



# The REFLECTOR

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## Marriages that Fail

Irvin Himmel

It is an indisputable fact that an alarming number of marriages are failing. Every divorce is a testimony to lack of success. Many marriages fail that remain legally intact. Separations may occur because of disagreements even when there is no divorce. The fact that a husband and wife continue living under the same roof is no proof of real togetherness. A couple may remain in the same house only to fight, quarrel, and make life miserable for themselves and others around them.

Some marital problems would puzzle one with the greatest of wisdom, but the major causes of failures are not so complex.

1. *A marriage may fail because it is viewed as a purely human arrangement.* We must remember that it was God who ordained the husband-wife relationship and gave laws to regulate it. Matrimony originated in the divine decree of Gen. 1:27, 28: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it . . ." Read also Gen. 2:18-24. It is God who joins partners in marriage (Matt. 19:3-6). Gospel preachers stress these facts in marriage ceremonies.

If we may judge their convictions by their attitudes and actions, many people must feel that God has no control or voice in marriage. Some men and women mate without marriage, living much like animals. They are led by physical drives, switching partners at will, having no higher purpose than gratifying carnal passions. Others are careful to comply with the laws of the state, but they recognize no higher laws. All who leave God out of the picture by ignoring His laws for marriage could not be expected to attain real success in that relationship. To view the husband-wife connection as purely human in every sense is to act as if marriage is only a human arrangement, therefore to conclude that we may do whatever we please and it is not any of God's business!

2. *A marriage may fail because it is not considered as a lifetime contract.* Naturally, people who leave God out

would be expected to regard marriage lightly. But some who claim to believe the Bible do not take marriage seriously. No doubt ignorance plays a role in this. Jesus said, "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" Many have not read. They claim to believe the Bible but are unfamiliar with what it teaches about the permanence of marriage.

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## GOSPEL MEETING

NOVEMBER 29 - DECEMBER 4

7:30 P.M.

H. E. PHILLIPS

Fultondale  
Church Of Christ

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People must be taught that God does not approve everything that the state approves. God designed marriage as a lifetime agreement. To overcome the looseness of attitude that manifests itself strong teaching is needed on such passages as Rom. 7:1-3 and Matt. 19:9.

3. *Some marriages fail because the partners have no common spiritual bond.* Marriages with the heathen were highly detrimental to the Israelites long ago. When Ezra learned of such marriages among the Jews, he plucked off the hair of his head and his beard, and sat down in utter astonishment. Ezra intreated the people to put away their "strange wives" and "such as are born of them." The birth of children by heathen women did not make the marriages any less abominable (Ezra 9; 10). In Nehemiah's time the same situation prevailed. The Jews had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. The children spoke half in the speech of Ashdod. It was a terrible evil. Nehemiah reasoned, "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? . . . even him did outlandish women cause to sin" (Neh. 13:23-27).

Today, the laws that governed ancient Israel are not in force, but serious problems can arise when one partner is trying to be loyal to Christ and the other is not. It is difficult enough to overcome obstacles when both husband and wife are endeavoring to follow the Scriptures; a Christian who marries out of the faith creates a built in potential for failure.

4. *A marriage may fail because true love is lacking.* If a couple genuinely and deeply love each other, problems can be solved, mistakes will be forgiven freely, and selfishness will be put aside. The husband who sincerely loves his wife will be tender and kind. He will love her as his own body, or as he loves himself, "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church" (Eph. 5:28, 29). The wife who loves her husband will submit to him and reverence him (Eph. 5:22, 33).

All marriages are not based on love. Some are based on the desire for financial security, or maybe a longing for social prestige. Some couples marry merely because of physical attraction. And sometimes people marry out of spite, but in the end they spite themselves!

