

*What is the Mystery
of Marriage?*

Carl H. Stevens Jr. is pastor of Greater Grace Church located in Baltimore, Maryland. Pastor Stevens is also chancellor of Maryland Bible College & Seminary and host of the international Christian radio program "The Grace Hour." This booklet was created from messages preached by Pastor Stevens.

Pastor Stevens can be seen weekly on cable television stations throughout the United States. Call us for information regarding programming in your area.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

GRACE PUBLICATIONS
P.O. BOX 18715
BALTIMORE, MD 21206

Printed in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A.

Copyright © 1997

Grace Publications is a ministry of
Greater Grace World Outreach, Inc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 5

Chapter 1 7

GROWING UP INTO CHRIST

Chapter 2 14

ESPOUSED TO JESUS CHRIST

Chapter 3 22

THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

Chapter 4 30

OBJECTIVE LOVE AND SUBJECTIVE LOVE

CONCLUSION 38

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever thought, “What was God’s purpose in creating the human race?” Certainly it was to bring Him glory (Isaiah 43:7). Yes, it was to bring Him pleasure (Revelation 4:11). And yes, it was to show the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness toward us for all eternity (Ephesians 2:7).

But there is a greater reason behind God’s creation of the human race. When Lucifer rebelled against God with his five “I wills” (Isaiah 14:12-15) and iniquity was found in his emotions (Ezekiel 28:15), he sowed *rachal* (the Hebrew word for discord) among a third of the angels. They joined Lucifer’s side, accusing God who is love that He is not a God of love. Lucifer said, “You are not a loving God. You’re a phony God, and I’ve got to replace you. If You were a God of love, you would never send anyone to hell—and you wouldn’t send angels to hell!”

In response to Satan’s accusation, God cre-

ated the human race. He has used the human race as His theater for the divine operation of grace upon the earth. God Almighty would use men to show the fallen angels as well as the elect angels the diversity of His characteristics in action toward a fallen race.

Now we are here as sinners saved by grace, spectacles to angels, to men, and to the world system with its demonic host (1 Corinthians 4:9). In 1 Peter 1:12, the elect angels desire to look into our salvation to study the character of God toward those who have fallen. Remember, the elect angels have never fallen. Created perfect, they never required the application of mercy and grace, so they study men to comprehend the depth of the character of God.

In order for the Lord to manifest His character in this theater on the earth, He chose to use the Church—redeemed sinners—in local assemblies throughout the world. God uses the individual's volition to display His provision of grace and to teach men how to grow into Christ's image through grace. But the main spectacle in this great drama upon the earth today for the elect and the fallen angels to witness is *marriage*.

Chapter One
GROWING UP INTO CHRIST

Now, in Ephesians 4:11-12, the Word of God says, “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

There are many pastors who are missionary evangelists. They do the work of a pastor-teacher, but their first call is to be missionaries, and that’s where evangelism comes in. They have the *gift* of evangelism. Every pastor does the *work* of evangelism, but these men have a gift of evangelism. Do you see this? My gift is to be a pastor-teacher who does the work of an evangelist.

The pastor-teacher and the evangelist are given “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12).

Notice verse 13: "Till we all come in the *unity* of the faith...." Oh, I like that! That means when I hear a message, I accept it. My wife accepts it, you accept it, the family accepts it, and we've heard from God. At that point, God produces faith in us (Romans 10:17). Faith produces a unity of obedience through our oneness with God's heart, His purpose, His call, and His provision. The Word of God motivates the river of the Holy Spirit as it goes into the various facets of our consciousness. The Word controls our self-consciousness, now motivated by God-consciousness, and makes us conscious of grace, mercy, love, forgiveness, and patience.

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the *knowledge* of the Son of God...." In this phrase, "knowledge" is *epignosis*. If the noun were *gnosis*, it would mean that the action of the Word stops with perception, never leading to experience. But here the word is *epignosis*. It's a simple term that means I experience the Word through my human spirit in the five parts of my soul. When I listen to the Word of God, it produces *gnosis*. But when I say, "I believe it," then the Holy Spirit transfers the Word that I've heard to my human spirit. There it becomes *epignosis*, and I operate in the experience of a

love that passes knowledge (Ephesians 3:19).

