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## Pastoral Premarital Counseling for Bi-Cultural Traditional Chinese and Chinese American Couples

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PASTORAL PREMARITAL COUNSELING FOR BI-CULTURAL TRADITIONAL  
CHINESE AND CHINESE AMERICAN COUPLES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JOSEPH YEUNG

PORTLAND, OREGON

MARCH, 2010

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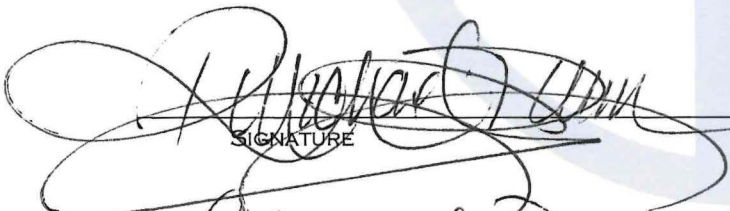
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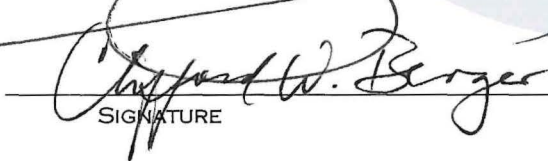
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I thank my church's congregants who understand that ministry is an ongoing process and education is essential. They encouraged my study at George Fox Evangelical Seminary and allowed me time for class attendance. They endured the time I spent studying and writing, which meant less time with them. I thank them for their prayers.

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## ABSTRACT

Title: A PASTORAL PREMARITAL COUNSELING MANUAL FOR CHINESE BI-CULTURAL COUPLES

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This ministry focus paper provides a premarital counseling manual based on partnership in marriage for pastors who counsel bicultural couples. Bicultural is defined as couples that include a traditional Chinese Christian and Chinese American Christian. The paper's thesis is that a pastoral premarital counseling manual can be developed for couples that include a traditional Chinese Christian and a Chinese American Christian in a bi-cultural relationship.

Traditional Chinese Christians are influenced deeply by traditional Chinese culture, and their behavior and cultural patterns are relatively unaffected by American culture. Chinese American Christians are raised in America and embrace American culture, behavior, and cultural patterns. When individuals from these differing backgrounds marry, many difficulties may emerge in their marriages. This manual addresses the importance of pastoral premarital counseling and provides guidelines for

pastors. The manual uses the theological concepts of partnership in marriage, support, and mutual submission.

The paper addresses the problem of bi-cultural marriage and the varying assumptions and expectations of the traditional Chinese and Chinese American cultures. It also looks at other proposed solutions and analyzes them from a biblical perspective. The author presents the thesis and its scriptural support. He incorporates and explains Adam and Eve's pre-fall partnership, Jesus' views on marriage and divorce, and Paul's concept of mutual submission. The paper includes the manual as a practical solution to the pastoral pre-marital counseling challenge.



## SECTION 1

### THE PROBLEM

Premarital counseling is widely accepted in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Professional counselors and ministers recognize the value of premarital counseling, but little has been written about premarital counseling for Chinese in America. The purpose of this ministry focus paper is the development of a premarital counseling manual based on partnership in marriage for ministers to practice counseling effectively with traditional Chinese Christian and Chinese-American Christian couples. In this paper, Chinese Christians are recent immigrants or visitors influenced deeply by traditional Chinese culture. Chinese Americans were raised in America and embody American culture or have adopted American behaviors and cultural patterns. A Chinese Christian/Chinese American marriage is described as “bi-cultural” in this paper. A traditional Chinese person pays no attention to premarital counseling and does not fully understand the meaning of marriage in America. When a person from this background marries a Chinese American, many problems and difficulties may emerge in their marriage life.

Premarital counseling is not an emphasis in the context of most Chinese churches, and many Chinese pastors are not competent premarital counselors. Some pastors know

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<sup>1</sup> Cromwell C. Chen, “Premarital Counseling in the Chinese-American Community” (D.Min. diss., San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1980), 8.

the importance of this ministry but overlook it based on their cultural backgrounds. A pastor may spend two months of intense Bible study with converts before their baptism, but the pastor may spend only two hours or less in premarital counseling.

A variety of problems may develop. For example, the couple may identify a large church for their wedding ceremony. In this case, the couple's pastor may happily transfer the premarital counseling responsibility to the pastor who performs the wedding in the large church. These pastors are often very busy, ill-prepared, and may omit or abbreviate premarital counseling sessions. After marriage, issues may arise that could have been discovered and addressed in counseling.

The author of this paper grew up in an ecclesiastical and cultural structure that paid little systematic attention to these challenges and provided no programmatic response. I knew nothing about premarital counseling before attending Bible College. I took no premarital counseling classes in Bible College and placed no emphasis on premarital counseling during graduate study in the United States. I did not emphasize premarital counseling when I served as a Hong Kong pastor because it was not part of my history, culture, or concern.

In America, premarital counseling is an important topic. Many American church members asked me to officiate at their weddings and requested premarital counseling, but I lacked adequate training. I decided I must study this area, and this thesis provides a premarital counseling manual for use by pastors and bi-cultural couples because bi-cultural marriages experience significant challenges.

Miss Li, a counselor at a Chinese counseling center in New York, reported on her many years of counseling experience.<sup>2</sup> She stated that there are nine sources of strain in Chinese American marriages:

1. Not knowing each other well enough. This is especially true for the one who comes from another country.
2. The differences in culture, education, and language.
3. Unrealistic expectations.
4. Family of origin influences.
5. Outside temptations.
6. Communication problems.
7. Pressures from job, finance, and children.
8. No supporting team. Chinese American intercultural marriage is still infrequent, especially in small towns.
9. In-laws problems.

Chinese culture encourages children to live with their parents after the children marry. Many Chinese live with their parents and grandparents because three generations living together is considered a great blessing, and living with the parents offers advantages. For example, the parents provide childcare, keep house, and provide free housing. The parents feel secure because the younger generation is with them, and as they age, they know someone will care for them. This is the Chinese philosophy: “養兒防老 means that children will provide for their parents’ every need when the parents age.”

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<sup>2</sup> Li, “The Causes of Marriage Crisis,” *Herald Monthly*, February 2008, 1.

American cultural expectations differ from Chinese cultural patterns.<sup>3</sup> Children are encouraged to leave home when they begin work, finish college, or marry. If this does not occur soon after they become eighteen, the parents may tolerate their staying at home, but they expect the children to move out within a year or two.<sup>4</sup> This difference in culture becomes a source of argument for bi-cultural couples. For example, if they follow the American custom, the Chinese relatives will probably criticize them for not honoring their parents because they are not living with the Chinese parents.

Another major conflict is that many Chinese American couples do not provide money for their parents on a regular basis. The Chinese philosophy “養兒防老” requires that children will provide for their parents’ every need when the parents age. In the American culture, social security benefits and pension support may be sufficient, but many first generation Chinese have worked without any such benefit. They hope that their children will support them.

Bi-cultural couples may also experience conflicts in daily living. For example, a couple in the author’s church includes the husband who is Asian American and grew up in America. The wife is a typical traditional Chinese woman who is greatly influenced by her parents. The husband often complains that his father-in-law asks him to do things without saying please. I explained to him that because he is the son-in-law, their relationship is very close, and the older generation Chinese never says please to the son-in-law when asked to do something.

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<sup>3</sup> Loren Van Tassel, interview by author, questionnaire, Portland, Oregon, 7 February 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The bond between husband and wife is strong in American culture, but in Chinese culture the husband is still under his parents and the wife is under her parents.<sup>5</sup> The bond with their child is stronger than the bond between husband and wife, and the wife, for example, might sleep with the child for years rather than with her husband. When decisions about the child are made, the advice and control of the grandparents overrides the wishes of the husband and wife about their child. This weak husband-wife bond is reflected by the fact that husband and wife will often live and work in different cities for extended periods of time.

When a Chinese couple prepares for marriage in America, they must make many life adjustments. This is especially true when one of person is immersed in American culture and the other in traditional Chinese culture. When two persons come from different cultures and marry, they can anticipate many conflicts even though they are Christian. This project and manual may be useful for pastors who have backgrounds similar to mine and face these issues. Three structural and cultural differences underlie these issues: individualism, freedom, and marriage roles, and these issues affect bi-cultural marriages.

### **Individualism**

Individualism is a social theory advocating the liberty, right, or independent action of the individual. It is the principle or habit of independent thought or action, with pursuits of individual rather than common or collective interests; it is egoism. It is also the doctrine or belief that all actions are determined by, or at least take place for, the benefit of the individual, not of society as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> *Webster's College Dictionary* (1997), s.v. "Individualism."

American individualism has traditionally been influenced by Christian compassion, and individuals take initiative and help needy people. They do not wait for help from government or officials in the hierarchy, and they do not wait for permission.<sup>7</sup> Americans respond as individuals.

In Chinese society, however, the idea of collectivism promotes concern for needy people, rather than individualism or self-concern.<sup>8</sup> This is conditioned by Chinese tradition that a person is communally responsible for a limited circle of people including relatives, classmates, clan members, and those lower in the social hierarchy. To Americans, therefore, Chinese can seem unconcerned about strangers, and Americans can seem superficial to the Chinese.

Individualism is a key concept for Americans; responsibility in and for the group is a traditional Chinese value. These varying values may create problems in a bi-cultural marriage. As the West exerts more influence on Chinese society, traditional Chinese values change and individualism affects culture.<sup>9</sup> These cultural forces, however, create continued challenges when bi-cultural couples contemplate marriage. They may view the world and their roles in the world very differently, and this may produce friction and discord. Premarital counseling can address these issues.

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<sup>7</sup> Van Tassel, 7 February 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

## Freedom

Great differences exist about freedom in American and traditional Chinese marriages.<sup>10</sup> Americans have great freedom to marry whomever they choose with little regard to age, background, race, ethnicity, and other factors. The freedom of choice and openness influences people from a traditional Chinese background. For example, this paper's author knows two dating college students. The male is three years older than the female, and both families in China strongly oppose their dating. The couple talked to a school counselor, and the counselor said, "You are in America now and you have the total freedom to make your own choice. No one is supposed to direct you."

Another very traditional Chinese person studied in America and fell in love with a divorced woman. He struggled with his decision to marry the woman and said such an arrangement was impossible in traditional China. The American culture of freedom and choice changed him, and he accepts things he would have rejected in China.

Interracial marriage is less an issue in America than in other cultures, and America has many interracial marriages.<sup>11</sup> Marriage between a Chinese and African-American is usually unacceptable in China, and both people would experience tremendous pressure from family members, friends, and neighbors. Americans experience great freedom and reactions are somewhat different. For example, two families attended our American church and the wives are Chinese and the husbands

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<sup>10</sup> Wai Shel, "The Analysis of Chinese Marriage in America," *World Journal* 1219 (December, 2003): 14.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

African-American. They experienced obstacles to their marriages, but they exercised their freedom in a manner unavailable in China. Different concepts of freedom may create problems in a bi-cultural marriage that could be addressed in premarital counseling.

### **Marriage Roles**

Significant cultural issues emerge when an American Chinese and a traditional Chinese person date and plan marriage, and the roles of husband and wife are part of the challenge. The traditional marriage roles and duties of husband and wife are very similar between early American and Chinese cultures. These roles and duties are culturally defined and prescribed, and must be performed by each partner.<sup>12</sup>

In the early twentieth century, men's traditional roles in America and China included husband, father, breadwinner, sexual aggressor, financial planner, and household mechanic.<sup>13</sup> Traditional female roles were wife, mother, homemaker, sexual recipient, childcare provider, and housemaid.<sup>14</sup> Each partner's contributions to the family were based on traditional male and female role models.

As societal expectations changed in America, a new model of marriage emerged based on intimacy, companionship, and cooperation, rather than solely on duty and

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<sup>12</sup> Lynn L. Long and Mark E. Young, *Counseling and Therapy for Couples*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole, 2007), 12.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 12.



responsibility.<sup>15</sup> A century ago, American marriage was primarily a social institution designed to meet economic needs and provide a place for rearing children. This view of marriage as an institution was largely replaced by the concept of marriage as companionship grounded on romantic attraction, self-fulfillment, and ego-need gratification.<sup>16</sup> Equality and choice are central tenets in modern American marriage.<sup>17</sup> This transition has not occurred in traditional Chinese culture, creates challenges in marriages, and premarital counseling must deal with these concerns.

### **Chinese and American Cultural Differences**

The following are key differences between Chinese and American culture provided by Loren Van Tassel, former missionary to China.<sup>18</sup> In the list, C is used for Chinese and A for American.

1. C: Everyone obeys the leader who makes most decisions.  
A: Leaders are accountable to those over and under them.
2. C: Rule-by-fiat is common; the highest leaders decide and they can unilaterally change their decisions.  
A: Rule-by-law is expected. The leader has the right to enforce decisions if the decisions are lawful.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> Jack O. Balswick and Judith K. Balswick, *The Family*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 79.

<sup>17</sup> Long and Young, *Counseling and Therapy for Couples*, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Loren Van Tassel, interview by author, questionnaire, Portland, Oregon, February 7, 2006.

3. C: Leadership is age-based; older persons have more authority and responsibility (even if the individual is fifteen minutes older than a twin sibling).  
A: Leadership is merit-based. Leaders earn positions through performance, education, qualifications, and experience.
4. C: Plans come down from above; ordinary people are afraid to take the initiative until the leader gives permission.  
A: Ordinary people feel responsible to make detailed plans.
5. C: Teachers and other authorities lecture; information is given in a one-way style.  
A: Teachers and other authorities tend to invite feedback; interaction is common.
6. C: Parents have total authority, decide right and wrong, and children must obey.  
A: Parents have authority over children, but children can question or state suggestions.
7. C: Children represent the extended family. They bring honor or shame, for example, by whom they marry, the school they attend, their rank in school or job, and type of career. This continues after they marry.  
A: Children make their own decisions about their future; this does not reflect very strongly on the parents' honor, and each generation is responsible for itself.
8. C: Parents want their children and grandchildren to live with them. This means parents exert continued control, but it also provides benefits: financial (avoid rent), meals prepared, babysitting services, and support when facing difficulties at work.

A: Parents expect their children to leave home as soon as they marry or reach about eighteen years of age. This requires that children make decisions, take responsibility for their actions, and decide how to raise their own children.

9. C: Children must give money to parents.

A: Children rarely give money to parents; parents may help children financially.

10. C: In society people fit into their niche; they become specialists in their own job or position. They know much about a few things.

A; In society people move from niche to niche; they are generalists. They know a little about many things.

11. C: When attending a group meal, the host decides the menu and each person is seated in a specific place indicating rank.

A: When attending a group meal, everyone helps choose the menu and seating is random.

12. C: People will sacrifice time, energy, and money for the benefit of people they know: family, village, clan, church, school mates. They remain loyal for life, even if they seldom communicate. People tend not to try to know people outside their own group, and they may appear uncaring.

A: People tend to greet everyone in a friendly manner, but they may not have deep loyalty and may appear insincere.

The dynamics discussed in this chapter reveal the potential tensions in bi-cultural marriages, and these tensions can be addressed through competent pre-marital counseling. This paper provides a manual for pastors who counsel bi-cultural couples

designed to uncover the tensions and deal with them effectively. Alternative approaches are available that range from enforcement of cultural traditions to refusal to officiate at bi-cultural ceremonies. These alternatives and their inadequacies are described in the next section of this paper.

## SECTION 2

### OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

#### **Women in Traditional Chinese Culture**

Traditional Chinese culture offers a solution for marital relationships that is male dominated and places women in an extremely subordinate position, but this solution is unacceptable and impractical in modern American culture. China has 5,000 years of history and almost everything that happens today is affected by that history. This is especially true for the Chinese women whose lives, worth, roles, marriages, and futures are deeply affected by traditional history. An understanding of this tradition is important for this paper because of the dynamics it creates in bi-cultural marriages.

Traditional Chinese culture values males more than females, and women are viewed as inferior. For the past 2,000 years, women were on society's margin and their natures and roles were not recognized. Their souls and belongings were always in a dependent, inferior position because they were born inferior. The Chinese saying 不孝有三, 無後為大 means: "If a man marry and does not have a son, he does not honor his parents." This is the most disrespectful reality in a family because only sons could carry on property, power, and the family name.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yin Ling Meng, "Women, Belief, and Marriage," *Nanjing Theological Review* 8 (June 2004): 17-18.

