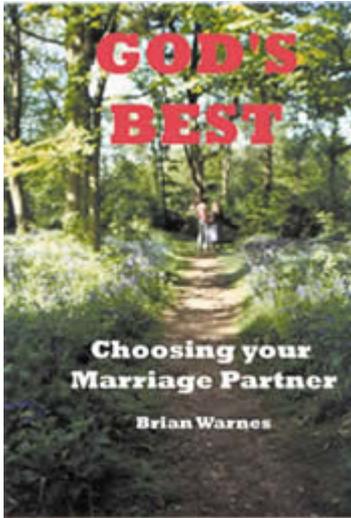


Choosing a Marriage Partner

Brian Warnes

God's Best



P R E F A C E

For all believers it is important to hear what the Word of God says on any matter. Of no less importance is the subject of marriage. This is something which has perhaps the most tremendous effect on a persons life.

When Christians are seeking a partner in marriage, it is essential for them to seek the mind and will of God. There should be an enquiry, "What saith the scriptures?".

There can be no better counsel than what is found in the Word of God. This is where the right guidelines for our direction can be found.

In this booklet the subject is treated in a straightforward way with simplicity. It is in language that all can understand with the confirmation of scriptural references.

When a believer is prepared to move in faith and obedience, God's best will be found. His love is always expressed in what He says and does. In the epistle to the Hebrews we are told to "obey your leaders, and be submissive; for they watch over your souls" Chapter 13 verse 17. (J.N.D's. Trans.). The writer of this booklet is one who obviously watches over the souls of those that he has affection for, and speaking from experience, is able to give sound and scriptural advice.

In the beginning of the Bible God says, " It is not good for man to be alone". Genesis 2 verse 18. He knows what is best for us and so provides a "help-mate". Marriage is what He has instituted.

This is a booklet that I am sure will be a help to those that are truly seeking the mind of the Lord and I

trust there will be blessing as a result.

Bob Skelton

INTRODUCTION

Christian marriage, with families living in the enjoyment of the knowledge of our Lord Jesus and living in accordance with the pattern set out in the Scriptures, is a wonderful blessing, and a pillar in the gatherings of the Christian Church.

As I pen these words of guidance in choosing a partner for life, I do so in the conscious knowledge that marriage is a gift from God; a blessing that is characterised by the giver; and one for which we can continually thank Him. I pray that with the help of God's Holy Spirit, and under the Lordship of my Saviour, I may be kept from failure in this area in which I am seeking to help others.

I am stirred to write as I see the sad effects in young people's lives of going their own way in their relationship with the opposite sex. The question of choosing a partner affects our whole spiritual outlook; how many promising lives have been ruined by a wrong choice! We all have to own our weakness and how much the old nature has to be kept in the place of death; but we can also be thankful that the grace of God is available for our every need.

The guidelines which I seek to give, you will realise, are completely contrary to those which are promoted by the world around; and not respected by some Christians either. In reading on I would ask that you do not view things from the world's perspective, but prayerfully consider these things before the word of God. Young people, you probably think you know better (I did) but allow the Holy Spirit to open your mind to the teaching from God's word and the reward God gives for obedience, faithfulness and patience, will be more than you ever could have imagined.

Older believers, parents and those who work with young people, I believe we owe it to the generation following, to be clear and uncompromising in our advice and principles in matters of this kind. What I am pleading for is a united stand against the levity with which relationships with the opposite sex are often treated with gossip and joking. Our young people's spiritual welfare is at stake and we look to see the joining of Christian young people in marriage, as guided by our Lord, with the resultant joy and blessing as they serve Him together.

If anyone reading these pages has not yet yielded to Christ and accepted Him as Lord and Saviour this must be the first step before anything else. These words are written for those who love the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord and desire to live their lives for His pleasure.

GOD'S PATTERN FOR MARRIAGE

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and they shall be one flesh" Genesis 2 v 24.

All the way through the Scriptures starting at Genesis chapter 2 we see that in marriage a man and woman leave their parents and are joined together by God to set up a distinct family unit.

This is a picture of the marriage of Christ and His church (His bride) which He loved and for which He gave Himself for. In speaking of marriage in Ephesians 5 v 32 Paul says "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." The marvel of this great story of love; of the Love of Christ who gave all that he had that He might win that which He valued so highly. A marriage that will last for eternity, a picture of which we can experience now.

Our marriages should be full of this love of Christ; giving them a holiness and a powerful testimony in the world, which thing Satan hates. He hates all that is precious to Christ!

