

Bible Text: Mark 10:9
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Please take your Bibles with me and turn to Mark chapter 10. I will read verses six through nine of Mark 10. The context is a discussion about the standard procedure in the first century of Israel, easy divorce. Jesus says, beginning at verse six of Mark 10:

But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh; consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.¹

Let's pray together.

Our heavenly Father, we thank you for the invitation to come into your courts. And we know it is true that some of your people have come like that lame man came to the Jerusalem temple, wounded and weary, and the request would be: Help me I pray. And we ask, Lord Jesus, that you would touch and that you would heal. And though there may be no silver or gold handed out today we ask that the truth of your Word, the balm of the Bible and the salvation of the gospel would touch some. And may some rise up and run in the ways of righteousness. We need your Spirit's presence if this would take place and we plead it in Jesus' name. Amen.

During this week the Republican National Convention took place and many of us heard much public rhetoric and oratory on the theme of courage and backbone and self sacrifice and reliability and heroism. And if you watched it all or read about brought into view were such national heroes as Senator John McCain who served valiantly in Vietnam even as a tortured prisoner of war. Also brought into view was the former mayor of New York City, Rudi Giuliani, who was declared by *Time* magazine as the "Man of the Year" for his personification of courage after the 9/11 catastrophe. Also in view were Democratic presidential nominees Senator John Kerry who received three Purple Hearts in Vietnam. And also mentioned and in view were former Senator Bob Dole who himself was maimed during battle in World War II.

Now the heroism of these men is well noted. And I, as a non veteran, am unworthy to tie their boots. However, I must admit my meditations on their bravery and valor—that is regarding all four of these national heroes—left me feeling a bit uneasy. You see, in each

¹ Mark 10:6-9

case, these four men I mentioned, every one of these national heroes displayed a selfish and spineless cowardliness at the most fundamental level of life. You see they all—according to my research and knowledge—initiated divorces against their first wives with no biblical grounds.

This week my uneasiness was stirred when I beheld John McCain in the convention hall sitting next to his second wife, Cindy Lou Hensley McCain who years ago replaced John's first wife Carol McCain one month after John filed for divorce stating his marriage was irretrievably broken.

And I also believe I saw there in the convention hall, Rudi Giuliani sitting next to his lovely new wife Judith Nathan who became Rudi's second wife after their extramarital affair was discovered by Rudi's first wife Donna Hanover.

John Kerry was married for 18 years before he filed for divorce due to, again, irretrievable brokenness as Theresa Heinz Kerry is the senator's second wife.

And, yes, even the dignified Bob Dole, after 23 years of marriage announced to his first wife Phyllis—Phyllis, by the way, who literally had nursed Bob back from the brink of death after his World War II wounds—Bob announced to his first wife Phyllis and his daughter Robin one morning as he came up from the basement, “I want out,” resulting in his divorce. As most of you know, Elizabeth Dole is Bob's second wife.

Now my purpose here is not to pile on these men who may have long ago agonizingly had heart dealings of repentance before God for past sins. My concern is with the present. My concern this morning is with us and our convictions about the solemnity of marriage. I am concerned about our obligation to build and maintain marriages that reflect the enduring love of Christ for his Church. And to this end I want to enlist four main headings of thought to address this theme, “What God has joined together let no man rend asunder,”² the theme of the solemnity of marriage.

And let me bring the first of my four main headings and it is this. First, the cornerstone vow, the cornerstone vow. The headwaters of this sermons began a couple three weeks back when I sat across Douglass Avenue there on a mid August Sunday night after the PM service sitting on a Dunton Park bench that overlooks lake Macatawa there. I sat there with an engaged couple and I began a premarital counseling session with them.

And I began the session by asking this question. What will be the foundation of your marriage? And these two delightful young people stared at each other, you know the look that I am talking about. And I know what their reflexive thoughts were at that time. Their thoughts were, “Well, surely our strong affections will be the glue that holds us together. Certainly our intense feelings of love for one another will be the Rock of Gibraltar upon which we will build our marriage.”

² See Mark 10:9

But I suggested to them this wasn't so, that romantic feelings for one another are a poor, miserable foundation upon which to build a marriage because romantic feelings are like beach castles that quickly morph into shifting sands, not solid at all. And I suggested to them, "You need something much more solid to build your marriage upon."

