

# **The Family Citadel**

by David Morsey

## **I - THE CONCEPT OF THE CITADEL**

“Lord, deliver our families from the Devil.” As Christians, we live in a hostile environment. Satanic forces threaten the destruction of the home. How in the world can we hold our families together, and instill within our young people the vitality of faith that will hold them steady in the soul-wrenching crosscurrents?

There is an answer. God did not intend us to bring children into the world with even a 50/50 chance of going to hell. There are principles that can be applied to the home which will pretty well guarantee the security of the children. And one does not have to be a psychologist, either, to know or apply them.

In the first place, we must see the family unit as a citadel—a fortress against the forces of Satan. The Bible makes it very clear that we gather strength in togetherness. “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst. If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father who is in heaven.” Growing together in the Lord, and standing together against Satan, are the most important elements of the family life.

God banks heavily on the family unit. It is the normal outgrowth of marriage. There are, of course, a number of reasons why some couples do not have children, but generally speaking, God's purpose in marriage includes the development of a family. Children are very important to the spiritual growth of the parent. Children help to break down the walls of self-centeredness, and force the parents into involvement with others. The raising of children demands self-sacrifice and a wholesome practicality about life. The responsibilities of a family usually bring about the needed transition in a young man, from adolescence to manhood.

In view of the above, it is imperative that we fashion the family unit with utmost care. Nothing less than absolute reality will avail.

The children come and go very quickly. And in the brief span of time that parents have them, forces must be set to work in their lives which will give them the capacity to live life successfully for many years. Yet, in spite of this fact, many parents have carelessly neglected the most effective instrument possible in preparing their children for life—leading them in, and sharing with them, devotion to Christ. It is not enough to commit this critical task to the work of assorted Sunday-school and day-school teachers. Parents cannot simply tell their young people what to believe; they must share their faith with them.

This principle is so basic and so obvious, that one wonders why parents, so universally, neglect it. The excuses are myriad, but none of them adequate in the face of the eternal destiny of the soul. There is no anguish so great as that which comes from realizing that someone we love has gone astray, and we could have prevented it. Now, what are these principles that will guarantee the success?

## **THE FOUNDATION**

The foundation must be laid very deep. First of all, the individual must, himself, be related to Christ in a dynamic personal involvement. Unless one sees life as Christ sees it, and has His Spirit within, no amount of wisdom will suffice to overcome the perils of life in Satan's world. Christ must be the head of the home in *fact*, as well as in *theory*. All decisions regarding the family must be made in terms of His will. The important question is, not what is the most reasonable thing to do, but what does Christ want us to do? Human logic is not adequate to meet the demands of our modern society. There is no chance to experiment. We have our children for a very short period of time, and then they are gone, and all that we give them in guidance and influence must be done quickly. Many decisions of great consequence in the lives of the children must be made in the midst of crises when the mind is charged with emotion. Our only safeguard is the prevailing presence of Christ. Our only hope—that we, being filled with the Holy Spirit, will make wise decisions.

## **THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE FATHER**

The most fundamental principle in the building of the family unit is the concept that the father stands as the representative of Christ. To him is given the responsibility of leading his family in the ways of God. And he will be held accountable, before God, for their welfare. This is true, both of spiritual and physical factors. ***“I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ: and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.”*** (I Corinthians 11:3) ***“But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”*** (I Timothy 5:8) This principle was first expressed in the Old Testament, in the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy. Fathers are given a solemn responsibility to teach their children the things of God. ***“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shall talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thine house and upon thy gates.”*** (Deuteronomy 6:6-9) A strong incentive is given for following these precepts: ***“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it.”*** (Proverbs 22:6)

In the light of these passages we must conclude that a father is responsible for the training of his family; and that he will be held accountable for them before God; and that, if he will do his part, God will do His, and the family need not go astray. But, now, this must be done from the very beginning. Every month of delay will make the task that much more difficult. There is no excuse that is adequate for a father's neglect of this sacred responsibility. A man will sound very lame to God when he tries to excuse himself on the

grounds that he was too busy, or that he did not know how. If a father does not know, he had better find out. The father should do all he can to know the things of God, and to see that his family gets the best of instruction from other sources wherever he may feel inadequate. In this respect it is very important that he find a strong group of believers where he and his family may find the help that comes from the body of Christ. As the family unit represents a citadel for the individual, so the body of Christ in its local group, represents a citadel for the family.

## **THE CREATIVE CARE OF THE MOTHER**

While the father has the primary responsibility for the physical and spiritual welfare of the home, the mother has an equally important role in caring for the home, and providing an atmosphere in which the family can grow in the knowledge and love of Christ. The meaningful nature of this role will depend largely on the woman's attitude. If she looks upon herself as a "maid," or "chore-girl," that is what she will be. But if she sees her role as Christ sees it, then it can be full of challenge and fulfillment.

The mother's task is a creative one, in which, she too, represents Christ in the sculpturing of the spirits of her children. Children are not a hindrance to her fulfillment. In a way, they *are* her fulfillment. They cannot be viewed as interruptions to her work, but rather the work must be viewed as an interruption to the care of her children. When children are seen as an interruption by the adults, the day will come when the adults will be seen as an interruption by the children. Here is one of the basic reasons for the going astray of our young people. We approach the training and discipline of children in terms of how to keep them from being a nuisance to adults. We are more concerned about their imposing on our rights, than we are with the development of their personalities. In this respect, they are all-too-often seen as the "enemy"—robbing the poor mother of the personal freedom to go out and "fulfill" herself. When a mother goes off to work, because she is frustrated at being tied down to her children, she is clearly saying to them that they are of secondary importance. If a woman does not want this kind of responsibility, she should not get married. It is, of course, understandable, that children should get on a mother's nerves from time to time, and that she should feel frustrated and distraught. It is also understandable, and necessary for her to have brief times away from her children. But when the frustration becomes an obsession to change her role, there needs to be a fresh look at the glory of her assignment in the eyes of Christ.

In the sculpturing process, the mother must give primary attention to the task of leading her children in the knowledge of Christ, and devotion to Him. This must be done both by example, as well as teaching. A mother can lift her children no higher than herself. If she is careless about the things of God, they will be careless. If she does not convey the love of Christ to them, they will not know the meaning of love. It is a grave responsibility, and the mother may protest that she cannot do it because she is human, and she is right. That is why it is imperative for a mother to be possessed with the Spirit of Christ, and reflect His love and grace. Without this, she can have little assurance that her children will turn out well. It is so much easier to maintain steady growth and development in a child, throughout its early years of development, than to have to put the child back together again as a teenager. This may seem to be a wearisome task, but the more consistently and carefully this is attended to in the early years, the easier the task will become as the years

pass. A child's pattern of behavior is largely formed by the time it is seven. Diligence in these years will pay the largest dividends.

