



Minutes With Messiah

Volume 22, Issue 2

Web Site: <http://www.minuteswithmessiah.com>

December 2020

SUITABLE FOR EACH OTHER

"As unto the bow the cord is,
So unto the man is woman,
Though she bends him, she obeys him,
Though she draws him, yet she follows,
Useless each without the other!" (Longfellow, *The Song of Hiawatha*)

The relationship between a man and a woman in marriage is a complex one. Unfortunately, some try to simplify it by taking one passage of scripture and leaving the rest alone. Rather than simplifying things, this skews them into something unrecognizable.

When talking about marriage, some men will automatically go to Paul's advice to women in the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians. What Paul says is true, but incomplete.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands,
as unto the Lord. (Eph 5:22)

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands,
as it is fit in the Lord. (Col 3:18)

Peter gives the same advice, but with an explanation. "Wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives." (1 Pet 3:1)

Now some honest people will acknowledge that Paul continues, "Husbands love your wives," which contains certain obligations. The husband is not to be abusive or overbearing. He is not to treat the wife as a slave.

Paul had his reasons for presenting the relationship in this way. He was teaching the chain of command in the church. Nevertheless, in some ways the way Paul presented it creates a false dichotomy.

In another place Paul demands silence from the woman. He traces his argument back to the creation.

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. (1 Tim 2:12-14)

Paul's argument is valid and just when it comes to teaching and authority in the church. In a broader sense,

though, harking back to the creation should bring out another aspect of man/woman relations.

And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. (Gen 2:20-22)

Almost every translation modifies the word helper with the word meet or suitable. God did not create woman to be subservient to man. He created her to be a suitable helper. God's command to subdue the earth was made to both male and female. (Gen 1:28) Man was not to subdue woman, but to work with her as an equal. They are to become "one flesh." (Gen 2:24)

Paul himself acknowledges this coequal relationship. One must not try to hold what he says to the Corinthians in opposition to his comments to the Ephesians and Colossians, but understand each in its context. "Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. (1 Cor 11:11-12)

There are, necessarily, certain definitions of roles between men and women. The genders will never be totally equal in certain respects. However, a marriage is between two people that are suitable to each other. Their roles complete each other. In so doing they make not only one flesh, but one entity, under God.

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THE ARRESTING GEAR

When I was in a squadron onboard USS Carl Vinson (CVN-70), my office was right under the flight deck, between the catapults and the arresting gear. A carrier has about 300 feet of runway, approximately one-third of a land-based runway. The catapult is able to get a plane from stationary to a takeoff speed of 170 miles per hour in two seconds. (And it is very noisy.) A plane landing on a carrier has been called “a controlled crash.” The plane has to stop within 300 feet, which is inconceivable to land-based pilots. The arresting gear is a complex system of cables, gears, and hydraulics (or magnetics) that can convert a plane’s 130 mph kinetic energy into hydraulic energy in a matter of seconds, stopping the plane well within the 300-foot distance. There are three (or on older carriers, four) arresting cables across the deck. A plane has an apparatus called a tailhook that is designed to catch one of these wires, engaging the system. The pilot aims to catch the number two wire. If he catches the one wire, he came in dangerously close to

Knowing of God and knowing the will of God are two different things.

crashing into the ship. If he hits the three wire, he came in high. If the plane coming in at 70% power misses all the cables, the Landing Signal Officer orders “bolter” and the plane resumes full power and takes off to try again. The arresting gear cables had two connectors, one of which regularly hit the deck right above my office. During launch and trap operations, we had to wear double hearing protection.

As we go through life, God has provided us an arresting gear to help us land safely in heaven. His system involves three wires. Unlike a carrier landing, however, we need to catch all three wires to land safely.

