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PASTORAL EMPHASES IN PREMARITAL COUNSELING

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MAY 17, 1993

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PASTORAL EMPHASES IN
PREMARITAL COUNSELING

A MAJOR PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE PRACTICAL DEPARTMENT
IN CANDIDACY OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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In fulfilling the responsibilities of the office of the public ministry in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod a pastor deals with a diversity of opportunities whereby the lives of God's people are touched by the power of God's Holy Spirit at work in the Word and the sacraments.

One of these opportunities comes in counseling. The need for counseling has been increasing steadily in the last three or four decades. There is need for all kinds of counseling: family counseling, grief counseling, and premarital counseling. Premarital counseling can serve to help a couple prepare for marriage. It may be viewed as an ounce of prevention which hopefully will avoid a pound of cure.

Without the input from fellow colleagues in the ministry this project would not have been possible. I am deeply grateful to the pastors of the Southern Illinois District of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for the response to a survey in respect to premarital counseling and to the additional assistance from a group of ten pastors in follow-up visits.

I am also greatly indebted to my wife, Deloris, who did much of the proof reading; to my Associate Pastor, Ron Bogs, and his wife, Gayle, for their technical assistance in working with the computer, and to the church secretary, Dorothy Zimmermann, who in many ways made it possible for me to set aside time to complete this project.

ABSTRACT

Many things in life start out as being something that is optional, but as time passes they soon become a necessity. Premarital counseling is one aspect of ministry which forty years ago was considered an optional service by many pastors. Today it is viewed as a necessity.

Premarital counseling which is conducted by a Christian minister is rooted in the Word of God. Teachings of Holy Scripture in respect to marriage are at the heart and core of the counseling process. While the premarital counseling which a Christian minister conducts may cover various topics, there are distinct pastoral emphases which are made in the light of God's Word.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Christian pastor in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is called to proclaim the Good News of God's everlasting love in Jesus Christ; to administer the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion in accordance with the Word of God; to teach Christian Doctrine to young and old alike; to visit the sick; to exhort and rebuke the erring; to bring a word of hope to the dying and to give comfort to those who are bereaved. The pastor assumes his duties cheerfully because he recognizes that in fulfilling his duties the Word of God touches and influences the lives of God's people.

Among the duties which the pastor assumes is that of serving as the Officiant at marriages. This is more than a public function which is sometimes also performed by a Justice of the Peace or a Judge. A pastor performs Christian marriages in the context of the whole life of the Christian congregation. In the community of Christians a man and woman commit themselves to living together as husband and wife until death parts them. Accordingly, a marriage ceremony is a worship service in which the Word of God and prayer play a vital part and the couple is pronounced to be husband and wife "in the name of the Father and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit."¹ In many instances, if not most, the pastor will be acquainted with the couples who come to be united in marriage. If both the man and the woman are not members at least one of them may be. The pastor appreciates the importance of helping the couple prepare for the joys and responsibilities of marriage. "Each year in the United States approximately 2,500,000 couples marry and some 1,200,000 divorce. Some sixty-one percent of adult women and sixty-six percent of adult men are married."² Such statistics show how important it is for the pastor to spend quality time in premarital counseling. "Premarital counseling seeks to promote good marriages. Its aim is to aid couples in making successful marital adjustments without these adjustments becoming threats to the stability of the home."³

The interest in premarital counseling has been steadily increasing among the clergy of The Lutheran Church-

¹*Lutheran Worship Agenda*, (St. Louis, MO.: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 123.

²Robert F. Stallman- William J. Hiebert, *Premarital Counseling*, (Massachusetts-Toronto: Lexington Books, 1987), Preface.

³Kenneth J. Morris, *Premarital Counseling*, (Englecliffs, N.J.: Prentiss-Hall, 1960), 22.

Missouri Synod since the mid nineteen hundred and fifties. It is the goal of this project to show that a Christian pastor has pastoral emphases to make in premarital counseling. These pastoral emphases will be reviewed in the light of the responses to a pastoral survey and follow-up interviews with a select group of pastors. The intent is to underscore that premarital counseling, as a Christian pastor approaches the task, has a pastoral bias. The pastor has a concern to relate to the counselees in a theological way.

In pursuing its goal this paper has four objectives.

These objectives are:

- 1) To survey the pastors of the Southern Illinois District of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to ascertain what methods they currently employ in premarital counseling and what scriptural and theological teachings regarding marriage they seek to stress with the couple who desires to be married.
- 2) To analyze the data received from the survey and to seek to draw some conclusions from this data.
- 3) To identify the foremost pastoral emphases which should be made in conjunction with premarital counseling in the light of the teaching of Holy Scripture, the testimony of trained counselors, and the experience of parish pastors; and

- 4) To clarify the importance of keeping the premarital counseling process pastoral and to make some concluding recommendations to pastors to help them.

"Premarital counseling in the Church differs from other counseling in that (1) most couples who come to the minister come at his insistence rather than on their own initiative, and (2) considerable instruction as well as counseling is involved in it."⁴ The importance of premarital counseling in general and specifically of pastoral premarital counseling was underscored in the "Report of the President's Commission on Urban Families." The Report stressed the importance of "encouraging religious organizations to require couples to complete premarital counseling in order to be married in religious settings."⁵ The pastor usually has the benefit of having ministered in some capacity to at least one of the two parties coming for premarital counseling. He may have baptized one or both or had one or the other or both in an instruction class and have had frequent opportunities to proclaim the Word of God to them in worship services. John Wynn suggests how this helps the pastor to minister in the new setting. "What we seem to admit less readily is the potential influence of the pastor upon the children of his parish as they grow toward the day when they marry and

⁴Ibid., 26.

⁵St. Louis, MO.: *The Post Dispatch*, January 15, 1993.

begin new homes."⁶

The pastor as counselor wears one of many hats as he fulfills the various duties of his ministry. He can set the stage for what may happen in the counseling situation. Previous pastoral experience with the couple may help him establish a good rapport with them quickly. If the pastor has enjoyed a cordial relationship on the basis of his other functions, then the door is open for an equally cordial relationship to occur as he offers premarital counseling. On the other hand, if the pastor has kept himself at a distance from most of his parishoners or is perceived as distant, and his sermons tend to give the impression that he is a very judgmental individual, then he may have a difficult task establishing rapport with a couple who comes to him for premarital counseling.

While performing marriages is inevitably a part of the functions of the pastor's office, there is a considerable difference between going through the duties in a perfunctory manner and sincerely investing oneself in the task of counseling a couple and encouraging them to look forward with joy and anticipation to the time of their marriage. Robert Morris suggests that what the pastor seeks to do in counseling should enhance rather than detract from what the couple

⁶John Charles Wynn, *Pastoral Ministry to Families*, (Philadelphia, PA.: The Westminster Press, 1957), 98-99.

is experiencing. "Premarital counseling by a minister should help lay the foundation for a happy and successful marriage within the framework of Christian faith."⁷

It is a challenge to every Christian pastor to recognize that premarital counseling and officiating at the marriage of a couple are golden opportunities to touch people with the Good News of God's love and favor in Jesus Christ. More weddings are conducted in a religious setting than in secular settings. "Nationally, it is assumed that clergy provide most of the premarital counseling. It has been reported that in the United States during 1977, 79.2 percent of first marriages and 60.6 percent of remarriages were performed in religious rather than civil ceremonies."⁸

⁷Robert J. Morris, *Premarital Counseling*, (Englecliff, N. J.: Prentiss-Hall, 1960), 22.

⁸Robert F. Stallmann-William J. Hiebert, *Premarital Counseling*, (Massachusetts-Toronto: Lexington Books, 1987), 4.

CHAPTER TWO

A SURVEY.

Premarital pastoral counseling is an art of putting theology into practice. "The objective of pastoral counseling is the same as for everything the pastor does; to offer peace from sin, forgiveness through Christ, which works to bring about a substantial and radical change of mind and life."⁹ Premarital counseling shares some objectives of all pastoral counseling. Through premarital pastoral counseling the pastor can help a couple become more aware of the many areas in which such change will need to occur.

Pastors are trained in seminaries primarily to know the faith which they personally hold and to which they intend to adhere and strengthen in the lives of God's people through the proclamation of the Word of truth and the administration of the sacraments. Seminary courses in practical theology may deal superficially with the subject of pastoral counseling, but intensive training in counseling is usually lacking. It, therefore, remains for the pastor to develop this skill on his own with whatever assistance he can receive through pastoral conferences, workshops and personal study.

⁹Norbert H. Mueller-George Krause, Editors, *Pastoral Theology*, (St. Louis, MO.: Concordia Publishing House, 1990), 125.

This help is sometimes also very meager. For example, there were only two District-wide Pastoral Conferences in the Southern Illinois District in ten years which gave specific attention to the matter of marriage and divorce. In the Fall of 1984 Ron Brusius of the Synod's Commission of Family Life presented the video materials entitled *Building a Christian Marriage*, which were new at that time. In the Fall of 1987 a paper was presented to the Pastoral Conference dealing with the subject of marriage and divorce in the light of both the Old and New Testaments.

Mutual encouragement of one another through the edification made possible in pastoral conferences and other interpersonal contacts between pastors is a very important strength of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod ministerium. The sharing of spiritual gifts, as St. Paul mentions in I Corinthians 12:12-31, serves to enrich the whole Church.

It seemed appropriate to the nature of this project to survey a group of pastors to try to discover what kind of premarital counseling methods they use, how much premarital counseling they provide, and what pastoral and theological emphases pastors seek to make in the counseling process. Thus a survey was sent to eighty-seven pastors of the Southern Illinois District. It was distributed to the pastors at a Fall District-wide Pastoral Conference and mailed to those who were not present at the conference.

