

Marriage At Breaking Point

A Catholic Guide To Family Happiness

Edited By Francis X. J. W.

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IN 1976 an Israeli woman named Veronica was very depressed. {Footnote Name has been changed.}

After ten years her marriage was ending. Many times she had tried to bring about a reconciliation with her husband, but it just did not work out. So she separated because of incompatibility and now faced raising two daughters on her own. Looking back at that time, Veronica recalls: "I was certain that nothing could save our marriage."

IF MARRIAGE IS AT THE BREAKING POINT WHAT CAN BE DONE?

If you are having marriage problems, you maybe able to relate to Veronica. Your marriage may be troubled and you may be wondering if it can still be saved. If such is the case, you will find it helpful to consider this question: Have I followed all the good advice that God has given in the Bible to help make marriage a success? If you are already a Catholic, ask yourself: Have I followed all the good advice that the Church has made available? Have I been using the graces of the Sacrament of Matrimony? - Psalm 119:105 reminds us: [It is called Psalm 118:105 in the Vulgate.] "Your word, O Lord, is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths."

Review Question. When a marriage is under stress, what question should be asked?

When tensions are high between husband and wife, dissolving the marriage may seem to be the easiest course of action. But, while many countries have experienced a shocking rise in broken families, recent studies indicate that a large percentage of divorced men and women regret the breakup.

A number suffer from more health problems, both physical and mental, than do those who stay with their marriage. The confusion and unhappiness of children of divorce often last for years. Parents and friends of the broken family also suffer. And what about the way God, the Originator of marriage, views the situation?

Review Question. While divorce has become popular, what reaction is reported among many divorced persons and their families?

HANDY HINT.

Handle problems quickly. Do not let the sun set with you in a provoked state.

FAMILY HAPPINESS.

As noted in previous pamphlets in this series, God purposed that marriage should be a lifelong bond. (Genesis 2:24: "Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh.") Why, then, do so many marriages break up? It may not happen overnight. Usually there are warning signs. Small problems in a marriage can grow bigger and bigger until they seem insurmountable. But if these problems are promptly handled with the aid of the Bible and the teachings of the Catholic Church, many marital breakups could be avoided.

Review Question. How should problems in a marriage be handled?

BE REALISTIC.

An element that sometimes leads to problems is the unrealistic expectations that one or both of the marriage partners may have. Romance novels, popular magazines, television programs, and movies can create hopes and dreams that are far removed from real life. When these dreams do not come true, a person can feel cheated, dissatisfied, even bitter. How, though, can two imperfect people find happiness in marriage? It takes work to achieve a successful relationship.

Review Question. What realistic situation should be faced in any marriage?

The Bible is practical. So is Holy Mother Church. It acknowledges the joys of marriage, but it also warns that those who marry "shall have tribulation of the flesh." (1 Corinthians 7:28.) As already noted, both partners are imperfect and are prone to sin. The mental and emotional makeup and the upbringing of each partner are different. Couples sometimes disagree about money, children, and in-laws. Insufficient time to do things together and sexual problems can also be a source of conflict.*

{*Footnote: Some of these areas were dealt with in previous pamphlets in this series.}

It takes time to address such matters, but take heart! Most married couples are able to face such problems and work out mutually acceptable solutions.

Review Questions.

(a) What balanced view of marriage does the Bible give?

(b) What are some reasons for disagreements in marriage?

DISCUSS DIFFERENCES.

IF MARRIAGE IS AT THE BREAKING POINT WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Many find it difficult to remain calm when they discuss hurt feelings, misunderstandings, or personal failings. Instead of straightforwardly saying: "I feel misunderstood," a spouse may get emotional and exaggerate the problem. Many will say: "You only care for yourself," or, "You don't love me."

Not wanting to get involved in an argument, the other spouse may refuse to respond.

A better course to follow is to heed the Bible's counsel: "Be angry, and sin not. Let not the sun go down upon your anger." (Ephesians 4:26.) One happily married couple, on reaching their 60th wedding anniversary, were asked the secret of their successful marriage. The husband said: "We learned not to go to sleep without settling differences, no matter how minor they may have been."

