

Principles of a happy marriage

Study 4 - Sex & self-control

This is not an easy area for me to write about as I grew up very conservative, and these kinds of things were never talked about in our home. However, through my years of ministry and in my personal life, I have come to realise the importance of this issue; and I've also noticed the lack of effective ministry in this area. If, in the early years of my marriage, I had known what I know now, I would have been able to avoid some difficult moments.

Some years ago, I discovered the following verse in the Bible:

Lev 18:19 "You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness during her menstrual impurity."

There are several references to this command in the Old Testament, one of them being in the prophets, where disobedience to this command, amongst other commandments, was cited as one of the reasons why God rejected the people of Israel and had them removed from His land (the captivity).

I know that many are probably throwing their hands up in horror - *"But that's Old Testament, we are not under law, we're under grace!"* Well, let me, if you will, bring a gentle side to the Law. Many people feel that the Law is old, out of date and not necessary anymore, and as a result, a lot of Christians hardly ever read from the Old Testament, except possibly the Psalms and the Proverbs.

Consequently, most Christians know very little, if anything, about the Old Testament; and the magnificence and beauty of those books pass them by. May I kindly ask you to consider why David wrote the following things about this supposed harsh taskmaster of the law:

Psa 119:97 "Oh how I love Thy Law. It is my meditation all the day."

Psa 119:167 "My soul keeps Thy testimonies, and I love them exceedingly"

Psa 19:7 "The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul ..."

Yes, we know that Paul writes about the law, pointing to it as a taskmaster, but he does say that *"the Law became our tutor to lead us to Christ"* (Galatians 3:24) - aren't you glad about that! If we are to gain an understanding of the Law (and this study is not really designed to teach about the Law), then we must realise that behind the written Law was the Spirit of the Law. Jesus Himself expressed it so clearly:

Mat 5:21 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' ... but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother ..."

He proceeded to reveal that behind the commandment not to kill was another command - to *"love your neighbour as yourself"* (Matthew 22:39). If you love, you won't want to kill. He gives the example of the command not to commit adultery, but then proceeds to reveal the

Spirit behind the command, and that was that God wanted us to be pure in thought, too.

Taking our introductory Scripture, then, and using Jesus' own example of interpreting the law, what could we say is the Spirit behind the Law of not approaching a woman during her menstrual cycle? Would you not say that it would be self-control - a fruit of the Spirit? I believe that, not only this Scripture, but many others indicate to me that God wants men to exercise self-control over their sexual desires and passions. This law forced a week in every month, where the men had to hold themselves back. If this is what the Law demands, then on the gentler grace side, how should we men act towards our spouses?

The marriage license is not a document authorising the husband to have sex whenever he feels like it. Many men - even Christian men - see it like that; or rather that is the impression the wife starts to have after a few years of marriage. She feels that she is in demand all the time and must perform, or else she might be discarded for someone else who is young and beautiful and might be able to perform better than her.

No Sir! The marriage license is rather a sacred document, giving you a soft gentle and beautiful creature, to handle and look after, to care for and love for the rest of your life. Actually, the marriage license carries with it an awesome responsibility and a great privilege. Don't abuse that privilege!

The Bible speaks often about fasting, and we are encouraged to fast. Fasting is not a means by which we twist God's arm to do us a favour. Fasting is rather a

putting down of the flesh, that we might hear God's voice clearer, and concentrate more on spiritual things. Fasting on a regular basis is a good thing.

Is this holding back of our sexual wants, then, not also a form of fasting? I believe it is a God-given design within marriage, whereby the husband can take a step back, control his physical wants, and take special care of his wife during her awkward time - and it is awkward for them. It's a good opportunity to be extra careful, extra soft, extra gentle. Come on, sir, it's only a week - you're not going to die!

You might even find that if you change your approach to your wife, where *her* enjoyment becomes your primary motive, that your physical relationship becomes much more meaningful and pleasurable, and that the two of you grow deeper and deeper in love with each other over time. I know this has been so in my happy marriage, and I thank my heavenly Father every day for the practical direction He gave us in His Word. May you experience a similar happiness and enjoyment in marriage as you learn the value of self-control.