

PRESENTATION

for Youth Discussion - July 2, 2006

2006 LLC Summer Services

By Keith Waaraniemi

“He made them male and female”

Note: This transcription is taken from the audio recording. It is best used as reference for the PowerPoint presentation as opposed to reading verbatim as a presentation in local congregation gatherings.

In the beginning, let us unite in thanksgiving and prayer. Our dear Heavenly Father, this evening as we have gathered together for this visit about matters pertaining to our life of faith, and especially those pertaining to youth, dear Father we desire to uplift our hearts to praise and thank You because You have given us freedom and peace and unity, wherein we can together visit about the way and the journey and uplift each other and instruct each other on the journey. Dear Father, we thank Thee for the word that we have heard at the services and that we have been able to go to the Lord’s Holy Supper for the strengthening of our faith. And now again, dear Father, as we pause around the matters of our lives of faith, and especially around courtship and marriage, we ask that You would bless our gathering with the same joyous spirit of unity and peace that we have experienced together to this point. So we ask that You would bless our gathering in the name of Thy dear son. Amen.

Dear young brothers and sisters and older ones as well, it’s a joy that we can gather together to visit about the topic “He made them male and female.” We haven’t had a summer service gathering where we have visited about courtship and marriage for perhaps ten years. The board and work committee were considering these matters and felt it very important to revisit this topic. We know it has been visited about on the local level, but also at our national services we wanted to take time to visit about it. I would suggest that those of you coming in the back would come in and fill in on the bleachers here. It’s a long way back, and I have a hard time seeing you all back there – need binoculars – and you would be able to see the screen better. It might help, so feel free to move up. There are some empty chairs scattered about, and there is room in the bleachers.

So when we talk about this topic of “He made them male and female,” we know that God has made man first and then He made woman, and he made them different. Each has their own physical characteristics that God has given and their role in this life that God has ordained. We have emotional differences between men and women, but we find how we need each other. God has made men and women for each

other. And aren't we glad that He did. It would be a pretty boring world if there were only men around. So as we visit about this topic, our purpose is to talk about in particular courtship and marriage and sexuality. In that sense, we're talking about the topic, "He made them male and female."

Everyone take a moment to think about the marriage that is closest to you, whether it be your own marriage, the single people that are here can think about the marriage that was most familiar to you in your childhood home, or some other marriage. Sometimes positive things and probably most often positive things will come to mind, sometimes also negative things. But think about what kinds of things stand out as important. When I think about my own childhood home, I remember a home where we didn't have a lot of temporal abundance, but we had a happy home. I was not able to follow the marriage of my parents and see them live together as husband and wife very long because my own mother was called to her heavenly home when I was seven years old, and she left behind twelve children, ages three to sixteen.

And when I pause to think about my mother, even though I didn't get to know her very well, I think above all about what she has done as a believing mother, endeavoring to do what God had given her to do, to be a mother of children, to bear and rear children into this world. And I can only with thankfulness remember her and, as I have my own family, I much more can see the sacrifice she made, the service of love she gave before she died at the age of 42. My father died five years ago and, as we escorted him to the bosom of the earth, we rejoiced in this that he had gained his victory but yet at the same time, there was a longing left in our hearts for our father. This is the kind of memory that I hope that I can leave in my family, that my children remember with love and forgiveness the weaknesses of their parents and that, above all, that most important remains this that even though there were faults in the home, as there were in my childhood home and in my own home – faults in parents, faults in children – but yet the gospel was the power of God. That's the memory above all else that we want to leave with our spouse and our children. So the important kinds of things, I'm sure, that came to your mind are love, security, warmth, forgiveness, the word of God.

Then let's pause to look at, before we talk about courtship, to talk about what marriage is. Marriage or family creates the basic unit of society. God gave two main purposes for marriage. One, God said in second chapter of Genesis, the 18th verse, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet." When we think of a help meet, or a helpmate, much help is needed for temporal life and support. Marriage is for temporal life only, but most important as believing spouses is this, that we would

help each other for the life to come, help each other preserve faith and good conscience so that we get to heaven one day to the eternal marriage.

