

Title: When Love is a Good Thing (and a Bad Thing)
Date: February 25, 2018
Subject: Love in the areas of marriage and money
Scripture: Hebrews 13:4 - 6

Five-year-old Suzie told her mom the story of Snow White she'd learned at school, including the gross part, Prince Charming's kiss bringing her back to life. Suzie ended by asking: "And do you know what happened then?" "Yes," said her mom, "they lived happily ever after." "No," frowned Suzie, "...they got married."

Somewhere Suzie got the idea that marriage is a bad thing. We live in a society that echoes her assessment and denigrates marriage. What are we as Christ followers to think? READ Hebrews 13:4-6.

I. Marriage is to be highly treasured v. 4

God is the originator of marriage as recorded in the book of Genesis. Jesus reaffirms the marriage design by quoting from Genesis. "Haven't you read 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 flesh" (Matthew 19:4-6). He adds an application point, "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." To add emphasis to the importance of marriage, the Lord includes a prohibition against defrauding it. "Do not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14).

God purposefully arranged marriage to represent him. The first woman, Eve, was taken from the first man, Adam. She was brought to him so they could be united again as a whole. One man and one woman, created in the image of God, come together as a team to follow the Lord. Marriage expresses the unity of God who is one though three different persons. Further the marriage relationship is used to illustrate Christ's relationship with the church (Ephesians 5:21-33).

Dennis Rainey of Family Life elaborates, "God's first purpose for creating man and woman and joining them in marriage was to mirror His image on earth...The Hebrew word for "mirror" means to reflect God, to magnify, exalt, and glorify Him...Marriage should reflect God's image to a world that desperately needs to see who He is...Purpose Two: Complete each other and experience companionship...like a computer and software. Standing alone, the computer and software are impressive, but combined as a team, they can accomplish so much more! Purpose Three: Multiply a godly legacy...God's original plan called for the home to be a sort of greenhouse—a nurturing place where children grow up to learn character, values, and integrity...to impart a sense of destiny, a spiritual mission...where children learn what it means to love and obey God" (familylife.com/articles/topics/marriage/staying-married/gods-plan-for-marriage).

We live in a world where marriage is devalued as outdated and attacked as unrealistic. The idea is nothing new. It goes way back prior to hippies of the 1960's and their pursuit of free love. Anti-marriage views were rampant in the first century. Pagan society was wild and wooly. They ignored marriage constraints with their loose morals as evidenced by orgies, legalized prostitution (even in their "worship" to their gods).

At the same time there were those in the Christian community who taught that marriage should be shunned. It hampered the ability to serve the Lord. It shouldn't be entered into and the single person should live a celibate life. Those who were married should stay married but be abstinent within the marriage.

In these ways, marriage was dishonored by nonbelievers and believers alike. The same thing takes place in our day. Ravi Zacharias, "How did sexuality become a thing to be enjoyed rather than a relationship to be committed to? It's a commitment before it's a delight. The delight comes as the reward for that commitment and an expression of that commitment, not an end in itself, but the meeting and the coming together of two souls to raise a family" [God's Plan for Marriage, part 1 (also part 2 and rzm.org/global-blog/how-wide-the-divide-sexuality-at-the-forefront-culture-at-the-crossroads)]. He talks about contributing factors to the demeaning of marriage — secularism, loss of shame, loss of reasoning ability, privatization where everyone has the right to do their own thing, and people who believe in God being told to be quiet about their faith.

Some seem to view marriage as a game, entered into lightly and dissolved as easily. An extreme example is Glynn Wolfe who set the Guinness record for the most monogamous marriages – 29 with another as a publicity stunt when he was 88 to a woman who was married 23 times. His shortest marriage lasted 19 days. All ended in divorce except for one annulment and the four wives who died. He had approximately 40 children, but only one of his kids and zero wives attended his funeral.

