

Sunday, September 6, 2009

**Matthew 5.31-32
The Two Shall Become One
SWCOB 9.06.09**

From a kid's point of view, love is;

“When my grandmother got arthritis,
She couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore.

So my grandfather does it for her all the time,
Even when his hands got arthritis too.”

“When someone loves you,
The way they say your name is different.”

“Love is when someone hurts you,
And you get so mad,
But you don't yell at them
Because you know it would hurt their feelings.”

“Love is when mommy makes coffee for daddy,
And she takes a sip before giving it to him,
To make sure the taste is okay.”

“Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas,
If you stop opening presents and listen.”

“Love is like a little old woman and a little old man,
Who are still friends even after they know each other so well.”

“Love is when mommy sees daddy smelly and sweaty,
And still says he handsomer than Robert Redford.”

“Love is when your puppy licks your face,
Even after you left him alone all day.”

“You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it.
But if you mean it, you should say it a lot,
People forget!” (LightSinger 3.14.02)

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So what happens when a married couple,
Say they've fallen out of love?

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A married couple went to their pastor and said,

“We're going to get a divorce,

But we want to make sure you approve of it.”

They further explained,
That there was no feeling left in their marriage,
And hoped the pastor would affirm their desire to divorce.
Instead the pastor said to the husband,
‘The Bible says you’re to love your wife,
As Christ loved the church.’

The husband responded, ‘Well, that’s impossible!’

The pastor then said,
‘If you can’t begin at that level,
Then begin at a lower level.

The Bible says that you are to love your neighbor as yourself.

Can you at least love her as you would a neighbor?’

The husband again remarked, ‘No, I can’t do that.’

The pastor then said, ‘If you can’t love at that level,
Love her at this level,

The Bible says, ‘love your enemies’
Why don’t you begin there?’”

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Today, we come to the third set of contrasting statements,
Found in the Sermon on the Mount.

It has been said

But I say

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Churches have responded in a wide variety of ways,
To divorce and remarriage.

The old Brethren wouldn’t allow it.
You were either not welcomed or church disciplined.

Other churches treat divorce almost casually,
Afraid to teach and preach about it,
Because of the large percentage of divorced in the congregation.

What guidance do we have in the Bible,
That would help us deal with issues,
Surrounding divorce and remarriage?

Can we be faithful to God by proclaiming divorce a sin,
But still hold those involved in a spirit of grace?

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Let's take a quick survey of what the Bible says about divorce.

Jesus makes a comment on divorce here,
And then later elaborates on the subject,
In Matthew 19.3-8

**Some Pharisees came to him to test him.
They asked,**

**“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife
For any and every reason?”**

**“Haven't you read,” he replied,
“That at the beginning the Creator
‘Made them male and female,’”**

**And said,
‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother,
And be united to his wife,
And the two will become one flesh?’**

So they are no longer two, but one.

**Therefore what God has joined together,
Let man not separate.”**

**“Why then,” they asked,
“Did Moses command that a man give his wife,
A certificate of divorce and send her away?”**

**Jesus replied,
“Moses permitted you to divorce your wives,
Because your hearts were hard.**

But it was not this way from the beginning.

**I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife,
Except for marital unfaithfulness,
And marries another woman commits adultery.”**

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Now let us look back into the Old Testament,
And find what Moses said about divorce.

Deuteronomy 24.1-3

**If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him,
Because he finds something indecent about her,**

**And he writes her a certificate of divorce,
Gives it to her and sends her from his house,**

**And if after she leaves his house
She becomes a wife of another man,**

**And her second husband dislikes her
And writes her a certificate of divorce,**

**Gives it to her and sends her from his house,
Or if he dies,
Then her first husband, who divorced her,**

Is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled.

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Moses was trying to deal with the gradual erosion of marriage,
In the life of the early Hebrew nation.

Moses allowed a certificate of divorce,
Hoping to curb the frivolous and whimsical attitude,
Toward the institution of marriage.

Jesus was trying to write the law on hearts rather than stone.
Jesus wanted disciples to strive for inner obedience to the Word,
Rather than just a legal, outer obedience,
That the Pharisees always were testing.

Divorce was common in both the Old Testament world,
And the New Testament world.

Remember the woman at the well?

She was married five times,
And the man she had been living with
Was not her husband.

Jesus preached against the trends of society,
Which sought to find any excuse to divorce.

Jesus reminded the Pharisees,
That this was not how it was meant to be.

Divorce and remarriage was not a part of God's plan.

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Based on the Biblical evidence,
We, the church cannot condone divorce.

According to the Bible,
Divorce is sin.

However, if we look deeper,

What we begin to see,
Is that divorce is more a symptom of sin.

Divorce is a symptom of sin already present in a marriage.

The sin of unfaithfulness,
The sin of sexual, physical, emotional abuse,
The sin of alcoholism and drug addiction,
And the sin of neglect and intolerance.

The list is long and ugly.