Ephesians 4:13 continues, "...unto a perfect [mature] man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The Greek word for "fulness" is *pleroma*, meaning "abundance." I have the abundance of His grace, the abundance of His love, the abundance of His kindness, the abundance of His thinking.

Speaking the Whole Truth

"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:14-15).

"Speaking *the* truth" (note the definite article) means that the pastor-teacher must preach the whole counsel of God—*everything*. If it's in season, he preaches the truth and builds his people up. If it's out of season and they don't want to hear it, he still preaches the truth, but he has to preach it in love. And why? So that "we may grow up into [Christ] in *all* things." The whole purpose for preaching and teaching is to help us to grow up into Christ in every area of our lives.

Then, verse 16 describes the purpose of evangelism: “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” That is evangelism.

The work of an evangelist increases the Body by winning people to the local assembly. Then we edify one another in love, quietly, through grace.

On Trial in Satan’s Appeal Case

After Satan fell, God sentenced him to hell. When he petitioned God, his request for an appeal was granted. Today, Satan is called the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Though he has been sentenced, he is out on bail, pending final judgment. The devil has permission from God to test the human race. Though he tests single men and women and teenagers, his primary focus is to test marriages because of what they represent. He will try to prove that the character of Christ is not working in the lives of those who profess Christ.

That’s what he did with Job (Job 1:7-12). That’s what he did with Joshua the high priest

(Zechariah 3:1-4) and with Paul through the thorn in Paul's flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7). Satan gets permission to do things to us, to test what we know about Christ's character.

For example, if I teach five weeks on grace, Satan says to God, "Will you allow my demons to come into the city and test your people on the subject of grace? Let's see if they will give that grace to each other when I rub them the wrong way, or life rubs them the wrong way, or a spouse rubs them the wrong way. I'll prove to you that your grace doesn't work!"

So, the invisible, inaudible demons of Ephesians 6:12—the principalities and powers, the rulers of darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in high places, the confederated host of cosmic enemies to the soul—get permission from the supreme court of heaven to test your private life at home, at work, in your car. If you glorify God, you defeat the demons and they flee. But if you do not glorify God, Satan boasts that you are a phony. He accuses you, and then he accuses God. This is happening every day you live. There is a myriad of demons, and some that are designated to cause disease (though not all diseases are from them).

Virtue Love

When Ephesians 4:15 says, “speaking the truth in *love*, [that we] may grow up...,” it is talking about *virtue love*. We have virtue love when the Word of God dwells “richly [in our hearts] in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another [building each other up] in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Colossians 3:16-17).

It’s interesting that the next passage reads, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands” (Colossians 3:18). The first thing God requires is from the wife, *not* the husband. God requires wives to submit to their *own* husbands “as it is fit in the Lord.” Then verse 19 says, “Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.” And in verse 20, “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.”

“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom” reflects *epignosis*: the application of His character through His Spirit. When the Word dwells richly in us and we are continually

filled with the fullness of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), rebounding the moment we fail—*that*, friends, is virtue love.

Virtue love is the supernatural, divine impartation of God's character. It is God's character operating in my humanity. As frail as I am, God borrows my humanity. He borrows my mind, my emotions, my volition, my conscience, and my self-consciousness (the five parts of the soul). Then my soul becomes His habitation (Ephesians 2:22).

The next thing He does through *epignosis* is to manifest Himself. He will manifest Himself in you during a terrible situation. Clouds and thick darkness may be all around you. Everything bad may be happening to you, but now you manifest Christ.

Chapter Two

ESPOUSED TO JESUS CHRIST

“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2).

When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 11, marriage customs were quite different from today. The parents of both children would get together and one would say, “I like your daughter.” The other parent would say, “I like your son. Let’s get together on the third day of the week and sign a contract.”