5. *Many marriages fail due to lack of preparation.* In relatively few things do any of us succeed without adequate preparation. The following are some areas in which preparation is needed for marriage: (1) *physical*—the body should be kept strong and healthy; (2) *emotional*—one may be physically mature but too emotionally immature for marriage; (3) *moral*—"keep thyself pure" (1 Tim. 5:22) is good advice for anyone at any point in life, especially for one who expects to enter marriage; (4) *intellectual*—one should know his or her responsibilities and how to fulfill them; (5) *financial*—do not expect to begin with a dream house fully furnished, but realize that there must be some means of a livelihood; (6) *spiritual*—this is the most important area of preparation for disciples of Christ who contemplate marriage.

A lot of couples, particularly younger ones, jump into marriage with little or no preparation. To make a marriage succeed, planning and determination toward that end are necessary from the beginning.

To realize before wedlock why many marriages fail should help to avoid pitfalls. I urge teenagers to study

this article carefully. All who plan to marry should ask themselves what kind of a marriage they really want. If one desires a messed-up affair, that can be arranged with ease. If he wants a happy, meaningful, and glorious marriage, it will take the right attitude, sincere and continued effort, respect for God's laws, and deep love with understanding.

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## What Is The Church?

Mike Willis

The American concept of the church is largely a product of what is seen to be practiced by those who call themselves a church. Americans should draw their concept of the church from the New Testament rather than from their experiential contacts with denominations. However, since the normal method of coming to an understanding regarding the church is what it is, Americans equate the church with a building, a socio-recreational group, and an agency which accomplishes anything labeled as a good work. To anyone familiar with the New Testament concept of the church, the American, twentieth-century concept of the church is only a badly mutilated imitation of the New Testament church. Perhaps this article will clarify some mistaken concepts about the church.

### What Is The Church?

The church is the people of God. They are the ones who have hearkened to God's call to come out of darkness and into the light. These are those who have believed the good news that God has provided salvation for sinful man through Jesus Christ. Their faith is one which has taken God at His word, expressing itself in obedience to His divine commands to "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). Therefore, these are the ones who are recipients of Christ's blessings; they have received "remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Since they have believed and been baptized, they are the saved (Mk. 16:16). The church, then, is the body of believers—all of the saved persons in the world.

Some will immediately conclude that the church is a mystical body which has no visible organization. Indeed, this is the usual concept maintained by Americans about the church. Yet, in New Testament times, the church was not something which was undefinable, ambiguous, or vague because, although the church was the body of all the saved of the world, it also had local manifestations. Every local group composed of those who had responded in submission to Jesus worshipped regularly in the respective towns and was known as the church (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; Acts 14:23). Keep in mind that these local groups were all alike in doctrine, worship, organization, and work; any local congregation which deviated from the apostles' doctrine was quickly the recipient of apostolic rebuke (cf., for example, Rev. 2:14-15, 20-21). There is no evidence which indicates that the different congregations could, under divine approval, teach conflicting doctrines. There did not exist a thirty-second cousin to twentieth-century denominationalism in New Testament times.

To only those who were in the blood bought church (Acts



## Confess Your Sins

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We should always seek to walk by faith. We are to be in harmony with the will of God in every aspect of our work and worship for His ways are high above our ways. We need to follow Bible principles, commands, or examples in all that we do. It pays to walk circumspectly (Eph. 5:15) or to be very careful where we put our feet when we take a step. Let any devout saint feel free to advise me freely on the things stated in this article.

In the matter of confessing our sins we look two ways. We confess to God, and there are times when we confess to men. To which men do we confess our sins? The questions of when, where, and why may also enter into the matter of confessing our sins to men.

In fighting the grace-faith-unity doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ to each baptized believer, some may have gone past Jerusalem and on down to Jericho. The idea seems to be around that man must confess every sin to God *explicitly* and repent of it to be forgiven. I have made some grievous mistakes (sins) that I did not realize until years after the mistakes (sins) were made. For example, I worked to help some new congregations get started in the decade of the forties. In those years, my relationship with the brethren at those places was very pleasant. I was happy to see the new works begin and grow, and my conscience was clear. I did not teach some things that were sorely needed. The brethren would almost certainly have listened if I had taught them earnestly, carefully, and patiently. In my failure some of these churches became what we usually call liberal. It hurts to realize this fact. The sin was a classic example of failure to teach the whole counsel. My ignorance was the occasion of my sin.