An accompanying letter was sent along with the survey to explain to the pastors the purpose of this project and to respectfully request their response. The letter read as follows:

October 8, 1991

Dear Co-worker in Christ:

The call to the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings with it the necessity for the Christian pastor to carry on that ministry in various ways: preaching, teaching, visiting the sick, comforting the dying and counseling.

Counseling is becoming an ever more important facet of the pastor's professional duties. A significant part of that counseling is premarital counseling.

In the interest of offering encouragement and help to fellow pastors in the area of premarital counseling, I am pursuing a graduate program at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo. It is my goal to help fellow pastors to zero in on certain and specific pastoral emphases in the process of premarital counseling.

As part of this study, I am asking you, as a fellow pastor in the Southern Illinois District, to complete this questionnaire and return it to me as soon as possible.

May the Lord bless you as you serve in His name.

Fraternally yours,

This is the format of the survey sent to the pastors of the Southern Illinois District, LC-MS, to identify current practices in premarital counseling and the pastoral emphases pastors seek to make.

A. The Methods of premarital counseling employed

1. The number of sessions.

- | | |
|-------------|---------------------|
| _____ One | _____ Four |
| _____ Two | _____ Five |
| _____ Three | _____ Six |
| | _____ More than six |

2. Types of materials used.

- a. _____ Ron Brusius, *Building a Christian Marriage*
- b. _____ C.P.H. Marriage Counseling Cards
- c. _____ Peter L. Velandar, *Premarital Awareness Inventory*
- d. _____ James Lawrie, *The Premarital Workshop*
- e. _____ *Prepare-Enrich*
- f. _____ Your own personal materials.
(If you check this response, please explain briefly.)

B. The pastoral emphases which the counselor seeks to make in the process of counseling.

1. Scriptural teaching regarding marriage:

Genesis 2:24, Proverbs 18:22

Matthew 5:32

Mark 10:9

I Corinthians 7:10-11

Ephesians 5:21-28

Hebrews 13:4

2. Pastoral concerns based on Scriptural teaching.
3. Discussion and eliciting of responses to help the counselor determine the level of commitment on the part of the prospective husband and wife.

C. The type of Parish you serve.

1. ___ Rural ___ Town ___ Urban
2. Size of the congregation
(Comunicant Membership)
 - a. ___ Less than 100
 - b. ___ 100 to 150
 - c. ___ 150 to 500
 - d. ___ 500 to 1000
 - e. ___ Over 1000
3. Average number of weddings each year _____.

D. The setting in which you do your counseling.

1. ___ Pastor's Office
2. ___ Meeting Room
3. ___ Church Lounge
4. ___ Classrooms where V.C.R. is available
5. ___ Other

Polls, questionnaires and surveys play a big role in our modern day life. The news media tends to put much stress upon the results gleaned from polls which seek to discover voter preference. Polls or surveys are also often used to register citizens' attitudes and reactions to issues of national concern. While there is always a danger to over-emphasize the value of a poll or survey, there is no doubt that a survey can have a beneficial value.

This survey was later followed up with a request to a smaller group of the same Pastors to elaborate more fully as to what pastoral emphases they seek to make and how they implement these emphases in the process of counseling.

In the next chapter the information gleaned from the survey and the follow-up will be analyzed and there will be an effort to evaluate the data received from the survey.

CHAPTER THREE

AN ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF A SURVEY

The response from the pastors was favorable. Sixty-five of eighty-seven who received the survey returned it. This represents seventy-four percent. The timing, namely, in early October, and the circumstance under which the survey was disseminated, namely, at a Fall District-wide Pastoral Conference, may well have had a bearing upon the better than average response to the survey.

The survey had four areas of concern in respect to premarital counseling to which the pastors were asked to respond. The areas were:

- A. The methods of premarital counseling employed.
 - B. The pastoral emphases, based on Scripture, which the Christian counselor seeks to make in the process of counseling.
 - C. The type of parish the pastor serves.
 - D. The setting in which the pastor does his counseling.
- The part of the survey which dealt with the methods of premarital counseling addressed two concerns. One was the number of sessions that the pastor holds in the process of premarital counseling.

The other asked what types of materials the pastor used.

Sixty-one of the sixty-five responses received from the survey checked section A. Some pastors checked more than one, adding comments like: "depending upon how much time is

available." Three pastors, or five percent, checked that they hold only one session. Twelve pastors, or twenty percent, indicated that they arrange for two sessions. Twenty-five pastors, or forty-one percent, checked that they set up three counseling sessions. Thirteen pastors, or twenty-two percent of the responses, indicated that they conduct four counseling sessions. Four pastors, or six percent, marked that they hold five counseling sessions. The same number hold true for those who schedule six counseling sessions. And, finally four pastors, or six percent, checked that they arrange for more than six counseling sessions.

Twenty-five pastors or forty-one percent of the pastors said that they have three sessions of premarital counseling with the couples who come to them to be united in marriage. This represents more than one-third of those responding to this survey. Some pastors indicated that each session may last as long as two hours. This means that the largest group of pastors devote anywhere from three hours to six hours in premarital counseling with a couple. John Charles Wynn makes a valid point when he writes: "The church has a sacred duty in this matter. In its sanctuary the knot of most marriages is tied. The Church, therefore, is obligated to make sure that the knot is tied as firmly as

possible. This means premarital education."¹¹

The pastor in his experience in the parish ministry and in previous premarital counseling will play a key role in the process of counseling. However, pastors often choose to use supplementary materials around which they structure their counseling. Eight pastors, or eleven percent, indicated that they use the video series, authored by the former Executive Secretary of the Synod's Family Life Commission.¹² Nine pastors, or fourteen and one half percent, choose to use the Concordia Publishing House Counseling Cards. Thirty one, or thirty-four percent, use Prepare-Enrich.¹³ Three pastors, or four percent, use the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis.¹⁴ Thirty-three pastors, or fifty-three percent, responded by checking that they choose to use their own personal materials. The two categories receiving the largest response were those who use their own materials and those who use Prepare-Enrich.

¹¹John Charles Wynn, *Pastoral Ministry to Families* (Philadelphia, PA.: Westminster Press, 1957), 110.

¹²Ron Brusius, *Building A Christian Marriage*, (St. Louis, MO.: Concordia Publishing House, 1984).

¹³David Olson; David Fournier & Joan Druckman, *Prepare-Enrich*, (Minneapolis, MN.: Prepare Enrich, Inc., 1982, Revised 1986).

¹⁴Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis Profile, (Los Angeles, CA.: Psychological Publications, Inc., 1967).

Prepare contains one hundred and twenty-five items rated on five point scales according to the amount of agreement each party has with the item. Answers are recorded on a specially printed computer answer sheet and are scored at the Prepare-Enrich Computer facilities. . . . These areas include realistic expectations, personality issues, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationships, children and marriage, family and friends, egalitarian roles and religious orientation.¹⁵

Pastors who checked that they choose to use their own materials also indicated that they use supplementary reading.

One pastor mentioned that he uses a book by Trobisch.¹⁶ Two pastors indicated that they like to use a book intended for young couples who are planning to get married and which was written by A. O. Geisemann, former pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in River Forest, Illinois.¹⁷ Two other marriage manuals which were mentioned by the pastors who responded are *A Marriage Manual For Lutheran Weddings*¹⁸ and *Planning a*

¹⁵E. L. Worthington, *Counseling Before Marriage*, (Dallas-London-Sydney-Singapore: Word Publishers, 1990), 7.

¹⁶Trobisch, *I Married You*, (N.Y.-Evanston-San Francisco-London: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971).

¹⁷A. O. Geisemann, *Make Yours A Happy Marriage*, (St. Louis, MO.: Concordia Publishing House, 1946 [1971]).

¹⁸Arthur Graf, *A Marriage Manual for Lutheran Weddings*, St. Louis, MO.: Concordia Publishing House, [1961]).

*Christian Wedding.*¹⁹ A possible new trend which may be developing is reflected in the fact that one pastor mentioned that he prepares a genogram on the couple as part of the counseling process.

"A genogram is a format for drawing a family tree that records information about family members and their relationship over at least three generations."²⁰ The intent of such exercise is to help the prospective husband and wife to see what bearing their respective families of origin have upon their relationship to each other.

Section B of the survey asked the pastors to indicate what pastoral emphases they seek to make in the process of premarital counseling. Norbert Mueller and George Krause encourage a pastoral approach to counseling:

The pastor should set about counseling with a deep conviction that he has much to offer. He has essential resources for helping persons with personal problems that humanistic counselors do not have and that even other Christian counselors may not be able to use effectively.

¹⁹Paul Krause, *Planning a Christian Wedding* (St. Louis, MO.: Concordia Publishing House, 1963).

²⁰Monica McGoldrich and Randy Gerson, *Genograms in Family Assessment*, (N.Y. and London: W.W. Morton Company, 1985), 1.

- These resources are the Law and the Gospel, God's Word, that enables people to have an abundant and eternal life in Jesus Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit.²¹

Three Scripture passages are incorporated in the Marriage Service. These scriptural passages are: Genesis 2:18-24, Ephesians 5:21-28 and Matthew 19:4-6. Sometimes an alternate Epistle lesson may be I Corinthians 12:31 to 13:13 and the alternate Gospel lesson may be Mark 19:6-9. In addition to these scripture passages the survey included Proverbs 18:22, I Corinthians 7:10-11 and Hebrews 13:4. Thirty-two pastors, or forty-nine percent of those who returned the survey, checked this section. In most instances they underlined or circled those Scripture passages which they particularly incorporate in their counseling. The passages which were underlined most frequently were Genesis 2:18-24, Ephesians 5:21-28 and Matthew 19:4-6.

Thirty-one pastors, or forty-seven and one half percent of those who responded, also indicated that there are certain pastoral concerns which they seek to make in the process of premarital counseling.

