

Love and Marriage

From time to time we have the opportunity to go back over material that may be very familiar to us. Not so many months ago I had the opportunity to go back over the wedding ceremony that we use within the Church.

Summer time is a very appropriate time to consider weddings. Pentecost is also an appropriate time to consider weddings. Pentecost was the time in which Israel became betrothed to the Eternal in the Old Testament. They entered into a relationship with Him.

In the New Testament, with the receipt of God's Holy Spirit, we also become betrothed. We enter into a contract with God which is going to be consummated at His return, in the marriage of the Lamb.

Pentecost is inextricably tied to the aspect of marriage. As I read through the wedding ceremony there was a statement which says:

"Men and women were created with the marvellous potential of eternal life in the Family of God. And as a loving Father, God gave us the institution of marriage and the blessing of the family -- that we might learn to love one another as He loves us."

It is a very simple statement. Yet it contains within it the whole principle of marriage.

Why marriage? What is the basis for marriage?

If we were to go onto the streets, the shopping malls or the sports arenas of western society today, and ask people casually, *"What is the purpose for marriage?"* most people would look upon it as being a function of companionship and romance. *"We want someone. We need someone."*

There is a romantic involvement, companionship. God obviously placed hormones within the human body that need to be taken care of. They create a chemical reaction and a chemical attraction of one sex to the other, in a godly and an appropriate manner.

In other societies what attracts a male to a female, a young man to a young woman (or vice versa) can differ. Different values exist, yet there is a desire for something.

If you ask the reasons why people marry, you find there are all sorts of reasons. People marry out of infatuation. They get carried away by the concept of romance -- that fuzzy feeling, or the vision that television advertisers like to use so frequently, to create an atmosphere. People get carried away with it. They want to have that.

People marry out of puppy love. Do you know what puppy love leads to? It leads to a dog's life!

Oftentimes people marry because they want a father figure, or a mother figure in their life. They want someone to take care of them, provide for them, protect them or whatever it may be that they seek.

Some people marry because of peer pressure. In certain societies more so than the west these days, peer pressure becomes a very important aspect in terms of marriage, because marriage forms such an incredible part of society. If you don't marry, you are not really going to survive! It becomes very essential for a young lady. She needs to marry. She needs to have a man, because once her father has gone, there won't be anyone to take care of her. So customs, as well as peer pressure, are involved.

Oftentimes people enter marriage as a business relationship. *"You do this for me, and I will do that for you"*.

There are a variety of reasons as to why people marry.

About two years ago, I remember reading an article in "The Sunday Times", in which an elderly dowager in the United Kingdom was talking about debutante balls -- those "coming out" ceremonies when young ladies of society were presented to eligible young men.

The question was asked, "*Why did so many of the young ladies marry so young in those days?*"

The dowager said, "*Simply for sex. That was the only way in which we could have sex in a safe manner*".

You look at these things and you ask, is it any wonder that marriages end in disaster? NONE of these reasons are the true basis for a marriage.

God is going to want people to marry who are attracted to one another, yes. But what is love? What is this love that we talk of as being the foundation for marriage? For many, the aspect of love equals feelings, good feelings! "*It turns me on*". Romance, the fuzzy focus, the floating here -- all of those things that are supposed to be attractive.

The 1960s, in which a good portion of this congregation went through their teens or young adulthood, was a time in which the concept of love was very important. "The Beatles" wrote a song about, "*Love, love, love. All you need is love, love, love*".

The protest movement generated its own variety of songs. I remember one song that was very popular when I was in College: "*What the world needs now is love, sweet love. That's the only thing that there's not enough of*".

But do these things reflect the same concept of love that God intends? What is this love that God intends to be the foundation for marriage, and the purpose for marriage? What do we mean when we talk about love?

The Bible talks of love extensively. In the New Testament the word "love" is derived from a Greek word. Most of the concepts that you and I carry in our head relating to love derive from Greek society!

Most of you would be able to write down the three Greek words that are translated as "love". The concepts that exist in the western world, particularly in terms of love, arise from the Greek culture.