## **BUILDING THE CITADEL**

We have established the principles of the family citadel. Now, what about the builders? In the Divine Order, Christ is the head of the home, and the father is His representative. As the father is submissive to Christ, he will communicate the will of Christ to the family. The wife, then, is submissive to the husband in the Divine Order. This will not be an unreasonable thing to her, if the husband is looking to Christ for His guidance and authority. Then, in a way, the woman, who is with the children the most, has the more direct task of communicating the principles of their home in the daily routines. This is, perhaps, the most demanding of the responsibilities in terms of personal sacrifice, but has great reward in the woman's self-satisfaction.

The key to the building of the citadel, is the cultivating of faith as the unifying element. By faith, we mean here, a dynamic involvement with God through Jesus Christ. This is, primarily, the father's responsibility. If he does not know how, he must find out. God does not accept ignorance as an excuse for neglecting responsibility. If a man does not have the dynamic personal faith, and a basic knowledge of how to live to the glory of God, then he should waste no time in coming to grips with these issues for the sake of his family. In fact, a man should really not even get married until he has faced these matters. It is bad business for a man to wait to learn how to sail a boat until he has his family out in the sailboat in the middle of the sea. For the sake of the family, a father must become knowledgeable in the things of God. He will achieve this knowledge through reading the Word; through prayer; through attending to Bible study; and through the practice of a personal relationship with Christ.

He will communicate this faith to his family by his own life lived before them; through family Bible study and fellowship, and through getting the family involved with the local group of believers.

## **THE SHARING OF FAITH**

The father must not simply teach the family about faith, he must share it with them. This means, that instead of simply reading a passage from the Bible, and offering a prayer, he must encourage communication. He must invite questions and discussions. If he doesn't always know the answer to the question, he must find the answers, wherever possible, and bring them back at the next session. Or, if possible, he may look them up on the spot, if a source is available.

Then, he must encourage prayer on the part of all, teaching his family how to pray. He must offer opportunity for them to present requests, teaching them what it means to communicate with God. Again we say, if a father does not know these things, he must learn. Much of these things he will receive through fellowship with the body of believers,

and then, in turn, can communicate them to the family. Of course, an extremely important point is that the Holy Spirit will give him the ability to handle this, if he asks for it. God does not give responsibility without making adequate provision for the carrying out of that responsibility. The stakes are high. We dare not gamble with the souls of our children. We do not have the luxury, as parents, of letting down. Christ said, *“For their sakes I sanctify myself.”* And so, parents must tend to the issues of their own souls, for the sake of their children. Again Christ says, *“Keep the heart, for out of it are the issues of life.”*

## **THE FAMILY AND THE BODY OF CHRIST**

When the family is united together in Christ, and growing together in their relationship to each other, they form a citadel against Satan and the forces of the world. Then when the family relates also to the larger family of the local body of believers, there is a citadel within a citadel, and, as the local church relates to the believers around the world, or the universal church, there is still another wall of defense. The relating of a family to the body of Christ is essential for spiritual growth and for worship. As the family learns together in the home, so it must also worship together. It is very important that the children observe their parents in worship, and participate with them. In this regard, the practice of splitting the family up, has been a great hindrance to the cultivation of worship in the life of a child. It is folly to turn the children over to some amateur to handle a separate worship for them.

It is the father's responsibility to find a place where the family can worship in a way that satisfies their requirements, and exposes them to the most dynamic expression of the body of Christ that is available.

## **CLOSING THE GAPS**

But what of the gaps that have been left by early failures? What about families that did not know the Lord in the early years? What of parents that married before they knew the Lord? What if one parent is more interested in the things of God than the other? Admittedly, there are handicaps, but remember that God is gracious and many times He must help to fill in the gaps. The apostle Paul, himself, not knowing Christ until his later years had even been responsible for the persecution of God's people, and regarded himself as the chief of sinners, with good reason. He had many regrets, and yet the Lord took his life and made of it one of the most powerful forces for God that ever lived. The ideal is rarely possible—but God has a way of taking present realities and translating them into blessings. ***“God works all things together for good to them that love Him.”*** (*Romans 8:28*) Ideally, the husband should carry the responsibility of priesthood, but many a woman has had to bear this burden alone. She does the best she can, and God's grace fills in the gap. Many parents have not started with the things of God until their children were beyond the vital years for training. Admittedly, there are many problems, and distresses, but once again a sincere effort to recover will be met with the grace of God. It will not be easy. But ultimately, faithfulness in prayer, coupled with understanding and love will prevail.

The important thing is to start with what you do have. The small boy by the Sea of Galilee brought what he had to Christ, and with it, fed 5000 people. Bring whatever you have to

Christ; it will be enough. You may feel discouraged, because of the handicaps of your own particular circumstances; you may feel inadequate; the ideal may not be available; but start where you are, with what you have. The eternal souls of your family are at stake. You may be the only link that they have with God. Begin now, He will fill in the gaps.

## **II - LOVE IN THE CITADEL**

In building the "citadel," a sound relationship between the husband and wife is essential. A sound relationship requires the merging of two personalities into a harmonious and workable unity. The most basic question to ask is not only how much do I love this person, but also, how much am I willing to work at the task of letting another personality into my own world. We spend the first 20 years or so of our lives accommodating our own personalities and getting used to living with ourselves. It is admittedly a comfortable cocoon, but the walls will close in on us if we do not break open the cocoon and involve ourselves with another personality. It is only here that true growth and maturation can take place. In fact, we can only really know ourselves as we are mirrored in our relationship to others.

The struggle for the merging of personalities in marriage, is one of the most productive means of growth possible. The person who rejects the struggle and pursues the search for another personality, to which one can relate without struggle, will not only fail to mature, but will also find the search hopeless. It is a great fallacy to think that we can ever find another personality with whom we can relate, without this struggle. A cardinal rule of life is that it is better to take the circumstances that one has, and work with them and handle them, than to go out to find new circumstances to work with. Because inevitably, inner peace and stability is nurtured in struggle and never in retreat.

The failure to accept the responsibility and discipline of learning to relate to others properly, either in marriage, or in single life, may seem to be an easy choice, but it only multiplies the problems. A married person backs away by getting a divorce; the single person backs away by moving in a self-centered world, and keeps the relationship to others on a casual and superficial level.

If personality merger is the basic ingredient, the catalyst to the effecting of this merger is love. But what is love? The understanding of this word is so crucial to a happy marriage, and yet few words are less understood. The young lady, with eyes bright and dancing, says, "I'm in love." What does she really mean? Does she even know what she really means? Probably not.