If I would have taken them to the lake shore a bit farther to the west I could have shown them Big Red, the lighthouse and how it is rooted and anchored in an enormous rock, stone and concrete foundation. That is what they need. And I spoke to them about their need for the foundation of their marriage to be not romantic feelings, but instead a covenant vow. And this is our first heading: The cornerstone vow.

You see, the covenant of vow that a couple makes to one another before and to God as they would say, "I take you as my lawfully wedded spouse, for better or for worse." You don't say, "Through warm or cold feelings." Actually you would say through warm or cold feelings, "till death do we part."

Now that vow is a wonderful, yet a very fearful thing. You see, it is a vow of a lifelong commitment before God, before witnesses as well. If you who were married before, I suppose, hundreds of witnesses, if you would break that vow it would be right that you would have hundreds of fists pounding at your door saying, "Wait a minute, Joe. You vowed till death do we part." And they would grab you by the lapels—hopefully and rightly—and hold you accountable for the vow that you made.

But I suggest to you that those hundreds of human fists are the least of your concerns regarding the vow that was made. Because the greatest problem has to do, the vow that was made before not just men, but before the almighty one, the living God, the judge of all the earth.

You see, when you take a vow, you take a vow in the name of God. And the Third Commandment says that the Lord will not leave him guiltless, unpunished, who takes his name in vain.³

When you make a promise, you are saying, "In the name of God I will stay with you, till death do we part." And to break that vow is to take God's name and person as vain, irrelevant, unimportant.

The Lord Jesus said in Mark 10:9, What therefore God has joined together, let no man, let no man separate."⁴ Let no man or woman dare break the covenant seal that has been firmly affixed by God.

If we could go over to the tomb in which the body of the Lord Jesus was encased and the stone was rolled over it. Then it was sealed. It was sealed and the insignia of Rome was placed on it. Well, of course the fear would be if anybody breaks this seal, the wrath of Rome will come down upon you. But what a small thing that would be in comparison to

³ See Exodus 20:7

⁴ Mark 10:9

having the wrath of the living God come down upon the man or the woman who would dare rend asunder what the Lord has brought together.

And you have heard me say this before. There are a lot of foolish and dangerous things you might do. You might do something so foolish and dangerous as to camp inside the cone of an active volcano. That would really be foolish and dangerous. Or you might do something so foolish and dangerous as putting your head in the mouth of a hungry lion. That would really be foolish and dangerous. Or, if in the middle of a lightning and thunder storm you climbed up one of those steel Nextel radio cell phone towers. That would really be foolish and dangerous. But none of that would be as foolish and as dangerous as taking a vow before the living God and then recklessly breaking it. Now that is something that is far more foolish and far more dangerous because all their discretions that a man might engage in, a woman might do, he may get away with. But no one will ever get away with despising the living God.

“Do not be deceived,” Galatians six say, “God will not be mocked.”⁵ The Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes his name in vain,⁶ because whether it is in this life or it is in the life to come, I assure you the shoe will drop, the punishment will come.

You may say, “Well, you are talking about marriage and the beauty of marriage and you are making me shudder and tremble. It doesn’t seem right.” Though it is right, you see, because it is right that we would be made to shudder and tremble regarding marriage because when it comes to marriage—as with all things, Psalm 111:10—what is the beginning of wisdom? The fear of the Lord. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”⁷ And that is the foundation of every marriage, the fear of the Lord. To revere God’s eyes and to seek after God’s smile, that is the foundation, ought to be the sturdy cornerstone of every God honoring marriage.

And if your marriage is to be wonderful and is to be solid and is not to be built upon the inevitable shifting sands of sentiment and feelings and affections, then it will be built right there on the fear of the Lord. I have made a sacred covenantal vow before him and I dare not rend it asunder.

It was just a few weeks ago that I was just outside of Chicago playing tennis with a young man. He is not so young. He is my age. But, you see, he had years ago married a woman who was a veritable beauty queen. But after having a child or two or three she...he knew there was something wrong with her as the marriage went on. She didn’t fear the Lord and she eventually left him. And as we there, after we played the first set and between the first and second set we sat there drinking water under the hot sun and with tear filled eyes he told me about how his life has become a shambles. He has gone through a meat grinder with his children being taken away from him and the way that she works the children to make the children hate him and what a terrible nightmare of a life he now lives.

