

# HE WHO LOVES HIS WIFE LOVES HIMSELF

In recent years, marriage has often been vilified and many pessimistic predictions have been made about its future. Some sociologists and psychologists have even gone so far as to say that marriage may be finished as a social institution. Alvin Toffler, in his best seller Future Shock, discusses alternate social units which he says may replace the traditional "nuclear family."<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the so called "failure" of marriage is not a failure of the idea, but of the quality of execution. It must be remembered that marriage was originated by God. One author has stated that in the opening chapters of Genesis, God after having said "it is good" seven times, finally said something was "not good." What he said was not good, was "for man to be alone."<sup>2</sup> I am glad to add that in very recent journal publications, there appears to be a reconfirmation of marriage. It seems that having been given time to experiment with the so-called "replacements of marriage," they have proved out to be so negative, that even with all of its problems, the traditional family arrangement looks good by comparison.

It is the thesis of this presentation that what has been missing in marriage and thus permits failure, is love...not the confused Hollywood-inspired idea of love which seems little more than infatuation...but the Biblical concept of love as commitment, service, understanding, and devotion.

The Biblical Text that serves as a basis for this study is Ephesians 5:21-33. "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself,

and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

There is a whole course of instruction as to the content of love in the above passages. Husbands are to love their wives as they love their own bodies, as they have literally become one flesh together. Husbands are to nourish and cherish their wives, as Christ does the Church. What an exalted state we find ourselves in when we marry, one that can be compared to the relationship that Christ has with his own spiritual body, the Church! Also, not even the otherwise closest human relationship, that of child to parents, can be allowed to interfere with the marriage union. A husband is to leave his father and his mother to be joined to his wife. His whole attention and being are to be dedicated to the loving of his wife.

Let it again be said that when marriage fails, it is a failure to love as the Bible enjoins, and not a failure of God's design for marriage. In the many years that I have served as a professional marriage and family counselor, I have not seen one case of marriage failure that could not have been avoided by a greater commitment to love, and the demands of love.

It is also my opinion that husbands are greatly at fault and bring great distress within the family when they do not rise to the Biblical challenges of love. Many wives feel let down and betrayed when they are joined to partners who do not show their love. As one writer suggests, they end up with a headache, rather than with the Biblical head.<sup>3</sup>

Earlier I mentioned the confusion that exists as to the nature of love, and the negative influence of much popular propaganda. In particular it is to be decried that so many think of love as an overpowering emotion. While I do not deny that love will include emotion, the vital aspect of Biblical love is a commitment to care for and work toward the fulfillment of another person. It is an active principle, visible because of what it does. In fact, love is without exception described by its actions in the New Testament. One writer states that too many are seeking someone to love them, rather than seeking to love another person...persons with their love buckets empty, looking for someone to fill them, rather than persons with buckets filled by the Lord seeking someone with whom to share their love.<sup>4</sup>

In stating that "he who loves his wife loves himself," the Holy Spirit was directing Paul to write that just as we provide for the needs of our bodies, because we love them, so we must provide for the needs of

our wives because we love them. It is therefore legitimate to ask, "what are the needs of a wife?"

Many have undertaken to answer this important question, and for each husband it must involve a life time of research. The needs are many, and they may change from one period of life to another. An effort will be made here to just list some that seem very important. Wives need a sense of personal being and identity, the right to themselves. Loving ones wife does not mean an engulfment of her, nor does it mean she must become a carbon copy of the sentiments and opinions of the husband... rather it demands aiding her to her own distinctive individual development as a person with her talents and gifts. Wives need a lover who is ever creatively searching ways of keeping that love new and exciting. Among other things this demands time and sharing together. Wives need security, which means husbands must be careful not to dump too much on their wives. Wives need a spiritual leader who will aid them in their efforts to serve the Lord, and to grow in Him. Wives need to be recognized, to be praised for their accomplishments so that they will feel good about themselves. Wives need not to be taken for granted. Wives need criticism, but criticism that is given in a climate of love, fully insulated by a great deal of positive reinforcement. Wives also need social and intellectual stimulation.

While the lover-husband does all that he can to show love to his wife, he also tries his best to avoid hurting her in any way. Realizing that God has joined them together in one flesh, he understands that when he hurts his wife, he hurts himself. Therefore, he thoughtfully avoids foolish actions and words that injure, just as he tries to avoid that which would do injury to his own body.

Fortunately, all imperfect husbands are teamed up with imperfect wives. In most instances, wives are very patient with husbands who show they are making an honest effort to learn and display the lessons of love. Part of the joy of marriage is the progress that husbands and wives make together in their ability to demonstrate the love they have for each other. It should also be added that for the less imaginative husbands, a good deal of thoughtful, well written material is available to help us understand and meet the needs of our wives. Two works that I think especially good are: 'James Dobson's What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women (Tyndale House, 1975), and Cecil Osborne's The Art of Understanding Your Mate (Zondervan 1970).

Of course, the best help comes from the Word of God I would like to conclude with the quotation of a number of verses that I believe will prove especially helpful to the husband who is accepting the challenge to love his wife as he loves himself. "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). "Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins" (I Peter 4;8), "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Colossians 3:14). "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends" (I Corinthians 13:4—8).

1. Toffler, Alvin *Future Shock*, Random House, 1970, pp. 238-259.
2. Strauss, Richard *Marriage Is For Love*, Tyndale House Publication, 1973, p. 17.
3. Frye, John W. *Moody Monthly*, "The Biblical Husband: Head, Not Headache," May 1978, p. 71 ff.
4. Guder, Eileen *To Live In Love*, Zondervan 1967, pp. 17-18.

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