Others view marriage as an unnecessary evil, an antiquated social construct from ancient civilizations that should be discarded. TV and movies treat traditional marriage as weird and promote a new morality which is really the old immorality. Extramarital sex is referred to as an affair instead of calling it adultery.

The entertainment industry plays a huge role. They want to make money and pander to baser senses. Music of all types, some much worse than others, pushes toward the fulfillment of urges outside of marriage. R rated themes of promiscuity, objectification of women, not to mention drug use, racial slurs, profanity. Video games and movies glorify rape and mistreatment of women. Pornography.

Part of the problem with the hatred and violence in the world is the teaching that people are just another kind of animal, a higher form, but still just an animal. We all came from the same ancestors who came about by chance. People are told "you're special, you're wonderful and can do anything you want" yet lurking underneath is that foundation of not being special or meaningful but just lucky and should feel a sense of shame

for being in that position and forcing our wills on other animals. It's no wonder so many people are directionless and feel human life is of little value. I read an article by a man who said he almost was a school shooter. He talked about gun reform and mental health but said the biggest need is love and shared how he didn't take his life (or that of others) because people reached out to love him.

We are to counter the culture and push back against its deadly contagion. Marriage is to be elevated and revered as sacred. It needs to be promoted not demoted. It's the first and greatest institution created by God. All the other stuff -- light, sun, moon, stars, planets, water, land, trees, vegetation, birds, fish, land animals -- though it's really cool and enjoyable, it's just stuff compared to the concept of a man and woman joining together in marriage. God made it holy and sanctified it.

The previous chapter told us to "see that no one is sexually immoral" (Hebrews 12:16). This includes any sexual involvement outside of the marriage relationship, whether it's the physical act, thought life or pornography.

The motivation to uphold marriage is that God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Those who are unrepentant in that lifestyle remain outside of a relationship with Christ and will be judged eternally because of their lack of true connection with Him. They will not be in God's kingdom but will be in hell (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10). There can be judgment on earth. Immorality causes the destruction relationships of the married and those who aren't. Teens who introduce the sexual element usually break up within three weeks. It rips away at the person like duct tape on an arm pulls off part of the person. There's regret; loss of reputation, integrity, respect; sadness, self-reproach, shame, guilt, disease. It hinders a person's relationship with God (1 Corinthians 6:18-20). God can give people over to more depraved sin (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

God wants to prevent pain. Christ followers are to break with sin patterns of the world. There's hope for the repentant, the one who admits their wrong to the Lord and desires to turn from it. God has open arms for them. He may not wipe away memories but he offers to transform us and our past (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

II. Money vv. 5, 6

It's the same phileo love used earlier. However, love for money is not a good thing. It afflicts people across the income spectrum. A beggar told his friends, "If I had \$100, I'd never complain again." A businessman overheard. "Excuse me. Did you say if you had \$100, you'd never complain again?" "You heard right." The man pulled out his wallet, handed the beggar \$100. "I'm glad I can have a small part in bringing happiness to the world." After the man walked away, the beggar turned to his friends. "I wish I'd asked for \$200!"

Cornerstone Bank in Waco, Nebraska was robbed in 2012. Employees gave a description of the teenage girl robber and the car she used. Police didn't need them because the thief posted a YouTube video titled

“Chick bank robber.” Fanning the 6 grand in front of the camera, she held up a sign, “I just stole a car and robbed a bank. Now I’m rich, I can pay off my college financial aid, and tomorrow I’m going for a shopping spree.” She regarded it as the best day of her life. The police got her.

Johnny Carson was the forerunner of current late night talk shows. When his third wife wanted a divorce in 1983, adjusted to current values, he made \$37,000,000. She asked for temporary support of \$6.5 million per year. Her need per month -- \$54,000 for her Bel Air home including staff, maintenance and security, \$3500 for groceries, \$92,662 for jewelry and furs (she needed to dress stylishly), \$25,000 for two New York apartments and \$30,000 for “gifts to friends and relatives.”

