

# 'Building Blocks' of a Healthy Marriage - Putting Away Childish Things About Love and Marriage.

*(From the book "Putting Away Childish Things", by David Seamands. 1982)*

Don't you wish everybody would put away their childish ideas about love and marriage? You know that statistics on American marriages--one out of two is destined for dissolution. Do you realize that US is responsible for one-half of the reported divorces in the entire world? And there are many fractured and broken marriages in this country that are not yet statistics. Though no legal action has been taken, many spouses are just living apart--nearly two million people who are emotionally and spiritually divorced.

If you add to this the number of spouses who are unhappy but still together, you come to a frightening conclusion that the average still-married couple in the US has much less than a 50-50 chance of being reasonably happy in their life together. Evangelical Christians aren't exempt, and are being added to the divorce statistics at an alarming rate.

Paul reminds us that growing into real maturity means getting rid of our childish understanding. In marriage nothing is more important than that. Too many people come to courtship and marriage thinking, understanding, and communicating like children. No wonder. The fantasy begins on Mother's or Dad's lap during these evening sessions before bedtime, in the story from the fairy tale book where the handsome young prince marries the beautiful young princess. For teenagers the fantasy continues in front of the television set. The mass media is the sickest and the most demonic factor in all of this, filling us with childish and unrealistic concepts. By the time young people begin to date and move into adulthood, they are still thinking and understanding like children.

In the area of love and marriage, psychologists have a fancy name for what St. Paul calls "childish things"--"romantic infantilism." What a contrast there is between this romantic infantilism--- a fantasy-filled, feeling-centered love--- and the love spoken of in the Bible. This love between husband and wife is so deep, so strong, so committed and enduring in quality, that it is used to illustrate the love Christ has for His church. It's the difference between reel love and real love.

## **Eros - "I think he/she's attractive!"**

"How do you know you are in love with him?" I ask some sweet college coed. "Oh," she says, "Every time I am around him, I really get shook up!"

I say, "Oh, you mean like a bowl of Jello?"

"Yes! That's it exactly!" she responds.

Now I like Jello. It makes a good salad or dessert. But you need a lot of things on the menu if you are going to have a balanced, well-nourished marriage.

Don't for a moment think I am underestimating the part of the marriage that shakes you up and turns you on. The feeling element is a very important ingredient in mature Christian love and marriage.

**Sexual love, Eros, physical attraction--this is God's gift, His idea, His plan.**

He intended it to be an essential part of a mature marriage. And if Eros love is not a part of your concept of marriage, you are not fit for marriage. I can't think of anything worse than being married for a lifetime to someone who didn't ring my chimes!

**Why is it nowadays that so many people are talking more about Eros and sex, but enjoying it less?** Why the growing rise in impotence related problems? Because as the song says, we have substituted fantasy for reality, "a paper doll" rather than a "real live girl."

That centerfold in Playboy magazine may someday prevent you from being a good lover, when you are faced with actually enfolding a real flesh-and-blood marriage partner. **Fantasy may become a substitute for reality.** You did notice it's called Playboy, not Playman!

Eros, sacramental in the mind of the Christian, is vital and important. But love based only on Eros, on desire, cannot be stable. No two people in the world will always seem desirable. Because time changes external characteristics, Eros must increasingly be based on inner beauty, for there to be enduring love in the relationship.

**"Falling in love" is a childish basis for a Christian marriage.** You would think love was a mysterious force from outer space that unexpectedly seized two people and overpowered them, a force beyond rational control. However, if love comes that way, it can also leave that way, as mysteriously as it arrived. Several years ago a television heroine and her TV bridegroom spoke their marriage vows, claiming that they cherish and care for each other "so long as we shall love." They changed just one letter, and espoused a totally different philosophy of marriage than that which promises to love "as long as we both shall live".

It is childish to think that my love can be measured by the intensity of my own subjective sensations. This is merely being in love with my feelings of love. **It is loving myself through another person, which is the most selfish thing in the world.** Who characteristically is in love with his own sensations? With himself? A baby, of course. The modern idea of love is merely romantic infantilism. And infantilism with gross imbalance on Eros turns out to be nothing more than a young child's self-love dressed in grown-up clothes, parading on a Hollywood techni-color stage, trying to make a child's fairy-tale fantasy pass for responsible adult drama.

### **Philia - "He/She is my best friend, they got my back no matter what"**

In the scripture, there is a second great word for love: Philia. This is love as friendship, the kind of love that develops a common bond between people who see things in the same way, who share the same points of view, who strive together for the for the same goals.

The Bible forbids a believer to marry anyone who is not also a truly committed Christian. This warning not to be "bound together with unbelievers". (2 Corinthians 6:14) exists because of the nature of Philia or friendship love, and the basic unity of the outlook and interests it presumes. "Can two walk together unless they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3) They can't! They can't even walk together for very long, let alone love and live together in the most serious, intimate, demanding relationship between two human beings. Thus the minimum requirement of Philia love is that you be one in Christ with the person you are dating or courting or preparing to marry. Without oneness in Christ, there is no possibility of a successful marriage.

However, this does not mean that simply because two people are good Christians they will necessarily make a good marriage. We all know wonderful Christians who should have never married each other. For Philia includes much more than a spiritual unity. It also takes in many important factors of personality blending which makes up the rivets in the bond of matrimony.

It is foolish to overlook this vital element in our thinking about love and marriage. One childish notion and part of the demonic delusion that comes from the mass media, goes something like this: "I couldn't think of marrying him--he's too good of a friend." Did you ever hear worse rubbish? Can you think of a better basis for marriage than the fact that you are good friends? Or, let's reverse that: would you really want to spend your life with someone who was not a real friend? When you are courting, a good question to ask is this: "Are we two the kind of persons who could have a lifelong friendship if there were never any sexual expression between us?" It is a pretty rough question, but an important one.

### **Agape - "I love him/her EVEN IF..."**

By the time we are adults, we have built a whole set of fantasy preferences for our marriage partner. However, the best person suited for you, the person whom God may guide you, may be very different, even quite the opposite of your dream guy or your dream gal. And this is where you need to understand that third biblical kind of love which is absolutely necessary for a mature marriage, agape.

Agape is the love that comes from only from God, the love that is godlike in all its characteristics. It is an other-regarding love, a self-sacrificing love. Agape is grounded not in the emotions but in the will. It is not even based on the commonalities of Philia or friendship, but is settled in the commitment of the will. It is the commitment to love, in spite of and regardless of.

What is this kind of love like? If you want to know, read and reread 1Corinthians 13. It is a manner of behavior, a commitment to care for and protect, to love and to cherish, to assume responsibility for the welfare of that person. It is covenanted devotion, and it can survive all sorts of changes of mood and circumstances.

### **Marriage Is For Adults**

Mature Christian marriage combines all three: 1. Eros -- desire, sexual attraction, 2. Philia -- genuine friendship, unity of interests and purpose. 3. Agape -- deeply covenanted, committed devotion.

Married love is very precious and precarious balance of all three. Romantic or Eros love is a wonderful help in getting a marriage started. It is like a rocket that puts the space capsule into orbit and then drops away. It takes other forms of power to continue that space capsule in its successful flight toward its goal. It takes a putting away childish imbalanced concepts of love to have a successful marriage. "I understood as a child," says Paul, "when I was a child." Yes, but marriage is an adult business. Rather than "falling in love," it might be more accurate from a Christian standpoint to speak of "climbing up into love"

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