### **WHAT IS LOVE?**

Actually, love is a many faceted word. In the English language, it is so broadly used as to be almost meaningless. In some ways it is not a word that can be defined or even described, except in some physiological terms, as in certain visceral responses. It almost seems that the keen edge of love is dulled whenever it is articulated in definitions. Love is something that must be sensed in a communion of spirit with spirit. It is very important to

divide the word, love, into its different facets. In fact, it is impossible to avoid great confusion without differentiating between the various kinds of love.

While love cannot be adequately described, it must be understood, nevertheless. The Bible, which explores the meaning of love, more deeply than any other book, is our best guide. The most basic usage of love is physical, which is expressed by the Greek word **eros**. For the most part this is the level at which love exists in the world. It is, of course, a very essential part of the relationship between a husband and wife, and is probably a very large part of the original attraction which brings the two together. However, unless there is a constant maturing into the other facets of love, the marriage is doomed. In the future, we will discuss at length the physiological aspects of marriage, which are very important, but it should be said at the outset, that physical expressions can never be fully satisfying without personality involvement. This is why the casual physical relationship tends to contribute to the disruption of personality, rather than the development of it. For this reason it is important that we thoroughly understand the spiritual aspects of love, first.

### THE LOVE OF “CARING”

Returning again to the Biblical usages of the word, “love,” there are two Greek words—**agape** and **phile**. **Agape** is an expression of the will. It is the kind of love that God commands. It means, primarily, “respect,” “consideration,” “caring.” This kind of love affects the will more than the emotion. It is something over which one has control, else God would not have commanded it. Christ illustrates this kind of love in the parable of the **Good Samaritan**. This is the story of a man who helped a stranger, who had been beaten and robbed. He dressed his wounds, took him to an inn, left money for his keep, and passed on. There was no continuing relationship involved, nor any noticeable emotional implications. Christ uses this story to define what He means by “loving one's neighbor.” The word that He uses here for love—**agape**—is the same word He uses throughout the New Testament, where love is commanded. This is the love of “caring.” The most outstanding expression of it is found in I John 4:10—**“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”** This love, based on the will rather than on the emotion, gives from within and is not dependent upon the response of the object of that love. This kind of love is the true foundation of marriage, and can provide a stability that does not fluctuate with the tide of human emotion.

All such love is overshadowed by the great, Divine concept that God loved us before we ever loved Him. His love for us is not based upon how lovable we are, but on the inner wellsprings of a heart open to others and encompassing others with the spirit of benevolence. Thus, then, the love is constant and not subject to vacillation in terms of the attitude of the object of love, This kind of love is really only possible when God is its source. The scripture says, **“Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.”** (I John 4:7) In a sense, God loves others through us. We possess His love in our spirits when we possess Him. Only an experience with God can provide one with the resources necessary to love constantly, no matter how the love is reciprocated. Bear in mind, that the love we are talking about here is not an emotional thing. It is simply an attitude of kindness and caring.. We must see one another through the eyes of Christ. This principle must be applied in the relationship

between husband and wife. It is not enough to be kindly disposed toward partners, only when they are kindly disposed toward us.

Still another insight into this concept of love is in the statement by Christ in John 15, **“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”** The Greek word which is translated, “lay down,” means to “put oneself at the disposal of.” The idea here is something like the experience of a good mother whose life is constantly given up to the needs of the children. She is continually setting aside her own interests in favor of the demands of the children. When Christ laid down His life for us, He was not only involved in an act of physical death, but in a lifetime of dying to selfish interests for the sake of the people whom He came to redeem. We find an echo of this in the words of Paul, **“I count not my life dear to myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.”** (Acts 20:24)

The woman in the home, who will see her life as a sacrifice to Christ is less apt to be frustrated than the one who seeks, simply, to make a happy life for herself. Happiness is not intrinsic within any circumstance, but rather within the individual. No individual can be truly happy without being satisfied with one's general attitude toward life. There is a bitter aftertaste to happiness that is sought through self-indulgence. True love is expressed in the assuming of responsibility for the welfare of others. Many marriages fail because each partner is more concerned with achieving personal happiness than with the constructing of a family unit, that will bring glory to God. If the myriad of distressing and frustrating experiences, that tend to “grind down” the individual, are seen rather as instruments for the sculpting of the soul than obstacles to happiness, then life becomes more a challenge than a frustration. And if the children in the home be seen as works of art, to be sculpted into something for the glory of God, then they too, will be a means to a fulfilling life, rather than an intrusion upon one's rights. When a couple brings a child into the world, they must stand by it.

This discussion of frustration may seem to the reader to be irrelevant to the subject of love, but there is really a direct connection. We have been showing that the love that God commands in marriage, requires the setting aside of one's own personal rights in the interest of others, as the mother whose life is constantly given to her children. This concept might be considered to make out of life, a drudgery of sacrifice. If one could see, however, that such an attitude toward others really opens up the horizons and makes possible a greater satisfaction and fulfillment than one could ever find within the narrow confines of self-centeredness. This is not an easy thing to grasp, nor to experience, but it is the true road to a satisfying life. Remember our basic premise that life is primarily a journey of the soul. The one who pays attention to the development of the soul will find oneself equipped with the resources necessary to cope with the rugged realities of life which emerge in the crisis hours. There is no feeling that compares with the satisfaction of having the resources to cope with life. It surpasses by far the momentary ecstasies of self-indulgence. Unfortunately, it seems to take a crisis to make one appreciate this concept.

The essence of **agape** love, as the scripture indicates, is giving. Love is to give. This kind of giving is very carefully specified in I Corinthians 13. The outward expressions of love in this chapter are—longsuffering (putting up with one another for a long time), graciousness, patience, humility, given to truth (reality). Love does not seek its own interests first; does

not provoke others (promote anger); is not envious of another's welfare; and does not act inappropriately in its relationships to others. In this passage Paul encourages the Christians to "pursue" love.

Such expressions of love, as have been outlined above, do not come easily. In fact, they are not the product of any soul untouched by God. The scripture says that love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, "**the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.**" (Galatians 5:22) It follows that since sound marriages must be based upon genuine love and love can only come through the Holy Spirit, to have a successful marriage, one must possess the Spirit of Christ.

"But," you say, "who can measure up to such standards?" No one, apart from Christ. That is why it is utterly unwise to marry one who does not possess the Spirit of Christ within. Unfortunately, even people who profess to be Christians have often failed to take the Spirit of Christ into their spirits. Many people have a knowledge of Christianity, but have never really taken Christ into their hearts. While one may later come into such an experience, yet, to marry that one beforehand is indeed a risk. This does not imply, certainly, that one must be perfect, but only that one has entered into the meaning of life in the Spirit.

This is excellent advice for those who are looking to marriage, but what about those who have already married, alas, someone in the above categories. In this case, all one can do is to be sure that one's own heart is open to the Lord. This will give to one in the first place, the grace to bear with the situation, and in the second place, the power to so live with one's partner as to make Christ attractive. In time the partner may thus be drawn to Christ.

