

INTERNATIONAL *Christian* *Digest*

Price N50.00

Vol. 8, No. 4 July/August, 2006 (Bi-monthly)

ISSN 1595-6946

Proclaiming the Gospel of Salvation Through Jesus Christ



Featuring

- **Your Marriage Can be Happy!!!**
- **Love, Sex and Marriage**
- **The Bible and the Da Vinci Code**

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INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN DIGEST

is published by the Worldwide
Church of God (Bethel
Congregation) P. O. Box 4216,
Ilorin, Nigeria

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International Christian Digest is
published bi-monthly (six times a year)
by the Worldwide Church of God (Bethel
Congregation), Ilorin, Nigeria. Annual
Subscription: ₦600/£6/\$12 (including
postage and handling). Single issues:
₦50 (plus ₦50 for postage).

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Ilorin, Nigeria.

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Your Marriage Can Be Happy!!!

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Your Marriage Can Be Happy!!!

Donald L. Ward

What makes a difference between a solid, substantial marriage and one that is on shaky ground? Here's vital information on how you can strengthen your marriage.

You have seen it happen – a marriage that, from all outward appearances, has every reason for success crumbles from within.

Sad to say, it may have happened – or be happening – in your own marriage!

A couple may be what you would consider well-off. They own a house, car and nice furniture. They have plenty of food and clothing. They are well educated and have a good job and money in the bank. They have several pretty children.

The husband can tell his wife 10 times a day that he loves her, take her out often, help her with household chores and with the children. The wife can cook delicious meals, keep the house spotless clean and be a model mother. They can have excellent sex life.

All the external, tangible qualities that one may consider necessary for a successful marriage may be present. But still the marriage fails.

Why?

Because the marriage has no substance. All these “external shows” do not constitute the substance or core of marriage. They make up only the shell around it.

Have you ever collected shells at the seashore? If you have, you know how beautiful they can be. Yet shells are brittle. And once broken, they are almost impossible to put together again.

So is marriage without substance – without a solid core – just a brittle shell.

The shell – the externals – is what you are doing or what you possess. These things can add to physical happiness. But material things come and go. Business opportunities and jobs can suddenly be swept away. Eventually the children are going to leave home and the nest will be empty. The shell will change, but the real substance will remain.

Substance is what you are and what you are becoming. Substance is the progress that husband and wife are making toward becoming one in every aspect of their being. Substance is that

quantity that, beyond everything else, they live for – where they are headed.

For true Christians, substance is the goal of always serving God, of becoming part of God's Kingdom.

Jesus Christ said that a wise man builds his house upon a rock, whereas a foolish man builds his house on the sand. The rains descend and the floods sweep along and the winds beat upon both houses, but only the house that is built on the rock stands (Matt. 7: 24 – 27).

Those who are married know that the storms of life are going to beat against their marriages. If you are not married but hope to be someday, know this: The storms of life are going to test your marriage too.

How can we build substance in our marriages, so that even if the externals are removed – even if the shell is broken – the marriage will continue to stand, and beautifully too?

Here are several steps we can take to build real substance – a solid, lasting foundation – into our marriages.

Respect marital roles

There are concerted efforts on the part of some individuals and groups to do away with any distinctions related to gender. Yet God made a clear demarcation when He created human beings in His own image and made them male and female (Genesis 1:27).

God could have created a sexless human society. He made angels sexless, after all. But God had a great purpose in creating humans both male and female.

Notice Hebrews 1:5 “For to which of the angels did He ever say: “You are My Son, Today I have begotten You”? And again: “I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son”? (NKJV).

God's transcendent goal is to bring many sons to glory as expressly stated in Heb 2:10 “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and

by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. (NKJV), He gave humans a physical image which is a likeness of His spiritual image. Human are ultimately to become spirit after their resurrection or transformation as described by Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 15: 50 – 53.

God is the author of marriage. He created humans both male and female for the purpose of marriage: "And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." (Gen. 2:18, NKJV)

Men and women, with their biological and psychological differences, were created in such a way that when they are joined in marriage they complement and complete each other. Together they form a beautiful union.

After God created woman as a help to complete the man, He ordained marriage:

"Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Gen. 2: 23,24 RSV).

Jesus said in Matthew 19: 6 "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." (NKJV). So, the marriage contract is not bound by man, but by God.

The first step to building real substance into our marriages is for both husband and wife to respect their masculine and feminine roles.

Realise the purpose of marriage

Another way to build substance in marriage is to realise and understand the purpose for which God ordained marriage and the family. Making sure that God's government operates in our marriages and families is a major step toward building substance into them.

The structure of God's government in the family is given in 1 Corinthians 11: 2 – 3: God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man and man is the head of woman.

Jesus taught His disciples how to exercise authority (Matt. 20: 25 – 28). They were not to exercise dominion over their neighbours as the gentiles did; they were to serve their neighbours, just as Christ came to serve them. The literal meaning of the word *neighbour* is "the one closest

to you." Your wife or your husband should be your nearest neighbour.

Ephesians 5:25 gives specific instructions to husbands: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (NKJV). The husband, then, who wants to exercise authority as Christ did will give himself in service to his wife. He should, symbolically, lay down his life for her. How?

The husband, as the spiritual leader, should always strive to make peace and to create an environment in which God's way of life can flourish. When things go wrong it is his responsibility to initiate the reconciliation process. Husband and wife should continually strive to become one in mind and spirit.

Wives, on the other hand, should understand submission; Ephesians 5:22 instructs wives to submit to their husbands as unto the Lord.

The key to submission, wives, is understanding that you are serving God, not man. Submission is not just blind obedience. It is a state of being – a reflection of what a woman is in her heart. If a woman submits as instructed in the scriptures, then she is trusting God for protection and deliverance. If her husband takes advantage of her submission, he will be judged by God – and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31)!

This does not mean that a wife should never say anything when she is being mistreated. Matthew 18: 15 – 17 applied equally to the wife as to the husband. If she cannot be reconciled to her husband, then she should seek the aid of a second party; in most cases within the church, especially the Pastor and his wife.

Practice the way of giving

Oneness in a marriage is not produced simply by a man and a woman repeating the marriage vows. Unity is produced by husband and wife obeying God's instructions on loving their neighbours as themselves.

In most cases, marital problems arise from one partner or the other or both trying to *get* something from the other – in a selfish manner.

Some couples are able to maintain a precarious balance as long as each mate feels that he or she is getting as much as the other is giving, but such an explosive situation certainly does not reflect the type of selfless, outgoing love and concern that should be present in a marriage.

Nothing will give husbands and wives any more satisfaction and pleasure than dwelling together in peace and unity. When you go to bed at night and reflect on the events of the day and know that you are at peace with your wife or your husband, your children and your neighbours, you will experience deep joy within you. You may be sick or your family may in great physical need, but if you are at one with God and your neighbour, God will supply the courage and the strength to gain victory over the trials and tribulation.

Husbands are instructed in Ephesians 5: 28 – 29 to “nourish and cherish” their wives. The most important nourishment that a husband can provide for his family is spiritual. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Husbands should take the lead in encouraging family Bible study and prayer.

