

God's Plan for the Marital Union

God is the architect of marriage (**Genesis 2**). It is Biblically defined as a life-long union between a man and a woman (**Matt 19:4-6**).

In Ephesians 5, the apostle Paul reveals by the Holy Spirit that the marital union illustrates the spiritual oneness and intimacy between Christ and His church. Here God teaches that His divine plan for matrimony will produce the harmony and happiness God intended in this lifelong bond. Men may change God's plan, but God's plan does not change.

Loving Husbands

Paul teaches that the husband has the responsibility of headship in the marriage, as Christ is head of the church (**Eph 5:23**). The great challenge of his spiritual leadership is for the husband to love his wife sacrificially, as Christ loves the church and gave Himself up for her (**Eph 5:25**). Paul teaches that each husband, without exception, should love his wife as being in a sense his very own self; he is to lead her, to nurture her in the things of Christ, and to live with her faithfully for life (**Eph 5:28-29**). This is the kind of man that a godly woman will want to give herself to unreservedly.

Submissive Wives

Paul teaches the wife must lovingly submit to the leadership of her husband in the home (**Eph 5:22**). This is still God's order, despite cultural rebellion against it. This submission involves support, cooperation and encouragement for the

By W. Frank Walton husband to fulfill his responsibility. She must also look up to and "respect" him (**Eph 5:33**). This involves noticing him, regarding his efforts, esteeming his good points, and loving him exceedingly.

We should teach our children to make it their aim to marry someone who is a good Christian, who will help them go to heaven. As two committed Christians grow closer to Christ, they will grow closer to one another as best friends.

Husbands and wives daily wear a physical token of this spiritual union. It is made of gold, symbolizing the preciousness of marriage. As a ring, it is an unending circle, symbolizing unending love. Every time a spouse sees their wedding ring, it should be a silent reminder of the promises made on that joyous wedding day. It is a daily symbol to prompt faithfulness to each other always.

Terry Gunnells wrote about the growing power of a love in marriage: "When beauty fades from the cheek, luster from the eyes, when steps become short and wrinkles may crease the face, when silver threads adorn the head, true love will still sparkle and happiness will increase until that perfect day when the great marriage feast of the Lamb will be enjoyed for all eternity."



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Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (**Matthew 5:16**)

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Leadership — Human and Divine

By Homer Hailey

A casual study of the history of Christianity after the days of the apostles reveals that the two things from which the Lord's religion has suffered more than any other, are human philosophies and human leadership. Human leadership inevitably leads men into human errors. The prophet Jeremiah had no doubt seen enough of human leadership to have said what he did, even if he hadn't been inspired, when he said, "O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." (**Jer. 10:23**)

Sometimes we begin to reason: "What the church needs today is a great leader, one raised up to lead us out of the present confusion, and direct us in an aggressive campaign against our external foes." But on second thought this is the very last thing we need, for no religious movement built around human leadership has been successful in accomplishing the divine purpose. History is replete with illustrations. The great movements of the reformation, the Mormon church built around the leadership of Smith and Young, and even some modern movements within our own brotherhood.

The argument is, "the church needs leaders." No, the need is not for leaders, it is for "elders." If a man is not qualified for the work of an elder, he is not what God wants in as an elder, regardless of how good a "leader" he may be.

It isn't "leadership" so much as "follow-ship" that the church needs. Jesus claimed to be the leader, when He declared Himself "the good shepherd," "the way," "the light of the world" to be followed; and announced to His disciples, if any man would come after me, let him deny himself... and follow me." It is not a leader," therefore that we need, for we have one, a divine one; but the need is for the disposition to follow where He leads.

A tendency is sometimes found today to glorify "boy preachers." Having just recently graduated from the class of "boy preachers" myself, it would be most unbecoming on my part to say

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anything disparagingly of them. The attitude of most of them is better than that of many of the older preachers. But when one of them is over-exalted he looks upon himself as "the leader," a modern Moses to lead the church out of Egypt and through the wilderness. In this he loses sight of his real mission, which is to point people to the Christ, the real leader. Trouble inevitably follows.

Other young preachers, and some older ones, feel that the first thing to be done when they go into a place is to "appoint elders" over the congregation. The argument is, "the church needs leaders." No, the need is not for leaders, it is for "elders." If a man is not qualified for the work of an elder, he is not what God wants in as an elder, regardless of how good a "leader" he may be. In fact, his ability to lead without the qualifications of an elder is the very point of danger. One function of an elder is to be an "ensample to the flock." He is an ensample worthy of being followed only as he follows Christ, and in his following leads others to follow Him. One who allows himself to be "appointed" without the necessary qualifications further disqualifies himself by that very thing. For in failing to respect the New Testament in the point of elder qualifications, he shows himself a poor ensample to be followed at all. It is "followers" not "leaders" that are most needed today.