Arranged marriage was common practice. The daughter may have been only eight years old and the son eleven. They were to have nothing to do with each other. Yet once the parents signed the contract, the children were legally married. They couldn’t touch, they couldn’t hold hands, they couldn’t be together until the wedding ceremony, yet they were legally mar-

ried. This was the case with Joseph and Mary. (By the way, when Mary conceived Jesus by the Holy Spirit, she and Joseph had never even kissed.)

It's very interesting that according to history, there was a law that said a betrothed couple couldn't kiss each other. And that was in the *secular* world. (I'm not so old-fashioned as I thought!) If they kissed before the wedding day, they were guilty of violating that law.

On the day of the wedding, the parents would come to the ceremony together, but the bridegroom came alone. As he arrived, his men were waiting for him. After greeting them, he had to go in to be with the father and mother of his bride.

When the ceremony began, the bridegroom would walk out first; he hasn't yet seen his bride adorned. Next came the bride's mother and father. The father would bring the bride to the bridegroom. There were no vows exchanged. The bridegroom simply stood in front of the father and he said, "I am her husband." Then he would look at his bride and say, "She is my wife." That was it! The ceremony was over.

After the ceremony, they would walk out into the streets and go to one of the parents'

homes where joyous parties lasted three weeks. Only virgins were allowed to be the bridesmaids, and they weren't even at the wedding—they had to wait at the house for the bride and groom to return. And to think that the *world* required that. Now, don't get upset or start condemning yourself. We're living in the dispensation of grace. At the moment of salvation, you became a brand-new creature, regardless of your past. Satan's accusations are lies, and you can be bold to confess that you are absolutely pure before God, washed in the blood of the Lamb.

A Pastor's Godly Devotion

Addressing the members of his church, Paul said: "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy" (2 Corinthians 11:2). The word "jealous" is a terrible translation. The Greek word is *zeloo*, a verb that means, "I am committed to you with a *tremendous devotion*." What a difference that is from the word "jealous." Paul was saying, "I am committed to you with a devotion to study, to prepare my message, and to give you the truth." He was saying, "I am committed to you and motivated by a devotion of God's *virtue* love."

Paul went on to say, "I have espoused you." In this present middle indicative, the subject

produces the action on the verb, and the indicative mood means that this is an assertion of reality. “Espousal” means “betrothal.” He said, “You are legally married to Jesus Christ now.” I love that! This is the first stage.

When David was in the first stage of marriage with Saul’s daughter, he said, “I want the second stage to come!” He was sick of no-touch love, of never being with her. He said, “When is the second stage coming?” And that was pretty good for David—to *wait* for the second stage.

Paul was saying to the Corinthians, “I am devoted to you with the motivation of love and a commitment to give you the Word so that you can have virtue love, so you can grow up into Christ in all things. My desire is that you will honor *God’s* order in your marriage to Christ.”

This verse in 2 Corinthians 11:2 continues, “that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” The verb tense used in this phrase is the aorist active infinitive. The infinitive implies a divine purpose. Paul was saying, “That I, at a point of time (*aorist tense*), may produce the action (*active voice*) of presenting you to Jesus Christ in the air, as a chaste virgin.” This doesn’t mean we achieve sinless perfection here on earth. It means we are always going after God,

always taking the provision of God's pure love as our motivation for living.

Beware of the Serpent

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him" (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

Paul said that as Satan beguiled Eve through his subtilty (his underhanded, veiled deceit), he would like to corrupt your minds in the same way. Paul warned them to "beware of anybody who preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached. Don't receive another spirit that you have not received from us, or another gospel that we have not preached."

That's what happens. Satan sends false teachers who will pervert and distort the Gospel. They will come and preach Jesus, but it will not be the Christ of the Bible. They'll talk about a holy spirit, but it will not be the Holy Spirit that glorifies God and gives every believer

one or more gifts when he's saved (1 Corinthians 12:4, 11). They will add works to the Gospel so it will not be pure grace. But Paul said, "My desire is to one day present you to Christ. I want you to know that you are legally married to Jesus Christ, and I don't want you 'going out' on Him. Don't get involved in an adulterous relationship with a spirit from another kingdom."