Men should also be physical providers for their families. “If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1 Tim. 5:8, RSV).

In 1 Corinthians 7:4 Paul also writes “The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” (NKJV). Husbands and wives belong to each other. They are to become one literally in physical intercourse and one spiritually by obeying Christ’s instructions on loving each other.

Master the art of communication

Another key to building substance in marriage is to master the art of communication. Husbands and wives should be best friends. Marriage is not a master-slave relationship. Husbands and wives should be constantly communicating with each other and building their friendship. It requires time and effort to communicate with our mates. It is often much easier to simply withdraw into the recesses of our own minds – turn off and ignore everything around us. But this is a selfish

approach. Couples should communicate with each other.

Stay close to God

The most important step in building substance in marriage is staying close to God. This means maintaining oneness of purpose – and that purpose is serving God with all your being and preparing for positions of leadership and service in the coming Kingdom of God.

Staying close to God also requires constant repentance. Nearly all marital problems spring from breaking God’s spiritual laws. We must repent, become more deeply converted and humble ourselves as little children so that God can live in our marriages. We need to pray as David prayed for a clean heart and a right spirit (Psalm 51:10).

Is your marriage what it is supposed to be? If not, start right now to put your marriage aright. Humble yourself before God and repent of your mistakes. God will help you. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1: 8 – 9, NKJV).

The storms of today’s world that beat so heavily on marriage can be filled with the fruits of God’s Spirit if we will build on the rock.

If you would like to read more about this topic, please send a request for our free booklets, *Your Marriage Can Be Happy*. You may also want to know more about family life. We recommend two booklets: *Building a Happy Family* and *Principles of Child Rearing*. They are free, you only need to request for them. ♣♣

Love, Marriage and Sex

by Ronald D. Kelly

It's important to get them in the right order.

The three most important ingredients to successful marriage have been terribly abused.

Some fall in love and never marry. Others marry but are not in love. Millions of people experiment with sex without being in love.

Still others are in love and are married but fail to understand the importance of a wholesome and proper sexual relationship.

Not many seem to be putting all three – love, marriage and sex – together in the right order.

Love to build a relationship

Almost everyone has experienced what he or she thought was love, only to find out it really wasn't. Perhaps your case was typical. It probably first happened early in the teen years when you were first attracted to a member of the opposite sex.

There was the strange, tingling, excited feeling that would just not go away. You thought you saw shooting stars. Felt like you were walking on air. And you could have danced all night.

Later, you probably came to realize that was not love at all. Your parents tried to tell you it was "puppy love". It was just infatuation.

Maybe you even experienced these feelings of "love" three or four or more times – each time thinking this new feeling was the really one true forever and ever love.

Unfortunately thousands of people make terrible mistakes because of not knowing how to handle adolescent emotions. It often leads to premarital pregnancy – and millions of babies born out of wedlock every single year.

Others, misinterpreting their feelings of "love" leap into premature marriages. A large percentage of those who marry and don't divorce are not really happy. They stay married for the sake of the children, or for religious or financial reasons. They find they are not really in love at all.

How sad.

And of course where and when to fit the sexual relationship into this picture is often confusing. The signals of our liberated society tell us to practice sex

whenever, however and in whatever manner we want to. "Consenting adults" is the catch phrase.

The God-given formula for happiness and success in marriage is usually totally ignored. That formula is the title of this article: Be in love, marry and have a healthy sexual relationship. You can't build a marriage without love. And sex should NEVER be practiced outside the confines of marriage.

But what is Love?

If you had to choose just one word to describe God. LOVE would be the best word. The apostle John simply stated it: "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

From what God is and what God does we can understand the deep and significant emotion called love.

God's love was most manifest by the ultimate gift he gave mankind: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Love, you see, is not a feeling of selfish tingling emotions, like the flaming sunset in an orange colored sky. It's not that feeling of desire and passion so often mistaken as love.

Real love is the ability to put one's selfish interests and feelings aside and GIVE to the other person.

Outside of marriage, the passions that lead to sexual experimentation are nothing more than lust.

Can you imagine a teenage couple necking in the backseat of a car whispering to each other, "Oh, how I lust after you"?

No, they say, "Oh, how I love you, I love you, I'll always love you." But what they *really mean* is, "I am lusting after you". The chances are that affair will last only a short time, and they will each be whispering the same thing to another person later on.

Love – real love – is not even possible without a degree of maturity. Mature love that prepares a couple for a lifetime of marriage and commitment begins slowly and grows. Love never stands still.

Of course love has to start somewhere. Romantic love begins with an attraction to a member of the opposite sex. There will probably be a beginning feeling of infatuation. But love that leads to marriage must grow beyond that and not be based on attraction alone.

Understanding Love from the Greek Language

In the English language there is the one word *love*. because of that, few are aware that there are different meanings to the words in the Bible translated into English as *love*. In the Greek language, the language of the New Testament, three different words translate into the English word *love*. By understanding them, one can better grasp what kind of love to strive for in marriage.

The first word is *eros*. It forms the root of our English word *erotic*. It is the kind of love discussed in this article up to now.

Of course *eros* is an important kind of love. Author H. Norman Wright defines *eros* in his book “*Pillars of Marriage*”, as love that seeks sensual expression. It is desire. It is romantic, sexual love. It is inspired by the biological structure of human nature – placed in mankind at creation.

Of itself, *eros* is not wrong. But it is a kind of love that should never act alone. Unfortunately, it is the only love many people ever experience. But romantic, sensual love is only part of the God-given concept of TOTAL love.

The second kind of love comes from the Greek word *philia*. Again you may recognize the meaning – for example, the name of the city of Philadelphia means the city of “brotherly love”. *Philia* is friendship, companionship, the physical as well as emotional sharing of time and interests. It shows a desire to cooperate.

Mr. Wright suggests the difference between *eros* and *philia* is that *eros* is a face-to-face relationship while *philia* is a shoulder-to-shoulder relationship. When applied to marriage it depicts a husband and wife working together. And parents and children and brothers and sisters working together.

A friend is someone whose company you prefer. Someone you want to be with. Every good marriage has *philia* love – husbands and wives who want to be with each other.

But these two words do not tell the whole story of love.

There is yet another Greek word that explains the deep and spiritual meaning of love. The word is *agape*.

Eros produces romance – makes your mate your lover. *Philia* makes your mate your friend. But *agape* goes far beyond. *Agape* is a love of total commitment. *Agape* means “selfishness”. *Agape* is total GIVING love.

This is the love God expressed when he gave his only begotten Son. He had no self-interest. He was giving the one gift that would make possible the forgiveness of sin and would save mankind.

In the human sphere, *agape* love is thoughtfulness, concern, sensitivity to the needs of others.

But *agape* is not a natural love. We were not born with it. It is not the love of adolescence. *Eros* is essentially in mankind by creation. *Philia* comes naturally – we all want friends. But *agape* is acquired by maturity.