Marriage is for the raising of children in a secure loving environment. We see the problem in society where children are raised without this security, and the instability it brings to children when this is broken.

In our verse, "A man" would indicate a mature person who is able to take the positive decision to "leave" his parents, and the responsibility that goes with that decision.

"Cleave" would indicate a bond of affection, which is enduring; literally to glue or cement. A permanent relationship of love.

Being "one flesh" would indicate oneness of activity and purpose and also the physical relationship.

Marriage is the God-given relationship for the display of our natural affections and desires.

Marriage is until the Lord shall come or death breaks the bond. Matthew 19 v 6 says "What God hath joined together let not man put asunder."

In marriage too, an individual loses his own identity and both become a new person: "And they twain shall be one flesh: so that they are no more twain but one flesh." (Matthew 10 v 8) If we take Christ as our pattern we should give our love to our partner, wanting only their love in return. (He loved us and gave Himself for us. Ephesians 5 v 25) and as this is displayed love will grow.

The husband has the rôle of responsibility as head and the wife the subject position. This is God's order

to which we must be prepared to submit if we wish His blessing Ephesians 5 v 22 and 23 "Wives submit yourselves unto your own husband, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife."

If you are considering marriage are you prepared to share everything with your partner as one person: yourself, your time, your money, your interests, your friends so that all you do will be only that which you are both happily agreed upon before the Lord? Ephesians 5 v 21 "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of the Lord."

CHOOSING A PARTNER THE SCRIPTURAL WAY

"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." Ephesians 5 v 31.

There is only one ideal for marriage running right through the Scriptures, and that is one man joined to one woman. Nowhere do we get the idea that we should try various partners before choosing the right one. We see that the selection of a partner was often made by parents, or sometimes as a reward; but the suggestion in the New Testament is of the choice of two people to come together of their own free will; only in the will of the Lord.

"She is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 7 v 39. This is the usual practice in the Christian Church and is in line with Scripture.

Marriage is for mature people; men and women (not boys and girls) who are able to form a separate family unit, independent both in finance and moral responsibility.

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and they shall be one flesh." Genesis 2 v 24.

Our natural desires can easily lead us into a wrong even dangerous position. Especially when we are young it is easy to become so convinced that we have found the right one that our judgement becomes blurred if not blind. There have been many who through an impetuous decision have been led into a sad relationship or led away from a path of devotion to the Lord and obedience to His Word.

From 1 Thessalonians 4 v 6 it is clear that competition between two people for one partner is hated by God. This is something we should consider carefully.

"That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in the matter." 1 Thessalonians 4 v 6 JND Translation. Many romance stories involve two men competing for the love of one woman or vice versa. This should not be so with those who seek to be guided by the Lord in these matters.

In Proverbs 30 Agur talks about three things that are too wonderful for him; one of these is "the way of a man with a maid"! The romance of choosing a partner and the way this happens to us as guided by God is something very special for the different individuals involved. Our Lord spent all night in prayer before He chose His disciples; and to be guided into the will of God we need to be similarly exercised in prayer.

There is a different role for the man and the woman in these things. The man has the responsibility to take the initiative, the woman has the responsibility to respond, or not, as the Lord may lead. The man therefore has the duty to wait patiently upon the Lord before intervening in the life of a sister; and the woman to prayerfully wait upon the Lord to provide her with His choice.

The term 'falling in love' is often used when a couple start to be friendly; this can be superficial, and we should be wary of this concept as it gives the idea of uncontrolled emotion. This could easily be led by our old nature in a mere infatuation simply because of physical attraction, because of being continually in their company or even because of undue pressure from others. Some like to act as match makers encouraging couples who they think are suitable for each other. This is a dangerous game and has had many sad results.

The love of the marriage relationship, is an act of will under the guidance of our Master. An intelligent and permanent decision, which is taken in mature consideration of the issues involved and which will endure through every pressure and circumstance which might otherwise cause a couple to 'fall out of love'. The Lord has decreed that marriage is for life and if we want the Lord's blessing we must follow his instructions. It is the lie of the devil that we can be happy with someone else. We must reject his subtle whispers.

GOD'S BEST

The question arises: "Will I get married and to whom?" The pressures around us from our peers, parents and the world in general are often very strong. Young people are expected to have a boy friend or girl friend from a very early age and if they do not they are seen to be failing. A relationship with a girl or boy may also be used as an expression of ego and superiority in young people who want to be seen with a partner. However it may just be the done thing, "everybody else does it, so I'll do it too." We have to realise, too, that young people have natural desires to be with members of the opposite sex of their own age. The fear of being "left on the shelf," apparently unwanted, with the real stigma that this may bring can also lead some to be desperate to marry someone.

