

SKELETONS IN FAMILY CLOSETS

"Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." Psalm 127:1.

Marriage is not a mere human arrangement. It was not devised by an earthly lawgiver. Rather, marriage is a divine ordinance. The stamp of divine intention and ordination is upon it. As a relationship it is the closest and most sacred on earth.

Marriage is intended to bring joy. The married life is meant to be the happiest, fullest and richest. It is God's own ideal of completeness. God intends for married life to yield happiness. If it fails to yield joy and be a blessing, the fault is not with the institution but with those who do not fulfill its conditions.

It is tremendously important to have a happy home. God wants us to have happy homes. He meant for home to be the happiest place in the land of the living. It is a pity when home is such a place that any member of the family wants to get away from it. Many suffer when a home is unhappy--the husband, the wife, the children, the relatives, the friends and the church. If there is a secret of happiness in the married life, then surely everybody ought to learn what it is.

While every home has its particular problems for adjustment, certain ones are common to practically all married people. One thing that every person who marries will discover is that his or her companion is human. There was a time when women thought of men as gods and men thought of women as angels, but they don't do that any more; now they know each other too well to make that mistake. However, many still idolize or idealize the one whom he or she is courting and then after marriage discovers that his or her companion is just as human as he or she is. Human nature is like a case of measles; it breaks out from nine to twenty-one days after being exposed matrimonially.

The girl a man weds is not always the same as the one he woos. Many a man, like Jacob of old, finds to his sorrow that he courted one girl and married quite another. Many a girl likewise thinks she is courting a prince but later finds herself married to a prig. While courting, the mettle of a man is often so well polished and his manners so glittering that the poor girl is likely to mistake him for pure gold. Then after their wedding day she discovers that what she mistook for pure gold was nothing more than impure brass. There is likely to be a lot of pretense, put-on and make-believe during courtship. Before the wedding he will quickly stoop to pick up her handkerchief; after the marriage he will not so much as bend his back, though she carry the whole household on her shoulders. He will even let his wife carry in the coal, build the fires and carry out the clinkers and the ashes. The person whom one marries should not be so different from the one who was courted.

One problem of married life is the fact that many couples are brought to the realization that they did not really know each other before their wedding. A man and his wife were in a court of Domestic Relations. The judge said, "Madam, how long did you know this man before you married him?" She replied, "I was acquainted with him for two years, but I never really

knew him until we married and I asked him for ten dollars." The trouble in these days is that many are not really acquainted when they marry. Many people learn that the newly acquired partner is encumbered with an incompatible disposition and some bad habits. Colored Manda sought to be divorced from her unsatisfactory mate. The judge said, "Manda, didn't you take Rastus for better or worse?" "Yes, Jedge, but he am much worsen than I took him fo'," replied Manda. In all probability some of you can sympathize with Manda because your experience has been very similar to hers.

If your home is not what it ought to be, or if it is the opposite of what it should be, you have made it what it is, even though you may have done so ignorantly or unintentionally.

Let us consider some of the skeletons which are found in family closets today:

I. Remodeling.

It is not necessary for a couple to be married very long before the discovery is made that they do not conform to the wishes of each other in all matters. The tendency with many is to start a remodeling program forthwith for the express purpose of changing the other to conform to his or her personal wishes. That procedure naturally leads to friction and trouble. After all, marriage does not imply ownership. Each is to maintain individuality.

II. Slouchiness.

Some women will spend hours in primping in order to be well gowned when they attend some social affair but will not even take the time or trouble to comb the hair and dress for breakfast. Some of them are so lazy and slouchy that they even patter around the house in bedroom slippers, pajamas and a dirty, faded and wrinkled housecoat, even though they know it is a personal embarrassment and aggravation to their husbands, as well as other people with a sense of propriety. Some wives think that because they have won their husbands it is no longer necessary to make any serious effort to be attractive and pleasing to them, so they become very slovenly in their personal appearance.

III. Selfishness.

Either the husband or the wife can be so selfish that he or she wants his or her own way about everything. That is both unfortunate and wrong. It is never conducive to happiness. Marriage is a give and take proposition. To this remark one married man replied, "That's right, she gives it to you and you have to take it." Your companion has rights too, so recognize that fact and be governed accordingly.

IV. Inconsiderateness.

The failure to maintain after marriage the little courtesies that are commonplace before the wedding is a common source of irritation. If courtesies are worth anything to us as a means of commending us to anybody, they should be worth most as a means of commending us to the one whom we profess to love best.