The second purpose that God has given, and these aren't necessarily in order, but the second purpose is for procreation, that God's created people would be able to continue and multiply. As it says here, "God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." So the continuation of God's people is another purpose of marriage. Children are a very precious part of the home. God gives as He sees fit. God gives to some few, to some many, and to some marriages not at all. This is in the hand of the Heavenly Father, and we want to trust in Him in this, that we would accept all children that God gives us as a gift. Children are a gift of the Lord. They are God's own possession, God's own heritage, and the fulfillment and happiness that children bring to a marriage is a striking matter that you can only really fully understand when you experience it yourself. So as the psalmist says, "Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is His reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them."

Then the relationship between husband and wife. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Paul, who is a single man, wrote very profoundly about marriage. So we see that God gave Paul the wisdom to write. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is head of the church, and He is the savior of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it." Some people would want to say that these words are outdated; they no longer fit the modern times. But God's word never changes; it never becomes outdated. It's the highest authority for life and for our faith. Wives are instructed here to be subject unto their husbands, or submit themselves unto their husbands unto the Lord. But then husbands are instructed to love their wives as Christ loved the church. When you stop to think about that which Paul has written here and used Christ as an example, isn't it so that us husbands have been given even a greater task than the wives because we are instructed to love our wives as Christ loved the church. Who could love so much as Christ has loved? We can never attain such high love. But these are the goals that God's word puts before us, and they are instructions that never grow old.

So the relationship between husband and wife is one of mutual responsibility for the marriage and for the family if God so blesses. And that's very important, that it's mutual responsibility that husbands don't

leave all the cares of the home to the wives or that wives would leave all to the husbands, but that together, hand in hand, we carry the burdens, the joys of the home. And this Bible text that I just read, as one brother has explained, being head of the house doesn't mean being dictator. But it means this, just like a plow going through the ground, the share of the plow or the point of the plow takes the brunt of the stones and the burdens that are encountered in the plowing. And so also, the husband is to bear the brunt, be a leader, be a supporter of the family. This is what being head of the family means and above all to take spiritual leadership in reading God's word and sowing the seed of the word in our home. Problems can arise if husbands and wives begin to debate who is doing more or whose job this is; we share all together. Marriage is a life of serving and sacrifice. Very important that we're willing to submit to each other and to serve. In the Finnish Bible, there's a phrase in Paul's letter to the Romans to compete in honoring one another. [This is not quite as clear in the English translation.] That's the kind of competition that we need in marriage – compete in honoring and serving one another.

Some of you remember our brother, Peter Nordstrom. I think in most every wedding sermon I've heard that he kept, he said that marriage is not a bed of roses. And so it is; marriage is not a bed of roses. There is much that needs to be done to care for the bond of love between each other. First of all, we need to learn to adapt to each other's ways. We think in courtship that we know each other through and through, but we don't yet fully know each other. It's a journey that never ends. We continue to get to know each other throughout our life, but it's not always easy. And if we think that we're going to change our spouse, we're mistaken, for we are pretty much what we are. We need to try to shave off some of the rough edges in marriage, but we can't change in a basic way who we are. It's a lot of work to keep the marriage bond healthy, and it's a lot of work to raise a family. But once we have taken that vow before God and His congregation, we accept that work, and we go forth in patience and longsuffering with one another. It's not always easy; sometimes as parents we become tired. As married couples, we become tired if we are struggling to understand one another, and we need to submit to one another and discuss matters in freedom and out of concern for one another and for the marriage.

The realities of financial matters sometimes stress the marriage. Sometimes there are differences between husbands and wives. They have had different backgrounds and are used to doing things a certain way at home, the childhood home that they came from, but the home together maybe is different, and we need to learn to adapt to the new home. And if there are financial difficulties, to bear this burden together and carry it together. Today we have possibility for getting so many things. It's very easy to obtain many temporal things. We have a high standard of living and to the point that, I think, many of us feel how often we get things that we probably can't really afford, and our wants become greater than our needs.

And wants and needs become confused. This can also be a burden in the marriage if we're not understanding wants and needs in the same way as husbands and wives and get ourselves into difficulty and debt and other such things.

