

ရန်ကုန်ပရိုတက်စတင့်ပြန်လည်ပြုပြင်သောအသင်းတော်
Yangon Protestant Reformed Church
တနင်္ဂနွေစာစောင်

နေ့စွဲ - ၆. ၁၂. ၀၉

ဘုရားသခင်၏ပဋိညာဉ်အား အသင်းတော်ထဲတွင်စောင့်ရှောက်ခြင်း

(Keeping God's Covenant in Marriage, Prof. David J. Engelsma)

ကျမ်းစာဖတ်ခြင်း - ၁ကော ၇:၁၇၊ ၃၉။ မာလခိ ၂:၁၁-၁၇

နိဒါန်း

ဘုရားသခင်ကိုယ်တော်တိုင်က သူ့လူတွေကို လက်ထပ်ထိန်းမြားခြင်းအပေါ် မှန်ကန်တဲ့ကျင့်ကြံ ပြုမူမှု ထားဖို့အတွက် အလေးထားပြီးပြောနေပါတယ်ဆိုတာဟာ၊ ကျွန်တော်တို့ ပဋိညာဉ်ကိုစောင့် ရှောက်ခြင်းမှာ အရေးကြီးတဲ့အပိုင်းက ပါဝင်ပါတယ်။ အဲဒီအမှန်တရားကို ဘုရားသခင်ဟာ သူ့ရဲ့ပဋိ ညာဉ်ကို ကျွန်တော်တို့နဲ့ပြုတာ လက်ထပ်တာနဲ့အတူတူဘဲလို့ ပြောပြတဲ့အချိန်မှာ စေချာစွာ ပြောပြ တာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

God Himself emphasizes that right behavior on the part of His people in marriage is an important aspect of our keeping the covenant. He emphasizes this when He makes marriage the outstanding symbol of His covenant with us. Throughout the Old Testament, for example, <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Jeremiah+3Jeremiah 3> and <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Ezekiel+16Ezekiel 16> , God teaches that He is married to Israel/Judah. In <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Isaiah+54:5,6Isaiah 54:5, 6> , God is called Judah's husband, and Judah is called Jehovah's wife. In the New Testament, <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Ephesians+5:22-176Ephesians 5:22ff> . teaches that God is the husband of the church in Jesus Christ. God's spiritual marriage to the church is the covenant.

If marriage is nothing less than the symbol of the covenant, our behavior in marriage is certainly an important part of our keeping the covenant. We are called to show the truth of the covenant in our marriage.

God emphasizes the importance of our behavior in marriage also by making the behavior of Christ and the church in the covenant the pattern of the behavior of the Christian husband and wife. This is the teaching of <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Ephesians+5:22-176Ephesians 5:22ff> . The Christian husband is commanded to behave towards his wife as Christ behaves towards the church, and the Christian wife is commanded to behave towards her husband as the church behaves towards Christ. The comparison implies that the covenant of God in Christ—the real and everlasting marriage—must be evident in our marriage. So closely are covenant and marriage connected in the life of most of us.

There is still a third way in which God emphasizes the importance of our conduct in marriage with regard to keeping the covenant. Ordinarily, God uses our marriages to bring forth and rear children who, by His election, are members of the covenant of grace. The covenant promise is always to believers and their children. Right behavior in marriage promotes the covenant by benefiting those members of the covenant who are the children of believers. Behaving rightly in our marriage, we are obedient to Christ, who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" ([Luke 18:16](#)).

There is also the obvious emphasis in the Bible on proper conduct in marriage as covenant keeping in that so many passages are exhortations, warnings, or instruction concerning marriage.

Transgressing the Covenant

We must be aware, as we consider this aspect of our calling to keep the covenant, of the powerful pressures on Christians to transgress the covenant by corrupting marriage. There is such development of rebellion against God in the West that not only is marriage dishonored by open, shameless fornication and by divorce and remarriage at whim, but society also approves homosexual unions. States are sanctioning such unions as “marriages.”

There is such lawlessness in churches that most, including those with a name for orthodoxy and conservatism, tolerate, if they do not approve, divorce for any reason and subsequent remarriage. This lecture will not be polemical. My intention is to be positive in setting forth what the Bible teaches on the great covenant truth of marriage. But I observe at the outset that there are very few churches any longer that even restrict remarriage after divorce to the “innocent party.” In the practice of most supposedly conservative churches, remarried guilty parties are accepted as members and received at the Lord’s Table.