It has also been said that a carrier landing is like landing a plane on a postage stamp; but the stamp is pitching, rolling, and moving away from you. That sounds a lot like life. Just when your GPS gets you headed in the right direction, somebody throws up a detour sign. When you think you have gotten your ducks in a row, they scatter in all directions. Life is hard. The tempter makes it harder.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith,

knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. (1 Pet 5:8-9)

The devil doesn’t need to spend a lot of time trying to get most of the world to sin; they are willing to do it without much effort on his part. That means he can spend most of his concentration on Christians. Therefore, we need to keep our minds clear and our eyes open.

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” (Jas 1:12) James assumes that temptation is a natural part of life. But he also assumes that God’s people will prove acceptable. We will have safely landed on that postage stamp, having caught the wires of the arresting gear.

Scripture

Wire one is the word of God. Unlike a carrier landing, we don’t need to worry about crashing if we catch the first wire. It is the grounding on which the whole arresting gear system is based. It is how the Landing Signal Officer lets us know where we are in relation to the pitching deck of life.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Tim 3:16-17)

Without the scriptures we don’t know what is expected of us, and what we can expect of God. Paul told the Romans that it was possible for the Gentiles to know of God from looking at creation. However, knowing of God and knowing the will of God are two different things.

David knew the importance of knowing the scriptures that were revealed in his time. Every verse of the 176 verses in Psalm 119 mention the scripture using one or more of several words. Perhaps the best-known verse of that Psalm says, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” (Ps 119:105) God’s word tells us how we are to travel in this world; how to navigate the pitfalls and twists of life.

One of the great functions of scripture is telling us of the gospel. It is what Paul calls “the power of God unto salvation.” (Rom 1:16) He further defines the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 as the death of Jesus for our sins, his burial, his resurrection, and the witness of people who saw him after his resurrection.

Scripture tells us of our need for a savior. It tells us about that savior. It tells us how to respond to that savior.

Prayer

Wire two is communication with God. It is how we let God know that we are relying on Him to land us safely. Normally in a carrier landing, the pilot aims to catch the second wire. In life, however, we often skip this wire altogether.

Prayer is not unique to the Judeo/Christian/Muslim tradition. Some of the earliest recorded prayers are to the Egyptian gods. It seems universal that anyone who has a god prays to it. "They have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save." (Isa 45:20)

Prayer serves several functions. It has been suggested that they fall into four broad categories suggested by the mnemonic ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. In practice, however, most people spend more time in the last of those, making requests of God. It has also been suggested that we should thank God for something as frequently as we made request for it.

There is, however, a certain aspect of supplication that may serve as the arresting gear against evil. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." (Matt 6:13) In Gethsemane as Jesus prayed before Judas betrayed him, he told Peter, James, and John, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matt 26:41)

Somebody once suggested a version of the following prayer. "Lord, I haven't offended anybody today. I have followed you in all things. But I am about to get out of bed now. Help me through the rest of the day."

James advises that "The energetic prayer of a righteous man can do much." (Jas 5:16) You have to catch the wire, though, for it to accomplish its purpose.

Fellowship

Wire three is fellowship in the church. It is knowing that we have a whole crew of people wanting to help us land safely. During a trap on a carrier there is no single person involved in a safe recovery. The Landing Signal Officer lets the pilot know where he stands in relation to the flight deck; whether he is high or low, straight or off target. There are a whole complement of people, unseen, in the arresting gear room, making sure the hydraulics are working properly. There are plane captains and safety crew to direct the plane once it has been stopped. Even before the landing itself, there are air traffic controllers and the Air Boss in the tower, making sure the plane is on the proper approach path, and that no other planes are in the way. Landing a plane on a carrier is a dangerous but coordinated dance involving many people.

God did not leave us to find our way home alone. The church is vital to the safety of a Christian.

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. (Heb 10:24-27)

This writer points out reasons for our fellowship with the rest of the church. We encourage each other in good works, and we keep one another from willful sin. In addition, our regular participation in the Lord's Supper reminds each other about the death of Jesus. (1 Cor 11:26)

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In congregational singing we are "teaching and admonishing one another." (Col 3:16)

These are among the functions of our assembling together, but it doesn't stop there. Our fellowship in the church must go beyond assembling one, two, or three times a week. James points out practical things we do for each other outside the assembly.

