

Learning To Love

Ephesians 5:21-30

Preface

Hardly a week goes by that I don't have a discussion with someone about marital problems. This week was no exception. The sermon you are about to hear is one recycled and reworked. I make no apologies for preaching it again and again for it so desperately needs to be heard and applied.

I have a saying that is probably not a good one coming from a Pastor but God understands the point I am making. I often say that 98% of the time marriage is pure heaven. But that other 2% of the time it is pure hell.

If I have an argument with a friend or co-worker, I can go home and get away from the anxiety. The argument is still on my mind but it is not terribly painful.

But when we have a conflict with our spouse, the pain is almost unbearable. Our spouse is our best friend 98% of the time. We confide in one another and we share everything together. We sleep together, make love together, eat together, worry together, struggle together and celebrate together.

So when we have conflict with our spouse, our entire world is upside down. Suddenly we aren't talking to the person we most want to talk to. We aren't hugging the person we most want to hug. It's hard to sleep beside someone with whom you are angry. Marital problems are very painful and emotional.

God's word gives us clear instructions for having happy successful marriages. Usually the people who need to hear God's instruction for a happy marriage never come to church where they can hear it.

I marvel at the young couples today. The thing they need the most to survive their marriage is the thing they consistently turn their back on. So I applaud those of you who are here today to hear God's word. I pray that it will speak to your heart and touch your life as it has mine.

In Ephesians 5:22 God's word gives us very specific instructions for making a marriage not just work but strive and grow.

Scripture Text

²¹Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²²Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰for we are members of his body. Ephesians 5:22-30 NIV

Introduction

Someone once said, "Love is a dream. Marriage is the alarm clock."

Most of us have no idea what we are getting into when we get married. Before marriage, we have visions of happy bliss. After marriage, we wake up to the reality of the struggle to make a marriage work.

I'm convinced that if we really knew what we were getting into, we would approach marriage more cautiously. If we knew the financial strains that come with marriage, we would not spend so much money on the wedding and honeymoon. If we understood the enormous responsibility that comes with children, we would not be in such a rush to have them.

I am not saying that marriage is bad or that I have regrets about my marriage. The point is simply that making a marriage work is challenging. Making a marriage work requires effort, sacrifice and commitment unlike any other relationship or endeavor in life.

Before marriage our understanding of love quite limited. Love to us at that point is driven mostly by physical attraction.

I would to give you some secrets to making a marriage work.

1. Recognize your problems

Too many marriages have failed over issues that could have been resolved with the right attention. We must first recognize where we have problems.

Sweeping the problems under the rug will not help. Just choosing not to talk about them will not get them resolved. Just because a problem is not acknowledged, doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

Marital problems are like cancer. They are best caught early and treated early. Like cancer marital problems cannot be ignored.

2. Understand your problems are not unique

When I meet with a married couple, I often ask; "What are the areas in which you are having problems?" They may say it a little differently but the answers are always the same. The trouble is usually in the areas of Money, Sex, Household Responsibilities and Dealing with the children.

Most couples struggle over the same issues. It is important to understand that other couples have the same struggles. You are not the only couple that argues over sex, money and the household responsibilities.

This is where Christian friends are so important. Making good close Christian friends will give you someone with who you can share your struggles without having them tell you to just divorce.

Trust me; you don't want the world's answers for solving your problems. Our world is richer than ever before. It is more technologically advanced, people are more educated, we have more laws, more government programs, and more non-profit organizations; more of everything. And yet our world has more problems than ever; especially in the areas of marriage.

3. Take divorce off the table

The saddest place I have ever been is not the hospital or the funeral home. It is at the court house in Mobile, AL during divorce court day.

I watched couples stood in the corners of the hall with their attorneys trying to work out the details before they entered the court room. I watched as they stood before the judge and fought over the very things that were the product of their dreams. The things they worked so hard to accomplish and acquire were being divvied up like candy to kids on Halloween night.

The Bible tells us God hates divorce. Jesus said in Matthew 19:8, *"Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard."*

Marriage is a Christian institution ordained by God. It is a covenant made between a man and a woman in the sight of God.

Divorce is usually centered in selfishness and hardness of the heart towards God's law that ends marriages and families today. Make up your mind that divorce is not an option.

3. Practice being thankful

Psalm 100:4 says "We should be able to always be thankful regardless of the circumstance."

God's word teaches us that in all things we should be thankful. Christians should have no problem finding many things for which to be thankful.

Being thankful is the biblical prescription for being happy. Satan will try his best to get you to focus on one or two things that dissatisfy you. But God says not to focus on those things but on the blessings.

