

A Parable of Love

Let us take a look at the Law of God through the eyes and perspective of marriage between a man and a woman. The love between a man and a woman is often twisted and misunderstood and too often falls short of the design of the Creator. Let us see if we can make sense of it all.

Two people meet as they so often do. A man and a woman and as sometimes happens they are attracted to each other and start a courtship. At first they adore each other and everything is wonderful. Life itself seems to just be better. That dull boring job isn't so bad anymore. The old clunky car is even now a great car as long as it gets the two of them together again and again and again. Life is good.

After a period of time, maybe a few months or maybe a few years, they decide to marry. Big decision, do they know what they are getting into? Probably not, only that life is better with each other and that some how life would be unbearable without each other. So, they make a covenant, an agreement, in writing even, signed and spoken before witnesses. Sounds serious. Some of the covenant is not spoken and is taken for granted and most of it is not defined or explained. After all, who says in their marriage vows – I will not commit adultery; and what couple sits down and discusses and documents what is meant by “in sickness or in health or what it means to love and to cherish? So, they make a promise to be together for life. Whatever that means to each of them the other will find out as they live it out in the years to come. Mean while they get their own place and start a home and family and everybody is happy, especially their parents.

Flash forward a couple of years and they are both still happy but the honeymoon is coming to an end or is already over with. Things are cooling off anyway. By now they have grown accustomed to each other, accepting one another's habits and making some new ones to please each other. Life is still good, especially with the new car.

Let's go forward another couple of years and we see they have been drifting apart. The wife is working and is not dependent on the husband for the financial security that she desires. The adoration and human touch that she needs have to be continually sought after from her husband who has his own little world where he is getting his needs met. So, the wife reaches out to other women for friendship or her children to

get some of her needs met. The husband and wife are finding replacements to fulfill their desires for love that they once found in each other. Good or bad that they found new avenues, they are still drifting apart not realizing that they should be adding relationships to their lives as they grow in love and not using other people or things to replace the love in their own straining relationship.

As life goes on one day the wife finds her husband looking at a woman the wrong way and maybe even speaking to her inappropriately. This makes her jealous and reminds him that he promised her long ago that he would never commit adultery. I did, he wonders? When? Of course, that was one of those unspoken vows in every marriage assuming the other spouse will remain faithful. After all, they are in love. Because the husband still loves his wife and his marriage and family he decides to obey his wife and the command do not commit adultery. It is not easy for him to do this because he has allowed some of his desires to stray away from her. He has replaced then with his job and other things in his life. Now, his eyes and thoughts wander and it is difficult to bring them back to her.

Do you see the problem with keeping the command; do not commit adultery? The command is legitimate and necessary. She says keep it and he will whether he wants to or not. Does she really want her husband to stay away from other women because he has to or because he wants to, because he loves her and only her?

Flash forward another couple of years. The happy couple is still together but still slowly drifting apart. The love they once had is disappearing year after year. The wife sees that something needs to be done so she reminds her husband of their covenant and wedding vows. She tells him that he is failing in love and that he should love her the way he wants to be loved. To her dismay, he informs her that he is doing just as he promised so many years ago. He loves her how he wants to be loved and is content. What can she do? How can she force him to love her? How can he do what he does not know how to do or want to do? They have different standards of love.

Do you see the problem with keeping the command; love your neighbor as yourself? We all have different standards of love and how we want to be treated. This is why so many marriages fail. The couple usually has a primitive and or a selfish understanding of love. Many couples want to keep their marriage alive so they agree to communicate their needs and try to fix what is broken. They rekindle the flame and

learn to adore one another again. They often live happily ever after. Others fail because they just can't or don't want to agree on a standard of love.