When people discuss marriage and love, when they talk about marriage generally, the word that is commonly applied is the word "eros". We have used it in the Church from time to time.

Eros was "the god of love". He stands, as a statue, in the middle of Piccadilly Circus in London, on one foot, with the other foot up in the air. His bow is in his hand, and his arrows are on his back. Eros, the god of love, is "looking for someone to strike through the heart", so that they can be smitten, love-struck, or moon-struck, whatever the term may be.

But it is interesting that "eros", one of the Greek words for "love", is not used in the Bible! It is a concept we mistakenly relate to marriage and the relationship that exists between a husband and wife in marriage, but the Bible NEVER uses it to describe the relationship between a husband and wife -- advisedly, as we will see!

The Bible talks about sexuality. It talks about the conjugal relationships between a husband and a wife, with a certain degree of candour.

Hebrews 13: 4 Marriage is honorable among all ...

It is an appropriate state! It is an honourable state to consider.

4 ... and the bed undefiled ...

Rather interestingly, the Greek word that is translated as "bed" is the word from which we take one of the technical terms relating to conjugal relationships today. The author of Hebrews was talking about the conjugal relations between a husband and a wife. But he continues ...

4 ... but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

There is a right place, a right approach, to it.

5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have ...

There is a role for a Christian. There is an approach that they should have towards life. The American Standard Version says:

4 Let marriage be had in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled: for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Paul addresses the situation in response to a question from the Corinthians. It is rather interesting to see how he talks about relations between a husband and a wife. In reality he does not speak of it in terms of the Greek world!

He speaks of it in terms of the Hebrew world, the Jewish world, of that day. Oftentimes people try and paint Paul as being a misogynist, a woman hater, etc, etc.

Such people should have lived in the Greek world to understand what it was to be a misogynist and a woman hater! A woman's right, and a woman's place in society was a much HIGHER position in Jewish society than it ever was in a Greek or a pagan society.

So Paul addresses marital relationships from the point of a Jewish perspective, and a godly perspective:

1 Corinthians 7: 1 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

The words "It is" are an ellipsis that has been provided. Is this a statement or is it a question? Obviously Paul has been talking about sexual relations. He has been talking about immorality in the previous chapters. So now he addresses a question; "*Is it good for a man not to touch a woman?*" He continues in verse 2:

2 Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.

The New International Version translates this verse as:

2 But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.

In other words, Paul was addressing the Church in a society which was not too different than that which exists today. It was a very immoral society. Paul said to avoid immorality it was wise for people to be married. But he said there is a way in which people should conduct themselves:

3 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her (King James Version "due benevolence"), and likewise also the wife to her husband.

He uses the term "due benevolence" or "due affection" that is appropriate. It is rather interesting that Paul refers to that, because in Jewish society there was a responsibility on the part of a husband to take care of the sexual needs of the wife! If the husband refused to take care of the sexual needs of the wife, that was grounds for a wife to have a divorce from her husband!

That was an expensive proposition, because when the husband entered into the betrothal, which may have been years before the marriage, he had to sign a contract. That contract provided for what would happen if that marriage came to a premature end. It was always at great cost to the husband.

The rabbis and sages of that period of time discussed this. Paul carries on ...

4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

We don't control ourselves. Our spouse controls us, and we control our spouse.

5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.
6 But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.

Rather interestingly, at the time of Paul, Shammai said that if a husband took an oath to separate himself from his wife for a week, it was grounds for divorce! That was pretty stringent. Hillel said that 2 weeks was ground for divorce.

If you separated yourself from your wife, and refused to give her her marital dues, it was grounds for divorce. That was the environment in which Paul had grown up, and in which he had understood marital relations. He said there was only one reason you should separate from one another, and ONLY one reason. It has to be with the consent of both of you -- and it is for prayer and fasting.

He said when that is completed, come back together again, lest you be tempted. He said God has given you marriage so that you are not tempted, you are not carried away, and not caught up by this world.

7 I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

He continues talking about the unmarried and the widows:

8 But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am;
9 but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry ...

It is an appropriate state!