With all that has been said one can see that a successful marriage is not an easy relationship between two people living under the same roof, nor is it by chance. It is the product of the application of principles that God has set forth in His Word. Problems there will be, and vacillating emotions, but the love that God gives, as the basis of marriage, can be as steady as God, because it is born of God and sustained by Him in the life of the one who joins himself to God in an eternal relationship.

## **THE LOVE OF AFFECTION**

All that we have said about love, so far, has had to do with **agape** love, which, you remember, is the kind of love that God commands. This love involves the will rather than the emotions, primarily. It is something which can be controlled and which God expects us to control. It must be added, however, that this control is only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit within us.

The scripture uses another word for love which does involve emotions. It is the word, **phile**, which means, "warm affection," as in the love of family, or even "liking," as in the

affinity of friends. This kind of love is not commanded, but did often occur in the scripture, as in Peter's expression of love for Christ in John 21, or Christ's love for the family at Bethany. This word is also used, occasionally, in the Father and Son relationship of Christ and God. It should be said here, that while affection relates to natural emotions, it is also something originally from God, as all basic mental processes, and can be a sanctified part of any relationship. It is only the abuse of affection that has made of it a superficial thing. While affection is not commanded by God, it is yet a very important aspect of the marriage relationship. A marriage can be stable without **phile** love (provided that the **agape** love is there), but lacks the vitality that makes it a truly satisfying relationship.

The most essential principle to consider in this phase of love is, that while **agape** love is commanded, the **phile** love of affection must be earned. If you want your partner to like you, you must be likeable. The effort to maintain the affection of one's partner is a process that must be maintained throughout the entire marriage. Before marriage, one is usually very careful, in appearance and conduct, to be attractive to the other person, but somehow after the vows are said, it is assumed that the partner is stuck with whatever attitudes and actions one wishes to express. The idea usually runs something like this, "you married me for better or for worse. If I choose to be worse, you have to put up with me." If you want your marriage to retain the vitality and sparkle of the courtship days, then you must put as much effort in to being attractive as you did in the courtship days. You have the right to be unpleasant in your relationship to others, but ultimately, you will walk alone. An attractive, pleasant person, is very hard to resist, and that attractiveness can help to influence one's partner into making a similar effort.

Of course, as the emotions are fluctuating and undependable, so affection may vary with moods and circumstances. As one matures, one learns to maintain even this aspect of love with some degree of constancy. It is not inevitable that affection must fluctuate, but it is normal.

You will not have to go through the agonies of rebuilding the marriage, if you keep in mind, from the beginning, the need of putting forth an effort to maintain the affection and love. As with a building, upkeep is easier and less costly than renovating. Remember now, that affection is the "like" side of love, and that it must be earned. How you make yourself attractive to your partner is personal. This matter is related to both the physical appearance and personality development. We will take up the meaning of personality in the next chapter.

### **A Word About the Expression of Affection**

It is one thing to have a proper understanding of the meaning of affection. It is quite another to express that affection properly. In the first place, one expresses affection with words. It is not enough to assume that the other person ought to know how you feel. A common comment is, "But you ought to know I love you—I wash your clothes and cook your meals and care for the house;" or, "That's why I break my back earning a living—to provide a home for you." No matter how much one may do for another, vocal expressions of love are essential. Affectionate words are like a caress. To protest the necessity of saying, "I love you," is like saying, "Do I have to kiss you again? I just kissed you yesterday." The

excessive use of words can become commonplace, and they can be false; but, sincere and meaningful words of affection, add an important lustre to the relationship.

In addition to the words of affection, are the deeds that say, "I love you." It is commonly understood that notes in the lunchbox, favorite dishes, and bouquets of flowers are a nice touch in the expression of love. Less commonly understood, and still less commonly practiced, however, is the simple act of listening. Nothing kills affection more quickly than neglect. Paying attention to another's words and being sensitive to another's needs, is far more important than bouquets of roses and chocolate cakes. One of the most common complaints a marriage counselor hears from wives is that their husbands do not listen. Often they listen, but do not hear. Or, if they hear, they may ignore the matter as trivia. It is essential for a husband to be sensitive to his wife's needs. If he keeps on ignoring her, affection can be crushed. If he delays too long in responding to the needs and desires, the action loses its value. Regarding a wife's needs and desires as trivial can destroy affection. And, of course, the husband has needs that should not be ignored. Often a wife is harassed by care of the children, and does, indeed, have a heavy responsibility in caring for the home. But, in one way or another, the husband needs to know that he really does matter.

Many husbands feel that the physical relationship is the ultimate expression of affection. Nothing could be further from the truth. The physical relationship is a natural by-product of affection. Where "lovemaking" is the object of attention, it becomes a distasteful obligation. Many of the physical difficulties that couples experience are the result of making the physical relationship an end in itself. Where the physical relationship evolves out of a period of warm and affectionate companionship, there is little difficulty in finding ways to express that affection physically. Herein lies a most important key to the paradox of why a young couple, prior to marriage, cannot stand to be apart from each other, and yet, after marriage, find too many reasons not to be together. Prior to marriage, when they are trying to win each other's affections, they do everything possible to make it pleasant for the other person to be in their company. A pleasant evening together of dining and conversation culminates in an almost irrepressible, desire to express the affection in physical ways. After marriage, when the physical relationship is seen as a right, instead of a privilege, one tends to dispense with more time-consuming, but essential expressions of affection, which previously made up the substance of the companionship. The care and kindness that a husband gives his wife whenever they are together will largely determine the way that she responds to his physical attentions. If a husband treats his wife carelessly, or unkindly, or indifferently, the effort to have a physical relationship will be seen as empty sexual desire. She then feels like a "sex-object." In the same vein, the effort to "patch-up" a quarrel, by a display of physical love, is, not only ineffective, but is repugnant, and further widens the rift. A pleasant evening together, on the other hand, where each attempts to make one's company desirable, is an excellent prelude to a satisfying physical relationship.

It is safe to say that there is no area in the marriage where women feel more deprived than in the area of expressions of caring and affection. Insistence on the physical act without attention to affection and companionship leaves the woman feeling used and abused. The physical relationship then becomes the most distasteful part of her marriage.

It is a sad commentary on society, and an evidence of the paucity of sound affections, that the most natural and desirable of human functions should require endless analysis and

instruction by behavioral science specialists. Perhaps we should throw away the book and learn to treat each other with kindness and sensitivity.

## **RECOVERING LOVE**

But what if the love is gone? What then? What hope do we have? There is much hope. But that hope lies only in getting God's help, and God's perspective in the matter of love. In getting God's perspective, we must consider, carefully, the difference between **agape** love, and **phile** affection. **Agape** love is God's special promise. It is commanded by Him; it is attainable by His grace. Affection, on the other hand, depends much on putting forth of human effort to pay attention to another's needs and desires, and to merge with another personality in a cooperative relationship.

