

Gotthold Beck

BLESSED MARRIAGE

A message at a wedding ceremony

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by Gotthold Beck

This is how we know what love is:
Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.
(1 John 3:16)

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The blessing of the Lord brings wealth,
and he adds no trouble to it.

(Proverbs 10:22)

My dear friends, I deeply thank the Lord that today we have a blessed opportunity to think together about the Word of God.

It is a wonderful, happy thing that dear E. and dear K. are getting married. I don't want to focus too much on the ceremony itself, though we call this event "a wedding ceremony." Instead, I would like us to think about the deep, real meaning of marriage, "a blessed marriage."

As everyone knows, a marriage should be for our happiness. After all, everyone wants to be happy. If we are not happy, life becomes meaningless.

For example, even if we are blessed with material wealth, our soul may not be fulfilled. If our soul is not satisfied, we may think that all is empty. And even if a

man has many friends, he must be lonely, because no one can fully understand the feelings of another person.

Even if everything goes well in a man's life, he will feel pangs of conscience in the bottom of his heart. No one can do enough to satisfy his conscience. A great many people are caught by uneasiness and fear these days. The basis of a truly fulfilling married life—a truly happy life—is that a man is released from uneasiness and anxiety.

The following words were printed on the invitation card I received from E. and K. the other day: "The Lord bless you and keep you." (Numbers 6:24). I will read the whole sentence, which a priest in the old days prayed to God before the people of Israel: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace." (Numbers 6:24–26). That is a very important prayer, isn't it? It is also just what I can tell you. "The Lord bless you and keep you!"

Solomon, the King of Islael, wrote the following words 3,000 years ago: "The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it." (Proverbs 10:22). Solomon was the greatest king in the

world in those days. He was gifted with abundant intelligence, wisdom and an affectionate heart. He could rule over the world without war. I cannot imagine a world that was conquered without a war. Anyone who reads his writings would be surprised by his wisdom. He was also the richest man in the world. Yet, this most famous king in history wrote, "The blessing of the Lord brings riches and adds no trouble to it." It may sound strange, but he is saying that our true happiness is not attained by our hard work, but given only through the blessing of the Lord, our God.

Marriage and conversion are the two most important decisions we can make in life. These two decisions and actions signify new beginnings. That is, a marriage means that two people, who have thus far decided everything individually, come to decide and act together, as in a "three-legged" race. On the other hand, a conversion means that a man who has thus far lived on his own will begin a new life with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why is conversion such an important decision? The reason is that the most important problem in our life is solved by it. Not only do we make a choice between a life with true joy and one without, a choice between

having a worthwhile objective in life or not, but we also choose our path after death: whether we will go to Heaven or Hell.

Long ago, a man named Jacob lived his life thinking of himself only. He told lies without shame in order to make money; he deceived even his own father, many times, and became rich. He appeared to be successful, but his heart was not peaceful at all, for he had succeeded in such a self-centered way. But the light of God entered into his restless and desperate heart, and as a result, he came to the point of crying out and praying to God. He said to God boldly, "I will not let you go unless you bless me!"

In the case of marriage, it is important for the couple to get the blessing of their parents. But comparing that with the blessing of God, the latter is indeed all that we need, isn't it?

An important question remains: What kind of people will God bless? King David wrote about King Solomon, whom I talked about a little while ago. "Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways. Thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord." (Psalm 128:1, 4). This is God's answer to the question, isn't it?

What kinds of people are valued in the world today?

We know the answer, don't we? Most valued are intelligent, capable, attractive, rich and powerful people. But it is not such people who are wanted by God. The judgment of the Lord is quite different from ours. That is, God searches for those whose hearts are broken, who fear both the words of God, and God Himself. Only such people can be blessed by God.

An interesting poster was hung on the wall of an attorney's office. This sentence was written in large letters: "A man is easily deceived." How interesting to find this in an attorney's office!

