

35. Love your closest neighbor – Part 1

December 28, 2008

If you've been a born-again Christian and attending church for sometime, you know the second most important commandment of God following the first commandment which is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul and all your body."

The second most important commandment is "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" which originally comes from Leviticus chapter 19.

We also remember the conversation between Jesus Christ and a self-righteous lawyer who asked a snotty question "And who is my neighbor?" in Luke 10 that eventually brought up the famous Good Samaritan parable from Jesus to end that question.

Luke 10:25-29 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" 27 So he answered and said, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.' " 28 And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." 29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

A. FROM THE MAIN TEXTS

Romans 13:8-10 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

First of all, we need to define the meaning of 'neighbor'. According to a dictionary, it is "a person who lives near another". In other words, I can safely say, "Any person who is not myself is my neighbor from the closest and to the farthest geographical distance.

This morning I believe that the Lord is going to speak to all of us about the marriage the way He designed and we need to learn from Him how to love our closest neighbor – our spouses. For those who are not married, learn this now so that you can practice once you get married.

Over a half of marriages in America break their wedding vows with many reasons. It used to be common to meet a couple married for over 20 years. Now, if you see someone who has been married for 20 years, people look at them with some sort of mixed feeling of "How-Did-You-Manage-To-Stay-Together-So-Long?" and admiration.

An old Arab proverb states that marriage begins with a prince kissing an angel and ends with a bald headed man looking across the table at a fat lady. Ancient Greek philosopher Socrates told his students, "By all means marry. If you get a good wife, twice blessed you will be. If you get a bad wife, you'll become a philosopher." Socrates was a very good philosopher.

Some say, "Marriage is like a fly on a screen door. The one from outside wants to get in, the one from inside wants to get out." Another person said, "For marriage, it is like a three ring circus – engagement ring, wedding ring and suffering."

I've officiated many weddings so far. During the ceremonies I look at the grooms and brides. There are sparks in their eyes and love and great expectation fill their hearts. I am glad and it should be. But the brutal reality comes to them in a few months or possibly sooner. Some even wonder if they married the right person.

We need to ask the Originator of marriage, our God, about what we can expect and what we should do.

B. GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

Genesis 2:18 And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

Everything God created was good and He made comments about them, too. But after He created a man, He said, "It is not good." God says that we men need help mates.

The marriage is ordained by God. It is not some smart marketing package someone pulled off. It was initiated by God and it is very close to His heart.

If you have any doubts, let's remember that the marriage was the first ordination by Him to the mankind at the Garden of Eden. The first miracle recorded in the Gospels was turning water to wine at a Jewish wedding. May I remind you one of the last things that happens in the Book of Revelation is the spiritual marriage, "the Marriage Supper of the Lamb" between Christ our Savior and the bride which is the body of Christ.

Genesis 2:21-23 And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. 22 Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. 23 And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man."

Adam fell into a deep sleep while God was creating a woman for him. Instead of chasing after a good looking female chimpanzee, Adam rest in Him. Do I believe that God has a choice of the person for each of us? Yes, I do. What if a man goes against God's desire for him and marries someone else? Would God be surprised? If He was surprised by his choice, He wouldn't be the God of the universe. But He would still bless that marriage if that family chooses to follow Him.

I asked you underline the verse, "He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man." What is the reason God took a rib out of the man's side? Why not from the head? Why not from his feet? God didn't make her out of his head, so that she can rule over him; He didn't make her out of his feet, so that he can trample over her. Rather God created the woman out of the man's rib from his side, so that she can be equal with him; under his arm, so that he can protect her; close to his heart, so that she can be loved by him.

Genesis 2:24-25 Therefore (1) a man shall leave his father and mother and (2) be joined to his wife, and (3) they shall become one flesh. And (4) they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Here are four timeless principles from the Word of God that give a marriage its strength:

1) SEVERANCE - *a man shall leave his father and mother*

Without any other people in the marriage including his and her parents, marriage is between husband and wife. In-laws must not be in the marriage equation.

I am sure that Eve was glad that her cooking didn't have to be compare with Adam's mom's, and Adam was glad that he didn't have to hear anything about Eve's last boyfriend.

2) PERMANENCE - *be joined to his wife*

No use leaving from their parents, unless man and woman cleave to one another. The word "Cleave" means "to adhere, to stick, to be attached by some strong tie." This verb requires action from both sides, not just one side.

Many of you still can recite a portion of your wedding vow:

To have and to hold,
from this day forward,
for better for worse,
for richer for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish you
as Jesus Christ so loves the church,
and to wash you with the Word, til death do us part.

So many people don't take this "til death do us part" seriously.

3) UNITY - *they shall become one flesh.*

This one remarkable phrase baffles theologians to explain the complete meaning according to Eph 5:31-32.

Ephesians 5:31-32 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

To understand and practice this element, we must rule out a few things. Polygamy, adultery, promiscuity and homosexuality must not be in the picture. Does it mean that a person who once was promiscuous before his or her marriage cannot have UNITY with the spouse? That would be difficult because of the past memory. But with repentance in God, it is possible. Because God makes all things new. It is more than a physical meaning, but also a spiritual meaning.

4) INTIMACY - *they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed*

The intimacy between husband and wife goes beyond knowing each other physically, but it goes to a tender, intimate and personal knowledge.