### **Recovery and Agape Love**

Remember, that **agape** love means "caring." It is commanded by God, and does not affect so much the emotions, as the will. If it is commanded by God it is also provided by God. When one takes Christ into one's spirit, one possesses His love also.

Thus, the matter of recovering love involves the question of which kind of love. **Agape** love is quite a different thing than **phile** love.

If one has Christ, **agape** love is already in one's spirit. When one receives Christ, one receives His qualities. One cannot have Christ within without having also His love within. (Galatians 5:22 is not a list of qualities we **ought** to have if we are filled with His Spirit, but qualities we **do** have.) And, if we have received Him, we do have His spirit (see Romans 8:9). We know that we have received Him if we care about Him. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit, one would not care about Christ. But, you may say, "I don't know if I care about Christ or anyone else, for that matter." Remember, we are talking about the will, and not the emotions, To care, in this sense, is not necessarily to feel affection for, but to be considerate of. Thus, if you did not care, you probably would not be reading this book. It would not matter to you what Christ thinks, and it would not matter about your marriage. You would just go and do what you wanted, in spite of anyone else, including Christ. You probably care more about your husband, or wife, than you think. It would matter to you if something happened to your mate. In reality, this is all that God commands in **agape** love. This is what He expects in regard, even to our enemies. You do not have to like your enemies, but you care, if they are in need, because the **agape** love of Christ within expresses itself in a kind of caring for all mankind. When Christ comes into our spirits, we are no longer indifferent to others. Admittedly, there may be carelessness in the expression of the caring. Often the love of Christ within is obscured by human self-centeredness, but it is there, nonetheless, if we possess His spirit.

Christ commands husbands to love their wives, "**as He loved the church, and gave Himself for it.**" (Ephesians 5:23) That means sacrificing one's own interests for the welfare of one's wife. He also instructs wives to "care" for their husbands. Many wives seem so absorbed with their own frustrations, that they fail to consider the needs of their husbands.

“Caring” is the beginning of recovery. Exercising simple care and considerateness for one another can rekindle fading feelings. Usually fading feelings are the result of careless behavior. A return to the considerateness of courtship can do much to recover the affection of courtship. The **agape** love of Christ within will help you to “care” for each other. Recovery of feelings is another matter.

## **RECOVERY OF AFFECTION**

Recovery of affection begins with recovery of “caring.” One cannot help how one feels, but one can help how one deals with how one feels. Deeds of kindness and caring are hard to resist. Love begets love. But someone has to start. Do not wait for the other one to begin first. Learn to act—not react. In other words, begin to show care and kindness (without strings) in spite of what the other one does. If you are the Christian and the other one is the non-Christian, you have all the more reason to exhibit kindness, and so reflect the love of Christ. Your attitudes may draw the other one to Christ. Deeds of kindness will do far more than words of exhortation (nagging). It is not easy. You may have to go the “second mile,” and exercise patience, but the stakes are high, and the rewards great.

In the recovery of affection, a cardinal rule to remember is that no one has to like us. If we want our mates to like us, we must be likeable.

There was something, in the beginning, that was attractive. Something that drew the two of you together. Else, why this particular one, and not another? It might have been similar tastes, or good communication, or some attractive personality traits. Something made you attractive to each other. But, that something is often obscured by a host of negative factors, that have entered the picture. The fault-finding begins to surpass the appreciation, and a vicious cycle begins—the more the fault-finding, the less will be the affection, and hence, the less effort to please. It is hard to like someone who is always criticizing. Criticism can reach a point where it has the opposite effect of fostering the very things one is trying to correct. The obvious answer is to focus on those qualities that were the original attraction. Of course, this is a two-way street. People change. Traits emerge that were not seen at first. You must ask yourself, “Where have I changed my actions or attitudes, so that I am less appreciated than I was.” Even letting one's physical appearance go can have its affect. We must realize that if we change, the other person may not like us as well. They married us for what they saw in us at that time. If we change for the worse, we may lose the affection. Or, if we covered up negative traits in order to make the “catch”, we cannot complain if they do not like the hidden traits that have emerged.

There is a price to pay for affection. There are behavioral adjustments, attitude adjustments, and personality adjustments to make, if we want affection. Otherwise, our mates may care for us, but not like us very well. Sit down together and talk the matter out, openly. Ask yourselves, “Where have we changed, and why? How can we recover our affection for each other? What can we change, and what can we accept?” Of course, the great help is prayer. God will assist you in finding yourselves if you are willing to follow his guidance. If each one really wants what Christ wants, personality problems are more readily handled.

All that has been said about the restructuring of a marriage may not seem relevant at all to young lovers—newlyweds, or those contemplating marriage. Because, “of course, we are different. Our love is too deep to ever fade.” One comment—**REMEMBER WHERE YOU PUT THIS BOOK.**

### **III - BUILDING THE CITADEL**

#### **THE BUILDERS**

The essence of a family is, of course, persons. Buildings, however lavish, do not make homes. Home is where the people are. The strength of a family is determined by the interaction of the persons that make up the family.

A citadel is a fortress. When the members of a family are functioning together properly, they become a fortress of faith—a bulwark against the archenemy of the soul. It is also a sanctuary for the preserving of sound values, in the midst of a society that is fluctuating, and often hostile toward the beliefs and mores which we regard as vital to our life with Christ.

**Harmony Between Parents.** If there is to be a strong citadel, the parents must be in harmony. There must be a merging of their personalities to form a strong unity in the spirit. Jesus said that the two should become one flesh. As usually practiced, marriage is a “tug-of-war” for the achieving of personal rights. Most marriages break up over scars suffered in this “tug-of-war”. One likes the idea of having a companion and of having the personal benefits that come through marriage, but one does not like the idea of giving up individual rights, or of merging one's own desires and purposes with those of another. As in purchasing an automobile, one likes the pleasure and convenience, but tires of making the payments.

The merging of personalities is not easy, but certainly essential to a successful marriage. We spend the first twenty years, or so, of our lives learning to adjust to our own personalities. Then we get involved with another person. When one marries, one is adding another personality to one's own. That means that the original self has got to make room for another. A good analogy is the organ transplant. One of the big problems in the transplanting of vital organs is that the body tends to reject the intrusion of a large mass of foreign protein. By analogy, when one marries, the original personality seems to reject the intrusion of a new personality into the picture, and is reluctant to give up individual rights, to include the new personality. Most people see marriage as adding something extra to their existing situation. In reality, marriage is a matter of modifying the existing situation to include and absorb another element—another personality. This means, of course, compromise and modification. If one is not willing to compromise and modify, adjust and absorb, then it is folly to get married. There is nothing in the Bible that says that one has to be married. There is much that says that if one marries, one has to adjust to, and accommodate the other person.