Review Question. If there are hurt feelings or misunderstandings between marriage partners, what is the Scriptural way of handling them?

FAMILY HAPPINESS.

When a husband and wife disagree, each one needs to follow St James' advice "You know, my dearest brethren, let every man be swift to hear, but slow to speak, and slow to anger." (James 1:19.) After listening carefully, both partners might see the need to apologize. (James 5:16 says: "Confess therefore your sins one to another: and pray one for another, that you may be saved. For the continual prayer of a just man avails much." He is obviously talking about confessing to the priests of the church, whom (ver. 14) he had ordered to be called for, and brought in to the sick; moreover, to confess to persons who had no power to forgive sins, would be useless. Hence the precept here means, that we must confess to men whom God has appointed, and who, by their ordination and jurisdiction, have received the power of remitting sins in his name. However, we should follow the tone of St James' advice and apologize to our spouses for any wrong or misunderstanding which we have been the cause.) Saying with sincerity, "Sorry for hurting you," takes humility and courage. But handling differences in this manner will go a long way in helping a married couple not only to solve their problems but also to develop a warmth and intimacy that will make them find more pleasure in each other's company.

Review Questions.

- (a) What is identified in the Scriptures as a vital part of communication?
- (b) What do marriage mates often need to do, even if this takes courage and humility?

RENDERING THE MARRIAGE DEBT (THE 'MARRIAGE DUE.')

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he recommended marriage 'because of the prevalence of fornication.' (1 Corinthians 7:1&2 says: "Now concerning the questions whereof you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. But for fear of fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." "Have his own wife"... That is, keep to his wife, which he has. His meaning is not to exhort the unmarried to marry: on the contrary, he would have them rather continue as they are. (Verses 7& 8.) But he speaks here to them that are already married; who must not depart from one another, but live together as they ought to do in the marriage state.) The porneia or 'fornication' present in Corinth reminds us that the world today is as bad as, or even worse than, ancient Corinth. The immoral topics that people of the world openly discuss, the immodest way they dress, and the sensual stories featured in magazines and books, on TV, and in the movies, all combine to excite illicit sexual appetites. To the Corinthians living in a similar environment, the apostle Paul said: "For it is better to marry than to be burnt." This includes the sense of being 'inflamed with passion'. - 1 Corinthians 7:9.

The Bible term translated "fornication" in this passage includes acts of adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, and other willful illicit acts involving use of the sex organs. Well instructed Catholics know that such actions are sinful, but the world in which we live seems determined to defy its Creator. With the grace of God, faithful Catholics will shun these evils from their lives.

Review Question. What protection recommended by Paul to Corinthian Christians might apply to a Christian today?

Therefore, the Bible commands married Christians: "Let the husband render the debt to his wife, and the wife also in like manner to the husband." (1 Corinthians 7:3.) Notice that the emphasis is on giving - not on demanding. Physical intimacy in marriage is truly satisfying only if each partner is concerned about the good of the other. For example, the Bible commands husbands to deal with

their wives "according to knowledge." (1 Peter 3:7 says: "All you husbands, likewise dwelling with them (their wives) according to knowledge, giving honour to the female as to the weaker vessel, and as to the co-heirs of the grace of life: that your prayers be not hindered.") This is particularly true in giving and receiving the marriage debt. If a wife is not treated tenderly, she may find it difficult to enjoy this aspect of marriage.

There are times when marriage mates may have to deprive each other of the marriage debt. This might be true of the wife at certain times of the month or when she is feeling very tired. (Compare Leviticus 18:19 which told the Old Testament Hebrews: "You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness.") It may be true of the husband when he is dealing with a serious problem at work and feels emotionally drained. Such cases of temporary suspension of rendering the marriage debt are best handled if both partners frankly discuss the situation and agree by "mutual consent." (1 Corinthians 7:5 says: "Defraud not one another, except, perhaps, by consent, for a time, that you may give yourselves to prayer; and return together again, lest Satan tempt you for your incontinency.") This will prevent either partner from jumping to wrong conclusions. If, though, a wife willfully deprives her husband or if a husband deliberately fails to render the marriage debt in a loving way, the partner may be left open to temptation. In such a situation, problems may arise in a marriage.

