

Bible Study

The Fall and Recovery of Christian Marriage

(edited transcript)

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We have been privileged over recent years to receive more understanding about the impacts of the fall of mankind on human relationships. Today, we are going to look at the effects of the fall on marriage relationships.

Those of us who have been married for a while came into our marriages not knowing the things that are only now being made clear to us. The ease with which some of our young adults who are courting, or have recently married, are able to clearly understand and turn from fallen relational motivations and ways is marvellous. Yet some of us in marriages of longer standing have been inclined either to think that regardless of how we have been living our marriage is good, or that as a result of how we have been living, our marriage is so bad it is beyond remedy. While ever we think this way, things that are *not* right just go on and on and we become more and more immune to the disastrous results that are being produced.

In this condition, we are unable to see or understand what is really going on.

We need illumination by the Spirit! The word today is not coming to force anyone into anything, but to bring illumination to our hearts if we will let the light come in.

A time to grow

The Christian courtship process that has been given to us as a fellowship of churches is not some sort of 'Lego' set that can be handed to a courting couple so that, if they follow the assembly instructions and consult the right tradesmen, a fully-formed marriage can be constructed and made ready for them to live in. Methodically ticking off boxes, joining dots and putting pieces together is not Christian courtship and does not produce a godly marriage. Neither does cutting in on people and imposing austerity, prohibiting fun or stifling enjoyment.

Rather, *time* is needed for two people to transition and grow from one mode of relating to another. In years gone by, many believed that if two Christians who 'fell in love' both wanted to serve the Lord and preserved morality during their courtship, the ground of their marriage would be good and would produce a good marriage. According to this view, the couple's relationship was theirs alone and they should be left alone to get on with it.

But do we really think that kind of courtship process will establish anything at all substantial to help a couple when relational conflict arises between them, as it surely will? When the enmity that exists between flesh and spirit rears up, and keeps rearing up? Enmity in a marriage relationship is not fundamentally between the man and the woman - it is between flesh and spirit.

The fall of mankind affected every man and every woman, setting them at odds with God and with one another. No man or woman, including Christian men and women, can avoid this. It is a deception to believe that just because we are Christians the fall no longer operates in us or operates less in us than in others. Nevertheless, we *have* believed that deception, and to one extent or another in approaching our marriages we downgraded our 'few issues' of sin so that we could marry the partner we chose. That is *not* the way to a godly marriage!

If that *was* the way we began our marriage, we are not therefore condemned or disqualified. We simply didn't know. None of us knows from the beginning of our Christian walk everything there is to know about being a Christian, but we are not therefore disqualified. God doesn't work that way. We are being delivered from the fragile delusion that we should know from the outset everything there is to know, so in faith, and without condemnation, let us simply receive the knowledge the Lord is giving us today.

The problem of fear

One of fall's effects on all of us is the fear of loneliness. This fear affects every single one of us, whether we register it or not, whether we are single or married. Before the fall, when God said that it was not good for man to live alone

(Genesis 2:18), He was not referring to man being lonely.

To illustrate, imagine two fictitious Christian people named Helmut and Zelda, neither of whom is married. Zelda is part of a church fellowship and serving the Lord on a church service team or two. Marriage to a nice husband to love, who would care for and provide for her and their children seems good to her. Much better than the prospect of loneliness. The romantic movies she's seen and the sentimental books she's read confirm her belief that marriage prevents and is better than loneliness. Is there any real difference between Zelda's thinking and worldly romance? If Zelda is functioning, with or without her realising, in a fallen mode, there is no difference at all.

Helmut is also part of the church fellowship and serving the Lord on a couple of church service teams. He has a good testimony - kind, faithful, reliable. Always at working bees, always on time. A hard worker with a good job. He looks pretty good.