So, marriage doesn't run on just romantic feelings and feelings of love, but it's above all something that we do. Love is something that we do; we serve each other and we honor each other and submit to each other. Sin is a destructive force in marriage, as our manual of sacred acts in the marriage rites relates. When one gets married, you are no longer living single life. You are no longer only living for yourself but for your spouse; you live for one another. And selfishness is part of our human condition, part of our fallen condition. It's easy to look after our own ways only in marriage. For example, fathers may be pretty used to hunting and doing their own thing and haven't had to consider the family, or have some special toys that they like, big boys' toys. And then when they get married, we need to learn to adapt to this new situation, and we need to learn to take into account the needs of our spouse and our family. Not that there's anything wrong with the activities that I just described, but that we above all think what's best for our marriage first of all, and our family, and secondly for ourselves.

Family planning and birth control are two destructive forces in marriage. They are sin. There are some Bible verses here noted. I won't go into reading them all, but this portion from Samuel says, "The Lord killeth and maketh alive." God gives life, God gives birth, and God appoints our day to die. This we believe and own by faith, and it's a very important principle in marriage. When Ruth married Boaz in the Old Testament, it's related in the book of Ruth that God gave her conception. It's God that gives conception. It's not for man to decide when the right time is because it never would be the right time, because of our selfish natures, our selfish condition. But when we leave it to God to decide, there's blessing in it. And we find that, even though sometimes we become tired, there's joy and blessing and inward peace and security when we trust in God in this matter also.

Then, divorce. When we make a vow to one another and before God and His congregation, promise to take our spouse in good times and in bad times, in prosperity and adversity alike, it's not something that we change as the world often does. It is not changeable other than by death – "Until death do you part. What God has joined together, let not man put asunder." As God's children, even if one experiences difficulties in marriage, divorce is not an option, according to God's word. But above all, we need to, with the help of God's children if problems come, work them out, speak about them, submit to each other, forgive one another, be open with each other, seek the help of God's kingdom. If sin gains a foothold in our marriage, it will destroy the marriage. Even if it's not something like birth control or family planning

– other sin. If our personal faith goes awry, it will destroy our marriage. Very important, dear brothers and sisters, to keep faith and good conscience in all phases of life.

I want to say, especially to you young people, younger ones of the young people, who are living at home yet. Take time now to value your childhood home. It's a very special time that you have right now. Life isn't only about running and pursuing a mate. Take time to enjoy your parents. Spend time at home and value your home. Learn about home life. Work for the good of your home. Support one another at home. You won't regret it. They will be precious memories that stay with you throughout your life. It's a very special matter for parents to be able to visit with their children as they become adults, very special to get to know them as adults and talk about things that adults talk about – life and the questions, joys and burdens of life. Do it while you still have opportunity.

If finding a mate becomes our only focus, we lose the richness of life. And even for those of you who are not living at home anymore, we can trust in God in this matter of finding a mate. We need not be overly concerned about it. Of course there's a natural desire in most all of us to find a mate. But live your life, enjoy life, and enjoy the work of God's kingdom and the fellowship of God's kingdom. And this matter of finding a mate will find you at the right time, at the time that God has appointed. It may just sneak up on you, sooner than you expect. I especially want to mention how, in the work of God's kingdom, what better place is there to get to know a potential spouse than to work together in the work of God's kingdom. My wife and I got to know each other at camp. Also, we knew each other before that, but camp work was one very special part of our time of getting to know one another. But we never broke the rule of courting at camp; we didn't do that, but we got to know each other at camp.

And some of you, I know, don't have a believing home. But you're part of this family of God and have many mothers and fathers who might not be your blood mothers and fathers, but they are in the spirit. I especially want to say to you older single brothers and sisters who are here, as we heard precious in the services tonight. You are dear to all of us, and I have often admired your lives and your joy that you have, even though I know this question can be a painful one at times. I was 32 by the time God granted me a spouse, and so I have some knowledge, some vision of what single life is like. But yet, I admire you when you are able to focus on other things in life and enjoy life, enjoy the richness of life. You are dear friends to us, precious to all of us. And it's important in God's kingdom that you are here, you are with us, you are supporting us. God has ordained this position in life for you at this time. We don't know what the future brings, but we trust in Him in all of these things. God gives a spouse if he sees fit. I believe that, and it's scriptural.