²¹Norbert Mueller & George Krause, Editors, *Pastoral Theology*, (St. Louis, MO.: Concordia Publishing House, 1990), 133.

The responses to the survey and comments from pastors in follow-up interviews indicated that the primary pastoral concern is to help people see that their relationship to the Lord Jesus is an important key to their relationship to each other. Some pastors freely acknowledged that this calls forth a willingness on the part of the pastor to listen. This is particularly true if the pastor is not very well acquainted with either the man or the woman. But the pastor's willingness to listen will be helpful in showing the couple the importance of communication. One pastor wrote this notation: "I have concerns about the ability to communicate; to understand and to satisfy each other's expectations." Three pastors mentioned that the use of supplementary tools, such as Prepare-Enrich, The Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis and Peter Velandar's Premarital Awareness Inventory helped couples to communicate with each other and with the pastor more openly.

These same tools, it was suggested, aid the couple in trying to understand each other's expectations. One pastor expressed concern that very young couples, like those couples who are under twenty-two years of age, do not have a clear idea of what to expect of marriage. They are often not ready for the responsibilities of marriage.

Many pastors see themselves in the German Lutheran

tradition of a "Seelsorger," a carer of souls. As such the pastor seeks to do all he can to strengthen the prospects for the couple to have a strong bond of love and devotion which will ensure a lasting marriage.

Thirty-one pastors, or forty-seven and one half percent, of those who responded also indicated that they seek to elicit discussion and responses from the couple to help the pastor to determine the level of commitment on the part of both the man and the woman. One pastor asks very specific questions of the couple. He inquires about how long they have been going together. He asks them, "Why do you want to be married? If you have any arguments how do you settle them?" This particular pastor does not always use Prepare-Enrich as part of his premarital counseling, but if he senses that there is a weakness in commitment on the part of one or both he will invite them to use the Prepare-Enrich materials.

To strengthen the concept of the importance of commitment to the success of a marriage another pastor speaks to couples about the importance of openness. As Christians we are open to the Lord as He touches our lives through both the Law and the Gospel. Likewise, it is important that a husband and a wife be open to each other. This pastor mentioned that he found the four steps in making a sale helpful in doing premarital counseling. The four steps he referred to are: a) Establish rapport. b) Identify the

need. c) Meet the need. and d) Close and seek to motivate them to remain committed to each other.

There are a lot of unexpected things which a married couple will face together. Bill and Lynne Hybel make a very important point when they state this about marriage:

Marriage is the sharing of the mundane together. It is going through the daily routine of life. Of course, there are exceptions. Nights out on the town. Occasional vacations. Peak experiences. But most of marriage is lived in the mundane-where you see each other for who you really are, where you look reality in the face. You sure better like what you see. You better respect the man or woman who sits across the table from you every night and wakes up in your bed every morning.²²

Some couples come to a pastor to ask him to do the honor of uniting them in the bond of Holy Wedlock who are not as well acquainted with each other as they might be. There are couples who have the mistaken notion that because they have been cohabiting they surely know each other and understand one another. Although Christian pastors may hope that their statistics are wrong, Stahlmann and Hiebert say that currently premarital counselors can assume that at least eight out of every ten couples are sexually active prior

²²Bill and Lynne Hybel, *Fit to be Tied*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishers, 1991), 64.

to the wedding."²³ Couples sometimes fail to realize that getting acquainted involves listening and sharing of ideals, expectations and feelings. "Marriage is demanding. It calls for intelligence and effort and maturity and patience to achieve the rewards it has to offer. Sometimes also it requires outside help, the guidance and support of a skilled counselor."²⁴

In follow-up interviews with some pastors they expressed concern over the fact that so many couples are having premarital sexual relations. Several pastors indicated that the information which is requested of the couple at the initial interview often provides the clue that they are living together.

Most of the pastors stated that when he knows about the couple's living together or having premarital sexual relations with each other he believes that this is an issue which needs to be discussed with the couple.

Some pastors approach this sensitive matter by trying to get the man and the woman to express how they feel about their living together or having sexual relations with each other before marriage. The intent of this method of

²³Robert F. Stahlmann-William J. Hiebert, *Premarital Counseling*, (Massachusetts-Toronto: Lexington Books, 1981), 74.

²⁴David R. Mace, *Getting Ready for Marriage*, (Nashville and N. Y.: Abingdon Press, 1972), 20.

discussing the issue is to have the couple look at the pre-marital sexual relations in the light of what they have been taught from God's Word. Unfortunately, some pastors have seen that often couples who cohabit before marriage have no remorse about their living together.

Several other pastors used the opportunity presented by the fact that the couple is living together to remind the couple what God's Word teaches in the sixth commandment. The pastor points out that in matters of sex our words and thoughts are to be pure and decent and that the marriage bed is to be kept honorable by refraining from sexual relations until marriage. The pastors said that they take the time to stress with the couple that as they recognize that this kind of lifestyle is not in agreement with God's Word, repentance is the way back to God. A part of that repentance, the pastors were quick to add, includes discontinuing having sexual relations and/or living together until after they have been married. One pastor said that he informs the man and woman that if they do not admit what they are doing is wrong and cease having sexual relations until they are married they will not be married in that local parish which he serves as the pastor.

Another pastor spoke of how some couples, instead of really planning for a solid marriage, simply begin to play house. Instead of sex being holy and special it becomes

something individuals do to satisfy their base desires. There is no understanding of commitment. With this outlook couples live together only as long as it is convenient.

The pastors expressed their concern that in a delicate matter such as this, where couples have premarital sexual relations or even live together, the couple is clearly ignoring the teaching of the sixth commandment. The whole family of believers is affected by this kind of aberrant behavior. In a firm, but straightforward way, the pastor declares to the errant sinners: "Thus says the Lord." By choosing to ignore the sixth commandment the couple has broken God's Holy Law.

Another matter of pastoral concern which often needs clarification is the matter of companionship under the umbrella of God's order for marriages. Sometimes this issue comes to light as the pastor walks the couple through the Order of Service for the wedding. When the word "obey" is heard as part of the question of intent the pastor asks of the woman, the woman may object to the inclusion of this word in the question which is asked of her. Several pastors said that they take the time to point out that our modern culture has distorted our understanding of the word obey. One pastor put it this way: "Obey is not a matter of subordination, but it is keeping everything in good order as God expected it to be when He created everything good in the beginning."

The information which is provided by the couple as part of the first interview often raises other yellow flags in the mind of the pastor. These are such things as: A vast age difference (ten or more years), differences in educational background, and personality traits which may be divergent. A good point was made by one pastor who said, "I urge them to talk freely about their relationship to each other and not to take anything for granted."

A pastor in a rural parish was particularly concerned about how the couple related to the prospective in-laws. He said, "I try to help them recognize that different family traditions will influence the couple and make it necessary for them to work out some problem areas." Another pastor finds it helpful to have the man and the woman do a genogram in order to better appreciate the future spouse's family of origin.

In the follow-up interviews it was also discovered that the pastors were unanimous in seeing the importance of walking through the Wedding Service with the couple. The pastors agreed that this procedure is not only helpful in making sure that proper music is chosen, but, more importantly, that the couple will understand what they are doing is publicly vowing to be faithful to each other until death parts them. This procedure allows the pastor to stress the God-given purposes of marriage. A close look at the vow offers the pastor the opportunity to impress upon the

prospective bride and groom both the joys and the responsibilities of their relationship to each other. One pastor said: "I help the couple clearly to understand the principles of a Christian marriage. God has some directions for us. He promises to bless those who live in accordance with His institution of marriage."

Section C in the survey asked the pastors to indicate the type of parish they serve geographically; the size of the congregation, and the average number of weddings each year. This part was included in the survey to help shed light on other responses given in the survey. Would the survey show, for example, that the size of the congregation which the pastor serves and the number of weddings which he conducts in the course of one year have a bearing upon the number of sessions which a pastor holds with a couple? The survey did not verify that the larger the parish and the greater number of weddings conducted in one year necessarily bears out the fact that the pastor will hold fewer counseling sessions.

Sixteen, or twenty-six percent of those who responded, serve as pastors of rural parishes. Thirty-six or fifty-eight percent of the pastors, serve parishes in towns. Ten, or sixteen percent of the pastors, serve in urban churches.

Congregations of one hundred communicant members or less are served by nine, or fourteen and one half percent, of the pastors who responded to the survey. Eleven pastors, or

eighteen percent, serve parishes with one hundred to one hundred and fifty communicant members. The largest number of pastors, which was twenty-eight, or forty percent, serve parishes with one hundred and fifty up to five hundred communicant members. Eight pastors, or thirteen percent, serve parishes of five hundred to one thousand communicant members. And nine pastors, or fourteen and one half percent, serve parishes with over one thousand communicant members.

The fifty-six responses to the item on the survey about the average number of weddings a year ranged from one a year to twenty-five a year. On the following chart column one indicates average number of weddings that are held each year. The second column indicates the number of pastors who responded to this part of the survey and the third column indicates the percentage of the responses.

| Average number of weddings | Number of Pastors who responded | The percentage of responses |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | 8 | 15% |
| 2 | 10 | 17% |
| 3 | 10 | 17% |
| 4 | 6 | 11% |
| 5 | 4 | 7% |
| 6 | 5 | 9% |
| 8 | 6 | 11% |
| 10 | 1 | 2% |
| 12 | 1 | 2% |
| 15 | 2 | 4% |
| 20 | 2 | 4% |
| 25 | 1 | 2% |

According to this chart it can be seen that fifty percent of those responding indicated that they have three or less weddings in a given year.

