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WHY NOT JUST LIVE TOGETHER?

Back during December I had the privilege of performing a wedding in a ranch home near Hotchkiss, a little town near the Black Canyon of the Gunnison, one of the most spectacular natural wonders in the State of Colorado. Paul and Joanna had both been married before, and they were married to each other in a civil ceremony some years ago, but something had changed in their lives that had been making them dissatisfied with that civil ceremony. What changed was their relationship with God. God started becoming real to them a few years ago. They love it! And they love Him! (I got their permission to share their story.)

Sometimes a young couple will say to a preacher, “What’s wrong with our living together without benefit of a preacher or a judge? We love each other, so what difference does a piece of paper make? Or what difference do the words of a preacher make?” A good answer is: “The words of a preacher or a legal piece of paper don’t make much difference. But the blessing of God makes all the difference in the world. Do you want the blessing of God on your marriage?”

That’s the conclusion that Paul and Joanna came to. They very much wanted to have the blessing of God on their marriage. And I believe that means that a man and woman should:

1. Get married legally, which can be done before a judge, a justice-of-the-peace in some states, before a minister, or before the captain of a ship.
2. Get married before a minister of the Gospel.
3. Get married publicly, declaring before family and friends that you are making a covenant with God and each other to stay married “In sickness and in health, till death do us part.”

Of course, getting married by a preacher and making that kind of covenant doesn’t guarantee the marriage is going to work out. There’s nothing magic about it. Marriage is really hard. But I

believe this is the right way to start the adventure of marriage.

Only a handful of friends were able to come to Paul and Joanna’s wedding because a snowstorm the previous night closed I-70 at the Eisenhower Tunnel. But it was a beautiful wedding and a lot of fun. They had prepared a banquet for the folks that attended, and because half of them weren’t able to come we got to eat twice as much.

WHAT IS THAT IN YOUR FLOWER BED?

During the course of the wedding preparations, Paul told me an interesting story.

Paul has a double degree in chemistry and biology, and his career is in weed control for large ranches and small cities. He and Joanna travel in season over a big swath of the southwest in a small cavalcade of trucks and big spray-rigs. He said that their sprays are environmentally safe and not toxic to people or animals.

He said that last June he and Joanna were driving through Snowmass Village and he noticed in the flower bed of a house a “flower” that he knew was really Myrtle Spurge, a noxious weed. He said that this plant had been imported as an ornamental, and that it had large lime-green leaves like a succulent, but that its sap was so caustic that if someone got it on their hands it could blister and if they rubbed it in their eyes it could blind. Paul went to the door of the house and engaged the lady in conversation. He told her who he was and what he had seen in their flower bed. He learned that only two weeks before their little son had been taken to the hospital with chemical burns, but that no one could figure out what he had gotten into. He offered to remove the plant from the family’s flower bed, which he did, and they were very grateful.

The message to us is: A lot of folks have toxic plants growing in their flower beds, and they don’t have a clue. It is possible that someone’s eyes have been affected, and they can’t see God and reality any more.

What are some of those toxic plants? Perhaps a habit that has become an addiction that God has

quietly warned you about many times. Perhaps some imported ornamental that looks attractive to your neighbors, but you didn't read the fine print in the Owners' Manual that warns about the caustic nature of some flowers.

For example, the **occult** has invaded our society and even the church until it is accepted as perfectly normal:

(a) A lady who came out of deep witchcraft and Satanism said she watched a Harry Potter movie and was shocked when she realized that the spells and curses they were saying and teaching to children were the very ones she had learned and used as a practicing witch.

(b) I watched the Super Bowl with my baby sister (only 87) who loves football, but the moment the half-time show started and I got a glimpse of the almost naked J-Lo and Shakira I chose to go in the front room and read the paper. I did that not because I'm such a holy person, but because I'm not. I've learned that I dare not expose myself to stuff that stirs up lust inside. Even though Methusaleh was 900 years old, he said that he still couldn't watch certain TV shows. (I made that up.)

Here's the point: It was obvious that the half-time show was morally filthy. But there was another dimension that was not obvious to most of us. Someone sent me a 14-minute video titled: "What They Secretly Told Us During the Halftime Show." It exposed all the pagan symbols, witchcraft, Freemasonry, and devil worship that were used during this show. Good night! I encourage you to watch the video. They used a rope, a chain, and a cage to symbolize bondage. They showed a pit that symbolized hell. The semi-clothed girl stretched her arms out to mock Christ on the cross. They all bowed down to a symbol of Lucifer. The almost-naked girls constantly - well, you saw what they did if you watched the show. Only a few years ago this kind of thing would have stirred up righteous indignation in our land and especially in the church, but we have become desensitized.