In the traditional Chinese culture, people consider a handicapped son better than a beautiful daughter. In the ancient society, some very poor families killed their newborn daughters to have sons because they lacked enough food for multiple children.<sup>2</sup> This killing newborn daughter still exists in mainland China. This paper's author and wife visited their parents in China several years ago. In the city of Zhong Shan, more than twenty little girls were listed on the daily newspaper for adoption because their parents abandoned them. The older generations believe only sons can carry on the family name, and China's one child policy accentuated the problem because Chinese couples prefer sons to daughters.

In traditional Chinese culture, women's lives are restricted to their houses and their daily life to their families. The Chinese proverb, 禮記: “男子居外, 女子居內” means, in Chinese tradition: “Men are responsible for things outside the house or family, and women are responsible for things within the house or family.” 教以婦德, 婦言, 婦容, 婦工 means women are not encouraged to have their own personalities and social status and 女子無才便是德 means women need not be educated. 子婦無私貨, 無私蓄, 無私器, 不敢私假, 不敢私與 translates as women do not possess property or money. They are fed by others, including the families they marry into, and their names are not listed in their father's family records. They focus their energy and attention on their husbands, and 婦人, 從人者也, 幼從父兄, 嫁從夫, 夫死從子 means women are always

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 173.

followers. They follow their fathers and brothers at home, their husbands after marriage, and their sons after their husbands' deaths.<sup>3</sup>

Traditional Chinese culture places women in a position of social worthlessness, and they have no place in the broad society outside the home. The culture maintains a wall so high that women cannot enter or participate in mainstream society, and marriage and family are the only space for women. This marriage model has existed for centuries, but it is inappropriate and unworkable in American society.

### **How Traditional Chinese Culture Impacts Marriage**

Women are inferior and marriage is relatively unimportant in traditional Chinese culture: 五倫: 君臣, 父子, 兄弟, 夫婦, 朋友. There are five ethical principles in ancient Chinese society, and they emphasize the priority of human relationship. First is the king and royal official, second is the father and son, third is brothers, fourth is the husband and wife, and fifth is friends. The relationship of husband and wife is less important than the brother relationship. 兄弟如手足, 妻子如衣服 means brothers are members of the body that cannot be replaced, but wives are like clothing that can be changed on a whim.<sup>4</sup>

Parents, especially the father, have absolute authority over family members, and the children's marriage arrangement is totally under parental control: 父母之命 . . . 指腹為婚. Some parents arrange marriages before the children are born,<sup>5</sup> and this created

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 173-174.

<sup>4</sup> Enoch Wan, *Questions and Answers about Marriage* (Lomita, CA: Overseas Campus Magazine, 2000), 28.

<sup>5</sup> Kwok Leung Lam, "Marriage Relationship in China," *Behold* 2, no. 4 (November 2002): 4.

many tragic stories. A famous love story, “The Butterfly Lovers,” reflects this type of marriage. Liang Shan-bo could not marry the woman he loved, and he died. Zhu Ying-tai could not marry Liang Shan-bo, the man she loved, because her father had arranged marriage with a wealthy man. She committed suicide by jumping into Liang Shan-bo’s grave.

These traditions influence twenty-first century Chinese in America and create significant problems. For example, a congregant in the author’s church was a state trooper. He did not marry at a traditional age because his culture required he follow his parents’ direction. He married at age thirty-five years when his parents arranged marriage with a sixteen-year-old girl.

Marriage continues the family line and if a wife cannot bear sons, the husband may marry a second wife or keep a concubine. If the second wife or concubine cannot bear a son, he can marry a third wife or keep another concubine. In ancient China some men had several wives or many concubines, and this created many family difficulties, arguments, and domestic fights. Usually the first wife had great authority over the other wives and concubines, and she could kill them.

The author has a friend who is the son of his father’s second wife or concubine because his father could not have a son by his first wife, and the first wife allowed her husband to have a son by another woman. Another friend avoided marriage even though he was under great pressure from his parents. He asked the author, “Can I get married and not have children?” Great relief came to his face when told he could. He and his wife now have a daughter, and he wrote to his father asking for forgiveness because he does



not have a son. The cultural traditions continue forcefully in today's culture. The traditional alternative, however, is impractical in a bi-cultural American marriage because one member of the couple is influenced by American concepts of individualism, freedom, and marriage roles. Premarital counseling methods must take these realities into account.

### **The No-marriage Solution**

A second proposed solution to the problem is to avoid marriage. Paul advocated this solution, "To the unmarried and widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry (1 Cor. 7:8-9). Paul was single, but he recognized this solution was impractical because he wrote: "For it is better to marry than to be inflamed with passion" (1 Cor. 7:9).

There was a group of Christian community at Corinth and they practiced celibacy.<sup>6</sup> Paul acknowledges that some people will "burn." This is an acceptance of the power of sexual passions. It concedes marriage and sexual relations in marriage as acceptable, but primarily as a way of avoiding the dangers of sexual immorality. The image of burning is used to represent the passion; the concession of marriage is because of the dangers that such passion, if not fulfilled in marriage, will lead to sexual immorality.<sup>7</sup>

Harrison, Mare, Harris, and Boice discusses Paul's postscript: "If the solution is such that these persons cannot control their sexual desires, they should marry. The

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<sup>6</sup> William Loader, *Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 166-167.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 165.

explanation Paul gives is that it is better to get married than be inflamed with sexual desire, which is hard to control outside marriage.”<sup>8</sup> The Roman Catholic Church under Pope Siricus prescribed celibacy in AD 185 for all priests, and a council at Carthage in AD 390 demanded chastity for bishops, priests, and deacons.<sup>9</sup> The result of celibacy in the church may help explain contemporary scandals among contemporary Catholic clergymen.

The celibacy or non-marriage choice may be acceptable to some Chinese who have said to the author of this paper that Chinese women do not experience sexual desire nor pleasure. S. A. Lewin and John Gilmore express a contrary view:

Throughout the centuries, scientists have studied the problem of whether man or woman had greater desire or greater capacity. . . . Hippocrates, the father of medicine, was credited with the statement that men enjoy coitus more but women’s enjoyment lasts longer. Other observations were added through the years but no one ever claimed that women had no sex feelings whatsoever . . . Modern scientists are agreed that the sex impulse in men and women is about equal.<sup>10</sup>

A pastor may suggest a couple not marry because their children will suffer from their intercultural marriage. H. Normal Wright believes the greatest problem faced by interracial couples is the difficulty rearing offspring because the children may be marginalized between two different cultures. He suggests the adjustments faced by the

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<sup>8</sup> Everett F. Harrison, W. Harold Mare, Murray J. Harris, and James Montgomery Boice, *Romans through Galatians*, vol. 10 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 229.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), 224.

<sup>10</sup> S. A. Lewin and John Gilmore, *Sex without Fear* (New York: Medical Research, 1960), 54.

couple in an interracial marriage can be insignificant in comparison to those faced by children of such a marriage.<sup>11</sup> Wright quotes Albert Gordon who writes,

Persons anticipating cross-marriages, however much in love they may be, have an important obligation to unborn children. It is not enough to say that such children will have to solve their own problems "when the time comes." Intermarriage frequently produces major psychological problems that are not readily soluble for the children of the intermarried. Living as we do in a world that emphasizes the importance of family and religious affiliation, it is not likely that the child will come through the maze of road blocks without doing some damage to himself. Children may be the recipient of cruel remarks and other unpleasantness. People can be hostile and cruel, and these factors must be considered.<sup>12</sup>

Although marriage between a bi-cultural couple is not interracial, some of the same cultural dynamics may occur. Some believe this presents sufficient reason to avoid bi-cultural marriages.

A pastor may suggest a bi-cultural couple not marry because the couple does not speak a common language. Language is a communication vehicle, and if the couple cannot communicate, their marriage may be threatened. This paper's author knows several wives who did not speak English because they came from China, and the husbands spoke only English. The first few years were very difficult for them, even to a point where they considered divorce. Wright discusses this issue:

Communication and language problems do not just involve language. In the beginning of a relationship struggles to understand the other person are accepted and even intriguing, whereas later they become a major problem. In speaking different languages there is more possibility that messages can be distorted or not fully understood. A positive in one language may be offensive in another. A title in one language and culture may have a much different interpretation in another. The humor of one culture is not necessarily the humor of another culture.

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<sup>11</sup> H. Norman Wright, *The Premarital Counseling Handbook* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 247.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Language can affect the balance of power in a relationship. Usually, the person speaking his own language in his own country (and his partner is not) has advantage and power. The more fluent person has more influence . . . and the person living in the foreign land soon begins to feel isolated, outnumbered, and lonely.<sup>13</sup>

A pastor has no authority to insist that a couple not marry, but the pastor may propose this alternative using the rationale discussed in this section. This paper's author believes, however, that many couples will seek out a more accommodating minister or decide to live together. A pastoral rejection may also cause the couple to leave the church. For example, a couple asked the author to officiate at their wedding. During the discussion, the couple said they were living together. When the author confronted them on this arrangement, the female said there was nothing wrong. When he decided not to officiate at their wedding, they were very angry and never returned to the church. The "don't get married" suggestion is not practical, compassionate, or realistic, and is an inadequate alternative proposal.

### **Marriage for Convenience or Wrong Reasons**

Another unacceptable solution is marriage without premarital counseling built on convenience or wrong motivations and pursued for mixed reasons. Premarital counseling may unmask the motives and reasons. The author served as a pastor in Hong Kong and America for thirty years and realizes that many people have wrong motivations for marriage. The worst motivation is marriage for citizenship. For example, the author received a telephone call from a Chinese woman who asked him to officiate at her

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 248-249.

wedding. He asked her motivation, age, her fiancé's age, and where she and the man resided. She was around thirty and the man was about sixty-five years old. She was from China and the man was from America. The author suspected her motivation was to marry an American so she could stay in America. He rejected her request based on his assumption and believed they would ultimately divorce. He also thought she would leave her husband when she received her American citizenship.

The author knew another person who sought a way to stay in America. He had a good working position and his wife was a Chinese physician, but he divorced his wife because he wanted to stay in America. He asked the author to introduce him to a Chinese-American woman, but the author refused and he married a woman with a slight mental disability. In another example, several parents came to our church while visiting their relatives in Portland, Oregon. They asked the author to find Chinese American friends for their children so they could marry them and come to America.

A Chinese newspaper in Portland, Oregon, prints a column for people seeking marriage. Many women put their pictures and personal information in the column, and some have very good educational backgrounds. The author knows a woman who lived in China and posted her picture and information in the newspaper. She found a Chinese American man to marry, and this prompted many of her friends in China to use the newspaper as a marriage maker.

This marriage solution is almost never successful. It may end in divorce because the persons get married for wrong, sinful reasons. Marriage is holy, instituted by God,

and people should honor and respect marriage (Heb. 13:4).<sup>14</sup> David Augsburger writes in

*Cherishable: Love and Marriage*,

Is marriage a private action of two persons in love, or a public act of two pledging a contract? Neither, it is a something other. Very much other! Basically, the Christian view of marriage is not that it is primarily or essentially a binding legal and social contract. The Christian understands marriage as a covenant made under God and in the presence of fellow members of the Christian family. Such a pledge endures, not because of the force of law or the fear of its sanctions, but because an unconditional covenant has been made. A covenant is more solemn, more binding, more permanent than any legal contract.<sup>15</sup>

Wright states,

[Marriage is a] total commitment of two people to the person of Jesus Christ and to one another. It is a commitment in which there is no holding back of anything. Marriage is a pledge of mutual fidelity; it is a partnership of mutual subordination. A Christian marriage is similar to a solvent, a freeing up of the man and woman to be themselves and become all that God intends for them to become. Marriage is the refining process that God will use to have us develop into the man or woman He wants us to become.<sup>16</sup>

Marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman intended by God as a permanent bond, though they come from different backgrounds. Marriage is not just a wedding in a church; instead, it ought to reflect the bond of love and not convenience.

This section as described alternative solutions for bi-cultural marriage without premarital counseling. Conformity to traditional Chinese marriage behaviors and culture is one alternative, but it is not acceptable or workable in a bi-cultural relationship where one member of the couple is influenced by American individualism, freedom, and

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<sup>14</sup> Scriptures in this paper are quoted from the *New International Version* (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> David Augsburger, *Cherishable: Love and Marriage* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 16.

<sup>16</sup> Wright, *The Premarital Counseling Handbook*, 140.

marriage roles. The no-marriage solution denies the reality of sexual drive and may disrupt or ruin the pastoral relationship with the couple. Marriage for convenience or wrong reasons is based on questionable motives, often leads to divorce, and does not involve premarital counseling. The next section provides an alternative: premarital counseling based on a biblical view of partnership in marriage founded on Old and New Testament values.

### SECTION 3

#### THE THESIS

The thesis of this paper is that a premarital counseling manual can be developed for couples that include a traditional Chinese Christian and a American Chinese Christian in a bi-cultural relationship. For this paper, traditional Chinese Christians are influenced deeply by traditional Chinese culture, and their behavior and cultural patterns are relatively unaffected by American culture. American Chinese Christians are raised in America and embrace American culture or have adopted American behaviors and cultural patterns. The manual uses the theological concepts of partnership, mutual support, and submission based on Adam and Eve's relationship and concepts presented by Jesus and Paul.

#### **God Created Male and Female in His Own Image**

The writer of Genesis reports that God created the heavens, the earth, and human beings (Gen. 1:1-31): "God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.' So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:26-27). God blessed humans after He created male and female and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen. 1:28). God originated the family as a partnership institution at the beginning of the human race:



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 bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.” For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. (Gen. 2:18-25)

The Scripture describes the origin of the family, and God gave an inspired record of the first marriage and the first family. The writer of Genesis asserts that God created humanity with a social nature that craved companionship (Gen. 2:18). Adam required a “helper” and a companion because God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18-20). This need was fulfilled by the creation of Eve who shared her life with Adam. From the beginning, the social needs of both men and women were handled through the institution of marriage.

Eve was a “helper,” but she was not created as Adam’s servant. The one who is able to help is stronger than the one who needs help. “Because of your father’s God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breast and womb” (Gen. 49:25). In the Old Testament God always appear as the “helper” to the Israeli. He helps the Israelites to defeat their enemies. “Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your

enemies will cower before you, and you will trample down their high places” (Deut. 33:29). In the New Testament the Lord Jesus also describes as a helper to the believer. “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me” (Heb 13:6)?

Augustine wrote, “God did not take a bone from Adam’s head from which to create Eve that she might be above him, nor a bone from his foot that she might be beneath him, but from his side that she might be beside him.”<sup>1</sup> The most valuable thing for man and woman in marriage is to find a lifelong companion who will be a most precious helper. The writer of Ecclesiastes suggests that two person partnerships are better than one person alone:

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:  
If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Eccl. 4:9-12)

Because partners bring unique strengths to the union, they can support each other rather than be subjugated by an overly dependent relationship.

Some Christians may interpret Genesis 2:18-23 to say that a woman is second to a man, but this Scripture does not support this teaching. The author of Genesis 1:27 writes that “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” The image of God includes the Trinitarian relationship of the godhead. There should not, therefore, be dominant and submissive roles for man and woman because the relationships within the Triune God are neither dominant nor

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<sup>1</sup> Cleveland McDonald, *Creating a Successful Christian Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975) 19.

submissive. Mary Evans writes in *Woman in the Bible*, “No hint of subordination of one sex to the other can be found”<sup>2</sup> in Genesis 1:27. She continues, “What is clear is that Genesis 1 gives us no reason to think that woman participated in the image of God in any way different than man.”<sup>3</sup>

Jack and Judith Balswick write, “Empowerment is the active, intentional process of helping another person to become empowered. The person who is empowered has been equipped, strengthened, built up, matured, and has gained skill because of the encouraging support of the other.”<sup>4</sup> The marriage partnership and relationship empower the couple, and the partners support and help each other. This emulates God’s role as a helper: “I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Psa. 121:1-2).

