

Our Changeless Lord's Instructions To A Married Man

Series: Our Changeless Lord (2nd Message of 5)

by Ron R. Ritchie

Last week we were talking about the fact that we are living in a rapidly-changing society. Things are moving so fast I get nervous from time to time. Yesterday, while watching a beautiful gymnastics show from Switzerland on the ABC Wide World of Sports program, the word "Newsbreak" flashed on the screen: "Yes, we are going to build the neutron bomb," they told us. They just wanted us to know that. Thank you very much. Suddenly, you are not very excited about gymnastics anymore. You sit there, stunned, thinking, "What? I didn't get a phone call. Nobody asked me." You sense that the whole world is going along and leaving you out. Major decisions affecting you are being made and you are left drifting on a sea of uncertainty. What is your responsibility? How are you supposed to react? What should be going on in your heart and mind?

Let me give you some more bad news. In this rapidly-changing society, all our traditions, morals and values are being challenged on every hand, particularly that bedrock of our society, the family. Do you remember what that was? There was a time when a man and woman fell in love and decided in a public ceremony to enter into a relationship called marriage--a man chose to live with a woman and she chose to live with him until death do them part; and, if God should bless, very soon there would be children. Do you remember that? That was called "marriage." But now we are being handed a steady diet in the printed page, on TV, on the radio--you can even take seminars on it--of what's called "alternative lifestyles." That spectrum ranges from conventional marriage to open marriage (where you can do anything you want to so long as it's between consenting adults and no one gets hurt), to contract marriage, to homosexual marriage, to a bumper sticker for your car that says, "Happiness Is Being Single." Your choice. This is the diet being fed to us day in and day out.

Here's some more bad news. The National Center for Health Statistics says that divorce is rapidly increasing. I wonder why? In the midst of all this confusion people don't have a clue as to what is right and wrong. The very foundation of our society, marriage, is being chipped away. Young people have all these choices but not many of them have any idea of what commitment over the long haul means. The National Center for Health Statistics tells us that in 1979 (the latest figures available) 1.18 million people in the United States got divorced. They don't give any statistics, however, on the heartbreak of the people who got divorced, their pain, frustration, fear and bitterness. I couldn't find any statistics on the confusion in the lives of the children affected, nor any statement saying how their lives would be affected by the divorce of their parents. You wonder how our children are ever going to enter into a marriage contract when they see our society crumbling all around them.

There is some good news, however. The National Center for Health Statistics tell us that in 1979, for some strange reason, marriages were up by 50,000. They expect 1980 to be a great year for marriage and they are really looking forward to 1981! Marriage, apparently, is back in, despite all this craziness that's going on. That's good news.

Here is some more good news: God is still on his throne. I know it will come as a shock, but do you know who created marriage? God did. God said, "I am going to create a relationship called marriage and I am going to offer it to all of mankind, not just my special people, but everyone may experience this gift. Then to the Christian and the Jew, if they understand who I am as I communicate to them, I am going to give an added bonus to this marriage relationship: I am going to teach them that the marriage relationship is not merely a physical phenomenon, but it is a spiritual illustration of my love for mankind, a walking, pulsating demonstration of servant hood, a picture of how to forgive, a picture of patience, a picture of all of my characteristics. The men and women who understand who I am are the men and women who are going to walk through a community in love with one another, teaching of my love for all of mankind to see and experience.

They are going to be salt and light, not living a selfish lifestyle, but a lifestyle of reaching out, caring and salting down a whole community, participating in my redemptive plan for humanity."

So God didn't leave those who love him without instructions on how to live in a marriage relationship. You know, one of the tragedies of life today is that people really do believe in marriage, they really are excited about it, but they don't have a clue about how to live it out day by day.