Review Questions.

- (a) What do the husband and wife owe to each other, and in what spirit should it be rendered?
- (b) How should the situation be handled if the marriage debt has to be temporarily suspended?

IF MARRIAGE IS AT THE BREAKING POINT WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Like all Christians, married 'servants of God' must avoid pornography, which can create unclean and unnatural desires. (Catholics are very aware that pornography is to be avoided as either an 'occasion of sin' or a very sin itself. St Paul in Colossians 3:5 warned: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; [avoid or 'kill'] fornication, uncleanness, lust, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is the service of idols.") They must also guard their thoughts and actions when dealing with all members of the opposite sex. Jesus warned: "But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:28.) By applying the Bible's counsel regarding sex, couples should be able to avoid falling into temptation and committing adultery. They can continue to enjoy delightful intimacy in a marriage in which sex is treasured as a wholesome gift from the Originator of marriage, God our Father.

- Proverbs 5:15-19 has a section which should be read by husbands and wives so that they might better treasure the extra-ordinary privilege they having in being able to share in the unitive mission of matrimony. It runs: "Drink water out of your own cistern, and the streams of your own well. (These are Biblical metaphors for the lawful spouse or wife.) Let your fountains not be conveyed abroad, and in the streets divide your waters. Keep them to yourself alone. (Again metaphoric language urges fidelity to one's lawful wife and abhorrence of dissipation or sexual indulgence outside the intimacy of one's own spouse. The Hebrew also conveys a hint that such intimate love and fidelity will be perceived by 'those abroad' as a sign of God's life-giving love.) Neither let strangers be partakers with you (in this intimate marital bliss). Let your vein (or fountain-head) be blessed (a blessing on spousal union). And rejoice with the wife of your youth. Let her be your dearest hind, and

most agreeable fawn. Let her breasts inebriate you at all times; be you delighted continually with her love.”

Review Question. How can Christians work to keep their thinking clean?

THE BIBLICAL GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE.

What are the Biblical grounds for divorce? The simple and strait-forward answer to this question is that there is NONE.

But wait on, I hear some of our Protestant friends say. Didn't Moses allow divorce and didn't Jesus allow at least one category for divorce when he was asked the very question about Moses' attitude to divorce? This needs a little more investigation and my readers will not be content with the one sentence answer given in the paragraph above.

FAMILY HAPPINESS.

Happily, in most Christian marriages, any problems that arise can be handled. Sometimes, though, this is not the case. Because humans are imperfect and live in a sinful world that is under the control of Satan, some marriages do reach the breaking point. (1 John 5:19 tells us: “We know that we are of God, and the whole world is seated in wickedness.” That is, a great part of the world is seated in wickedness. Scholars note that this verse may also signify that the world is under the wicked one, meaning the devil, who is elsewhere called the ‘prince of this world’, that is, of all the wicked. John 12. 31.) How should Christians deal with such a trying situation?

Review Question. What sad situation sometimes presents itself? Why?

Here is how the Bible describes the marriage relationship: "A man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to [stick to] his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh." (Genesis 2:24.)

Jesus Christ forbade divorce and the Church has followed in his footsteps, though at times permitting separation without the possibility of remarriage while the partners are alive. (See 1 Corinthians 7:11.)

This is such an important element of marriage that it is worth quoting our Lord's teaching in its full context from Matthew chapter 19 verses 3 to 9.

“There came to him the Pharisees tempting him, and saying: ‘Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?’ [that is ‘for any pretext whatever?’]

“Answering, Jesus said to them: ‘Have you all not read, that He who made man from the beginning, ‘made them male and female?’ And that He said: “For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be in one flesh.”

“Therefore now they are not two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.”

“They say to him: ‘Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorce, and to put away?