Marriage is really the culmination of love in the sense that it affords the opportunity for one, who loves another, to give to that other person the care and tenderness that one desires to give them. If marriage is seen simply as the privilege of receiving from the other

party all that they have to give, then it is going to be a failure. Because, in reality, love is to give. Receiving in love is merely a byproduct, or a bonus in a life of giving. So, you see, for there to be a satisfying marital relationship, there simply must be sensitivity to the idea of taking another personality and joining it to ourselves—accommodating, adjusting and modifying, in order to make one great personality out of two separate ones. This is why Christ says that marriage is a matter of a man and wife cleaving to each other and so becoming one flesh.

When both parties seek to please Christ, instead of self—to want what Christ wants—most of the “tug-of-war” is eliminated. And, after all, pleasing Christ is the only sure road to personal satisfaction, anyway.

**Harmony Between Parents and Children.** Building the citadel is a matter of building the persons that comprise the citadel. Here, the parents must take the lead. All the instruction in the world will not avail, unless the parents are an example of the very qualities they wish to instill in their children. Many times, the problem of authority in the home is directly related to the lack of respect for parents. If young people are to yield to the authority of the parents, parents must conduct themselves in such a way as to earn the respect of the children. If they wish to teach children to be kind and gracious, they must, themselves, display kindness and grace. If they want to teach the primacy of Christ, they must, themselves, put Christ first.

*“But doesn't the Bible teach that children must honor their parents?”*

Yes, indeed, but we must understand what that word means. The word, “honor,” translates the Greek word, **timao**, which means “to attach worth to.” Children are enjoined to give consideration to parents in terms of the value of parenthood. The idea of respect extends to the place of authority, and not necessarily to the person. We cannot ask young people to be false, and give respect in a personal sense, to persons whose behavior may not be worthy of respect.

Thus, in building the citadel, parents must be sure the foundation is secure in reliance upon Christ, and that building blocks are solid in practices and behavior patterns that will be worthy of the respect and emulation of the children. Such careful attention to one's personal life will also assist in making a better relationship between husband and wife. This cultivating of personality is not easy, but the rewards are great, in the peace and stability of life. If the price of building the family citadel seems high, the price of a family vulnerable to a relentless enemy is higher. There is no agony so great as seeing one's family riddled with dissension and disintegrating under enemy fire.

There are, of course, no guarantees. Children do go astray, in spite of the best efforts of parents. But stable, loving parents do provide the anchor point that is the only hope for such ones. Eventually, the steady caring and prayers of faithful parents do win out. The Bible gives such assurance. **“Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”** (Proverbs 22:6)

*“But, I have made my mistakes, and my family is already disintegrating. What can I do?”*

Pray and care. Prayer is effective. There are many things God can do to corral an errant child. But, in addition to prayers, (and example), the young people must have the sense that you care, and that you accept them. You may not approve of what they do, but they must know that you are open to them. The days of discipline and control may be past. Now you will hold them, not by judgment and criticism, but by giving them the sense that whatever happens, they can come to you and get help—not recrimination. You may be all they have—the only link with stability, and the only bulwark between themselves and desolation. You brought them into the world, do not ever abandon them. Do not pamper, or indulge them, or excuse their behavior. Do not let careless, or lazy children take advantage of you, but do let them know that, while you cannot always agree with their conduct, you are always “in their corner.” You can be firm without being harsh. You can be sympathetic, without condoning. You can give guidance, without lectures. Above all you can be an example of the love and grace of Christ. If they do not find it in you, where will they find it? We would not expect less of Christ. We offend Him, ignore Him, and turn from Him, but we hope He will remain steadfast and not turn from us. This certainly requires a selfless attitude, but we brought these children into the world, and gave them their genes. They are the product of our circumstances and marital choices. We can hardly abandon them.

You cannot change the past, but you can determine now, to be a stable and caring anchor point for your family, for the present and the future.

## **THE BUILDING BLOCKS**

We have said that the citadel is made up of persons. The attitudes and actions of the persons are vital to the building of the citadel. In a sense, these attitudes and actions may be seen as the building blocks. For the walls to be strong, these building blocks must be fitted together in a harmonious bond. (See Ephesians 2:20-22) This “fitting together” requires adjustment and growth on the part of all members. The process of fitting the blocks is often painful. The ancient method of fitting building blocks was to hone them against each other. And so, in the “fitting together” of persons, it is necessary for them to interact with each other in a realistic and meaningful way—in the “give and take” of normal living—and not in superficial and banal pleasantries. The latter may be less painful, but accomplishes nothing in the shaping of the spirit. When we are forced to interact with other persons in a realistic way, our own behavior patterns become modified through the agency of the Holy Spirit. If we do not have other persons to relate to, we can become self-oriented and distorted. We will only see ourselves through the often misguided perspective of self-deception. We can only truly know ourselves as we are reflected in the responses of others. Robert Burns, the famous bard of Scotland, caught this concept in the following lines:

“O, wad some Pow’r the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as others see us!  
It wad frae monie a blunder free us  
An’foolish notion.”

*But granted the need for merging our personalities and changing our behavior patterns, how do we go about it? Can we really change, and what is it in us that does change? Furthermore, to what degree must we effect the changes ourselves, and to what degree can we expect the help of the Holy Spirit?*

The answer to these questions must come in a careful consideration of human nature. Human beings are rather complex. There are a number of facets to the human being. We have to understand, for example, the difference between the human self, and the human spirit.

**The Self and the Spirit.** The Bible makes a strong distinction between the spiritual and the natural, or the spirit, which is possessed by God, and the natural self. The **self** is the human personality. It is our thoughts and attitudes and feelings—the way we look at life, and react to its experiences. The personality is really the behavior pattern that develops within each individual, as a result of both genes and experiences. The personality is made up of the sum total of all personal experiences from the time of conception (even subconscious experiences in the womb), plus the character traits of the genes. These elements combine to form a complex pattern of behavior, inscribed on the cortex of the brain. All spontaneous action takes place in terms of this pattern, or grid. The self is the mischief-maker. It is never satisfied. It must be kept under the control of the spirit. The **spirit**, on the other hand, is something of an overriding consciousness, governing the self, or personality. The spirit is the vital, eternal element of the human being. It is where Christ dwells. The personality, apart from the spirit, is merely a series of impulses traveling through the brain and nervous system. Taken in these simple terms, man does appear to be not much more than an animal, with behavior patterns established by experiences and needs. The thing that really lifts man into a far higher category than this is the adding of the Spirit of God. As originally created, man possessed this Spirit, but it was lost to him as a result of the fall, or rebellion of man. The result of this fall was described as death. But, while death did occur potentially, in the introducing of corruption, the death of the spirit was immediate—that is, the loss of the Spirit of God. The Bible teaches that as a result, man has been pretty well reduced to a greedy, self-centered, striving being, not much beyond an animal. And so it seems that man is, as we see him in action all about us. It does not take much of a genius, or a philosopher, to assess man as being in an extremely unhealthy state. In Jeremiah 17:33 we read, **“The heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked above all things; who can know it? But God trieth the heart.”** The word “heart”, as used here, simply refers to the inner being, the essential personality of man. Generally, a psychologist would refer to this as the “ego.”

