person, who took my counsel after it was given. That was an older woman who was more mature and had been married, raised a family, lost her husband, and was considering a second marriage. The man in this case was a professed Christian, but a sectarian and not a saint in light. I advised her strongly against that and gave her a number of Scriptures to support my advice. She backed right out of it, dropped her plans, and lived the remainder of her life in widowhood. She had the advantage over people in your age group, in that she was more mature in age, thought, experience, and was able to weigh things out better in the light of the advice given her.

I have often thought that if each succeeding generation could take up where the preceding one left off, go on from there and build on their experiences, the human race would be way on up the line. It does not work out that way. Each generation has to learn its own lessons, by its own experiences, so we just keep covering the same ground over and over.

It seems strange that we would develop an attitude such as this in regard to our marriage when the teachings and admonitions of

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God's Word are so explicit on this line. When God's Word says to not steal, we readily grasp the idea that stealing is wrong and we are committing sin if we steal. The same with lying or any other common sins, which God's Word implicitly declares on the contrary. Somehow, we get the idea that our marriage is a private, a personal affair into which no one else, even God Himself, has any right to intrude, and we will handle it as a personal, private matter as we see best; however, there is much more said in God's Word about marriage than there is about stealing, lying, etc. We cannot disregard that and play fast and loose with God and His Word in that area and expect Him to bless us in it.

I wish the management would have given me another subject on which to bring a lesson; however, this is the most important subject I could possibly speak on, so I proceed with gladness.

In Psalms 37:5-7a we read, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and he shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." We see here that God has His plan for our lives and wants us to seek His Divine will in all of our plans and all that we do. This certainly applies to your marriage as much as anything in your life. God wants you to commit your way to Him, trust Him and wait patiently for Him in this important matter. When a spark has been lit and two prospective marriage partners have set course in that direction, it is very difficult to wait, but you will always be glad that you did. There are some great rewards promised here to those who commit their way unto the Lord and wait patiently for Him.

In Eccl. 12:1 we read again, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." We see here

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that God wants to get hold of us, get our lives in His hands early so He can plan for us, and guide us through the uneven, unsettled period of our lives called youth. It will save us from many heartaches, sorrows, and troubles on down the line if we will permit Him to do this.

Again in Matt. 6:33 we read these words of Jesus, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness: and all these things shall be added unto you.” God help you and me to learn to put first things first, and trust Him to take care of all things pertaining to our lives, including our marriage. The thing of prime importance is to obtain salvation, get God in our lives to guide us and then let Him guide in our marriage and everything else in life.

In Proverbs 3:5, 6 we read again, “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.” A person may feel that he knows what he wants and does not need anyone else’s help or advice. But God admonishes us not to lean to our own understanding but to trust in Him.

Then also, what does it mean to acknowledge Him in all our ways? It would mean to inquire of Him, earnestly seek His will in any prospective plans and especially in this area of our marriage, because of its importance, and commit our way to Him. He said if we would do this in all of our ways He would direct our paths. Surely Divine guidance is much needed in the area of marriage because He knows the end from the beginning, the future from the past and just how things will work out on down the line. He has told us that it is not in man that walketh to direct his own way. We need to recognize this.

Also in Proverbs 4:26 we are admonished to “Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.” Surely in a matter

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as important as one's marriage, which is a lifetime contract, one should diligently ponder, consider, pray, think, and project one's thinking on down the line into the years ahead, even to the mature years of one's life and how things may be then. If young couples will honestly do this, they will find their marriages solid and established.

The Lord wants our entire life in His hands. Surely He would be particularly interested about having that special area of life which pertains to our marriage and choosing a marriage partner for life. This is a most important thing in one's life, second only to one's salvation; is so closely connected with one's salvation and affects his spiritual life in such a great way that it is a close runner-up. Certainly our choice of a marriage partner is easily without competition as the most important choice and decision we will make in life as pertains to our natural, earthly life.