⁵ See Galatians 6:7

⁶ See Exodus 20:7

⁷ Psalm 111:10

Looking back on the whole theme of charm's deceptive beauty, beauty queen beauty is fleeting. But a woman who—there it is—fears the Lord, she is to be praised. A woman who fears the Lord, that is chief among all. That needs to be the foundation of every marriage.

My dear wife recently confided in me. She said, “When disappointment set in early in our marriage...”

I said, “What do you mean by this, ‘Disappointment set in early in our marriage’?”

Well, what she meant was I was not the prince charming she thought I was and marriage was not all that it cracked up to be. She said, “I wondered if I had married the wrong person.”

Now that is an interesting thought especially since it says in Proverbs 20:25, “It is a snare for a man to say rashly, ‘It is holy!’” that is make a vow, “And after the vows to make inquiry.”⁸ Because the point is, once you have made a vow, the season of inquiry is over. You don't rethink it afterwards. And so it is true that during a time of courtship and friendship before the marriage it is the season for inquiry. It is the season for evaluation. Is he or is she compatible? Is there the right chemistry? Does he have the right discipline? Does she? Does my potential spouse hunger and thirst after righteousness? Proper spiritual caliber, proper wisdom, proper beauty, proper godliness, have a servants heart; all of these things are crucial in the season of inquiry. But once the vows have been taken what God has joined together let no man rend asunder.⁹

And as surely as God had brought Eve to Adam... You wonder if Adam wondered, “Did I marry the right person?” It is obvious. God brought her. Likewise, providentially if you have walked down an aisle and you have made vows, it is as certain that God providentially brought that woman to you as God brought Eve to Adam. Yes. The guess work is over. You two have been ordained by God to be married. The issue is certain.

And we are looking at this issue of cornerstone vow. He has made a vow. It is certainly right.

Now there is a flip side to my wife's story about this. And that is that in the early months of marriage my wife and I had an argument. And I can still remember—I think I have told you in the past—staring at a digital clock that read in the dark room approximately 1 AM. And I was not a happy camper at that point. I was married, but I was, in some sense, miserable because of the argument and the conflict. And you know how it is when you...when you sign up for a job and you realize that this job is unsatisfactory. This job is not what I thought it was. I can resign and get out of it.

⁸ Proverbs 20:25

⁹ See Mark 10:9

Well, that was really the way I had lived up to that point regarding things that were unacceptable. As I stared at the clock I realized, I am stuck. For good I am padlocked to this woman and there is no undoing the lock. I have made a vow before God. She is mine for life. And she was, no doubt, having the same thoughts about me as well. But I was able to at that point just...just go to sleep with great peace because the issue was settled. It wasn't even a question.

In fact, there is an account of a father in Billings, Montana. Listen to this. We were visiting friends when they received a telephone call from their recently married daughter. After several tense minutes on the phone the mother told the father to pick up the extension. The newlyweds had had their first big fight. In a few moments the father rejoined us and tersely explained, "She wanted to come home."

"Well, what did you tell her?" I asked.

"I told her she was home."

You see, for 22 years my wife has been my home sweet home for me and your wife has been your sweet home for you and not the shifting sands have held me to her, but it is the foundation of our marriage that has been built upon the rock of that covenantal commitment.

We say, "Honey, you are my home," one to another. And we must build that house of our marriage on the rock of that covenantal commitment and not upon romantic feelings or infatuations.

So, firstly, then, the cornerstone vow.

Come with me now, secondly—I promised four main headings: The resolution of love, the resolution of love.

The world's concept of love and the Bible's concept of love, I assure you, are two completely different animals.

A counselor expressed an experience that he had. Some of you have gone through this. In fact, I was even telling someone this morning how, you know, when I spoke with the two of you a while back this was the very kind of thought that I had. Listen to this.

Phil and Emily had not come for help in solving the problems in their marriage, although they had called the chaplain to ask for marriage counseling. Actually, their minds already were made up. They had decided to get a divorce, yet they were Christians and they knew that a divorce was wrong since they had no biblical grounds for it. There had been no adultery, no desertion, only untold misery.

"If we can only get him to agree that going on in this marriage would be an impossibility," they thought, "then perhaps the chaplain would be able to show us how in

our case God will make an exception to his law.” That was how they were reasoning inwardly when they first told their stories to Chaplain Cunningham.