Another way you can prove that marriage is "in" today is by checking the new J. C. Penney catalog. It's loaded with pages of wedding gown pictures! People are interested in marriage again. But I couldn't find one line in the J. C. Penney catalog that told what to do after you got married, how to live out this thing called a marriage relationship; there are no instructions on how to go through the tough times or the good times. I had a couple in my home yesterday. The woman said, "We've been married 22 years but now we're really confused. The children have left and we just don't know what to do with our time. We do like each other, but we never experienced this before. We are just sitting there day in and day out, with all these vacant rooms and an extra car in the garage. I've got to feed the dog now and my husband has to take out the garbage and we're not sure we like it." Well, fortunately, for those who love him, Jesus Christ has given us prophets and apostles who wrote down the very "heart" of God. He tells us how to live in a marriage, so we don't have to be frightened or confused.

Today, therefore let us look at some of those instructions which God has given us, in Psalm 128. This psalm was to be sung to instruct married men in the Jewish community, or any young men in that community who were contemplating marriage. All Jewish men had a very high view of marriage, so you can imagine, during the time of David, all these men coming into the tent in Jerusalem and singing this song with musical accompaniment. And as they are singing this psalm they are learning how to build a foundation in a marriage relationship.

The psalmist says that the key for a married man is to "fear the Lord and walk in his ways." He tells us that if a husband does this, he will experience Yahweh's blessing in his personal life, in his business life, in his family life, in his community life, and in his senior years; and these blessings will then spill over to the next generation. Now when God gives us the key to married life, it would be prudent of us to put the key in the door and open it and see what God has to say. So all you women can just sit and listen today. I want you to listen and pray that your husband, or your son who is hoping to get married, listens. Today I am going to talk to the men. These are our changeless Lord's instructions to a married man in a rapidly--changing society.

1.The Key To Blessings (verse 1)

**How blessed is everyone who fears the Lord,
Who walks in His ways.**

What an amazing statement! God says, "Do you want to be blessed? Do you want to be happy and content? Do you want a sense of joy, of purpose, a sense of worth and a sense of completeness, young man? You who have been married for many years, is that what you want? Is that what you have always been seeking? Great! Here's how you get it. You make two very important choices: first, you decide to fear the Lord." In the Old and New Testaments we are given twenty-five names for God, and in this particular psalm the name we are given for God is, "Yahweh." This is the same Yahweh who appeared in the burning bush to Moses; it is the Yahweh who said, "I AM everything that you are not, Moses. I AM everything you need, Moses. Do you need patience and wisdom and love and discernment? Whatever you need, Moses, I AM." When? Right now! "I am" is present tense. "Yahweh" means, "He who is present with his people; he who has made a Covenant with his people and is working out this Covenant with his people." Not only am I going to be with you," Cod said, "but I am going to work through you and create a plan of redemption so the whole world will come to know me." And Jesus Christ is that same "I AM." "Before Abraham was born I AM," he said. So we too, gentlemen, have, as Israel had, the great Yahweh, I AM, available to meet all our needs in a family relationship the moment we declare those needs because I AM will get involved with us.

So we are to "fear" I AM. Do you know what that means? It does not mean a "scared" feeling, rather, it has the idea of reverence. When I was in North Africa as a young man, I lived in a little hotel room there for 2 1/2

years. One day, I noticed that the shower in my room was clogged by chemical deposits, so I took a straight pin and scraped out the holes in the shower head. When I had finished, I thought to myself that this would probably need to be done again sometime, so, still taking my shower, I looked around for someplace to stick the pin. I noticed an electric line running through the shower to a light over my basin, so I said to myself, "I'll just put the pin in the rubber wire." The next thing I remember is being thrown out of the shower with the shower curtain wrapped around me, being smashed against the wall and falling down on the bed. I thought I was dead! Now I learned fear, I learned reverence for electricity that day, and I want to tell you that ever since I have been 22 years old I have never ever approached electricity with anything but reverence! That is exactly what the psalmist means by "fear" in this passage. "I want you to fear the Lord," he says. "That is the key to your married life." I looked up "fear" in the Hebrew and found that it is mentioned 46 times in the Psalms alone. Do you know what the word means in Hebrew? This will blow you away! It means, "Fear the Lord"! It's there 46 times. Now if we are going to "Fear the Lord," first, we have to know who he is, and when you know who Yahweh is you have a respect and a reverence for him that colors your whole life; you want to obey him, and when you want to obey him you find yourself serving him by faith through his power in you. So, gentlemen, the first thing in your marriage relationship, and in any aspect of life, is to "Fear the Lord."