Zelda sees and hears good things about Helmut, and Helmut about Zelda. He looks at her, she looks at him, and they recognize there's an attraction between them. An unspoken communication has passed between them, but not all that is going on in their motivations has been communicated. One thing that has probably not even been recognised or articulated even to themselves remains hidden in their motivations, even as Christians. Unspoken is the fact that each of them wants to be verified by the other. They feel pretty good that the other is looking at them with interest and wonder whether the other can be to them what they want, and they can be to the other what the other wants.

We *all* fell into that very trap of defining what our spouse would be for us and what we would be for them. In our courting days, we may well have had some great conversations and agreed wholeheartedly about our shared Christian goals, including our aim to raise godly children. We will have had an extensive list of the good intentions and aspirations we would each and together attain, and the evils we would each and together avoid. But if we did this, our seemingly Christian agenda was only an exercise in eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. By it, we each served up to the other our good inventory, and the other, viewing its promised goodness, wisdom, and potential to make everyone happy, 'ate' the inventory so that the envisaged great life together would come to pass.

We may attribute our fallen exchange of agendas to Christian living, as if by our mere agreeing we are in the fellowship of one Spirit, but this will not be true. If this *is* the fallen way a couple is courting, or has married, the resulting consequences will also be fallen, without exception, regardless of our sincere and heartfelt intentions to the contrary.

Was the Greek philosopher Plato right in teaching that true human meeting is not physical at all but spiritual? Not in the least. When God said it wasn't good for man to live alone, and so made woman (Genesis 2:18-22), He didn't do so because Adam was lonely at the time. Adam *wasn't* lonely - he had no reason to be. What lack, then, *was* God answering when He brought Eve to Adam? Simply this: there could be no multiplication of fellowship and life without Eve. There could be no fellowship with any other sons of men without her, for there would be no other sons of men.

Adam was not lonely without Eve because he was in full and satisfied fellowship with Yahweh - God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In

Yahweh's own fellowship, Adam would have felt no lack for there was no lack. Nothing was missing in his life for nothing is missing in the fellowship of the God who fills all things. Adam was not lonely! Indeed, he would not have known even the concept of loneliness, for loneliness didn't exist. There was only complete satisfaction in the fellowship of Yahweh.

When Eve was brought to Adam as his helper, still neither of them, in their new fellowship together with Yahweh, would have felt there was anything lacking in what the Lord had given them. Nevertheless, something in them began to agitate, leading them away from the tree of life towards the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the deceived belief that they could add something to improve the life they already had. Eve led Adam to join her belief in this lie and act on it with her. Not until Adam turned his headship sight away from Yahweh who is true and looked instead into the face of Eve who was deceived did he lack anything, but in looking to her, he received the deadly fruit she had brought to him and they both fell into utter lack and loneliness (Genesis 3:1-6).

Adam was not supposed to look to Eve for verification! No husband's verification is found in his wife. Eve was not supposed to call Adam to join her in what she had taken it upon herself to do, nor is any wife supposed to call her husband to join her agenda. Yet that *is* what happened in the first marriage, and still happens in *every* marriage until we are illuminated to see and understand how that dynamic works in us and are delivered by the Lord to a better way - *His* way.

Wrath, doubting, fear and control

The New Testament shows us that this fallen dynamic has produced enmity between men and women, making men subject to unbelief

and anger and women to fear and control. The apostles Paul and Peter urged men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting, and urged women to submit themselves to their husbands without giving way to fear (1 Timothy 2:8; 1 Peter 3:6). Of course, men can also be fearful and controlling, and women angry and unbelieving, but here the apostles were addressing the characteristic dynamics of fallen relationships.

To bring these completely carnal dynamics into a Christian marriage and insist that, because each person loves the other and both love the Lord, everything will somehow turn out well is a deception that *cannot* produce good fruit.

After the cunning serpent deceived Eve, who subsequently convinced Adam, they both fell, taking all of us with them. God then said to the woman:

“I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labour you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” (Genesis 3:16)

For the first time, there would be sorrow, and the bringing forth and raising of children would become painful and hard. A desire for the man would drive womankind - the same desire that God identified with the sin that was crouched at the door of Cain’s resentful heart (Genesis 4:7). This is *not* a good desire!