The same is true in our marriages. Be thankful. Look for things for which you can be thankful. My wife never cooks a meal that I don't thank her generously and let her know how much I enjoy it.

When we express gratitude, we help ourselves by keeping our attitude positive and focused on the good. We also encourage our spouse by letting them know how much we appreciate what they have done.

4. Learn to love like Jesus

Our text today tells us how to have happy thriving marriages. To summarize this one might say, “Learn to love like Jesus.”

We must learn to love like Jesus loves the church. We must learn to love unselfishly. We must learn to practice loving sacrificially.

When you think about it, we are born selfish creatures. As children, we really didn't like to share. When we were forced to share, we always wanted the larger piece of the candy bar.

We are selfish about everything. We want to do the things that make us happy rather than the things that others want to do. It goes against our natural inborn characteristics to love unselfishly.

But Paul admonishes us to do just the opposite in our marriages. We are to put our spouse above ourselves.

a. Wives

When Paul says, “Wives submit yourselves,” he isn't calling for wives to be slaves. But he is saying put your husband above yourself. Put your husband's happiness and well being above your own.

²² Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. ²⁴ Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Eph 5:22-24 KJV

The problem isn't with our understanding the scripture. The problem is accepting it and being obedient to it. Again, we are too selfish by nature to be willing to submit to anyone.

A man instinctively wants the respect and appreciation of his woman. A wife who loves and respects her husband does everything she can to care for him and make him look good. Her greatest desire is to make him happy.

Illus: Welding sites and things men make for their wives.

Women today refuse to accept this command. Look at our homes today. When we disobey God and live by man's ideals, we get man's results.

Trust the Word of God. Obey Christ and honor your husband. Submit to your husband.

b. Husbands

Notice verse 21: *²¹Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

Husbands don't think this is a one way street. Paul is talking about mutual submission. And notice how Paul goes into great detail to paint a picture for men as to how much they must love and give for their wives.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. Eph 5:25-28 NIV

I particularly like the words in verse 28: *“In this same way...”*

Paul is saying that likewise, men must give it all for their wives. Men are to love their wives as Christ loved the church.

People are sinners, yet Christ died on the cross for them. People rebuked Christ, yet He forgave them.

Husbands who truly love their wives will do anything to protect them and honor them. They will do nothing to hurt them.

If a man makes Christ's love for the church the pattern for loving his wife, then he will love her **sacrificially**. Christ gave himself for the church, so the husband in love, gives himself for his wife. This does not just mean work to bring home the bacon.

A husbands love must be sanctifying. The husband is set apart for the wife and the wife is set apart for the husband.

Any interference with this God given arrangement is sin.

The husband is not to use his wife for his pleasure. He is to show the kind of love that is mutually rewarding and sanctifying.

c. Both

A home that does not obey the Word of God invites civil war.

The way to overcome our selfishness is to experience and exemplify the love of Christ. The only way a wife can submit to her husband is to first submit to Jesus Christ as Lord.

The only way a husband can love his wife like Christ loves the church is to submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ in his life.

Paul makes it clear that in marriage the husband and wife become “one flesh.” Therefore, whatever each does to the other, they do to themselves.

Satan’s easiest attack is when a man and woman are not satisfying one another. There should be no starvation for love in a relationship. The husband and wife should love each other and always desire to make sure the other knows of their love for them.

The best marriages where there is the greatest fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control is where each partner is more concerned about the other than themselves.

Conclusion

Proverbs 30 contains a number of sayings by a wise man known as Agur. He makes a number of poetic observations about life. Beginning in verse 18, he cites three things that are amazing..

¹⁸ “There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: ¹⁹ the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden.” Proverbs 30:18-19 NIV

Agur says “the way of a man with a maiden” is amazing. Paul describes it in verses 31-32 as a profound mystery.

The can deepen your love in ways that the young cannot grasp or understand. Your marriage can work if you will trust God and be obedient to God’s guidelines.

Your marriage can be an amazing thing, a profound mystery. Even with your differences and personalities, you can love one another for the rest of your life. You can grow old together and your love can grow stronger with each passing year.

The musketeers used to say, “One for all and all for one.” I am saying, “Each for the other, both for the Lord.”

12 Practical Steps To A Happy Marriage

1. Center your marriage around the Lord.
2. Develop Christian friends through church.
3. Observe God's definition of love.
4. Bestow words of appreciation liberally.
5. Never criticize in public, no matter what.
6. Treat one another after marriage the way you did before.
7. Plan little surprises, acts of kindness for each other.
8. Make time to talk and enjoy one another.
9. Place the others happiness or good above your own.
10. Never speak or air private problems outside the home.
11. Don't live beyond your means.
12. Work to make your intimate life beautiful.