9 ... For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Paul spoke to a people who lived in a society of excess, just as we live in a society of sexual excess today.

Paul makes a distinction in terms of sexuality that was unknown in the pagan world. What is he saying to a husband and wife? He said sexual relations were not to be entered into for self gratification! That is a strange idea today, because today people divorce one another, because they are not being sexually fulfilled by the other person. It becomes grounds for divorce. *"I am not being fulfilled by this person. I am not being gratified by this individual. I want something better for myself."*

Paul talked about a situation in which marriage existed as a means of GIVING to one another, not getting. It was to be a godly means of living together.

Today people play games in marriage; *"I will let you ... if you do ..."*. Games are played in marriage in terms of trying to use sexuality as a power or control over another person. It shouldn't have a part in it, because sexuality should be a matter of GIVING to the other person, not seeking for yourself.

Rather interestingly, even in the Jewish society of that day, a husband, even though he was the head of a wife, had no right to force himself upon his wife, not even on the wedding night! He did not have that right. He may have been the head of the house, but there was a level of respect that had to be accorded to a wife that was unknown in the pagan world.

Paul, with the Spirit of God, was teaching these people the attitude they should have towards one other; what should motivate their relationships one to the other -- not the self satisfaction, or the self gratification of the pagan world, but rather CONCERN for the other.

Why was it unknown? Eros as a word relates to passion. Let me read you a definition of this word in terms of the Greek world. This is the definition that existed before the time of the apostle Paul:

"This is the passionate love that desires the other for itself.

"I want you."

"The God, Eros, compels all, but is compelled by none. In Plato "eros" symbolises fulfilment; in Plotinus [who came after Paul], the desire for union with the one.

"What is sought in eros is intoxication or ecstasy. Reflection is good, but a static frenzy, while sometimes viewed with horror, is greater!

Would it not be better to translate "eros" as lust? That, really, is what eros is about! It is about seeking for oneself.

"Eros masters us and consumes supreme bliss thereby."

That is what eros is about! It is not the basis of a relationship between a husband and a wife. It is a basis of unbridled want: *"I want, and I am going to get"*.

I think it is perhaps advised that "eros" is not used in Scripture, because it is so CONTRARY to God's way of life. It embodies a concept that is so contrary to the type of relationship that God wants to develop between a husband and wife.

Paul establishes that the purpose of marriage is to avoid sexual immorality. The marital relation has been described by some as the glue that binds a marriage together. It creates a bond between two people, that should not be broken. Solomon talked a little about that as well.

We have talked to the adults, the married. But of course this has an application to the youth and the young adults as well. It is a manner of living that needs to be taught.

God NEVER intended sex to be a matter of self gratification. Enjoyable, yes -- God intended it, and made it to be enjoyable, but it was to be enjoyable because of the person with whom it was fulfilled. It was the relationship that was being built that was the important thing.

Sometimes people have said, *"Fornication is not mentioned in the Old Testament"*. Oh yes? Why should Christ and Paul be so concerned about fornication? People debate the aspect of the word "porneia" in the New Testament. But it is rather interesting that Paul told Timothy to "flee youthful lusts". Flee them! Keep away from them.

As he told the Corinthians, in 1st Corinthians 10:8, don't become fornicators like ancient Israel. The example he took was right from the law, from Numbers chapter 25.

If we go back to Exodus 22 we will see the way in which God intended to control the aspect of fornication. God was doing something here in terms of the society, and in terms of their attitude towards marriage, in terms of their relationship towards other people of the opposite sex:

***Exodus 22: 16 "If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife.
17 "If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins.***

He must still pay the dowry! You can imagine how broke young men would become if they started to sow their wild oats, so to speak. It becomes a very costly undertaking. God said there is something here that was to be protected. There was something that was to be preserved. We tend to skim over this, because we don't pay a bride-price these days.

In one part of the world where I go, a bride-price IS still exacted. Almost every time I go back there, I am confronted by some male member saying, "*Mr Nathan, should Church members require the bride-price of other Church members?*"

It is a big theological question of these people. Why? Because a bride-price is so high!