Gilbert Bilezikian supports the supportive partnership character of marriage in *Beyond Sex Roles* and asserts that nothing in the text says males were to govern females. He writes that the Genesis 1 account of creation does not assert a “disparity of rank or function between men and women. . . . They share equally the God-assigned task of creation rulership without any intimation of role distinctions.”<sup>5</sup> This interpretation provides theological support for marriage partnership endorsed in this paper. The helpful

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<sup>2</sup> Mary J. Evans, *Woman in the Bible* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>4</sup> Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 26.

partnership provided through marital relationships reflects God's role and the Trinity's unity of persons.

The cultural subordination of women occurred after the fall of Adam and Eve. Sin introduces the subordination and reflects the reality of the curse, not God's choice for the marital relationship. The perpetuation of subordination of women reflects sin and sin's domination in the world, not God's plan for the relationship of men and women. Any continuation of subordination is acquiescence to sin's control and should be resisted by Christians in marriage.<sup>6</sup> The goal of this paper is partnership facilitated through premarital counseling.

### **Jesus on Marriage and Divorce**

Divorce was not a judgment decided by a law court in biblical times; it was an independent action taken by a husband against his wife (Deut. 24:1-4, Matt. 5:31-32). The husband's absolute right to divorce his wife was taken for granted by nearly all Jews. A husband could divorce his wife by writing a "bill of divorce and put it in her hand and send her out of his house" (Deut. 24:1).<sup>7</sup> The author of Matthew 19:3-12 and Mark 10:1-12 recorded that the Pharisees questioned Jesus about the divorce. Matthew reports,

Some Pharisees came to Him to test Him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," He replied, "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

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 54-58.

<sup>7</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, ed., *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, vol. 1 of *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 262.

God has joined together, let man not separate.” “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?” Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.” The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.” Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.” (Matt. 19:3-9)

The New American Standard Bible<sup>8</sup> translates the word “any and every reason” to “any cause,” and David Instone-Brewer discusses these issues in his book, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church*.<sup>9</sup> A few decades before Jesus the Hillelites, a rabbinical group, invented a new form of divorce called the “any cause” divorce. By the time of Jesus, this any cause divorce was so popular that almost no one relied on the literal Old Testament grounds for divorce

Instone-Brewer writes that Moses allowed divorce for “a cause of immorality,” or, more literally, “a thing of nakedness.”<sup>10</sup> Most Jews recognized that this meant adultery, but the Hillelites wondered why Moses added the word “thing” or “cause” when he only needed to use the word “immorality.” They decided the extra word implied another ground for divorce: divorce for a cause. They argued that anything could be a cause and that divorce was allowed for adultery or any other cause.

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<sup>8</sup> *New American Standard Bible* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1971).

<sup>9</sup> David Instone-Brewer, “What God Has Joined: What Does the Bible Really Teach about Divorce,” *Christianity Today* 51, no. 10 (October 2007): 28.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Instone-Brewer reports that another group of rabbis, the Shammaites, disagreed with this interpretation. They said Moses' words were a single phrase that referred to divorce for immorality, and they concluded that any cause divorce was invalid. Instone-Brewer claims that the opposing views were well known to first-century Jews, and the Pharisees wanted to know Jesus' opinion. "Is it lawful to divorce your wife for any cause" (Matt. 19:3)? they asked. In other words: Is any cause divorce lawful?

Jesus responded negatively to their question. Although he did not condemn the original meaning, he did condemn the newly invented any cause divorce. Jesus agreed with the Shammaites that the phrase did not mean divorce was allowable for "immorality" and for "any cause," but that it referred to no divorce "except for immorality."

This may have shocked the crowd and the disciples because it meant men could not get a divorce whenever they wanted it.<sup>11</sup> It also meant that all divorced people were not actually divorced if they had any cause divorces. Matthew, Mark, and Luke summarize the debate in one sentence: Any divorced person who remarried was committing adultery because they were still married (Matt. 19:9, Mark 10:11-12, Luke 16:18).

Jesus did not question the law when the Pharisees asked him about the divorce provisions of the Mosaic Law. His answer was based on first principles, and he said Moses' permission to divorce accommodated human weakness and "hardness of heart"

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<sup>11</sup> John Temple Bristow, *What Paul Really Said about Women* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991).

(Matt. 19:8). Any cause divorce was an attempt to order a society that disregarded God's standards, but it was not what God intended in marriage. God's design was that marriage be an unbroken, lifelong union (Matt. 19:6, 1 Cor. 7:10-11). A distinction exists between the absolute will of God and provisions that take into account human sinfulness and are intended to limit and control sin's effects. Moses' bill of divorce falls into the second category. The rabbis mistook God's divorce provision as His approval of divorce in general.<sup>12</sup>

The instruction given in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was intended to regulate divorce practices not to legitimize divorce for any reason. When a husband divorced his wife, the Law of Moses required him to give her a bill of divorce and forbade him from remarrying her if she became the wife of another man who later divorced her or died (Deut. 24:2-4). The "abomination" (Deut. 24:4) was not divorce but remarrying the first wife. The Law was primarily aimed at preventing what the author of Deuteronomy considered an abomination.<sup>13</sup>

Jesus said that divorce constituted adultery except in the case of unchastity (Matt. 5:31-32). When God unites husband and wife, He intends for them to stay together forever: "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6). From God's perspective divorce is like amputating an arm or leg. A person should not leave

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<sup>12</sup> D. A. Carson, Walter W. Wessel, and Walter L. Liefeld, *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 711.

<sup>13</sup> Arnold, *Illustrated Bible*, 262.

wife or husband because the person has not adjusted to some unpleasant characteristic of marriage life. The exception is adultery (Matt. 19:9, 5:31-32; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:2-12).

Jesus' high view of marriage and his inclusion of women in discipleship and ministry (Matt. 26:6-13; Luke 10:38-42, 24:22) are based on the creation ideal that existed before the fall. Jesus included women in his conversation and travels in a culture that denigrated and subjugated women. Bilezikian writes, "Jesus solidly based his definitions of persons and his directives for male/female relations in the creation ideal. As a result, He fearlessly demonstrated in His actions, teachings, and example His rejection of the male-rulership principle."<sup>14</sup> Jesus' view of women and marriage provides biblical support for marriage partnership endorsed in this paper.

### **Paul and the Marriage Partnership**

Craig S. Keener writes that the Roman aristocracy believed its power base was threatened in Paul's era by social changes. These changes included the upward mobility of former slaves, foreigners, women, and other social groups. They were uneasy about "new religions from the east that seemed to challenge standard values like the honorable man's sober guidance of his family."<sup>15</sup> These foreign religions came under the suspicion of upper-class Roman conservatives.

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<sup>14</sup> Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, 82.

<sup>15</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 139-141.



The Roman elite believed Jews in Rome represented a foreign superstition that might subvert the “morals of virtuous Roman women.”<sup>16</sup> Soon the success of Christian evangelism created a similar threat, as Keener writes:<sup>17</sup>

Judaism seems to have appealed especially to women—who did not have to contemplate the pain of circumcision at their conversion—and their willingness to convert seems to have irritated Roman men, who expected their wives to follow their own beliefs. The turning of a wife from her husband’s religion was viewed as an especially subversive ploy on the part of foreign religions. . . . The conversion of wives to Christianity thus posed a threat to upper-class men, and through them could provoke increased hostility toward Christians. Ephesians 5:22-33, unlike 1 Peter 3:1-7, deals only with Christian spouses; but the behavior of Christian families would no doubt affect public perceptions about Christianity. Paul did not want the church to be viewed as an immoral mystery cult.

The gains of women in ancient society had introduced new tensions into Greco-Roman life in general and probably into some marriages as well, due to the greater flexibility of possible role expectations now available. This meant that religions that were thought to ignore traditional roles for women would be viewed as threatening by the conservative male establishment.<sup>18</sup>

The aristocratic discomfort and antifeminist rhetoric increased during Paul’s time.

The Roman male dissatisfaction with the freedoms they believed were increasingly given to their wives produced marital conflicts. They saw family defined by relationships of subordination rather than blood relationship.<sup>19</sup>

The Letter of Ephesians was sent from Rome to Asian Christians, not to Rome and the opponents of Christianity, but it does appear to address Roman male concerns

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 141-142.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 142-143.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 145-146.

about women's roles. Paul encouraged Christians to live in a way that could silence some of the objections raised against the faith by Romans and other groups. Keener writes,

Paul was contributing to a cultural defense of Christianity that would hopefully gain it a better hearing in Roman society. When he had written to the Romans, he had encouraged their support of civil authorities; now that he himself was in Rome, the issues that would contribute to a lifestyle defense of Christianity had no doubt become even clearer to him.

There is thus reason to think that Paul, awaiting trial in Rome, would have been contemplating strategies to appeal to the powerbrokers in Rome whose decisions could set precedents for policies toward Christians elsewhere in the empire. . . . Stressing the wife's submission would be important for evangelizing resistant elements in the Roman world and for resisting progressive culture temptations for wives to affirm too much independence at the expense of their marriage. This strategy makes sense if, as we suspect, it would not have alienated any other groups from the gospel.<sup>20</sup>

Paul was dealing with a pressing issue that affected a specific audience. He did not focus on the subordination issue to congregations where wives may have shared leadership with their husbands in their homes. Paul addresses some of these issues in his letter to Ephesus.

### **The Spirit and Submission**

The principle of Christian submission governs the community life of the church and social relationships. Paul selects the most conspicuous of these relationships and claims they are transformed when controlled by obedience to Christ. He deals with wives and husbands (Eph. 5:21-33), with children and parents (6:1-4), and with slaves and masters (6:5-9). The teachings in Colossians 3:18-4:1 provide a close parallel. Commentators discuss whether Ephesians 5:21, "be subject to one another out of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 147-148.

reverence for Christ,” represents the conclusion of the text’s previous section or the start of a new one. While grammatically it may be attached to verse 20, its content connects more naturally with what follows.<sup>21</sup>

In Ephesians 5:15-20, Paul discusses wise and spirit-filled living and understands submission in verse 21 as a spiritual attitude. The submission described in Ephesians 5:21, like the worship of 5:19-20, flows from being filled with God’s Spirit (Eph. 5:18).<sup>22</sup> Paul writes,

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Eph. 5:15-21)

The presence of the Spirit leads believers to worship by confessing their faith that God is sovereign over the universe and will accomplish Christ’s purposes. When Paul says that the Spirit moves people to “give thanks for everything,” this may have been acceptable to Jewish readers who learned about God’s providence in the Scripture. Another expression of Spirit-filledness, however, affects a Christian’s interpersonal contact including family members. Keener writes, “Those who are filled with the Spirit will also be ‘submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ’ (vs. 21) and this mutual submission will be expressed in specific household relationships (5:21-6:9).”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> A. Skevington Wood and Arthur A. Rupprecht, *Ephesians through Philemon*, vol. 11 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed, Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 75.

<sup>22</sup> Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives*, 158.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

### **Wifely Submission and Husbands' Love**

Paul writes that wives should submit to their husbands: “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” (Eph. 5:22-24).

As described earlier, the Roman aristocracy and ordinary Roman citizens considered females inferior. According to Keener,

Traditional Roman writers portrayed the feminine ideal as supportive and subservient. Roman inscriptions similarly indicate that women were usually honored for their roles as mothers, wives, or daughters, even through they sometimes made other contributions to society. Part of the male ideal of women’s submission was that they be meek, quiet, and apparently what we would consider “shy” and “Self-conscious.” . . . The submission of wives was standard in ancient culture. Roman law gave men binding authority over their wives and unmarried daughters.<sup>24</sup>

Keener writes that Egyptian and Jewish cultures had the same opinion:

Marriage contracts from first and second century BC Egypt stipulate specifically that the wife must be submissive to her husband. . . . The few extant Jewish writers from the first century are at least equally insistent. The Jewish philosopher Philo assumes that the masculine rules the feminine, and describes the wife’s proper duty to her husband in language of slave service. Josephus attributes to “the law” the view that the woman must submit to her husband . . . for the authority has been given to the man. Most Jewish writers seems to have shared this view. . . . The later rabbis also recognized the husband’s authority over his wife as standard.<sup>25</sup>

Submission to a husband was part of what it meant to be a good woman in ancient society. Paul does not eliminate the social structuring of submission. He responded to a specific cultural issue for the sake of the gospel, and his words should not be applied to

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 164-165.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 165-166.

all cultures. Paul suggests Christian women in his day should conform to the general social ideal without contesting it.<sup>26</sup>

After Paul exhorts wives to submit to their husbands, he devotes more space and exhorts the husbands to love their wives. Paul's instructions are more demanding for husbands because the husbands are told to sacrifice more for their wives than wives do for their husbands. He instructs the husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her:

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 this 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. (Eph. 5:22-33)

Greco-Roman society recognized that wives had obligations to their husbands, but not husbands to their wives. Paul introduced a revolutionary approach to marriage and equalized the rights of wives and husbands. The Greek word for love used for the husbands is the highest and distinctively Christian word for love. Paul intends that Christian men love their wives as Christ loved the church and died for her, and he suggests husbands should love their wives and die for them as necessary. This is the ultimate submission because it was through love that Christ died for the church.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 170-171.

<sup>27</sup> Wood and Rupprecht, *Ephesians through Philemon*, 76.

Paul writes that “no man ever hates his own body” (Eph. 5:29) but looks after, cares for, and cherishes it. He provides it with everything in everyway and supplies it with food to maintain its health. This is how Christ loves the church. Paul applies the same principle and tells husbands they should love their wives because Christ loved the church as living parts of His body: “for we are members of His body” (Eph. 5:30).

### **Mutual Submission**

The writer of this paper believes the submission of Ephesians 5:22 is connected to the submission of verse 21 and what follows. The overarching theme is: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Paul then describes the wife’s submissive role and the husband’s submissive responsibilities: “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and died for her” (Eph. 5:21-22). It is legitimate to read Ephesians 5:22 as: “Wives, submit to your husbands,” if the reader understands that verse 22 is an example of mutual submission (5:21). Wives should submit to their husbands because Christians should submit to one another.<sup>28</sup>

Paul believes that Christians should be submissive to each other and not seek their own interests, and he advocates mutual submission in Ephesians 5:21-33. Wives respect their husbands (Eph. 5:33) out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21). Husbands should love their wives as Christ loves the church and died for her. The church’s love for Christ is expressed in submission and obedience, and submission must be done out of “reverence for Christ.” Wives and husbands have a heavenly Lord: “Since you know that He who is

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<sup>28</sup> Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives*, 169.

both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with Him” (Eph. 6:9).

No one should be lord over others; rather all submit mutually in Christ.

The concept of mutual submission described by Paul, the elevated status Christ gives woman in the gospels, and the partnership principle of Genesis provide a biblical foundation for this paper. The author of this paper believes premarital counseling with a bi-cultural couple can incorporate these ideas effectively. This paper provides a manual for pastors who face the challenge of premarital counseling with bi-cultural couples.

## SECTION 4

### THE PROJECT

- **Project Description:** The written statement describes the biblical basis of marriage and the traditional Chinese perspective of marriage. The second component is a practical manual for pastoral use in premarital counseling for bi-cultural traditional Chinese and American Chinese Christian couples. The manual is grounded on information in the written statement, and describes how to incorporate the biblical teaching into pastoral premarital counseling.
- **Thesis-based Practical Solution:** The manual provides a practical solution dictated by the thesis. Chapter one describes the importance of premarital counseling and love-based marriage that is different from the traditional Chinese marriage designed to continue the family line. Chapter two presents God's plan for marriage exemplified in Adam and Eve's pre-fall partnership (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:18-25), Jesus' teaching on marriage (Matt. 19:3-12), and the Apostle Paul's concept of mutual submission (Eph. 5:22-33). Chapter three discusses bi-cultural marriage between traditional Chinese and American Chinese Christians. Chapter four provides suggestions for pastoral counselors, and the supplement offers biblically based materials for use in counseling sessions.



- **Alternatives Solutions Identified and Evaluated:** Section two of the written statement presents three alternative practical solutions and evaluates them. The alternative solutions presented include traditional Chinese, the no-marriage solution, and marriage for convenience or wrong reasons. These solutions are described and deemed inadequate.
- **Rationale for Selected Solution Explicated:** The manual's approach to pastoral premarital counseling bi-cultural couples was selected based on a biblical foundation and scholarly support. The manual format was chosen because interested pastors would have a ready resource in a published manual.
- **Claims Supported and Nuanced:** The written statement and the manual are biblically and theologically sound with documentation included in each.