I've often thought about the mind of Abraham when, in that time, Abraham was concerned about his son Isaac finding a wife. He was mainly concerned about this, that he would find a believing wife. But at that time, they had arranged marriages, and so Abraham was sending his chief servant to go fetch a wife for Isaac. And so Abraham sent his servant and told him to go to the land of his kindred, his relations, and get a wife for Isaac. But the servant wondered, "Well, what would happen if this woman wouldn't want to come with me?" Abraham said, "The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred, which spake unto me and swear unto me saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land. He shall send His angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. He shall send the angel before thee." Abraham believed God would be with his servant, and Abraham was right. God gave Isaac Rebecca, a believing wife. And Rebecca was a joy to Isaac, especially when he lost his own mother, Sarah.

Then, when you think about this matter of finding a spouse, it's a matter of prayer. It's not a matter of our own works. Of course we have to do something to get to know someone, but it's a matter of prayer. Luther is supposed to have written – I haven't found the exact quote – but that you can start praying for a spouse already at seven years old. So if you haven't started yet, you've lost a lot of years of prayer in between here. All kidding aside, it is really a very important matter that we pray to God that He would grant us a spouse, a believing spouse, that could help us. Sometimes we have characteristics in mind that we think should be in our spouse. They should be beautiful, good looking, have lots of money, have a career – these are the things that sometimes come to mind. They should be nice, friendly, fun. But those aren't the most important matters. The characteristics that we have in our minds often change when we trust in God and God gives us a spouse. Our own characteristics, our own thoughts, many times are not fulfilled as we had thought they should be. But we see when we have received a spouse that God has known our needs better, and He has blessed us with much greater blessings in the spouse that He has given. So pray, dear brothers and sisters, pray that God would lead you in this. It's an important prayer. But the most important matter is that the one that we would be seeking as a spouse, is a believer. That's the first and most essential. And that's not because we have said it, but it's because God has said it. It's according to God's word.

Temporal preparation is important. There are realities in marriage that we talked about a few moments ago. It's important that we prepare ourselves for supporting a family if God so blesses us, that we're mature enough to accept the responsibilities of marriage, that we look to obtaining a career, work that will sustain us. These are all very important matters. They aren't the most important matter, but they are

nonetheless things that we should not disregard either. There is no unnecessary haste needed in finding a spouse. Believe, brothers and sisters, that God will give you a spouse if He sees fit. The one that God has intended for you, He won't give to somebody else. Believe this, accept this in faith, trust in God. Don't feel burdened by this, but trust in God and relax and enjoy life. Keep faith and good conscience, and God will bless, if He so sees fit, with a spouse.

Then, courtship. Courtship is a time to get to know one another better. It's not marriage, it's not engagement, but it's a time to get to know one another better and to pray that God would show you, "Is this one that I seem to be interested in the one that You have intended, God, for me as my spouse?" We could ask these kinds of questions: What does courtship mean to you? What would you do while courting? What about physical contact? First of all, with regard to physical contact. God's word instructs us to flee from lusts, flee from the attacks of the enemy of the soul. When two people are interested in each other, there is also a physical attraction that we need to keep in check with the power of the Spirit. Paul has written to the Colossians, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication (which is sex outside of marriage), uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience." I won't go into talking about all of these different areas, in the interest of time, but let it suffice that the matter of fornication is sexual relations outside of marriage, and evil concupiscence is sexual desire. So God instructs us to mortify, or press down, these powers in our flesh in courtship and in all phases of life. Then, "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." Very important instructions.

Then how do we get to know one another in courtship? It's by talking. Get to know one another from the heart by visiting and by observing. Sometimes it's good to observe a little while before showing your interest in someone. Observe, see what the testimony of the other believers is and, if you still seem interested after observing for a while, then maybe it's time to start courting and talking. This is very important, brothers and sisters, that we ask trusted believers about the one that we are interested in. Seek the blessing of believers. That is very critical. If God's children warn us and instruct us, even contrary to what seems so powerful in our own minds and flesh, it's important to heed those warnings and listen to those warnings. One thing that made us, as a courting couple, myself and Kathy, very happy is that the believers were happy about our courtship. That's a good sign if God's children are happy about the courtship. If they're not, maybe there's reason for us to pause and consider the matter further.

