

CHAPTER 8

THE LOVE-ROUND -MARRIAGE

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3v16) Just think of that sacrifice! Think of the love that it took to give His only son. What did He give Him to? Was it to a beautiful bride that was prepared for His coming? No, it was to a sin-sick world. Jesus came so that from this sin-sick situation a 'bride' might be prepared for Him.

Let us think for a moment of the love relationship between the Father and His son. It was not a selfish love of just thinking of themselves, but a 'giving' love. A love that came forth to serve others. Think of Jesus exhausted after a long day and troubled by the bad news of the be-heading of John the Baptist. He wanted to get away to be alone with His Father, yet when a crowd finds Him, He ministers to their needs instead of pleasing Himself and doing what He would like to have done. (Matt. 14) Jesus was constrained by the love of the Father to do the Father's will. Jesus tells us to love one another as He loved us-with the same quality of love as was between the Father and Himself. (John 15v9- 12) The apostle Paul speaks of the love of Christ controlling us. (2 Cor. 5v14) Do we really appreciate the love that God has for us? We need to spend time meditating on that love that God has for us in Jesus. Jesus's love was poured out in compassion on people who were really only interested in getting what they could from him instead of being committed to him. Think of how much more He loves the church, His body, those who have responded to His love and committed themselves to Him.

HUSBAND/WIFE RELATIONSHIP

"Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that he might sanctify her that He might

present the church to Himself without spot or wrinkle or any such thing and that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife, loves himself, for no man hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it." (Eph.5v25- 30) One of the reasons that Jesus came was that we might have life and have it more abundantly. Husbands and wives come together not only that their lives may be completed in a physical sense, but that they may both lead a more abundant and fulfilled life.

When we think of our physical bodies, we are aware when some part hurts. In the same way, if our wives are hurting, we can not be happy until that hurt is dealt with. **What we are called to is a practically demonstrated 'Love-round'**. How may this 'Love-round' work? I love my wife by telling her that I love her, I demonstrate it practically by caring for her and being considerate of her needs. (That may mean washing dishes and changing nappies etc.), I provide for her and the family. Love stimulates love. When we allow the love of God to flow through us to our wives and they in turn allow the love of God to flow through them to us, it produces a 'Love-round' Which gathers momentum and our marriages grow stronger and stronger. Our homes become homes where love flows and radiates out to others.

As was said in previous chapters, Marge and I did not know each other very well before marriage. Marge married me in faith, believing it was the right thing to do. She received various confirmations that the blessing of God was upon this union and considered the blessing of her parents to be one of the most important confirmations. To have the approval of Christian parents on such a big decision meant a lot to her. Marge was a country girl and found living in the city of Dublin very hard to get used to and a difficult pregnancy did not help the situation. As she says herself; "It was faith in the fact that I believed God had sent me to Ireland and had given Charles to be my husband, that kept me in those difficult days of adjustment." "Now there is a real depth of love

between us and God has been faithful to His word to keep me and guide me and give me a love for Charles." The 'Love-round' between us just grows and grows and the children sometimes tease us by calling us, 'Romeo and Juliet!' It is from the unity of the 'Love-round' that children can have a stable home.

The word that Harry Greenwood had for us about "waiting until one saw what the other saw and then stepping together" has been a very practical word for us. We make suggestions to each other and at times meet with a negative reaction. We both pray about the matter and ask the Lord to reveal what is right to the other person and in the Lord's timing .He does just that. Praise H is wonderful name! In other words, we work on the principle of mutual submission. When a person is in the Spirit they are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2v6) The party in the flesh is moving on an earthly plane. A woman in the Spirit is nearer to God than a man in the flesh and vice versa! The promise in Joel (Ch. 2v28) says that God's Spirit will be poured out on all flesh. Sons and daughters will prophesy. What a man receives from the Lord is no more important than what a woman receives. The question is whether it is from the Lord.

Marge and I grew up in a Society who have believed in equal responsibilities and opportunities for men and women over three hundred years. Quaker business meetings are conducted on the basis of consensus and there is no difference made between what women have to say and what may come from men. It also makes it equally important that everyone, men and women, find out what God is saying and share that rather than what they themselves think.

