

Love Isn't Silly Ephesians 5:1

Introduction

In January, 2022 – Ron and Joyce Bond from Milton Keynes, England – were in the news for being Britain's longest married couple. That month – they celebrated 81 years of married life together. They were 102 and 100 years old respectively. They recounted how some people said on their wedding day that it would never last! The Couple even received a congratulatory card from Queen Elizabeth.

If one looks up the average duration of marriage in the United States - the number given is 7-8 years. With a divorce rate of around 50%.

How do some people stay married for more than 8 decades - when the average couple can't even last ten years?

Denny Burk: 'the divorce rate among evangelicals who rarely attend church is 60 percent, while it is significantly lower for those who regularly attend church, at 38 percent.'

i.e. – claiming to be a Christian – does not necessarily improve the statistics - - - but being a practicing Christian who regularly attends church – would appear to add to the strength of one's marriage.

C.S. Lewis gives a few thoughts on marriage – tucked away in a letter written to Mary Willis Shelburne – a woman whom he never met – but whom he corresponded with for over ten years. This was written a couple years after his brief marriage – in which his wife passed away from cancer.

C.S. Lewis: 'The truth is that the only alternatives are either solitude (with all its miseries and dangers, both moral and physical) or else all the rubs and frustrations of a joint life. The second, even at its worst seems to me far the better . . . we are all fallen creatures and all very hard to live with.'

He says – 'marriage is difficult – but if he had his choice – he would prefer it to being single.'

Of course, the Apostle Paul – would position the issue as a matter of calling from God - - - some are called to be married / some are called to be single

But – both lifestyles carry with them a certain degree of challenge

Tim Keller: 'The bible is utterly realistic about how hard it is not to be married; and it is utterly realistic about how hard it is to be married.'

We celebrate Valentine's Day this week

It seems to be a fitting time – to recall some of the Biblical principles on love and relationships

Whether you are married / single – or 'in a relationship' – we all are called to walk in love

Ephesians 5:1 - 'Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love.'

It was Paul McCartney – who once wrote a song called, 'Silly Love Songs' – back in 1976

Paul – in the post- Beatles era – was criticized by music critics and John Lennon of not having progressed beyond writing silly love songs / or sentimental slush

His response was to write: 'Silly Love Songs' – in which he stated that love isn't silly - - - and the song became one of his biggest post Beatle hits

You'd think that people would've had enough of silly love songs

But I look around me and I see it isn't so

Some people wanna fill the world with silly love songs

And what's wrong with that?

I'd like to know

'Cause here I go again

What is love?

If it isn't silly – what is it?

We will consider 3 aspects of biblical love

I. Love is a Choice - Ephesians 5:1

When I do pre-marital counseling – I always like to ask the couple – 'Is love a feeling or a choice?' – you get a lot of interesting answers

Generally speaking – both answers have elements of truth to them

But – the emphasis in Scripture is upon it being a choice or act of the will – [You decide to love] / it's a daily choice to love another person

That is important – because the culture often buys into the idea that people fall in love / they fall out of love - - - you feel love / you don't feel love - - - as though we are all just helpless victims of cupid's arrow

But – that does not fly with Scripture – in the various categories of love we are called to – particularly in marriage

Paul instructed husbands to love their wives

Ephesians 5:25 - 'Husbands love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.'

We note: He does not say – love your wife as long as you feel like it – or when the mood strikes your fancy

William Bennet – said he once attended a *modern* wedding ceremony where the couple pledged to remain married as long as their love should last - - - he said he sent paper plates for a wedding gift

The problem with feelings or moods [is that they fluctuate] - - we don't always feel like doing what we ought to do

You may not *feel* like getting out of bed and going to work in the morning - - - more often than not you do go to work – feelings notwithstanding

We may not feel like reading our Bible at times - - - or going to church / but we do it because it's right and for our good and the good of others – oftentimes we see the feelings come afterwards – when we choose to do what is right

Warren Wiersbe liked to ask prospective couples: **'If your wife became paralyzed three weeks after marriage - do you love her enough to stay with her and care for her?'**

Well – that's a different set of circumstances / etc.

In reality – that takes us closer to the biblical calling to love

Ron Allen: **'The word agape describes a love that is based on the deliberate choice of the one who loves rather than the worthiness of the one who is loved.'**

We see that with God's love for us

Romans 5:8 - 'But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.'