God’s faithful covenant friends are called to keep the covenant in marriage in a time when there is such widespread sexual promiscuity, such encouragement of the gratification of sexual desire outside marriage, and such exaltation of the goddess Sex as tend to destroy the institution of marriage altogether. In such societal, religious, and moral darkness, the call comes to the saints: “But fornication, and all uncleanness . . . let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints” ([Eph. 5:3](#)). A little later, in the same chapter, the Spirit calls us to conduct ourselves rightly in marriage, which He describes as the mystery of Christ and the church ([Eph. 5:22-33](#)).

Before I take up the subject of keeping the covenant in marriage, I must recognize that some Christians are called to keep the covenant outside marriage, that is, in single life. I Corinthians 7:7-9, 25ff. allows this, if one has the gift of sexual self-control, so that he does not “burn.” Others are prevented by God from living in marriage, as [I Corinthians 7:11](#) notes. A woman separated from her husband because of his adultery must remain single, or be reconciled to her husband.

Single life is perfectly honorable. The unmarried can more fully devote themselves to the Lord. Marriage for all its importance is of no permanent significance. It is a passing institution and relation: “they that have wives be as though they had none” ([I Cor. 7:29](#)). The unmarried believer has the reality of marriage: his or her union with Christ.

Nevertheless, marriage is the rule for Christians. The Creator said, “It is not good that the man should be alone” ([Gen. 2:18](#)). God made the race male and female for marriage, and God Himself instituted marriage for the human race.

Faithfulness

Keeping the covenant in marriage for a member of the covenant—a believer—is, fundamentally, being faithful to his wife or to her husband. Marriage is the unique, intimate, mysterious, and delightful relationship of one man and one woman, in which the two become “one flesh.” This is what marriage is by the will and institution of God as revealed at creation:

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” ([Gen. 2:24](#) ; see vv. 18-25).

For this reason, the true church and a genuine Christian will never recognize or speak of “homosexual marriage.” Homosexuals can do many things, although being fruitful and multiplying is not one of them. What they cannot do is marry. I do not say they *may* not marry. They *cannot* marry. They are not able to marry. They are not able to marry regardless of the contrary legislation of states that rebel against the law of God in nature and regardless of the decisions of apostate churches. By virtue of the ordinance of God, marriage is the union of a male and a female.

When a man and woman marry, God the Creator binds them together, so that they are no longer two, but one flesh, as Jesus teaches in <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Matthew+19:6> Matthew 19:6 : “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh.” The two persons share one earthly life.

This amazing, even mysterious, closeness demands that a Christian marry a fellow believer, with whom he or she is one in the truth of Scripture and in church membership. “In the Lord,” the apostle commands in <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=I+Corinthians+7:39> I Corinthians 7:39 . How difficult it must be to try to share one earthly life, especially in the rearing of children, with one who does not share Christ with you. The Dutch have a proverb: “*Twee gelooven op een kussen, daar ligt de duivel tussen*” (“two faiths on one pillow, the devil lies between them”). An English proverb runs: “Who has an unbeliever for a mate has the devil for his father-in-law.”

An important aspect of this shared life is the sexual relationship. Sex is not all that is referred to by “one flesh.” “One flesh” is far more than the uniting of two bodies. But the sexual relationship expresses, confirms, maintains, and deepens the shared life of the two. Sex is intended by God for marriage, and for marriage only. Keeping the covenant in marriage consists, in part, of perfect sexual fidelity in marriage and of abstinence on the part of the unmarried.

As this intimate, one-flesh relationship, marriage is the appropriate symbol of the covenant between God and His people in Christ. Both are intimate relationships of fellowship. Both are relationships of love. In both, those who were two are so united that they become one. In the covenant with God, we are not absorbed into the Godhead, but we do become the party of the living God. To use the language of Ephesians, the church becomes Christ’s very body.