Section D of the survey asked the pastors to indicate the setting in which they normally do their counseling. Eighty percent of the pastors say they do their counseling in the pastor's office. Nine percent of the pastors use a meeting room. Two percent of the pastors indicate that they do their premarital counseling in a classroom where there is a V. C. R. available to be able to show a Video as part of their counseling method. Nine percent of the pastors

indicate that they meet at other places. At least one pastor indicated that he at times uses a joint counseling session in which he chooses to work with his wife. In that case the place of counseling was the parsonage.

The debate over the proper place for counseling is still not over. Professional counselors tend to suggest that the pastor's office, with its many reminders of the pastor's professional status and authority, can prove to be intimidating to the counselees and, therefore, non-productive. On the other hand, pastors tend to view it as important for parishoners to remember that the pastor is serving with the authority of the Office of the Ministry. Finally, there is the very practical issue that the pastor's office may still be the best or even only place to do premarital counseling.

The survey served to underscore some positive trends in pastoral ministry. First, this survey certainly showed that a very high percentage of the pastors who responded to this survey place a great deal of importance upon premarital counseling. Secondly, this survey showed that pastors are appreciative of good tools which can help them in the counseling process. They appear to prefer tools which are compatible with the theological concerns and emphases which the pastors desire to make in the process of premarital counseling. The two mentioned most frequently in the survey responses were Prepare-Enrich and the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis. Thirdly, this survey appears to

reflect a desire on the part of the counselors to remain pastoral. A majority of the pastors indicate that they incorporate the Scriptural teaching regarding marriage as part of counseling. Pastors indicate that they stress that marriage is a divine institution and that it is intended to be a lifelong union of one man and one woman for their mutual joy and companionship.

Having a pastoral concern that the bond established by the union of husband and wife may be lasting and a strong one, pastors are willing to take the time to help the couple to become aware of the things which may need to be strengthened in their relationship with each other.

In follow-up visits with the pastors several of them stressed the importance of encouraging the couple to keep the channels of communication open between themselves. Pastors pointed out how easy it is for a couple to fall into a pattern where they tend to take things for granted. In counseling with the couple it is a pastoral concern to warn them of the dangers that such poor communication poses to their happiness together.

It was with deep anguish that some pastors referred to the tendency on the part of professing Christians to engage in premarital sex. The pastors lamented the fact that almost fifty percent of all couples coming for premarital counseling have engaged in sexual relations or are

cohabitating. Because this kind of a lifestyle has a bearing on the spiritual life of both the man and the woman, pastors speak of the importance of dealing with this issue. The pastors mentioned that they often ask the couple how they reconcile what they have been doing with what they have been taught from the Word of God in connection with the sixth commandment. When the couple reflects upon this and admits wrongdoing the pastors were quick in underscoring the importance of bringing the Gospel message that there is forgiveness with God. The pastors pointed out how they make clear to the couple that dealing with this issue will serve to strengthen their relationship with God and with one another.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR MARRIAGE

The teachings of the Word of God are an important part of premarital counseling. In chapter four the theological foundation of marriage will be looked at in the light of God's Word in part A. Part B will discuss the importance of stressing the theological foundation of marriage in premarital counseling.

St. Paul wrote that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."²⁵ The training in righteousness includes the practical aspects of our day to day living. God's Word has two chief doctrines that are presented to us in both the Old and New Testaments. They are the Law and the Gospel.

The Law serves a three-fold purpose. The Law curtails the coarse outbursts of sin by its threats of punishment of those who break the Law. The Law shows us our sins and makes us thoroughly aware of our need for the grace of God. The Law show us what works please God and what works we are able to do as the baptized people of God. We cannot be made righteous in God's sight by keeping the Law for there

²⁵Tim. 3:16 NIV.

is no one who keeps the Law of God perfectly.²⁶ In His grace God intervenes to save us from our lost condition. We hear of God's saving grace in the Word of the Gospel.

The Gospel is God's Good News. The Gospel assures the troubled sinner who trembles at the thought that he cannot measure up to the demands of God's Law that God is rich in mercy and forgiveness. The Gospel informs us that God has given His own Son to fulfill the Holy Law in our place and to suffer death under the Law that sinners who believe in God's Son might be declared righteous before God and given the assurance of eternal life with God. It is through God's action in Jesus Christ, His Son, that a sinner who turns from his sins to seek the mercy of God is declared to be righteous by faith. God is not only concerned about declaring the sinner righteous by His grace through faith, but God is also interested in setting apart as special those who have come to Him in faith.

This is where the third purpose or use of the Law becomes important. In His mercy God has redeemed the lost sinner through the blood of Jesus Christ. The Law shows us

²⁶Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism*, (St. Louis, MO.: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), 94-95.

those things which are pleasing to God. The Word of God provides guidance for the people of God to lead sanctified lives. The believing child of God looks upon God's Word as a lamp to provide light on the pathways of this earthly life.²⁷

The Word of God does shed light upon our understanding of what God intended marriage to be. God established the institution of marriage as a blessing for His creatures. The entry of sin into the world brought about distortion. As a result we live in a world which has to deal with divorce, marital infidelity, sexual immorality, homosexuality and sexual deviation.

A. Marriage in the Light of the Holy Scriptures.

The passage of Holy Scripture which is very essential to our understanding that marriage is an institution established by God is Genesis 2:18-24.

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my

²⁷Ps.119:105 NIV.

bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."²⁸

In a commentary on these verses in Genesis chapter two the Old Testament scholars Keil and Delitzsch have this to say:

As the creation of man is introduced in Genesis 1: 26-27 with a divine decree, so here that of man is preceded by the divine declaration, 'It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make a helper of his like.'²⁹

To shed more light on these verses the authors go on to say that "the words in the original Hebrew for 'a helper of his like' imply that the woman is not a subordinate person to the man, but one who will truly help to fulfill the God-given directives not only to perpetuate and multiply his race, but to cultivate and govern the earth."³⁰

The account of the creation of woman as given in Genesis chapter two tells us how God went about making "a helper of his like." God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. God took a rib from the man and formed the woman. After the man awoke from the deep sleep God presented the woman to the man. In their commentary Keil and Delitzsch

²⁸Gen. 2:18-24 NIV.

²⁹Keil-Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol.1, (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Erdmann Publisher, 1985), 86.

³⁰Ibid., 87.

make a helpful point when they write:

The woman was created, not of dust of the earth, but from a rib of Adam, because she was formed for an inseparable unity and fellowship of life with the man, and the mode of her creation was to lay the actual foundation for the moral ordinance of marriage.³¹

The man does not need to be told by God but on his own recognizes that the person who was presented to him as a "helper of his like" is "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."³² The man himself suggests that she shall be called woman since she was taken out of man. And even though the man and the woman were both naked there was no shame. A sense of shame came after their disobedience of God's command. Adam and Eve knew that they should not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.³³

The summary statement in verse 24 appears to be an editorial comment inserted by Moses, who wrote about the beginnings of man and woman by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.³⁴ They speak of leaving father and mother and being united to each other. But neither Adam nor Eve had come into this world by such a birth. Accordingly, Keil and Delitzsch

³¹Ibid., 89.

³²Gen. 2:23 NIV.

³³ Gen. 2:17 NIV.

³⁴2 Peter 1:21 NIV.

seek to give helpful clarification when they write as they do.

They are words of Moses, written to bring out the truth embodied in the fact recorded as a divinely appointed result, to exhibit marriage as the deepest corporeal and spiritual unity of man and woman, and to hold up monogamy before the eyes of the people of Israel as the form of marriage ordained by God.³⁵

Solomon, son of David, is considered by most Bible commentators to be the author of the Book of Proverbs. In Proverbs 18:22 we read: "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord."³⁶ In its translation of this verse in the Septuagint Bible, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, adds the adjective good with the counterpart for wife in the Greek language. The Hebrew text has *isha*, but the Septuagint adds the adjective *agatheen* (good), to the noun, *gynaika* (wife). These words stress the value of marriage as not only that which brings goodness into your life, but through which a person also receives favor from the Lord.³⁷ Many a husband affectionately refers to his

³⁵Keil-Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol.1, (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Erdmann, Publisher, 1985), 90.

³⁶Prov.18:22 NIV.

³⁷Pulpit Commentary Vol. 9, (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Erdmann Publisher, 1950), 352.

wife as his better half. Such an attitude may be a reflection of Proverbs 18:22.

In the New Testament Jesus reiterated Moses' summary that monogamy is God's intended way for his children to experience marital happiness.

Jesus replied to the Pharisees, "Have you not read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate."³⁸

The Pharisees frequently challenged Jesus on His understanding and interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures. There were differences of opinion and of interpretation among themselves. Those Pharisees who held to a most conservative view of marriage and divorce were of the school of Shammai. On the other hand, those Pharisees who held a more progressive or legalistic view were of the school of Hillel.³⁹

"They expected Jesus to enter into a discussion of Deut. 24:1. Marriage is bound up with the very creation of man. It is not a product of some progress or development

³⁸Matt.19:4-6 NIV.

³⁹Floyd Filson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (New York, Evanston and London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1960), 206.

that came later."⁴⁰ As Jesus reiterates Moses' words that "a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,"⁴¹ He makes the point that a lifelong union was the intent of the Creator. In this union they are no longer two but one flesh. While the Pharisees raised the question with Jesus, they were not the only ones who were present. Jesus used the occasion to respond to another challenge from the Pharisees. It served as an opportunity for Jesus to bring a message to the people, a message intended to help them have a more abundant life. He offers a concluding statement that not only stresses that the union of a man and his wife in the bond of marriage is according to divine will, but also that this bond is not to be treated lightly or broken by man.

The New Testament Bible Commentator, Richard Lenski, points out that the aorist tense of the verb in the original Greek serves to make a significant point.