How did you ever come to love each other well enough to marry? Who was that who said, "That's what I would like to know, too?" It was by a process of cultivating your friendship each for the other. You won and were won by courtship. Therefore, you should keep up your courtship after marriage. For, mark this, your love is going to be a growing or a dying love. Like the flower you have growing at home, love must have attention. Many forget this or, remembering it, fail to act accordingly. A marriage certificate is not a paid-up policy on marital happiness. In courtship you pay the premiums of compliments, cheerfulness, courtesy, consideration and chivalry. Marriage does not make unnecessary any further assessments. You must keep on paying the premiums. If you suspend the payments, the policy will lapse.

V. Lecturing.

Quite frequently either the husband or the wife lectures the other in somewhat this fashion: "Do this. Do that. Don't do that. Didn't I tell you the way I wanted that done? Come on here right now and do what I told you." Some can scarcely do anything without getting permission. Illustration--Edgar stopped plowing and went two miles to ask Nellie if he could sell a bushel of seed corn to a neighbor and fellow-deacon in his church. He was under control to such an extent that he waited for a signal to laugh.

There are some people who have learned to cultivate the art of turning a deaf ear to the lecturing companion. That sort of treatment requires an unusual power of concentration. Mrs. H. was going to remodel their house, so Mr. H. borrowed some books from me. She talked at length in announcing what she was going to do, how she was going to do it and why she intended to do it that way. At long last, she happened to call him by name. He stopped reading, put his feet down on the floor, looked around and said, "S., did you say something?"

VI. Nagging.

Nagging comes from the Anglo-Saxon word which means to "gnaw." Have you ever watched a squirrel cut a hole through a nut with its sharp teeth, or a rat cut away at a piece of wood or some obstruction through which it desired to open a vent? Just as either of these gnaws at its respective object until it finally cuts through, so the human nagger metaphorically gnaws at its victim until the patience of its object is worn through completely. A chronic nagger never lets anything die. A nagger seems to take keen delight in reopening a wound long since healed. If you have had the misfortune to marry a nagger, the only way to avoid accepting those inevitable taunts is to put on your hat and walk out. Nagging prevents some husbands from spending more time at home and causes some wives to breathe a sigh of relief when their mates leave for work. One cannot nag while the object of the nagging is out of earshot. Illustration: Mat and Willie. Nagging is unnecessary, foolish and never pays. Most any broad-minded person can accept, in the spirit of love and affection, mild reproach and correction from the other mate, but it would take either an angel or a weakling to stand constant nagging.

VII. Quarreling.

A husband and wife do not have to be married very long before they come to the realization that they do not see all matters alike. Upon

a number of things they disagree. They have differences of opinion, if they are capable of having an opinion and are permitted to do so.

One of the first temptations that newly-weds have is to quarrel. As any thoughtful person would expect, the first quarrel usually takes place over some matter of no importance. It is usually born of a difference over a trifle. In fact, the big things seldom, if ever, cause couples to separate, families to divide or churches to split, but it is the little things that bring these things about. A great loss, a great tragedy or a great sorrow does not make for separation. As a rule, either of these makes for a closer bond of union. So it is that again and again the little foxes spoil the marital vine.

One trouble with the little quarrel is that it ceases to be petty. Like every other form of sin it grows and becomes a habit. Avoid quarreling, even if you have to walk out, because it is one of the most common of the murderers of love and home happiness. You may not always be able to see and understand every little thing alike, but you can at least agree to disagree, instead of having a word-battle and resultant hard feelings over trifles. If you and your companion quarrel, it is not altogether the fault of your mate. It takes two to have a quarrel. When one stops, the other soon gets tired and stops too. Sacrifice some of your personal desires on the altar of expediency. Little compromises and concessions make up much of the poetry of married life. These are the things that make marriage a duet rather than two solos.

VIII. Unappreciativeness.

The art of appreciation is sadly lacking today. It is greatly needed, too. Christ taught the need of it by precept and example. Besides, the best people practice it. However, it is an art which has to be cultivated.

If one is going to exercise the prerogative of complaining when things go wrong, by the same token, he certainly ought to express appreciation when things go right. If appreciation is to be expressed, why not do it before the one who is to receive it is dead and gone.

