

September 24, 2017

## ***The Most Excellent Way***

***"I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge—because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed."*** I Corinthians 1:4-9

One of the toughest challenges from the world to believers is in our attitude toward the sanctity of marriage. We live in a society that, while still actually abhorring divorce, has accepted it as the norm. Very nearly fifty percent of all marriages fail and many of those that remain intact can hardly be called successful.

In the first century Roman world divorce was every bit as common as it is today. But Jesus made it clear throughout his ministry that such was never God's plan. At the very beginning of the world God observed of his creation, man, ***"It is not good for man to be alone..."*** (Genesis 2:18) Our Father's solution to this inherent need in all mankind was the creation of marriage which he intended to be the perfect solution to our inability to be alone.

So, why do so many marriages fail? And, why does that matter so much to our Lord? I have become convinced that most discussions about marriage and divorce, especially among believers, are focused too much on the divorce side of the question. Most often we want to talk about when, if ever, it is appropriate to divorce.

I am convinced that the real solution to the high number of failed marriages is to discover a way to make more marriages succeed. In his letter to the Corinthian believers the Apostle Paul focuses on what is, I think, a fundamental understanding that is key to marital success. He writes, ***"...each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone, but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife."*** (I Corinthians 7:1-11)

When two believers are married the standards by which they live their lives must continue to reflect their beliefs. Jesus calls on each of us who would follow him to lay down our selfish desires; putting them to death in our lives. (Matthew 16:24-25) Nowhere is selflessness more essential than in marriage.

If the key command that each of us is called to follow is ***"...do to others what you would have them do to you..."*** (Matthew 7:12), then that command is nowhere more important than it is in our marriages. Any relationship lived by Jesus' standards will succeed. When we are selfless in our marriages, when we treat our spouses the way we would like to be treated, when we live out our discipleship, then our marriages will succeed.

If the proof of our discipleship is our unity as Jesus says it is, then that unity is no where more important than it is in our marriages. But, in the face of so many broken relationships how do we make marriage work? The Apostle shows us the way. When we choose a spouse, and for the record the decision to be married should be a carefully made choice and not a response to intense emotions, we are surrendering our very existence to them. As a husband I no longer belong only to myself. I now belong to my wife. As a wife, My wife no longer belongs only to herself. Now she also belongs to me. In marriage we have become a single unit and we have to function as a single unit.

I am convinced that far too many of those who get married fail to recognise the degree of surrender required to make their relationship work. The resulting selfishness destroys the relationship. As a disciple I have surrendered my very existence to my Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. As a husband I have surrendered my life as a disciple to my wife and she has surrendered her life to me.

To hurt her is to hurt myself. To fail her is to fail myself. To allow our marriage to fail is to fail as a disciple. When we, as believers, allow the unity of our marriages to fail, we make our discipleship a lie. As believers, when we let the unity of our churches fail we make our discipleship a lie.



Jesus would tell us, "...*Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" (John 13:34-35) In the unity of our relationships we demonstrate our very love for God. Letting any relationship fail, especially our marriages, destroys the credibility of our discipleship.