

**Promise?
Your Promise
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 and 5:4-5**

Dr. Steve Horn

June 15, 2008

Text: ⁹ Two *are* better than one,
Because they have a good reward for their labor.
¹⁰ For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.
But woe to him *who is* alone when he falls,
For *he has* no one to help him up.
¹¹ Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm;
But how can one be warm *alone*?
¹² Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him.
And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

⁴ When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it;
For *He has* no pleasure in fools.
Pay what you have vowed—
⁵ Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.

Introduction: Last week we began a series on the subject of marriage. We are calling the series *Promise*. That's what we say in our marriage vows, isn't it? Again, I would like to say to our singles today that I trust that you will not feel left out in this preaching series. I hope that you would be able to see the great need in our church for this series. In addition, particularly today, I can assure that almost all of what we will talk about can be applied to most any relationship in your life.

We turn our attention this morning to the book of Ecclesiastes. This text has become a favorite of mine to share at weddings. I always tell them that Ecclesiastes is known as a book of wisdom and that our marriages surely need lots of wisdom.

Now, just so you will know, this text in Ecclesiastes is not specifically written about marriage. As many have said about God's Word before me, the Bible has one meaning—many applications. This morning, we are going to take the basic meaning of this passage and apply its teaching and wisdom to our marriages. I don't think we are wrong to do that. In fact, I am convinced that God wants us to apply these two passages to our marriages.

Both of these texts in Ecclesiastes help us to further define the promise that is involved in the marriage vows.

The Privilege of the Promise

The text of Ecclesiastes unfolds as an all encompassing list of the meaninglessness of life. In many respects, you might think of Ecclesiastes as a depressing book. It is not! The writer points out through this series of observations about life that life only has fulfillment when God is included. The immediate context of our passage today is indicating the vanity of life when one is all alone in this life. Here is where this text begins to make application to our marriages. In a Christian marriage, the hope would be that we are not all alone. The hope is that we would recognize that in marriage there are some wonderful **privileges**. The privileges of marriage indicate what you have vowed to do in your marriage. Whether you and your spouse recognize this or not, here is what you have promised to do.

1. A Partner for the Purpose of Life.

We understood that God gives us a purpose in life. In marriage that purpose is increased, because now you have purpose as a couple. With children, you have increased purpose. In that sense, when you are in relationship to anyone, a family or a church, you have increased purpose. You have an individual purpose, but you have purpose as a relational unit. In Genesis 2, God tells man and woman that they should become one. This means one in all things. Certainly this means one in purpose. So, what is your purpose as a married couple? Anything will die as the result of a lack of purpose. Your marriage relationship can die without purpose.

2. A Partner for the Practical Needs of Life.

Notice how practical the need for relationship is in verse 10. The privilege of marriage is to have someone to help you with the things of life. When God created Adam, He looked at Adam and said, "It is not good that man should be alone." What did God say next? He said, "I will make him a *helper*." (Genesis 2:18)

3. A Partner for the Physical Needs of life.

Notice again how practical the marriage privileges are. God meets those physical needs through marriage.

4. A Partner for the Problems of life.

Finally, we see that the privilege of marriage is help for the problems of life. We don't have to face problems alone. In marriage, there is no such thing as my wife's problem. In marriage, it is our problem.

Now, this is what we must understand. Many marriages don't enjoy these privileges. But, this is what you have promised to do.

A Principle for the Promise

In the passage, everything to verse 12 has been centered on two being better than one. Then, all at once, the Proverb is expanded. What is better than two? Three! A strand of three cords is often spoken about at weddings. Let's do more than speak about it—let's make sure God is that third strand in our marriages. The success or failure of your marriage depends on what you decide to do with God in your marriage. Someone by the name Perry Tanksley wrote this poem that is appropriate for today.

Marriage Takes Three

I once thought marriage took
Just Two to make a go,
But now I am convinced
It takes the Lord also.

And not one marriage fails
Where Christ is asked to enter
As lovers come together
With Jesus at the center.

But marriage seldom thrives,
And homes are incomplete,
till He is welcomed there
To help avoid defeat.

In homes where Christ is first
It's obvious to see,
Those unions really work,
For marriage still takes three.

Perry Tanksley 1984

A Prerequisite for the Promise

Finally, we come to the prerequisite for the promise. The strength of your marriage, we said a moment ago, is in what you decide to do with God. When you make a vow, according to Ecclesiastes 5, you better understand how God feels about that vow. When you make a wedding vow, you make a vow to each other, but you make a vow unto God.

Ravi Zacharias tells a parable about a rich man who paid a builder to build a house. The rich man was going to be away on a journey and expected the house to be complete upon his return. The builder cut corners since the owner was not checking over his shoulder. The outside appeared to be in order, but there were many internal inadequacies in the

house due to the poor construction. Upon the rich man's return, he surprised the builder by giving him the house as a gift.¹

As you build your life (your marriage), so you will dwell. In your marriage, if you choose to cut corners, your marriage will surely tell.

What about you? What about any vow you have to God? Are you paying what you have vowed?

¹ Ravi Zacharias, *I, Isaac, Take Thee, Rebekah*, W Publishing Group, 2004, 122.