## SECTION 5

### PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

- **Project's Goal:** The thesis of this paper is that a premarital counseling manual can be developed for couples that includes a traditional Chinese Christian and an American Chinese Christian in a bi-cultural relationship. The project's goal is the development of the manual.
- **Project's Audience:** This project's audience is Chinese pastors who conduct premarital counseling with couples in bi-cultural relationships. Bi-cultural relationship is defined as a relationship between a traditional Chinese Christian and an American Chinese Christian.
- **Project Scope and Content:** The manual has four chapters and eight supplements. Chapter content includes the importance of premarital counseling, biblical views of marriage, American Chinese marriage, and adjustment and preparation. The supplement includes a personal data sheet, important questions for premarital counseling, questions about marriage and love, questions about Chinese perspectives on marriage, questions about God's plan for marriage, Jesus' teaching on marriage, questions designed to help couples apply the Apostle Paul's teachings to the marriage relationship, and God's blueprint for marriage.

- **Projected Budget:** \$2,000 for contact with potential publishers, manuscript preparations and delivery, and potential travel to publishers' offices. \$10,000 for self-publication and distribution if no publisher accepts the manuscript for publication.
- **Marketing Strategy:** The author will research potential publishers and use their resources for the publication and distribution process. If no publisher accepts the manuscript, the author will self-publish and distribute the book in printed and electronic formats.
- **Ongoing Maintenance:** No ongoing maintenance is envisioned.
- **On-going evaluation:** George Fox Evangelical Seminary's doctoral staff will conduct the first evaluation. Evaluation will follow by potential publishers. If no publisher accepts the manuscript, the author will self-publish and secure reaction and critique by book purchasers.
- **Standards of Publication:** The book is written in English for use by English speaking clergy engaged in pastoral premarital counseling with bi-cultural couples. The book will be available in printed and electronic format with copyright protection.
- **Action Plan:** The author will use the book in premarital counseling with bi-cultural couples from traditional Chinese Christian and American Chinese Christian backgrounds. The author will use the book with his congregation for discussion about partnership in marriage, support, mutual submission, and conflict resolution in

bi-cultural marriages. The book will be available in printed and electronic formats for use by other Chinese pastors.

## SECTION 6

### POSTSCRIPT

- Effectiveness of the Completed Practical Solution: The project will be evaluated as a doctoral project by professors at George Fox Evangelical Seminary. The author will submit the book to a publisher for evaluation and possible publication. The published book will include a response device to seek reader reaction and evaluation. The number of copies sold will be monitored.
- Reflection on Project Development Process: The author submitted the first three chapters of the thesis to his advisor, Dr. Rand Michael, who determined the project is a Track 02 practical project. The Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program, Loren Kerns, concurred. The author followed the standard format for LEC Track 02.

The partnership in marriage and mutual submission concepts differ greatly from traditional Chinese patriarchal cultural expectations. The author reflected on this reality and responded by including a detailed analysis of Adam and Eve's pre-fall partnership and the views of Jesus and Paul. This provides biblical foundation for counseling bi-cultural couples.

- Triumphs and Shortcomings: The author contacted several bookstores and asked if the storeowners knew of any books on this topic. They said they had never seen a publication on this subject. The author inquired at several seminaries and universities

and found no book on the topic. The paper, therefore, fills a gap in the literature. A shortcoming of this project is that it deals only with traditional Chinese and American Chinese couples. Many other cross cultural couples could benefit from similar publications.

- **New Learning Gained from the Project:** The author found the study and writing very useful because they clarified his understanding that God made males and females equal, and God advocates mutual submission. Chinese cultural history spans thousands of years with strengths and weaknesses. Male dominance is a weakness and non-biblical. Husbands are still considered more important than wives in Chinese society. God created man and woman in God's image and likeness, and they are equal before God. This is a very important message for traditional Chinese and American Chinese Christians.
- **Recommendations for Further Topic Development and Research:** This project focused on traditional Chinese and American Chinese bi-cultural couples. The author provides premarital counseling for couples from Chinese and Vietnamese bi-cultural backgrounds. A book of this type would be useful for pastoral premarital counseling with these couples and others from different traditions.
- **New Problems Discovered and Open Questions:** A new problem the study surfaced for the author is premarital counseling for bi-cultural couples in which one is non-

Christian. As non-Christians they have no affinity for biblical teachings. This is not the subject of this thesis, but it opens a new area of study.

Five practical issues remain open for discussion including communication, finances, in-law relationships, wedding preparations, and Christian home life. For example, communication and financial issues affect marital happiness, but traditional Chinese husband do not usually discuss these subjects with their wives. Husbands control discussions and finances. These practical issues merit review and attention.

## APPENDIX

### A PASTORAL PREMARITAL COUNSELING MANUAL FOR CHINESE BI-CULTURAL COUPLES



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## INTRODUCTION

This manual can be used by pastors; there are a total of five sessions consisting of two hours in each session. It starts with Appendix A. The pastor should ask the couples to provide their personal data before the premarital counseling sessions begin.

After the pastor has finished the materials in Chapter One, he may ask the couples to work on Appendix B and Appendix C. Each person works on his or her own questions. After they have finished the pastor may ask them to share their answers together. By asking them the questions the pastor is helping them to understand their marriage and they may also discover any potential problems that they may have.

It is the same for the following Chapters and Appendixes. The pastor may ask the couples to do their homework after the fourth session. Since this is the last Appendix and it covers the whole premarital counseling material, the couples may answer Appendix H at home and bring it back for the last session. From the questions in the Appendixes the pastors and the couples may find out that they still need more time. Then the pastors may schedule a few more sessions with the couple.

The following is the “checklist” of important topics. This might help pastors during the actual interview when they are doing premarital counseling. This checklist might summarize some of the material in the Manual. Pastors might forget some points if they have to rely on their memory after having read the manual. The checklist could prompt their memory as they proceed through the interview.

## CHECKLIST

[illegible]

## CHAPTER 1

### THE IMPORTANCE OF PREMARITAL COUNSELING

The purpose of this manual is to prepare ministers for premarital counseling with cross-cultural couples that include a traditional Chinese and an American Chinese Christian. Premarital counseling is an important topic and widely accepted in the United States, but this is not the case among traditional Chinese persons living in the United States.

In this manual, traditional Chinese are influenced deeply by traditional Chinese culture, thought, and teachings. These individuals may be new immigrants or visitors to America, and their behaviors and thought patterns are not greatly affected by American culture. American Chinese were born or raised in America, or came to America when very young. They have adopted American culture or are greatly influenced by it. Bi-cultural identifies couples that include a traditional Chinese and an American Chinese person.

Traditional Chinese pay little attention to premarital counseling and may not fully understand the meaning of Christian marriage. When a traditional Chinese person marries an American Chinese, many disagreements and difficulties may develop in their marriage. The couple must make many adjustments in their lives. When two persons come from different cultures, marry, and live together there may be many conflicts

although they are Christians. This manual is designed for pastors who provide premarital counseling for these bi-cultural couples.

In addition, some non-Christian, bi-cultural couples seek marriage in the church. This provides pastors opportunity to discuss biblical perspectives of marriage. Premarital counseling topics can include, for example, the relationship between Adam and Eve and the origin of death and sin. Non-Christian Chinese people consider the word “death” taboo. During a premarital counseling session, however, pastors can explain death’s origin and how individuals can receive Jesus as their personal savior.

### **The Importance of Premarital Counseling**

Wong provides a useful illustration about marriage. He says that marriage is like a precious boat, and married life is a shallow sea with many sunken rocks. Premarital counseling is a pilot. If the couple does not have premarital counseling and lacks a pilot for its boat, it may hit the sunken rocks.

Investigators report that couples who participate in premarital counseling have stronger marriages than those who marry without such preparation. Jason Williams writes,

Researchers at Brigham Young University (BYU) and the University of Minnesota (U of M) analyzed twenty-three studies conducted over the past thirty years and examined the effectiveness of premarital counseling programs. They found that couples who received counseling scored 30 percent higher on tests that rated their level of communication and overall satisfaction with their spouses.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jason Williams, “Talk before Tying the Knot Counseling before Vows Helps Marriages Stay Together,” *Psychology Today*, July/August 2003.

According to Wei Yan Wong in *Herald Monthly*,<sup>2</sup> fewer divorces have occurred in recent years because many couples live together rather marrying, and a number separate before they marry. On the positive side, many churches, Christian organizations, and governments emphasize premarital counseling. The church and Christian organizations use the Bible as the blue print for marriage. They preach about love and the value of marriage, emphasize commitment, and help couples build strong and happy families.

Churches in Grand Rapids, Michigan began a ministry called the Community Marriage Policy (CMP) in 1999. The pastors believed the church is a place to build strong marriages and families and a place not only for wedding ceremonies. They decided that couples who wanted to use church sanctuaries for their wedding ceremonies must attend six premarital counseling classes over four months, and the pastors teach couples the biblical aspects of marriage. The program also includes renewal of existing and troubled marriages, reconciliation of separated couples, and family support groups.<sup>3</sup>

The CMP program was very effective in Michigan, and other churches adopted it. For example, the divorce rate was very high in Modesto, California, and after the churches adopted the CMP program, the divorce rate dropped 40 percent over ten years.<sup>4</sup> Another Tennessee city reported the divorce rate dropped 17% after the churches adopted

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<sup>2</sup> Wei Yan Wong, "The Secret of a Successful Marriage," *Herald Monthly*, October 2004, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Paul James Birch, Stan E. Weed, and Joseph A. Olsen, "Assessing the Impact of Community Marriage Policies on U.S. County Divorce Rates: Executive Summary" (Salt Lake City, UT: Institute for Research and Evaluation, 2004), 1, <http://www.smartmarriages.com/cmp.weed.pdf> (accessed June 3, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Wong, "The Secret of a Successful Marriage."

the same program.<sup>5</sup> Birch, Weed, and Olsen report, “The simple explanation of the [positive] results is that Community Marriage Policies are successful and lead to reductions in divorce rates.”<sup>6</sup> Premarital counseling is an integral component of in CMP programs.

H. Norman Wright writes about premarital counseling’s effectiveness:

Anyone can walk into the state courthouse and get a marriage license in four days. . . . With such an effective civil system in place, there is no reason for churches to be marriage factories. After all, religious institutions have different responsibilities. . . . If people want to get married in a church, then it seems appropriate that the churches should do something to increase the chances that those people will stay married. Training and discussion of spiritual principles, morality and marriage are vital if the union is to work.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, according to one recent survey by the Chinese Christian Mission, less than 10 percent of Chinese churches provide premarital counseling.<sup>8</sup> This manual is written in response to the lack of premarital counseling in Chinese churches.

Premarital counseling tools and training exist. For example, David H. Olson founded Life Innovations, Inc. in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to market a set of premarital counseling tools called PREPARE/ENRICH.<sup>9</sup> The foundation of the PREPARE/ENRICH Program offers scientifically developed questionnaires designed for couples preparing for

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Birch, Weed, and Olsen, “Assessing the Impact of Community Marriage Policies on U.S. County Divorce Rates,” 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> Wright, *The Premarital Counseling Handbook*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Nelson K. Yiu, “Contextualizing Pastoral Care and Evangelism to Reach a North American Chinese Community: Using Laity in Premarital Preparation” (DMin diss., North American Baptist Seminary, 1990), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Prepare-Enrich by Life Innovations, Inc. “Overview of Life Innovations,” [https://www.prepare-enrich.com/webapp/pe\\_main/mainsite/about\\_us/](https://www.prepare-enrich.com/webapp/pe_main/mainsite/about_us/) (accessed June 2, 2009).

marriage. Based on the responses of each individual, a personalized PREPARE/ENRICH computerized report identifies the couple's strengths and areas needing growth. The report summarizes how each person sees the relationship. Counselors attend a one-day training seminar on how to use the tool and interpret the results.

The government also supports premarital counseling, and many premarital counseling organizations receive government funds. For example, the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 allocated \$150 million to promote healthy marriages and fatherhood.<sup>10</sup> "Premarital Education/Premarital Counseling" is a federally funded program used in churches, schools, and social centers.<sup>11</sup>

Premarital counseling is practical training that helps couples in their marriage journey and may increase happiness and harmony in families. David and Vera Mace describe the importance of premarital counseling and successful marriage:

A marriage can be likened to a large house with many rooms to which a couple falls heir on their wedding day. Their hope is to use and enjoy these rooms, as we do the rooms in a comfortable home, so that they will serve the many activities that make up their shared life. But in many marriages, doors are found to be locked—they represent areas in the relationships that the couple is unable to explore together. Attempts to open these doors lead to failure and frustration. The right key cannot be found. So the couple resign themselves to living together in only a few rooms that can be opened easily, leaving the rest of the house, with all its promising possibilities, unexplored and unused.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "The Healthy Marriage Initiative: General Information," Administration for Children and Families," <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/about/mission.html#background> (accessed June 2, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Hoi Ching Lau, "Premarital Counseling: The Insurance for the Happiness," *World Journal* 1041 (February 2004): 20.

<sup>12</sup> David and Vera Mace, "We Can Have Better Marriages If We Really Want Them," reprint ed. (Nashville: Abingdon press, 1987), 14; quoted in Nelson K. Yiu, "Contextualizing Pastoral Care and Evangelism to Reach a North American Chinese Community: Using Laity in Premarital Preparation" (DMin diss., North American Baptist Seminary, 1990), 27.



Premarital counseling can help couples find a master key and explore the promising possibilities of marriage.

### **Marriage for Love**

Church-based marriage ceremonies are joyful events for many pastors. Young people date, become engaged, and marry, and they can build strong and happy Christian homes. Premarital counseling helps makes this possible and can be part of successful pastoral ministry.

Wright cites numerous reasons for marriage: romance, love, pregnancy, rebound, rebellion, escape, loneliness, physical appearance, social pressure, guilt, and pity. Romance and love are the most desirable reasons, and marriage need not end love.<sup>13</sup> In fact, marriage can produce deeper stages of love. A saying from Communist China declares, “It is ethical if the marriage is built on love, and it is even more ethical if this marriage is continuing to build on love.”<sup>14</sup>

Another saying claims, “Marriage is the tomb of love.” This need not be the case. People who believe the saying may not understand the meaning of love or the importance of a good relationship. In fact, marriage can be the womb of love because love can truly come to life in marriage.

Premarital counseling provides a foundation for a healthy, happy marriage. This manual provides pastors and churches effective tools for premarital counseling.

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<sup>13</sup> Wright, *The Premarital Counseling Handbook*, 38-40.

<sup>14</sup> Simon Li, *Before You Say I Do*, 4th ed. (Hong Kong: Breakthrough, 1985), 2.

APPENDIX A  
PERSONAL DATA

Since this is the first session with a couple, the counselor should ask the couple to provide the following personal data:

Name\_\_\_\_\_Age\_\_\_\_\_

Fiancé/Fiancée's Name\_\_\_\_\_Age\_\_\_\_\_

Job\_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been in this job?\_\_\_\_\_

Education\_\_\_\_\_

Hobby\_\_\_\_\_

Have You Been Married Before?

Yes\_\_\_\_\_ How many times?\_\_\_\_\_

No\_\_\_\_\_

Divorce\_\_\_\_\_ When\_\_\_\_\_

Spouse passed away?\_\_\_\_\_ When\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

## IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FOR PREMARITAL COUNSELING

1. Why do you want this premarital counseling?
2. What do you expect from this premarital counseling?
3. Do you both want to have premarital counseling?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
No \_\_\_\_\_
4. Why do you want to have the wedding ceremony at the church?
5. Why do you want the pastor be the counselor for your premarital counseling?
6. Are you a Christian?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
No \_\_\_\_\_
7. If your answer is 'no' to question 6, then what is your faith system?

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS ABOUT MARRIAGE AND LOVE

1. Why do you want to get married?
2. List five reasons why you think now is the time to get married.
  - (1)
  - (2)
  - (3)
  - (4)
  - (5)
3. What is your definition of marriage?
4. How have you prepared for your marriage?
5. What do you expect from your marriage?
6. Do you have fears about marriage? If so, what are they?
7. How did you meet your fiancé/fiancée?
8. How well do you know your fiancé/fiancée?