The leaving, cleaving and knowing each other results in a new identity in which two individuals merge into one – one in mind, heart, body and spirit. This is why divorce has such a devastating effect.

C. THE FIRST THING FIRST

Before Apostle Paul wrote how to make the marriage in Ephesians 5:22-32, he wrote the most important instruction for a good marriage in Ephesians 5:18.

Be filled with the Spirit.

That means that your individual relationship with Jesus Christ must be foremost, even before the relationship with one another in your marriage. Without it, your marriage suffers.

Folks, if your marriage is stale and humdrum, go to the Lord in prayer together. Spend time together in the Word of God. Pray for each other and lift up each other to the Lord. Go out of your way to please your spouse with everything you have. And see how the Lord is going to work in your marriage.

D. A COVENANT, NOT A CONTRACT

Marriage is not a contract we sign in business world. It is a covenant between man and woman and God. Here are the differences:

- A covenant is based on trust between parties.
- A contract is based on distrust. That is why we have to sign so many times when we buy a car or house.

- A covenant is based on unlimited responsibility.
- A contract is based on limited liability.

- A covenant cannot be broken if new circumstances occur.
- A contract can be voided by mutual consent.

Love is an active power that we control with our own wills. We can choose to love or not to love. That is why I don't buy the story of "There is no love between us," from the couples who want to divorce. If they truly want to rekindle the marriage, there will be a beautiful love again with their efforts.

Some couples who want me to counsel them for their crumbling marriages, what they really ask for is my blessing for them to divorce. Unless they have a biblical ground to divorce, they ain't gonna have one from me.

E. PROTECTING THE MARRIAGE

There are onslaughts against marriage, especially Christian marriages, in this world. If we are not careful, we easily can be one of the divorce statistics. Here are three methods to protect your marriages:

1) Having a right priority in our lives

The priority in our lives should be starting with God first, your spouse second, your children third, then the rest of people and things follow. Did you notice that I have not mentioned one person in this list? Who would that be? Myself and yourself. Everyone else should come before ourselves. Whether it is your desire to rise to the top of your corporate ladder, or fancy life long dream career or your favorite sports, nothing should come before your God and your marriage. I saw one too many marriages go down because husbands or wives expect the others to sacrifice for their careers.

Matthew 19:6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

Selfish individuality leading to separateness between husband and wife can be witnessed all around us and most of them end up in divorce courts.

2) Keeping marriage bed pure

It used to be mostly guys' problem – getting involved with other women than their own wives. Now, with free casual sex which is nothing more than nicely packaged trash from sex driven men, many women don't even think twice about having sex with someone else other than their husbands.

Hebrews 13:4 Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

We often call marriage "Holy Matrimony." Why? Because God honors it. When we break the marriage we are in, we are dishonoring our God.

Whether it is actual physical adultery, or looking at porno magazines, or watching nudity in movies, or visiting internet porno web sites, mesmerizing muscle bulging hunks from soap operas and movies or having sexual fantasies with someone else other than our spouses, they all must be removed from our hearts for the purity of our marriages.

3) Never, never talk bad about your spouse in front of anybody, not even a joke.

You might think it is funny and it might be nothing more than a joke, but your spouse might take it into his or her heart. I see many husbands and wives say how heavy or short or wrinkly or whatever their spouses are. You may not see the immediate result of those dumb jokes or comments, but your spouse will remember it.

One more thing, never compare your spouse with someone else's spouse in negative ways unless you have a death wish. If you get nailed by your spouse in the future because of this kind of dumb remark, don't look at me. I'll say, "I told you so."

F. APPLICATIONS – HOW TO MAKE THE MARRIAGE STRONGER

Give your spouse nothing but **B • E • S • T**.

1) Bless each other – Bless your spouse with your words constantly from your heart.

I am not asking you to lie, but look for something good in what your spouse does, instead of bad things. Then commend to your spouse, praise your spouse for work that person does, your spouse carries himself or herself in apparel and makeup. Send cards to your spouse in mail. Leave a love note for your spouse.

2) Edify each other – Build up your spouse with your words and to other people.

Tell others how you are blessed to have your spouse. Pray for your spouse to be what the Lord wants him or her to be, not the way you want. But expect that the Lord will work on you before He works on your spouse. It can be rather a painful, but it's worth it.

3) Share with each other – Share your spouse's desires as yours.

Be attentive to your spouse when he or she talks to you without watching TV, or reading newspaper, or doing something else. Give your spouse your full attention. Honor what your spouse likes more than what you like.

4) Touch each other – Now, guys, don't get excited here. I am not talking about sexual touching. I am talking about physical gestures toward your spouse.

Winking at your spouse across the room, smiling, squeeze hand or shoulder when you pass by. Give your spouse a quick kiss on the neck or cheek.

I know that we will not achieve perfection in our marriage with this three week series study. But as we follow God-given pattern of Genesis 2:24, we will discover the thrills and wonders of marriage He planned for us to have, and we will fulfill the purpose He has set before us of showing His love to others who are so desperate for hope.

Any promise is hard to keep, but the wedding vow is just totally impossible to keep, apart from the supernatural empowering of the Holy Spirit. But when you keep your relationship with Jesus strong, being filled with the Holy Spirit, then your relationship with each other will grow stronger and stronger. But remember, the Bible says that apart from Jesus, we have no power at all to live a holy and loving life.