My dear friends, Myrtle Spurge is growing rampant in our flower beds.

PAY NO ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY!

A couple of weeks ago I heard someone preaching about the faith of Abraham, and he

mentioned the passage in Romans 4 where it says that Abraham "did not consider his own body" when he was thinking about the promise of God that he would become the father of many nations. Abraham was nearly a hundred years old and Sarah was almost ninety, far past her child-bearing years, and she had been barren all her life. But God had made a promise to Abraham, so he chose to pay no attention to his body but to believe God.

So last Sunday at the end of the second service I met with an older lady (20 years my junior, but still) who came to the altar for prayer. She has been suffering with scoliosis for many years, and she showed me on her cell phone an MRI she had just had done. It showed that her lower spine had a severe crooked place, and the doctor told her it was impinging on the nerve and causing the pain. She said that MRI and the doctor's diagnosis filled her with fear, and she thought maybe she should withdraw from many of her Christian activities and asked for my thoughts.

I prayed for her back, but I also told her about how Abraham "did not consider his own body" but continued to believe that God is able to do all that He has promised. I encouraged her not to pay any attention to her body, or the MRI, or the doctor, or her discouragement and fear, or the pain, but to continue to faithfully serve God.

She said that was the very word she needed to hear.

That is what I am determined to do as well.

THE BIBLE'S SUPERNATURAL HYPERLINKED TEXT

Professor Jordan Peterson of the University of Toronto has computerized a multitude of cross references found in the Bible and shown that an intelligence infinitely beyond the human was at work. Remember that the Bible is a massive text compiled over 1,500 years; there were at least 40 different human authors on three continents (Asia, Africa and Europe) in four different languages (Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Aramaic). The Bible's continued existence over almost 4,000 years is itself a miracle beyond comprehension.

We are all aware of many of these cross-references as they pertain to Jesus Christ. We know that there are over 300 references in the Old Testament to Jesus Christ - his virgin birth, life, ministry, death on the cross, and resurrection. (Psalm 22, written 1,000 BC, describes his

crucifixion, even mentioning the soldiers who gambled for his cloak); Micah mentions the little town where he was born; etc.

Following are a few other cross-references, and I just picked out a handful that fascinate me. The consistency among all these authors suggests that there was an Author behind the authors.

Lebanon - is mentioned about 75 times in the Old Testament by authors from Moses to Zechariah. Lebanon and the Cedars of Lebanon seem to represent joy, glory, strength. King Solomon even named his palace, the "Palace of the Forest of Lebanon." And in the Song of Solomon he writes that the Bridegroom has the "scent of Lebanon". Isaiah says that in the future "The earth shall be as green as the mountains of Lebanon." And so forth.

Birds - Eagle - represents God

Dove - Holy Spirit

Raven - provision (the ravens brought Elijah bread and meat every morning and evening)

Sparrow - God's omniscience and care for the least

Numbers -

1 - God, unity

3 - the Trinity

6 - man (God made man on the 6th day; 666 = man without God).

7 - perfection, maturity, completion

12 - government - 12 tribes, 12 apostles, 12 gates

40 - testing and judgment - Israel was 40 years in the wilderness; Jesus was 40 days in the wilderness

Think about the symbolic meaning of: clouds, grass, mountains, valleys, trees, water, fire, sheep, lion, donkey, the body, sun, stars, rock, light, etc.

How many hyperlinked cross-references do you think there are in the Bible? A hundred? A thousand? Ten thousand? There are 63,779 and counting.

One of the most amazing things about this insight is that if you read Professor Peterson's website, you learn that he is not a Christian, nor even apparently a believer in God! What? How can that be? The reality is that intellectual proofs might convince people that there is a "God," but they never cause someone to become a Christian - - which only comes by faith and surrender of the will. A "believer" is someone who believes, not someone who is convinced by reasoning or demonstration.

The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor

can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (I Cor. 2:14)

Open my eyes, Lord, that I may see.... (Ps. 119:18)

FORGIVE YOURSELF?

As a part of my teaching about forgiveness, I have for many years been teaching that we must forgive ourselves. A man that recently visited my little cell group challenged me about that teaching. He said, "That's not in the Bible. The Bible says that we should ask God for His forgiveness and then renounce the accusing spirit that comes and tells us that we are not really forgiven."

