

First Things First (Understand God's Word)

David Halbrook

This series of articles about “First Things” illustrates a basic fact—YOU can understand what God has said.

Adam and Eve understood God when He told them to be fruitful, rule the animals, eat of most trees, and avoid eating from one tree (Genesis 1-2). Israel understood the law which they often rebelled against (Exodus 19). When Jesus spoke, did people understand? Yes, and that is the reason many people wanted Him dead, while a few followed Him!

You might be surprised to know how many churches do not believe this. A Catholic Cardinal wrote, “Is the Bible a book intelligible to all? Far from it...” (*The Faith of our Fathers*; www.cathcorn.org/foof/8.html). Many Protestant, especially *Reformed*, churches say you cannot understand the Bible until your mind is miraculously changed--making a simple matter seem complex. *God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Timothy 2:4). Humble yourself before the Creator, learn “first things first,” and accept and obey what you learn. Herein, you understand the fear, will, and words of the Lord (Prov. 1:7; Eph. 5:17; 3:3-4). Send us your comments or questions on this or any Bible topic.

Editor's Note: Do you know anyone who admits the Bible is God's word but avoids reading the Bible “because I don't understand it”? Use our *Arkansas Weekly* article to introduce them to this “first things first” approach to Bible study. Maybe they need your help to know where to begin. Possibly they need the book of beginnings—Genesis, or maybe they need to “begin” with Jesus' earthly life and teachings (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John), or the beginning of salvation through Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection (Acts). Offer to help someone, somehow this week.

Simple opportunities to teach the lost and assist each other.

Pray for: Ed & Janice White, The Ledgerwoods, Novela Puckett, Noleka Hopper, Samuel Southall, others with ongoing trials, and new Christians among us.

Join us each Sunday at 10AM (classes), 10:45AM, & 5PM and Wednesday at 7PM.

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The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*
church of Christ--Quail Valley
June 21, 2015
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Saving the Marriages of Our Unmarried Children John R. Gibson

It is probably not the first thing parents think about at the birth of a child, but that child will still be quite small when they first think about him or her possibly getting married someday. Though hard to even think about when they are babies, most parents realize it is more likely than not to occur, so they end up spending a lot of time thinking about it as their children grow up. And along with the dreams for a beautiful wedding (it's mostly mothers who do this) and the thoughts of one day enjoying grandchildren (fathers share equally in this one), there are fears. Will they choose the right person? Will they be happy? Will it endure? With good reason, parents are concerned about the future marriages of their children.

Today's children will grow up in a culture where heterosexuals often treat marriage as optional. Approximately 40% of all babies are born to unwed mothers and begotten by fathers who were not married to the mother of their baby. Some of these out-of-wedlock births are to single mothers and others to women who, though unmarried, cohabit with the baby's father. Television, movies, and the entertainment industry as a whole will continually portray this as the norm and belittle anyone who says otherwise, yet these attitudes toward sex and marriage are a complete rejection of all God has said on the subject. While we could cite 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Eph. 3:3-5; et al, we will allow Heb. 13:4 to sum it up, “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”

While marriage is no longer seen as prerequisite to sexual activity, when marriage does take place it doesn't always last. Though an exact number cannot be obtained, evidence suggests that between 30 and 40% of first marriages will end in divorce. Though accepted by society and even promoted by some as “healthier” than remaining in an unhappy marriage, this too is a clear violation of God's standard. “The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?’ And He answered and said to them,

‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate... And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.’” Matt. 19:3-6, 9

Then there is the irony of homosexuals clamoring for marriage privileges even as heterosexuals are spurning them. Today’s children will grow up in a country in which men will marry men and women will marry women. They will see men “self-identify” as women and women as men, with some undergoing surgeries to complete the transformation. They will come to maturity in a society that has stood on its head God’s usage of the words natural and shameful. “For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.” Rom. 1:26, 27

Yes, our children will come to maturity in a corrupted world that has rejected God’s teaching, but discouragement is not the purpose of this is article. I want to offer parents hope—hope for the future marriages of their children and though we could say more, these are three things that can and will make a difference in the lives of your children.

Teach! It is vital that they know God’s will for marriage and sexuality. Study carefully all the Lord has said on the subject and then speak often of these things with your children. “Bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Learn from Deut. 6:6-9 to do this as you rise up and lie down, as you go in and go out.

Stay married! During tough times, your children need to see that you are going to keep your word (Col. 3:9) and not allow a rough patch to cause you to disobey God by separating what God has joined together (Matt. 19:6). Marriage is not just a trial to be endured, but the reality is that the best of marriages will have difficult times. There may be financial struggles, major health concerns, or simply differences of opinion, but with a commitment to God you will show your children that marriages can last.

Be a biblical husband or wife! If you develop the character of a Christian, you will be well on the way to being a good spouse, but you must also become the person described in Eph. 5 and 1 Pet. 3. If you provide the kind of loving leadership described in these passages you will help equip your sons to be husbands and at the

same time help your daughters to see in marriage a blessing of protection and provision. If as a wife you will honor your husband and follow his lead, your daughters will be more likely to go against the feminist thinking of our day and view marriage as a blessing and not enslavement. Sons who are reared by these kinds of mothers and fathers will know that such a praiseworthy woman (Prov. 31:28, 29) makes marriage a blessing (Prov. 18:22) and is to be honored (1 Pet. 3:7).

If and when your children get married, you will have concerns, but if you wait until then to act, you will likely be too late. Now is the time to begin saving the marriages of your unmarried (and even unborn) children.

Joy, Gentleness, Prayer and Peace

Joe R. Price [Sword Tips #496 and #497, Combined]

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7, NASB95)

Christians have the ability to live in joyful gladness under the most stressful situations. The character of gentle forbearance couples with remembering the Lord’s approaching judgment to form two reasons we live in joy instead of anxiety. The third strand of the three-fold cord of joy is prayer. The thankful requests of prayer strengthen our resolve to rejoice in the Lord because we know God hears and answers us.

With a gentle spirit, generous prayers and respect for the Lord’s presence and power to judge, Christians refuse to abandon joy for anxiety, especially in the face of temporary trials. Though Paul was imprisoned in Rome for his faith, he set this example of always rejoicing in the Lord.

Today, remember Christ rules from heaven and sees all things. Keep a gentle spirit toward others as you petition God with thanksgiving for His great and constant care. By doing so you can, and will, “rejoice in the Lord always.”

The positive result of such joy, gentleness and prayer is that God’s great peace will stand as a garrison around your heart and mind, protecting your thoughts, feelings and perceptions from the onslaught of doubt and fear. Many yearn for inner peace, yet it eludes them, because they are at war with God (James 4:1-4). For true and abiding peace, turn to God and the salvation that is in His Son, Jesus Christ. Then, because you are at peace with God, nothing can overwhelm you. You have His promise.