How does the young person steer himself or herself through this minefield? - Let's answer a few questions.

Firstly the Christian is a person who has committed his life to the Lord Jesus Christ and come under His lordship and direction. If in our hearts we have truly yielded to Him then our own desires or indeed the

plans of those around us are of no account. Only His will shall be my aim and only His will is BEST.

Does God want the best for me?

If I trust the matter of my marriage to God will I have to make do with somebody that no one else wants? Will I ever get married? Will I perhaps miss out on a lot of fun? Let us think about our God! "All things work together for good to them that love God" Romans 8 v 28.

"Let the Lord be magnified, which hath pleasure in the prosperity of His servant." Psalm 35 v 27.

"Delight thyself in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass." Psalm 37 v 4 and 5.

The more we get to know and trust our Father, we experience that He gives only good gifts to His children. He knows whether or not we are best to be married, and He knows how we will be able to serve Him best. So if we are to remain single we know that His will is best - indeed in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 Paul says that to remain single is better. If He wants us to be married He will have prepared a partner for us before we were born and He knows best how to bring us together.

If we do it God's way will it be boring?

God created all the good things we associate with courtship: love, joy, happiness and the physical and mental attraction of the opposite sex. Only as led in the will of God will these things be enjoyed to the full if we leave the choice of our partner to God: His choice and in His time.

Young people with all the pressures you face are you prepared to go this way?

As a young man I had many lessons to learn. I thought I knew all the answers but at the age of seventeen I came to realise that I needed to completely rethink my attitude to this subject. I came to the conclusion that God knew what was best for my life and if He wanted me to be married He would guide me to the right person when His time was right. I did not want to do anything that would prevent my receiving His best. I realised that God knew how to give me a wife, if that was His will, so I determined that I would not in any way commit myself to anyone until I was sure it was the Lord's will. (I was sure that in such an important matter I would not be in any doubt.) I made a simple rule for myself that I would not go out alone with or show attachment to any girl until I was sure of God's will. This way I avoided being carried along by a momentary whim.

I am sure that it will be different for each one of us, but God rewarded me beyond my wildest dreams with a lovely wife, a romantic coming together and a oneness of feeling and purpose for which we constantly thank Him. We often spend hours reminiscing over the way we came to know each other and it gives much pleasure to see the way the Lord works. In giving these personal details I would be the first to admit much failure on my part but of this I am sure; having committed my way to the Lord He did not fail me.

As we have seen, the ideal of Scripture is that there should be one man joined to one woman, and I would love to be able to say to my wife that I have never shown affection to another, but through self will and lack of understanding that is not so.

God knew that I needed a wife and that we could serve the Lord better together than apart and His will is best. Pray to God to show you His way, don't decide what you want and then pray about it. Pray that He may make His mind clear to you and then you will be able to thank Him when He gives the answer.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY

We have spoken about God's leading to the right partner for us if it is His will, but there is also another aspect to consider and that is our responsibility to act according to the Scriptures and with wisdom.

Prayer for wisdom and direction is as essential in this area as it is in every aspect of our lives. There have been many that have made mistakes: remember Samson and Delilah; Esau and the daughters of Heth; Solomon and his many wives; Ahab and Jezebel.

The Scripture is clear that it is quite wrong for a Christian to marry an unbeliever:

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." 2 Corinthians 6 v 14 - and of course this must apply to courtship as well. We may think we can bring good out of our wrong action, but let us not be deceived, this has been the downfall of many young and older Christians. If all we are looking for is the physical and natural aspects of marriage we may be misguided into thinking that a non-Christian can provide this. Remember there is no true happiness and joy without Christ being the centre and He cannot bless us if we are disobedient. (This does not, of course, disallow His grace and forgiveness with us), but remember marriage is for life and a wrong step taken here is taken for life.

There is only one nature that we share with an unbeliever, and that is the old fallen nature that we inherited from Adam. The new nature which appreciates the divine truths that we possess as 'born of God,' is unknown to an unbeliever. A Christian should be living in view of the world to come. An unbeliever has no hope for the future and lives wholly for this life and for self.

If the Lord is going to use us together as a family unit we need to be committed to Him. It is not sufficient to choose a partner who just says they are a Christian because: firstly they may prove to be otherwise and secondly if they are converted but not committed to the Lord they will always be looking back to the world's things. Remember Lot's wife. In the same way, if I am not committed to the Lord I cannot think of myself as a suitable partner for another.