We don't pay bride-prices in the western world, so in some ways the whole concept of betrothal and marriage gets played down a little.

A young man would become very destitute if he were to live that way in a theocratic society.

During apostolic times, as today, the world was not a theocracy. Judea was under the control of Rome. They were subject to Roman laws, especially in terms of those relating to death. So you couldn't necessarily go around demanding the death penalty as was stated, if a young lady was forced, or raped, as we would describe it today.

Paul told Timothy:

2 Timothy 2: 22 Flee also youthful lusts ...

It was something forbidden. God created a context for the proper sexual relations.

Let us look at another comment about eros that will help us appreciate that eros is not the love that God seeks to find in a marriage. Relating to eros, one writer says:

"Religion seeks the climate of experience in transmuted eroticism; compare with the fertility cults.

If you want to understand a little bit about the fertility cults, you can read James Michener in "The Source" on life in that area of the world known as The Levant, under the fertility cults! See how selfish it really was!

"Even going through Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and looking at their use of the term, however the original idea is that of erotic intoxication."

It was very self-centred.

So that is not the foundation that God is seeking in terms of a marriage.

The other Greek word that is used in terms of love, is "phileo", from which we have "Philadelphia". Phileo is "brotherly love". In fact, in the Greek language, it was the word with the broadest based application.

As The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says:

"It is a solicitous love. It embraces all humanity, and it entails obligation.

The highest form of philia is a mother's love. You might say that is the greatest form of love that exists. It is

very profound in its own way -- the way in which a mother is able to love her offspring, which may have caused her nine months of discomfort, several years of sleep-less nights, many heartaches, etc, etc! Yet a mother still loves those children, that offspring.

I remember very well, as a young minister, going out into the field ministry. Almost the first problem that I had to confront was a young lady who had given birth to a still-born child. How was I to encourage her?

One of the amazing things was the way in which the concern for that child was part of her thinking for YEARS afterwards. Almost any time I met that lady, there would be one question: and that is about the place of such babies in the Resurrection. You might say that was an example of *philia*. To this day, the love and concern for that little child, which she had carried for nine months, and was then born dead, is still with that mother. It is a very profound love, a very great love.

And of course, it very much needs to be part of a marriage, just like attraction needs to be part of a marriage. People who marry should have a sense of *philia* towards one another. We often talk about the advisability of marrying best friends!

Oftentimes you look around in society, and you see many successful marriages. Why are they successful? Because of the *philia* that exists, of that form of love that they have for one another.

But this is still a HUMAN love, that one should expect to find within a marriage. It is still not the love that God is looking for in terms of each and every one of us!

We have to move on to another love -- *agape*. This is an interesting love because this is a love that the Greeks did not really understand! That is quite a profound aspect to consider!

As The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says:

"This term has neither the magic of *eros*, nor the warmth of *philia*. It has first the weak sense "to be satisfied," "to receive," "to greet," "to honor," or, more inwardly, "to seek after". It can carry an element of sympathy, but also denotes "to prefer" especially with reference to the gods. "Yet in the Greek writers the word is colorless. It is often used as a variation for '*eros*' or '*phileo*' and commands no special discussion.

They don't really understand it. It doesn't really have a place. It exists in Greek society, but it is not really defined.

The Greek language is a language which is based upon nouns, from which verbs are drawn.

Hebrew is the opposite -- from verbs you then create nouns. In terms of the two languages, it's like chalk and cheese.

But do you realise there was no Greek manuscript found, outside of Christian literature, until the 3rd century, that used the word '*agape*' as a noun! That was the state that existed in the world up until about 50 or 60 years ago. It was not a word that was really used in the Greek language. They didn't understand the concept within the Greek language. They used it to *agapao*, to love, but they never understood the concept of *agape*.

Yet how often does the term *agape* appear as a noun in the New Testament? Frequently!

Some 60 years ago they did find a profane inscription in which the word '*agape*', as a noun, was used, outside of the biblical writings. That is quite profound! Here is a word that is not defined by the Greek language. Here is a word which is defined by the Word of God, not by other treatises of people.

