

# True Marriage is Tough

Steve Jourdain

## Ephesians 5: 21-33

I am going to read Chap. 5 verses 21 to 23, and ask you to consider these questions as you listen:

How do you feel about this passage? What sticks in your mind?

Now, imagine you were in the garden courtyard of a house in the city of Ephesus listening to this letter. How would this sound to you if you were a married woman?

To help you imagine this, let me paint the background.

It was typical of Jewish, Greek and Roman society, that a woman had no rights or privileges and was essentially the possession of her husband (or if single, her father).

In Jewish Society: A Jewish man's morning prayer gave thanks that God had not made him, "a Gentile, a slave or a woman".

"Divorce Law in Deut. 24 v 1 " If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, (that she is guilty of some shameful conduct, or finds something about her he doesn't like) he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house"

(It had to be correctly written by a Rabbi, and handed to her in front of two witnesses. The only other condition was that her dowry must be returned!

Developed two interpretations of a wife's indecency:

The Conservative interpretation only allowed divorce for adultery.

A Rabbinic saying, "Every Jew must surrender his life rather than commit idolatry, murder or adultery"

and "The very altar sheds tears when a man divorces the wife of his youth."

The Liberal interpretation allowed divorce for various reasons: e.g. Spoiling his dinner, being quarrelsome or troublesome, speaking disrespectfully of in-laws in husband's hearing, or if he found another woman more attractive.

Woman had no divorce rights except if husband became a leper, apostate (abandoned the Jewish faith) or engaged in a disgusting trade.

Divorce in Jewish society in Paul's day was tragically easy for men and near impossible for women.

In Greek Society: Sexual permissiveness and prostitution were wide-spread, a normal & essential part of Greek life and were not seen as sinful. A wife was to bear and raise children and run the household while mistresses/concubines were for companionship & sex and courtesans /young boys were for pleasure. (Demosthenes)

Woman of respectable classes took no part in public life, in social occasions, or went out on the street alone. She had her own apartment that only her husband could enter. This was in order says one writer, "that she might see as little as possible, hear as little as possible and ask as little as possible."

Companionship in marriage was most unlikely and unexpected.

Socrates: "Is there anyone to whom you entrust more serious matters than to your wife, and is there anyone to whom you talk less?"

Another aristocrat, whose wife criticised him for associating with other women, replied that she must remember that the name of 'wife' was a title of dignity but not of pleasure.

And worse, there was no legal procedure of divorce in Greece, but it was at the whim of men. However, the dowry must be returned.

Family life as we know it, was non-existent and faithfulness in marriage not expected.

But believe it or not, it was much worse in Rome.

Seneca wrote in Paul's time, "that woman were married to be divorced and divorced to be married". Women dated their years by names of their husbands. Numerous records exist of women having eight husbands in five years, and some had 10 husbands. One woman was married to 23 husbands and she was his 21st wife. (this makes Elizabeth Taylor look like a prude!) There was no faithfulness in or to marriage and the whole environment was adulterous.

It was against this background that Paul wrote these words. How then, would they have sounded if you were a married woman in 1st century Ephesus?

To hear that she should submit to and respect her husband was no surprise. The real shock was to hear that her husband must respect her & even more surprising must love her as Christ loves the church!

But imagine being a husband! He is to love his wife with a self-giving, sacrificial love, which puts her well-being above his own, to help her be a radiant and whole person just as Jesus Christ had done for his body the church. True marriage is tough in its requirements on women and men!

The husband is to be the head of the wife.

(Head-ship is one of the devil's greatest tools in history because its misuse and abuse have done great harm to women and children and the gospel.) 'Head' can mean has authority over her (head of organisation), or is the source of her life (head-waters). The husband is to take responsibility for and give leadership in ensuring the well-being of their relationship and family.

But it is not a responsibility or authority exercised with power but with love, not by threats or fear or tyranny, but with a love that is ready to make any sacrifice for her, which will strengthen her character and moral goodness. The husband is to love her as deeply as himself - not simply as an agent of his comfort, pleasure or service.

Any marriage relationship which abuses, demeans, hardens or deceives the other, is false marriage. Any man who regards his wife as his possession, servant, housekeeper or simply the mother of his children, has got it wrong from God's perspective.

A husband is to love her with a faithful, unending love. They are to be a joint, one-flesh unity, with such an intimacy that a kind of new single entity is established (two become one, 'cleave' as in 'glued together').

These words were liberating to women trapped in their culture.

Another fascinating thing here is that the Greek word for 'love' used here is not romantic/sexual love but the unique extensive Christian word meaning a constant concern in attitude and action for the total well-being of the other, and more, the continual willingness to put aside one's own pleasures and opportunities for the benefit of the other.

This is the same 'love' of which 1 Cor 13 speaks, which is patient and kind, humble and respectful, trusting and supportive. This love does not derive its meaning from any human expression of love but from God's love for humanity and Jesus' love for his disciples.

"This love means that a husband is eager to understand the needs and interests of his wife, and will do everything in his power to supply those needs and further those interests."

(C.L.Mitton on Ephesians)

Now I ask you women here, wouldn't it be a pleasure to submit to and respect a husband like that?

Paul didn't encourage rebellion or the undermining of the social place of woman, but sowed the seeds of radical change and destruction from within marriage. (The immature celebration of freedom can lead to hurt and instability. We are free in Christ, not to do what we like, but to do what we should and be who we're meant to be.)

Some modern counsellors and psychologists have sought to identify the different needs of men and women, who are 'wired' differently. The primary needs for men and women have been identified as

Women need to know that they are loved. Men need to know that they are respected.

These are the things men and woman find hardest to do and it seems that Paul had real insight, I suggest divine inspiration.

Women naturally love. Men need to be encouraged to.

Women don't naturally respect, (hardly surprising!) and need to be encouraged to.

Maybe Paul did recognise that "Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus"?

What would Paul write about marriage if he was writing today?

- Remain faithful.
- Men tend to be things-orientated, be preoccupied with activities and work. Can be workaholics.
- Women more relationship-orientated and martyrs for their children and husbands.
- What LOVE means.

Find out what loving your particular partner really means. (The Five Love Languages - Gary Chapman)

Chapman suggests that being in a relationship with a person from another culture and language group, would clearly cause us to work hard at learning their language in order to understand them better and communicate effectively. Similarly, within our own culture there are different dialects within the language of love.

Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Receiving Gifts, Acts of Service, Physical Touch

(GATTS for short)

"Meeting my partner's need for love is a choice I make every day.

If I know her primary love language and choose to speak it,

her deepest emotional need will be met and she will feel secure in my love." (p132)

These are radical words and liberating words of Paul's. Challenging words, especially for us men and valuable to reflect upon.

## REAL LOVE IS

- emotional but not obsessive
- unites emotion and reason
- involves an act of the will
- & requires discipline
- recognises the need for personal growth.

### I need to be loved

- by someone who chooses to love me,
- who sees in me something worth loving.

### To love, is the choice to expend energy

- in an effort to benefit the other
- knowing that if their life is enriched
- I too will find the satisfaction
- of having genuinely loved another. (p35)

### Meeting my partner's need for love

- is a choice I make every day.
- If I know her primary love language
- and choose to speak it,
- her deepest emotional need will be met
- and she will feel secure in my love. (p132)