And the highest form of love we can attain is a gift that God can give us. The very giving and loving nature of God can be put within human beings by a supernatural miracle. Paul wrote. “... the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy [Spirit] which is given unto us” (Romans 5:5). That is *agape* love.

One has not truly loved until that selfish love has been experienced. It is when every desire is for the other person. Jesus said. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). If and when, in marriage, you come to the point you would give your life for your mate, then and only then, have you experienced the penetrating meaning of love.

Relevant to *agape* love in marriage, Paul further said in Ephesians 5: 28-29, NIV: “In this same way, husbands ought to love [*agape*] their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the Church” (verse 25).

It is natural to love the self. It is not so natural to love someone else that much. Thus God says that we ought to grow in love toward our mates equal to the love we have for ourselves. No one can expect more. But so few ever come close. Most are simply so selfish they do not achieve the real depth of love.

Too many marriages are based on only one kind of love – *eros*. That love usually will not hold up

under pressure. And sadly, too many marriages don't even have *philia* love. Some husbands and wives are not even good friends.

When I was graduating from college, I went to a respected faculty member for advice. I had dated a number of young women, but didn't really know my own feelings clearly about romance. One whom I had dated throughout my college years had become my best friend – but I hadn't thought seriously about marriage to her.

As we talked, the faculty member gave me some good advice. He said, "Every time you talk about the girl you most respect and enjoy being with, the girl you talk about is Norva Lee. You are really in love with her, but you just haven't admitted it to yourself".

He was right.

I just needed that gentle shove in the right direction. She was everything I ever wanted in a girl. But I had only thought of her as one of my best friends.

We were married a year later and now have more than 23 wonderful and happy years together. I think we have not only found the first two kinds of love, *eros* and *philia*, but are growing in *agape* love together more and more each year.

That faculty member, by the way, is now the editor of the *Plain Truth* magazine, Herman L. Hoeh. I wonder if he ever knew till now how much his advice of nearly a quarter a century ago was appreciated?

Love Leads to Marriage

Since *eros* or erotic love is a natural love, as also is *philia* love, it's natural that when couples spend a lot of time together they begin to think about building a permanent relationship.

But in the adolescent years it is not possible to develop true and full *agape* love. It is not the time to settle into a permanent relationship.

The widely practiced custom of going steady only leads to difficulties. Young people who spend too much time with only one member of the opposite sex create circumstances where passions can get out of control. Sexual experimentation then begins *before* marriage. Serious mistakes are made that lead to deep regret later.

The teen years should be spent developing a wide variety of friends from both sexes. At a proper age, young people can begin to date – but not just one person.

That way, a person can experience being with a variety of members of the opposite sex. You can know much better the type of person with whom you could spend the rest of your life.

Don't even consider marriage unless it is built on a relationship of growing love. Don't marry for convenience, desire, security, money or any other single reason. Marry because you have grown to love the person with whom you want to share the remainder of this physical life.

And never live together outside the sacred bonds of marriage.

From the beginning the Almighty God instituted the marriage covenant as the most sacred of all ceremonies. It is the start of a new life together – the beginning of a new family unit.

On the day God created Adam and Eve, he said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (gen. 2:24, NIV). God presented Eve to Adam in the first marriage ceremony.

Marriage should be the most wonderful part of life. And the wedding, one of the most joyous days to remember. As a minister, when I begin a marriage ceremony I usually start by saying, "There is no more joyous ceremony than this we now enter! Marriage is a natural union, but a divine institution ordained by the Creator God".

A beautiful bride dressed in white, a handsome groom in a tuxedo or suit, and an event shared by family and friends should be a happy occasion well worth remembering.

How sad that too many marriages are not based on true love and don't last long. Joy turns quickly to sadness. Happiness turns to tragedy.

If only everyone would put these things in the proper order. First, learn to love – really and truly love. Then *before* beginning the sexual experience, plan a wonderful wedding.

Sex – Only After Marriage

God designed the human sexual experience to begin only one time in life – AFTER the marriage ceremony.

I know that doesn't sound modern and up-to-date. But it is the truth!

And the truth about why God created sex is vitally important.

Sex is part of the *eros* love God designed. It is part of our nature, our makeup. Sex, when practiced in love and in the confines of marriage, is holy and pure. The apostle Paul said, "Marriage

should be honored by all, and the marriage bed [sex in marriage] kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (Heb. 13:4, NIV).

Only two generations ago sex was a taboo subject. It was often wrongly regarded as dirty. It was seldom, if ever, discussed. Most were ignorant of the true meaning of the human sexual experience. Sex life within marriage was often tragically unfulfilling.

Then following two world wars the world burst into sexual experimentation and promiscuity.

In the 1950s Dr. Alfred Charles Kinsey conducted his research on human sexuality. More and more people became educated about sexual functions. Now there are literally hundreds of books and pamphlets on the subject.

At the same time moral standards declined. Organized religion exerted less influence. Liberality became the pacesetter. The result is a modern society gone rampant with sexual experimentation.

Virginity is an almost obsolescent word. Peer pressure and false or unbridled emotions have led to a great deal of premarital sex experimentation.

The modern argument is, “Those who have experienced intimate sexual relationships before marriage will be better sex partners in marriage”.

How sadly wrong that argument is.

The Almighty God who created us male and female designed sex to be practiced ONLY in the confines of marriage. Any other practice of sex is sin! Premarital sex is fornication. Extramarital sex is adultery. Both are capital offenses against the holy law of God!.

But sex within marriage – practiced in love – is clean, holy, pure.

The most obvious reason for sex is the reproduction of mankind. God has designed the marvelous human reproductive system to function in the confines of love and marriage. Husbands and wives produce, through sexual contact, miniature reproductions of themselves – new life.

One of life’s truly great experiences is the birth of a child. But this again, was designated by God to be part of the marriage union – never to be experienced outside of marriage.

But there is even a greater and far-reaching purpose for human sexuality. Sex can be the embodiment of all three of the Greek words for love – *eros*, *philia* and *agape*.

Sex has been designed by God to be the guiding force in preserving and perpetuating love between a husband and wife.

The modern argument that premarital sex experimentation can lead to greater joys in marital sex is one of the greatest lies ever perpetrated by Satan the devil.

Such experimentation before marriage or in extramarital affairs can only destroy the purity of what God designed.

The honeymoon is not meant to be a time for experienced sexual professionals to practice. The honeymoon should be that joyful, timid, beautiful, shy, exciting period of time when two people who have begun to love one another begin their new life together – and should be their first joyful expression of sexual intimacy.

Sexual experience should be learned together – *after* the marriage ceremony. Why should anyone go out and learn it all in advance with a whole army of other people? Why create the possibility for sexual comparisons and vivid memories of unpleasant experiences?

The honeymoon should be the beginning of a new life together when a totally inexperienced couple *begin* to learn from experience through the human sexual relationship. In each other’s arms, they will then spend the rest of their lives growing in *philia*, *eros* and most of all *agape* love.

One of life’s greatest accomplishments is getting love, marriage and sex in the right order with the right person at the right time.