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. (Jas 5:14-16)

Encouragement and keeping one another from sin are also not limited to the assembly. In this day, we have the advantage of being able to communicate with one another, privately or in a group, quickly. A phone call or video call goes both ways. If we are concerned about another Christian, we can call them and encourage them. If we are facing temptation, we can call somebody who can talk us down from the ledge.

We cannot survive in a vacuum. There may be circumstances, such as a pandemic, that make it difficult to assemble together. When it becomes a matter of safety or a temporary inconvenience we should not feel guilty about failing to join with the saints in an assembly. When that temporary situation is resolved, we must resolve to come together again. Otherwise we have missed the arresting gear and have to bolter; to go around, get into the pattern, and try again. If we don't, we run out of fuel and crash. That is why God gives us multiple wires to catch us. He is "unwilling that any should perish." (2 Pet 3:9)

HANUKKIAH OR DARK LANTERN

Hanukkah begins the evening of December 10 in 2020. The most notable aspect of the holiday is the nightly lighting of the hanukkah, sometimes called a menorah. It is unclear when the practice of Hanukkah lights began. Josephus, who was born around the time Jesus died, knew nothing of the practice, although the holiday was already called the Festival of Lights. About a hundred years later some rabbis wrote about the Hanukkah candle, singular. By 400 AD/CE, the current practice had become common. Probably the practice came from Roman Saturnalia, in which neighbors exchanged candles. This is the same Roman holiday that probably influenced the date of the celebration of Jesus' birth, even though that was probably in April or October. (In an interesting juxtaposition of the two holidays coming out of Saturnalia, some Jews now put up a Hanukkah bush, corresponding to their neighbors' Christmas tree.)

At one time there was a debate over whether eight candles were lit on the first night and decreased nightly until only one was lit, or one candle was lit on the first night and increased until eight were lit on the last night of the holiday. Obviously, the latter practice won out. One part of the tradition is certain. The hanukkah is supposed to be placed where it can be seen from outside the house. In Germany under the Nazis, some hid the lights while others, even in the death camps, proudly displayed the lights. In recent years some non-Jewish families have placed a hanukkah in their windows in support of Jewish neighbors who were the victims of antisemitic demonstrations.

Clearly, then, Jesus was not speaking of the hanukkah when he said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your

Father which is in heaven." (Matt 5:16) Nevertheless, the principle is still the same. The purpose of a lamp is to give light, and the purpose of the lamp of our life is to enlighten the world. Jesus says that we are to be like a city on a hill. At night, when the city lights are lit, travelers can see it from afar. How many people over the centuries have been encouraged when they finally see city lights!

"Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house." (Matt 5:15) There was a time when some people used a "dark lantern." This light had a shutter so that the light could be hidden without extinguishing the flame. Perhaps the best-known story using such a lantern is Poes *The Tell-Tale Heart*, at one point in which the narrator opens the lantern just a slit and the light falls on the open eye of the man the narrator is about to murder. It is just that eye shining in the light that gives the narrator the impetus to commit the murder. Most of the time, though, the purpose of lighting a lamp was to give light.

Our purpose is to give light. Just as a lamp doesn't draw attention to itself, so we spread the light of the gospel, but not for our own purposes. Jesus said it was so that men may "glorify your Father." This, coincidentally, is the same reason the hanukkah is placed in a window to the outside. It says that this family chooses to let the world know that God is light. The Hanukkah lights are not to be used for mundane purposes. It would be improper to light a cigarette from one of the candles, or use it to read a book. It has a nobler purpose.

We have a choice if the light of God is in us. We can be a dark lantern, with the shutter closed. Or we can be a hanukkah in the window.

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