After hearing that her husband is content and won't expand his capacity or understanding of love she decides to go to her bible for wisdom. She reads in John 13:34 about the New Commandment, to love one another as Jesus loved us. Now she has found a new standard, the standard that Jesus lived by. Now she had a new understanding, how Jesus understands love. So, what does the wife do? She informs her husband that he needs to love her as Jesus loved him. New understanding has come to the marriage. Right away the husband sees that he needs to lay his life down for his wife and put her needs first. The marriage is now doing better. The wife is content and they lived happily ever after, right? Wrong. Now the husband is not content. What is his problem? A happy wife is a happy husband. Everyone knows that. The husband's problem is that he is still doing things because he has to. He is obeying God's word which is good, but he doesn't want to. He is back to obeying the commands. He asks himself and God what can I do to make a happy marriage for myself and not just for my wife? The man decides to take the woman's lead again just like in the garden. But this time instead of taking the forbidden fruit she took wisdom from God's word. So, he opens up his bible and starts to read in Ephesians 5:25-33. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church." What a coincidence he says, just what I needed." At last the light bulb goes on. "I can do this he shouts to the heavens. If I lay down my life and serve my wife and make her more important than me; wait, more important than anybody in the whole world then I will begin to cherish her again just as I did when we first met. This is what Christ did. He cherished the church above all people in the earth."

So, the husband begins to love his wife with this new standard he has learned about. It may take some time and some learning and some relearning too, but it will work. His heart will change and his love

for his wife and marriage will be renewed and expanded. It could be better than ever. As time goes on he puts into practice all that God has shown him about love and forgiveness and service and they live happily ever after.

What we have seen is the New Covenant in action. Man can keep the law for a while, but since the love and understanding is not in his heart, his carnal desires take over and he stops for whatever reason. When this happens relationships fall apart, whether it is between God and man or husband and wife or friend and friend. When God and His word give more understanding of His higher standard of love it becomes a part of us and in our hearts. One important thing the husband learned was that he is responsible for his actions and his marriage which makes him responsible for his wife. A benefit of all of this is that when you realize your responsibilities it gives you purpose in life. This is one key to a fulfilled and happy life; to know and live your purpose that God has created you for. Do you see the difference between having love written on you heart and serving God and other people because you want to and because that is who you are; versus, obeying commands and traditions? What happens is that you serve the law or tradition or religion instead of God. So, getting understanding is everything. Read Proverbs chapters 1-4 if you doubt. Even a child wants more from their parents than just "because I told you so."

Let's go back to the husband and wife because God is not done with them yet. Because He loves them He wants them to grow in love and maturity. He will say to the family, "now that you have learned to love one another it is time to love others outside of your little family circle." Immediately the husband and wife say, "you mean love people that we don't adore?" Of course God's answer to such a silly question is, "you were not so adorable when you were yet sinners," Romans 5. And thus the process begins, again.

The questions we all wrestle with in our minds are how can we love people we don't adore? How can we love people we don't find very attractive? How can we love our enemies? These commands would be hard enough to obey by themselves let alone have them written in our hearts. God promised that He would do this. If we decide not to allow Him to do it wouldn't that be breaking the Covenant? When did I agree to do this you might ask? Isn't it when you were baptized? Baptism is the handshake so to speak with God when you entered into His Covenant. Just as circumcision was the sign of the agreement with the

covenant with Abraham, so is baptism with the New Covenant. We find this in Colossians 2 where circumcision and baptism are compared, both putting off the flesh of the old man and starting a new life in Him.

So, we agree to submit to God and put off the old and to put on the new. Keep in mind it is not our death we are baptized into or our life we are raised in newness. It is the death and life of Jesus Christ. Let me show you what I mean. A thief may get out of prison and start a new life. He has decided to quit stealing and get a job and work for a living. For him that is a new life and his new self. For God that would not be enough. He wants a complete transformation from all of us, a new creation. He would make the thief into a giver and not just a giver but a merciful giver. With mercy in his heart and he sees a need he would have to take care of it; like a mother who hears her baby crying and has to do something about it. God wants a complete death and a complete life from us. He wants us to submit all areas of our lives to Him to be transformed. Each area is actually a place in our hearts. Do you remember what Jesus said? For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also, Matthew 6:21. Other people and our attitude toward them is another area of our hearts.

God will write the law in our hearts by teaching us. He gives understanding and wisdom through his word and through the experiences of life. He will chastise or correct us at the same time in the same way. The classroom and the on the job training are both important to our growth. Colossians 1:10 tells us we are renewed by the knowledge of Him. This is understanding the whys and the hows of His ways. After all if God is love then to understand love is in some way to understand Him. Like children who admire their parents and want to be like them, we will do the same. It is how God designed us.

What is most important is that we understand the process. It will make the changes come a little easier and faster. Instead of paddling upstream all the time against the current, we will submit and allow the current to take us where God wants us to go.