Jesus said to them: ‘Because Moses by reason of the hardness of your heart permitted you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery: and he that shall marry her that is put away, commits adultery.’ (Matthew 19: 3 -9.)

The exception that Jesus mentions points to a type of 'uncleanness', which invalidates the original marriage contract and is the basis for the Church's investigation of some marriages to see whether they should be annulled. Annulment is not divorce.

There is not a reputable scholar who questions the fact that Christ's words, as reported in Mk. 10, Luke 16 and Mt. 5 and 19, forbid divorce and remarriage. The whole context of Mt. 19 makes it so clear that there can be no possible doubt on the matter. If scholars continue to disagree, it is not on that fundamental fact. They may argue about the meaning of the phrase except it be for fornication, but none of them imagines that by it Christ made any exception to his prohibition of divorce. It would make nonsense of the whole scene. Even the Apostles who close the scene bear witness, by their shocked attitude, that Christ's ruling is uncompromisingly stricter than Shammai's. (Shammai was a near contemporary of Christ and was one of the leading Jewish rabbinic scholars and he insisted that only indisputable adultery permitted Moses' allowance of divorce. His opponents, from the school of Hillel, say a divorce was permitted for ANY uncleanness on the woman's part.): "If that is your decision about the relationship between a man and his wife" they say, "better not marry at all!" (Mt. 19: 10).

This, it must be repeated, is so clear that those scholars who still think that the words except it be for fornication are really meant to provide an exception to Christ's ruling, conclude that they cannot be Christ's own words (they are such a blatant contradiction of all that he has said), but must have been interpolated by some Christian community which found itself unable to live up to the high standard set by Christ. This of course is the easy way out. The study of Scripture would be considerably simplified if we could dismiss any difficult phrase as a later interpolation. Is there no other possible meaning of the phrase?

'Fornication' What It Could Mean.

Scholars of all times have returned again and again to struggle with this phrase. On the one hand it does seem at first sight to qualify in some way Christ's general prohibition on divorce. On the other hand the context makes it clear that Christ considered a divorced person still bound by the marriage bond: to attempt marriage with another would be "adultery". If there is to be any solution to the dilemma, some alternative translation must be found for one or other of the three words which appear in our text as "divorce", "except" and "fornication".

Some scholars (by far the majority) have suggested that it is the word "divorce" which has been mistranslated. Since Christ explicitly forbids remarriage, the word might be better translated as "separation". In this case his ruling could be paraphrased: If anyone separates from his wife (and that is allowed, for "fornication") then he may not marry again. Christ would be making a real exception, not indeed to his prohibition of remarriage, but to his prohibition of "divorce" (i.e. separation). It is a possible solution.

Others have queried the word "except", especially in view of the forceful word used in the Greek original of Mt. 5: 32, and suggested that it might be better translated "leaving aside", so that Christ would be saying: If any one divorces his wife (and I am not considering the question of "fornication", which makes no difference one way or the other) he may not marry again. Christ would be bypassing the whole dispute about what constitutes sufficient grounds for divorce, as irrelevant. It is a possible solution.

But it is the third word, "fornication", that perhaps provides the most satisfying solution to the problem. The solutions based on the other two words unconsciously make this word equivalent to

"adultery", without allowing for the fact that when the text speaks of the adultery of the divorced husband or wife, it uses an entirely different word. It would seem that "fornication" refers to something else. Can we discover its exact meaning by looking to see how it is used elsewhere in the New Testament?

Yes we can.

The Greek word *porneia* that is used in Mt. 5 and 19 is in fact both more general and more specific in meaning than the English word "fornication". In itself it means simply "impurity" (the English word "pornography" which is taken from it has a similarly wide meaning) and the context must decide what precise impurity is being referred to. Such a context is provided, for instance, by St Paul in his first letter to Corinth, where he condemns the illicit union between a Christian and his dead father's wife. This he calls *porneia* (1 Cor. 5:1). The Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 uses the word in exactly the same sense when it directs Christians of Gentile origin to respect the susceptibilities of their brethren of Jewish origin by complying, where necessary, with Jewish custom in the matter of *porneia*. The Council had made it clear that, in principle, the Christian is no longer bound by the ritual laws of the Old Testament (Acts 15: 7-19). But charity demanded that where converts from Judaism were in a majority and continued to live according to these ancestral laws, the Gentile Christians among them should make a communal life possible by respecting their social taboos in the matter of "idolothytes" (food which had been offered in pagan sacrifices), "porneia" (marriage within forbidden degrees), "blood" and "things strangled" (non-kosher meat) (Acts 15: 20). Exactly the same four concessions had for centuries been demanded of any stranger who wished to make his home in Israel (Lev. 17:8-18: 26).