Marriage is a lifetime thing and is a sacred and divinely consecrated institution, ordained in the hands of a loving and all-wise God for the good, happiness, and general welfare of mankind. It should never be entered into thoughtlessly, recklessly, or hastily; but thoughtfully, prayerfully, reverently, discreetly, and in full consideration of the purposes for which God ordained it. Remember as you approach the time when you will be casting about for the person who is to be your life's companion, that your whole life lies ahead of you and the course of your life is being charted. The most important decision of your life is being made right at that time.

A solid marriage that will continue to produce peace and contentment on through the uneven journey of life and the changing fortunes of war, so to speak (for life is a warfare according to the Scriptures), must be established on something more than just physical beauty, physical attraction and attractiveness. All of that

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may change and fade as age comes on, work its changes in the physical features and form of a person, and take its toll.

There must be deep mutual love, respect, trust and confidence between the two parties to bind them together and undergird them for the struggles of life that lie ahead. This may exist entirely separate from, and independent of, physical charm, beauty, and physical attraction. Let me say right here that you should never enter into a marriage with a person you cannot trust implicitly. That would be a great big mistake. Your life would be filled with misery and woe because of your perpetual suspicion and wonderment about your mate.

The great danger for youth is, that so many times they mistake infatuation and physical attraction for love, and later on, when that begins to fade, they find their foundation crumbling from underneath them.

A sister told me, not long ago, that there was not a single thing in common between her and her husband—nothing. She named his three major interests in life—things in which she had no interest at all—and then said, “After these three things I come first.” These people are nearing retirement age, coming down to the time in life when they will need the comfort, sympathy, and strength of each other more than they have ever needed each other in their lives, and now, the foundation is crumbling from under them and they are actually just two people living in the same house—nothing more. There are no common bonds to bind them together in their closing years of life.

Another sister in her middle years of life, who has raised a family, has married children, told my wife a while back that she did not know why she and her husband had ever married, as they had so little in common.

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Another couple that I knew quite well and I have been in their home on various occasions were just two people living in the same house—nothing more. They were married for quite a few years but the charm and attraction of those earlier years had faded away. They had separate bank accounts and separate bedrooms. When she took her vacation, she took two or three of her lady friends in her car and struck out wherever they wanted to go, leaving him at home. When he took his vacation he just took off alone and left her at home. They each contributed a certain amount for food and the other expenses of operating the home. Everything that makes a marriage a real marriage was gone and their foundation had crumbled from under them. Do any of you want to face the advanced years of your marriage and of your life in situations like this? Certainly not. Then you had better think now and project your thinking on ahead into those years and how things may be then.

But at this point, let us not mistake the value of physical attraction. This is a part of it, a very important part of it and if you do not feel a physical attraction to the member of the opposite sex whom you are considering for marriage, you had better just back off and proceed no further. To marry a person, ruin his or her life by refusing to cooperate in the intimacies of marriage, is a crime to be punished by the Judge because He commanded in His Word in I Cor. 7:1-5, that we defraud not one another in this capacity.

Jesus Himself also said in Matt. 5:32, that if a man put away his wife except for fornication he causeth her to commit adultery. One does not have to put his or her spouse out of the house to put them away in this sense, but just withhold one's self from one's spouse and force him or her out into illicit affairs. In the sight of God that one becomes equally responsible and guilty for the adultery in such a case.

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We see that physical attraction is important. The important point is to hold it in proper balance with the other essentials of marriage and not allow it to get out of control or predominate over the other essentials—love, respect, trust, and confidence.

