

1_ THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE (Marriage Matters)

Our series this month is entitled: *"The Language of Love."* At a recent get together at the church here we were challenged to identify the words *"I Love you"* in 25 different languages. Most of us did pretty poorly. Though we may not always be able to read the word "love" – I do think most of us can recognize "real love" when we see it. Here's what **1st Corinthians 13** says it looks like, no matter what language you speak ...

⁴ "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails..."

Yet, the way that our culture has re-defined love to justify selfish and sinful choices, maybe a fresh look is long overdue. For 'love' as God defines it is neither sinful nor selfish_ ever. We'll be looking to scripture to see what the Author of Love intended. Here's an overview of what you may expect...

Next week, we'll take a hard look at the love God planned to be celebrated within the **family**. The Greeks often used the word "storge" to refer to the love a parent has for a child and a child for their parent. It is also the love that brothers and sisters have for one another. The following week, we'll examine the love God blesses **friends** to experience. The Greek term is "Phileo"- the word we get "Philadelphia", the city of brotherly love from. The final week, we'll contemplate the most supreme of all these loves. It is the very love of **God**. The term "Agape" is unconditional, everlasting love.

Today, in a lesson I'm calling **"Marriage Matters"** we will consider that romantic love designed by God to be shared between a man and a woman. The Greeks used the word "Eros" almost exclusively in reference to sensual desire and physical attraction. We get the word "erotic" from this idea and hence it can stir up all sorts of sexual images, many which are distortions of the perfect and beautiful relationship that our Lord intended.

Consider **DESIGN**. Genesis tells us that **in the beginning** God created man in His own image_ and in like manner He created woman for man. He did not create multiple partners for man, nor did He create another man for him. If He had done the latter it would have been the end of it. Nature itself tells us one man is not a suitable mate for another man_ nor a woman for a woman_ if for no other reason that they cannot reproduce. From the "get go" God's design was for a monogamous lifelong relationship between a man and a woman. Though there's no wedding ceremony recorded, God presented Eve to Adam, much as a father may give his daughter's hand in marriage today. It would not be long before man rebelled and followed sinful desires, but listen carefully. Whatever you may hear, men and women were never intended to have multiple sexual partners, or engage in romantic, sensual same sex relationships. Neither were we created to indulge in sexual liaisons with anyone other than our own spouse. **In 2014**, half of millennials polled said they believed "beta" or "real estate" marriages are preferable to God's plan. These are trial unions, moving in together for **2-3** years to see if it will work, even drawing up contractual agreements to be renegotiated after review.

Not only does God not condone these options by design, He condemns them in His **LAW**. This is crystal clear in the **10** commandments as well as in **Leviticus 18** where He rates adultery and homosexuality as deviant behaviors on a par with rape, incest, and bestiality. God's word never refers to such things as "love" but rather as "sin." He sometimes even calls them "abominations."

Then there's the **testimony of the Holy Spirit** through the apostle Paul in **Romans 1** that same sex relationships are unnatural and far removed from the plan of God as are other departures from God's design. Now there are those who suggest that Paul was a narrow minded chauvinist who had no knowledge of such things as sexual orientation like we do. After all, they suggest, we're enlightened. Really? Paul was inspired by a God who understands the hearts of mankind better than anyone. And it is a cold hard fact that Paul's culture was so full of sexual deviants that he was moved by the Spirit to address the issues.

The Scripture also makes it clear that though men often slept around and engaged in sexual affairs, God did not approve of it. In **Matthew 19**, Jesus clearly appeals to God's design and His law to speak out against "*marital unfaithfulness / fornication*" and stressed the need for His followers to remain as "*eunuchs*" outside of the covenant of marriage. That means they were to either marry or live lives of celibacy. Bottom line? Sex is to be engaged in only within the covenant of marriage. But enough of how man has abused God's gift twisting it into something sick and wrong. What "*good*" is there in "*eros*"? How is this romantic love and courtship to be expressed_ and even enjoyed?