9. How long have you been dating?

10. How do you know that you love him/her?

11. List five reasons why you chose him/her to be your spouse?

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

12. List five reasons that attracted you to him/her?

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

13. No matter what might happen in the future, are you committed to him/her as your life-long spouse?

14. Is there anything about yourself or your past that you think might affect your marriage seriously?

15. What might you need to do in order to improve your marriage as time goes on?

16. Why do you think it is God's will for you to marry your fiancé/fiancée?

17. Are you sure you will go to heaven after you leave this earth?

Very sure\_\_\_\_\_

Why?\_\_\_\_\_

Somewhat unsure\_\_\_\_\_

Why?\_\_\_\_\_

Definitely unsure\_\_\_\_\_

Why?\_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL VIEWS OF MARRIAGE

#### **God's Plan for Marriage**

##### God Created Male and Female in His Own Image

Genesis chapter one records that God created the heavens and the earth in five days. On the sixth day He created all living things including human beings. This gives us a glimpse into God's love because His preparation for human entry into the universe was so detailed and extensive.

“God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.’ So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:26-27). Writers have made many attempts to explain the plural forms: “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.” *The Expositor's Bible* summarizes the explanations given for the plurals under four headings: (a) the plural refers to the Trinity, (b) the plural refers to God and His heavenly court of angels, (c) the plural is an attempt to avoid the idea of an immediate resemblance of humans to God, and (d) the plural describes God's deliberation as He creates humans.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in John H. Sailhamer, Walter C. Kaiser Jr., R. Laird Harris, and Ronald B. Allen, *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version* ed. by Claus Westermann, Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 37.

The singulars in Genesis 1:27 “in His own image” rule out Sailhamer’s second explanation. Explanations c and d above are both possible but the context does not support the explanations.<sup>2</sup> The most reasonable explanation is that the plural refers to the Triune God. Sailhamer explains how God uses the intimate, cooperative, triune relationship as a model for the marriage relationship. The relationship is among equals who create, share, and communicate effectively:

In v. 27 it is stated twice that man was created in God’s image and a third time that man was created “male and female.” The same pattern is found in Genesis 5:1-2: “When God created man . . . he created them male and female.” The singular man is created as a plurality, “male and female.” In a similar way the one God created man through an expression of His plurality, “Let us make man in our image.” Following this clue the divine plurality expressed in v. 26 is seen as an anticipation of the human plurality of the man and woman, thus casting the human relationship between man and woman in the role of reflecting God’s own personal relationship with Himself.<sup>3</sup>

In their book *The Family*, Jack and Judith Balswick also point out that the plurality of God and humans reflects a unique relationship between partners:

God intends for marriage to reflect the unique type of relationality found in the Holy Trinity. This truth is a core derivative of Genesis 1:26-27: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness’. . . . So God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.” The relationality between the distinct human beings (male and female) reflects the image of God.<sup>4</sup>

They continue,

We bring this emphasis on relationality into our model for marriage. The relational nature in marriage is analogous in human form to the divine Trinity. As the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (three distinct persons) mutually indwell

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>4</sup> Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 80.



in a Trinitarian fellowship, so do spouses (two distinct selves) mutually indwell in the marriage union. . . . Unity and distinction coexist. Reciprocal and mutual inter-dependency is what God had in mind for marriage. . . . In marriage, spouses are both distinct (male and female differentiation) and equal (directed to be fruitful and have dominion) in their created purpose.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, a man and woman in marriage have a unique relationship that reflects the Trinitarian relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in cooperative and equal fellowship.

### Be Fruitful and Increase in Number Fill the Earth and Subdue It

God created and blessed male and female and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Gen. 1:28). Some Christians do not want children after marriage. They want more time for education, careers, service, and church activities. Before 1997, some newly wedded Christian couples in Hong Kong also said they did not want children because Communist China would soon take over Hong Kong. They would rather raise dogs and cats. This is not God’s will because Psalm 127:3 says, “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from Him.”

On the other hand, Scripture does not require couples to have as many children as possible. The Hebrew meaning is that children can continue their parents’ role. Josiah Sung-Yan Mann points out that our role is to use the resources God provides: “God’s earth can be replenished and occupied through multiplication.” Mann notes that the word

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 81.

“occupied” means more than to occupy a land; it also means “to do or deal with something.”<sup>6</sup> People age, pass away, and leave some responsibilities unfulfilled; their children can fulfill their parents’ unfulfilled roles and unfinished tasks.

### A Suitable Helper

The Genesis writer records that God originated the family in the beginning of the human race:

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. . . . 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 bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.” For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. (Gen. 2:18-24)

Christians have no doubts about the origin of the family because God created the first marriage partnership and the first family. Genesis records that God created humans with social natures that craved companionship (Gen. 2:18).

Sailhamer writes about God’s knowledge of the “good”:

No only has the first chapter stressed that God knows the good (e.g., “and God saw that it was good”), but now in the present narrative the creation of the woman has become an archetypal example of God’s knowledge of the good. When He sees man alone, God says, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (v.18). At the close of chapter 2, the author put the final touches on his account of what it means for man to be “in God’s image and likeness.” In the first chapter the author had

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<sup>6</sup> Josiah Sung-Yan Mann, *The Christ-centered Family*, 3rd ed., ed. by Esther Yue L. Ng and Anne Y. C. Yuen (Hong Kong: China Graduate School of Theology, 1996), 33.

intimated that man's creation in the "image of God" somehow entailed His creation as male and female: "In the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (1:27). In the narrative of the creation of the woman in chapter 2, the author has returned to develop this theme by showing that man's creation "in God's image" also entails a "partnership" ("a suitable helper") with his wife. The "likeness" that the man and the woman share with God in chapter 1 finds and analogy in the "likeness" between the man and his wife in chapter 2. Here also, as in the first chapter, man's likeness to God is shown against the background of his distinction from the other creatures.<sup>7</sup>

Loneliness produces emptiness, incompleteness, and a lack of communion and companionship. Lonely persons cannot share with someone who understands, nor do they enjoy mutual commitment and trust. That was Adam's condition. Although Adam needed God, God said Adam also needed a companion. This was fulfilled when God created woman who shared her life with Adam as God shares relationally in the Trinity.

From the beginning, the social needs of men and women have been satisfied in marriage: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." God said creation was "good," but loneliness and lack of partnership and companionship "is not good." Before God created Eve, God asked Adam to name the living creatures. Perhaps God did this intentionally so Adam could realize his limitation and isolation. Adam had to make all the decisions himself because he had no one with whom to discuss the options or make suggestions: "For Adam no suitable helper was found" (Gen. 2:20).

The specific sense of the term "suitable helper" should be drawn from the immediate context. That the woman is a helper is to be understood from the commission given to man in both 1:28 ("Be fruitful and increase in number") and 2:15 ("to work it and take care of it.") Augustine suggested that she was to help in the task of bringing

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<sup>7</sup> Sailhamer, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 46.

forth children, she was to help “to work and to take care” the garden.<sup>8</sup> Sailhamer takes the implication of the narrative in both of these areas of life, the family and worship. 2:15 (“for worship and obedience.”) Man stands in need of the woman’s help. It is not good that he should be alone.<sup>9</sup>

In response, God created Eve as Adam’s companion and precious helper. Eve was a helper, but she was not created to be merely a servant, but a helper fit for Adam. Augustine wrote, “God did not take a bone from Adam’s head from which to create Eve that she might be above him, nor a bone from his foot that she might be beneath him, but from his side that she might be beside him.”<sup>10</sup> The most valuable thing in marriage is a partnership that ends loneliness and creates companionship.

The writer of Ecclesiastes asserts that two persons are better than one:

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Eccles. 4:9-12)

Because they each bring unique strengths to the union, marriage partners can be there for each other without being dragged down in an overly dependent relationship.

Some Christians use Genesis 2:18-23 to say that a woman is second to a man, but this Scripture does not support that idea. “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27); therefore,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>10</sup> McDonald, *Creating a Successful Christian Marriage*, 19.

there is no first and second among man and woman because there is no first, second, and third within the Triune God. All have roles and are equal and empowered.

Jack and Judith Balswick write, “Empowerment is the active, intentional process of helping another person to become empowered. The person who is empowered has been equipped, strengthened, built up, matured, and has gained skill because of the encouraging support of the other.”<sup>11</sup> Helpers are strong persons because they have strength, competence, and can assist others. The Bible describes God as a helper: “I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Ps. 121:1-2).

The fall produced inequality and exploitation when sin entered the world. Male dominance and female subordination resulted from sin and are sin’s products. Christian marriage offers the re-emergence of the partnership and equal companionship that Adam and Eve first experienced and that occurs in the Trinity. Couples can experience mutuality in Christian marriage.

Genesis 2:24 describes the three elements necessary for a truly biblical marriage: there must be a “leaving,” a “uniting,” and a fusion into “one flesh.” The result is a marriage partnership that emulates Adam and Eve’s relationship before the Fall. When two unmarried people engage in a premarital sex act, there is “one flesh” physically, but because there is no “leaving” and no “uniting” they are guilty of fornication, sexual union between two unmarried persons.

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<sup>11</sup> Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 28.

The author of Genesis records, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” This sentence is repeated four times in the Bible: Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7, and Ephesians 5:31. God states this once in the Old Testament and three times in the New Testament, one time before the fall and three times after the fall, and it remains God’s goal for marriage. It is God’s original and present blueprint for marriage.

### **Jesus’ Teaching on Marriage**

Divorce is a serious problem in the United States, and it is a fast growing trend in many places around the world. According to *The Magazine of the Protestant Churches in China*, the divorce rate in Beijing, Shanghai, and other large cities in China is catching up with the United States.<sup>12</sup> Our church includes several young people from China who study at American universities. They say the divorce rate in Beijing and Shanghai is about 50 percent, which creates a significant problem in Chinese society.

I attended a Christian marriage seminar recently. The speaker was a famous Chinese marriage counselor who travels to China and leads marriage seminars in various cities. He said some young people approach their friends without a traditional greeting such as “How are you?” or “Did you have breakfast this morning?” Rather they ask, “Have you divorced yet?” He reports that divorce is an identity symbol and source of pride for some people.

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<sup>12</sup> See Tseng Li, “Marriage Should Be Honored by All,” *The Magazine of the Protestant Churches in China*, August 2006, 32.

Divorce is a very important topic, but it is not the main focus of this manual. Our focus is premarital counseling that emphasizes a biblical approach to marriage relationships. The concepts of partnership, mutuality, and cooperation are central to pastoral premarital counseling topics. Pastors should teach engaged couples to be aware of, and know what Jesus taught.

Matthew 19:3-12 recorded that the Pharisees questioned Jesus about divorce, and Jesus took a very strong position:

Some Pharisees came to Him to test Him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” “Haven’t you read,” He replied, “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.” “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?” Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.” The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.” Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.” (Matt. 19:3-9)

A few decades before Jesus there were two groups of rabbis who had different interpretations about divorce. The first group said that one can divorce his wife “for any and every reason.” They argued that “reason” included a burnt meal or wrinkles. The text, they said, taught that divorce was allowed both for “adultery” and “for any and every reason.” Another group disagreed with this interpretation. They said Moses’ words were a single statement that rejected divorce “except [for] immorality.” These opposing

views were well known to all first-century Jews. But Jesus agreed firmly with the second group that there was no justifiable divorce “except [for] immorality.”<sup>13</sup>

The first interpretation reflects divorce in contemporary society. When a husband does not love his wife, he may use any reason to divorce her. This is also true for the wife who divorces her husband. I know a woman who divorced her husband because he loves his mother more than his wife, and another person divorced his wife because he thought she talked too much.

A young Chinese exchange student attended church recently. Several students discussed marriage, and one said “If you do not like your spouse you can divorce him or divorce her. Even after you remarried, you can divorce your second or third spouse if you do not like him or her.” What she said may represent the young people today because many do not see marriage as a lifelong commitment. They see marriage as a relationship they can change whenever they choose.

Jesus said Moses based his permission to divorce on adultery (Matt. 19:8). It was an attempt to bring some sort of order in a society that disregarded God’s standards. His design in creating man and woman was that marriage should be an unbroken, lifelong union (Matt. 19:6, 1 Cor. 7:10-11).

Jesus said that divorce constituted adultery except in cases of sexual infidelity. When God puts two people together He intends for them to stay together forever. If we see marriage as the oneness God desires, divorce would be like amputating an arm or leg. A person would not consider cutting off an arm because of a splinter in a finger. Nor

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<sup>13</sup> Instone-Brewer, “What God Has Joined.”



should a person consider cutting off his wife or her husband because this person has been unable to adjust to issue in the marriage.

### **The Apostle Paul Teaches Husbands and Wives**

Paul's discussion of submission in Ephesians 5:22-33 is widely misunderstood, and this may be especially true for Chinese Christians. Traditional Chinese cultural norms place males above females, and women are considered inferior. This creates a crisis for many Chinese bi-cultural couples who live under the Western world's influence. Traditional husbands may criticize their wives for insubordination and lack of submissiveness, and Christian husbands may use Ephesians 5:22-33 to support their claims. For example, I know a Chinese Christian couple eager to serve the Lord, but the husband is very dominating. He often says and does inappropriate things, creates trouble, and often argues with the pastor. His wife supports his actions because she believes a Christian wife must submit to her husband.

An Asian couple asked me to provide premarital counseling, and we read Ephesians 5:22-33. The woman said, "I did not know the Bible has these verses. Even though I am unwilling to submit, I will submit because I am a Christian." This is a misunderstanding of Paul's words.

### **The Wives' Submission and the Social Situation**

Paul dealt with a pressing issue when he wrote his letter to the Ephesians. At the time of Paul's ministry, the Roman aristocracy felt its power base increasingly was threatened by social changes. These changes included the upward mobility of socially

inferior elements, such as former slaves, foreigners, and women. The aristocracy was uneasy about the new religions from the east that seemed to challenge standard values like a man's guidance of his family. These foreign religions came under the suspicion of upper-class Roman conservatives.<sup>14</sup>

Many upper-class women were willing to convert to Christianity. The turning of the wives from their husbands' religion was viewed, however, as a subversive plot by foreign religions. The conversion of wives to Christian thus posed a threat to upper class men because they expected their wives to follow their rules and religious beliefs. The gains of women in ancient society had introduced new tensions into Greco-Roman life in general and probably also into some marriages.<sup>15</sup>

Paul's letter to the Ephesians was sent to Asia and to Christians. Paul encouraged Christians to live in a way that could silence some of the needless objections raised against the faith. Stressing the wife's submission was important for evangelizing elements in the Roman world and restraining wives who affirmed independence at the expense of their marriages. This strategy makes sense if it avoided alienation of groups from the gospel.<sup>16</sup>

### The Spirit and Submission

What did Paul mean about mutual submission (Eph. 5:21)? This becomes clearer through understanding the cultural and historical background of his ideas.

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<sup>14</sup> Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 139-141.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-143.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-148.

The principle of Christian submission governs the church's community life and social relationships. Paul discusses marriage as a key relationship and claims it is transformed when controlled by obedience to Christ. A key Pauline statement is, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21). He deals with wives and husbands (Eph. 5:21-33), children and parents (Eph. 6:1-4), slaves and masters (Eph. 6:5-9), and his teaching has parallels in Colossians 3:18-4:1. Some ask whether Ephesians 5:21, "[B]e subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," represents the conclusion of the text's previous section or the start of a new one. While grammatically it may be attached to verse 20, its content coincides more naturally with what follows.<sup>17</sup>

In Ephesians 5:15-20, Paul discusses wise and spirit-filled living and understands submission in verse 21 as a spiritual attitude. Keener writes that the submission described in Ephesians 5:21 is "like the worship of 5:19-20, flows from being filled with God's Spirit (Eph. 5:18)."<sup>18</sup>

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Eph. 5:15-21)

The presence of the Spirit leads believers to worship and confess their faith that God is sovereign over the universe and will accomplish Christ's purposes. When Paul says that the Spirit moves people to "give thanks for everything," this may have been

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<sup>17</sup> Wood and Rupprecht, *Ephesians through Philemon*, 75.

<sup>18</sup> Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives*, 158.

acceptable to Jewish readers who learned about God's providence in the Scripture.

Another expression of Spirit-filledness, however, affects a Christian's interpersonal contact including family members. Keener writes, "Those who are filled with the Spirit will also be 'submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ' (Eph.5:21) and this mutual submission will be expressed in specific household relationships (Eph. 5:21-6:9)."<sup>19</sup>

#### A Wife's Submission and a Husband's Love

Paul said that wives should submit to their husbands: "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" (Eph. 5:22-24).