"A man is easily deceived." This may be true, but the Lord is never deceived. The Bible says clearly that neither a man whose heart is not broken, nor a man who does not fear God, or God's words, can be blessed.

A marriage should be for happiness. But why do many marriages end in unhappiness? The reason is that many people seek only for their own pleasure and make much of themselves. People who think only of themselves and who don't care to imagine or find out what their partners are thinking or feeling, are brewing trouble. If a man wants to make his partner unhappy, he needs only to think of himself and not the other.

I think there are four types of married life. The first is the case in which a couple lives opposing each other. There is always an oppressive atmosphere in such a home, for there is always trouble and there is neither love nor happiness.

The second is the case in which a couple has no communication; that is, though they live together, there is distance between them and they pursue their own ways. They have no interest in what their partner is thinking, what their problems are, or what they wish. Though they are married, they are entirely separated.

The third is the case in which a married couple does everything together. It looks like an ideal situation; that is, they work together, go shopping together and buy everything together; they talk with each other, and bring up their children together. Many people think it is wonderful for them to do everything together. But this is not always an ideal marriage. An ideal marriage needs to include more important conditions.

Only the fourth case is ideal. Here we find a marriage in which each of the pair lives for their partners' sake, and gladly wish to do what their partners want without insisting on their own wishes. It is a married life in which they love each other, help their partners,

make them happy, serve their partners in humility, and forgive their partner's mistakes. My friends, a marriage without self-denial will become a tragedy. For a man to live thinking of himself only is a cause of unhappiness. It is merely the selfish pursuit of self-satisfaction to live thinking only of oneself. Anyone who wants to live for himself only, to be at the center of things, and seeks only his own heart's desire, will ultimately be unhappy.

Some years ago, we had a little time after a fellowship meeting and I had a chance to visit an exhibition of rare seashells in Miyakojima Island. Looking at them, I admired the Creator who had made such an amazing variety of beautiful shells. We saw poisonous sea snakes, too. And we saw a door leading to the last room and on it was a doorplate inscribed with the words: "The most fearful creature in the world." We went near to a big box in the room, imagining what kind of awful creature we could find. But we could only see a small hole on the box. So we went nearer to it and looked inside, and everyone cried out in surprise, for there was only a mirror in the box. We couldn't see anything but ourselves and couldn't help wondering: "Well, then, is the most dangerous creature myself?" The Bible answers, "That's right."

Usually, when we have a problem in interpersonal relations, we think the cause lies with another person. Even a child says, "It was my parents' fault," "It was my teacher's fault," "It was my friend's fault." It is not important who is to blame, my friends, but it is important that the individual man himself becomes humble.

The reasons for the death of Jesus Christ are written in the Bible. The first reason is as follows, written in Romans 4:25: "He was delivered over to death for our sins." We cannot do anything to atone for our sins and so Jesus Christ came to this world as a man, throwing away his glory, which he had in heaven from the beginning of Eternity. He did not come to create the Christian religion. He has nothing to do with Christianity. Jesus Christ did not come to teach anything. He is not a so-called "teacher." One of the main reasons Jesus came into this world was to die. Jesus Christ was sacrificed for the atonement of our sins. This is one reason for which Jesus came to this world.

And there is another main purpose of His coming to the world. Paul wrote in his second letter to the Corinthians as follows: "He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and was raised again." (2 Corinthians 5:15). When a man begins to think that it

is important to live not for himself, but for Jesus, who died for him and rose again, he will be changed. It is the greatest privilege and true happiness to live not for oneself, but for Jesus, who sacrificed His life on the Cross and rose from the dead. One who cares only about himself lives an unfocused life. But whoever wants to live for Jesus will surely have true freedom and happiness, and consequently bear a lot of fruit.

We must choose one of these two ways of life: either we lead a self-centered life where Jesus is ignored, or we deny ourselves and surrender ourselves so that Jesus can always work within and through us.