God could have created man and woman with urges and instincts to insure the continuation of the species much as He did in many other creatures. That like some brute beasts, a female would go into "*heat*" at times, a male would "*get wind*" of it, chase her down, and impregnate her before going on his happy way chasing squirrels. Yet, that is not what God did. He created both man and woman in His image, and instilled within them a desire for love and intimacy. In fact, there is no other creature on planet earth that was "*designed*" to mate face to face. In nature, only one other can. (*the Bonobo*)

God could've created us without taste buds, so that we ate stuff when hungry, but without the ability to enjoy food. He didn't. He could've made us without erogenous zones_ incapable of experiencing pleasure in our union. He did not. Read **1st Corinthians 6** and you'll see that some concluded from this truth that there lustful pursuits were God's fault. If He made me this way_ created me we this hunger_ and I fulfill my need, why should I be blamed? Just as God did not intend for us to be gluttons, overindulging for sheer pleasure, He did not intend for us to selfishly engage in sexual activity. There's this thing called "*self-control*" that He expects us to exercise.

Yet, in the next chapter (**1st Corinthians 7**) we're told that each man is to have his own wife and each wife her own husband in order to fulfill this need_ and that husbands and wives are not to deprive one another in this regard. Later in the same chapter Paul calls sexuality a gift from God. **James 1:17** also tells us all good gifts come from God. The issue then is not whether or not "*eros*" is a good gift. It's about whom God intended to enjoy this gift_ whom He intended it for_ and when is it to be opened.

In **Ephesians 5**, Paul tells us ³¹ "**For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.**" ³² **This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.**" When a husband and wife become one flesh it is a profound mystery_ it is a unique symbol of the relationship that Christ has with His church. The physical intimacy that God intends for a husband and a wife to share is analogous to the spiritual intimacy that He wants us to share with Him. This is the primary reason I get upset when people belittle purity, redefine marriage, and distort God's gift of marital love. You see, within love and marriage is **the earliest proclamation of the gospel**. How? Think on it. Was it not Christ who left His Father for His bride? In **2nd Corinthians.8:9** we're told that He left the glory of heaven "**so that we might become rich.**" He came so He might take His bride home. You see, He had to leave in order to cleave (*cling*) to His bride.

Paul explains in **Romans 6:3-5** that when we are baptized into Christ **"we are united to Him so that we may live new lives."** The idea here is we're joined to grow together. It is as if two become as one, continuing in a committed relationship. It's why I often refer to baptism as a believer's wedding ceremony. The wording Paul uses is very similar to what we find in **1st Corinthians 6:16-17** **"Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." But whoever is united with the Lord is one with Him in spirit."** I, for one, do not believe that is sheer coincidence.

Now, I don't know if you realize it or not, but Jesus loves you_ and He wants to be with you. The question is, *"Do you love Him?"* He invites you into an everlasting intimacy_ that is unrivaled by any physical relationship or experience. But, perhaps the closest thing to it on this earth is the ecstasy that a husband and wife share when they become one flesh.

Jesus will not have a one night stand with you. He does not sleep around. Neither will He permit you to have Him as just another one that you turn to for satisfaction. He publicly proposes to you. What will you say to Him?

Maybe you're a person who has violated God's plan. You've gotten things out of order and you are convinced that Jesus wants nothing to do with you now. Listen closely: No matter how far you've strayed, it's not too late to say "yes" to Jesus. Repent of your unfaithfulness and He will forgive you, bathe you in the waters of His love, and dress you in white. **Ephesians 5:25-27** says **"Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."** Jesus can and will restore your purity. In Christ, you are made new.

And for those of us who have said "yes", there are so many things that can get in the way of us being one with Jesus. We get distracted so easily. Some of us may have even been unfaithful. But whether we have strayed or we have stayed, the time is coming when every hindrance will be removed. No matter what may have come between us, **He is coming for His bride**. He will carry us away to the place He has prepared for us in heaven. The honeymoon suite awaits.

Meanwhile, we should prepare ourselves as the bride does for her groom_ and long for that time when we will truly be as one. In a moment, the choir will sing the song for us **"Even so Come."** As they do, I pray that you'll reflect on Jesus' love for you....and you'll consider accepting His proposal. Let's pray...