Relationships are not built on physical contact but on talking to each other from the heart. That's very important, dear brothers and sisters. Today we see a breakdown of the barrier between men and women, boys and girls. There is much more contact, physical contact, than there was even in the time I was growing up and yet much more than from the previous generation. We see it amongst our young people – more hugging, more contact. In today's thinking in the world today, we get to know one another by physical contact, sexual relations, but this is not according to God's word. Sometimes what is defined as sexual relations in the world is very confusing. Sometimes it's said, for example, making out or oral sex is not sex because it's not intercourse, but that's not true. That's not according to God's word. We want to reject the teachings, these kinds of teachings of our time. Kissing and making out is foreplay to sexual intercourse, and it's not for a Christian courtship.

So then what is appropriate in courtship? Sometimes in past times when we discussed this topic, from Finland came discussion that the courting couple should always be able to fit a Paivamies – that is their Christian paper – between them, or a Voice of Zion, we could say. But then they would joke that do we mean fitting between this way or this way? [on edge or flat] But these are good instructions, brothers and sisters. And obviously these are somewhat playful instructions or light instructions, but they're good instructions nonetheless, to take it in the spirit in which they are said. I remember one discussion that I've quoted. An old brother, Elmer Alajoki, when we were discussing this matter in a discussion meeting at the old Minneapolis church, said, when they were asking about what's appropriate, "Oh, you can hold hands." And I've thought about that over the years, that beyond holding hands and an occasional hug, there's not a lot of physical contact that is appropriate for a Christian courtship. It's a great blessing to be able to be able to enter into marriage without the scars of premarital sex, and that's why God's children speak about these things, so that the enemy of the soul can't deceive one into falling in this area and causing scars that one carries even though matters are forgiven.

It's a sensitive matter to talk about sexuality in such a big group, but we have found the need to speak openly about this because you as young people know and hear these things in school and in the world around you. And it's very important that we support our young people with instructions about these things that are according to God's word. Sexuality has been given by God; it's the result of His creation work, as we recalled a moment ago, and it's a gift to man, a gift to marriage, and it's a way for God's created people to multiply. But it's only for marriage, and there is a blessing in this, a great blessing in this. It is only in marriage that sexual life is realized with a sense of responsibility, as the book *Victory to Victory* states. These are very, very important matters to talk about and to discuss, even amongst

yourselves, to discuss the importance of understanding this matter in the way that God's word teaches, and that's contrary to what we hear so much in the world today.

Then I want to talk about a yet more sensitive area, because I know in the world there is teaching that is contrary to the teachings of God's word, and yet further to talk about this matter of sexuality and the subject of masturbation, first of all. And by masturbation, I mean, for the purpose of definition in this presentation, touching oneself in a way to cause sexual arousal. It's sin. This portion from scripture speaks about a man by the name of Onan, who spilled his seed on the ground, and God was not pleased with it. Even though the world teaches that masturbation is acceptable and even to be encouraged, it's sin according to God's word. There are other areas that tie very closely, and it's sometimes difficult for parents to speak about these things. But it's necessary that we do so, so that our young people and our children have the right understanding; it's our responsibility. But tying very closely to this area of masturbation is fantasy, fantasizing about sexual matters. That is also sin. Pornography is a real danger today with the internet, a real close matter to all of us when we use the internet. Pornographic pictures just pop up sometimes, and there's a real temptation there. But it's a very dangerous area, dear brothers and sisters. We have to battle against this attack of the enemy of soul. These temptations are familiar; all of these are familiar to God's children. We are not immune from them. But the gospel is the power of God. You can talk about these things to a trusted believer. Take care of wounds of conscience that come in these and be freed of those burdens. There is nothing new under the sun, dear brothers and sisters, in these matters. There are sealed vessels in God's kingdom to whom you can speak about these very things and take care of your life of faith. We are not looked down on, but we rejoice when God gives strength to battle against these and we can take care of them with the power of the gospel.