It may seem natural for a young woman to desire a husband to love her and whom she can love, but self-centred desire, rooted in the fall, is not what God ministers to the hearts of His sons and daughters, and He will not bless it.

Law versus law

There is another problem attached to a woman’s desire for her husband. Even though both she and her husband may be Christians, each has their own fallen, self-centred, self-serving law (Romans 7:14-23). No husband can deliver to his wife her desire, regardless of agreed intentions and aspirations. That will *always* fail. She will end up demanding, he will end up dominating, and there will be conflict and enmity. Things may be peaceful for a while, and then one or the other won’t cope with their being at odds and things will blow up again. And again.

The patriarch Jacob’s burning anger against Rachel for putting him in the place of God by demanding he give her the children she desired illustrates the point (Genesis 30:1-2). Rachel was the woman Jacob fell romantically in love with, but he was tricked by his uncle Laban into marrying Rachel’s sister, Leah. You can tell what the genes were like in that family! Uncle Laban and his young nephew Jacob must have been cut from the same cloth, for Laban did the dirty on Jacob, and Jacob tried to do the dirty on everyone else.

Jacob married Leah, but he didn’t like her. She was the wrong sort for him. He wanted Rachel, the one who was winking at him. But Rachel’s desire for what he could give her infuriated Jacob and caused Rachel to die in bitterness¹ (Genesis 35:18). They found nothing but trouble because the fallen dynamics in their marriage did not work. They *could* not work.

How can we think that young people who have never been in a courtship before will intuitively know and avoid these fallen relational dynamics? How can we expect them to know what these fallen dynamics will be and how

¹ Rachel, on her death bed, called her newborn son ‘Ben-oni’, which means ‘son of my sorrow’. But Jacob

later renamed him Benjamin, which means ‘son of my right hand’.

they will operate in their situation? They're not going to know, and that is why they need time in their courtships to receive illumination about these things and then to walk out what the Lord is showing them so that they don't replicate the dynamics of the fall in their marriages. We don't want them to walk into conflict and enmity, do we? Wouldn't we rather encourage them towards the illumination the Lord is giving them?

The fall of men and women first took place in a marriage relationship between two people who believed that together they could source life and success outside of God. It was only when they pursued this lie, fell, and were ejected from the Garden of Eden that they suddenly found themselves to be truly alone, and lonely.

To the man, God said:

"In toil you will eat of [the ground] all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your brow you will eat bread..." (Genesis 3:17-19)

Everything would now be hard for him. His food would come by the sweat of his brow and the fruit of futility would be his for generations. Years passed for Adam before Seth, the ancestor of godly seed, was born. Learning the way of the Lord is a long haul. If courtships are established on fallen instead of godly foundations, the work will have to be done after the marriage, and it will be a very long process.

Two Christian people coming together are not to look into each other's eyes for verification. Each is complete. A man does not need verification from a woman, nor does a woman

from a man. In Christ, they are not drawn together in overpowering passion or to avoid their fear of being alone. They are drawn together because, as responsible adults who understand themselves and how to live and serve in the will of God, they believe that this is where they are being led by Him. Of course, attraction and true romance are part of the equation, but they are entirely appropriate to the reality and stage of the relationship and they don't rule. Each person walks in sanctification and honour, not in passion and lust (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8).

Courtship is not a religious exercise. We are not robots, pretending unreality. But neither is courtship a fallen romantic exercise. That model only produces disaster.

One spirit, not carnal synthesis

Worldly romance is based on the proposition that produced the fall in the first place - that two people can meet and be a supply of life to one another, shielding each other from loneliness and serving each other's agenda. These agendas come from each person's own law, and when these laws are running, they are thesis and antithesis. They compete, and the best that can be hoped for is a compromised, fleshly synthesis. But that is not God's way!