Would I have perished in my sins if I had died in the decade of much unselfish work in seeing these new churches begin and grow? If I am saved it will be by the grace of God. I do now see my mistake and confess it to God and men. When the mentioned work was being done I was aware of my need of mercy and prayed for forgiveness, but I did not know how to list my sins one by one. I do not claim that ignorance will cover any and every sin, but I see no way short of mercy for my salvation because I do not have perfect knowledge. That perfect knowledge will never be mine. All of us have room to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. (See 2 Pet. 3:18). Any time I preach, I may find myself wondering if I have selected the appropriate lesson for the occasion and if I have said the proper things in the right way. May the Lord have mercy. We may sin by omitting some things that should be said and done.

In preaching we try to help people have a stronger faith (Rom. 10:17). We also seek to persuade them to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). These things are *essential* as parts of God's plan for our redemption. When we plead for people to repent we are not telling them that they must recall

every sin and confess each to God as they turn from their sins in repentance. Repentance leads to a new life, and the old man of sin is crucified. We do not go to heaven by ignorance, but if we do go it will be in spite of some ignorance. As the newborn babe takes the milk of the word that he may grow thereby, he learns more and more of the errors of the past.

The Philippian jailer could not have written out a complete list of all his errors in thoughts and deeds on the morning after his baptism (Acts 16:23-34). The Lord has left this story as an example of conversion. The jailer knew of his change of mind, and his repentance was accepted as genuine, but he still needed to be taught more of the things Christ had commanded. He could not have learned everything in one night in one sermon (Matt. 28:18-20). His faith, repentance and baptism led to the remission of his sins.

There is no doubt in my mind about my forgiveness in October, 1928 when I obeyed the gospel, but there was much growing for me to do. I was a babe indeed. I can claim in all good conscience that for fifty years I have preached, thought, learned, and stumbled along the way in trying to walk by faith. My confession of sin and my plea for forgiveness today are just as earnest as in my youth. I need help and know it. I am not a thief, alcoholic, or fornicator, but I work with the minds and hearts of people, and that requires skill. Errors on my part are serious. You and I must walk in the light to have forgiveness, and we must remember our littleness and our need of help. We are to confess our sins even though we are walking in the light.

We should read 1 John 1:5-10 again and again because we find instruction as to what we as servants of the Lord are to do that we may be cleansed from all sin. We also need to read this passage that we may be reassured that there is power in the blood. The blood cleanses as we give ourselves to the Lord in humble obedience. The best people need forgiveness since we all sin, but we can count on the cleansing as promised. I could not give the Lord an itemized list of all my sins this month, but I can realize that I am weak and can correct blunders as completely as possible when I realize them. The Lord knows if I really want to go to heaven. Repentance here would be parallel to repentance at the time of baptism.

There have been many pages written on 1 John 1:5-10 in the last several months, and more should be written. Some of the things written have been in error. In some cases people who believe the same things may have thought they were arguing with one another. The erroneous teaching can make it harder to teach the truth. More teaching will finally help us to find the sharp line between truth and error.

Some who would object to our insisting that repentance and confession are necessary to forgiveness have sarcastically talked of one's falling in and out of grace every thirty minutes. The Lord knows us so He is fully aware if we are giving the proper diligence to make our calling and election sure (1 Pet. 1:10; 1 Cor. 10:12; Phil. 2:12). Paul could at three or four o'clock in the day have written about the crown of righteousness which was awaiting him (2 Tim. 4:8). The Holy Spirit used him to remind us that we all sin and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). He knew that he was saved by grace, but he was just as aware as was the beloved John that we must walk in the light and confess our sins.

20:28) did Jesus promise to be the Savior (Eph. 5:23). The New Testament doctrine revealed that the only way to God the Father was through Christ Jesus (Jn. 14:6); His way involved the church. I say this because not a few believe that one can be saved without worshipping and working with the church. God did not plan from all eternity a church which was unimportant or non-essential; it has a purpose in the scheme of God. Realizing this, let us notice some of the distinguishing marks of the Lord's church.