Suppose God looked upon us and said – 'I don't feel like loving these people today' [Why not?] they are sinners! / they have a lot of bad flaws – this one over here in Sully really gets under my skin - - - no love today

We know that's not how God operates – because He tells us - - - He loved us while we were yet sinners

In fact – we sometimes use the term – ‘unconditional love’ – to describe God’s love for His people

It’s a love that is given before we could ever possibly do one thing to deserve it

If you belong to God - - - His love for you does not rise or fall based on your performance

God’s love is never something we deserve - - - and if we are to love others - - - whether it is your husband or wife / your children / your neighbor / your fellow church member - - - we have to get over the idea that they need to somehow earn that love [or act in a manner deserving of that love]

That’s not how God’s love operates – we are called to imitate Him!

Paul Washer applies the unconditional element to marriage

Paul Washer: 'How would you ever learn unconditional love if you were married to someone who met all the conditions? How would you ever learn mercy, patience, long-suffering, heartfelt compassion if you were married to someone who never failed you, who was never difficult with you, who never sinned against you, who was never slow to acknowledge their sin or ask for forgiveness? How would you ever learn grace to pour out your favor on someone who did not deserve it if you were married to someone who was always deserving of all good things? The main purpose of marriage is that, through your marriage, you become conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Marriage, I believe, is the greatest instrument of sanctification.'

When we love unconditionally – we are beginning to see what it means to imitate God

Has your spouse given you an opportunity to exercise patience / grace / forgiveness?

Thank God for the lesson in character He just gave you

I used to have a school teacher who would occasionally slip in a truth or a lesson about something totally unrelated to the subject – and then say – ‘that’s for free!’

When you get married – you think you are signing up for love, companionship, sex, family, children

You get all that – but you also get a lot of lessons on character – and God smiles, ‘that’s for free!’

II. Love is . . . - I Corinthians 13

One of the classic definitions of love is found in I Corinthians 13

Consider a couple of terms Paul uses

I Corinthians 13:4-5 - 'Love is patient, love is kind . . . it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered.'

Love is patient

This refers to patience with people

Love [literally] has a long fuse – [μακροθυμew] long / anger – rage

Love is patient with the faults and ill behavior of others

One measurement of our love – is how much it takes to cause us to become exasperated / to give up / to blow your top / etc.

If we are always losing our cool [lacking self-control] – Paul says – that's not love

Love is kind

If we are walking in love – we are to be characterized by kindness

Martin Luther: 'Let the wife make the husband glad to come home, and let him make her sorry to see him leave.'

That can only take place where there is kindness

One of the great barriers to kindness is selfishness

MLJ: 'Why is it difficult to live with others? Oh but you say - it is because that other person is difficult. Yes - but that other person is saying exactly the same about you; and the truth of the matter is that you are both right! We are all difficult; and we are all difficult because we are all selfish, because we are all self-centered.'

For love to take place – there needs to be mutual consideration – a laying aside of selfishness

Philippians 2:3, 4 - 'do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. Do not merely look out for your own personal interests but also for the interests of others'

We might think of Tabitha – who thought of others

Acts 9:36 - 'this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did.'

Do something kind for someone this week – your spouse / a random stranger / etc.

David Jeremiah says a woman believed he cut her off in a drive thru line – she began using sign language to show her disapproval of him [not the peace sign]

At the window – he asked to pay for her order – he then watched her stunned reaction when she got her order for free

Too many people are too eager to fight with others over the smallest of slights

If you are patient / kind that will not be true of you

Proverbs 20:3 - 'Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel.'

In marriage – in life – a lot of arguments are simply foolish

As Christians – we should refuse to have a quarrelsome nature

Love forgives

I Corinthians 13:5 - 'love . . . does not take into account a wrong suffered.'

Relationships never progress when there is score-keeping / grudge holding / a refusal to forgive

Warren Wiersbe: 'One of the most miserable men I ever met was a professed Christian who actually kept in a notebook a list of the wrongs he felt others had committed against him. Forgiveness means that we wipe the record clean and never hold things against people.'

Everyone likes to be forgiven – not everyone likes to forgive

C.S. Lewis: 'Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive.'

We are called to forgive as God has forgiven us

Richard Wurmbrand – was a pastor in Romania – under communist rule – he was betrayed to the government by a friend [a frenemy] – it resulted in 14 years of imprisonment and torture.

