

## Disappointed in marriage?

It may be that we have lost sight of God's purposes for marriage.

Last week I attempted to share Jesus Christ's point of view about divorce and marriage. He consistently refused to weigh-in on "righteous divorce." Instead, He pointed His hearers to God's original intention for marriage. Namely, that it is not good for man to live alone, that husband and wife are "one flesh," and that what God has joined together, people should not separate. (Mt 19:4) Instead of figuring out ways to righteously divorce, men (in particular) should figure out ways to stay married! This upset Jesus' disciples. So much so they bluntly said, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." (Mt 19:10) Jesus countered and said that not all could accept this teaching, but those who could, should.

God permits divorce because of our hardness of heart. He understands that in certain situations life can simply become intolerable. But to leave one wife in order to marry another is flat-out adultery, according to Jesus, whether or not any sexual infidelity occurred. This we cannot do. (Mt 19:8-9)

"But what if...?" we ask. Reasons for seeking to divorce are many and varied. I understand why so many people can't make their marriage work. Marriage is hard. Our culture is churning out person after person who simply does not know how to live with another human being. A spirit of "me first" has come upon us all. The walls of respectability surrounding not-getting-divorced have fallen, and since women finally do have some options, it is no wonder there is so much divorce. But one reason for getting a divorce should be set aside: that of no longer being in love.

The ancient Greek culture (the language of which produced the New Testament) had four words to describe our one word "love." C.S. Lewis has written a wonderful book titled, *THE FOUR LOVES*, in which he carefully helps English readers see the distinctions. "Eros," romantic love, "Storge," love of a parent for a child, "Philia," love for a friend, and "Agape," love from God are indeed very different things.

Almost certainly, if you ask a married person in our culture, "Do you love your spouse?" they will think you mean, "Are you 'in love with' your spouse?" At that point they will either answer truthfully "yes," or either in embarrassment and disappointment, "no." Would it shock you to hear that God never



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intended for Eros, "being in love," to be sufficient to carry us through the hardships marriage must deal with? Eros is never presented in the Bible as a sustaining force to continue the covenant of marriage, nor for that matter even a primary reason to get married to begin with! But today, if you ask almost any couple seeking marriage, "Why do you want to get married?" the first thing out of their mouths will usually be the statement, "because we are in love."

Now, lest it be thought that I am just a grumpy middle-aged man, we should all agree that Eros is wonderful. Capricious, for sure, but wonderful. It is the most amazing human experience of life, outside of religious conversion. No wonder it is magnified in song, art, literature, and cinema. No wonder we seek it so earnestly. Sadly too, no wonder that when Eros dies, or takes a vacation, many conclude their marriage must have been a mistake, and set out to find someone else with whom Eros can be re-kindled.

But Eros is not God's purpose for marriage. What are God's purposes for marriage?

There are at least four. First of all, marriage is for companionship. "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Gen 2:18) Eros does have a place in companionship, but so with both Storge and Philia. How wonderful it is to see an elderly couple, tenderly living their lives together to the end.

A second purpose for marriage, at least among Christians, is the modeling to this world, both seen and unseen, of the relationship between Jesus and His people. (Eph 5:22-33) In what surely is one of the most politically-incorrect passages of Scripture, husbands are compared to Jesus and wives are compared to His people. (By the way, almost everything in the Bible is politically incorrect. The Bible is the Word

of God. People can accept it or reject it, but I'm through, I hope, trying to apologize for it!) To the extent that husbands lead in the way of God and lay down their lives for their wives, they imitate Jesus. To the extent that wives yield to and praise their husbands, they imitate Jesus' people. Most marriages I have known over the years do not do this model justice. But I have known a few that do. And they are just amazing—I have experienced blessing from God just to be in their presence. Are you disappointed you may no longer be "in love?" Maybe you and I have been taught wrong. Maybe SNOW WHITE, CINDERELLA, and SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE have unintentionally misled us. How about the love between Jesus and His people? That is model worth following.

A third purpose in marriage is for the shaping of Christ-like character. Again, only Agape, love from God Himself, is of use for us here. Eros may begin a marriage, but only Agape can create the inward tendencies towards self-denial and "other-centeredness" that is the essence of what God is after. What better laboratory for creating people characterized by divine love could there be than in the daily rub of marriage? Where else are we going to learn how to "bear with one another," to "prefer one another before yourself," to "forgive as the Lord forgave you," and to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," if not in marriage? Here is where even difficult marriages have wonderful purpose. We are being trained to reign with Jesus for the next life.

A fourth purpose, not often talked about, is the creation of a dynasty of godly men and women. Our God shows love to "a thousand generations" of those who love Him. (Ex 20:6) Have you declared the blessings of Almighty God over your not-yet-present, great-great-great grandchildren? It is fitting, I believe, to proclaim in faith that not only our own immediate family, but ALL succeeding generations coming from us, will be blessed of God and utterly devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ, and be separated from any curse or contagion of evil. Why not believe for this?

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