### **Distinguishing Marks of the Church**

Our list of distinguishing marks is designed as only an introductory lesson about the New Testament church and makes no pretensions to be exhaustive. However, no church can be scripturally called the Lord's church without these distinctive marks. The plight of each of us should make the remainder of the lesson relevant and important. We must be a part of the people of God to be saved; the church is the people of God. Thus, you need to know how to find God's people.

We can begin by saying that no group can properly be called the Lord's church which teaches a different plan of salvation than Jesus taught. Surely this is self-evident. The church is the saved; a group which does not properly tell people what to do to be saved is not the saved! Here is what Jesus revealed to be necessary for salvation: (1) Belief in Jesus Christ (Mk. 16:16; Jn. 8:24), (2) Repentance of one's sins (2 Pet. 3:9; Acts 17:30; Lk. 24:47), (3) Baptism (an immersion in water) for the remission of one's past sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21; Mk. 16:15-16), and (4) A life of faithful service (Rev. 2:10; 1 Jn. 5:18; 3:9). If you will simply contrast this with what you hear the different groups teaching about salvation, you can quickly perceive which group is the Lord's church. Notice that you can not read the following popular methods of salvation in the Bible: (1) "Just accept Jesus as your personal Savior." (2) "He that believeth and is saved should be baptized" (contrast with Mk. 16:16). (3) "A man can be saved the moment he believes." (4) "Just get on your knees and pray to God and you will be saved." Perhaps we could list other contemporary schemes of redemption devised by man but just remember that Jesus revealed the only way, which says: "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mk. 16:16). No group which teaches otherwise is the Lord's church!

Secondly, we should notice that the Lord's church will wear a Bible name. Either God will allow a congregation to wear any name or there are some revealed appellatives chosen by God for it to wear. If God allows a congregation to wear just *any* name, it could scripturally be called "The Devil's Domain," "Mike's Mumblers" or "The Lutheran Church." However, if God has designated several names, anyone of which is approved by God for the church to wear, the New Testament church must wear them only. Here is a partial list of scriptural names:

Church of God (1 Cor. 1:2)  
House of God (1 Tim. 3:15)  
Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23)  
Church of the Living God (1 Tim. 3:15)  
Kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 16:19).  
Church of Christ (Rom. 16:16)

No group which wears any name other than one of the approved Bible names is the church of the Lord. Let me emphasize that if you cannot find the name of the church with which you worship in the New Testament, you can rest assured that it is not the Lord's church. Let me insert a word of caution: a group can wear a Bible name without being the Lord's church. To illustrate this, suppose that I was looking for James Smith in Indianapolis. The 1974 phone book contains two columns of men bearing this name and another column bearing the name J. Smith. Knowing the name of the individual is insufficient information to locate the individual. Likewise, knowing the scriptural names of the church is insufficient information to locate the Lord's church. One group, for instance, known as the Church of God, wears a scriptural name but teaches a false plan of salvation.

A third mark which distinguishes the New Testament church is its program of work. The New Testament church had a limited field of endeavor; it taught the gospel to the lost, assisted the needy among the saints, and edified the saints (Eph. 4:11-12). The primary work of the church, as you can easily perceive, was spiritual; the benevolence practiced by the church was secondary to the preaching of the gospel (no attempt was made at universal benevolence as was made at universal preaching). Any church which is involved in activities other than these cannot be called the Lord's church. One reads nothing of church-sponsored recreation, a church entering business ventures, a church supporting secular educational institutions or having its own kindergarten or grade school, or church hospitals. Despite this fact, American churches engage in business ventures (usually tax-free) ranging from the Christian Brothers distillery operated by the Catholic Church to Burlington Mills operated by the Baptists. Churches are supporting hospitals, schools, old folks homes, the NAACP, and practically any other work which someone of some influence has labeled as "good." If the church you attend is engaged in these extra-biblical activities, it is not the Lord's church. Are you in the Lord's church or a humanly devised and governed institution?

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