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed." Amos 3 v 3.

How do we see someone else's commitment to the Lord? If we are involved in the Lord's work in whatever capacity our abilities allow, we will meet others who are like minded and this commitment to serve the Lord will flow into our marriage. Let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that an attraction to someone is sufficient and assume that other difficulties will be overcome after we are married.

Serving the Lord with your spouse must mean having the same exercise as to the place to enjoy the privileges of Christian fellowship, and being committed to the gathering together of the Lord's people as seen in the Scriptures. Then together you can serve the Lord and bring up children with the same conviction and not be divided, so that one goes to one 'type of church' and the other to another with the conflicting loyalties this brings when children come along.

We should ask ourselves the question - Are we ready to make a decision as to who to marry and to begin to take on the responsibility of a new family unit before facing the Lord's request to be baptised and remember Him in the Breaking of Bread and drinking the cup? The Lord has the first claim to our love, obedience and devotion. We cannot say we are spiritually mature unless we have responded to His request. Luke 22 v 19 "This do in remembrance of me!"

Physical attraction makes up part of the bond we have with our partner but this must not take priority over the spiritual and mental aspects of our relationship. The world around us makes almost everything of the physical and we must guard against this playing too great a part in our choice of partner. The world is led on by Satan who is against the idea of marriage as instituted by God. If we allow ourselves to be exposed to the media's perceptions of relationships they can unconsciously enter our minds and affect our actions. Let us guard ourselves from songs, films, books, plays etc. that entertain low morals or overplay the physical and emotion aspect of choosing a partner.

As I said at the beginning, pray. Earnest prayer is vital, we must be guided by the Lord in these things - but even in this there is a danger. How often has someone starting down a foolish road quickly justified himself or herself by saying 'but I have prayed a lot about it.' We must realise that the flesh is weak and it is so easy to persuade ourselves that the Lord is sanctioning our actions because we want it that way when we have already committed ourselves to our own will. Patience is a safeguard while we pray. Wait patiently upon Him.

"For all seek their own not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Philippians 2 v 21.

Do we have ambitions for a family life that is based on the world's aims of materialism? Are we seeking a marriage in which to settle into a comfortable existence? If we are truly committed to the Lord we shall be willing to serve Him together in whatever circumstances He places us, whether humble or exalted, rich or poor.

"I have learned in whatever state I am, therewith to be content." Philippians 4 v 11.

We will do well to take account of advice given by godly and experienced believers and parents. We must remember that they have a responsibility to help us through difficult decisions.

"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose

faith follow considering the end of their conversation." Hebrews 13 v 7.

ENGAGEMENT

The Scripture does not say much about engagement but it does refer in several places to betrothal or espousal. This is shown in the case of Mary and Joseph and mentioned in the Song of Solomon. Engagement is a time when a man and woman are preparing for a marriage to which they have committed themselves.

As we have already seen Scripture clearly speaks about the relationship between one man and one woman. Engagement should therefore be seen as a serious step of firm commitment to marry (having received clear guidance from the Lord in the decision) and not as a trial period. I would hasten to say that should a mistake be realised before one is married it would be far better to admit it and end the relationship, than to continue in a path which is not the Lord's will.

Engagement is a time to prepare yourselves for a new life and attend to the many practical matters that need to be sorted out: a wedding to prepare; a new home to find; and studies to complete for example.

First and foremost, however the engagement period should be used to grow closer together spiritually, mentally and physically (with self-control).

The length of an engagement will vary according to different circumstances. If there is a clear knowledge of the Lord's will and there is no reason to delay, it could be frustrating to wait too long before the full enjoyment of living and working together can be enjoyed; especially if the couple are in the same town and see each other often. This, of course, is only my personal view.

Engagement should be used to get to know each other by talking over different matters; praying together and reading God's word. Habits formed at this stage will provide a foundation for married life. In discussing all the many practical aspects of our lives in an attitude of dependence to our Lord and commitment to Him, He will guide our thoughts together and set our aim to serve Him. It is natural to want to spend as much time as possible in each other's company, but let us ensure that we make time for our responsibility to serve the Lord together in our local assembly or wherever He leads. These are all foundations for a spiritual marriage. If we use this time well it will be something to remember with pleasure.