The aorist is generally considered timeless, yet here it marks time antecedent to the main verb and is thus in place for this reason. In connections such as this the English prefers the perfect 'has yoked together.' The implication is that any man who divides what God has thus

⁴⁰Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, (Minn., MN.: Augsburg Publishing Company, 1961), 728 & 729.

⁴¹Gen. 2:24. NIV.

by his own creation united into one flies in the face of God and his will; a serious opposition, indeed.⁴²

A parallel verse is recorded in Mark 10:9.

The Apostle Paul also picks up this thought that once man and wife have been united there is not to be a separation.

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord); a wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.⁴³

The Apostle Paul realized that immorality was rampant in the Greek world and lax attitudes about divorce prevailed among the people who had a Jewish background. Sometimes the Apostle Paul was inclined to express certain things as just his opinion. The word he gives to those who are married is not just his opinion, but it is a command from the Lord.

In Corinth the Apostle came preaching the Good News of God's love in Jesus Christ. The Apostle faces both a Jewish and a Gentile audience with each having their respective traditions. The Apostle strives to meet the needs of both groups. In the Jewish culture the man could get a divorce more readily than could the woman. When a man did get a divorce he was expected to give the woman a writing of

⁴²Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, (Minn., MN.: Augsburg Publishing Company, 1961), 730.

⁴³I Cor. 7:10 and 11 NIV.

divorcement. But the Apostle Paul categorically states that a "husband must not divorce his wife."⁴⁴

In the Gentile world of Corinth where the heathen worship of other gods and goddesses encouraged sexual immorality and marital infidelity it becomes equally important for the Apostle to stress that the wife must not leave her husband. Perhaps the Apostle states the ideal. For whatever reason the wife does leave her husband, she is to remain unmarried or become reconciled to her husband. The Apostle had to deal with mixed marriages in which one spouse was a believer in Jesus Christ and the other was not.

The Apostle Paul encourages a man and wife to stay together for the sake of the marriage and that the believer might serve as God's instrument to bring the unbeliever to faith. He states it this way:

To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord). If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances. God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?⁴⁵

⁴⁴ I Cor. 7:11 NIV.

⁴⁵ I Cor. 7:12-16 NIV.

In the way in which the Apostle Paul speaks about the unbelieving spouse being sanctified by the believing spouse he is also stressing the covenant relationship that exists in such a household, where at least one, if not both, have a faith relationship with God. In that covenant relationship at least one party to the marriage sets the tone for godly living in the home where the virtues of love, patience and kindness are manifested. In such a home when disagreement and conflict occur, forgiveness comes into play rather than hatred and anger. The Christian appreciates the forgiveness which comes from God and is willing to forgive the other party. In such a family there is recognition, at least on the part of one of the spouses, that God is the Giver of every good and perfect gift, none the least of which is the love which the husband and the wife have for one another in the bond of marriage.

The Apostle Paul personally recommended that those who are single remain single. For he allowed the fact that there is much immorality in the world. In order to avoid an immoral life the Apostle realized the expediency of marriage. "But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband."⁴⁶ There are not to be an adulterous

⁴⁶I Cor. 7:2 NIV.

affairs, but faithfulness to one's own spouse.

Paul also touched upon the importance of spouses meeting their marital duty toward each other. To make his point the Apostle offers the thought that the Creator's intent with marriage is that the two become one flesh. Paul writes:

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone, but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.⁴⁷

The tense of the verbs "fulfill" and "deprive" are in the imperative. The conjugal rights of the spouses are not to be viewed as something that is optional. It is inherent in the nature of marriage where the man and the woman become one flesh that each fulfill this responsibility over against the other. The only exception is that abstention from this duty be agreed upon mutually. And then the Apostle Paul is bold to suggest that the only reasonable occasion that this might occur is at a time when both want to devote themselves to prayer. This abstention could conceivably occur when children are ill and the parents are concerned about the

⁴⁷I Cor.7:3-5 NIV.

children's well-being or when one or the other is dealing with a stressful situation in life. The Apostle is quick to suggest that unless such abstention from marital responsibilities is mutually agreed upon the husband and the wife will be putting each other in a situation where they may be tempted by Satan because of their lack of self-control. In the language of the modern day marriage counselor the Apostle was stressing the importance of communication, of sharing feelings and of understanding one another's expectations in respect to marriage.

The passage of Holy Scripture which is used most frequently as an Epistle Lesson for a wedding service is Ephesians 5:21-33. In his comment to the Ephesians about marriage the Apostle Paul deals with practical aspects in regard to marriage. The husband and the wife submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. The whole concept of marriage is elevated by the Apostle when he compares the union of husband and wife to that which exists between Christ and His bride, the Church. This serves to remind us how holy and precious marriage is. It is also to be noted that there is an accent upon unity elsewhere in the letter to the Ephesians. The fourth chapter refers to the unity which all Christians experience with one another.

In the fifth chapter, having warned his readers to avoid sexual immorality and any improper behavior, the

Apostle writes of the duties of husbands and wives.

Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church, for we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery- but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself and the wife must respect her husband.⁴⁸

Writing in the Greek language the Apostle Paul could have used one of three verbs to direct husbands to love their wives. He did not choose to use the verb *erao* which expresses a passionate love. Nor did he choose to use the verb *phileo*, which expresses a love which is more like a companionship. Instead the Apostle chose to use the verb *agapao* which reflects the love which Christ has for the church. In the concluding admonition that the husband love the wife the verb *agapato* is in the imperative.

⁴⁸Eph.5:22 NIV.

There is sanctified logic employed by the Apostle to kindly remind married people to treat their spouses as they would treat their own bodies. The Apostle is hereby underscoring the unity which husband and wife enjoy in the marital relationship. Furthermore, he leads married people to see a sanctified comparison between the way in which Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it to the way in which husbands love their wives.

Certain noble truths about marriage appear to be the reason why the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes about marriage the way he does. Marriage was instituted by God for the well-being of His creatures. Marriage is intended to be a lifelong union between husband and wife. The beautiful relationship of a husband and a wife in the bond of marriage can be compared to the relationship which Christ has with the church and that relationship is one that is based on genuine love and respect. The writer firmly asserts that "marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."⁴⁹

Marriage should be honored by all, but unfortunately it is not. The world is very evil. One of the ways in which

⁴⁹Heb. 13:4 NIV.

evil shows itself is through shameful disregard for the sanctity of marriage. Even those who profess to be Christians do not keep the marriage bed pure but follow the ways of the world and engage in premarital sexual relations with the intended spouse. "According to statistics from the U.S. Bureau of the Census between 1970 and 1984 the rate of cohabitation quadrupled, increasing substantially even among Christians."⁵⁰ In view of these trends it is important to be reminded that "God will judge the adulterer and the sexually immoral."⁵¹

These truths about marriage have been written for our learning. They enable us to be built up in our faithful relationship to God by understanding what His Word teaches about the institution of marriage. These gems from Holy Scripture lead us to understand that God had our well-being in mind when He caused the holy writers to write what they have written about marriage.

B. The Importance of Stressing the Theological Foundation of Marriage in Premarital Counseling

⁵⁰E. L. Worthington, *Counseling Before Marriage*, (Dallas-London-Sydney-Singapore: Word Publishing Company, 1990), 24.

⁵¹Heb.13:4 NIV.

Theology is the study of God's Word with the intent of applying that Word to daily living. The conscientious theologian who holds that the Bible is the norm and source of Christian living approaches the study of God's Word with sound Biblical principles of interpretation. Ralph Bohlmann mentions three of these principles as being essential. "1. Derive meaning from the text. 2. Seek the native sense of the text. 3. Let Scripture interpret itself."⁵²

The theologian recognizes the need to apply God's Word to daily living. Often as the theologian brings the Word of God to bear on daily life in contemporary language he is employing the "analogy of faith" to give a meaningful word of direction and guidance. By this it is understood that the theologian brings to his work all that he has learned from his study of the Scriptures and focuses it upon the issue with the view that God's Word will shed light on the pathway of life.

Marriage is very much a practical aspect of life. The view of marriage which is advocated by many people living in this modern world is, to say the least, confusing. It is worse than that. It is misleading. The worldly viewpoint often sees marriage as a temporary contractual agreement

⁵²Ralph Bohlmann, "Biblical Interpretation in the Confessions," *Aspects of Biblical Hermeneutics*, (St. Louis, MO.: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 27-33.

between two people that can be broken off by either party if things do not work out as either of the two might have expected. From the worldly point of view marriage is often not looked upon as a blessing but rather as some kind of enslavement. From the worldly point of view there are more negative things to say about marriage than positive things. There are many people who are quick to point out that with marriage there is loss of freedom which a person may have enjoyed as a single individual. They do not see that marriage provides an answer to loneliness, offers the person who enters marriage companionship and very intimate sharing with one another. The world often tends to overlook the fact that children are a blessing from God to enhance and enrich the relationship of husband and wife. The theologian has the task of trying to break through the fog of confusion which the world has allowed to settle over the idea of marriage by shedding the light of God's Word.

Therefore, the theologian often finds it necessary and important to re-define what marriage is. To assume that the man and the woman coming to the pastor to be married have a good understanding and definition of marriage is to invite trouble. Eugene Jobst, Jr. offered a positive definition of marriage which reflects the teachings of God's Word, and with which the author of this project wholeheartedly agrees. It is concise and complete.

Marriage is a divine institution providing for the mating of one man and one woman in a living union for life, established and maintained by their mutual consent, for companionship, mutual care and assistance, for legitimate sexual intercourse and for the procreation of children.⁵³

Two documents have been produced by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod which deal with the subject of marriage. The first was entitled, *Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective* which was published in 1981. The second was *Divorce and Remarriage: An Exegetical Study*, with a publication date of 1987. In the work *Human Sexuality* there is another precise definition of marriage from the Christian point of view. The authors, who in the introduction state that their aim is to "discuss the purposes or end which marriage serves, as these are taught in the Scriptures and understood in the history of the church,"⁵⁴ say this about marriage:

The earthly estate of marriage is a divine institution. It is therefore subject to certain requirements which remain in effect until the close of this age regardless of the social customs, civil laws, or ecclesiastical rites which may come to surround it.⁵⁵

⁵³Eugene W. Jobst, Jr., "Pastoral Techniques in the Counseling of Young People Preparatory to Marriage," B. D. Theses, (St. Louis, MO.: Concordia Seminary, June 1945), 33.