We said earlier that the Roman aristocracy considered females inferior; ordinary Roman citizens also judged females inferior. According to Keener, Egyptian and Jewish cultures expressed the same idea:

Marriage contracts from first and second century BC Egypt stipulate specifically that the wife must be submissive to her husband. . . . The few extant Jewish writers from the first century are at least equally insistent. The Jewish philosopher Philo assumes that the masculine rules the feminine, and describes the wife's proper duty to her husband in language of slave service. Josephus attributes to "the law" the view that the woman must submit to her husband . . . for the authority has been given to the man. Most Jewish writers seems to have shared this view. . . . The later rabbis also recognized the husband's authority over his wife as standard.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 165-166.

In other words, submitting to one's husband was part of what it meant to be a good woman in ancient society. Paul does not eliminate the submission expectation, but he transforms it to include submission by both partners. Paul responds to a "specific cultural issue for the sake of the gospel, and his words should not be taken at face value in all cultures. . . . Christian women in his day should moderately conform to the general social ideal without fighting it."<sup>21</sup>

After Paul exhorts wives to submit to their husbands, he devotes more space to the husbands' submission responsibilities and their love for their wives. Submission is more demanding for husbands because they must love their wives "as Christ loved the church." Christ sacrificed his life for the church: "[He] gave himself up for her."

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 this 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. (Eph. 5:22-33)

Greco-Roman social norms insisted that wives had obligations to their husbands, but not the other way around. Christianity introduced a revolutionary approach to marriage and equalized the rights of wives and husbands. The word "love" by husbands for wives is *agapate*, and this "is the highest and distinctively Christian word for love."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 170-171.

<sup>22</sup> Wood and Rupprecht, *Ephesians through Philemon*, 76.

Paul tells husbands to love their wives as God in Christ loved the church. Christ died for the church.

Paul writes that people “[n]ever hates [their] own bod[ies] (Eph. 5:29). They look after, cherish, and provide for them in every way. This is how Christ loves His body the church. Paul tells husbands they should love their wives as Christ love the church because Christians are the living parts of His body—“for we are members of His body” (Eph. 5:30).

### Mutual Submission

Keener writes,

It is clear that the submission of verse 22 cannot be other than the submission of verse 21. “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord” (verses 21, 22). The word “submit” does not even appear in the Greek text of verse 22. It has to be borrowed from verse 21. It is perfectly legitimate to read verse 22, “Wives, submit to your husbands,” as long as we understand that we must take verse 22 as an example of verse 21’s mutual submission. Wives should submit to their husbands because Christians should submit to one another.<sup>23</sup>

Paul believes Christians should be submissive and not seek their own interests, and he advocates mutual submission. Wives respect their husbands (Eph. 5:33) out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21), and husbands should love their wives as Christ loves the church. Neither should lord over the other “since you know that He who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with Him” (Eph. 6:9).

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<sup>23</sup> Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives*, 169.

### What Submission Is and Is Not

Wives are sometimes commanded to submit, obey, or be subject to their husbands in the New Testament (Eph. 5:22-24, Col. 3:18, Titus 2:4-5, 1 Tim. 2:9-12, 1 Pet. 3:1-6). The idea of submission is unpopular in the twenty-first century, but the unpopularity may arise from a false understanding of submission. To correct this false picture, we list some things biblical submission is not:

1. Submission is not a concept only for women. It is a concept for all believers including husbands (Eph. 5:21, Phil. 2:3-4, 1 Pet. 5:5, Rom. 13:1, Heb. 13:17).
2. Submission does not mean that wives become slaves. Actually, wives are never more free when they submit to their loving husbands who also submit to their wives.
3. Submission does not mean that wives never open their mouths, hold opinions, or give advice (Prov. 31:26, Acts 18:26, Judges 13:21-23).
4. Submission does not mean that wives become wallflowers and whose abilities lie dormant. Review the full use that God's ideal wife made of her talents and abilities (Prov. 31).
5. Submission does not mean that wives are inferior to husbands.

This list describes submission:

1. Scripture indicates that husbands and wives should be mutually submissive (Eph. 5:22, 1 Pet. 3:1).

2. Submission is a spiritual matter and done “as to the Lord” (Eph. 5:22). Submission is a spiritual matter because it operates through the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:1-5:21, 1 Pet. 1:1-3:6).
3. Submission is a positive, affirming concept.

### Implications for Premarital Counseling of Christian Couples

A blueprint is important for building construction, and it is also important for constructing a marriage. Many broken marriages and unhappy families exist among Christians as well as non-Christians because people do not heed God’s plan. What is this plan and what is this all about? As indicated in Genesis, it involves leaving, uniting, and becoming one flesh. It is based on our discussion of Adam and Eve, Jesus, and Paul’s understanding of marriage discussed earlier in this chapter.

### **Leaving**

Jack and Judith Balswick write, “A person cannot leave mother and father if he or she clings to them. People who are overly connected with their parents have difficulty creating a new marital dyad.”<sup>24</sup> What does “leave” mean? It does not mean to abandon your parents and leave them without attention and support. Exodus 20:12 requires that children honor their parents: “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.” The writers of Mark 7:9-13 and 1 Timothy 5:8 also teach us to honor our parents.

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<sup>24</sup> Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 77.



Leaving does not mean you must move away from your parents' home after marriage. This is especially true in Chinese culture because the older generation expects the younger generation to stay with them after they marry. You can stay with your parents after you marry, but you can still "leave" them. On the other hand, it is possible not to "leave" your parents even though you live far away. For some people, even though their parents have passed away they feel as though they still have not "left" their parents. It does not mean you should change your attitude toward your spouse if your parents dislike your spouse.

Leaving your parents means to change your relationship with your parents totally. For example, when you have your own family, you should be independent from your parents. You should seek your spouse's interest more than your parents' interest, and pay more attention to your spouse rather than to your parents. You should not depend on your parents for finance, help, love, and decision-making. You should change the way you see your parents. If not, it does not matter how far you move geographically, you remain connected with them. You should consider your spouse the most important person among your relationships. You should be a good father/mother, and you should be a good son/daughter, but you should be a good husband/wife above all.

Leaving your parents means your parents' status has changed. Your parents' nurture will diminish, and you will nurture next the generation. Your father will no longer be the "lord of the house" in your family. The husband will be the "lord of the house," but within the context of Christian marriage, mutuality, and partnership. And the wife is not required to obey her mother-in-law's demands about how to discipline the children.

## Uniting

Many young couples think they will seek divorce if they fail in marriage. This raises several issues. They may think they will be faithful when they make their vows, but in the back of their minds they think they will seek divorce if serious problems arise. They believe marriage is for convenience and, perhaps, for a short time. Some people suggest the couple not sign the marriage certificate so that they are not bound by it, or that they do not need a wedding ceremony.

God, however, states marriage is for life. Mark 10:7-9 records, “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.” Several conclusions follow. Successful marriage is not accidental or for convenience; it is chosen for love. Successful marriage involves mutual obedience to God’s words and the marriage vows. Successful marriage is not based on luck; it is based on determination, partnership, and mutuality.

Happy and successful marriage is based on a covenant rather than temporary feelings or sexual interest alone. According to Scripture, marriage is an unchanging commitment that binds both partners. Malachi writes, “[God] no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. You ask, ‘Why?’ It is because the Lord witnessed the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant” (Mal. 2:14). Proverbs adds, “Who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God” (Prov. 2:17). Marriage partners, therefore, should be

faithful to each other through their mutual covenants. The husband and wife remain committed and love each other even though they are sick, age, gain weight, become less physically attractive, or seek bankruptcy. The covenant remains.

Marriage is a stage in which both persons enter into a new life, and both persons commit to be responsible and faithful to the other. Getting married is similar to becoming a Christian. When individuals become Christians, they leave the old life behind and live new lives. They give up self-righteousness and self-sufficiency; they commit their lives to Christ. They trust Christ and serve him diligently and faithfully under all circumstances. The same dynamic occurs when two persons enter marriage because they commit their lives to each other under all circumstances.

The marriage that God establishes requires commitment in health or sickness, for richer or poorer, for better or worse, in joy or sorrow, and during success or failure. God's will for marriage requires that couples face challenges willingly. Both partners seek help from God, work together through difficulties, and do not run away. Their lives belong to each other. Their partnership is mutual, and they determine to stay together for their whole lives.

### **One Flesh**

"Become one flesh" means joined together sexually, and Paul acknowledges the importance of sex: "Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh'" (1 Cor. 6:16). Sex can be good, holy, and beautiful within marriage, but it can be evil and sinful when there is

no “leaving” and “uniting.” Hebrews 13:4 records, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

“Become one flesh” does not only mean a sexual relationship. Sex unites two persons, and this can be a cherished moment when two persons commit themselves to each other. Marriage can be defined as a total commitment in which both persons share themselves with the other. God’s plan requires that couples share their bodies, property, will, opinion, ability, difficulties, success, pain, and failure with each other.

Husbands and wives form partnerships and act for themselves and each other. They must not harm each other, and they must care for each other as they care for themselves. Proverbs asserts, “She brings him good not harm, all the days of her life. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate” (Prov. 31:12, 27). Paul writes about husbands, “In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself” (Eph. 5:28).

The married couple is one person. This is an abstract idea, a practical matter, and can be fulfilled concretely. “Become one flesh” does not mean that both persons are identical. Paul claims there is one body but many members with their own shapes and functions. All members work for the good of the body. The husband and wife have many differences, but the differences need not separate them. The differences can strengthen them in mutuality, cooperative unity, and function.

God instituted the highest, purest, and happiest form of marriage: the union of one man and one woman for life. When Christian couples vow to live together “till death do

us part,” they affirm the truth of Genesis 2 that which teaches couples can live in mutual, cooperative partnership without dominance or subordination by either person.

## APPENDIX D

## QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE

1. Why does a person have the image and likeness of God? (Genesis 1:26)
2. Why did God create marriage? (Genesis 2:18)
3. List five positive aspects of marriage.
  - (1)
  - (2)
  - (3)
  - (4)
  - (5)
4. Who said, "It was not good for the man to be alone?" What did God do about it? (Genesis 2:18)
5. Do you ever feel lonely? Please describe what you experience.
6. Do you ever feel you need someone to help you? Please describe what you experience.
7. What do you understand the word "helper" means in Genesis 2:18?

8. List five ways in which you could help your fiancé/fiancée.

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

9. How would you describe Adam's response when the Lord God brought Eve to him?  
(Genesis 2:23)

10. What is the meaning of "A man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife"? (Genesis 2:24)

11. What can you do to leave your father and your mother? Please list five different ways.

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

12. What could happen if your spouse cannot leave his/her parents?

13. List three ways in which you cannot leave your father and your mother because they are your responsibility.

(1)

(2)

(3)

14. What is the meaning of “be united with his wife”? (Genesis 2:24)
15. What is the meaning of “they will become one flesh”? (Genesis 2:24)
16. What is the biblical factor that allows separation between a man and woman who are married to each other?
17. If one of the spouses is not a Christian, will they be together in heaven? (1 Samuel 12:22-23, 2 Thessalonians 4:13-18)
18. How do you want God to help you in your marriage?



## APPENDIX E

## JESUS' TEACHING ON MARRIAGE

Matthew 5:31-32; 19:1-9

1. What does Matthew 19:6 indicate about the permanency of the marriage relationship?
2. Apart from death (Romans 7:1-4), what do the aforementioned passages state as the only grounds for divorce?
3. List several implications that emerge from the fact that marriage is a permanent relationship.
  - (1)
  - (2)
  - (3)
  - (4)
  - (5)
4. Have you ever thought of changing your mind after you decided to get married? If the answer is yes, why?
5. Do you think this indicates you should not marry this person? Or is your hesitation simply uncertainty about the unknowable events that might happen in the future?
6. What can you do to avoid divorce in your marriage?
7. How strongly do you and your prospective spouse agree that marriage is a life-long commitment?

8. What can help you both develop a similar view of this question?
9. Can a couple mention the word “divorce” while they are arguing?
10. If it is mentioned, what can you do in order to discover what behavioral changes need to be made in your relationship?
11. If it is mentioned, are there reasons to think that one party is being unfaithful?
12. How can you find out how serious divorce is being considered?
13. What is your point of view about divorce?
14. What do each of you think about this question: “Under what circumstances should Christians consider divorce?”
15. Under what circumstances can a divorced Christian remarry?
16. What happens if the divorced Christian remarries outside biblical permission?

## APPENDIX F

QUESTIONS DESIGNED TO HELP COUPLES APPLY  
THE APOSTLE PAUL'S TEACHINGS TO THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

Read Ephesians 5:21-33 carefully and then answer the following questions about the passage.

1. According to verse 21, what attitude honors Christ?
2. What do verses 22-24 say to wives?
3. How can a wife show respect to her husband through submission? (Verse 33)
4. The idea of the wife's submission was addressed to people living in a male dominated culture, and Paul wrote it to show the principle that Christianity is culturally sensitive as well as faithful to biblical principles. How might the wife's submission be demonstrated in our culture and still maintain this principle?
5. List five things and then describe how you as a wife can show submission to your husband?
  - (1)
  - (2)
  - (3)
  - (4)
  - (5)

6. A husband's responsibility to love his wife and care for her even at great expense to himself was written to people who lived in a male-dominated society where a husband had absolute authority over his wife. Paul wrote a counter-cultural idea in order to emphasize Christ-like love in marriage. What does Paul say about mutual submission and a husband's responsibility toward his wife?
7. You can better understand how husbands are to love their wives when you see how Christ loved the church. From the passage Ephesians 5:21-33, list five characteristics of Christ's love for the church. Now compile a list showing the husband's responsibility in loving his wife using the same passage.

Christ, Head of the Church	Husband, Head of the Wife
(1)	(1)
(2)	(2)
(3)	(3)
(4)	(4)
(5)	(5)

8. Read the statements below and check those you believe to be true or false.
 

T/F (1) The husband has been appointed head of his wife and family, and by following her husband's leadership, a wife is being obedient to Christ.

T/F (2) A husband must possess strong leadership qualities and abilities or his wife is not expected to consider him head of the family.

T/F (3) The relationship between Christ and his bride, the church, illustrates the relationship that should exist between husband and wife.

T/F (4) A wife retains the right to choose the areas in which she will be subject to her husband's leadership.
9. According to Ephesians 5:21-33, who has the more demanding task: the husband or the wife?

## CHAPTER 3

### CHINESE AMERICAN MARRIAGE

#### **Traditional Chinese Perspectives of Marriage**

A traditional Chinese saying asserts, 竹門對竹門, 木門對木門: “If two persons plan to marry they should have the same background.” For example, if a man is from a wealthy family he should marry a woman from a wealthy family, and if a man is from a poor family he should marry a woman from a poor family. Some traditional Chinese parents believe this strongly and insist their children find a spouse from the same background.

The notion is that if both persons graduated from college, they speak the same language. If they eat the same kind of food, harmony exists. If they come from the same town, their ways of doing things are pretty much the same. In addition their parents are pleased, and it is easier for family members to get along.

A graduate student from Shanghai attends our church and dates a schoolmate from another part of China. The student’s parents believe strongly and insist their son marry a woman because from Shanghai. Another person is a physician and his parents and his brothers are also physicians. He dated a nurse, but they decided to separate because the woman’s parents are restaurant workers. He feared the parents had nothing in common.

Traditional Chinese believe people should marry persons from similar backgrounds, and this is a basic cultural issue. This idea creates difficulties when a traditional Chinese and an American Chinese Christian plan marriage. Some young people marry the persons they love but come from different backgrounds.

### **American Perspectives of Marriage**

American individualism creates a desire for freedom of choice and openness of mind in marriage. Freedom of choice and openness of mind are two positive products of individualism, but these are also the greatest differences between American marriage and traditional Chinese marriage.<sup>1</sup> Americans have freedom to marry whomever they choose. Age, background, and marital status do not matter, and their parents seldom control them.

I know someone who is a very traditional Chinese. While studying in America he fell in love with a divorced woman. He struggled for a time and decided to marry her. He said he would never have married her if he had not been in America. The American culture changed him, opened his mind, and provided choices not found in traditional Chinese culture. He now accepts things he never accepted under traditional Chinese culture.