In married life there can be crisis where either party have to make snap decisions. This is particularly true in relation to discipline of children for example. It is important that the party not

involved in the act of discipline supports the action of the other even though he or she may feel it was not the right course of action at the time. Differences can be sorted out later when only the husband and wife are present. Sometimes decisions must be made when there is not time to arrive at a consensus and the responsibility for the decision quite clearly rests with the husband. As Paul says, "The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the church." (Eph.5v23) When the 'love-round' is working properly the wife can obey, knowing that the Lord will work everything out to the good. Yet, decisions that are made in agreement with one's wife are best because we both can put our hearts into carrying out what we believe to be right and the whole-hearted support of each other is a tremendous encouragement and strength.

Consensus decisions in Jesus Christ are not the lowest common factor between people, but a response to the highest call of the Holy Spirit in any individual's life. One party 'lording' it over the other and demanding obedience can never draw the best out of the other, nor from God. Jesus said; "If two of you agree on earth about anything they shall ask it will be done for them by my Father in Heaven." (Matt. 18v19) Where is there a better place to have unity and agreement than between husband and wife? If we allow un-forgiveness or jealousy or envy to come in then the 'Love-round' is stopped and disintegration starts. this is why it is important for Christians not to be 'unequally yoked (miss-mated)' with unbelievers. (2 Cor. 6v14) The motivation of our lives changes when we become new creatures in Christ and unequal yoking means pulling in two different directions.

Unmarried Christians need to realise that once erotic romantic love is stimulated one can be blinded to lack of unity in Christ. Also there is no guarantee that your friend will ever come to the Lord. (1 Cor.7v16) It is therefore important to find out if

there is real unity before you allow love to be stirred up. Mens' nature has not changed since the story of Tamar. (2 Samuel 13v1-19) Amnon's supposed love devised a plan for sexual intercourse, yet when he got to lie with her, he hated her. Words of love can be deceptive, so observe anothers life not just in dim romantic settings but in the clear daylight, watch the pattern, check the source before committing to another your romantic life,

I remember another sad case of a young Christian who disappeared from college shortly before her final exams. As a leader in the Christian group at college, I called to see her at her home. It was a shock to meet a disheveled, broken young lady. She had gone on with a relationship with an unbeliever. She had previously been unhappy with the relationship and I had warned her against continuing it. However, she continued, became pregnant and then the father of her child had gone off with someone else as far as she knew. No wonder she was shattered. She repented and the Lord I believe, put her life together again.

The evil one goes around seeking those he can lead astray. In the open society in which we live, unmarried Christians need to beware of starting relationships with people who they know are not really committed Christians for romantic love can easily be aroused and deceive. Probably a good question to ask is; 'does this friendship deepen my relationship with God or not?' Romantic love is based on self-satisfaction, but true love serves others and is so well summarised in the chapter on love. (1 Cor. 13) The sad outcome of self-satisfaction comes out in the next story.

A young woman asked me one day if I could forgive her. A few years earlier I had warned her against 'sleeping around' outside marriage. She had not listened to the advice and got pregnant. She was then faced with the current thinking of the day that there was nothing wrong with abortion (this happened in America) and chose

that way of escape for herself. **She realised afterwards that abortion was murder** and wondered if I could forgive her. I reminded her of one of the most amazing tokens of God's ability to forgive that is recorded in the opening chapter of the New Testament in the very 'roots' (ancestors) of Jesus. It refers there to the sin of David (Matt.1v6) In 2 Samuel 11 v2-11, you will recall the story of David whiling away his time one day when he saw his neighbour's wife having a bath. He lusted after her, committed adultery with her and had her righteous husband murdered. David was brought to his senses by a story from Nathan the Prophet (2 Sam. 12v1-15), repented of his sin (Psalm 51) and was forgiven. Subsequently, Solomon was born to Bathsheba and Solomon succeeded David as King with God's blessing. So the roots of Jesus are recalled through this line. In other words, when God forgives, the sin is so **totally** forgiven that if necessary, it can be talked about. This does not mean that what David did was right; it was not. But it does mean that we should not be less willing to forgive than God was. Certainly I could forgive this girl because Jesus has forgiven me.