The second choice the psalmist asks you to make is to "Walk in his ways." What I love about walking is that it is a process of taking mu' step al a time. Another thing I like about walking (because of my weak ankles) is that walking involves stumbling too; there is room to stumble. But there is no room to lie down and suck your thumb and not get up again. If you fall down, get right up again. The is what God says: "of course you are going to make mistakes in your relationship with me and with your family, but don't just sit there and suck your thumb--get up and walk in my way." And he has defined his "ways" very clearly. If we are going to follow Jesus Christ we have to know not only who he is but where he is going. We have to follow in his ways--not the ways of our culture, not the ways of our traditions, not the ways of our folkways or mores, not the ways of our mother or our father, not the ways of our society, not the ways of our friends, but the ways of the Lord.

Let us look at some of the ways of the Lord. Psalm 34:8 14:

**O taste and see that the Lord is good;
How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!
O fear the Lord, you His saints;
For to those who fear Him, there is no want.
The young lions do lack and suffer hunger;
But they who seek the Lord
shall not be in want of any good thing.
Come, you children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
Who is the man who desires life,
And loves length of days that he may see good?
Keep your tongue from evil,
And your lips from speaking deceit.
Depart from evil, and do good;
Seek peace, and pursue it.**

In Psalm I we are told of the man who fears the Lord that,

. . . his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 119 tells us that the ways of the man who seeks after God with his whole heart and keeps his law are blameless. Jesus, who is "the Way," says, "Obey my commandments. 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you'--including your wife, your children." Ephesians 5 says that one of the ways of God is, "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church." 1 Peter 3:7 says, "Husbands live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life."

In the Book of Acts the early Christians were called, "The people of the way." Wouldn't it be an incredible

salting down, not only of our own homes, but this whole community, if every husband in this room was known as "a husband of the way"? Well, you can be one if you just turn to Yahweh. In your spirit you say, "Oh, I could never do that. They would never call me that." But the Lord says, "That's true, but if you trust in me, I who live in you, I who not only invaded the lives of the Israelites but have invaded your life in my son, Jesus Christ, I can produce that quality of life in your hearts, gentlemen. It can be yours if you will but choose. You have to make a choice. You have to, first, know who God is, and second, know what he wants; you have to know where he is going and then you follow." Now you say, "That's not easy," and God says, "Exactly. I didn't make it easy. I just want you to choose and then I'll give you the power through my Spirit to do it. You want to be a godly man in the community? You want to be called 'people of the way'? You want to be called 'husbands of the way'? You've got it. It's yours. When do you want it?" Think that through, gentlemen, because if you become "husbands of the way" you die so that Christ can live through you.

The psalmist now says that those married men who fear the Lord and walk in his ways will be "blessed of the Lord." Not only will you be blessed in your personal life, your physical, emotional and spiritual life, but this relationship with God will produce righteousness which will spill over into your business life. It's amazing, but it will actually affect your business.

2. Labor Will Be Blessed (verse 2)

**When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands,
You will be happy and it will be well with you.**

You know, God created work too. He created a fabulous garden and then he created a man and said to him, "Go in and cultivate and keep this garden." Man hadn't sinned yet. He was working and loving it before sin entered the world. But sin came along and God said, "OK, you're still going to work, but, one, you will have to toil because the ground is going to be hard; two and three, there are going to be thorns and thistles; and four, you're going to sweat."