The DaVinci Code: Not Just Unbiblical but Anti-biblical

(A commentary by Don Hooser, Sedro-Woolley, WA, USA)

The DaVinci Code by Dan Brown, published in March 2003, is claimed to be the best-selling novel of all time—certainly the best-selling novel in any one-year period. Over 40 million copies have been sold and it has been translated into over 40 languages!

While it may be politically incorrect to criticize other's religion, it seems to be open season on Christianity, especially all forms of

Christianity that would seriously attempt to be biblically accurate, as evidenced in many of today's books, movies, and TV shows.

Now a movie adaptation of *The DaVinci Code* is being filmed. It is due to be released in theaters May 19, 2006, starring Tom Hanks. (This article was written before the film was released – *Editor*).

The DaVinci Code has become a pop-culture phenomenon. Why is it so popular? Well, weird sells. And it has appeal for almost everyone. Murder-mystery fans! Romance novel lovers! History buffs! Suspicious conspiracy-theory zealots! Radical feminists! Present-day pseudo-intellectual Gnostics! And some art enthusiasts who may be wondering if there really are secret clues in the paintings by the Italian artist Leonardo DaVinci!

The DaVinci Code is riding a strange wave of interests: scandals in the Catholic Church and other churches; growing interest in apocryphal and Gnostic writings claiming to be gospel accounts of Christ; the "spirituality is good but religion is bad" mindset; burgeoning biblical illiteracy; and a general anti-Christian bias.

Our views and emotions are easily shaped by storytelling, whether in books or movies. Authors who have agendas often manipulate us as to who are the good guys or the bad guys.

In *The DaVinci Code*, with its sympathy toward "the sacred feminine" the good 'guys' are its goddesses, especially Mary Magdalene! This reinvented Christianity allows for a much looser standard of morality.

Defenders will say, "Why criticize *The DaVinci Code*? It's just a *novel*!" Yes, but it claims to be a *historical* novel.

To make that claim its historical parts should be *true*—which is usually not the case in this book. As a result, countless people are being deceived into believing a history which is nothing more than fantasy, not an authentic rendering of truth!

At the very beginning of the book is this statement: "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate." In reality, it incorporates many inaccuracies.

But more serious are its outright fabrications and distortions of *history* and *theology*. The harm might be minimal for people who are well-grounded in the Bible and read *The DaVinci Code* as a purely fictional

story. But countless readers who have very little biblical knowledge will form their primary opinions *about* the Bible and *about* Jesus Christ from this book! And because the book claims to have an accurate historical basis, many Christians have become confused and disturbed.

In this short commentary I can mention just few of the fallacies in this book. Thankfully, there are several books on the market and numerous websites on the Internet devoted to exposing the myths and heresies in it. The book *Breaking the DaVinci Code* by Darrell Bock gives a very thorough critique. By searching the internet you will be able to find much helpful information exposing the misleading ideas within the book.

If you haven't heard the main premises, get ready for a shock. This fictitious story presents Jesus Christ as a mere mortal prophet and the New Testament Gospels as "fabrications." Jesus supposedly married Mary Magdalene and she was carrying His child when He was crucified. This Mary fled to France, where she gave birth to a daughter named Sarah. Their descendants are living today, carrying on the royal blood line. The womb of Mary Magdalene was the legendary "Holy Grail," which held the sacred blood.

The story continues with more fictional premises: The truth about Jesus and Mary Magdalene was kept alive by a secret society called the Priory of Sion. An ongoing Catholic conspiracy, especially by Opus Dei, has prevented this truth from coming to light because of prejudice against women. The clue to Mary's prominent relationship with Christ is that she supposedly is the figure to Jesus' right in Leonardo da Vinci's painting of "The Last Supper."

The theories in *The DaVinci Code* are not new. This book just revives and popularizes long-debunked heresies. The main theories are copied from a 1982 book: *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*.

A biblically based account of Jesus Christ, His message and His legacy is now available to you free of any charge or obligation. Just request for your personal free copies of two of our most informative booklets: *What is the Kingdom of God?* and *Jesus Christ of Nazareth*. Send your request to the Editor at the address shown on the inside front cover of this magazine.

The Da Vinci Code, Christianity and the Bible

The Da Vinci Code has sold more than 40 million copies and has been made into a major movie. But how much of the story is fact and how much is fabrication? And how important is it for you to know?

by Don Hooser

The Da Vinci Code is a fictional thriller that is supposed to be set against a backdrop of real history. But how much of its "history" is actually true?

The timeless and perfect standard of historicity and truth is the Bible. It contains true history—God's flawless account of the past, present and future.

The *Da Vinci Code* attempts to reconstruct Jesus Christ, reinvent Christianity and radically revise the Bible. One of the book's major characters presents its major premise on page 235: ". . . Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false."

Which should we believe, *The Da Vinci Code* or the Bible? Popular Christianity isn't much help. Ironically, the Bible discredits much of today's Christianity as well, as we shall see.

Why *The Da Vinci Code's* astounding popularity?

The Da Vinci Code appears to be the best-selling novel of all time. Buyers have snapped up more than 40 million copies, and it has been translated into more than 40 languages and counting!

The Da Vinci Code has become a pop-culture phenomenon. In fact, it has spawned a whole cottage industry of publishing—books and Web sites that praise and parrot it, and Christian books and Web sites that refute its claims.

Why is it so popular? Author Dan Brown is a talented storyteller who knows how to appeal to a variety of people—murder-mystery fans, lovers of romance novels, history buffs, religious skeptics, conspiracy theorists, radical feminists, intelligentsia attracted to "alternative" Christianities and even art enthusiasts who may be wondering if Italian

artist Leonardo da Vinci really did put secret clues in his paintings.

The Da Vinci Code is riding current waves in our culture: revelations of scandals in the Catholic Church and other churches; the growing interest in apocryphal and gnostic writings claiming to be the genuine accounts of the life of Jesus; the "spirituality is good but religion is bad" mind-set; the feminization of Western society; the rage for New Age; biblical illiteracy; and while criticizing most religions is politically incorrect, it's open season on Christianity.

And, of course, sex sells—so we should anticipate a sexual angle in a blockbuster novel. In *The Da Vinci Code* it's the portrayal of Jesus as having engaged in a physical relationship and the call for restoration of the "sacred feminine," sex rituals and the worship of goddesses.

The plot

The current-day portion of the plot takes place over 24 hours, mostly in Paris, London and Scotland. It has plenty of surprising clues to pursue, cryptic messages to interpret and people to identify.

In the movie, Harvard professor Robert Langdon, an expert in religious symbols (played by American actor Tom Hanks), is paired up with Sophie Neveu, a detective specializing in analyzing codes and other cryptic messages (played by French star Audrey Tautou), to help solve the mystery of the bizarre murder of Jacques Saunière, the curator of the Louvre Museum in Paris. All together there are five murders in the story.

They discover that Saunière was murdered because he was a grand master of the Priory of Sion, supposedly a secret society formed to protect the "truth" that Jesus Christ married

Mary Magdalene, planning for her to lead His Church after His death.