People who've stuck together all their married lives, finding in their synthesis a way of muddling through, may conclude that their marriage is sound. But mere longevity does not equal soundness. After all, geese mate for life. If a marriage that people call happy is no more than a synthesis of two people's other laws², it will inevitably lock up, and without help, will remain that way. This is where courting couples

² By 'other' law we mean a law of life that is other than God's law, which truly is love.

need help, otherwise their competing laws can only harm the relationship.

Helmut and Zelda can illustrate the point for us. Helmut has his own law in operation, and Zelda hers. Things that were off to a promising start in their relationship have not continued quite so well. Each is wondering what is going wrong and attributing the problem to the other. Inwardly, each is delighting in the word of God and in His word on godly marriage and courtship, but their own law is operating within them. Zelda wants Helmut to accept and live up to her good agenda, and Helmut wants Zelda to accept and live up his. But their agendas are fed by their different and often incompatible versions of good, so there is upset whenever one does not capitulate to the other's good. The upset is magnified if the one who is not capitulating was (or appeared to be) happy at the outset to serve the other's good.

If this kind of dynamic and upset continue into a marriage, no matter how well hidden, the upset will build into something that looks like the breaking of a promised commitment, or worse, the breaking of the marriage covenant they made together. But a synthetic covenant with hidden carnal agendas and conditions is not the marriage covenant that God ordained. Marriage was ordained by God *under*, not *over*, His Everlasting Covenant. The first responsibility of a man and of a woman is their responsibility before God as a son of God.

If we do not let the Lord illuminate and deal with our carnality so that we can be spiritual, our marriages will be carnal and will become very strange indeed.

A carnal marriage bond?

When a husband relates to his wife from the basis of the fall, he will *want* to believe in her version of her own goodness. The same will be

true of his wife. She will *want* to believe in his version of his own goodness. When an individual person eats from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he or she assesses what is good and evil for them. When husbands and wives *together* eat from this tree, they assess and agree on what is good and evil for their marriage, and that agreement can so affect the bond of their marriage as to *become* the bond.

If the bond of a marriage *is* an agreement between the husband and wife about what is good and evil for them, it is a false bond, and their marriage covenant will be a carnal agreement that is impenetrable to the word of the Lord and to any messengers He sends to them. The prism of their own private 'reality' will be the lens through which they interpret the word of God.

If a couple's shared or individual good intentions are in play in relation to the word of God, then provided the man or the woman agrees with the word and *intends* to follow it, the other will validate them by giving them the spiritual affirmation and absolution they seek.

This fallen mode can also be in play in pastoral settings if we are coming to a pastor to receive an assessment of the good or evil of a matter and an absolution in relation to it. This kind of interaction is all too common, but it does not minister life for at base level it is grounded in another gospel - a gospel that does not lead a person to join the fellowship of Christ's offering or accept their personal accountability to the Lord in the matter.

This dynamic is particularly noticeable in a relationship whenever matters affecting the relationship are being addressed by the Lord and one partner absolves the other if remorse and intention to change are expressed. Such private absolution allows a couple to

circumvent their deliverance from the fallen behaviour the Lord is seeking to address and instead to reinstate and continue in the destructive behaviours that may be comfortable but are undermining their marriage. Deceived, they will all the while believe they are being obedient to the word.

This same absolution dynamic is evident in a different guise when either the man or the woman in a marriage has a tendency towards being pathetic or behaving like a victim, and the person with this tendency expresses to the other an awareness of their own sinful behaviour. If the response of the couple is to commentate on the sin and its solution, their commentary will only serve to strengthen the bonds of their mutual empowerment and change nothing at all. Avoiding the voices of the Holy Spirit and of fatherhood and motherhood in the church, the couple will believe they are being completely open in talking away the sin that is harming them. They will not see the need for any perspective or fellowship but their own and will not realise they are reconstituting and thereby disobeying the word they heard from the Lord. This is a terrible snare and deception! In effect, regardless of their intention otherwise, the couple will be living by another gospel. Who among us intends to do that? No one!