When I lived on the farm, every spring I had to walk miles of pastureland and hoe out the thistles so the cows would not eat them. A summer never went by that I did not think of that verse in Genesis. Even now there is never a time when I break out in sweat while working around the house that I do not think of that verse. You see, sin came along and took the joy out of work. Do you know what your neighbors and friends are looking forward to? Retirement! They hate work. There is no joy left in it. The working men and women in the community are rebelling against their employers by cheating, by lying, by making promises they cannot keep, by "gold bricking", by padding their expense accounts, by bribes, by faulty craftsmanship. Talk to any Christian businessman in our community and he will tell you that it's a moral and an ethical graveyard out there. A man's word means absolutely nothing; an honest day's work for an honest day's pay sounds like something out of ancient history. Proverbs says, "A just balance and scales belong to the Lord; All the weights of the bag are his concern." God is so involved with us that when a man puts a bag of grain on a scale God says, "I'm concerned, merchant, how you set the scale, and I'm concerned that the scale matches the grain in the bag." Our God is that involved in our lives. My grandmother in South Philadelphia, a little 5'2" Italian woman, shopped every day in the open meat market. When the chicken hit that scale and the butcher said, "A dollar," she would say, "Hold it, hold it. Get away from the scale." Why? Because those butchers would put their thumb on the scale and she knew it. Every woman in that neighborhood knew about those butchers and they knew the scales could not be trusted unless the man was standing away from the scale. I can still hear her little voice, "That's all right, get behind the scale." That is what God is saying to the business world. So, gentlemen, God is telling us that if we walk in his way even our business life will be affected.

When you walk in this way, the psalmist says, two things will be true of you: first, in spite of the toil, the thorns, the thistles and the sweat, you will still enjoy work, your heart will be satisfied; and second, "It will be well with you." Physically, emotionally and spiritually, you will have a sense of moral integrity. Your work will be affected, and that will also have a positive effect on your family. That is what the psalmist is saying. Therefore, a married man who fears the Lord and walks in his way will not only experience personal blessing, but that blessing will spill over into his business life and into his family life.

3. Family Will Be Blessed (verses 3-4)

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine, Within your house, Your children like olive plants Around your table. Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed Who fears the Lord.

The Scriptures have some very wonderful, encouraging things to say about a good wife. Proverbs 31, for instance, says,

**An excellent wife, who can find?
For her worth is far above jewels.
The heart of her husband trusts in her,
And he will have no lack of gain.
She does him good and not evil
All the days of her life.**

Proverbs 18 tells us, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord." Proverbs 19 says, "A prudent wife is from the Lord." The psalmist says your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house (verse 3). The Jews always looked forward to the time when God would come and rule on the earth. Then there would be perfect justice and righteousness; there would be no more war, and every man would sit under his fig tree, which was a picture of national and domestic contentment, joy and peace. The psalmist is saying that if you make a choice, gentlemen, to fear the Lord and walk in his ways it will affect your business life, and it will also affect your wife.

Your wife will be a "fruitful vine." What does he mean by that? I learned something just a few weeks ago. A friend introduced me to his brother who owns a vineyard up in Napa Valley, and this man took us on a tour of his vineyard. As we started to walk back toward the house, he pointed to a beautiful vine sitting all by itself. "This vine is 80 years old," he said, "and it produced grapes for 35 years." I thought, "Doesn't a woman do that? Doesn't she give fruit for 35 years, physically? And then doesn't she live on into beauty and age?" That is what the psalmist is saying here. If I fear the Lord and walk in his ways, that affects my wife in such a way that she responds to that righteousness that I am receiving and enjoying from the Lord. She responds by flourishing as a vine within our home; she gives fruit physically and emotionally by her joy, contentment and encouragement; and she gives fruit spiritually as she salts down our home, our neighborhood and our community. That is what these verses are saying.

Last month my wife and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary. During that time my "vine" has flourished in my home, not because I was always perfect and charming, but because I feared the Lord and I sought to walk in his ways. I made every mistake in the book, but I am still married. My wife has produced in my home the fruit of two fine children who love the Lord; she has produced an emotional, contented, happy home that I could wish with no embarrassment at all on any man in this body; and she has been salt and light in our community. She knows everybody in it. Atheist women are coming to her and asking her to raise their children. Now there is a woman at peace. She trusts her husband because she knows he is submitting to the Lord to run his life and the family. Gentlemen, if you want a happy Christian wife, just fear the Lord and walk in his ways, and, according to his promises, somehow he will make this come true in your experience.