There will also be the opportunity to get to know each other physically. This is once again an area that needs prayerful consideration. It is normal for there to be a display of affection between two who have committed themselves to each other; yet there is need for self-control and restraint. As in all the other areas we have discussed we should seek to honour the Lord and so live for His glory. Let us be wise in these matters and seek guidance to act in a manner that does not embarrass others or give a bad

testimony. We must leave until marriage that freedom to enjoy all the privileges of physical closeness and union; we are forbidden to have intercourse outside of marriage and must not allow our physical emotions to control us. Such actions as staying unaccompanied in the same house should be avoided as they could lead to temptation and suspicion. "Abstain from all appearance of evil." 1 Thessalonians 5 v 22.

PHYSICAL

"Marriage is honourable in all and the bed undefiled." Hebrews 13 v 3.

As part of the blessing of marriage God has given us the pleasure of showing love through physical union and the freedom of the display of mutual affection; all within the bounds of a secure relationship.

In the marriage relationship there is complete freedom in this respect but outside marriage this is forbidden as we can clearly see from our scripture. The world does not see this distinction and the holiness and purity that God intended is destroyed. This relaxation of God's standard where physical relationships are entered into wherever and with whoever one chooses, can only bring guilt and misery.

In all our relationships with the opposite sex we must make a clear and positive stand against this attitude; this will save us from being ensnared ourselves and will show a clear testimony to the world and an example to other believers.

The whole of Scripture is full of the errors of fornication (Acts 15 v 29) and adultery (Exodus 20 v 14). The first is sexual relationship outside of marriage and the second sexual relationship with a married person. We must clearly state that physical affection is only intended by God for one man and one woman and that within the confines of marriage and to a very limited extent by a couple committed to marriage (see previous chapter).

With the current attitude of the world to these things we must ensure that our standards are not lowered so that the old nature within us is allowed to work and make us prey to the temptations we will face. Remember Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Genesis 39 v 13.

"Flee youthful lusts." 2 Timothy 2 v 22.

Choosing to live together rather than marry is prevalent in the world around us. This is clearly fornication; there is no commitment to marry and no public declaration of marriage. The laws of most countries states that marriage must be lawfully enacted and Romans chapter 13 verse 1 tells us "the powers that be are ordained of God", they must, therefore, be obeyed.

Let us take care to keep ourselves from the world's temptation by avoiding the display of the human body. This evil is all around us. Let's ensure that we give no room for the flesh by unsuitable dress and

behaviour.

So as we grow from our youth let us keep our bodies (the temples of the Holy Spirit) pure and private until, in the will of God, He gives us a partner in marriage; in this holy relationship our physical desires can be satisfied.

GOD'S GLORY AND OUR BLESSING

God's will for marriage is that a couple may form a family unit to His glory, so that love may be displayed to those within, and reach out to those outside. A sphere where His honour may be maintained and obedience to Scripture practised and where children can be raised in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord". Ephesians 6 v 4. It is also for the blessing of man and wife. God gave Eve to Adam for an "help meet" to be his companion through life.

As with everything in the Scriptures marriage is for the glory of the Lord Jesus. He is the one who was the originator of the creation and all the laws and order in it. It is part of that grand design. The beauty of the marriage relationship is testimony to his divine wisdom. Evolution theory, which rejects the early chapters of the Bible, therefore rejects the account of Adam and Eve and the marriage bond established by God in the garden of Eden. This is the great lie of our times.

Evolution takes from Son of God the glory He has as creator, and so also, disregarding God's laws in the Scripture relating to marriage, robs the Lord Jesus of his glory. The whole marriage relationship is a picture of Christ and the assembly. The unity between The Lord Jesus Christ and the Christian Church, which will be displayed when the marriage of the Lamb is seen in heaven. "He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied" Isaiah 53v11.

If we ignore the holiness of the marriage relationship we bring dishonour to our Lord. There is no room for my selfish will.

A step out of the will of the Lord in disobedience will only result in sadness for oneself and others. However reasonable it may seem, if it contravenes the Biblical pattern it will bring disappointment.

My prayer is that as young people grow up, amidst all the temptation with which Satan will surround them in the world, they may, in patience and obedience, and as under God's clear direction, experience **God's best** in this area of their lives. Find a marriage partner (if this is their calling) to display love to each other as a type of Christ and His church, His Bride, and know **God's best** together until our Lord comes.

SUGGESTED READING

Marriages are made in heaven by A. Retallick

The Institution of Marriage by P. Wilson

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Brian, Susan and their five children live in the most easterly town in Britain, where Brian is involved in the house building industry.

In this book he shows to all who are unmarried that there is a better way than the world would teach. To find a marriage partner 'GOD'S WAY' is the way of true blessing. This book is a must for all young Christians.