The Bible makes it quite clear that man has a problem with his personality. But it also makes it clear that God has acted to cure this problem through the sacrifice and life of Christ. The Spirit of God is restored to the spirit of man by the indwelling of Christ. That is the new birth. In simple terms, when God's energy, or Spirit, flows through our being, He brings about the effects of His love and grace in our hearts. Now this is the thing that we are talking about when we say that the spirit must be developed in harmony with God, if we are going to find a meaningful life. The process of this development, however, is not like a hypodermic injection, but rather a life-long experience, wherein God takes the circumstances of our lives and uses them to mold us, by the agency of His Holy Spirit. Experiences in the life of an unbeliever, not having the agency of the Holy Spirit, will often bring about bitterness and negative attitudes, which work to destroy the soul. But the

believer, possessing the Holy Spirit, finds that when experiences come to him that could be disruptive, they rather work toward growth and maturity. Thus, the way to find satisfaction in this life, is simply to accept the circumstances which come to us, and see in them the means by which God is building our spirits.

**Of Human Nature and the Process of Change.** We come back to the original questions—How do we change; to what degree do we change; and to what degree can we expect God's help? Strictly speaking, the human nature does not, itself, change. As a result of the fall, the flesh, or human nature, does not have the capacity to change. It is rather a change of behavior patterns, than a change of the nature itself. The importance of this distinction is that one will not be misguided into thinking that changes can be made which will eliminate further need for vigilance. If the human nature were, in fact, changed, we would be perfect. The fact of the matter is, however, that behavior patterns are not constant, and can change either way. Without care and vigilance, it is quite possible that one would “revert to type.” We are like the wild rose. Hybrid roses are made off of a common, wild rose stalk. The hybrid is grafted into the stem of the wild rose, and becomes a thing of beauty. But, if growth is allowed below the place of the graft, the wild rose can take over again. If we return to old practices and patterns, they can easily take over.

If the human nature does not **change**, what does change? The answer is, that the spirit changes. When Christ comes into our spirit, He brings with Him His own attitudes and characteristics. With His presence, we also possess His love and faith and grace, for instance. Our attitudes change toward God and self and others. The attitude toward God and others changes from indifference, to caring, and the attitude toward self turns to a recognition of its weakness and dependence upon God. These attitude changes are constant, in spite of the limits of our expression of them in the flesh. The spirit desires to please Christ and relate to others properly. But, the self has difficulty carrying out the desires of the spirit. The spirit of the believer is open to Christ, but the self is often unyielding. The self needs to be controlled by the spirit. Paul indicated, in Romans 7, that the spirit of the believer wants to serve Christ, but the self serves the law of sin. We know that our spirits have been changed, because we do constantly care about Christ, and what He thinks of us. The very distresses that Christians feel regarding their own personal weaknesses and failures are the best indication that the Spirit of Christ is in them, and is at work in their spirits. Vigilance is required. If we give way to the tendencies of our flesh, we hurt others, and bring upon ourselves great earthly sorrows.

*So if our spirit is changed, but our flesh is not, then how do we go about handling our personality problems? How do we “modify” our behavior?*

The change that takes place in our spirits is quite significant, because attitude—the will to change—is half the battle. The central issue in the will to change, is motivation. The will is no match for an adequate motive. When Christ comes into our spirit, there is a deeply-rooted concern to conduct ourselves properly—not just to please Him, but also because we see our spirits as having eternal worth. A low self-image affects the motivation factor. And, if life were to end at the grave, there would be little concern for the shaping of it.

A further issue in motivation, is the desire for friendship, or to have people like us. If we want people to like us, we must be likeable. The question is often asked, “Where has our love gone?” The answer is not too difficult. It has been blown away by the winds of

careless behavior. It is commonly assumed that love is an obligation in marriage, and that whatever one's behavior, the other is required to maintain affection. This is, of course, an illusion. The degree to which we are concerned to have the affection of others, will be the degree of motivation to change our behavior patterns so as to invite such affection. The subject of love and affection was, of course, dealt with at length in the previous chapter. So motivation is the beginning point of behavioral change.

When the motivation to change is there, then one will honestly look to the Spirit of Christ to help. The inner spirit, possessed by the Spirit of Christ, must constantly monitor and control our behavior patterns. Otherwise, the self, like the wild rose, becomes dominant. It is natural to be self-centered, but the Spirit of Christ within, provides a check against selfish behavior. Compatibility in marriage, as well as in relationship to others, is a matter of keeping self-interest subservient to the spirit, and functioning in terms of the best interest of others. This is especially important in the more intimate family groupings.

*Assuming that one has the motivation—one really wants to change, how much change is required? How much of one's personality can really be changed?*

This brings us back to the issue of what constitutes personality. Since some aspects of personality are hereditary, it is obvious that there are aspects of one's nature that will probably not change, and do not, necessarily, need to change.

**Personality Types.** There are, for example, three basic personality types with, of course, many gradations in between. There is the **extrovert**—the outgoing type; the **introvert**—the withdrawn type; and the **mesovert**—the one who is in between. Sometimes these different personalities clash. The outgoing type may seem boorish and insensitive to the withdrawn type. The American poet, Emily Dickinson, described such ones as “public, like a frog . . . croaking in the bog.” That, of course, was how the introvert saw the extrovert. It is not that the one is better than the other; but that the two types have difficulty relating. It should, therefore, be obvious that one should be sure, prior to marriage, that one is able to relate to the basic personality type of the other. It is folly to marry another in the hope that the other will change. It is not necessary to understand the technical matters of personality, but only to be sure that there is a reasonable basis for compatibility—that is, that you can get along together. In fact, the entire field of personality analysis is highly speculative. Efforts to classify types are risky, especially for the amateur. It is not necessary to classify another—only to be aware of that one's true attitudes and behavior patterns.

If one has already married another with incompatible characteristics, it is well to try to adjust and compromise (where possible) to accommodate the other. It is futile to expect change in established personality patterns. Change could possibly be achieved but it is uncertain. Here, a decision must be made, weighing the relative values—how important the problem is, in the light of other options, as for example, having to live alone.