The psalmist says that not only will your wife be like a fruitful vine, but, "Your children like olive plants around your table." The first time I read that I thought, "Yeah, both my kids have black hair!" So I decided to read up on olive trees. The olive tree is one of the most important trees for the people of the Middle East because it does four things. One, you can plant it anywhere and it will grow; two, when it does grow it will produce fruit for making oil for medicine, for cooking, oil for anointing (oil is the symbol of the Holy Spirit); three, the olive tree produces firewood and wood for decoration (Solomon's temple was filled with olive wood, and in Jerusalem today you can buy all kinds of figurines and book covers made of olive wood); and four, the olive tree provides us with pizza topping!

What does the psalmist mean by "Your children like olive plants around your table"? (The RSV says "olive shoots".) Well, God gives us children to teach about him around our table, and as we "water" our children as we pour our lives into these young olive shoots there will one day come a time when they will be transplanted into their own garden, into their own hill, into their own community; and then we water them one more time with our prayers and step back and set them free to become trees. Our children are olive shoots awaiting

transplanting. We are to water them with our tears, our prayers, our instruction, our caring, our love and our discipline; that is the soil they grow in. (Last night I was having an argument with my older "olive sprout." I became angry. I said, "Why don't you just leave the house?" Then I thought, "That's no way to transplant a son." Anyway, the problem with the argument was that he was right.)

The psalmist says, "Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord." He will be happy and content when he eats the fruit of his labor; his wife will be a fruitful vine, physically, emotionally and spiritually; and his children will be fruitful after being transplanted to their own garden.

4. Community Will Be Blessed (verse 5)

**The Lord bless you from Zion,
And may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.**

The psalmist is pointing back to the blessings of the business and the family life, saying, "See, it is true. God really blesses the man who fears him and walks in his ways." And our God, Yahweh, who resides in the temple in Zion (Jerusalem), was not only interested in their personal prosperity but in the prosperity of his Holy City and now he is interested in the prosperity of his Body, the church. As men and women walk in the fear of the Lord and walk in his ways, they are a force that can influence the community and bring redemption to all mankind. Nothing is more devastating than hearing someone say, as you are witnessing to him, "Are such and such a couple Christians? Do they go to your church? Because if they do I don't want anything to do with Christianity." We do have an effect in our community. If your wife is not fruitful and if your children are not growing in the fear and the knowledge of God, you don't have a lot to say about Jesus to anybody.

When God lived in his temple in Jerusalem and the Israelites followed in his ways they flourished and grew. All the surrounding nations wanted to know who the God of Israel was, and why were they always being blessed. The Jews could only reply that Yahweh, I AM, the One who intervened in history had intervened in their lives, in their homes, in their businesses and in the city of Jerusalem. Psalm 125:1-2 says,

**Those who trust in the Lord
Are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved,
but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
So the Lord surrounds His people From this time forth and forever.**

The psalmist concludes by saying that God's blessings on the man who fears him and who walks in his ways will spill over into that man's senior years:

Indeed, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

Solomon says that grandchildren are the crown of an old man's head. Today we see bumper-stickers that say, "Happiness is being a Grandparent." Gabriel Ishar, a 99-year-old Russian immigrant who left Russia in 1975 just became a U. S. citizen. He left five children in Russia, and seventy grandchildren and great--grand--children. That is as many people as left to go to Egypt with Joseph! If he were a Christian (and I do not know that he is not) he would have the joy of teaching seventy people about the fear of the Lord and how to walk in his ways. Do you see the incredible influence we can have on future generations?

In this rapidly-changing society, where homes are breaking up all around us, the good news is, if you want to be blessed, then fear the Lord. Know who he is; spend time finding out who he is; meditate on his law day and night; follow him with your whole heart and walk in his ways. Then he will bless you and you will be happy. Where are you going to get the energy, the wisdom, the courage, the patience, the spirit of forgiveness and the love that's necessary for this task? And where in the world are you going to get the kind of power that makes a whole community say, yes, there goes a husband of the way? From Yahweh. From Jesus. I AM said, "fall give it to you. Just ask me."

Our Heavenly Father, we would be fools if we thought for one moment that we could accomplish this on our own. Take these words and put them in our hearts, teach us your ways. Especially, Father, give all us men

who are married and those who desire to be married a fear of you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Psalm 128:1-6
Ron R. Ritchie

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