When you are considering marriage with a person, study him or her real well. Note the different points of character and disposition. See if you can love and respect him or her for what he or she is in character and disposition. Decide if you will be satisfied to have that person for the father or mother of your children, bearing in mind the old saying, “Like father, like son and like mother, like daughter,” etc. This saying proves to be quite true, works out quite generally and fairly sure. The strong points of character and disposition are more than likely to be transmitted to the children. If the man is surly, cantankerous, inconsiderate of the rights and feelings of others, and discourteous, you will more than likely have some children like that to deal with in your home. If he is rebellious against the authority of his parents, talks sassy and disrespectful to them, you will likely have some children treating you that way later on. The law of reaping what we sow works out quite accurately and without error. If he talks sassy and disrespectful to his mother, and is inconsiderate of her, he is more than likely going to be the same way toward you. If the girl is sassy, independent, disrespectful to her parents, unsubmitive and disobedient, she will likely be the same way toward you and will help in bringing problem children into the home. If she is the dominant, domineering, bossy type, she will be the same toward you. Brother Chandler taught us in his lifetime that people would usually behave like they had been conditioned and this is generally true.

Marriage is no place for pettish, peevish, selfish, self-centered folks to enter; but it is good soil for self-sacrifice, self-denial, and

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selflessness to grow and develop. True love will cause one to think more of what he can give than what he can get. Infatuation and physical attraction will work just the opposite, causing one to think more of what he can get than what he can give.

Weigh out your prospective spouse real well and see if you will be satisfied to spend the rest of your life with him or her just as he or she is now. Don't ever make the mistake, and it is a very serious mistake that many do make, to marry a person with the idea of making him or her over to suit you after you are married. That never has worked out well and it never will. Decide if you want him or her just as he or she is.

When you are approaching marriage, you should talk over and have a good understanding together regarding every area of home and family management. Talk over and reach understandings on your separate attitudes toward the intimacies of marriage. When it reaches that point, don't be afraid or hesitant to talk those things over frankly, openly, and see how your separate attitudes correspond in that area. It is very important to settle on the adjustments to be made where you do not agree, as your success in much else in the future will depend on full agreement or adjustment in that area.

Talk over your likes and dislikes to see what you have in common and if they are enough to make a good bond between you, make your lives agreeable, and a blessing to each other.

Talk over the matter of finance, money management, what can be expected in this area and who is to manage the money, etc. You may say, "Oh, there is no question there; the man is the head of the house and he will manage the money!" This may be true in general, but there are some cases, and I know some, where the woman is a better money manager than the man is. If he recognizes that quality in her and delegates that responsibility to her, in some cases and

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perhaps many, it will work out to the advantage of the entire family. I am conscious that the Bible says that a woman shall not usurp authority over the man. The usurped authority is when one takes authority that is not theirs, but rightfully belongs to another without the consent of the party to whom the authority belongs. In the matter I am discussing now, this would be delegated authority and therefore not usurped.

Talk over the matter of children and whether you want several or few, the attitude of each party regarding the management, discipline, etc. of the children. If you happen to be one who does not want children and does not want to settle down to the responsibilities of a home and family, you had better stay single.

I knew a man who entered into marriage with a woman who wanted a family of several children but he did not want children. This caused a dissatisfaction and unhappiness between them, and after two or three years of this hassle, he just walked out and dissolved the marriage, said that he had decided he did not want to be married and have the responsibility of a wife and family. He broke that woman's heart. I say he was a little late arriving at that conclusion. It would have been much better if this matter had been talked out and resolved between them before they entered into marriage. That marriage should never have been entered into because there was too much difference between them on such a vital issue.

If a woman does not want the responsibilities of taking care of her children, bathing the babies, feeding them, washing their diapers, and the other chores of maintaining her home in proper order, also preparing meals for her husband and family, she had better stay single. If she does not want to be subject to her husband and have a man telling her what to do, she had better leave marriage

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alone because the Bible is very explicit on all these points—how the woman should bear children, guide the house, be a keeper at home, be in subjection to her own husband, etc. if she is a married woman.

Likewise, if a man does not want to settle down to the responsibilities of providing for his family (however much family God sees fit to give him), maintaining his home, correcting, training, and guiding his children, etc. he had better let marriage alone. The Bible is very explicit on these points also. He is also to love his wife to the extent he would give himself for her.