In spite of the freedom of choice in mate selection, many Americans look for someone from a similar educational level background. Husband and wife holding undergraduate or graduate degrees is common in American society. If, however, a

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<sup>1</sup> Shel, "The Analysis of Chinese Marriage in America," 14.

woman marries a man with less education, her culture and education may cause her to encourage her husband and not flaunt her educational superiority.

One college student described this relationship when he wrote about his parents' educational backgrounds:

My father is a mechanic who graduated from high school. My mother not only has her bachelor's degree but also a master's degree in education. She is a principal of an elementary school. My parents get along very well. Father runs the garage and mother does the bookkeeping for him. A stranger observing their interaction would never know my mother has a master's degree.<sup>2</sup>

Individualism is the root of American freedom of choice and openness of mind.

Traditional Chinese persons value family opinion and are influenced greatly by strict cultural controls. These differences present challenges for pastors who offer premarital counseling to bi-cultural couples, which include traditional Chinese and American Chinese partners.

### **Bi-cultural Marriage**

#### The Reasons for Traditional Chinese/ American Chinese Bi-cultural Marriage

Traditional Chinese persons marry American Chinese persons under at least three types of situations. First, one person is an immigrant from China. When families move from China to America, first generation parents find it difficult to fit into American culture, and they must work hard and support their families. Many immigrant parents work in Chinese restaurants or other jobs that require less English fluency, skill, or

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<sup>2</sup> Cleveland McDonald and Philip M. McDonald, *Creating a Successful Christian Marriage*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 54.

education. Because of the immigration laws, their children are frequently under twenty-one years of age. In fact, many come when their children are much younger so that the children have greater opportunity to learn the American culture and attend American schools.

Among these immigrant families, many children graduate from high school or college, and frequently hold graduate degrees. They find jobs in America. This second generation adopts American culture and has few issues about bi-cultural marriage. Their parents, however, remain strongly influenced by traditional culture.

The second situation includes those who study in America and learn American culture while at school. The law may allow them employment in America after they graduate, and may marry an American Chinese person after they find stable work. They may not have spent enough time in America to learn and adopt American culture fully. After they marry, they may discover many cultural differences between them. This may be especially true for those who marry while still in school.

The third situation is the most difficult. In this category, traditional Chinese people marry American Chinese through third parties, such as friends, newspaper advertisements, or the Internet. Based on a small investment, they intentionally locate an American Chinese prospect for marriage, and this practice is popular in contemporary China. Many Chinese women have no other way to come to America and they enlist third party connections.

I know some traditional Chinese women who married American Chinese. They struggle to acclimate to American culture before they get married, but their marriages are



jeopardized because they know little of the culture or the language. I often translate for newly wedded wives because they know no English.

Some traditional Chinese come to America because their spouses are American Chinese, but they find America is not heaven and cannot adjust to the culture. An important factor in these situations is that some American Chinese men seek to marry traditional Chinese wives. They may fall in love with Chinese women in school or at work. Some work in China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan where they meet traditional Chinese women. In any case, cross-cultural relationships present challenges in pastoral, premarital counseling.

Many couples struggle in cross-cultural marriages because their marriages also involve their families. Chinese who live in America are concerned about these family dynamics especially because cross-cultural marriages are not unusual. For example, Josiah Sung-Yan Mann writes that the percentage of Chinese intercultural marriages in Los Angeles, California, increased 10% in 1950 to 40% in 1970.<sup>3</sup> According to the 2006 U.S. Census data analysis Chinese marry non-Chinese in the U.S. is 15%. The inter-marriage for Chinese women is higher than men.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Josiah Sung-Yan Mann, *Before the Wedding Bell Rings* (Hong Kong: China Graduate School of Theology, 1998), 26.

<sup>4</sup> C.N. Le, 2010 "Interracial Dating and Marriage" *Asian-Nation: The Landscape of Asian American*. <http://www.asian-nation.org/interracial.shfml> (February 6, 2010).

### The Difficulties of Bi-Cultural Marriage

When Chinese persons converse and learn that someone plans marriage, they frequently ask, “Is the other person Chinese?” This spontaneous reaction suggests bi-cultural marriages are an important topic among Chinese persons.

I interviewed two first generation Chinese couples who have lived in America for more than twenty years. Their children are married, and the couples have grandchildren. When I asked their opinion about American-born Chinese marrying Americans, they hesitated. They said they prefer their children marry Chinese persons from a traditional cultural background. They said it is difficult for first generation, traditional Chinese persons to communicate with second-generation Chinese persons who marry Americans. The language, food, and ways of doing things differ greatly. One couple has a Caucasian son-in-law, but he and his Chinese wife seldom visit her parents, even though they live only ten miles apart. This older couple wishes they had more contact.

According to the *Herald Monthly*,<sup>5</sup> Miss Li, a counselor at a Chinese counseling center in New York, described her many years of counseling experience. She identified nine factors that jeopardize Chinese American bi-cultural marriages:

1. Not knowing each other well enough. This is especially true for the one who comes from another country.
2. The differences in culture, education, and language.
3. Unrealistic expectations.
4. Family of origin issues.

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<sup>5</sup> Li, “The Causes of Marriage Crisis,” 1.

5. The temptations from outside the marriage.
6. Communication problems.
7. Pressures from job, finance, and children.
8. Lack of a support network. Chinese American bi-cultural marriage is still a minority, and this is especially true in small towns.
9. In-law problems.

Bi-cultural marriage involves sacrifice, and a major sacrifice is cultural. For example, Enoch Wan writes that when traditional Jews marry persons from another cultural group, they eventually withdraw from the Hebrew Bible rituals such Sabbath or Passover.<sup>6</sup> Jewish traditions are very important in traditional culture, and bi-cultural marriage is a difficult challenge. In the same way, traditional Chinese who live in America are affected by American culture, and spouses may sacrifice their cultural traditions.

I know a cross-cultural couple, and I asked them about their marriage. The American Chinese husband said he had no problem with their marriage. The wife maintains strong relationship with her Chinese friends inside and outside the church, and she is close to her many Chinese relatives in the area. Her husband accommodates her by attending her Chinese church, dining in Chinese restaurants, eating Chinese food at home, befriending her Chinese friends and relatives, and learning to speak Chinese. They live a happy life, but this may be an unusual example. Many traditional Chinese persons

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<sup>6</sup> Enoch Wan, *Jewish-Gentile Couples: Trends, Challenges and Hopes* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2004), 16.

who marry American Chinese persons and live in America find the American Chinese way prevails in a conflict.

Traditional Chinese culture encourages children to live with their parents when they marry. Many traditional Chinese live with their grandparents and parents in the same residence because they consider three generations living together a great blessing. These living arrangements have advantages because the younger couple's parents care for grandchildren and maintain housekeeping. If a married couple lives with the parents and the parents own the property, the married couple may save money because the parents provide free housing. In addition, the parents feel more secure because the younger generation is with them and will care for them as they age. This reflects Chinese philosophy 養兒防老, which means the reason to have children is for the children to take care the parents as they age.

This differs from American culture because American Chinese children often are encouraged to move out when they are employed, finish college, or marry, and if this does not happen soon after the children turn eighteen, the parents expect the children to move out. This cultural difference may become a source of argument in bi-cultural couples. If they follow the American custom, the traditional Chinese relatives may criticize them for not honoring their parents because they do not live with their Chinese parents. If they follow the traditional Chinese expectations, the American Chinese spouse may become discontented.

Another major conflict is that many bi-cultural couples do not provide money for their parents on a regular basis. The Chinese philosophy 養兒防老 means that children

will provide their parents' every need as the parents age. For example, I know a Chinese couple whose sons have very good jobs, one of whom is a lawyer. Recently the mother lost her job and they are in financial crisis, but their two American Chinese sons do not help them financially. In American culture, the government may help them through unemployment insurance and other programs. Social security and pensions may be sufficient, but many first generation Chinese worked without earning such benefits. Their traditional Chinese values lead them to expect their children to support them when necessary.

Minor conflicts in daily living may also develop. For example, I know a couple in which the husband is American Chinese and grew up in America. The traditional Chinese wife is greatly influenced by her parents. The husband often complains that his father-in-law asks him to do things without saying the word "please." I explained to him that because he is the son-in-law, their relationship is very close, and older generation Chinese never say please to the younger generation when they request something.

In another couple, the husband is Caucasian and the wife's sisters are traditional Chinese who ask their sister to babysit their small children. This upsets the husband, and his relationship with his wife becomes tense. He complains that she should not babysit her sisters' children because she is not a babysitter, and he was not consulted in the decision. I told him that traditional Chinese help family members when there is a need. He felt relieved when he learned there was no disrespect involved.

These examples demonstrate the potential tension in bi-cultural marriage that can create problems in relationships between traditional Chinese and American Chinese

couples. Premarital counseling can deal with the issues, and this manual provides guidelines and assistance for pastors in premarital counseling of cross-cultural couples.

### Key Characteristics of Chinese and American Culture

Traditional Chinese and American Chinese often have different ways of doing things. When pastors recognize the characteristics of both, they can provide more effective premarital counseling and help couples avoid potential conflicts. For example, a traditional Chinese wife may use her own chopsticks to pass and serve food to family members and guests as a way of showing respect, kindness, and intimacy. Her American Chinese husband's family members and friends, however, may see this as unsanitary and disrespectful. Although this may seem a small issue, emotional tension may surface through this conflicting custom.

The bond between husband and wife is strong in American culture, but in traditional Chinese culture, husband and wife remain under their parents' control and supervision. The parent-child bond is stronger than the bond between husband and wife. For example, a wife might sleep with her child, rather than her husband. When decisions about children are made, the grandparents' advice and control overrides the husband's and wife's wishes about their children. This weak husband-wife bond is reflected in the fact that husband and wife often will live and work in different cities for extended periods of time.

### The Family of Origin

All persons have two families: the family of origin into which they are born and grow up, and the family created by marriage. The family of origin molds character, affects behavioral patterns, influences emotions, and affects decisions about life partners. The family of origin affects persons' lives greatly.

Parents are powerful role models. They teach through verbal communication, but their nonverbal behavior may be even more influential. Children learn important lessons about marriage by observing how their parents communicate with each other, and how they express love, affection, and anger. Everything that parents do as marriage partners influences their children's behaviors and attitudes as marriage partners. Balswick and Balswick describe a study that found family of origin experiences affect marital adjustment. Although this is true for both husbands and wives, the study found a stronger relationship between wives' positive experiences in their family of origin and their reported marital adjustment.<sup>7</sup>

No matter how good the parents' marital relationship, adult children vow to do some things differently. Fulfilling this, however, takes awareness and conscious effort. Since modeled behavior is such a strong conditioner, most people are not aware of how often they unconsciously imitate their parents' values and actions.

Research indicates that whether or not people agree with the way their parents handled their marriage or parenting responsibilities, they may behave exactly as their parents did when similar situations arise. A young wife who witnessed her mother's

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<sup>7</sup> Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 74.

temper when her father came home late may wish to respond gently rather than lash out in anger at her tardy husband. When a similar situation arises, however, she may scold her husband before he can explain. A thoughtful husband may forget to call his wife even though his father made the same error.<sup>8</sup>

The Balswicks suggest spouses can recognize and correct attitudes and behaviors they bring into their marriage from their families of origin, and premarital counseling may help reveal these unconscious, automatic responses. They say,

It is imperative to avoid the fatalistic attitude that denies responsibility for one's own behavior by saying, "My parents have been such a strong influence on my behavior that there is nothing I can do about it!" To make excuses of this nature is tempting. A husband may say, "My wife wants me to be more open in communicating my feeling to her; she just doesn't realize that we didn't do that in my family." A wife may say, "I can't help worrying about you when you go on a trip; my mother always worried about my father." These defeatist attitudes do not facilitate needed change.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to recognize a person's family of origin has an impact on marital life. When couples realize these familial influences, they can change negative behavioral patterns learned from their families of origin. "Without personal awareness of these patterns, change is unlikely to occur."<sup>10</sup>

Lynn Long and Mark Young give of examples how families of origin affect newly married couples. They describe Craig and Stacy's decision about how to celebrate a special occasion.<sup>11</sup> Craig spent most of his youthful birthdays fishing with his friends

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Long and Young, *Counseling and Therapy for Couples*, 15.



because in his family of origin, the birthday person chose how to celebrate. In Stacy's family, however, birthdays were family times for dinner or a party. These conflicting traditions created problems for the couple when their birthdays arrived. Long and Young write, "Stacy was hurt that Craig did not plan a party; Craig felt criticized as being selfish when he went golfing with some friends and came home too late for a celebration."<sup>12</sup>

Stacy and Craig's problem illustrates how family backgrounds, traditions, and expectations may conflict in a new marriage. Other issues may involve basic choices about "eating, sleeping, working, and playing" and complicated subjects such as "money management, influences of extended family, gender roles, career choice, conflict resolution, and expressions of love and intimacy."<sup>13</sup> These are important topics for premarital counseling.

Long and Young suggest a task that can "consolidate psychological separation and establish new connections with the family origin."<sup>14</sup> This experience helps couples separate from their families of origin and still maintain healthy contact. Couples should listen to their parents' advice, discover their own solutions, and maintain their relationships with their parents. They should spend time with their parents without neglecting their own relationship. Long and Young say, "Although this is particularly important for young adults, older adults who have been divorced or widowed for a period

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 18.

of time face the same challenges. They must negotiate a new role as part of a couple after being single and maintain contact with adult children.”<sup>15</sup>

The Balswicks and Long and Young raise issues that affect all new marriages; however, the issues may be particularly complicated in bi-cultural couples. This manual provides guidance for pastors involved in premarital counseling who help couples anticipate and avoid conflicts that emanate from their backgrounds.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

## APPENDIX G

## QUESTIONS ABOUT CHINESE PERSPECTIVES OF MARRIAGE

1. Can you describe what parts of traditional thinking and what parts of Western thinking influence your expectations now?
2. If you cannot have a son to carry on the family name, would you experience any pressure from your parents?

Yes, why? \_\_\_\_\_

No, why? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Describe how much loyalty you feel toward the following people in your life?

Parents \_\_\_\_\_

Brother/Sister \_\_\_\_\_

Husband/Wife \_\_\_\_\_

Friends \_\_\_\_\_

4. If you receive conflicting opinions from your parents, brother/sister, friends, a professional counselor, and/or your spouse, how do you decide what you should do?
5. If you and your spouse come from totally different backgrounds, how can you solve the problems that are caused by the differences? Please list five things and give the solutions.

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

## CHAPTER 4

### ADJUSTMENT AND PREPARATION

In *The Premarital Counseling Handbook*, H. Norman Wright provides suggestions areas about “areas of adjustment, patterns of adjustment, and preparing in advance.”<sup>1</sup> Pastors should explore these issues in the premarital counseling process with a goal of relational partnerships based on a biblical understanding of marriage.

#### **Areas of Adjustment**

Culture is learned early in life, and people are attached strongly to family values, habits, and styles of life. In premarital counseling, couples can deal with these emotional attachments and make changes and adjustments. Pastors can facilitate this exploration.

Consider, for example, adjustments identified by interracial married couples, which have implications for cross-cultural couples. Not all couples experience these challenges, but some encounter more problems than others. Premarital counseling provides opportunity for exploration and recognition of issues, and couples can make adjustments. Wright describes the following areas for discussion: values, food, sex, male-female roles, and the use of time.

Values are important because they affect other areas in marriage. According to Wright, “A value reflects what is important to the person and what may be seen as good

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, *The Premarital Counseling Handbook*, 245-251.

or bad, right or wrong, important or unimportant. Values can be reflected in dress, religion, food, the way one behaves in public or when guests are entertained, and morals.”<sup>2</sup>

Food issues include cuisine, the way food is cooked and eaten, and other factors. Consider these cultural differences. As described earlier, a traditional Chinese wife may use her own chopsticks to pass and serve food to family members and guests. She believes this shows respect, kindness, and intimacy, but her Japanese husband may object. “The emotional involvement in these conflicting customs overrides the intellectual understanding of the differences.”<sup>3</sup> Pastors should explore issues about food as an example of how couples can discuss issues, explore options, and reach consensus.