⁵⁴*Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, (St. Louis, MO.: Sept. 1981), 4.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 10.

Definitions and statements like these reflect the clear Biblical teachings of Genesis 2:18-24, Ephesians 5:22-33 and I Corinthians 7:3-5.

Other marriage counselors have opted for a definition that may appeal to modern needs, but may not be consistent with the clear teachings of the the Holy Scriptures Stahlmann and Hiebert say:

We have defined marriage as a multidimensional relationship that functions on many levels. . . . social, geographical, sexual, emotional, intellectual, economic, recreational, religious, legal and paradoxical.⁵⁶

The language of a definition like this leaves much to be desired in as much as it fails to be precise in an area in which it really ought to be. The definition ought to be precise in regard to the relationship by adding "between a husband and a wife," and that it is entered into by mutual consent of the man and the woman. However, later in their book Stahlmann and Hiebert qualify their definition by adding: "This way of looking at marriage would be to see it as a relationship that possesses a unique kind of bonding."⁵⁷ With this as a definition it would remain for the Christian counselor to spell out precisely how unique that bonding is when it is carried out under the

⁵⁶Robert F. Stahlmann-William J. Hiebert, *Premarital Counseling*, (Lexington, MS.: D.C. Heath & Company, 1980), 28.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 30.

guidance of God's Word.

It is regrettable that some people tend to think that Biblical language is obsolete. The Bible deals with real life issues. It addresses our sinful condition and brings the grace of God in Jesus Christ to bear upon our human problems.

Another counselor offers these thoughts, which are more in line with the Biblical accents on marriage.

"Marriage is a process of leaving, grieving, cleaving, rejoicing and leaving, grieving, cleaving, rejoicing and leaving, grieving, cleaving, rejoicing that gets better until death."⁵⁸

This same author elaborated on his definition and explains his concept of marriage as a crucible for growth.

Marriage is much more than mutual consent. Marriage is a lifelong process of leaving, grieving, cleaving, and rejoicing that is built into creation and depicted in Biblical imagery. It is a crucible into which God draws people by the very nature and history of their lives, and in which there is great potential for growth as the temperature goes up and up through the years.⁵⁹

With many people the idea that growth is lifelong is not readily understood. Christian pastors and coun-

⁵⁸David F. Wuerster, "Marriage, Crucible for Growth," *The Journal of Pastoral Care*, 37, (Dec. 1983), 253.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 262.

selors often are called upon to minister to certain individuals who have stagnated. They grew to a certain physical mental, emotional and spiritual stage and they became content to stay at that stage or at least they gave every appearance that they were content to stay at such a level of growth. The counselor's challenge is to lead such individuals to see and understand how much they are missing in life when they fail to see that the fulfilling life is one of constant growth.

David Wuerster has a Christo-centric emphasis when he explores the concept of marriage as a crucible for growth.

Crucible is ultimately derived from the word crux or cross. It is significant that for the formulation of the Christian life in the middle of the pot stands a cross. That is the point at which the nature of humankind and the nature of God meet and are revealed most fully to each other. That is the point at which the natural forces created by God are again liberated to do their work. Marriage is one of those creatures of his creation.⁶⁰

The cross is not just the subject of sermons, jewelry that is worn to express a person's deep religious convictions or art work to decorate places of work. The cross has relevance for all of life. The Apostle Paul wrote this to the Corinthian Christians, "For I have resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him

⁶⁰Ibid., 263.

crucified."⁶¹ The cross of Jesus Christ can bring about liberation. The sanctifying and purifying which can occur in the crucible of marriage is further discussed by David Wuerster.

The image of marriage as a crucible is really on the other side of the continental divide from the image of marriage as a haven. A crucible is a fire pot in which metals are refined. The image is used in Scriptures to describe God working to purify his people. (c. f. Is. 1, Is. 48 and Zech. 13). In the purifying process the heat goes up until things are exposed for what they are. As the heat goes up both an integrating and differentiating process is happening simultaneously. Marriage is a real crucible or fire pot in which old images break down and new life opens up.⁶²

There are those who find this concept of marriage frightening. These are individuals who have been conditioned by their life in their family of origin to expect marriage to be something that is static. Such individuals want to know what they can expect from the other party to the union. They are prepared to accept that kind of static relationship. As the Spirit of God works through the Word a change in attitudes and actions witness the joy which comes with the new discovery a couple has made that growth in their relationship is exciting and fulfilling.

⁶¹1Cor.2:2 NIV.

⁶²David Wuerster, "Marriage Crucible for Growth." *The Journal of Pastoral Care*, 37, (Dec.1983), 263.

Marriage is intended by God to be a lifelong union of a man and a woman. It certainly deserves more than haphazard preparation. Other things in life receive extensive preparation. Youth spend from twelve to sixteen years in school to prepare for an occupation or a career. Individuals who want to be able to drive a vehicle are expected to take a driver's education course and actually have experience driving a vehicle under the guidance of an instructor. Yet there are many who approach marriage with the idea that they do not need preparation for marriage. "It is often said that the immature person uses people and loves things; the mature person loves people and uses things."⁶³

Maturity, as an important preparation for marriage, is discussed by Stahlmann and Hiebert.

Rutledge (1966) postulated that although marriage itself could be a maturing process, people must have obtained a reasonable amount of adult growth and responsibility in order to carry their share of the various responsibilities of marriage. Rutledge identified three basic factors in preparing for marriage; discovery of selfhood, continual growth as an individual, and possession of communication and problem-solving skills. He spoke of the premarital counseling process as that of opening up these three areas of life for a young couple and projecting the couple into the future, enabling them to foresee the kinds of problems and the many challenges awaiting them in marriage.⁶⁴

⁶³Kenneth J. Morris, *Premarital Counseling*, (Englecliffs, N.J.: Prentiss-Hall, 1960), 10.

⁶⁴Robert F. Stahlmann-William J. Hiebert, *Premarital Counseling*, (Lexington, MS.: D. C. Heath and Company, 1980), 12.

The role of the Christian counselor includes helping the man and the woman to look at themselves to see whether they have reached that level of maturity where they have achieved these basic factors. "In premarital counseling the skilled counselor can do much to help a couple analyze their points of friction and come to a better understanding of themselves."⁶⁵

The Christian counselor does well to heed the sage advice of the ancient philosopher Socrates who said, "Know yourself." The counselor needs to know what role he is playing and how he has been equipped through personal experience and special training to serve in the role that is expected of him. The counselor will need to know for himself which tools he may wish to use to augment what he does personally to lead the couple through the process of premarital counseling.

Each counselor will have to determine for himself whether he will meet separately with the man and then with the woman or whether he will employ conjoint premarital counseling.

Conjoint couple counseling refers to the practice of seeing both the male and female together, from the very beginning. In the premarital counseling process, the conjoint model uses exclusively the conjoint format. In our experience, the conjoint couple

⁶⁵Kenneth J. Morris, *Premarital Counseling*, (Englecliffs, N. J.: Prentiss-Hall, 1960), 10.

premarital counseling model is the most productive. We encourage its use for a number of reasons.

First, the very use of the conjoint format implicitly suggests to couples that the premarital counselor values not only the individual person but the relationship.

Second, the use of the conjoint format allows the premarital counselor to have an opportunity to see how the couple interacts; it allows the relationship to be seen and observed.

Third, by seeing both people together, the premarital counselor heightens the bilateralism of the relationship. Bilateralism means that marriage is a two-way street, a quid pro quo experience. Education that is one-sided, or unilateral, is unproductive and ineffective because marriage is not one-sided. Significant research has shown that relationships achieve the most growth when the effort put into the relationship is two-sided. (Waltzlawick, Beavin and Jackson 1967).

Fourth, using the conjoint format also underscores the idea that the counselor does not want to be the keeper of secrets. Seeing the couple concurrently allows the premarital counselor to be the repository of secrets. We suggest that if a couple is not ready to deal with whatever they need to talk about in the presence of each other, the premarital counselor's private knowledge of some secrets will be of little help in working with the couple.⁶⁶

It is not just the mechanics of the counseling process itself that the counselor will want to take under consideration. The very way in which the pastoral counselor relates to the couple from the initial visit will have an important bearing upon the counseling process. It is the

⁶⁶Robert F. Stahlmann-William J. Hiebert, *Premarital Counseling*, (Lexington, MS.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1980), 46.

author's experience that it is not unusual for a couple to be reluctant to go through premarital counseling. The point was borne out also in comments which were added by pastors when they returned their surveys and in follow-up visits with them. It is to be granted that anything new can cause an individual to experience doubt and apprehension. Under these circumstances it becomes extremely important that the pastoral counselor, through a cordial and friendly approach, set the couple at ease. It also helps the couple to know where they are going in the counseling process. It helps the couple to have the counselor make clear in the first counseling session what that session and all remaining sessions will include. The counselor will have special issues that he will want to cover with the couple.

The counselor can cover special concerns in an issue oriented way or a people oriented way. Stahlmann and Hiebert appear to suggest a people oriented approach.