After his release – a mission leader [Dale Rhoton] was walking down the street with Wurmbrand when they saw a man coming their way. Wurmbrand greeted the man with kisses in the typical Romanian style of greeting – and introduced Rhoton to him.

As they parted ways – Rhoton said to him, 'That's interesting. The name of that man is the same name as the man who betrayed you.' - - - Wurmbrand replied – 'Dale – we all make mistakes.'

He had forgiven him

Ephesians 4:32 - 'And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.' [KJV]

For the Christian - - - our good behavior flows down from Calvary

We are to be kind because God has been kind to us
We are to forgive because God has forgiven us / etc.

Because marriage is the union of two sinners – there will be ample opportunity to express forgiveness in your relationship

III. Love Endures - I Corinthians 13:7

I Corinthians 13:7 - 'Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.'

God's love endures with us

Psalm 136:1 - 'Give thanks to the Lord for He is good. His love endures forever'

Love does not lose its strength or give up on the journey – it keeps loving

When I was in the 7th grade – one of the top songs was REO Speedwagon – 'I'm gonna keep on loving you.'

Love keeps on loving

It does not die – disappointments / defeats / obstacles - cannot rob it of its strength

The idea of commitment is built into the marriage covenant

The marriage vow is not a statement of present love [at the marriage altar] – but a pledge of future love - - - Will you:take this person . . . to love, honor, and cherish till death do you part.?’

It’s a promise / pledge of future love

We understand the importance of promise and faithfulness when we think of God’s faithfulness to us

It is because God is faithful – that we can be saved

God has made promises to us – that He will forgive the sinner who puts His trust in Jesus

We believe that God is faithful to His Word

Heb. 10:23 - 'let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.'

In the marriage relationship – the couple gets to imitate God in the character of faithfulness - as they keep the promises that they pledged to one another

God is not a quitter – and neither should his people be so

God knew what He was doing when He put you with your partner - - - He knew you would face challenges and obstacles

But – He also knows that thru such things people learn how to pray / how to grow deep in the Christian life – gain character traits they never would have gained in a perfect world with a perfect partner

Quinton Campbell entered the US military academy at West Point – and he quickly became discouraged and thought about quitting. His mother – hearing this – asked a friend of hers to write Quinton a note of encouragement to stick with his commitment

Cadet Quinton Campbell:

Your mother tells me you are feeling very badly in your new situation. Allow me to assure you it is a perfect certainty that you will, very soon, feel better - quite happy - if you only stick to the resolution you have taken to procure a military education . . . On the contrary, if you falter, and give up, you will lose the power of keeping any resolution, and will regret it all your life.

A. Lincoln
June 28, 1862

Lincoln made the point that it's largely a matter of character as to whether or not we decide to be quitters - - - or those who keep on in the journey

If we are always quitting jobs / quitting marriages – quitting the team - - - dropping the class - - - those are character weaknesses – not strengths

[there are exceptions to the rule – but the general principle holds true]

Conclusion

The marriage vow envisions a love of loyalty – ‘till death do us part’

There is a tremendous story of loyalty – known as the story of Greyfriars Bobby

In 1850 – John Gray joined the Edinburgh police force as a night watchman. He walked the streets to ensure their safety.

John had a constant companion on his walk – a little Skye terrier named Bobby. Every night – no matter the weather or the temperature – you could see John and Bobby walking the streets together – alert to any sign of trouble or cry for help.

After a number of years – John Gray died of tuberculosis and was buried in a cemetery named Greyfriars Kirkyard within the city

Bobby the terrier – began visiting daily and lying down near John's grave for hours at a time. At first the kirkyard gardener would shoo the dog away – but after months of seeing this behavior – he decided to make a small shelter so the little dog could be out of the weather while continuing his silent vigil.

The dog was later nicknamed Greyfriars Bobby, and he visited his master's grave every day for fourteen years until he also passed away. The residents of Edinburgh erected a granite fountain outside the cemetery with Bobby on the top. You can still read his headstone today: ‘Greyfriars Bobby – died 14th January 1872 – aged 16 years – **Let his loyalty and devotion be a lesson to us all.**’

Loyalty and devotion in your marriage is not silly – it's imitating God

Psalm 136:1 - 'Give thanks to the Lord for He is good. His love endures forever'