Married life is not as easy as living on one's own, because there will always exists conflicts of thought between a couple. It may be said that the role of marriage is to convert natural love into true love. Therefore, for a marriage to be a "blessed" marriage does not mean it is one without any difficulties. Rather, it is one with problems which are eventually to be solved not by the couple alone, but by Jesus Christ. Peter wrote in his first letter as follows: "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." (1 Peter 4:8). This doesn't mean a couple has to love only with their natural love, but to love each other with the love of Jesus. One who has

experienced Jesus' love in his own life can truly love others.

In the epistle to the Ephesians, there is another passage which sets the standard of love in married life as follows: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. . ." (Ephesians 5:25). E. might be willing to say, "Yes, I will," but isn't it a little difficult for him to actually do so? People tend to misunderstand the Bible. They think they must do this and do that because those commands are written in the Bible. For such people, the Bible is a kind of textbook, but this is not true. For instance, it is actually impossible for E. to love K. as Jesus loved humankind.

Moreover, the Bible says, "Love your enemies." But it is impossible for any of us to do so. If such things can't be done by anyone, why are there so many commands in the Bible? It's because they are not commands to keep, but to break. God knows it is impossible for a human being to keep them.

We are so arrogant that we close our eyes to reality. We tend to think we can adhere to all the commands if only we try hard. But it is impossible! And one who finally realized this is blessed. He will begin to cry out for help to the Lord. He will admit that he can't do

anything himself and needs help from above. Then the situation will change dramatically. We are hopeless 'til the end of our lives. But if we rely on Jesus, who is Almighty God, then everything will turn out all right.

Therefore, Jesus will surely lead the newly wedded couple, if they confess in this way to the Lord: "Lord Jesus, we have always been self-centered, and we are afraid we will be so even in the future. But we thank you, Lord, because you will never leave us. Please lead us in our life." And so it is that He will become their strength and safe-haven in life.

In the previous passage we read, "Love your wives, just as Jesus also loved the church." True sacrifice, that is, sheer self-denial toward others, is expressed here. Self-denial and self-sacrifice. May these be the characteristics of E. and K.'s new life. True love means to long for the happiness of one's partner instead of one's own, that is, to surrender oneself for the other and to sacrifice oneself voluntarily. True love is to take pleasure in one's partner's happiness.

The Bible tells us about the order of God as follows: "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." (1 Corinthians 11:3). This divine order is the very secret of a blessed marriage.

Those who keep this order as the Lord wishes will certainly be blessed. Of course, it is not easy for a man to let his rationality submit to the will of God. It may actually be unpleasant. Similarly, it is not easy for a woman to let her will and emotion submit to a man's will. Now take a look at today's world. Men don't fear God and go against the Lord; women don't obey men, and children don't submit to parents. As a result, people are increasingly in despair.

Although the Bible says, "The head of woman is man," the relationship of a married couple is not one in which one is superior to the other. The Bible only wants to point out that husbands have the initiative in life. I wonder if it's a privilege or a burden! In either case, if someone thinks he is always right, I suppose he'd better not get married. When there is some disagreement and a bad mood between a couple, they should say to each other, "I'm terribly sorry. I was wrong."

To conclude my message, I would like to introduce a letter by the famous Bismarck, who was Germany's first Prime Minister. It is a wonderful letter sent to his wife. It can be called Bismarck's confession of love to his wife, and also a testimony of his faith.

"My Dear Wife: I married you because I deeply

loved you in the Lord. I married you because I longed for a warm sweet home where a fire is burning in the fireplace whenever a cold wind is blowing outside in the chilly evenings. I'll cherish you, who have a warm, sweet heart like a fireplace. In order to do so, I'll keep throwing branches into the fire and protect you from all the many evils so that the fire will never be extinguished. I'll do my best to keep the small light of a lamp burning because I have no more precious thing in this world than your love—except the mercy of our Lord Jesus."

Appendix: Contact points for further information

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