According to this secret knowledge, Mary was pregnant with Jesus' child when He was crucified, and in France a whole royal line of their descendants survived to modern times. Instead of a literal cup or chalice, the legendary "Holy Grail" was Mary Magdalene herself, the "vessel" who held the blood of Jesus in her womb by carrying His child.

Supposedly the Priory of Sion has hidden the bones of Mary Magdalene together with numerous documents "proving" this truth until the right time to reveal it to the world.

In the story, members of Opus Dei (Latin for "Work of God"), a Catholic priestly order, are part of a conspiracy that will stop at nothing, including assassination, to prevent this "truth" from being revealed—because it would not only disastrously undermine the patriarchal Catholic Church, which has suppressed women, but would also refute the very foundation of Christianity.

How? By demonstrating that Jesus Christ, though a great teacher, was a mere mortal and fallible man—and that there was no miraculous virgin birth, no perfect life and no resurrection from the dead.

Can we separate fact from fiction?

Much space in *The Da Vinci Code* is devoted to "history" being explained by its three leading characters—Robert, Sophie and Holy Grail fanatic Leigh Teabing.

But it's a "history" that exists largely in the imagination of the biased author Dan Brown and the coauthors of one of his major sources, the 1982 book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* — Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln (the first two of whom unsuccessfully sued Brown for incorporating their ideas into his book).

A Christian who has proved the veracity of the Bible will judge books by the Bible, not the Bible by books. Although translations sometimes introduce minor errors in understanding, the original Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament are absolutely true and trustworthy. In Jesus' prayer to God, He said, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

This is not something we need to accept only on blind faith. If you sincerely want to

know truth, you can learn many proofs that God exists and that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). Simply request for our free booklets: "Does God Exist?" and "Do We Have the Complete Bible?" (See the inside front of this magazine for our address).

Both biblical and secular history expose many flagrant fallacies in *The Da Vinci Code*. You can learn about many specific errors in such books as *Cracking Da Vinci's Code* by James Garlow and Peter Jones, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* by Darrell Bock and *The Da Vinci Code: A Quest for Answers* by Josh McDowell. You can also find many helpful resources on the Internet.

But the title of this article is significant in that there are not just two perspectives to consider—the Bible vs. *The Da Vinci Code*. The perspective of most Christian churches is far different from that of the Bible and the way of life of the original Christians.

Any mixture of truth and error is error

A major tragedy is that, rather than diligently reading the Bible for themselves, most people assume that the teachings and practices usually presented as "Christian" accurately reflect biblical teaching. As a result, they often get false impressions of what the Bible says. Some become skeptical, assume the Bible has no real authority and decide it is not worth reading. Please, to know the real truth, *read the Book!*

People are seldom deceived when teachings are totally false. Most deception occurs when error is mixed with enough truth to make it believable, so the counterfeit seems genuine. Such deception began when Satan befriended Eve and deceived her with half-truths. "The tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17) partly represented the confusion that results from mixing truth and error.

Deception also depends on the deceiver appearing to be harmless. The apostle Paul warned of "false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:13, Revised Standard Version).

Believe it or not, the beliefs of most churches are mixtures of biblical teachings and pagan traditions. No wonder the great mother Church is called "Babylon," since the Hebrew word for Babel or Babylon means "confusion"

(Revelation 17:1-6; Genesis 11:9). And during the Reformation, when "daughter" churches were expunging many wrong practices and traditions, they did not reject nearly enough!

Certainly *The Da Vinci Code* mixes a paucity of truth with a plethora of error. Its introductory page makes this audacious claim: "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate." In fact, a large portion is anything *but* accurate. Since the author's history and physical facts include innumerable errors, how much less can he be trusted in describing complex theological issues!

However, some of its statements about numerous "Christian" teachings having originated in paganism are true. Note—none of the *Bible* originated in paganism, and the teachings of the *earliest Christians* did not originate in paganism, but pagan ideas and practices began to infiltrate the Church very early in its history.

Most erroneous theories circulating today are nothing new. *The Da Vinci Code* revives and popularizes long-debunked heresies. Religious history has myriad myths based on previous myths based on still previous myths.

Major errors in *The Da Vinci Code*

During Jesus Christ's earthly ministry, His example and teachings did more to elevate women to spiritual equality and respect than perhaps anyone else in history. The Gospels note repeatedly that women were among His most devoted followers.

It is true that oppression and suppression of women have been all too common from the beginning of time. But this novel proposes the opposite extreme—that women are spiritually *superior* because new life comes from their wombs and is nourished from their breasts. It suggests a return to matriarchal paganism with its ritualistic sex. It even supports the worship of goddesses—especially Mary Magdalene.

The Da Vinci Code makes many false and outrageous claims. Among them are:

- The world has made a huge mistake in rejecting Mother Earth in favor of Father God.
- The early Christians did not believe Jesus Christ was divine—only that He

was merely a great preacher and prophet.

- After the supposed conversion of Roman Emperor Constantine to Christianity, he invented the idea of the deity of Christ to achieve male dominance and the suppression of women.
- It was the Council of Nicaea, which Constantine convened in A.D. 325, that determined which books were to be included in the New Testament.
- This council rejected as many as 80 gnostic gospel accounts of Jesus to suppress the knowledge that Jesus was a feminist, merely mortal and had a sexual partner.

Please be aware that the Bible teaches that there are only two members of the divine God family—God the Father and Jesus Christ—and they are always referred to with the masculine gender. There are no goddesses. One must not make assumptions based on paganism, such as if there is a Father God there must also be a Mother Goddess.

As the apostle Paul explains, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Neither Mary the mother of Jesus nor Mary Magdalene is a god or a mediator between God and men. Nor is any supposed "saint."

Conspiracies, conspiracies!

If you decide to read *The Da Vinci Code* or see the movie, it would be much better if you were well-grounded in the Bible rather than have your opinions *about* the Bible and Jesus Christ formed from this novel or film!

People are so intrigued by secret conspiracies that they imagine them, invest in them and exaggerate them. But this blinds them to the world's *greatest* conspiracy and cover-up—the one pulled off by "Satan, who deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9). Jesus Christ called him "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Paul said it is "the god of this age [who] has blinded" everyone (2 Corinthians 4:4). John wrote that "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19).

Satan doesn't care what you believe as long as it is not the truth. He would have you piece

together your own god in whatever image you choose.

Satan has always wanted to destroy Jesus Christ and the truth that He taught. He influenced King Herod to try to kill Jesus when He was a child (Matthew 2:1-18). He tried to tempt Him to sin (Matthew 4:1-11). He tried many times to get Jesus killed and finally succeeded—with a Roman crucifixion no less. But Christ arose from the dead after three days and three nights, and later ascended to heaven where He rules at the right hand of God (1 Peter 3:21-22).