Suppose we consider the challenge of sectarianism. Some of us think it would be fine if we had a good leader to guide us in the fight against these foes of truth. The fact is, we have such a leader. Jesus met the devil in debate soon after his baptism, which was not a spectacular affair before a large audience of people, but except for the possibility of heavenly on-lookers it was strictly private. Immediately afterward He began meeting the devil's children, the Pharisees, who were the sectaries of that day. He has opened the way and is leading. Christians need simply to follow the leader in carrying the attack to all sectarianism, in private discussions or with them in groups as opportunity affords. He is all the leader needed; we need to follow the example. God never left the work of "defending the faith once for all delivered

unto the saints" solely for preachers and "leaders," but for all of His children.

Then there is the challenge of work, the work left to be done by the church. The cry made so often is, "We have no leaders to direct us, to tell us what to do." Why yes we have, there is the example of Christ, of whom Peter said, "Because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that ye should follow in his steps"; "who went about doing good." Every needy person whom He met, either in need of physical help or of spiritual help, was an opportunity. Every opportunity to serve was an opportunity in which to glorify His father by that service. What greater leader could one ask for than the Saviour?

It is not even a "leader" that we need to lead the church out of any difficulties and differences that arise within its own ranks, but rather the need is for a disposition on the part of all to follow the Christ, whose way is bound to lead all aright. Difficulties and differences are bound to eventually iron themselves out when the right disposition is manifested by all. Often Jesus looked upon lost humanity as "sheep having no shepherd;" a world suffering from human leadership. But this need not be true of us, for Christ is the Shepherd, and for one today to be the victim of human leadership is inexcusable.

Instead of talking "leadership" and "leaders" so much, as is being done in preacher's meetings and other similar places, let's put the emphasis on "following" for a while. No truly godly man wants to be "the leader of the church," nor does he want to "rule" it; he realizes that true greatness according to Christ's standard is to be realized in being a "servant of all." The truly great and godly is content to follow Christ, and simply insist on others following Him. It seems to me that the work of elders and preachers is not so much that of being "leaders," but it is that of instructing and guiding others to be followers of the Lord, as they themselves follow Him.

Just as surely as men learn that the need is for followers and not leaders, just that surely will the church be led in triumph from victory unto victory. Not only the church, but humanity will be led out of any chaos into which human leadership has brought it, either political, doctrinal, or moral.

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Before God — Before men

By Bill Hall

"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1).

True righteousness is primarily "God-conscious" rather than "man-conscious." God is pleased as we sing His praises, or teach His truth, or lead in prayer, or help the needy, or give to support His work, if our purpose is to gain His approval and bring glory to His name. But woe to that person who sings for the purpose of displaying his beautiful voice. Woe to that person who seeks the praise of men as he leads in prayer. Woe to that preacher who "tickles the ears" of his listeners. Woe to that person who gives to be seen of men. When he gains their praises, he "has his reward in full"; none awaits him from the Father in heaven.

In keeping with this teaching, the Bible reveals God's judgment of two different couples, one enjoying God's approval, the other suffering His disapproval.

God disapproved of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). His disapproval was not because of the amount of their offering. They had brought a very liberal offering. They had even sold a possession in order to give, and while we do not know what portion they brought, they obviously brought what they thought would be sufficient to impress the apostles. But herein lies the key to their real problem: They were more conscious of men's reaction to their benevolence than they were of God's. Had they

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been conscious of God in what they did, and had they been seeking His approval, they would not have lied. But they did their righteousness "before men, to be seen by them," and in their concern for impressing men, they lied concerning the amount which they brought.

In contrast to Ananias and Sapphira, there were Zacharias and Elizabeth of whom it was said, "And they were both righteous before God" (Luke 1:6). While

many no doubt observed their righteousness, and as a result glorified the Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16), Zacharias and Elizabeth obviously were not as concerned for man's approval as they were for God's approval. It was God's approval that they sought; it was His approval that they gained.

God blessed Zacharias and Elizabeth, choosing them to be the parents of John, the forerunner of Christ. He punished Ananias and Sapphira with immediate death, and, in keeping with Jesus' statement of Matthew 6:1, they "have no reward from your Father who is in heaven."

Hypocrisy is loathsome to the Lord. For a person to appear outwardly religious and sincere, while inwardly he only desires the praise and approval of men is to be guilty of gross hypocrisy. Let us seek always to do our righteousness before God to be seen of Him. The glorious and eternal "reward, of the Father" cannot be compared with the fickle and fleeting praise of men.