These two examples make it possible, if not likely, that *porneia*, as well as bearing the generic meaning of impurity, had in certain circumstances the technical meaning of marriage within the degrees of kinship forbidden by Jewish law. Among the Gentiles there was no restriction on the matter, and marriage between near relatives was not unusual. But it was the Jewish custom which was eventually taken over by the Church, where a marriage of this kind was regarded as being one in name only, and in reality as illicit a union as plain fornication. The use of the same word *porneia* in the context of a dispute about marriage makes it at least possible (more and more scholars today think that it is certain) that the text of Mt. 5: 32 and 19: 9 refers to such illicit unions, and excepts from the general law of indissolubility those "marriages" which were already null and void through forbidden degrees of kinship. The text could then be paraphrased: If any one divorces his wife, he may not marry again, except when his marriage was not a real one at all, but had only the appearance of one such as involved with the many Gentile customs of 'marrying' close blood relatives.

Matthew 19:9 therefore condemns divorce absolutely. If you have definite proof that your marriage mate has been unfaithful, then you face a difficult decision. Will you continue in the marriage or obtain a separation? Some Christians have completely forgiven a genuinely repentant partner, and the preserved marriage has turned out well. Others have decided against separation for the sake of the children.

Review Questions.

- (a) What is the only Scriptural basis for separation? Is there the possibility of remarriage while the partner is still alive?
- (b) Why have some decided against separating from an unfaithful marriage mate?

The sinful act of adultery may have resulted in pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease. The child must be cared for. The diseased one needs treatment. If this has occurred in your marriage consult with your Pastor if you believe these are grounds for separation. Perhaps the children need to be protected from a sexually abusive parent. Clearly, there is much to consider before making a decision.

IF MARRIAGE IS AT THE BREAKING POINT WHAT CAN BE DONE?

It will be useful to quote here what the Code of Canon Law says about separation. This is helpful knowledge to have when you are consulting with your Pastor

SEPARATION WHILE THE MARRIAGE BOND REMAINS.

Canon 1151.

Spouses have the obligation and the right to maintain their common conjugal life, unless a lawful reason excuses them.

Canon 1152.

§1) It is earnestly recommended that a spouse, motivated by Christian charity and solicitous for the good of the family, should not refuse to pardon an adulterous partner and should not sunder the conjugal life. Nevertheless, if that spouse has not either expressly or tacitly condoned the other's fault, he or she has the right to sever the common conjugal life, provided he or she has not consented to the adultery, nor been the cause of it, nor also committed adultery.

§2) Tacit condonation occurs if the innocent spouse, after becoming aware of the adultery, has willingly engaged in a marital relationship with the other spouse; it is presumed, however, if the innocent spouse has maintained the common conjugal life for six months, and has not had recourse to ecclesiastical or to civil authority.

§3) Within six months of having spontaneously terminated the common conjugal life, the innocent spouse is to bring a case for separation to the competent ecclesiastical authority. Having examined all the circumstances, this authority is to consider whether the innocent spouse can be brought to condone the fault and not prolong the separation permanently.

Canon 1153.

§1) A spouse who occasions grave danger of soul or body to the other or to the children, or otherwise makes the common life unduly difficult, provides the other spouse with a reason to leave, either by a decree of the local Ordinary or, if there is danger in delay, even on his or her own authority.

§2) In all cases, when the reason for separation ceases, the common conjugal life is to be restored, unless otherwise provided by ecclesiastical authority.

