

## HOLDING MARRIAGE IN HONOR

Marriage is a great matter in the Bible. The record of God's restoration of His creation in Genesis 1 and 2 consummates with the marriage of [one man, Adam, and one woman, Eve](#). The Scriptures also conclude with a marriage as the fulfillment of God's eternal economy (Rev. 19:7; 21:9-11). God instituted marriage for two purposes—humanity's propagation and the carrying out of His interests on the earth (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:18-25; 4:1). As believers, we should care for God's intent for marriage. We should hold it in honor and honor our spouse as a co-heir of the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7). However, today few marriages are practiced in a way that serves God's interests according to His original ordination. In recent years Satan's attack on the institution of marriage has intensified. As a result, it is common to completely disregard the reasons for which God ordained marriage. Instead, people practice fornication apart from marriage, readily end marriages that are no longer desired, reject having children out of selfishness, or participate in strange unions. These deviations from God's ordination for marriage are widely applauded.

Since the fall of man Satan has organized everything related to man's existence into a system in order to occupy and control man, making him unsuitable for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Even marriage has become part of this system. As a result, marriage has been reoriented from serving man's existence for God's purpose to a means of serving man's lusts and desires. Today's carefree attitude toward separation and divorce is the issue of the worldly systematization of marriage. When their lusts and desires are no longer satisfied by their marriage, many feel free to divorce their spouse and pursue their desires elsewhere. Brother Lee observed that "toward the end of this age, this situation will be intensified and will reach its climax during the Lord's parousia" (*Life-study of Matthew*, 736). As the people of God, we are not for marriage in and of itself or for its [rehabilitation in society](#); we are for the Lord and His interest, and our focus is on cooperating with Him for the fulfillment of His economy. Hence, we must recognize that our living and service to the Lord very much depend on how we handle marriage.

In Hebrews 13:4 we are charged to "let marriage be held in honor among all, and the bed undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." At the time this epistle was written, marriage had already become fully systematized, being abused for the pursuit of man's personal interests, and held in dishonor. Here the command to hold marriage in honor is specifically related to not committing fornication or adultery (cf. 1 Thes. 4:3-5; 1 Cor. 6:18). The Lord Jesus said that those who divorce for any cause other than fornication and marry another commit adultery (Matt. 19:9). Both divorce and adultery dishonor one's spouse to the uttermost and disregard God's purpose in ordaining marriage. If we consider marriage as part of God's ordination for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose, we will hold marriage in all honor and, as a result, will realize the need to bestow honor upon our spouses.

### Honoring Our Spouses

Peter wrote of the honor a husband should show to his wife: "Husbands, in like manner dwell together with them according to knowledge, as with the weaker female vessel, assigning honor to them as also to fellow heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Pet. 3:7). Thus, he charged a husband to appreciate the preciousness and worth of his wife, assigning honor to her accordingly and considering her as [a co-heir of the grace of life](#), not as a lesser party in the marriage due to her comparative weakness. Expounding this verse, Brother Lee observed:

Submission always goes with honor. If you do not submit to a particular person, how can you honor that one? This would be impossible. Honoring someone always implies a certain degree of submission. As we have already pointed out, this is a word of balance. Husbands must honor their wives, and, no doubt, the wives must also honor their husbands. (*Life-study of 1 Peter*, 209)

In the same message he said:

Some may think that saying that husbands are to be subject to their wives contradicts the word that wives should subject themselves to their husbands [Eph. 5:22]. Actually, as we will see, this is not at all a matter of contradiction; it is a matter of balance. Neither Peter nor Paul says clearly that husbands should be subject to their wives. But Peter says that husbands should honor their wives, and Paul, that husbands should love their wives. In Ephesians 5:21 Paul says, "Being subject to one another in the fear of Christ." This seems to indicate that a husband and a wife are to be subject to each other. (205-206)

It is shameful for a husband to deprive his wife of the honor that is due her and yet expect her submission. For a husband to assign honor to his wife is for him to submit himself to his wife. Hence, honor and submission are mutually exercised in a proper marriage.

Peter charged husbands to honor their wives according to knowledge, a knowledge that is spiritual, not secular. Brother Lee characterized such spiritual knowledge in the following way:

If we have this knowledge, we shall know that God created woman the weaker vessel simply for the nature of the marriage relationship. If there is to be a proper marriage relationship, both parties should not be equally strong. One party should be stronger than the other. Therefore, the brothers should not think that the weakness of their wives is something to be despised. No, we must realize that our wives' weakness was created by God specifically for the purpose of the marriage relationship. Therefore, we need to understand the reason for the weakness of the female, and we need to understand the nature of the marriage relationship. This is to have our married life governed not by the knowledge from human education but by spiritual knowledge. (207-208)

For the sake of the marriage relationship God ordained that the woman would be the weaker vessel. That the wife is weaker implies that the husband is weak also. All human beings are frail vessels (Psa. 78:39; 103:14; Isa. 40:6-8). Therefore, there is no basis for a husband to despise his wife for her relative weakness. Elsewhere Brother Lee said:

Although the husband should be sympathetic with his wife according to knowledge because she is weaker, he should not despise her for her weakness. On the contrary, he should assign honor to her because she is one flesh with him and a fellow heir of the grace of life. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1932-1949, vol. 3, 613*)

Such a beautiful balance of mutually exercised honor and submission brings to the marriage a peaceful and enjoyable atmosphere and enables a husband and wife to be fellow heirs of the grace of life.

### **Fellow Heirs of the Grace of Life**

Brother Lee called becoming fellow heirs of the grace of life the “most outstanding point” in Peter’s treatment of marriage. A marriage according to God’s ordination produces co-inheritors of the grace of life (v. 7)—the Triune God processed to be the indwelling Spirit supplying the believers with the riches of the divine life. Brother Lee continued:

A husband is the authority in God’s ordination, and a wife must submit to this authority; in the old creation God made the husband stronger and the wife weaker. Nevertheless, in God’s eyes a husband and wife are one person, and in His salvation a husband and wife are heirs together of the grace of life. Therefore, husbands should be sympathetic to their wives’ weaknesses on the one hand and assign honor to their wives on the other hand. (613)

While all believers are heirs of the riches of the Triune God as the grace of life, whether a husband and wife are co-heirs of the grace of life depends on their mutually honoring and submitting to each other. Furthermore, a husband and wife’s enjoyment of the grace of life brings into the marriage a life of mutual honoring and submission. Thus, the relationship between mutually honoring and submitting, on the one hand, and the enjoyment of the grace of life, on the other hand, becomes a cycle.

How the saints handle marriage has a great impact on the condition of a church. Brother Lee cautioned us, saying, “Whether a church is sound and healthy or loses its element and essence is very much dependent upon the marriage life. Do not consider the matter of marriage to be a light thing. We must hold it in honor” (*Life-study of Hebrews, 613*). We should not treat marriage as common, as those in the world do; it is something of God’s ordination. We should cultivate our relationship with our spouse as co-heirs of the grace of life and forsake the worldly view of marriage as being merely for self-gratification. In this way we can avoid the terrible damage of adultery and divorce, thus preserving ourselves and our spouse in a proper condition to participate in God’s move on the earth. May marriage be held in honor among all the saints in the Lord’s recovery for the strengthening of the churches and the fulfillment of God’s economy in the present age.