We must all be aware that for one to marry a divorced person is strongly taboo in the holy Scriptures. Jesus said in His teaching in Matt. 5:32 that whosoever marries her that is put away commits adultery. Again in Luke 16:18 Jesus said, “Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.” Also in Mark 10:11, 12 we read these words in the teaching of Jesus, “And he saith unto them. Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.” Then in Romans 7:2, 3 Paul said, “For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.” In I Cor. 6:9, 10 we see that adulterers shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

This was not Old Testament doctrine but it is New Testament doctrine, the teachings of Jesus and His apostles (the law by which

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we now live), and we see here that death is the only thing which will dissolve a marriage in God's sight. We also see here that our souls are very intricately involved in this, and that to be an adulterer is to miss the kingdom of God.

Don't ever even consider it, nor entertain any questions in regard to it. Don't ever take the first step in that direction by dating a person who is divorced if you know it. If you should date someone who is divorced, not knowing it, and you find that to be the case, break it off right there and don't ever go again. Up to this point you have God with you and He will help you through even though affections may have become involved. If you go on after you have knowledge, you step out from under the sheltering wing of God by disobeying His Word and He will not be at hand to help you out of any entanglement in which you may have become involved in the case. Don't ever give place to the devil by even wondering if there might be some extenuating circumstances, some exceptions in this particular case, and maybe by some means it might be permissible. Remember your soul is at stake at this point.

For a saved person to marry an unsaved person is also taboo in the Scriptures. I Cor. 7:39 says, "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." The phrase "ONLY IN THE LORD" qualifies the foregoing statement that she is at liberty to be married to whom she will. To marry in the Lord would surely first of all involve marrying a saved person. Let us not make the mistake of thinking, that just because a person is saved, to marry him or her would be a sure guarantee of a successful marriage and happiness. All saved people are not compatible with one another in this kind of a union. At this point you need to seek the Lord earnestly, commit your way to Him and wait patiently upon Him to

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determine which saved person He would have you marry. In II Cor. 6:14 we read, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” Some translations apply this directly to marriage and read “Do not be married to an unbeliever.” Both are saying the same thing and teaching saved people to not enter into this kind of yoke with unsaved people or unbelievers.

The passage goes on to say, “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” It is making it very emphatic that there would be no fellowship between them, but a constant hassle and tug-of-war between them, and surely, those who enter into such unions will bring down the wrath and displeasure of God upon themselves, have much trouble in the flesh and more than likely lose their souls in the end.

These Scriptures and many others make it clear that for a saint in light to marry a sectarian even though saved, but not in the light, is taboo. Read Deut. 7:1-4. In this case the children of Israel were strongly forbidden to intermarry with the heathen nations around them and the reason given for it was that they would turn the hearts of the children of Israel from the true God to serve other gods. This thing happened when they disobeyed God, entered into marriages with these people and they wound up being idolaters like unto them.

Ancient Israel was a type of spiritual Israel in this New Testament or New Covenant age of time—the Church of God. The nations around her were typical of the sectarian institutions—so-called churches—around the Church of God in the earth. I have seen this thing work out numbers of times, when a saint in light married a sectarian, or person of another faith, they nearly always wound up in the denomination their companion belonged to.

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There is a reason for this thing and when one does this he crosses over the plain teaching of God's Word. He disobeys God and moves out from under His sheltering wings of mercy and protection and loses his drawing, pulling power to draw his companion to the truth.

I admonish you to take ahold of yourself, keep yourself in hand, don't let your emotions run away with you and don't lose your head. Just remember what is involved in marriage. It is not just an idea of having a ceremony said as a matter of convenience or something like that, but it's for a lifetime and it's going to involve you in many different things. Ponder the path of your feet through this period of your life—courtship and marriage. Remember your whole life is before you and eternity beyond that. Your soul and spiritual welfare are very intricately involved in this area, so commit your way to God, trust in Him, wait patiently upon Him and you will be glad you did.

—Ostis B. Wilson
(1976)