Our Ceremony

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Paul, along with every pastor, will introduce his church to Christ when we meet in the air at the Rapture. This will be our ceremony, where the legal contract becomes a living marriage in the air, before we ever get to heaven! That's what the Greek teaches. The pastor will introduce everybody in his assembly by name to Christ.*

You are probably thinking, “Won’t that take a long time?” I have no idea. But remember, we will have glorified bodies in eternity, and we will not be limited by time.

Virtue Love Produces Eternal Values

God wants us to have virtue love. He wants us to grow into virtue love in everything we think, say, and do, because with virtue love come values—eternal values.

You see, when a person starts drinking alcohol, he has lost a value. When a person starts thinking with pornography, he’s lost a value, and he begins to add sin to sin. And when a person starts criticizing, he loses the value of edifying. When a person refuses to minister grace, he loses the value of Christ’s character. When a person doesn’t love unconditionally as Christ loves him, he has lost a vital spiritual value.

I receive so many letters and telephone calls each week. Recently, a lady wrote to my wife and said, “I had such a beautiful week when I was visiting with you and the church. It was so heavenly! Now Satan is tempting me to go back to my bulimia, and I’ve failed twice.” She’s a dear person, and she *will* win the victory because she’s honest. But can you see this? Satan

wants us to lose God's values.

Christ wants us to build with a spiritual value system. As the Word and the Spirit dwell in us richly in all wisdom, our value system will become our very life. Inside, our hearts will be singing with grace unto the Lord. We will be relaxed and happy.

There was another situation with a gentleman who said, "My wife was constantly nagging and trying to control me. Then something happened during the convention in Baltimore. After listening to several pastors speak, she said, 'God is performing surgery on me.' Ever since we got home, she only wants to love me and wash my feet! Our marriage is brand new." It wasn't an emotional experience; it was spiritual. Yet, it is affecting her emotions in a healthy way.

**Read The Bema Seat: Presented in Joy or Grief? by Pastor Stevens, Grace Publications 1996.*

Chapter Three

THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

“Holding the *mystery* of the faith in a pure conscience” (1 Timothy 3:9).

“To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this *mystery* among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

“And without controversy great is the *mystery* of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, *seen of angels* [Remember, there is angelic involvement in this mystery], preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Timothy 3:16).

“This is a great *mystery*: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband” (Ephesians 5:32-33).

Ephesians 5:32-33 is talking about marriage. It's talking about wives submitting. It's talking

about husbands loving and nourishing and cherishing their wives. As the months go by and I learn more and more about this great subject of marriage, I am overwhelmed. Repeatedly we see the word “mystery”—something that has never been known, something that has been kept secret. What is the great mystery? *Marriage*.

If I were to go to the average home in America today, I would discover the reason so many marriages fail, the reason so many are just sustained, and the reason single people get into deep emotional problems: *They do not understand the “mystery.”*

Ephesians 3:5-6 says that this mystery was never made “known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit”—and this is why—“That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.”

Paul went on to say in verse 7, “Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.” (The Greek says, “...that works in me.”)

Jesus Christ's Royal Family

Jesus Christ had God the Father and God the Spirit for His royal family in heaven. But He came to earth, incarnate in a hypostatic union, unique in every area like no other man. Though He was God, yet He was man; and though He was man, yet He was God.

Though He was God when He walked this earth, Jesus emptied Himself of the right to exercise His deity. He lived each day in His humanity in total dependence upon God the Father for His resources. In His deity, Jesus' title was "the Son of God." In Matthew's account of the genealogy of Jesus' humanity, He is called "the Son of David." This genealogy traces Jesus back to the line of Solomon through Joseph (Matthew 1:1-17). (Luke 3:23-38 traces the line to Nathan, the younger son of David. Most scholars agree this was probably a reference to Mary's lineage, recognizing her husband, Joseph, as a son and heir of her family.) On both sides it takes us back to the royal line, showing that Jesus was a member of royalty in His humanity (legally entitled to be called King of the Jews) as He already is in His Deity.