But Satan has never stopped trying to "suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18). He continually circulates countless counterfeits of biblical Christianity as well as innumerable other religions. But there is only *one* way to eternal life—through Jesus Christ and His revealed Word, the Bible (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

We hope that the controversy surrounding *The Da Vinci Code* will "work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). We hope it will motivate our readers to study the Bible and be prepared to help other people who are confused and disturbed by fictional pop-culture books and movies like *The Da Vinci Code* (1 Peter 3:15; 2 Timothy 2:15, 22-26)

Recommended Reading

Perhaps no figure in history has been as misunderstood and misinterpreted as Jesus of Nazareth. Hundreds of books, thousands of articles and billions of words have been written about Him. But who is He really? How much do you know about the Jesus Christ of the Bible? You need to read "*Jesus Christ of Nazareth*". You should also request and read "*Do We Have A Complete Bible?*" Both are yours free for the asking. (See inside front cover for our address).

BIBLE STUDY

Are You a Real Christian?

This Bible Study is prepared by AMBASSADOR COLLEGE OF THEOLOGY. It is part of the Bible Correspondence Course run by the College. You can enrol in this course by writing to the Editor, *International Christian Digest*, P. O. Box 4216, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Look up in your Bible the scripture references given in answer to the questions, and carefully *read* the passages. The comments following the questions elaborate on the scriptures you have just read.

Although not required, writing out the scripture reference will help you remember, and keep a record of, what you have studied. It will also make future revision of the Bible Study easier. (The scriptures quoted here are based on the New International Version of the Bible, unless otherwise stated).

Who is a real Christian? Could you give the Bible definition?

Jesus gave us the very basis of real Christianity in what is commonly called the *Sermon on the Mount* found in Matthew, chapters 5 through 7. He pointed out those characteristics, often called beatitudes, which would clearly identify His true followers.

Before we pick up the story in Matthew 5 and focus on several of these Christian characteristics, you should read the whole of chapters 5, 6 and 7.

1. What did Jesus say about the poor in spirit? Matt. 5:3. When He spoke of the "poor in spirit", did He mean they would lack the Spirit of God? Rom. 8:9; Luke 11:13.

No, Jesus wasn't suggesting that the "poor in spirit" would be lacking God's Holy Spirit, as did the five foolish virgins in the parable of Matthew 25. Rather, He went on to show that those who are truly humble in attitude of mind are blessed because they will be in God's Kingdom.

2. What are the meek in Christ destined to inherit in addition to being born into God's Kingdom? Matt. 5:5. Was Jesus meek? Matt. 11:29. Will a real Christian exhibit meekness in the way he conducts his daily life? Eph. 4:12

There is a difference between being meek and being weak. Jesus was meek but not weak! He endured abuse and injury with patience and without

resentment. He didn't deliberately try to stir up arguments and trouble.

A meek person will not try to justify the self when wrong. Neither is he revengeful. And he certainly does not feel superior to others.

3. What will a true follower of Christ – a real Christian – be “thirsting” for? Matt. 5:6. What is the Bible definition of “righteousness”? Psalm 119:172.

To “hunger and thirst” for righteousness is to be deeply motivated to obey God – to keep His laws, which are given to us in loving concern for our own good.

Those who are truly hungering and thirsting for righteousness will be studying for true understanding, and willing to change when they see they have been wrong, admitting their wrong beliefs, their mistakes, their sins. “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth”. (2 Tim. 2:15). “Prove all things [Test everything] and hold fast to what is good” said Paul to the Thessalonians and to all of us today (1 Thess. 5:21).

4. Why did Paul say we are justified before God – the *hearers* or the *doers* of God's law? Rom. 2:13. Did Paul make it plain that even though the unmerited pardon of our sins is by the *grace* of God through faith in Christ's sacrifice, nevertheless a Christian is still obligated to God to keep His law? Read Romans 3:31 and the whole of chapter 6.
5. Who did Jesus say will enter the Kingdom of God? Matt. 7:21. What did the Apostle Paul plainly say was the *most important* for a Christian to be doing? 1 Cor. 7:19.

Notice that in order to enter God's Kingdom there is something you have *to do* – not only the confession of Christ as our Saviour. God is also very much concerned about our spiritual “works” after becoming Christians. He plainly states that we cannot make it into the Kingdom of God by just sitting back and thinking Christ has done it all for us!

6. Unless we have the love of God, can we really be a Christian? Read all of 1 Corinthians 13. (If you are using the King James translation, the

word “charity” means love). What are we if we lack the love of God? verse 2.

7. Will God's love, which He imparts through His Spirit (Gal. 5:22), lead one to keep His Ten Commandments – *all* of them? Rom. 13:8 – 10. In what way did God inspire John to confirm Paul's statement – what is the Bible definition of God's love? 1 John 5:2 – 3. How is God's love perfected in us? 1 John 2:5.
8. Is a real Christian one who strives to follow Christ – to imitate His examples – to “walk” with Him? 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6.
9. Who is one of the first men in the Bible who “walked” with God? Gen. 5:22 – 24. What else are we told about Enoch? Heb. 11:5, last part. Will he be in the resurrection? Heb. 11:13, 39-40.
10. What other great patriarch walked with God? Gen. 6:9. Did Noah therefore find grace in God's sight? verse 8. Was Noah clearly a faithful and righteous man, pleasing before God? Heb. 11:7.
11. What was God's command to Abraham? Gen. 17:1. Why could it be said that he did indeed walk with God? Gen. 26:5; Heb. 11:8 – 10.
12. Was Abraham consequently the *friend* of God? 2 Chron. 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23. How can *we* become Christ's friends? John 15:14 – 15.
13. Did God especially command His Church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38) – the nation of Israel – to walk in His ways; that is to obey His laws? Deut. 5:32 – 33; 8:6; 11:22; 13:4; 26:17 – 18; 28:9.
14. Did God promise to walk with them if they walked with Him? Lev. 26:3, 12. Would He greatly bless them if they walked with Him? Verses 4 – 11.
15. But if the people of Israel chose to walk contrary to God – refused to walk in His ways – what did God say would happen to them? Lev. 26:14 – 39.

To “walk with God” clearly means to obey His commandments and laws, and to do those things

that are pleasing in His sight. It is the only way to really be a Christian!

16. What will be a real Christian's attitude toward the sinning society around him? 1 John 2:15 – 17; 1 Peter 4:1 – 4; Rev. 18:4. What will he rather be striving to live by? Matt. 4:4.

A real Christian will no longer be able to conscientiously follow all the customs and practices of the society around him. Where he formerly "went along with the crowd," thoughtlessly indulging in various social activities and business practices, he will now begin to seriously question his lifestyle. He will begin asking: "What is God's will? How does God say I should live?" He will begin by saying, with Christ, "Nevertheless not *my* will, but your will be done." And he will be diligently searching the Bible to learn the will of God, and *follow* it.

Of course, God's people must live in this world (John 17:15 – 16). And while striving to fully obey God – not being conformed to this world's ways (Rom. 12:1 – 2) – they should strive to "live peaceably with all men" (verse 18). And if a Christian has to disagree because of biblical teaching, he does so without being disagreeable or self-righteous about it.

17. What further responsibility do Christians have toward the world? Matt. 5:14 – 16.

While not "of the world" in the sense that Christ meant, those men and women of God having the Holy Spirit and a knowledge of His truth and abundant way of life have a responsibility to be bright "lights" in the world. Far from just "quietly glowing" like a 25-watt light bulb, or hiding their light "under a bushel", God's people should be exhibiting the "fruit", or characteristics, of God's Holy Spirit within them (Gal. 5:22 – 23).