Canon 1154.

When a separation of spouses has taken place, provision is always, and in good time, to be made for the due maintenance and upbringing of the children.

Canon 1155.

The innocent spouse may laudably readmit the other spouse to the conjugal life, in which case he or she renounces the right to separation

From this we can see that if you learn of the infidelity of your marriage partner and afterward resume sexual relations with your mate, you thus indicate that you have forgiven your mate and desire to continue living actively in the marriage. Grounds for separation no longer exist. No one should be a busybody and try to influence your decision, nor should anyone criticize your decision when you make it. You will have to live with the consequences of what you decide. "For every one shall bear his own burden." - Galatians 6:5.

Review Questions.

(a) What are some factors that have moved some to separate from their erring marriage mate?

(b) When an innocent mate makes a decision to separate or not to separate, why should no one criticize that one's decision?

MORE ON THE GROUNDS FOR SEPARATION

Let us recap at this point. Are there situations that may justify separation or possibly divorce from a marriage mate even if that one has not committed fornication? Divorce is never permitted and so is NOT a possibility. Yes, separation is permitted, and on grounds more extensive than just the sin of adultery with someone else's spouse or of fornication with an unmarried person, (excessive cruelty, for instance.) But in such a case, a Christian is not free to pursue a third party with a view to remarriage. (In Matthew 5:32, Jesus says: "But I say to you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, excepting for the cause of fornication, makes her to commit adultery: and he that shall marry her that is put away, commits adultery.") The Bible, while making allowances for such separation, stipulates that the one departing should "remain unmarried or else make up again." (Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 teaches: "But to them that are married, not I but the Lord commands, that the wife depart not from her husband. And if she depart, that she remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband. And let not the husband put away his wife.")

Review Questions.

(a) Do the Scriptures, properly understood, permit divorce?

(b) Even when the sin of adultery or fornication with an unmarried person has occurred, what limitations do the Scriptures place on separation?

(c) What was the intention of Christ our Lord by his remark, as recorded by Matthew, 'excepting for the cause of fornication'?

FAMILY HAPPINESS.

Let us go a little more deeply into the matter of separation within a marriage. What are some extreme situations that may make a separation seem advisable?

Well, the family may become destitute because of the gross laziness and bad habits of the husband.*

Please note:* This does not include situations in which a husband, although well-intentioned, is unable to provide for his family for reasons beyond his control, such as sickness or lack of employment opportunities. We are talking here of gross moral failures.

He may gamble away the family's income or use it to support an addiction to drugs or alcohol. In 1 Timothy 5:8, Saint Paul teaches: "But if any man have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." To paraphrase, the Holy Spirit

inspired Bible is thus stating: "If anyone does not provide for members of his household, he has disowned the faith and is worse than a person without faith." If such a man refuses to change his ways, perhaps even financing his vices by taking money that his wife earns, the wife may choose to protect her welfare and that of her children by obtaining a legal separation. This should be done only in proper consultation with your pastor. The Church will often advise to seek a separation that is recognized by Civil Society so as to avoid legal complications.

Such legal action may also be considered if a spouse is extremely violent toward the partner, perhaps repeatedly beating that one to the extent that health and even life are in danger. Additionally, if a spouse constantly tries to force a marriage mate to break God's commands in some way, the threatened mate may also consider separation, especially if matters reach the point where spiritual life is endangered. The partner at risk may conclude that the only way to "obey God as ruler rather than men" is to obtain a legal separation. – We should always keep in mind the incident recorded in Acts 5:29. "But Peter and the apostles answering, said: We ought to obey God, rather than men." We should never break God's Laws (whether on contraception or fraud or anything else) merely to please another human being, no matter how exalted his position.

Review Question. What are some of the extreme situations that may lead a spouse to weigh the advisability of legal separation, even though remarriage is not a possibility?