Where change can more readily come, is in areas of acquired characteristics and behavior patterns. But once again, it is not wise to assume that undesirable habits will disappear after marriage. If you cannot accept the matter before marriage, do not think it will be easier afterward. Or, if you married, knowing the habit was there, you have no right to complain about it after the marriage. On the other hand, patterns that develop after

marriage do not have to be accepted. After all, one marries another for certain, special qualities that one admires. If those qualities change, or are obscured by new factors that have entered the picture, do not be surprised if the attitude toward the marriage changes. Affection can easily be crushed by newly acquired and undesirable characteristics. Where has love gone? It went with the changes. It is not at all unreasonable to say, "You have changed and I don't like you very much anymore." Perhaps, on the other hand, one covered up undesirable traits. It is common, during courtship, to put one's best foot forward. The problem is the awakening after marriage. If one has been less than open about oneself prior to marriage, one has no right to complain if one's real personality is not acceptable to the other.

We have been considering personality factors that are basic to one's character. We have indicated that change in these areas is uncertain. We have also indicated that change is not always necessary. However, it must also be noted that many normal personality characteristics, if not controlled, can become highly undesirable. The extrovert can become overbearing—perhaps violent. The introvert can become totally self-centered—insensitive to others. Such patterns of behavior need to be controlled, or changed. If one elects to turn away, or withdraw, rather than change, one merely acquires a new set of problems. Walls of defense and separation rise all too easily. But, what appears to be a comfortable haven of self-sufficiency, ultimately becomes a prison house of loneliness.

We cannot give, here, an exhaustive discussion of personality, but the following examples may give enough insight into the matter to make the necessary applications to one's own special situation. It should be understood at the outset, that almost all undesirable behavior patterns are the aberrational excess of normal personality traits. A strong will, for example, is a normal and useful personality trait. Stubbornness is the excess. Determination is creative, while stubbornness is destructive. Inflexibility, the expression of stubbornness, can destroy the family unit. Flexibility makes the most of each given opportunity to relate wisely and beneficially to other human beings.

Another normal trait is the capacity for strong emotions. But, the habit of reacting to circumstances with excessive anger, such as tantrums is usually a carry over from insisting always on having one's own way. It may be normal for a child to throw a tantrum, and react irrationally, but it is both ludicrous and disastrous in an adult.

There are endless combinations of personality traits that could be discussed. The danger is that we might become lost in a maze of technicalities and lose sight of the central purpose. We have merely been trying to develop the point that some personality traits are more subject to change than others. Some of the basic tendencies do not need to be changed, but controlled. Habits that have been acquired may do damage to the relationship and should be changed. On the other hand, the tendency to cover questionable, or incompatible behavior patterns, in order to woo another's affections, is risky and sometimes creates serious problems when the true nature is finally exposed. It is far better for couples, who are contemplating marriage, to be open with each other about themselves, and to determine before marriage whether or not they are compatible, than to find out afterward and have to "put-up" with each other, or perhaps get a divorce. It is not sound to rely on promises in this matter, since personality changes do not come that easily. If there are changes required, it is well to wait for a long enough period to determine if the changes are going to be lasting. The chances of "reverting to type" are strong.

*But what if I am already married and these personality problems do exist? We did not really know each other.*

Then one must weigh the relative values. How important is the relationship? Is affection important enough to put forth the effort to change. What are the options? Is loneliness more bearable than certain difficult personality traits? Are the problems of divorce more difficult than the problems of adjustment? Are there not enough redeeming qualities to make the marriage worthwhile?

Often, personality adjustment is a matter of “growing up.” No matter whom you marry, there will need to be adjustment. If one does not wish to go to the trouble of “growing up,” one should not get married. Although it should be observed that immaturity brings its own miseries to the single person as well. It is well to think of responsible character development as being like putting down roots. The higher the tree grows, the more important the depth of the root system. The value of strong character development may not be obvious to the young, for whom options in life seem limitless, but as one gets older, and life becomes more complex, and the storms come more fiercely, then one may realize, with regret, how little effort was given to the putting down of roots. Thus, any effort to adjust one's personality, and to relate properly to others, is important, not only for the marriage, but for growth and maturity—for the increasing capacity to cope with life.

*Granted, the desirability of change, what help does Christ give us?*

Perhaps the first question ought to be—what does He **not** do? He does not merely wave a “magic wand,” or give an injection, and produce instant character change. *But are we not “new creatures” in Christ?* Yes, we are new creatures, but only in our spirits. The coming of Christ to our spirits brings a complete and permanent change of attitude—toward God, and self, and others. But the natural self—the personality, or “flesh,” as Paul calls it—is brought under control, but not intrinsically changed. Paul said it in many different passages, and in many different ways but one text is revealing—**“In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.”** (Romans 7:18)

What Christ does do for us, then, is to change our basic attitudes and motivations—giving us the will to change—and to give us assistance, in many different ways, to effect changes. In response to our prayers for help, He can affect circumstances and attitudes, both of ourselves and others. Growth comes through experiences which God allows in our lives. We learn patience and grace. We become less critical and more sensitive. We become wiser and less self-centered. These things occur, if we take our experiences from Christ and are open to learning. They occur when we are submissive to the Holy Spirit, and desire to receive His help. The Holy Spirit is the agent in the transformation. He takes our circumstances and translates them into growth. The growth is not always obvious—it seems to come so slowly; but it is there, nevertheless. Again, Paul makes this process quite clear in Romans 5. **“Affliction works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope.”**

Christ also helps us by giving us insight into ourselves and others, as well as a sound perspective on life. This comes primarily through prayer, and attendance upon His word. Going by inner feelings alone is risky. Satan is very clever at deceiving us, but when inner feelings are corroborated by the Bible, we have strong guidance about life, and how to live it successfully with others.

So then, Christ does help us immeasurably, in our relationship to others, by giving us right attitudes and motivations; by affecting the attitudes and feelings of others; by bringing about growth through the affecting of our circumstances; and by instruction and guidance. One thing is certain. The heart that is open to Christ and earnestly seeks to relate properly to others will surely have His help.

One does not have to know anything about the technicalities and terminologies of the vast and elusive subject of personality, to function properly in relation to others. What is essential is a greater concern for the welfare of another, than for the welfare of oneself. When we learn to forget about ourselves and focus on the welfare of others, we will eliminate much of the cause of dissension and dissatisfaction with our lives.

Most marriage counseling would be eliminated if couples would simply quit pressing for their own personal rights and self-interest, and seek instead to please Christ, and to do what is in the best interests of the family.

A big order? Yes, and impossible if one is concerned primarily with oneself. But the self is the greatest prison of all and the greatest taskmaster. The self is never satisfied. It is only when one breaks down the walls of self-centeredness and seeks to please Christ that one can breathe free and revel in the limitless horizons of God's purpose for life.

Ask Christ, now, to help you fulfill His purpose for yourself and your family. He will help you build an invincible citadel.