But I want to also make one mention of dress in this connection. God's word instructs us to flee youthful lusts. That's very important. But if our dress is such that it's provocative or it's revealing or it's encouraging sexual thoughts, it's not good, it's worldly. It makes it hard for our brothers and sisters in faith. So I would say, especially to you young people and to all of us, consider these matters of dress very carefully. Dress in a modest way, like God's word teaches. And then, your inward beauty shows. The outward beauty is not so important. Inward beauty is what is important. But if we dress contrary to the way we believe, it gives a bad picture. It doesn't give a true picture of the treasure that's in our heart. Take these things to heart. Last year when we had this kind of meeting, a youth discussion, our brother Jim Jurmu, if I remember correctly, quoted from one dress code, dress policy of a school, that had things in it like spaghetti straps being inappropriate for school, bare midriffs, shirt and top that reveal one's

midriff, halter tops, etc. And these were not acceptable for school. But shouldn't our "dress code" even be beyond what the school's dress code is. Take these things to heart; they're important matters.

But then I want to talk about one more sensitive area, and that's alternative lifestyles. We hear much about it in the world around us, and we need to talk about it in God's kingdom also. It's plain and simply sin to live a gay-lesbian lifestyle or to have homosexual relations. It's not according to God's word; it's sin. These Bible portions reveal that, and I'll quote from this Romans portion here, where it says, "Women did change the natural use into that which is against nature, and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men, working that which is unseemly." And it says that God was not pleased with this. It's sin, in spite of what is taught in the world around us.

We talked about this last night at our ministers' and board members' meeting, and there is a position statement that the LLC is developing on various topics. One of them is homosexuality. Sometimes people make the argument that genetics plays a part; I don't know the answer to that, and I won't get into discussing that tonight. [NOTE: Inadvertently the following point was omitted in the presentation. It was covered in the discussion period, however. *The August 1996 VZ editorial states the following: "As a legacy of the Fall we have an inclination to all evil." This includes homosexual sin against which a believer must battle with the power of the gospel.*] Some say God has created me as a homosexual. Be that as it may, no matter how much people appeal to creation or genetics, things that we don't fully understand, we know nonetheless that God's word says that homosexual relations are sin. I'm going to quote this position statement, this portion on homosexuality, where it says, "Appeals to God's creation work and genetics do not justify homosexual relations, for even if, in some cases, the homosexual is not responsible for the onset of the homosexual tendency, God's word nonetheless obligates him or her to abstain from its practice, in the same manner that it obligates an individual with normal sexual inclination to abstain from extramarital sexual relations. God does not approve the sexual relations of partners of the same sex, and He does not bless such relationships. It is with good reason that the Bible warns against this sin. The increase of homosexuality has always been an expression of moral decline." So even if someone would have tendency in that direction, it's still sin to practice homosexual relations.

Another article on this same topic speaks about the possibility to help someone who may be struggling with homosexual tendencies. It's quoted from the Paivamies. "We should be helping rather than bashing them, for many of them may long for mental as well as spiritual help. In addition, there are studies which show that help given at the right time can effect a change from homosexuality to heterosexuality."

(VZ Editorial Aug. 1996) But I want to say, especially to you young people, you who are going through adolescence. Sometimes there can be confusing thoughts like this, wondering, when the world teaches so much about homosexuality being acceptable, having doubts about your own sexuality or tendencies. But don't be confused by these things. If you have questions, you can freely talk to a trusted believer about them, about your fears, your questions. I know many believers have had questions about these things from time to time in their lives, but there are always answers in God's kingdom. And I worry about the flood of sin of this world. I worry about the emphasis the world puts on homosexual relations being acceptable, that some young person struggling in their own adolescence may begin to believe that and wonder about themselves and be confused by the teachings of the world in their own thoughts. But remember, these things can be talked about. There are trusted believers with whom you can speak about them. And there are some articles that we have on file, if anyone is interested in reading more about this topic, that we could provide.