Not condemnation but mercy

God is merciful and does not condemn us for these things we have unwittingly done. We can be encouraged by the apostle Paul's testimony of God's mercy towards him for the things he had done in ignorance:

"Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief." (1 Timothy 1:13)

Peter also testified of the forgiveness of God for things done to Christ in ignorance, saying:

"And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance... Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you..." (Acts 3:17-20)

The stripes we receive for things done in ignorance are few, but once they run to disobedience and rebellion, they are many more (Luke 12:47-48).

We have been ignorant of these fallen dynamics in our marriages, but we can repent and be set free to get on with the works the Lord has for us to do. If, however, we stand on our ignorance, we will have major problems because we will be living by another gospel. We will be denying that the illumination of a person's heart by the Spirit is the agent that initiates change. If we *choose* ignorance, we will self-perpetuate in our marriages the fallen dynamics we have been deceived into believing will produce happiness, godly children, remedy for sin, and all the other 'good' outcomes we sought. And we'll do all this while hearing and thinking we're believing the word of the Lord proclaimed at the Communion table. Turned in to ourselves, our sight, including our relational sight, will be completely veiled.

Hallmarks of such veiled sight include never quite feeling completely secure about ourselves in fellowship with our brethren; never quite 'getting it'; feeling that other people are not quite relating to us; not quite knowing how to join the Lord's administration. Everything is 'not quite' right with us because we keep bringing the other law that is in us and in our marriages into the church and measuring everything by that law as if we are the measure.

Not quite feeling secure in fellowship is a function of the fact that true fellowship does not function by mutual empowerment. True fellowship functions by offering, in the knowledge that the illumination of God is needed in every action if it is to be an action of faith. Those who live by mutual empowerment rather than by illumination and faith in the fellowship of God are not secure, and do not feel secure.

We need God to speak right into our hearts about these things. Our *children* need God to speak to us, so that our families do not function by fathers trying to dominate and impose godliness on everyone or mothers over-riding and trying to contrive godliness in everyone. These carnal modes masquerade as godliness, but they are not godly at all.

The Lord is giving us time to deal with this. Most of what we have done has been done in ignorance. We didn't know, but now the Lord is showing us, and we can begin to really apply ourselves to look at what He is showing us. That is not too hard for us!

Illumination and fellowship

If we are to have fellowship, we must walk in the light just as He is in the light (1 John 1:7). That means that as the word of the Lord comes to us personally, bringing illumination to our hearts, we are to walk in the light of that illumination. The fellowship in light in which we are to walk is not found in a marriage relationship between a husband and wife who choose to seek verification from one another. Those who live like that will struggle constantly to understand their proper relationship to their brethren. They will feel awkward with others when their identity verification is sought from their romantic attraction to one another. Their consciences, their 'knowing together with themselves', will be fundamentally flawed.

The Scriptures describe people who have dysfunctional consciences (1 Timothy 4:2; Hebrews 10:22). The marital consequences of a couple's dysfunctional consciences, their 'knowing together with themselves' are quite frightening. Each can become a participant in the dysfunctional workings of the other's conscience by watering down or filtering the word of the Lord. This would be happening, for example, if a wife, on hearing the Lord's recent word to us about the spirit and ways of Jezebel, asked her husband to verify that neither she or their marriage was like that, and he did so, exonerating them both. But how would they judge that by their own view? Isn't each of them a son or daughter of God to whom He spoke that word, and with whom He was seeking to deal uniquely? When were they made spiritual authorities and the arbiters of the truth to one another? They could well be in a *worse* state than Jezebel ever was!

The word of God addresses each of us individually. We can certainly take the illumination we have received home and share it, but neither husband or wife is to come over the top of the illumination given by the Holy Spirit! If they are usurping the priesthood of Christ towards themselves, rendering His sufferings entirely vicarious and not allowing one other to individually join His offering, they are making the cross ineffective towards themselves. Their marriage will be getting in the way of their personal relationship with Christ, and that is *never* to happen.