It is a well-known fact that more than one husband has committed the unpardonable matrimonial sin of comparing his wife's cooking with that of his mother. Such a heartless creature should be reminded that, in all probability, he is not as good a provider as his father; also, that his wife has not yet had the experience in cooking that his mother has had. The trouble, after all, is not with the cook or the cooking, but with him. It is the difference between the ravenous appetite of a growing boy and the jaded appetite of a grown man. When his mother did the cooking, he had an appetite like a sawmill and a digestion like a concrete-mixer; anything tasted good and was readily digested. When he sits down to a meal prepared by his wife, his appetite is poor, his digestion is faulty and his stomach is dyspeptic.

IX. Fault-finding.

In every home things sometimes occur which ought not to happen, but blaming somebody for them does not undo them. Various things are a

source of irritation. Your companion has faults, no doubt, but so do you. Being dissatisfied with each other's ways and doings kills happiness and love. A grumbling, growling, murmuring and complaining man and a peevish, snapping, snarling woman can surely make a home a miserable place. Fault-finding will not cause the meals to be ready on time, or make the poor cook into a good one, or change an untidy housekeeper into a neat one. Fault-finding will not rid the husband of his bad habits. It is no encouragement for the ones complained at to do better. Fault-finding only tends to make the husband or wife quit trying to do better. The best way to start making home a happy place is to obey the scriptural injunction, "Confess your faults one to another."

A person may emphasize the faults of his or her companion until the five percent faulty may obliterate the ninety-five percent which is splendid. A man harped on the fact that his wife could not cook as well as his mother, but he seemed to forget that she was a marvelous mother, a splendid housekeeper, a charming personality, a gracious and beautiful woman and one who could bring credit to any home. One woman had a husband who would not hang up his clothes as he should. That was certainly a bad habit, but she harped on it, talked of it in private and in public until she almost came to believe that that one fault made him unfit to be her husband. Each must learn to overlook some faults and go ahead and be happy in spite of the weaknesses of the other. Men have been known to find fault about buttons not being sewed on their clothes. It is actually surprising how few buttons a fellow can get by with. Frequently a nail can be used in the place of a button, and it will soon bring about the desired result.

X. Jealousy.

Never allow yourself to become the victim of jealousy. Jealousy is never a sign of love. In fact, it always kills love. When jealousy is exhibited by one party toward another, it never makes the jealous person more happy, or the party to whom the jealousy is shown more affectionate toward the jealous one. Jealousy is composed of envy, resentment, fear, selfishness and suspicion. It is always a sign of great weakness. It is an outright admission that one is not strong enough to hold the affections of one against a rival. Jealousy not only kills love, but it incites unfaithfulness. When you try to hold the affections of a person with a jealous grasp, you only drive him or her farther away from you.

If you are jealous of another, no human being can help you conquer your jealousy. That achievement will necessitate the exercise of your own will power. Therefore, stop being envious; don't resent the one of whom you are jealous having other friends; don't try to dominate the thoughts and actions of the object of your jealousy; get rid of that fear of being able to hold his or her affection; eliminate doubt from your mind, control your exaggerating imagination and cultivate faith instead; get rid of the crazy thought that somebody else is after the object of your jealousy; and make yourself so attractive, pleasant and lovable that competition will be shut out.

XI. Finances.

So often the subject of money is a source of irritation and a cause for misunderstanding. The god of desire causes some young people to

want as much as their parents and others have. That kind of a person will scheme daily to acquire additional possessions not realizing that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth." Happiness is not dependent on the amount of one's income. Others focus their attention on what they do not have instead of what they do have. If you don't have what you want, then learn to want what you have. This spirit and attitude cannot purchase things, but they will guarantee happiness.

Money must never be allowed to become your master, but it can be a helpful servant. It is only good for the things that it will buy. Heartaches and trouble often stem from an unfair division of the income. Some men have incomes of thousands and their wives have to beg them for spending money. Such a man will say, "It's mine, I worked for it," but that is not true. One borrowed money from his wife and gave it back to her as a Christmas present. Another remarks, "All he has is yours," but that is not true either. A lady in Covington and her third husband separated over money. She explained her attitude about the matter and said frankly and rather proudly, "Out of each of his pay checks I gave him his carfare to go back and forth to work in Cincinnati." Both parties should be fair in the realm of finances.

Set apart one tenth of the income for the Lord to whom it belongs. Then live within the nine tenths. Don't succumb to the charge account or installment buying habit. You will find it so much easier to rise in your expenditures than to take a sizable reduction in your income.

XII. Godlessness.

No couple can possibly build a happy home and leave God out of it. Home-makers do not have a chance to succeed if in the home which they build the Son of man hath not where to lay His head. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1).