What is this love that God has for us? What is this love that God demands from us, and God expects us to have towards one another?

When Jesus Christ restates the two great commandments, He doesn't say, "You shall "agapao" God with all your heart, with all your mind, and all your strength, and you shall "philia" your neighbour as yourself".

No, the challenge Jesus Christ laid at the feet of humanity was to "agapao your neighbour as yourself"! You have got to have the same love.

What sort of love is God? He is not eros. He is not philia. He is agape!

In 1st Corinthians 13 is a wonderful expression of love, of agape. It is often referred to as "charity". What is the love that God seeks? The apostle Paul said ...

1 Corinthians 13: 1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not (agape), I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

"If I don't have agape, I am useless."

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not (agape), I am nothing.

Agape is part of the fruit of God's Spirit.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not (agape), it profits me nothing.

You can do good to other people out of philia! Philia is a sense of belonging. Philia, ultimately speaking, becomes inward seeking as well: "What relates to myself?"

***4 (Agape) suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;
5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;
6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;
7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
8 Love (agape) never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.
9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part.
13 And now abide faith, hope, (agape), these three; but the greatest of these is (agape).***

The greatest thing that a human being, who has God's Holy Spirit should be seeking, is agape!

Paul mentions a number of aspects and concepts of agape.

What is distinct about agape? Firstly, it is spontaneous and unmotivated. God so agaped the world, He so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believed in Him, would not perish, but have everlasting life!

It is something that God does for everybody! It doesn't matter who they are. Eventually they will have the opportunity of being related to that love of God. They will be called and have the opportunity to respond.

God doesn't go round placing value upon people. God's love is indifferent to value.

As the Psalmist said, "What is man that You are mindful of Him".

What are we? We are nothing. If we were melted down, our constituent elements could be sold for almost nothing! We amount to nothing!

God looks at people and says He has a purpose for them! *"I am going to do something with them."*

Look at what mankind has done since the Garden of Eden. Look at the way in which we have conducted ourselves. Would God be justified in blotting us out and starting all over again? I think He has a good reason to! But He hasn't!

We are value-less. We amount to nothing.

As Job said, *"My days are like a vapour -- puff and then gone"*.

... and the part that is not a vapour (the other 90%) is hot air!

There is nothing to us. There is nothing of value in terms of a human being.

But the love of God is creative, because God looks at each and every one of us and says, *"I can use you -- if you will use My Holy Spirit. If you will accept Christ's sacrifice, if you will be reconciled to Me, if you will use My Holy Spirit, something can happen. You can be part of My Family. You can have a part with Me in ruling this universe!"*

God creates value where no value exists. I am sure many of you have looked at yourselves in your own lives from time to time, and asked, *"Why did God call me? There are a lot of better people in the world that He could use. Why me?"*

God sees that He can do something with us. He sees that He can do something with other people at another time that is appropriate.

The love of God is creative. It creates value where no value exists. What is agape talking about? It is talking about something that is OUTGOING towards another person. It is talking about something that is mindful of the needs and well-being of others, irrespective of how much they deserve it or not.

Human beings love to play games. *"You can have this because you have done something nice."*

The love of God is not motivated that way. *"I love you because of what you are, and what you will be."*

If you look at a child, what do you see? Do you see somebody's baby, or do you see another potential member of the God family?

When we see someone who is dressed in a particular way, we feel, *"Ah, they are my type of person"*. They may have a particular personality, or something else that we identify with.

That is not agape! That is philia! That is a love which relates to identity.

What should we really see when we see another person? Forget the clothing, forget the personality, forgot all of the things that divide humanity in this day and age. Forget their background. Forget their education. Forget their nationality, whatever it may be.

What is standing before me when I see another person? A potential member of the God family!

And what is my relationship to them to be like? Like the God family! That is what it is to be. It doesn't matter what they are. It doesn't matter how low they may be on the totem pole of life -- they have value because they are a potential member of the Family of God. We have to respect them. This is why James (in chapter 2) said if you respect people, you break the law.

Paul made some amazing comments about agape that need never to be forgotten.

Galatians 4: 13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use

liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love (agape) serve one another.