Each one can reach out with friendliness and with a helping hand toward his neighbours and those he comes in contact with everyday. People not as yet called of God will be encouraged as they witness some of the mind and character of God in action through the living example set by individual Christians.

18. What steps has a real Christian already taken to be recognised by God as one of His children? Acts 2:38. What has God bestowed upon Him as a free and unearned gift according to his willing obedience? Same verse and Acts 5:32.

A real Christian has been conquered by God. His "carnal", antagonistic attitude toward God (Rom. 8:7 – 8) is now broken. He came to realise he had sinned against God, having broken His holy, righteous law (1 John 3:4). Therefore, he cried out to God and asked His forgiveness for those sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and a lifting of the death penalty that every sin incurs (Rom. 6:23). Then he submitted to the ordinance of baptism that illustrated to God his deep sincerity.

And as he expected God to stand behind His promise to beget him spiritually by the Holy Spirit, as a result of his repentance, baptism and the laying on of hands, he was indeed imbued by the Spirit of the Father and became a spiritually begotten child of God. It was *then* that he became a *real* Christian!

19. Can one be a true Christian without having the Holy Spirit of God? Rom. 8:9 – 10.

20. What does God call the person who claims to "know" Christ, who says he is a Christian, but refuses to walk in His ways – refuses to keep His commandments? 1 John 2:4. What will the one who is indeed a real Christian actually be doing? Verses 3, 5, 6.

A real Christian has sincerely repented of his sins and is striving, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to live by His Saviour's teachings. He is walking with God, seeking to do His will in every aspect of his life. And he is becoming a recipient of the happiness and blessings that come with obedience to God!

Food for Thought

The Door That Goes Nowhere

Have you ever been caught in a revolving door? It just keeps on going around and you cannot get out. Some people are like that, they have no direction as to where they are going. You may ask someone, "Where are you going?" The person will answer, "I don't know." Then how will you know when you get there? Besides its common use as the entrance to a house or building, this word is used metaphorically as the entrance to anything. Jesus said that He is the door, the entrance, into the kingdom (Joh 10:7-9). The door of faith is the opportunity of belief offered to the Gentiles in Act 14:27. Elsewhere it means opportunity.

Paul refers to a great door opening to him in [2Co 2:13](#). [Rev 4:1](#) says, "I looked and a door was opened." Do we have the ability to see the open doors, and if so, do we go in and avail ourselves of the opportunities that await us? Jude talks about people who have no direction, driven about by winds first one way then another. This accomplishes nothing. Ephesians 4 speaks of being carried about by every wind, again depicting no direction.

Some brethren show no more direction after being a Christian for thirty or forty years than they did when they first obeyed. This is the door that goes nowhere. They have gone through the door but stopped, so in essence it has taken them nowhere. Paul relates to this when he says, "By reason of time you ought to be teachers, you have that need that someone teach you again what be the first principles" ([Heb 5:12](#)).

Shut the Door

A man went inside a telephone booth and dialled the number of a friend. When the connection was made, the friend kept saying, "I can't hear you; speak louder; I can't hear you." All he could hear was the roar of traffic in the background. "Shut the door so I can hear," he said to the caller. In order to hear God's voice speaking to you, you've got to shut the door to the outside world so that its enticements won't distract you. Doing this could change your whole life. Then when you go back into the crowd, you'll not only be able to listen to what the world has to say, but you'll have something to say to the world that you've personally heard from God.

Attitude

Several years ago a man encountered the idea that we should live our lives in such a way that when we die even the undertaker will be sorry that we are gone!

The saying is that life begins at 40. It really begins when we want it to begin!

- At age 71 an agent turned down Jack Benny thinking he was washed up. Jack found another agent and fulfilled twelve million dollars more in bookings before he died at the age of 81.
- Moses was 80 when he received the Law.
- Aaron was 83 when he began to perform miracles and plagues in Egypt.
- Joshua was 85 when he led Israel into the promised land.

- Will Durant sold a series of television programs at the ripe young age of 91.
- Frank Lloyd Wright created the magnificent Guggenheim Museum at 89.
- Colonel Sanders was in his 60s when he sold his first Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise.

A University of Wisconsin study says that if we are physically well, and keep active as we get older, we can enjoy people, laugh at ourselves, and get as much out of life at 90 as we could when we were 40!

Like Pharoah, or Job?

What can make the difference in how we face our everyday trials, even our little ones, is our attitude. We can have the attitude of the Pharaoh of Egypt, who, when confronted by Moses and the ten plagues from God, grumbled, and griped, and became stubborn, causing more woes to come upon him. Or, that of Job, who at the loss of all his possessions, even his own health, succumbed to the will of God and remained faithful. That type of commitment to Christ will give us eternal life, happiness and joy.

Remember: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" ([Phi 4:13](#)). "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God" ([Rom 8:28](#)).

Share a Joke!!

A man dies and goes to heaven. Of course, St. Peter meets him at the pearly gates.

St. Peter says, "Here's how it works. You need 100 points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things you've done, and I give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you get in."

"Okay," the man says, "I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, even in my heart."

"That's wonderful," says St. Peter, "that's worth three points!"

"Three points?" he says. "Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my tithe and service."

"Terrific!" says St. Peter, "that's certainly worth a point."

"One point? Golly. How about this: I started a soup kitchen in my city and worked in a shelter for homeless veterans."

"Fantastic, that's good for two more points," he says.

"TWO POINTS!!" the man cries, "At this rate the only way I get into heaven is by the grace of God!"

"That's 100 points!! You can come on in!!!"

Improving Your Maths

A ten year old boy was failing maths. His parents tried everything from tutors to therapy, but to no avail. Finally, at the insistence of a family friend, they decided to enroll their son in a private Catholic school. After the first day, the boy's parents were surprised when he walked into the house with a stern, focused and very determined expression on his face. He went right past them straight to his room, where he quietly closed the door. For nearly two hours he toiled away in his room - with maths books strewn about his desk and the surrounding floor. He emerged only long enough to eat. After quickly cleaning his plate, he went straight back to his room, closed the door, and studied feverishly until bedtime.

This pattern continued night after night until it was time for the first quarter report card. The boy walked in with his report card -- unopened -- laid it on the dinner table and went straight to his room. Cautiously, his mother opened it, and to her amazement, she saw a bright red "A" under the subject of Maths. Overjoyed, she and her husband rushed into their son's room, thrilled at his remarkable progress.

"Was it the nuns that did it?", the father asked.

The boy only shook his head and said, "No."

"Was it the one-on-one tutoring?"

"No."

The peer-mentoring?"

"No."

"The textbooks?"

"No."

The teachers?"

"No."

The curriculum?"

"No."

"So what was it?" asked the father in desperation.

"Well," said the boy, "on that first day at school, when I walked into the classroom and saw the picture of what they'd done to the guy on the "plus sign" (which they call the cross), I just knew they meant business! I didn't want that to happen to me."