In the relationship of marriage, the fundamental calling of both husband and wife is faithfulness. They must always regard and will each other as their exclusive marriage companion. They must always actively share earthly life, especially in the fellowship of talking together. <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=I+Corinthians+7:3-5> I Corinthians 7:3-5 commands them to pay each other the debt of the sexual relationship and activity. According to this frank passage, such is the bond of marriage that neither has sole authority over his or her body. For one or the other to withhold himself or herself sexually is a “defrauding” of the other, that is, robbing the other of that which is his or hers. And abstinence for the sake of more intense spiritual exercises too long continued may well lead to fornication.

Since marriage is an exclusive relationship, husband and wife must rigorously guard against falling in love with another. Marriage is an exclusive relationship: one man and one woman (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:18-25; <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Eph+5:22-33> Eph. 5:22-33). This is essential to the symbolism of marriage: Jesus Christ alone and His one church.

There may be no wishful dwelling on the attractiveness of another woman or another man; no opening up of oneself, even in conversation, to another as is appropriate only to marriage; no physical contact with another that can become a powerful temptation to fornication, for example, dancing; no dangerous private meetings in restaurants, or cars, under the pretence of business or even of Christian fellowship.

Indulging in pornography is unfaithfulness to one's mate, regardless whether it leads to the act of fornication.

Unfaithfulness is adultery. God forbids adultery in the seventh commandment as a refusal to keep the covenant. No adulterer enters the kingdom of heaven ([1 Cor. 6:9, 10](#)).

God calls us to unconditional faithfulness. The marriage form expresses this call this way: "for better, for worse." Whether one's wife is a lovely lady, or a brawling woman, whether one's husband is a lovable man, or a fool like Nabal, married Christians are called to be faithful to their wife or husband. We are called to be faithful as God is unconditionally faithful to His miserably sinful people and as the church is unconditionally faithful to God, who, though He is always good, often afflicts His church.

Faithfulness in marriage is fundamental, and, therefore, it is sworn to with a vow. Regardless whether the vow is uttered, marriage is entered into with a vow—a vow to God, whose institution marriage is. Faithfulness in marriage, therefore, is always faithfulness to God, not only to one's marriage companion, just as unfaithfulness is always treachery with regard to God, not only with regard to the betrayed wife or husband.

God Himself has sworn to be faithful to His covenant people: "when God made promise to Abraham [of the covenant], because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself" ([Heb. 6:13](#)). He kept His vow at the cost of the sacrifice of His Son. How shameful that there is marital unfaithfulness in the churches! How shameful that there is as much marital unfaithfulness in the churches as in the ungodly world! How shameful that the vow of marriage means as little in the churches as in the world! How shameful that the churches tolerate and approve marital unfaithfulness and the breaking of the vow of marriage!

Divorce and Remarriage

On behalf of the faithfulness of the covenant people in marriage, the Word of God forbids and condemns divorce and remarriage.

The gospel forbids and condemns divorce. Christ forbids divorce in <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Matthew+5:32> Matthew 5:32 : "whosoever shall put away [divorce] his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." In this prohibition of divorce, Christ fulfils the Old Testament. The prophet Malachi declared that Jehovah God "hateth putting away [divorce]" ([Mal. 2:16](#)).

It is true that there is one, and only one, exception to the prohibition against divorce on the part of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven, namely, fornication ([Matt. 5:32](#) ; 19:9). In these passages, as elsewhere in the New Testament, fornication refers to all kinds of sexual relationships with others than one's husband or wife, whether by the married or by the unmarried, including adultery, homosexual acts, incest, and bestiality. But God also forbids fornication, so that among God's people there will, as a rule, never be a ground for divorce. Besides, even if

one's marriage companion falls into fornication, as can happen, the one who is sinned against—*grievously* sinned against—should forgive and be reconciled with the offending husband or wife, if he or she repents. Fornication by one's marriage companion does not require divorce. Fornication certainly does not dissolve the marriage bond. In the covenant, God forgives and takes back His fornicating wife (<http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Jer+3Jer.3> ; <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Ezek+16Ezek.16>). This is the experience of every one of us, who often have gone awhoring from our God.

But if one's marriage companion continues in fornication, or commits fornication repeatedly, a believer may divorce him or her. Divorce as permitted in <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Matthew+5:32Matthew.5:32> and <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Matthew+19:9Matthew.19:9> is full, legal, and probably permanent separation. It is separation "of bed and board." The divorced Christian is freed from all marital obligations towards the fornicator. This indicates the gravity of the evil of sexual immorality, especially on the part of a married person. It, and it alone, is ground for divorce.