“So, you see,” Emily concluded, “There is simply nothing left to our marriage. I don’t feel a thing for Phil any more. There is nothing to build on.”

Phil ended his remarks in a similar vein. “Well, I suppose that it has been a long time since you have heard a story like that, chaplain. And while we don’t agree on many things, I must say, that Emily is absolutely correct when she claims that there is nothing left in our marriage. Every drop of love that I once had for her has been drained away.”

We can understand this kind of a thing happening. The chaplains response was an interesting one. Listen to how it goes.

“You say that there is no love and no feeling left? Now that is serious. If you didn’t love each other, if you don’t love each other there is certainly only one thing to do.”

And here it comes, they thought. He’ll advise a divorce.

“You have to learn how to love one another.”

“Learn how to love,” they returned almost simultaneously. “What do you mean learn how to love,” asked Phil as soon as he was able to regain a measure of his composure.

“Yeah,” offered Emily cynically, “How can you learn it? You can’t produce feelings out of thin air.”

“I was not talking about feelings,” said Chaplain Cunningham, “I was talking about love. The two are not identical even though Hollywood, the TV and playboy might say otherwise. Love is not a feeling first. Before all else it is the determined, the resolution to do good for another person because God has told you to do so. Love begins, therefore, with a desire to please God. Love toward one another is a willingness to give to him whatever you have that he needs because you know that God wants you to.”

So we are looking at love. And the heading here is the resolution to love. You see, biblically speaking love is not primarily and emotion. Do you hear that? Love is not primarily an emotion. It is a resolution. Love is a decision. Love is an action, not based in sentiment, but based in objective principle.

The world’s notion of romantic love is different. In fact, it speaks of in love. Have you heard of that? In love, I am in love or I am not in love. You see this idea has infected and twisted and contorted biblical love in the views of many people.

Lou Priola writes this. “Biblical love isn’t primarily a feeling or an emotion. Biblical love is not a noun, but primarily a verb.”

Doug Wilson goes on to say, “Love is not sentiment. Love is action.”

Listen to me. Love is not something you feel. Love is something you do. Again, love is not something you feel. Love is something that you do biblically.

John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.”¹⁰ You see, loving another, loving an object is not based on the loveliness or the lovability of the object.

Let me ask you. As God looked upon the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, his elect whom he would love, did he look upon the Church and see loveliness? No. It says in Romans 5:8, “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”¹¹ And two chapters earlier we see in Romans chapter three what God saw when he loved the bride of Christ, what Christ saw when he sacrificed himself for his bride. Did he see a moral, delightful beauty in the nest of sinners. No. It is not beautiful at all. It says in Romans 13 and following, describing sinners,

Their throat is an open grave...their tongues...keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their...there is no fear of god before their eyes.¹²

When Christ loved us was it based on loveliness in us, something attractive? No, not at all, because we were the ugliest hag conceivable that any groom would take to be his bride.

And the Lord Jesus becomes our model. It says in Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands,” turn there please, Ephesians 5:25. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ...loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”¹³ What kind of a love was it that the Lord Jesus exercised?

It was not what we would call honeymoon love or romantic love or infatuation love based on feelings. But rather it was Gethsemane love. It was Golgotha love.

Let me ask you. Have you ever encountered your spouse in such a way that you had anything but affectionate feelings toward them? Maybe some have had that. That there was a conflict that was going on and you did not have the hint of warm feelings for them. In fact, to the contrary you had anger and resentment and bitterness.

Now, this summons forth an occasion of true love, resolution to love. You see, the Lord Jesus the way he loved the church not only loving when it is pleasant, not only loving when I am inclined, not only loving when she is lovable, but rather the Lord Jesus Christ

¹⁰ John 3:16

¹¹ Romans 5:8

¹² Romans 3:13-18

¹³ Ephesians 5:25

loved when it was not pleasant. He was being scourged at the pillar. Why? For his bride. Do you think it was pleasant? But there he stayed, loving his bride when it was not pleasant. He loved his bride when he was disinclined. Gethsemane, “Oh, Father, that this cup would pass from me. But not my will, thine be done.”¹⁴

And, further, we find he loved when his bride was unlovable. You’ll see that picture of the Lord Jesus Christ hanging upon the cross and people walking by wagging their heads at him. For such—I believe it is true for some head wagers when we look at...read the book of Acts—for some head wagers the Lord Jesus died when his bride was unlovable. That is Gethsemane love. That is Golgotha love. That is biblical love. And with that Christ like love we are to love our spouses.