Love for money happens in all walks of life. It goes by a number of aliases -- greed, materialism, and covetousness. Test questions for love of money. If I won \$100,000 on Wheel of Fortune, would my first thought be how I can spend it on me or how the Lord wants me as his steward to use it for His purposes? Do I often daydream about becoming rich and the lifestyle I’d have or how to pursue my relationship with Christ?

Some of the harmful effects of loving money are given in Scripture: “Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Timothy 6:9, 10).

View ourselves as a garden. We need to keep pulling weeds of the love of money out when we spot them. When a television commercial comes up showing the bright shining car, when the pop-up ad appears on the side bar of the computer screen, when walk through the store and our eyes get big and feel we have to have or won’t be fulfilled, yank out the weed. It’s much easier to pull weeds when they’re small. Pour on some of God’s weed killer by reading what he has to say about our finances which are really his finances. Remember that God owns it all. He’s preparing a place for us. Be generous.

The passage tells us the key way to keep ourselves free from the love of money. Be content with what we have. A Jewish man in Hungary went to his rabbi and complained, “Life is unbearable. There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?” The rabbi answered, “Take your goat into the room with you.” The man was incredulous. The rabbi insisted, “Do as I say and come back in a week.” A week later the man returned more distraught than before. “We can’t stand it. The goat is filthy.” The rabbi said, “Go home and let the goat out, and come back in a week.” A week later the man returned radiant, “Life is beautiful. We enjoy every minute of it now that there’s no goat—only the nine of us” (*Reader’s Digest* 12/81). Contentment is more a matter of our perspective than of our circumstances.

A wealthy businessman was horrified to see a fisherman sitting beside his boat, playing with a small child. “Why aren’t you out fishing?” asked the businessman. “Because I caught enough fish for one day,” replied the fisherman. “Why don’t you catch some more?” “What would I do with them?” “You could earn more money. Then with the extra money, you could buy a bigger boat, go into deeper waters, and catch more fish. Then you would make enough money to buy nylon nets. With the nets, you could catch even more fish and make more money. With that money you could own two boats, maybe three boats. Eventually you could have a whole fleet of boats and be rich like me.” “Then what would I do?” “Then you could really enjoy life.” The fisherman looked at the businessman quizzically and asked, “What do you think I am doing now?”

There seems to be something deeper to contentment than in regards to money, homes, cars, possessions - stuff. The instruction to be content is immediately followed by a promise of God’s presence. “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” That’s the motivation for contentment. We have the Lord. He is our constant need. Find contentment by focusing on him.

The second quote expresses our confidence. REREAD v. 6 quote. The Lord is our helper. Though rejected by the world, or lonely or without what the world says is necessary, God is with us and we’re with God. There’s nothing people can do to us to really harm us when the Lord is on our side.

Billy Graham went to heaven this past week. TV and radio news shows are unintentionally spreading the Good News of Jesus as they air Graham’s words. WTMJ radio ran a line going into breaks from his Milwaukee crusade that fits this passage. I found a longer version. “Nowhere in Scripture does it teach that you are to search and pursue happiness...It’s not a goal. Our goal is to obey God. Our goal is to do the will of God. Our goal is to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as we move along we will pick up happiness here and there along the way... The purpose and meaning of life, Christ can give you the answer. He can fill that cosmic void in your heart because that void in your heart is made because you’re made in the image of God and without God there’s a void there that only God can fill. Nothing else can fill it. Marriage can’t fill it. Drugs can’t fill it. Sex can’t fill it. Alcohol can’t fill it. Friendship can’t fill it. The church even can’t fill it. Religion can’t fill it. But the person of Jesus Christ can fill it.”

This is the message Graham frequently proclaimed, “Christ is the answer.” It’s true for salvation and for life situations until we get to heaven. Jesus said we are to seek him and his kingdom first, foremost, primarily.