After His crucifixion, when Jesus ascended

into heaven, the Father said, "I'm going to give you a royal family made up of all of those you died for, who believed on you. Among this royal family will be the Church, your Bride forever."

God the Father—who planned everything, according to Ephesians 1:1-7—*planned* that Adam and Eve would have a perfect marriage in the perfect environment of the Garden of Eden. But God gave them *free volition*, the freedom and ability to choose to obey Him. Their entire destiny would be determined by volition and values—choices *for* God or choices against themselves. Eternal values set the stage, and free volition changed the scene in this eternal drama in the courtroom of heaven.

The stage has been set. The institution of marriage is now the theater for an angelic conflict. Satan, out on bail in his appeal case, has a purpose in the conflict: to get marriages to fail and ultimately be destroyed, adversely affecting the future of Jesus Christ's bride. But Revelation 19:7 tells us that Satan will not succeed. Jesus Christ will marry a spotless bride in heaven, and the multitudes around the throne in heaven will cry out, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."

The Purpose of Marriage

Ephesians 5:23-31 speaks plainly about marriage. "...For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh." Then in Ephesians 5:32, "This is a great mystery: *but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*" It is a mystery.

In Romans 16:25 Paul said, "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the *mystery*, which was kept secret since the world began."

This is what God is saying: "There's something I never told the Old Testament prophets. There's something that the disciples didn't understand until later." The Apostle Paul, however, understood it well: God designed the institution of marriage to reveal the character of Christ.

This was the plan: As a husband and wife reproduced themselves, they would raise their children, nurture them, and train them in the Lord. Then, as the children would grow, godly families would become a godly local assembly. The local assembly in turn would send people out into all the world to reveal a most wonder-

ful, indescribable plan, never known until the Church Age: the mystery of people becoming saved and revealing the character and nature of Jesus Christ, glorifying God individually and in marriage. This is the mystery of a fallen race glorifying God in the family, in the Church, and ultimately in Satan's world system.

Remember, Satan is out on bail. He appealed to God so he could go to court against God's people, to test our minds, our emotions, and our volition, invisibly and inaudibly. He wants to rob us of our eternal values, cause divorces, and promote immorality, promiscuity, and sensuality. Satan wants men and women to live without responsibility to people and without personal accountability to God.

Paul's Strategy

"For [Paul's] letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Corinthians 10:10).

The Corinthians accused Paul of writing letters that were "weighty." They labeled him as sarcastic, mean, heavy, and rude. They said, "Your speech is contemptible, unbearable." They told him he didn't know how to communicate

and that when he did, his manner was negative, nasty, and sarcastic. Aware of their complaint Paul said, “But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things” (2 Corinthians 11:6).

There was a strategy in Paul’s use of the language. He was an extremely straightforward speaker, powerful in his communication of truth. He rebuked both the Corinthian women who would not submit to their husbands and also the men who would not take headship. Because they were magnifying the gifts above the Giver, Paul approached them with figures of speech to convey a full thought through words that were not only carefully chosen but also precisely placed.*

The Greeks were masters in rhetoric, skillful in the use of language. Paul, well trained in the Scriptures and discourse, pointed to the mystery that many would never understand or receive—Christ *in* you, Christ *for* you, Christ *through* you, the Word of God in you, the Holy Spirit in you. He rebuked them because they ignored his emphasis used in a strategy known as *paraleipsis* (making brief mention of a topic to emphasize by suggestion what is omitted).

Strategies would change depending on the purpose of his communication and the audience who would hear it. Methods known as *epanadiplosis* and *epiphora* (2 Corinthians 12:11) used purposeful repetition to make a point. Furthermore, by use of a rhetorical question in 2 Corinthians 11:10-11, there was no doubt that Paul loved the Corinthians. He was saying in essence, “I have said what I’ve said, and I don’t apologize—but I said it because I love you!”

Consider the mystery that God has revealed to us. Only during this dispensation of grace—the Church Age—is the Lord Jesus Christ calling out people to be members of His body, His flesh, and His bones (Ephesians 5:30). As we become totally one with Him in spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17), we look to the day when we become His glorious, redeemed Bride in heaven. On earth we are one new man (Ephesians 2:15), an organism in which every member is a cell compacted and fitly framed, each in his proper place, supplying the whole.