One method of approaching issues is to integrate them into the premarital counseling process. This method does not use a specific formal discussion or lecture on the theology of marriage or on the nature or meaning of marriage within the perspective of faith. The focus of Method One is not on the presentation of an established theological perspective, whether of the denomination or of the pastor. Rather the focus is on the couple and helping them to become aware of

- 1) each person's previous religious belief system,
- 2) their similarities and differences in their religious value system,
- 3) each person's practice of their faith,
- 4) their similarities and differences in their religious practice, and

5) their future plans regarding their religious practices.⁶⁷

In this approach there will still be a concern on the part of the Christian counselor to make certain specific pastoral emphases in the counseling process.

On the other hand these same authors suggest an alternate method.

Method Two has two focuses; helping the couple to expose and expand the spiritual dimension of their relationship; and formally discussing or presenting the meaning of marriage from a perspective of faith. Ministers may choose one or both of these.⁶⁸

Christian counselors who want to make sure that the theology of marriage has been presented to the couple will probably prefer Method Two over Method One. The video series approach to premarital counseling tends to use Method Two; at least this seems to be evident in the materials prepared by Ron Brusius.⁶⁹ Sometimes the use of such video materials can detract from helping the prospective husband and wife to focus upon their own relationship. If that should happen the couple may complete the counseling series with a sigh of relief that they have completed the counselor's required course. In the process they may have gained very little by way of growing in their

⁶⁷Ibid., 105.

⁶⁸Ibid., 105.

⁶⁹Ron Brusius, *Building A Christian Marriage*, (St. Louis, MO.: Concordia Publishing House, 1984).

understanding of each other and in their relationship to one another.

One pastor, who tries to use a little of both methods, appended a copy of material which he has personally prepared for premarital counseling. In a notation he made the comment:

These materials are prepared by my wife and myself. They include a question and discussion sheet to help them touch on the couple's personal and together history; plans for the future, finances, theology, Bible study of marriage and planning for the marriage ceremony itself.⁷⁰

Another pastor spends four sessions in counseling with each couple and indicated that two of these sessions are devoted to leading the couple through a study of the Scriptural teachings regarding marriage. This includes helping the couple to choose which Scripture lessons they wish to incorporate in the marriage ceremony.⁷¹

An interesting observation was made by another pastor in a follow-up visit when he suggested that pastors are more religious educators than counselors. God has much to say about marriage in His Word. The pastoral counselor provides a great service when he makes the couple aware of these teachings from God's Word about marriage.

⁷⁰Anonymous Response from the Survey of the pastors of the Southern Illinois District.

⁷¹Ibid.

It is generally recognized by pastoral counselors that whatever methods are used they will have to be tailored to meet the special needs of those couples where one or the other has been divorced or where children from a previous marriage enter the scene. It is not unusual for the counselor to discover that there may be many unresolved issues, such as, who was responsible for the break-up of the previous marriage or who has or will have primary custody of the children. These unresolved issues can pose a serious threat to the success and happiness of the new relationship. The concerned counselor tactfully, but firmly and in a loving manner, will point out that these unresolved issues will have a bearing upon their relationship to each other. While the counselor certainly will not be able to resolve those issues he may be able to impress upon the couple the importance of their working together to resolve them. It could well point out to the couple who face such problems of the wisdom of postponing the date of their marriage until they have resolved them or have seen the possibility of resolving them.

While it may be expedient for the Christian counselor to employ different methods of counseling and use various tools to assist, he will still have as the foundation of the premarital counseling the Biblical principles about marriage. If anything came out loud and clear in the survey responses and in the follow-up visits with pastors, it was the point that what the Word of God teaches regarding marriage will be

the foundation of everything that the pastor seeks to fulfill in premarital counseling.

Chapter five will seek to summarize the importance of this project, and give encouragement to pastors to continue to implement these pastoral emphases in the process of premarital counseling.

CHAPTER FIVE

A SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

The testimony of parish pastors underscores the importance of structuring pastoral premarital counseling around the Biblical teachings of marriage and clear theological principles of marriage. Professional counselors who have written about premarital counseling for the most part tend to support what pastors emphasize as being important in the counseling process. In chapter four the Biblical teachings were examined more closely. In a second portion of chapter four the importance of utilizing this theological foundation as the basis for premarital counseling was stressed.

Methodologies of counseling tend to vary among pastors. In many instances pastors used tools to assist them in the process of counseling. But the pastors insist on the need to adapt these tools to enable them to format the counseling around solid theological principles.

Chapter five will summarize the importance of the project. Special encouragement will be provided to pastors towards implementing important pastoral emphases in the process of premarital counseling.

Premarital counseling is very important. The needs of society call for that kind of expertise. The Christian community expects pastors to help couples prepare for the responsibilities of marriage. The personal call for obedience to the Spirit of God in rightly dividing the Word

of Truth compels a Christian counselor to be pastoral in the task of premarital counseling.

In the modern world many people have their ideas and attitudes about marriage conditioned by what they see on television. It is not only full length movies, but the daily serial programs, which are often referred to as the "Soaps," which give the idea that marriage need not be lasting. These programs stress that the primary concern is that each person find satisfaction and happiness in life. If such happiness cannot be found with one partner the solution lies in divorcing that person and moving on to marry someone else. These same television programs for more than two decades have been openly encouraging young couples to think that premarital sexual relations and even cohabitation are acceptable things to do because everybody else is doing it.

There is no doubt that the world gives a very confusing picture about marriage. Consequently, it is not unusual for couples who come to be united in marriage to be influenced by what Bill and Lynne Hybels call myths about marriage.

Ellen Rothman suggests additional reasons why people want to get married; to have children, to get even with an old lover, to get out of the parental home, to further a career, to obtain a father or mother for their children

- . Others marry for money, power, security, prestige, or readily available sex. Still others marry simply so they can say they did.⁷²

These are poor motivations to lead a person into marriage. Nevertheless, they often do exist. The concerned counselor who detects that any of such poor reasons to marry seem to be revealed in the counseling situation will endeavor to lead the couple to see what is happening in their lives. He will try to help them to see for themselves what reasons they have for getting married.

The Hybels seek to shatter some common myths about marriage.

Unfortunately, there are even more wrong reasons to marry. Some of these reasons are touted as inevitable benefits of marriage; in reality they are nothing more than myths.

The first myth that motivates some people to marry is this: marriage will end my aloneness.

A second myth; marriage will heal my brokenness. But whole healthy marriages cannot be built on foundations of brokenness. Spouses cannot be expected to be life preservers.

Probably the most widely believed of all marriage myths is this one; marriage will ensure happiness. Marriage does not produce life or character transformation. Such changes are produced by the inner work of the Holy Spirit, which is not dependent on one's marital status.

⁷²Bill and Lynne Hybels, *Fit to be Tied*, (Grand Rapids, MI.:Zondervan Publishing, 1991), 31.

The final myth is that it is God's plan for everyone. It isn't.⁷³

A myth is something which is believed to be true, but has no basis in reality. A marriage that is based on a myth is headed for troubled waters. Confronted by a society which consistently gives the view of marriage which is steeped in fantasy, it is no wonder that many couples approach marriage with their heads in the clouds, but their feet are not on the ground. They have not faced squarely the issues of sincere and deep commitment and of readiness to assume responsibilities. Take, for example, those who see marriage as encouraging happiness. Unless there is a solid basis for this expectation in common convictions such aspiration is not much more than expecting pie in the sky by and by. Trained counselors spend a good deal of time listening. This enables the counselor to evaluate the relationship that exists between the couple and seek to have them focus on the areas of their strengths and weaknesses.

The Christian community has growing expectations of pastors in the area of premarital counseling. The local congregation may not actually incorporate in the pastor's call any reference to premarital counseling, but there often is a sort of unwritten expectation that the pastor will do

⁷³Ibid., 34, 37, 39.

more than simply "tie the knot." In many congregations there develops a consensus among the membership that the pastor will spend time counseling with every couple which comes to that church to be married. In such congregations there is a general awareness that the pastor will need to know about wedding plans as soon as the couple is engaged. Some pastors and their congregational Board of Elders or Deacons have worked out a marriage handbook. The handbook serves to remind the prospective bride and groom that marriage was instituted by God, and that the wedding ceremony is a divine worship service. The handbook will refer to the counseling service which the pastor provides and also spell out why the congregation and the pastor believe such ministry is important. One handbook refers to it this way:

Premarital counseling is a service which the pastors, with the encouragement from the Board of Elders, render to all couples who are united in marriage in this church. The purpose of these sessions is two-fold. First, it is through these sessions that the pastor can make the couple aware of the fact that the congregation considers this a worship service and that there may be certain extenuating circumstances under which the pastor will not be able to officiate. Secondly, it is through these sessions that the pastor can lead the couple to communicate about the important responsibilities of marriage.⁷⁴

At the time of marriage the Christian congregation and its called pastor are engaged in ministry. In this

⁷⁴*Wedding Handbook*, (Steeleville, IL.: St. Mark's Lutheran Church, 1993), 3.

instance the ministry is focused upon two individuals in particular. Through the process of premarital counseling the pastor helps the couple to look at their relationship to God and how that will have bearing upon the relationship they have to one another.

In this facet of ministry as in many others in which the called pastor reflects the love of God in Jesus Christ the pastor will seek to rightly divide the Word of Truth as he touches the lives of two individuals in a personal way. The pastor will apply the Law of God as needed and he will bring the sweet message of the Gospel before them. The pastor will want to speak about the cleansing and renewing power of forgiveness as we experience it from God and from one another. In the exercise of his pastoral office the Christian minister of God remains conscious of the fact that a primary responsibility is that he remains faithful to the trust given to him. St. Paul writes: "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful".⁷⁵

The task of doing premarital counseling is challenging. As a called minister of Christ the pastor will have a sense of urgency to bring God's Word to bear on their unique needs. At the same time the counselor realizes that

⁷⁵I Cor.4:2 NIV.

he is dealing with people's lives. The weight of such responsibilities can easily cause a modern day pastor and counselor to have a similar response to that which Isaiah gave when he was called to serve as the prophet of God. "Woe to me!" he cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King, the Almighty.'⁷⁶

Isaiah, the prophet, and Paul, the Apostle, both discovered that the sufficiency to measure up to the responsibilities of the office in which they were called was not to be found in themselves, but in God. The Christian counselor will turn to God for the guidance and strength to meet also this responsibility. He will study the Word of God often. He will continue to look specifically at what the Word of God teaches regarding marriage. As the pastor carries out his counseling responsibilities preliminary findings suggest that these are some of the pastoral emphases which he will desire to make with each couple that comes to him to be united in marriage.