14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love (agape) your neighbor as yourself."

You are to love them in a particularly godly manner.

15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

We started talking about marriage. Why marriage? Marriage is the closest opportunity that two human beings have to exercise and express that love of God. It's the closest opportunity that two individuals have to really express that love of God one to the other; to be concerned for one another.

Peter talks of that spiritual aspect. In a section in 1st Peter chapter 2 he talks about Christian living and the various circumstances that people find themselves in. He talks to the wives about how they are to have chaste conduct, accompanied by fear:

1 Peter 3: 7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

He has not necessarily expressed the term 'agape'. But is that not, in fact, what he is expressing -- that husbands have to dwell with their wives with agape?

You have got to see your wife for what she really is. She is not "just" a woman, as some societies think, a lesser mortal. She is also a potential member of the God family! Peter is saying if you see her as anything less your whole spiritual relationship with God can suffer, because you have lost sight of what it is all about.

That relationship exists to help us understand and appreciate God's love for humanity, and what God's purpose is.

Paul expressed that in Ephesians 5. Most of us are aware that Ephesians 5 talks of marital relationships. It talks about the way in which we are to submit ourselves one to the other. And it talks about the way in which we are to be concerned, one for the other -- and why we are to do it.

Ephesians 5: 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

It is not just because he is a man, and he is the head of the house. It is because he is the representative of Jesus Christ in the marriage. He holds the position that Jesus Christ holds in God's master plan.

23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

But of course it is not just a matter of abject submission. Husbands have to LOVE their wives. They have to agape their wives, just as Christ "agaped" the Church. That means he would die for her.

One young couple were discussing marriage and the young girl said, "Would you die for me?" The young man said, "No, I couldn't do that. Mine is an undying love!" (Just checking you haven't gone to sleep!)

We are to love our wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

We are to give ourselves. Why?

***26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,
27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or
wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.***

Not all of these things relate to the whole concept of marriage. Why has Christ done this for the Church? Because he is betrothed to the Church and He is looking forward to that period of time when the marriage ceremony will take place, and the marriage will be consummated. He looks forward to it.

28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

He is learning the proper love of God.

29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.

Christ cares for the Church. He takes care of it. He nourishes it and provides what is necessary for it.

***30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.
31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."***

They become a unit of themselves -- a family unit. It is not just talking about a physical union. It is talking about spiritual, mental and emotional aspects. They become as one. They learn to think as one.

And what is the one thing based upon? It is based upon what God has established.

32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

What was the love that Christ had for the Church? What is the love that Christ has for the Church now? It is agape. It is not erotic. It is not philia. It is not self centred. He loves us because we are what we are.

As John said, we love the Father because He first loved us. God saw some value. He said, "*I am going to use sinful man to accomplish My plan*".

***32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.
33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself,
and let the wife see that she respects her husband.***

So Paul, in no uncertain terms, places a very heavy responsibility upon a husband. He is to love his wife, as Christ loves the Church.

It is not a love that we can generate by ourselves. It is a love that is part of the fruit of God's Holy Spirit. It is a love that can only be experienced as result of God's Holy Spirit.

So we should remember that we have access to that Spirit, that enables us to have that love -- to understand that love, to express that love, to appreciate that love. That needs to be the motivation of our marriages.

For those who are contemplating marriage, ultimately speaking, that needs to be the purpose for that marriage -- to be able to appreciate that love of God in a very particular way.

Young people may be looking forward to the time when marriage may become a reality for them. Remember, it is NOT all hormones! Hormones are important, but there is something greater than that, something that should not be devalued, something that should not be overlooked -- and that is the opportunity to express the love of God.

So, coming back to the marriage ceremony as we have it:

"Men and women were created with the marvellous potential of eternal life in the Family of God.

You might ask yourself why?

Because of God's love. Because of the value that God places upon us, the way in which God sees us.

As a loving Father, God gave us the institution of marriage and the blessing of the family, that we might learn to love one another as He loves us!

God does love us.

The greatest challenge is for us to express that in return, to one another!

...Peter Nathan

11 May 02

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