**Bullinger, Ethelbert W. Figures of Speech Used in the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House/Revell, 1979)*

Chapter Four
OBJECTIVE LOVE AND
SUBJECTIVE LOVE

Consider the qualifications for marriage: I must have *objective love* toward God, which means that God is the object of my love. He is also the source—the One who makes it all happen. “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Then, as the Holy Spirit sheds the love of God abroad in my heart, I enter into *subjective love* toward people. This means that I am the subject loving, no matter what the object is like. “Love your enemies.” “Love one another.” That’s subjective love.

When a man, as the subject, is so fulfilled with the Holy Spirit, he is able to love with subjective love, regardless of how the object responds. The only objective love, then, has to be of God who motivates subjective love in us.

Once I have understood objective love—

how it motivates me into subjective love with the Holy Spirit shedding God's love abroad in my heart (Romans 5:5)—then the mystery of godliness, the mystery of faith, the mystery of mercy, the mystery of forgiveness, the mystery of patience, and the mystery of kindness all begin to come out of me. The mystery of faith produces and promotes the mystery of unconditional love (meaning others can't see the Source of my love, but that Source is inside me). So, the people in the world just see *me*, loving them, yet I am revealing a *mystery* of godliness.

Marriage Won't Change Me

Someone who is lonely or unhappy, will only double it by getting married. If a man cannot live a mature life by himself, why would he be able to do so by getting married?

When a person tries to be successful without virtue love, he ends up trying to be successful without the ability to succeed. When a person gets married apart from virtue love, he ends up living in need all the time, because marriage does not change people. People are people, and they bring who they are into marriage. Without virtue love, sex becomes promiscuous, licentious, lascivious, and folly.

When we try to settle problems by operating in our emotions, we become irrational. Without doctrine, it is distortion. Without grace, it is perjury. Without wisdom, it is superficial reality. All of these things produce problems.

Many people enter into marriage with pseudo love—false love instead of virtue love. A man may take on *machismo*, a Spanish word that describes an exaggerated masculinity. He takes on a pride complex, while a woman may live in an emotional complex. So you have Mr. Pride Complex with Mrs. Emotional Complex, bringing “who they are” into their marriage. (And they thought *marriage* was going to make everything all right.)

I have discovered that moody people who get married are moody *after* they get married, or even worse. In my forty-five years as a pastor, I have found that when people who are irresponsible in certain areas of their lives get married, they are just as irresponsible after they get married. I’ve discovered that some men will try to change their wives instead of being changed themselves. Some women try to change their husbands instead of releasing the miracle of a mystery—planned as a secret in eternity past, revealed in this dispensation of grace.

The Counseling Checklist

I think I'll put up a beautiful golden plaque in my office for people to read before I counsel them. The first line will read, *Did you talk to God first?*

The second line will say, *Did you get filled with the Spirit before you came to this appointment?*

The third point will be, *Are you living by every Word of God? or any of it?*

The fourth line will ask, *Whose fault is it?* (On second thought, don't tell me.)

Fifth, *Will you accept the provision God gives?*

Sixth, *Will you mix faith with everything that we read from the Word?*

And finally (seventh, for the Finished Work!), *Do you love as Christ loves?*

Not a bad session! The average person will go through the list say, "You know what? Just give me a couple of Scriptures. I think everything is going to be all right."

Outward and Inward Provision

"We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men" (1 Corinthians 4:9b). The angels also desire to look in unto our salvation (1 Peter 1:12). We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers

and rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12).

What I'm trying to do, without being redundant, is to bring Scriptures into the focus of marriage, because marriage was instituted to reveal the mystery of the dispensation of grace.

Satan and his demons have a strategy with a tactical approach to make you fail. God, on the other hand, has given every believer a ministering angel—at least one, according to Hebrews 1:14. These angels are on the outside; they hear every conversation. But Jesus Christ is on the inside, witnessing everything that's going on, along with the Holy Spirit and the Father (John 14:23; 1 Corinthians 6:19). They are witnesses to everything that is happening—in my circumstances and in my heart—at all times.