Contrary to the thinking of many, <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=I+Corinthians+7:15I.7:15> *Corinthians 7:15* does not give another ground for divorce, namely, "desertion": "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace." First, this would contradict Jesus, who, in <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Matthew+5:32Matthew.5:32> and *Matthew 19:9*, teaches that there is only ground for divorce. Second, divorce is not the subject in [I Corinthians 7:15](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=I+Corinthians+7:15I.7:15) . An unbelieving husband or wife forsakes the Christian wife or husband, *because of the believer's confession of Christ*. The believer simply lets him or her go: "let him [or her] depart." The thought is not whatsoever that in this case the believer may, indeed should, get busy to divorce the deserting unbeliever. The believer is called to do nothing. Quite literally, the apostle says: "Do nothing!" "Let him go!" That is, "Do not deny one particle of the Christian faith, or give up the least aspect of the Christian life, on account of which the unbeliever left you, in order, perhaps, to get him back!" "Nor should you pack your bags, and follow him all over Corinth, or even all over Greece, leaving the true church and the fellowship of the saints, in order, perhaps, to get him to live with you again!" "Let him go!"

In such a case, the apostle adds, that is, the case of an unbeliever forsaking a believer on account of the gospel, the forsaken believer is "not under bondage ... but God hath called us to peace." Not being "under bondage" is not the same as not being "bound." In the language of the New Testament, being "under bondage" and "being bound" are two completely different words and two radically different realities. Not being under bondage, when one has been abandoned by an unbeliever, in <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=I+Corinthians+7:15I.7:15> *Corinthians 7:15* , has absolutely nothing whatever to do with being bound, or not being bound, in the bond of marriage. In this text, the apostle is not addressing the subject of being bound, or not being bound, in marriage. He will address this subject directly in verse 39, where the word is "bound," not "under bondage": "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth." In verse 15, the teaching is that the abandoned Christian is not living in sin, even though he or she lives alone, apart from his or her marriage companion. He or she is not enslaved by guilt and shame. He or she is not enslaved by the power of disobedience to God's law concerning marriage. He or she need not *feel* guilty, ashamed, or disobedient—not with regard to his or her living apart from the deserting wife or husband. He or she may have peace in these irregular circumstances—peace with God and peace with his or her circumstances. "Not under bondage in such cases," is the verdict of the apostle.

To explain the word, “under bondage,” as though it were the word, “bound,” and the words, “but God hath called us to peace,” as though they meant, “but God now gives us the right to re-marry,” is indefensible exegesis, contradiction of Jesus’ teaching that there is only one ground for divorce, corruption of the biblical truth of marriage, and practically disastrous for the lives of many professing Christians.

The gospel also forbids remarriage, even in the case of lawful divorce. This is clearly the teaching of <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Mark+10:11Mark+10:11> , 12 and of Luke 16:18.

Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery ([Mark 10:11, 12](#)). Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery (Luke 16:18).

This is also the teaching of the more difficult passage, Matthew 19:9: “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” Christ permits divorce on the ground of fornication, answering the question of the Pharisees in verse 3 concerning the lawfulness of divorce. He does not permit the remarriage of the woman unjustly put away by her husband, who then commits adultery by marrying another woman. In the second part of the text, Christ teaches that whoever marries her, the so-called “innocent party,” also commits adultery.

The basis of the gospel’s prohibition of remarriage after divorce, including the remarriage of the so-called “innocent party,” is that marriage is an unbreakable bond for life. That marriage is an unbreakable bond for life is the implication of the very nature of marriage as a one-flesh union by the ordinance of God in creation ([Gen. 2:24](#)). That marriage is an unbreakable bond for life is the express doctrine of the apostle of Christ in <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=I+Corinthians+7:39I+Corinthians+7:39> : “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.” <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Romans+7:2Romans+7:2> teaches the same: “For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.” Verse 3 draws the implication concerning all those who remarry after a divorce: “So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress.”

Marriage is an unbreakable bond for life, because marriage reflects and symbolizes the covenant, and the covenant is an un-breakable relationship between God in Christ and His church.