By George, that guy is right!

I don't think there is anything wrong with saying, "I forgive myself for...." But we should only do this after we have asked God to forgive us, because we don't have any more authority to forgive ourselves than we have to declare: "I am the king of Australia!" Try that on a few Aussies and see what it gets you.

God has assured us in his Word that, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sinsI....*" and He promises to remove them from us "*as far as the east is from the west and to remember them against us no more.*" The problem is that we have a difficult time believing that and living as if it is so. A voice comes to us saying, "What you did was awful! You hurt your spouse, your own children, and everybody who trusted in you. What you did is unforgivable. Etc., etc." That voice is not from God. "*In Christ there is no condemnation*" That voice is from the enemy of our souls, the devil, who is called "the accuser." We have to resist those condemning words because they will rob us of peace and trust in God.

I have come to a heart understanding recently of something I have known in my head: I don't have any righteousness. None. All my righteous acts are like filthy rags before God. But I am regarded as a righteous man by God, totally without sin or blemish, because I have the righteousness of Christ. He took my sin and nailed it to the cross, and I received his righteousness as a gift. (I know this is Christianity 101, but it has become more real in my heart than ever before.)

After we have asked God to forgive us, there is surely nothing wrong in saying, "I forgive myself." The important thing is: If you are a Christian and

still struggle with self-condemnation, stop it! Repent for listening to the voice of the accuser, and command any lying, demonic spirits of condemnation to leave you in the name of the Lord.

MORE INSIGHTS FROM "TPT"

Following are a few more insights from "The Passion Translation of the New Testament" (TPT)," this time from the little book of 1st John:

1 John 1:1 - *We saw him with our very own eyes. We gazed upon him and heard him speak. Our hands actually touched him, the one who was from the beginning, the Living Expression of God.*

fn - The word for touch is poetic. It comes from a sensory verb meaning: "to pluck the strings of an instrument." It can also be translated "to feel." It is as though John is saying, "We have plucked the chords of his being and felt what motivated him, his melody within."

1:9 - *But if we freely admit our sins when his light uncovers them, he will be faithful to forgive us every time. Go is just to forgive us our sins because of Christ, and he will continue to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

fn - "Unrighteousness" in this context means the sins we're not aware of. Confession cleanses known sins and restores fellowship with God, but God's faithfulness, in seeing Christ as our Sin-Bearer, also cleanses us from all unknown sin. (Psalm 19:12-13 in the TPT says: *Without this revelation-light, how would I ever detect the waywardness of my heart? Lord, forgive my hidden flaws whenever you find them. Keep cleansing me, God, and keep me from my secret, selfish sins; may they never rule over me For only then will I be free from fault and remain innocent of rebellion.*

There can be a deep well of hidden sins in our hearts: unclean sexual fantasies, bitterness, revenge, unforgiveness, anger at God, hatred of men or women, love of money, jealousy. As God brings these secret faults to the surface of our consciousness, we are to repent of them and ask God for his forgiveness, which he freely gives us.

2:18 - *Dear children, the end of this age is near! You have heard that Antichrist is arising, and in fact, many enemies of Christ have already appeared, and this is how we know that we are living in the closing hour of this age.*

fn - The "final hour" is John's description of what Paul describes as the "last days," which began at

Pentecost (Acts 2:16), 2,000 years ago. In these last days many antichrists will come. They oppose the teachings of Christ and lead people astray from the true church. There is no one individual named "the antichrist" (or enemy of Christ) in the Bible. (The definite article *the* is never used in connection to antichrist. John tells us that the "spirit of antichrist" has already been in the world (1 John 4:3) and that many antichrists (false teachers who oppose the truth of Christ and have a following) have already come. John's warning is that we must set our hearts firmly on the truths of Jesus Christ and his Word as protection from the multiple lies that will increasingly try to deceive believers. The words *antichrist* and *antichrists* are not found in the book of Revelation but only in 1 and 2 John.

These insights in Scripture may call into question much of the teaching about "The Antichrist," the tribulation, etc.

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ANNOUNCEMENT: My 8-week annual class on "Pathway to Freedom" in our church will be: Wed. evening, Feb. 26 to April 15. For the first time, Lynne Cumming will share the teaching. (Hallelujah!)

<p>I would like to thank each of you for your support of this ministry. If any of you want to receive tax credit for your financial contributions, you may send them to:</p> <p>CANYON VIEW VINEYARD CHURCH 736 24 ½ Road Grand Junction, Co. 81505</p>