In all cases of extreme spousal abuse, no one should put pressure on the innocent mate either to separate or to stay with the other. While mature friends and elderly couples who have had much experience of the vicissitudes of the married state may offer support and Bible-based counsel, these cannot know all the details of what goes on between a husband and wife. By all means, however, talk to your Pastor. If necessary, use the Seal of the Confessional to make your first enquiries, but then follow through on his sage advice. He may recommend seeking assistance from the many Church-related services that are available for married couples in difficulties. Only God Our Father can see all things, even the intimate and secret thoughts of a married couple. Of course, a Christian wife would not be honoring God's marriage arrangement if she used flimsy excuses to get out of a marriage and to separate from the bed of her husband. But if an extremely dangerous situation persists, no one, no out-sider, should criticize her if she chooses to separate. Exactly the same things could be said concerning a Christian husband who seeks separation. Remember the Biblical injunction: "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." - Romans 14:10.

Review Questions.

- (a) In the case of a family breakup, what may mature friends and elderly couples offer, and what should they not offer?
- (b) Married individuals should not use the Bible's references to separation as an excuse to do what?
- (c) What role should your priest-pastor have in helping you overcome abusive marital situations?

HOW A BROKEN MARRIAGE WAS SAVED

IF MARRIAGE IS AT THE BREAKING POINT WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Three months after Veronica, mentioned earlier, separated from her husband, she met some good Catholics from the Legion of Mary and started to study the Bible with them. "To my great surprise," she explains, "the Bible supplied practical solutions to my problem. After just one week of study, I immediately wanted to make up with my husband. Today I can say that God our Father knows how

to save marriages in crisis because his teachings help mates learn how to feel esteem for each other. It is not true, as some assert, that Catholicism divide families. In my case, exactly the opposite was true. My Husband and I, plus my two daughters, joined the Church and are now working in a housing estate in the Ivory Coast, West Africa." Veronica learned to apply Bible principles in her life.

Review Question. What experience shows that the Bible's counsel on marriage works?

FAMILY HAPPINESS.

Veronica is not an exception. Marriage should be a blessing, not a burden. To that end, God our Father has provided the finest source of marriage counsel ever written - his precious Word. He has given us the greatest helps – in his wonderful Sacraments. He has provided the solid Rock of the Church to guide us through tumultuous times. With David let us prayerfully repeat these words from Psalm 19:7-11. [It is Psalm 18: 8-12 in the Vulgate.] “The law of the Lord is unspotted, converting souls: the testimony of the Lord is faithful, giving wisdom to little ones. The justices of the Lord are right, rejoicing hearts: the commandment of the Lord is lightsome, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is holy, enduring for ever and ever: the judgments of the Lord are true, justified in themselves. More to be desired than gold and many precious stones: and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. For your servant keeps them, and in keeping them there is a great reward.’ The Bible can thus give "wisdom to little ones." It has saved many marriages that were at the breaking point and has improved many others that had serious problems. May all married couples have full confidence in the marriage counsel that Almighty God our Father supplies. It really works!

Review Question. In what should all married couples have confidence?

HOW CAN THESE BIBLE PRINCIPLES HELP...

TO AVOID THE BREAKUP OF A MARRIAGE?

Marriage is a source both of joy and of tribulation.

- Proverbs 5:18, 19:

“Let your vein (or fountain-head) be blessed. And rejoice with the wife of your youth. Let her be your dearest hind, and most agreeable fawn. Let her breasts inebriate you at all times; be you delighted continually with her love.”

- 1 Corinthians 7:28:

“But if you take a wife, you have not sinned. And if a virgin marry, she has not sinned: nevertheless, such shall have tribulation of the flesh. But I (wish to) spare you.

Disagreements should be handled immediately. - Ephesians 4:26.

In a discussion, listening is as important as speaking. - James 1:19.

The marriage debt should be rendered in a spirit of unselfishness and tenderness.

-1 Corinthians 7:3-5.

“Let the husband render the debt to his wife, and the wife also in like manner to the husband. The wife has not power of her own body, but the husband. And in like manner the husband also has not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud not one another, except, perhaps, by consent, for a

time, that you may give yourselves to prayer; and return together again, lest Satan tempt you for your incontinency.”