The problem with our lives has never been our failure; it's what we do about the failure. We are not "failures" just because we have failed. It's what we do about it. If we confess our sins (1 John 1:9), we're doing something about it. And, "God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Bringing Christ into the Marriage

Why should I bring “me” into the marriage? Why should I bring my past into the marriage? Why should I bring my emotional frustrations or my anger into the marriage? Why should I bring Adam into the marriage? My wife didn’t marry Adam, or at least she didn’t think so.

It’s no longer Mr. and Mrs. Adam. It should be Mr. and Mrs. Christ, because of 1 John 4:17b, “as he is, so are we in this world.” “For to me to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21). It is “not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). It should be Christ revealing Christ, and God revealing God, through the treasure in our earthen vessels, “that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

If this is true (and it is), then we have objective love toward God. When the Object of our love died for us on a tree, He sent the Holy Spirit to shed His own love abroad in our hearts as His subjects; and now, we love our neighbors as ourselves. How is this possible? It is only because the Source of our love is now in us, no matter what the object may be like.

The same is true for marriages when one partner has a bad day. The person who is Spirit-

controlled and Spirit-filled has subjective love. That means he's like Christ for *that* day. He doesn't get stirred up. He's not irrational, trying to reason in his emotions. He doesn't rationalize, he doesn't compare himself with others, and he doesn't ask for the other person to change. Rather, he is changed from glory to glory by letting the Spirit and the Word control him (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

He goes from faith to faith (Romans 1:17), and from strength to strength (Psalm 84:7) into new levels of maturity. *That* day, through his co-crucifixion, co-burial, co-resurrection, and co-ascension in Christ, he decreases as God increases, preparing him for the next trial of his faith.

The trial of your faith is "much more precious than of gold that perisheth..." (1 Peter 1:7). That means that your faith is on trial. God gives Satan permission to test your faith. If your faith is *not* on trial, then you're probably not a candidate for eternal rewards. You're no candidate for virtue love—and you're certainly not a candidate to be a witness in heaven's courtroom against Satan in his appeal case.

Jesus wants to use you in His court case. He wants to use you against Satan's defense. Instead of Satan accusing you in his defense, God

wants to accuse him. God wants to show him that he can't touch you—even in his domain—because you have the mystery of godliness and the fruit of the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, flowing out of you.

CONCLUSION

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy [Spirit], be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14).

This benediction in Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth is telling us that the Trinity wants to take turns being our provision. The Father wants to take care of anything you need for the plan of your life. Jesus Christ wants to take care of any need you have for a revelation of Himself. The Holy Spirit wants to reveal anything you need to know about the Bible and to guide you into all truth. They all want to participate in covering everything concerning you. They all want to bless you.

The Father wants to bless your plans and purposes. The Son wants to bless your life, give you joy and good health, take care of your needs, and bless your provisions. The Holy Spirit wants to lead you in faith rest as you enjoy being led into all truth.

Aren't you glad that of all the generations in history, *you*, and Christians like you throughout the world, have been chosen to be Jesus Christ's Bride? And aren't you glad you were chosen to become a member of His royal family forever?

When we speak the truth in love, God's people begin to grow up into Christ who is the Head. If God has spoken to you through this booklet, then let the Holy Spirit resolve some issues in your life. Let Him bless you and increase your capacity to live for God's glory.

Father, bless us this week. Help husbands to know that a godly leader is always concerned about those he is leading; that his volition determines his leadership when it's based upon proper values. Help every wife to honor you, Lord. So many people seek honor without virtue love. Others seek wealth without honor or virtue love.

Teach us whatever you want to teach us about these truths. Cover us with your precious Blood. Protect us and guide us this week. Establish intimacy while you still give us autonomy. Establish compatibility in relationships while you still give us a right to live unto you in the light we have received. Balance these truths in our hearts. Protect us, guide us, give us health, and meet all our needs through Calvary; in Jesus Christ's name, Amen.