In heaven there is no marriage. It is an earthly ordinance, so how should a marriage take precedence over a man's or a woman's eternal relationship with Christ? It must not take precedence, and we must not allow it to, either overtly or covertly, hidden behind the appearance of offering and obedience that in truth are carnal and disobedient at every point.

Ananias and Sapphira give us the extreme example of this problem (Acts 5:1-11). This husband and wife had clearly reached a mutually empowered agreement in the bond of their marriage. Their agreement resulted in them lying to the Holy Spirit. When they lied to the apostles it is unlikely to have been their first lie. Much more likely is that there was a fallen dynamic between them, stretching back over years, that made their lie on this occasion seem to them a small thing. But lying to the Holy Spirit, who is the New Covenant in Christ's blood, was *not* a small thing! By lying to the New Covenant, they did not judge the body of Christ or themselves appropriately in any way, for they had their own covenant, elevated above the Holy Spirit's name and function, violating His attempts to sanctify them as individual sons of God.

When this happens in a marriage, the husband and wife absolve or condemn one another. With this dynamic running, neither heeds the conviction of the Holy Spirit, for they have made the ground of their marriage their ultimate reality. The wife hides behind the husband and the husband behind the wife in a family fortress that nothing can break in upon. No bottom line of any matter can be found or addressed because everything that is spoken to them is pulled down into their own discussion and dialogue to determine what they think is true. In doing that, they are forging lies.

Each one coming to the Lord

Every individual is to come in prayer to meet with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In this prayer meeting of four, each wife and each husband are to come before the Lord as a son of God in their own name and right, without looking to their spouse, or to anyone else, for verification. We *all* need deliverance from seeking verification from other people, and the

courtship process the Lord has given us leads young people to recognise and be delivered from this fallen need for empowerment.

If any of us chooses an empowered ministry model, as Ananias and Sapphira did, there will be no room for the Holy Spirit or the ministry of Christ's grace to us. We will exercise a ministry initiative that is empowered by the flesh, and no one will be able to speak in to our lives. We will be deadlocked in corruption.

To break this deadlock, both parties in a marriage must personally be allowed to join the offering and sufferings of Christ. No pastor, no husband and no wife can mediate this for anyone else. Each person must individually find fellowship with Christ - a fellowship that is not bound up inside the marriage. Marriage is a specific and very unique kind of relationship, and we are not seeking to violate that relationship. However, neither should a marriage violate other relationships.

Now, please understand that I am certainly not declaring that everything in our marriages is corrupt. However, we do need to understand and have clearer insight into how we are living and what we are doing in our marriages. Husbands and wives are not each other's mediators or performance evaluators. Rather, each husband and each wife are to meet the Father in their unique relationship with Him. Neither spouse has any access to the other's relationship with the Lord.

Does that shock you? Well, how *could* you have access to your spouse's relationship with the Lord? That's not what marriage grants. Nor, by the way, is that what parenthood grants. No parent has access into their child's relationship with their heavenly Father. Each person meets the Lord in their own relationship with Him, and as they abide in Christ and take up their cross daily through their apportioned participation in

the fellowship of His sufferings, the Lord keeps them in His will and hand. As husband and wife individually abide in the Lord's hand, they will together find the Lord's unique will for them as a couple and as a family, because it is God who has named each one and each family, and He will speak to each of them easily and without difficulty according to His own order of headship (1 Corinthians 11:3-12). That is not to say there will not be any more troubles, or any reversions to carnal behaviours, but we are being recovered by God. We are more and more easily entreated by Him if we don't 'dig in' anywhere and become hardened in heart.