1. Marriage is a divine institution.

Human institutions are known to rise and fall. Human institutions pass through the vicissitudes of change because they bear the marks of sinful humanity. Human institutions often undergo such a metamorphosis that they

⁷⁶Is.6:5 NIV.

are hardly recognized as being the same as they were in their inception.

Marriage as a divine institution has remained as it was in the beginning when God established it for the health and happiness of His creatures. Human beings by their sinful inclinations often have distorted and changed the institution of marriage as it was given by God.

Marriage was given as a gift from God. Life itself is a gift from God. It was by His will that God determined to make man in His own image. God also willed it that the man should not be alone. God formed the woman out of the rib of man. God presented her to the man.

Keeping this focus clear, namely, that marriage is a divine institution, will serve to elevate marriage above the mundane, the things of this world, which because of human sinfulness change and decay.

2. Marriage is a lifelong union of one man and one woman.

Permanence is not a prevailing tendency in our 20th century world. Many companies produce products which are not intended to last very long. This is referred to as planned obsolescence. This is intentional so that the consumer will periodically go out and buy a new product. Other things which we use in our daily lives are only intended for a one time use and they are to be thrown away. Living with many impermanent features and factors of life there are many

people who have a hard time understanding that marriage is intended to last a life time. For Adam and Eve a life time was quite long. Adam was married for 930 years, Seth 808 years and Methuselah 783 years.⁷⁷

Although we do not witness that kind of longevity in our world today, it is not unusual for couples to celebrate seventy or seventy-five years of wedded life. These people are living testimonies to a world which tends to think of most things as being impermanent that the institution of marriage which was planned by God can have the quality of permanence.

3. Marriage is a mutual submission of husband and wife to each other out of reverence for Christ.

In the arena of changing ideas a dominant note that is being struck in the late years of the 20th century is the note of liberation. There are people who push for an equal rights amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America. There are advocates of liberation theology, especially in the Third World nations of Africa and South America. But here is an old idea which, among the people of God, sells better than the new ones do. It is the idea of mutual submission of husband and wife to each other out of reverence for Christ.

⁷⁷Gen.5:3-8,25,26 NIV.

Mutual submission is each person considering the other person better than self. This is done out of reverence for Christ. Christ took our place under God's holy Law. Christ submitted Himself to God. His love motivates His people to reflect His self-sacrificing love in their lives. When there is mutual submission of husband and wife to each other the myth of marriage as being a 50-50 proposition vanishes. Both have given themselves fully to each other. Nor does either one of them find this in the least bit degrading for they remember the words of the Master who said, "The greatest among you will be your servant."⁷⁸

The wife submits herself to her husband in recognition of the fact that according to God's plan for marriage the husband serves as the head of the family even as Christ is the Head of the Church.⁷⁹ God created the world and mankind, as the foremost of His visible creatures, in an orderly way. The believing child of God will also be minded to do all things in decency and in order.⁸⁰

4. Marriage is the formation of a new family unit of society as the husband leaves his family and cleaves to his wife and the wife loves her husband.

⁷⁸Matt. 23:11 NIV.

⁷⁹Eph. 5:23 NIV.

⁸⁰ I Cor. 14:40 NIV.

Societal changes have in many ways eroded the family. The traditional family of husband and wife and children has dwindled in our nation to the point where it represents only about half of all family units. The others are single parent families or families where one or both of the spouses have been married before and there are step-parents and step-children living under the same roof. However, there is a cry going up from many sectors of the nation that a serious effort must be made to restore fundamental family values once again. These values can be and will be re-established as more young couples come to appreciate that marriage not only brings blessings to them, but also brings blessings to the nation in which they live.

The family is often spoken of, and rightfully so, as the pillar of society. The family becomes solid as a pillar as the two people whose union forms the basis of that family unit experience the binding power of their love for each other. Ties which have been important to the man and the woman before give place to the new tie which binds them together as one.

5. Marriage is "intended by God for their mutual joy, for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity, and, when it is God's will, for the procreation

of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord."⁸⁰

When God instituted marriage He had a plan and purpose in mind for those who enter this estate. It is a counselor's privilege to share with the couple who looks forward to marriage the design God had in mind when He instituted marriage. In many instance the couple knows a lot about planning. Together they have been planning the details of their wedding and the reception. This is a good time to lead them to understand that God had purpose in mind when He gave the blessing of marriage. In follow-up visits with pastors several of the pastors stressed the fact that they take time to encourage the couple to talk openly about their plans for the future and to work together under God's blessings to see them come to fruition.

God invites a husband and wife to plan to experience continuing joy. In His Word God states clearly, "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord."⁸¹ The accent in the proverb is that marriage is certainly in accord with the will of God and that those who enter marriage, as God has established it, can anticipate living under the favor of the Lord.

⁸⁰*Lutheran Worship, Little Agenda*, (St. Louis, MO.: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), 17.

⁸¹Prov.18:22 NIV.

The union of husband and wife that is brought about under the blessings of God is one that can weather the storms of life. Both are willing to have and hold each other "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health."⁸² They are prepared for the ups and downs of life. Better yet, we need to say that they have been pre-pared by God for the ups and downs of life.

There is also an unknown factor as part of this plan. The unknown factor is children. The theological understanding which a Christian counselor will want to help a couple to realize is that having children is not to be viewed as an outcome of our will, but of God's will. Ultimately, it is God who blesses a union with children, as the patriarch Abraham and his wife, Sarah, came to realize.

And when God has seen fit to bless the union of a husband and a wife with a child or with many children, once again it is by divine plan that they serve as God's representatives in raising the children. In our sinful world a nation finds it necessary to enact laws which serve to impress upon parents their God-given responsibilities over against their children.

6. Marriage is a relationship which provides lasting happiness to husband and wife as they continue in their

⁸²*Lutheran Worship, Little Agenda*, (St. Louis, MO.: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), 19.

personal faith life to stay close to God.

The happy stories told to children about romances usually end with the statement that they lived happily ever after. This is not just story book fiction. A lasting happiness can and does exist where a husband and a wife each grow daily in their personal faith life. Jesus' assurance to His followers is this: "If you remain in Me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you."⁸³

Even as God has seen fit to plan for our physical needs so He has planned to meet our spiritual needs. God has given us His Word. His Word sheds light upon the darkness of this world to lead us into all truth. Hearing and heeding His Word become a crucial key to the on-going happiness of His people.

In follow-up visits with pastors several of them spoke of how they take time in the premarital counseling sessions to discuss the personal faith life of the man and the woman. When the pastor knows a little about the worship patterns of either one of the two coming to be united in marriage it becomes an easier task to open that door of discussion. The couple will be less likely to be defensive about the subject of their faith life. The same pastors stressed how important it is to be specific about the way

⁸³John 15:7 NIV.

in which they can be an encouragement to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. These pastors are not reluctant to speak about family devotions, reading the Bible together, and finding ways to give encouragement to each other about attending divine worship services.

7. Marriage is a blessed relationship in which a husband and a wife share themselves with each other physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

To put it another way we may say that marriage that is lived under the blessing of God is multi-dimensional. It is a blessed sharing which tends to increase the joy and to divide the sorrow.

The trained Christian counselor will weave these pastoral emphases into the warp and woof of the fabric of the counseling process. For the pastor approaches his task not just as a counselor, but as a Christian counselor.

Pastors indicated through notations on the survey sheets and in discussion in a follow-up visit that it is very helpful to establish a good rapport with the couple as graciously as possible. Expressing congratulations, showing interest in the plans which the couple may already have made for the wedding and allowing each of them to talk freely about their families and about themselves are some of the ways in which that rapport can be established.

Pastors recognize that the task of premarital counseling is special. The task deserves and needs the best

preparation. This preparation includes prayer that God would give His blessing upon the counseling process. Adequate preparation would mean that the pastor will have a specific plan in mind as to what he expects to cover throughout the counseling sessions. Flexibility on the part of the pastor for those individuals whose work schedules may make it necessary to change appointments will go a long way in helping to keep good rapport.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION

When the task of premarital counseling has been carried out faithfully the benefits are many. People are served. The couple which is being united in marriage receives the coun-selor's special care. Society is served. A conscientious effort is made to help establish another solid family unit. God is served.

In premarital counseling the counselor touches two people with the Word of God. He has the confidence that God's Spirit can do far more than we imagine or expect by way of having His Word take root in their hearts and their lives. For the Christian counselor deals not only with secular matters, but above all lifts up what the Scriptures teach regarding marriage.

Parish pastors give testimony to the importance of this aspect of ministry. Pastors are greatly concerned about helping couples who desire to be united in marriage establish and keep a lasting and happy union. To that end pastors point out that their role is, in fact, different from that of any other counselor. They have a pastoral concern not only to help a man and a woman to relate well to each other, but also that they will be strengthened with God.

Competency in counseling is, of course, a desirable skill for the pastor as he engages in this aspect of ministry. He will do well to prepare himself for the task by

his personal reading and by attending seminars, workshops and taking courses which offer help in premarital counseling. But it is clear that pastors rightly see that the foundation of their counseling will be the teachings of the Sacred Scriptures in regard to marriage.

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