Irish people drink at wakes, the Japanese have ritual tea ceremonies, and the British enjoy high tea. Food rituals include what people eat, how food is prepared, when and where meals are served, and how food is eaten. For example, many American farmers eat a large meal at noon and call it dinner, which may require adjustment for a city person who marries a farmer.

Sex is an issue and includes behaviors and reactions to contraception, menstruation, family honor, public displays of affection, hygiene, dancing, dress, and courtship rituals. Pastors engaged in premarital counseling with cross-cultural couples should address these subjects with cultural sensitivity.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 246

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.,

Male-female roles may require adjustment. Issues such as male superiority and women's roles differ from culture to culture. Some cultures blend roles, but others expect unique, separate behaviors. The pastor's goal is to help the couple develop a partnership based on biblical standards of mutual respect and consensus.

The use of time and timeliness are additional issues because schedules and the value of time vary among cultures. Being "on time" means something to one group and something else in another tradition. Some cultures are more relaxed and unhurried than the American system. For example, some Mediterranean people enjoy a large meal at noon followed by a nap or siesta. When people marry and move to their spouse's country, they must adjust to the new relationship and a different cultural sense of time. Pastors engaged in premarital counseling should help couples explore these issues.

Other issues include where the couple lives, politics, friends, finances, in-laws, social class, religion, dealing with stress, illness and suffering, raising children, language, and communication. Effective premarital counseling addresses all these subjects. Pastors can explore these issues in premarital counseling sessions with a goal of helping couples develop relational partnerships based on biblical concepts of marriage.

### **Patterns of Adjustment**

How can pastors help couples adjust to their cultural differences through premarital counseling? Wright offers several options including one-way adjustment, compromise/alternatives, rejection of both cultural traditions, and blending.

### One-Way Adjustment

One-way adjustment requires that one person gives up his or her patterns and adopts the patterns of the spouse. Some cultures are strong, dominant, and demand that all persons in the culture adopt the culture's religion, food, language, and other behaviors and practices. This may be the only choice for some who wish to avoid conflict, but it may create real tension because it requires loss of cultural and personal identity and breeds resentment.

### Compromise or Alternatives

Wright believes some couples deal with difficulties through compromise or alternatives, and they adjust to their partners' differences. Compromise requires that persons give up something to get something, and the result may dissatisfy. Successful compromise results through negotiation, and each partner is pleased with the result even though both give up something. This takes time, and compromising may mean doing something one way this time and another way later.

### Rejection of Cultural Uniqueness

Another method is rejection of all aspects of the couple's two cultures and creation of a pattern different from either person's tradition. This produces a significant loss for both individuals and is extremely difficult because both persons are set adrift culturally and cut off from their roots. Pastors can discuss this possibility in premarital counseling sessions.

### Blending

Blending involves consensus and cultural mixing. This ideal solution involves sacrifice of issues that are not tied to individuals' identities and cultural roots. Conflicts may occur, but the partners explore the issues repeatedly and reach resolution. Wright describes a relative who married into a Hispanic family. The man and his Hispanic wife celebrate Thanksgiving holidays with their own turkey dinner at home, and they eat a traditional dinner of enchiladas with her family later in the day. Rigid individuals who are set in their ways may have difficulty blending because attitudes make a great deal of difference.

Pastoral premarital counseling allows couples opportunity to discuss these issues, evaluate their impact, plan ways to adjust, and act on their plans. They may not have considered all the implications of their marriage, and pastors can raise issues, describe choices, and discuss the options. Blending probably reflects the biblical approach most accurately because blending requires couples discuss and develop consensus as partners in marriage.

### Preparing in Advance

Couples should develop healthy adjustments and understandings before marriage, and premarital pastoral counseling provides an appropriate venue. For example, one partner's parents may live in another country, and a visit by the couple may be helpful and productive. A trip may be costly financially, but experiencing their future partner's home, family, and culture is worthwhile. This offers an opportunity to observe family



roles, male/female role practices, meal preparation, cuisine, city or country resources, political structure and stability, and other features. It is also important to meet one another's friends and learn about the partner's taste in social activities, interaction with others, sense of humor, and response to conflict. Pastors engaged in premarital counseling can suggest these opportunities in counseling sessions as couples develop relational partnerships.

Studying the partner's culture through books, newspapers, movies, films, and interacting with others from that culture adds an awareness of differences. If the couple knows people in the community who lived in the culture, talking with them may be worthwhile. For example, missionaries who have served in the culture may be sources of information. Pastors engaged in premarital counseling may suggest couples contact persons with these experiences.

Language fluency may be an obstacle. Wright reports situations arise in his counseling experience when couples can communicate, but one partner cannot communicate with the partner's friends or family members. This topic should be discussed in premarital counseling sessions with a pastoral goal of shared information, emotional expression, and consensus between the partners based on a biblical understanding of marriage partnership.

### **Building a Relational Partnership**

Love is a foundation of marriage, and successful bi-cultural marriage requires sacrifice. Even though both partners must sacrifice, one person may sacrifice more than

the other. Premarital counseling provides the couple opportunity to discuss these and other realities and reach agreement based on clear expression of ideas and feelings. Pastors engaged in premarital counseling with bi-cultural couples should help couples build relational partnerships based on a biblical foundation of marriage.

Bi-cultural couples in America may blend with American culture, but American Chinese partners may mistakenly ignore their traditional Chinese partner's struggles. American Chinese partners should keep this in mind and encourage their partners' contact with traditional Chinese people and culture. Several adjustments facilitate this process, and pastors can use them to help couples develop biblically based partnerships. Couples should listen to each other based on partnership in marriage that reflects Adam and Eve's relationship, Jesus' view of women, and Paul's beliefs about marriage.

In traditional Chinese marriage husbands makes decisions and wives comply, but Christian marriages are partnerships that involve discussion and consensus. In bi-cultural marriages, both partners can learn how to discuss, contribute meaningfully to discussions and reach consensus. Men may need to learn to listen to their wives; wives may need to learn to speak up. The premarital counseling goal is open discussion, exchange of ideas and opinions, and progress toward consensus. This process is biblically sound and respects both persons' ideas and contributions.

### **Suggestions for Accommodating Bi-cultural Partners**

Pastors engaged in premarital counseling with bi-cultural couples might benefit from considering ways partners can accommodate one another in ordinary activities such

as language, food, external relationships, church, and devotions. The traditional Chinese partner in a cross-cultural marriage may speak little or no English. Many Christian individuals and organizations teach English free of charge or charge very little as an outreach method. Traditional Chinese partners who learn English may adapt more readily to bi-cultural marriage in addition to finding work or continuing their education. It is much easier for traditional When the partners can communicate better, their discussions and ability to reach consensus should improve.

Food is a very important part of Chinese cultures: 飲食文化 means food is part of Chinese cultures. Traditional Chinese and American Chinese partners can find ways to blend their cultural differences through food. For example, the traditional Chinese partner can prepare Chinese meals, and the American Chinese partner can prepare American meals. Bi-cultural couples can use American-style food markets and find Chinese grocery stores for Chinese ingredients. Couples may decide to eat simple American breakfasts, pack their own lunches, and prepare Chinese food for dinner. Couples may choose to alternate food choices from day to day, and they can accommodate each other in their choices of restaurants.

It is important that couples resolve these issues mutually within cooperative relationships. For example, traditional Chinese partners may have family members or relatives nearby. The American Chinese partner might encourage the traditional Chinese partner to visit them on a regular basis. Traditional Chinese people emphasize family gatherings, and the traditional Chinese partner may feel more comfortable if the family ties are maintained.

The American Chinese partner might encourage the traditional Chinese partner to make friends with other traditional Chinese people such as neighbors or co-workers. These friendships provide easy conversation and a support system. Perhaps the new traditional Chinese friends have American Chinese partners and the friends can share ideas about successful bi-cultural marriage.

Many Chinese churches in the United States have Chinese and English services or interpretation during services. The American Chinese partner may find English speaking Christian friends in the churches and have fellowship in a Chinese church. The traditional Chinese partner can find Christian friends in the same church who may be eager to help in many different ways. Bi-cultural couples may find other bi-cultural couples in a Chinese church they can befriend and develop support systems. Pastors can explore these issues, and the goal is development of a Christian partnership based on mutual submission.

Bi-cultural couples can share daily or periodic devotions. Many Chinese-English Bible versions are available, and couples can read Bible stories, share prayer requests, and pray together. The traditional Chinese partner can pray in Chinese, the American Chinese partner can pray in English, and they can develop good communication patterns in the process.

### **Sexual Adjustment for Chinese Spouses**

Traditional Chinese people are self-contained, seldom express themselves, and hide things in their hearts. They may say “Good, Okay, Fine,” even though they do not

mean it. For example, when someone praises their children traditional Chinese parents may say, “No, they are very stupid,” but Americans express gratitude when someone praises their children. In this regard the two cultures are very different.

A similar difference exists about sex. Traditional Chinese couples do not express their sexual feelings, and are unlikely to seek help even though they may have trouble in their sexual relationship. They would not study about sex, and many Chinese pastors avoid talking about sex in premarital counseling because many Chinese consider sex sinful, ugly, and dirty. When children asks parents about sex parents may reply, “Don’t ask this; it is dirty.” On the other hand, many American people want to know more about sex.

Sex is a big topic that involves many issues beyond the scope of this paper; however, the subject is important in premarital counseling and can be approached from a Christian perspective. In traditional Chinese-American Chinese bi-cultural marriage, both partners should have some basic understanding about sex. Two books have Chinese and English versions that discuss sexual relationships: *Love Life for Every Married Couple* by Ed Wheat and translated by Ruth Yen<sup>4</sup> and *Intended for Pleasure* by Ed and Gaye Wheat, translated by Joseph Chen and Ruth Yen.<sup>5</sup>

Theologically, human sexuality can be understood as a reflection of God’s design for creation:

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<sup>4</sup> Ed Wheat, *Love Life for Every Married Couple*, trans. Ruth Yen (Houston, TX: Glory Press, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Ed Wheat and Gaye Wheat, *Intended for Pleasure*, trans. Joseph Chen and Ruth Yen (Houston, TX: Glory Press, 1982).

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Gen. 1:27-28)

Jack and Judith Balswick believe this passage shows that males and females are distinct in God’s design,<sup>6</sup> yet in God’s sight they are equal and united as sexual beings. God commands men and women to be fruitful, subdue the earth, and rule over God’s creation. Pastors who engage in premarital counseling can help bi-cultural couples accept their sexuality and be thankful that it is part of God’s creation, design, and intention.

Cleveland McDonald and Philip McDonald believe God endowed Adam and Eve with their sexuality.<sup>7</sup> Human males and females differ biologically, and their unique sexual natures cause them to respond to each other and situations differently. Pastors can help bi-cultural Christian couples recognize that their sexual natures are gifts from God.<sup>8</sup> If their culture taught them sexual relations are sinful and dirty, premarital counseling can emphasize what God says about the subject in the Bible.

In addition to the Genesis passage, pastors can use New Testament passages and reinforce a biblical view of sexuality. For example, Hebrews 13:4 declares the marriage bed should be undefiled: “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” In 1 Corinthians 7:2-5 Paul indicates spouses’ bodies exist for the pleasure of each other:

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<sup>6</sup> Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 220-221.

<sup>7</sup> McDonald and McDonald, *Creating a Successful Christian Marriage*, 31.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. 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 and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

McDonald and McDonald write,

The body is a sacred place, where God dwells and is manifested. The body's beauty and mystery are prominent in the sexual expression and celebration of love. God is there. For the Christian, the sexual union is not only a physical act but should be an act of worship and celebration of God's love and goodness.<sup>9</sup>

McDonald and McDonald believe the sexual relationship between husband and wife is their most intimate interaction because maximum closeness is achieved in sexual intercourse.<sup>10</sup> "In this relationship they most uniquely and fully express their love for each other and fulfill the one-flesh dimension of the marriage."<sup>11</sup> Intimacy is often equated with sexual intimacy; however, sexual intimacy is only one intimacy factor for a couple.

Wright suggests the couple learn to talk together freely about sex,<sup>12</sup> and pastors engaged in premarital counseling should encourage bi-cultural couples to talk about these issues. If something displeases or causes discomfort, the displeased or uncomfortable

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 167-169.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 168

<sup>12</sup> Wright, *The Premarital Counseling Handbook*, 207.

partner should say so. Mutuality and partnership can develop as individuals discuss the topic, learn about each other's body, and discover how they relate.

Some traditional Chinese wives complain that their traditional Chinese husbands do not know how to show affection. Some women complain that their husbands express affection only as a precursor for intercourse. If a traditional Chinese man has an American Chinese wife, the pastor should talk frankly and directly to the man about giving his wife frequent hugs and kisses without leading her to the bedroom. Affection and attention should occur every day.

This manual describes the biblical basis for marriage based on partnership, support, and mutual submission. Bi-cultural marriages between traditional Chinese and American Chinese persons present a unique challenge. Premarital counseling provides pastors opportunity to intervene, introduce biblical concepts, and facilitate communication and understanding. The goal is the development of a Christian marriage based on Adam and Eve's pre-fall partnership, Christ's ideas, and Paul's concept of mutual submission.

This manual provides the biblical foundations and describes various counseling topics and interventions pastors can use with couples. The following supplement presents questions and background information pastors may find useful. The materials may be copied and used by pastors involved in premarital counseling sessions.



APPENDIX H  
GOD'S BLUEPRINT FOR MARRIAGE

Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-25

Some of the following discussion and study questions about unity through understanding God's purpose for marriage are taken from Unit One of Wayne Mack, *How to Develop Deep Unity in the Marriage Relationship*.<sup>13</sup>

1. Who originated the marriage institution?
2. What are the purposes of marriage? Why did God originate marriage? (Compare Genesis 1:28, 2:18; Ephesians 5:22-32.)
3. In what ways is marriage "good"? (Genesis 2:18, Hebrews 13:4).
4. What does the word "help-mate" suggest about the man and the woman?
  - (1) The man
  - (2) The woman
5. According to Genesis 2:24, what is the primary human relationship in life?
6. What does leaving mother and father involve?

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<sup>13</sup> Wayne Mack, *A How to Manual for Developing Deep Unity in the Marriage Relationship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 7-11.

7. List some of the things that married people must do to promote and manifest this oneness.
  - (1)
  - (2)
  - (3)
  - (4)
  - (5)
8. What are some of the barriers to deep oneness?
9. Discuss your marriage in terms of leaving your parents and oneness in marriage.
  - (1) Have you really left your parents? In what ways might your marriage relationship be adversely affected because you are following you parents' behaviors? Is your spouse the number one human being in your life?
  - (2) Are you really committed to your partner? How do you react to your partner's weakness, failures, needs, and problems? Does your treatment of your partner depend upon your partner's performance? Must your partner earn your affection and approval?
  - (3) How would you rate the intimacy or sharing level of your relationship? Total? Partial? Very little? Is there anything you are afraid to share with each other? Do you think mostly in terms of "me" or "we"? Discuss the level of your spiritual, intellectual, emotional, sexual, recreational, financial, parental, communicational, occupational, aesthetic, and creative partnership. Where is your partnership weak? Where is it strong? How will you improve the weak areas?

10. Evaluate your present relationship. What do you like about your partnership as it is now? What are the things that could be even better?

Strengths	Areas for Growth and Development
(1)	(1)
(2)	(2)
(3)	(3)
(4)	(4)
(5)	(5)

11. What are some worthwhile goals for your marriage?

12. Make a list of things to be avoided in your partnership.

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- (4)
- (5)

13. In one sentence (one word, if possible) describe your partnership.

14. List five positive aspects of marriage.

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- (4)
- (5)

15. Do you ever feel lonely? Please describe what you experience.
16. Do you ever feel you need someone to help you? Please describe what you experience.
17. List five ways in which you could help your fiancé/fiancée.
- (1)
  - (2)
  - (3)
  - (4)
  - (5)
18. What is the meaning of “A man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife?” (Genesis 2:24)
19. How can you leave your father and your mother? Please list five different ways.
- (1)
  - (2)
  - (3)
  - (4)
  - (5)

20. What could happen if your spouse cannot leave his/her parents?
21. List three ways in which you cannot leave your father and your mother because they are your responsibility.
- (1)
  - (2)
  - (3)
22. How do you want God to help you in your marriage?
23. What do you think and feel about marriage now after discussing all these ideas, concepts, and questions?

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