We live in a 'messed up' world today -yet one thing is clear that God cares for the 'fatherless' and 'widows'. I write as a man. If we are real men, we should be prepared to accept the consequences of our actions. We don't want to pass the buck, do we?? True, we need to pray, "Lead us not into temptation" Eve tempted Adam, but that did not make his sin any less. (Rom.4v12-14) We need the word of God's truth in our hearts that we may not sin but if we do, is it right to pass the buck?? No, it is not, but it takes the strength of manhood and much more to say 'the buck stops here.' We procreate a child -is it right to leave the mother holding the baby? Must we not provide for him or her? If the mother has an abortion, are we not co-murderers? If we had taken our responsibility, would the murder have taken place? We cannot live in ivory palaces.

Clearly we men are as responsible for our offspring whether outside marriage or not- whether legitimate or not as women are.

We make the commitment of marriage -is it right to desert our wives? No! We have responsibility to love them and provide for them.

God has made us male and female with the intention that men and women should, leave their parents, .and become one flesh with their wife/husband. (Gen. 2v24) The joy, fun and purity of this physical union, in the commitment of marriage, is an adhesive to hold the relationship together. It is the combination of the loving caring commitment to each other and the physical union that makes sexual intercourse in marriage so wonderful in the love of God. Relationships without the commitment to jointly care for each other and any children which may come must lack also the total giving of oneself to each other. This is a good reason against adultery and fornication (voluntary sexual intercourse between unmarried people). Fornication is described as a work of the flesh (Gal. 5v19KJv) and as one of the things that defile a man by Jesus (Matt. 15v18-20) who put it along with murder and adultery. Furthermore such relationships mean giving oneself to someone who is unlikely to be a life long partner. For example, over half the fathers of illegitimate children¹⁵were either not worth telling of the pregnancy or if told absconded, terminated the relationship or denied paternity. Why give your body to someone who may not give you the loving support you need. Why not stick to the argument that if you love me enough to want sexual intercourse with me you love me enough to marry me so lets wait till the public commitment of marriage.

It is interesting to note some old testament Scriptures "If a man seduces a virgin who is not be throthed and lies (has sexual intercourse) with her, he shall give the marriage present for her and

make her his wife" (Exodus22v16)and she shall be his wife because he has violated her; he may not put her away all his days" (Deut. 22v28-29) "If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equivalent to the marriage present for virgins." (Exodus 22v17)

Yes if we step outside of God's wisdom of keeping our bodies for our wife, our husband something very precious is lost. We need to pray "Lord Lead us not into temptation Deliver us from evil." We must avoid situations which we know might be a problem for us. We need to remember "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with every temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure, Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor.10v12-13).

We need God's strength to walk right with God. We need to realise how easy it is for people to fall, (1 Cor. 10v12) and yet we need to encourage one another to walk right with God. We need to realise God's power to heal marriages while at the same time realising that basically marriage is a relationship, and relationships require communication appreciation, forgiveness, trust; in order that they may grow strong. When both parties acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ and are seeking to do His will, the relationship has a basis for growth, but it still requires time and commitment. There is a strength in two people being 'one' for when one is down, the other can be an encouragement.

To end on a happier note; I will relate how things can turn out for the good if we co-operate with God's love. A young friend of ours got pregnant, so we invited her to stay in our home. The man involved wanted to marry her, but at that stage she was not in a state of mind to discuss that. We encouraged them to meet and

suggested to him not to talk of marriage for a while. Firstly, she wanted an abortion, but as we shared together, she decided against that course of action and felt that she would have the baby adopted. The baby was born premature and during the time she spent closely watching the baby's progress and sharing nature's own food supply, she decided to keep the, baby herself. She agreed to meet and at least get to know the father of her baby. Eventually they were able to talk of marriage and have since become a family unit and rejoice in the birth of another child. Wrong action does not lead to an easy life, but if we repent, seek God and do His will, He can turn disaster to good for truly; "All things work together for good to those who love the Lord." (Rom.8v28)

God's love flowing into us, enables us to keep the 'Love-round' going. God's love can also enable parties to broken relationships to have the love and determination to find in God a way to get a 'Love- round' going again.

Yes, love is stimulatable. It is the natural response to love. (Matt.5v46)