

DISCIPLINE FOR GODLINESS

DISCIPLINE OF MARRIAGE

I regularly have the best view at Christian weddings, as I stand about three feet from the joyous couple. Their skin glows with amber luminosity from the flickering candles behind me. I see everything: the moist eyes, the trembling hands, the surreptitious wink, their mutual earnestness of soul. I hear the words their parents said before them: “... **for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health ...**” They are submitting to the larger logics of life, to the solidarity of the Christian community, to “otherness,” to life itself.

Sometimes in my enjoyment I let it all blur for a moment and imagine the ultimate wedding where Christ will officially take us to Himself, and then I blink back to the living parable before me. How will the couple fare over the years? Will she reverence her husband? Will he love his beautiful bride as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her? Will he love her with an elevating, sanctifying love? Will he love her as he loves himself? I pray it will be so.

It was and is so in the life of Robertson McQuilkin, the beloved former president of Columbia Bible College, and his wife, Muriel, who suffers from the advanced ravages of Alzheimer’s disease. In March 1990 Dr. McQuilkin announced his resignation in a letter with these words:

My dear wife, Muriel, has been in failing mental health for about eight years. So far I have been able to carry both her ever-growing needs and my leadership responsibilities at CBC. But recently it has become apparent that Muriel is contented most of the time she is with me and almost none of the time I am away from her. It is not just “discontent.” She is filled with fear — even terror — that she has lost me and always goes in search of me when I leave home. Then she may be full of anger when she cannot get to me. So it is clear to me that she needs me now, full-time.

Perhaps it would help you to understand if I shared with you what I shared at the time of the announcement of my resignation in chapel. The decision was made, in a way, 42 years ago when I promised to care for Muriel “**in sickness and in health ... till death do us part.**” So, as I told the students and faculty, as a man of my word, integrity has something to do with it. But so does fairness. She has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years; if I cared for her for the next 40 years I would not be out of debt. Duty, however, can be grim and stoic. But there is more; I love Muriel. She is a delight to me — her childlike dependence and confidence in me, her warm love, occasional flashes of that wit I used to relish so, her happy spirit and tough resilience in the face of her continual distressing frustration. **I do not have to care for her, I get to!** It is a high honor to care for so wonderful a person.

Bible Study: Discipline for Godliness

Discipleship Series:

Pastor Eddie Idefonso

Now listen to the testimony of the president of our seminary who knew this lovely couple intimately: “The following month Glenda and I had a brief visit with the McQuilkins and witnessed Dr. McQuilkin’s gentle, loving way with his dear wife, who understood little of what was going on. The memory of our visit is one of lingering beauty.”

Such beautiful Christlike love did not just happen! It came from the inner resolve of a young husband who had determined forty-two years before to live under the authority of God’s directives regarding how a godly man must love his wife — as it is spelled out in [Ephesians 5](#). They are directives every Christian man ought to be familiar with, must understand, and, I think, even commit to memory — as I myself have. They are the foundational discipline of marriage — the bases for holy matrimonial sweat.

To examine the godly man’s responsibility, we must fix in our minds the grand truth at the end of [Ephesians 5:31](#), where Paul quotes [Genesis 2:24](#): when a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, **“the two will become one flesh.”** He then adds in [verse 32](#), **“This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church.”** There is an astounding unity in marriage! The assertion that men and women become **“one flesh”** indicates something of the psycho-spiritual depth of marriage — an exchange of soul.

Marriage *ideally* produces two people who are as much the same person as two people can be! Christians in marriage have the *same* Lord, the *same* family, the *same* children, the *same* future, and the *same* ultimate destiny — an astounding unity. An amazing bonding took place the moment I saw my newborn children and held them in my arms. They are from my flesh. I am close to my children, interwoven with them. Yet, I am not one flesh with them. I am one flesh only with my wife. This, in my opinion, is why old couples possessing extraordinarily different appearances yet often look so much alike — they are **“one flesh.”** There has been an exchange of soul — a mutual appropriation of each other’s lives.

This is, indeed, a mystery — which partially illustrates the even deeper marital union of Christ and the Church. And this is why the text often uses descriptive language when speaking of Christ and husbands and the Church and wives at the same time. We must keep the mysterious nature of our union constantly before us if we are to understand the disciplines of marital love as they unfold — the discipline of *sacrificial love*, of *sanctifying love*, and of *self-love*.