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There may be times after all else fails,
And the well being of the spouse and children are at risk,
That the only option left is to separate.

Had those sins in the marriage been successfully dealt with,

Had the spirit of grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation,
Been present in both parties,

It might never have reached the point of divorce.

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A woman went to a divorce lawyer and said,
“I want a divorce and I really want to hurt my husband.”

The lawyer thought a bit and then suggested,
That since she was going to divorce him anyway,

Why not speak only good of him,
Not to criticize him,
And every time he does something nice,
Commend him for it.

And then when she was ready to divorce him,
Drop the bomb; he'll be crushed beyond repair.

So she agreed to this approach,
And for the next three months,
She complimented her husband for every thing he did.

For three months she told him what a great man he was.

You know what happened to the relationship?

After three months,
She forgot about the divorce,
And they went on a second honeymoon!

(Erwin Lutzer, "Learning to Love")

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There is a reason that Jesus proclaimed the sanctity of marriage.
Not only because it was wrong in the eyes of God,
But that marriage makes a lot of practical sense.

University of Virginia professor Steven Nock comments,

"We haven't discovered a better way of sustaining
Adults and children than marriage."

This statement was taken from a study entitled,
"Why Marriage Matters,
21 Conclusions from the Social Scientists."

The report found that communities,
With a majority of successful marriages,
Are happier and healthier,
Than communities with a high divorce rate.

In the same report, Diane Sollee,
Founder of the Coalition
For Marriage and Family Education states,

"[If you think you are] falling out of love,
There's a reason to hang in there.

Try to work out your differences.

If you do, then in the end,
Everyone will be better off."

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In a book written by Judith Wallerstein entitled,
"The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce,"

The author makes the point that,
After all things are considered,

"A lousy marriage still beats a great divorce."

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Suleyman Guresci divorced his wife of 21 years,
In an effort to find someone more compatible.

In order to find someone more to his taste,
He entered a computer dating service,

The kind that evaluates your written profile,
And suggests matches for you.

From a list of 2000 prospective brides,

The computer selected his former wife,
Who had also signed up with the same dating service.

Their reaction?

They remarried nine months after their divorce.

He concluded,
“I didn’t know that my ex-wife had been the ideal
Counterpart for a marriage.

I decided to give it another try by being more tolerant toward her.”

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How should the church respond to divorce?

Richard B. Hays in his book,
“The Moral Vision of the New Testament,”
States six points;

1. We must recover the Biblical vision for marriage.
 We should not be afraid to teach the sanctity of marriage.

2. The church must reaffirm its historic teaching,
That since marriage is a covenant before God,
Divorce is contrary to God’s will.

3. The church must teach that marriage is not grounded,
In feelings of love,
But in the practice of love.

4. The church should respond to a troubled marriage,
By helping to bring grace and reconciliation,
Through its own love and support.

5. However, in some situations,
Despite concerted efforts at reconciliation,
A divorce may occur.

If and when it happens,
 Churches should continue,
 To love and support the separated partners.

6. Remarriage after divorce,
Cannot be completely excluded as a possibility.

Although some biblical texts discourage or prohibit this option,
Other texts seem to leave the door open,
Under certain circumstances.

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The church must be a witness,
Against shallow and false understandings,
Of marriage in our culture.

We must bear witness to God's creative intent,
For the permanence of marriage.

We must bear witness to the power of the Holy Spirit,
That is able to transform brokenness.

We must bear witness to Christ's Spirit,
Of love, grace, and forgiveness.

We must never exhaust the God-given resources,
Available to us as we seek to live in marriage.

Divorce is wrong,
But so is greed, envy, jealousy, anger,
Slander and lust.

The church needs to deal equitably
With all sin,
And not single out one sin,
As greater than the rest.

The church must seek to find ways,
To confront the sins which create divorce,
Rather than ostracize divorced people.

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Harry Emerson Fosdick said,
 "It is not marriages that fail,
It is people that fail."

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We cannot compromise the teachings of Jesus,
Just because we fail to live up to them.

The church has an obligation to identify sin where it sees it.

The church also has an obligation,
To reach out in love and reconciliation
 To those who struggle in marriage, and in divorce.

The church's place is to call sin a sin,
And to embrace the sinner
And help to restore and transform,

Through the forgiving grace,

Found in the redemptive love of Christ our Savior.

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I know something of the shame, guilt and disgrace,
That follows a divorce.

I know how the church can treat you.

I also know of the boundless grace,
That is available to all sinners, even me.

I know what it means to be and to feel forgiven.

And if you are struggling in marriage or in divorce,
I pray you would know Jesus,
And the bounty of his grace and love.

My prayer is Paul's prayer found in Ephesians 3.16-19;

**I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you,
With power through his Spirit in your inner being,**

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

**And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,
May have power, together with all the saints,**

**To grasp how wide and long and high and deep
Is the love of Christ,
And to know this love that surpasses all knowledge—**

That you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

In Jesus name. AMEN.