What our recovery will mean when the Lord speaks to us we won't fully know, and we don't have to know. If we are being ourselves, knowing that we are poor in spirit, the Holy Spirit can regenerate our spiritual sight and make a breach upon our blindness. This is a work of the Holy Spirit for each person, individually. Badgering your spouse does not bring illumination! Neither does badgering anyone else. Raised voices, pointed words and impatience for results only mistreat our brethren. We *entreat* one another in the love of God, who is patient and takes the time that is needed with each one.

As the Holy Spirit gives each of us sight and we receive initiative from the Son, *then* we have sonship initiative - a new creation son standing up in the fellowship of the Lord who is love. That's what we all want and what we want to see! We don't want or need mediators. We each want to be a whole, new creation person. Marriage was not given by God to protect those who don't have quite enough faith to be a whole person. If each person in a marriage only has faith to be half a person, incomplete without the other person, then together their faith will be enough for one of them and the other will be lost.

Look to the Lord

Both husband and wife are to receive sight and initiative from the Lord, not from each other. Obedience to Christ doesn't mean there won't sometimes be a word from one to the other, or headship direction. The point I'm making, the nub of the matter I'm trying to reach, is that any idea of headship and submission that leaves either party relying on the other instead of on the Lord for illumination is fatally flawed.

Rather, motivated by love, we are each to find a fellowship in the light with the Lord and our brethren (1 John 1:7). In this fellowship we find all things answered. All our commentary, which never resolved or could resolve anything at all, falls away and the matter is answered by the Lord. Enmity goes, and lo and behold, we find the love our fallen romantic model promised but could never deliver.

As each one finds, walks and abides in fellowship in the light, they find an easy confession of their own sin, and they find God faithful and just in cleansing them of their sin. (1 John 1:9) They find easy relationship among their brethren and with each other. They can work things through in life as an individual son of God and in their married life as husband or wife. Some things need a bit of appropriate help from outside the marriage, and others can just be walked through in the light in easy dialogue and prayer.

In a godly courtship between a young man and a young woman who are disciples of Christ, each is a son of God and already in fellowship with the Lord and among their brethren. They know how to approach difficulties, even difficulties that appear intractable. In fellowship, they find a way forward. It really is delightful to find with the younger couples such ease of fellowship, an ease that allows meeting

and talking about these things without anyone having a meltdown.

For those of us who are middle- or older-aged, can we do this too? Where we've made a mess of things, can we be a bit easier, a bit less fragile, and a bit more honest so that we can get on with the things God wants us to get on with? So that we can multiply His fellowship through offering instead of sitting back on whatever old religious models we've become a bit entrenched in? The Lord has a way and can dig us out! Faithful brethren are helping us in the word, and the Holy Spirit is illuminating our understanding. How we need Him to do that!

Every marriage is unique because every person is unique. The Lord is not condemning us for our ignorance of these things. We didn't know before He showed them to us, but now we can turn to Him. The apostle John didn't know about the churches as lampstands until Jesus showed them to him. Even though John been ministering as an apostle for the whole of his Christian life without knowing this, he didn't harden his heart or give up when he heard the Lord's voice - he simply turned to the Lord, saw, and did what the Lord asked Him to do. (Revelation 1:9-20).

Today, as we hear the Lord's voice, let's not harden our hearts or give up (Hebrews 4:7). Let's turn to Him, see, and do what He's asking us to do! God wants us to understand and overcome in the matters He's bringing to our attention. We don't need to be defensive. We do not need to fear facing reality when God puts His finger on our sin, wilful or ignorant. We can trust the Lord's love and simply turn to Him in accountable repentance and faith, seeking His illumination, help and recovery. God is not surprised by our sin.

"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess

our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:8-9)

The cure for our ignorance is to turn to the Lord, for only then can we really see.

"...whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." (2 Corinthians 3:16)

God desires every marriage, each husband and wife, to be one spirit because He desires godly seed (Malachi 2:13-16). Children of the Lord's covenant are precious to Him! As *you* enter fully into His culture for your marriage, you will be able to help teach your children.