We should note that the unbelief of one’s marriage companion, much less spiritual differences, is not ground for divorce. The Christian is patiently to live with the unbelieving husband or wife, treat him or her in a Christian manner, and pray that God will use the Christian’s godly testimony and conduct to convert the other. [1 Corinthians 7:12, 13](#) forbids the Christian with an unbelieving wife or husband who is willing to dwell with the Christian to divorce or leave the unbeliever. <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=I+Peter+3:1,2I+Peter+3:1,2> requires a Christian wife to live submissively with her unbelieving husband. She may have the hope that God will use her holy behavior to convert the man.

Submission to an unbelieving husband and living with an unbelieving wife do not include that the believer leaves the true church, denies sound doctrine, or commits wicked deeds, in order to please the unbeliever and maintain the marriage. In a mixed marriage of believer and unbeliever, as everywhere, the great truth holds, that the Christian must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29).

Love and Submission

Faithfulness in marriage, as an important aspect of keeping the covenant, includes more than living together, not divorcing, and not committing adultery.

<http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Ephesians+5:22-33>[Ephesians 5:22-33](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Ephesians+5:22-33), another of the outstanding passages of Scripture on marriage, calls the husband to love his wife and the wife to reverence her husband. The passage makes the relationship between Christ and the church, that is, the covenant of grace, the pattern of the faithful conduct of husband and wife: “as the church is subject unto Christ ... as Christ also loved the church” (vv. 24, 25).

The wife must actively put herself in subjection to her husband in “reverence” for him, that is, respect for his authority in the marriage and in the family. The husband is “head,” which means “authority”—the God-given right to rule wife and home. Marriage is structured by God, just as is the covenant. The structure is that of authority and submission. Rejection of the headship of the husband in marriage—headship as *authority*—is rejection of the headship of Christ in the covenant, by virtue of the comparison in <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Ephesians+5>[Ephesians 5](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Ephesians+5) between Christ and the husband; the throwing of the home into confusion and uproar; and, on the part of a wife, disobedience to her calling.

Submission to her husband includes the wife’s obedience to his will in lawful things ([I Pet. 3:6](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=1Pet+3:6)). The calling to submit is a strong exhortation in <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Ephesians+5:24>[Ephesians 5:24](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Ephesians+5:24): “in everything” and “as the church is subject unto Christ.” The submission of the wife is an aspect of her being the “help” to her husband God willed when He created the woman ([Gen. 2:18](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Gen+2:18)). The married woman no longer has an independent life of her own, but she lives for her husband. According to <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Ephesians+5:22-33>[Ephesians 5:22-33](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Ephesians+5:22-33), the wife is the “body” of her husband, who is her “head.” The body lives for the head. The characteristic sins of a wife are rebellion and sheer independency.

The husband must actively love his wife, and he does this by consciously assuming the headship entrusted to him by Christ and deliberately exercising this headship in giving himself for the wife. The husband too has a calling in marriage. He is head in the marriage, but he is not sovereign over the marriage. Rather, he is subject to Christ. Christ is lord over our marriages.

The headship of the husband must express itself in a surprising way, not by using the wife for his own advantage, but by giving himself for her advantage. Literally, <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Ephesians+5:25>[Ephesians 5:25](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Ephesians+5:25) speaks of the husband’s “giving himself up,” that is, sacrificing himself for the benefit of his wife. This, of course, is the idea of the pattern to which the husband must conform his behavior. Christ, the husband of the church, gave Himself up to the death of the cross for His bride, the church. The Christian husband, therefore, spends his life pleasing his wife. He serves his wife by seeking her welfare, especially her spiritual welfare.

Giving himself for the wife is motivated by the husband’s love for his wife. Love for one’s wife is commanded by the apostle: “Husbands, love your wives” ([Eph. 5:25](http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Eph+5:25)). Love for one’s wife, therefore, is not only, or even primarily, a romantic feeling. Feelings cannot be commanded. Rather, this love is esteem for this particular woman as precious to the husband, as the one woman bound to him by God, and the will, or resolution, to do her good. This esteem and resolution issue in the behavior of selfless, sacrificial giving on her behalf. In love for his wife,

the husband works for her; supports her; takes her wishes into consideration; listens to her; lives for her.

The calling of the husband is a very strong exhortation to a demanding behavior: “even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” ([Eph. 5:25](#)).