Good News and Bad News

In November 1996, God called Bill Clinton, Boris Yeltsin, and Bill Gates to come to a conference. And, when they were all there, God said: "I've got good news and I've got bad news. The bad news is that I'm really fed up with the way things are on Earth, so I've decided to destroy it."

The good news is that I'm giving you one week's notice."

So, Bill Clinton called into session the joint houses of Congress and announced: "I've got good news and I've got bad news The good news is that there is a God. The bad news is that He's going to destroy the Earth in one week."

Boris Yeltsin called into session the Communist Party and announced: "I've got bad news and worse news. The bad news is that there is a God after all. The worse news is that He's going to destroy the Earth in a week."

Bill Gates, meanwhile, called all of his programmers, marketing experts, and administrators together and announced: "I've got good news and I've got better news. The good news is that God thinks I'm one of the 3 most important men on Earth. The better news is that we no longer have to fix the problem with Windows 95."

Language problems

Two American preachers were visiting in Germany and attended Sunday services. Since they couldn't speak German, they decided to do as the man sitting in front of them did.



Prayer, persistence keys to solve marital problems

One of my staff members came into my office today aglow with enthusiasm. He was excited to tell me the latest development in his soon-coming marriage. He reminded me of a glass of champagne filled to the brim and bubbling over.

His excitement and enthusiasm brought back fond memories of my courtship of my wife. He and his fiancée seem to be walking slightly above the ground.

This young man and his young lady are trying to do everything right. They have spent considerable time counselling together with their minister and going over the marriage vows word for word with each other.

They're getting good counsel, they're making decisions together, they're applying biblical principles, building a good foundation toward a happy marriage.

Sad contrast

Another couple my wife and I know are having serious problems in their marriage. One of the ministers in their church area met with the husband one day for lunch and asked him pointedly if he loved his wife.

"Yes," he responded, "I love her."

"May I read something to you?" asked the minister.

He opened his pocket-size Bible and read from 1Corinthians 13, which outlines the qualities Paul use to

A few minutes into the service the preacher from the pulpit said something and the man in front of them stood, and they stood also. The congregation burst into laughter. They then sat down when the man did.

At the end of the service, they met the pastor and found that he spoke English. They asked him why everyone laughed so much when they stood?

The pastor explained that he had announced that they would have a christening service for a new baby that evening and would the father of the child please stand up.

define love: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (New International Version).

After the minister had read this list from 1Corinthians 13:4-7, he asked the question again. "Do you really love your wife?"

Without a moment's hesitation the husband responded, "No, I really don't love my wife – not that way!"

You see, the man's first response was based on our contemporary culture's definition of love – often primarily based on sexual feelings.

And in this case, which can be multiplied again and again, what this man defined as love was probably not love at all.

Our Western culture propagates the idea that feelings of attraction and particularly sexual feelings are the essence of love. It's superficial and inadequate explanation of what keeps a marital relationship on the track. What is initially classified as love is a selfish feeling – a desire to have the other person satisfy a personal need.

Four Ps

Let me ask this question. Is there hope for this unhappy couple and others like them to not only overcome their problems but to develop the true love God intended between them?

I believe it is possible because I have seen and heard of marriages mended and love not only restored but increased to an even greater degree than the couples ever dreamed possible.

Determining a change in attitude is in order is the first step toward resolving the difficulties. It isn't an instant cure and it takes what I call the four Ps to pull it off – prayer, practice, persistence and patience!

Prayer involves not only praying, but turning your marital problems over to God and following His guidance. Seek counsel from His servants. Search for God's wisdom through reading the Bible daily and then apply His principles in living.

When you go to God in prayer, it shouldn't be from a selfish point of view. Try to put yourself in your spouse's place. Ask God to help you understand both sides. Pray together to God about your problems. Let your spouse know how deeply concerned you are about your relationship.

Practice makes perfect as the saying goes. Too many don't apply the principles God gives us to live by. Many married couples are hearers of the Word (marriage principles, child-rearing principles, health principles), but are not doers on a daily basis.

Experience bears out why this kind of love must form the foundation for every marriage. If we performed our responsibilities to each other only when we felt like it, we would frequently leave undone that which contributes to marital harmony.

For example, a man who has faced a tough day on the job to provide for his family does not always – at least at the moment – approach his responsibilities at home with strong motivation and positive emotions.

But, if he behaves toward his wife and family as Christ shows love to him, he'll do what is right, in spite of his negative feelings. (I try to help with the dishes. It's a great time to talk to my wife about the day's happenings).

Household chores aren't exciting for a husband and when he has just faced a difficult and draining day.

But a husband should remember when he asks his wife – who might have had an especially trying day at home – for help with some of his work (as I do), her response might not be enthusiastic either.

Mature husbands and wives know there will be difficult moments in marriage. And because they are mature psychologically and spiritually, their love for each other ultimately transcends their selfish tendencies.

They will often perform responsibilities for each other in spite of their negative feelings. Meeting the needs of each other, my wife and I have found, is the fastest way to feel good about ourselves and our marital roles.

On the other hand, God's love (John 13: 34) also causes husbands and wives to be sensitive to each other's emotional needs.

At times the most loving thing to do is not to place demands on our mates. And, at the same time, the most loving thing to do in response may mean not taking advantage of our mate's willingness to forego a need, be it emotional, social, spiritual or physical.

Men and women who indeed love according to God's perspective and Christ's example are able to work through these situations with sensitivity, maturity and good balance. They're aware that marital life is not always a rose garden.

Persistence is refusing to give up even when we can't see results. It is continuing firmly and steadily in trying to find solutions – changing our attitude toward our spouse, apologizing when we are wrong and sometimes when we are not.

Patience is waiting calmly for the change you pray will occur, and having the faith that God is able to accomplish His will in His own perfect timing.

Remember, individuals are different. God made us that way. Different backgrounds and education take years to fuse.

And consider how much patience God has expended toward you and your shortcomings.

Breakdown of communication may have taken years to qualify a marriage for the intensive care unit. Many marriage problems and injured feelings aren't going to heal in a day.

The important thing, in turning an ailing marriage around, is practicing the right kind of healing – a change in attitude. Pessimism must become optimism; silence, enthusiastic interest. Nagging must change to admiration; antagonism to acceptance; rigidity to flexibility; and a strong dose of outgoing concern for our mates.

Our attitudes are so important and so visible! We convey our feelings to others by our attitudes, even without words.

We can improve our relationships. No matter what degree of successor failure we are experiencing we can begin at that point and move forward. And if you are contemplating marriage make sure your foundation is sound – seek wise counsel.

God's plan for marriage – yours and mine – is that a couple achieve oneness. In other words, one man plus one woman should equal one great married couple. That doesn't happen in most marriages. For many, one man plus one woman simply equals one man plus one woman.

I believe that happens because for a marriage to add up to oneness, a third ingredient is needed. One man plus one woman plus God's Spirit equals one great relationship.

When God's Spirit is present and working. His love is present; and God's love enhances, purifies and beautifies the natural love of a couple.