

True love is more than hot air and hormones

Sermon for Sunday, May 9, 2010 - by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Ephesians 5:21-33

A young man wrote this love letter to his sweetheart:

Dearest Linda,
I would climb the highest mountain,
swim the deepest ocean,
brave the coldest blizzard,
cross the hottest desert,
just for one look in your eyes, and for one smile
from your lips.

Yours forever,
John

P.S. I'll be over Friday night if it doesn't rain.

So many marriages begin with romance and passion, but when reality sets in, many couples lose that initial zest. The Bible has help to put the spark back into marriages.

God's Word speaks about the marriage relationship with reverence and with conviction. For example, Jesus talked about the sacredness of the bond joining a couple in marriage: "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. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" [Matthew 19:5-6].

Several of the letters in the New Testament, from both Paul and Peter, give direction for keeping marriages strong and happy.

There is the overall message that in God's plan, marriage is vitally important. Let's see what that looks like in detail. I'm referring in particular to Ephesians 5:21-33.

1) Submit to one another

Ephesians 5:21, New International Version:
Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

There is a lot of misunderstanding about submission. To submit to someone means to honour that person by serving that person, putting aside our own rights. We often get a picture of someone who becomes a doormat, allowing others to walk all over them. What honour is there in that? That would be like inviting guests over for supper, then serving them cold leftover hotdogs. That would be an insult, not an

honour. When we submit to others, we serve them, giving our best for their best.

Jesus gave us the greatest example of submission:

Philippians 2:5-8, New International Version:

Your attitude should be the kind that was shown us by Jesus Christ. Although he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God, but laid aside his mighty power and glory, taking the disguise of a slave and becoming human. He humbled himself even further, going so far as to actually die a criminal's death on a cross.

Jesus submitted himself to his Father's will. Over and over again he made clear his purpose in life was "not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me" [John 6:38].

What happens when you have two people, each submitting himself and herself to one another? You have a relationship of respect and love that is so deep, it is breathtaking when you stop and think about it.

Humility is one practical result of submission. Both persons put aside their pride. You may still argue and fight at times, but it becomes easier to apologize and ask forgiveness. With Jane and myself, I recognize that there are times when she's right and I'm wrong; and there are other times when I'm wrong and she's right (pun intended).

2) Wives, submit to husbands

In verses 22-24 we have one of the most troublesome passages in all of the Bible:

Ephesians 5:22-24, New International Version:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

This is entirely in conflict with the modern emphasis on equality. We see some of the patriarchal bias which is found through much of the Bible (example: when giving family histories, usually only the men are listed. It is as if the women did not count — which is quite true for that culture). It is not something that we follow in our own marriage. Yet, as you may know by now, I have a high regard for the Scriptures. I believe that they are inspired by God, and are given to us to give us direction in life. This sermon does not resolve that tension; I still live with it.

Three thoughts on this passage about wives submitting to their husbands as their heads.

- a) If the husband is the head, and anything goes wrong, whose fault is it?
- b) “Submit to your husband as the church submits to Christ.” When people submit to Jesus Christ as Lord, does that:
 - make them spineless, weak and dull?
 - wipe out their character, their personality?
 - make them into a non-thinking robot?
 - remove their drive, their will, their creativity?
 - make them into a non-person, a nobody?

No! Neither would this happen in a *Christ-centred* marriage relationship.

There is tremendous danger to the wife when the relationship is not Christ-centred. I’m sure all of us know of couples where the relationship is husband-centred, and the man dominates the wife, holding power and control over her life. This is wife abuse. The abuse may be with physical violence, it may be controlling her social life, or other forms. When I have counselled women who were considering leaving their husbands because of abuse, I have assured them that they are not breaking their marriage vow by doing so. It was broken long ago, when the husband began the abuse.

- c) The husband here is compared to Christ. If men really followed the example of Jesus Christ, his life of love and service, then women would have no qualms about submitting to someone like that. That is exactly what the next verses say.

3) Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church

Ephesians 5:25, New International Version:
Husbands, love your wives in the same way that Christ loved the church, and gave his life for it.

Isn’t this interesting! The job description for being “head” does not consist of a list of responsibilities and rewards. Only one item is given: “Love your wives as Christ loved the church.”

How did Christ love the church? Verse 25 gives the answer: “he gave his life for it.” You men may never be in a situation where you literally give your life to save your wife. But there are other ways to sacrifice.

4) What it looks like in practice

Jay Adams runs a Christian counselling agency, and he works with lots of people whose marriages are in trouble. When a couple come to him for help, he talks with them about this principle of submitting to one another. Then he talks with each spouse privately, in a separate room.

During that private meeting, Adams talks with the wife about the Biblical principle of submitting to the husband. He asks her to focus on only one thing during the coming week: to support her husband in every way she possibly can. If the husband makes a suggestion, instead of criticizing its faults, just agree to try it. If something goes wrong, don’t make a big deal of it. Make sure the husband still knows you love him and trust him.

When he meets with the husband, Adams talks about the Biblical principle of loving your wife as Christ loved the church. He asks the husband to focus on only one thing during the coming week: to love his wife in every way he possibly can. This doesn’t mean buying expensive gifts, as if money could buy love. Rather, always be thinking, “What does my wife like? What can I do to make her happy? How can I help her? How can we spend some special time together?”

Each spouse is asked to say nothing to their partner about their private conversation. The couple come back for another counselling session a week later, and often the results are dramatic!

There was one couple who were fairly typical. Wayne and Jill had no big problems, just a general feeling of “blah” in their marriage. This is the time when other men and women start looking attractive, and they didn’t want it to get to that stage.

When Jill started supporting and encouraging Wayne, it felt weird, artificial. Until the day he had a car accident which cost them several hundred dollars. Wayne was afraid to tell her what had happened, because when Jill was in a bad mood, her words could cut through stone. He finally did get it out, and when she calmly hugged him and said she wished he would be more careful, but she loved him anyway... the feeling of relief and joy was overwhelming.

At the same time, Wayne was working on being more loving. He had never given much thought to before. What *would* she like? It suddenly dawned on him — a frightening thought — that he really didn’t know his wife very well. So he decided that instead of watching sports on TV every night, he would take a

couple of those evenings to go for a walk with Jill, just like they used to do years ago, and talk about everything under the sun... just like they used to do years ago. Again, for Wayne it felt weird. But Jill jumped at the idea when he asked her.

5) Only the beginning...

That's only part of the story. But what's really important here is *your* story. Are you satisfied with your marriage? Or do you desire something more? Whether or not you agree with this principle of the husband being the head, there are surely some things we can all use.