Two further aspects of the behavior of the husband are important. The first is that he must treat his wife with tenderness: nourish and cherish her, according to <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Ephesians+5:29> [Ephesians 5:29](#). The second is that when a man loves his wife he is loving himself, for she is one flesh with him ([Eph. 5:28-30](#)). How foolish, how sinfully stupid, that we treat our wife harshly, or brutally! We thus hate ourselves, make ourselves miserable, and destroy ourselves.

The typical sins of the husband are tyranny, brutality, taking the wife for granted, and seeking himself at her expense.

Marriage, a Calling

Love on the husband’s part and submission on the part of the wife are a calling, a holy duty assigned by God in His covenant. By carrying out their calling in marriage, husband and wife keep God’s covenant. On the other hand, professing Christians who impenitently disobey their calling in marriage transgress the covenant and will be judged as covenant breakers.

Marriage itself is a calling. So must married Christians view their marriage. With regard especially to marriage, Paul wrote, “as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk” ([I Cor. 7:17](#)). Neither marriage nor single life, neither a happy marriage nor a troubled marriage, is of ultimate importance to the Christian. What is of ultimate importance is that he faithfully carries out the calling God gives him in his circumstances. Living married life as a calling, the “innocent party” lives a single life, or is reconciled to his wife, or to her husband; the husband with a shrewish, insubordinate wife loves her for God’s sake; and an Abigail with a Nabal for her husband is in subjection to the fool as to the Lord.

Marriage, or single life, is brief, for “the fashion of this world passeth away” ([I Cor. 7:31](#)). Soon, at the coming of the Lord, everyone will receive the reward of his faithful exercise of his calling.

For two Reformed believers, fulfillment of the calling is possible, and expected, by the indwelling Spirit of Christ.

For our failures, confession of sin and forgiveness are necessary—confession to each other, as well as to God, and forgiveness from each other, as well as from God. Especially husbands and wives must not let “the sun go down upon your wrath” ([Eph. 4:26](#)).

Faithfulness in marriage by a husband who loves his wife and a wife who reverences her husband will glorify God in Jesus Christ, will mean bliss for the couple, and will benefit the children.

“Seeking a Godly Seed”

Our purpose in marriage must include “seeking a godly seed,” that is, desiring children who fear and serve God. This is ordinarily God’s purpose with the marriage of believers. He purposes His own glory as the couple reflect His covenant in their marriage, and He purposes the enjoyment of the delightful companionship of marriage by the two who marry. But He also purposes a “godly seed.”

The phrase “seeking a godly seed” occurs in <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Malachi+2Malachi 2> . Verse 15 describes the original marriage as God’s making Adam and Eve one: “And did not he make one?” The prophet then asks, “And wherefore one?” The answer is: “That he might seek a godly seed.” Seeking a godly seed from Adam and Eve was one of the purposes of God in the institution of marriage. In accordance with this purpose, God blessed Adam and Eve with the Word of fruitfulness: “Be fruitful, and multiply” ([Gen. 1:28](#)). <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?version=KJV&passage=Malachi+2Malachi 2> makes plain that God still seeks a godly seed from the marriage of believers.

Malachi raises the truth of God’s seeking a godly seed as part of the prophet’s condemnation of the men of Judah for divorcing their wives: “For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away” (v. 16). Divorce is destructive of the children, who are not simply the children of the two married persons, but covenant children— “godly seed.” Divorce opposes God’s seeking a godly seed.

In the covenant, God promises to save the children of godly parents. He is pleased to use Christian marriage to bring forth elect members of His church, to lead them to Christ, and to rear them to spiritual maturity. The faithfulness of the Christian husband and wife to God and to each other, their own peaceful, loving relationship, the stability and peace of the home, the godly example of their lives, and their teaching are used by God to produce the godly seed He seeks.

Reformed married persons keep the covenant in their marriage by bringing their will into conformity with God’s will. They too seek a godly seed. They seek a godly seed in these ways. They have children, and, if God wills, many children. They teach their children the Word of God at home and see that they are taught the truth at church and in the good Christian school. They rear their children also by supervising their life, disciplining them, and dwelling with them. The mother is a keeper and worker at home. The father is at home evenings and weekends, as much as possible.

Emphatically, they do not divorce and remarry. For God’s sake.

And for the children’s sake.