But then, God loves the sinner but hates sin. As one article (VZ Editorial Jan. 1999) says, we do not practice gay bashing, as the term is. We do not condone what God's word calls sin. Homosexual relations are sin, but yet neither can we condone gay bashing. We have opportunity in society to interject our views, scriptural views, and we can do this. But we do this in a respectful way and through those channels that are available to us, not through violence or violent talk or gay bashing; it's not right, it's sin. We need the mind of Christ.

Then I want to move on to the last area, and it's getting to be about time for me to quit here. And this is an article that's called "My Battle" in the Voice of Zion (Feb. 1998). And I won't take time to read this article, but it's one that we have on file. It's an article where, I believe, an older single person wrote about a trial that they had, and they called it "My Battle," or was that the title that was given to the article. It's not easy sometimes to be older and single and wondering what God's will is for you. There is much temptation in this area. There's a temptation to seek a spouse from the world; there are many nice people in the world. But God's word does not condone this either, as we mentioned earlier. But we understand this trial, dear single people. It's not always easy.

But this sister who wrote this article wrote about the struggle that she had when she became infatuated with an unbelieving person and thought that they would just be friends but soon realized the friendship was going much further. They began to enjoy each other's company more and more, to the point where there was this kind of "wrestling match." She hoped that God would grant him the grace of repentance so that they could be together, but it didn't happen. She wrestled with this, but she said she lost the

wrestling match. The only alternative was to give up this friendship and she did so, and it says, “All other alternatives and compromises would’ve endangered my faith and removed my eternal freedom and peace. I cried over the pain of giving him up. I could not even thank the Lord for His protection, that He allowed obedience to win over disobedience. Nevertheless, God had fought beside me, on my side. Although I felt at first that He had worked against me, later I discovered that He even heard my selfish prayer and gave me much more and far better than I could ask – an escort who turned out to be a far more right and suitable spouse and friend. However, a greater miracle than the gift of love is that I still have, after this battle and many other trials, the name of a child of God.” That’s what’s most important. Marriage is just for time, just for this life; but faith, the gift of faith that we own brings us to the next life, to heaven’s home. So even if you are struggling in this, as you sometimes do, look for blessings in life. As our brother Jim brought out in the sermon tonight, think about all these precious escorts that you have around you, which is one blessing. And you single people, even older single people, are precious to us, dear escorts to us – we need you – and pray for contentment and thankfulness. Remember that God blesses obedience. You are remembered in Zion.

But then returning at the end here to this, the fact that God has made us as male and female. We can enjoy these different roles that God has given us. We can enjoy God’s creation work when He has made both male and female, enjoy one another’s company, and enjoy those closest escorts that we have as our spouse. In spite of what we hear in society today, in spite of the difficult matters that we’ve discussed tonight, and the problems in society, the sexual deviance in society, the broken marriages in society, all of those things. In spite of all those things, marriage is just as beautiful to God’s children and just as holy as it was in the time of Abraham. It’s a wonderful estate that God has given, a holy estate, a precious estate. Don’t let the ways of this world dim our vision of what this holy estate is.

In all things, dear brothers and sisters, remember that the gospel is the power of God. No matter is too sensitive. No matter is too private that it can’t be discussed with trusted believers. There are sealed vessels. There are trusted believers that you can share the concerns of your heart with. Don’t believe the sermon of the enemy of the soul. There’s nothing new under the sun that hasn’t been experienced before. Nothing that you’re experiencing is different than what others have experienced. You can open your heart when you need to, to speak of even those very private matters that only you are aware of. The gospel is the power of God. We are faulty in these things, but God is gracious and forgiving to penitent sinners. Dear brothers and sisters tonight, be uplifted and be encouraged to believe all of your sins forgiven in Jesus’ name and precious blood. The gospel lifts us up and it carries us and it brings us to the destination. May God bless and keep us now and always.

Now we will sing a song and, as the service director mentioned in the beginning, if we have desire to discuss matters more, we can do so this evening. But if not, that's okay too. It's been a long day, but we want to offer opportunity if you want to discuss things.

And one last thought in seeking trusted believers, counselors. Seek those who have experience in these matters, those who can help you. You have precious escorts in your young brothers and sisters, but sometimes in these difficult questions it's good to seek someone that has more experience in life that can help and guide and instruct you. Isn't it a precious matter that we have such escorts in God's kingdom.