Now in our account, Phil or Emily, they came to the counseling office. They might respond by saying, “Oh, come on. Love my spouse when she is acting obnoxiously, when he is giving that head wag to me? You are saying that I should love him, love with kind words, love with tender kisses? I mean, wouldn’t that be hypocritical for me to do such a thing?”

Well, yes, of according to the world’s idea of love it would be hypocritical to bring the kind words and the tender kisses if we don’t first feel the warm affection for, because only then the world says are you to be real and give of yourself. But the Bible teaches to the contrary. The Bible even says this in Luke 6:27, “Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you.”¹⁵

So biblical love is a resolution. It is an action. If we had to wait until we felt warm feelings toward our enemies they would die of hunger or they would die of thirst before we gave them the food or the drink of water that they need. We are not to be feeling directly. We are to be directed by God’s Word. We are to do the right thing whether we feel like it or not. And that is not being hypocritical. And that is one of the secrets.

Almost morning I roll out of bed I don’t feel like it. So...so what? Am I a hypocrite? No, you...you don’t always feel like getting up at five in the morning either. But you do it because it is godly. You do it because it is your duty. The Proverb says, “Like a door swinging on its hinges, so a fool turns back and forth on his bed.”¹⁶ You do it on principle. You follow the Lord. You love him. And it is not hypocrisy.

This idea of covenant love, we are looking, again, at the resolution of love. This idea of covenant love, resolution to love one’s spouse based on an unbreakable, life long vow is really revolutionary to a marriage. It is. I mean in...as opposed to a marriage being based on the worldly idea of being in love.

Oh, man. You try this harness on as a husband and a wife who are together pulling toward the celestial city. This idea is quite revolutionary. Some of you have had the

¹⁴ See Matthew 26:39, 42

¹⁵ Luke 6:27

¹⁶ See Proverbs 26:14

experience of looking at your husband in the morning, or looking at your wife, maybe, in the morning. You say...maybe it came after a couple of months of being married or maybe three or four months. "Is this...Is this the right person? I mean, look there. Look at the matted hair. Look at the no makeup. Smell the bad breath. I don't have an infatuation rush at this moment."

Then you realize it. That's my man. That's my woman. I will love him. I will love her. Now, that is a solid foundation.

And even this week I was discussing this with my wife and she told me how she was listening to a radio broadcast where the speakers were talking about this idea of three stages of marital love. I don't think there is a lot of horse sense in what they are saying. Three stages of marital love. First there is the stage which could be called new love. That's the infatuation feeling. That's kind of the dream world, you know, the romantic era of the marriage.

But then the man said typically it moves from new love to what could be called disappointed love. That's when, really, reality sets in. The mundane, the tarnish is worn off the marriage. One woman I heard express it this way.

"I got up one morning and I realized that I thought I had married a 10, but instead I got a four."

Disappointed love, that era sets in.

But then they spoke about how when the experience is directed by the Word of God it will graduate to mature love.

"The Lord gave me this spouse as Christ was given the Church and it is for me to pour out myself in sacrificial love for my spouse till death do we part."

Now this is so different than a worldly marriage which is not based on till death do we part, but, you know, it is based on till disinterest do we part, till discontentedness do we part. And I think of our introduction and those women who were married to successful, high profile men. I am telling you right now. In our society with the world's ... such women hang chronically in uneasy suspense and insecurity wondering every morning when they wake up, "Am I still pleasing in his eyes this morning?"

You think of that kind of instability. "I have borne his children. I may have stretch and aging marks. My body may be sagging. Is he going to trade me in for some trophy wife like so many of these national heroes and celebrities do?"

Because really often times the trend of society is set by such individuals as our models.

Doug Wilson speaks of the worldly view which basically is described this way. "The woman needs to keep herself up to keep her man." He goes on to say how this is

inculcated very early where now in society, in fact, for the past few decades girls don't play with baby dolls so much anymore. But instead they play with Barbie dolls and they see themselves in the place of the doll, "And of course," writes Wilson, "the doll is both pretty and well endowed and the pressure is on the little girl and that pressure stays on." So it is in society today." What instability, what a sense of hanging on the edge. Instead of the blessed security of a woman who is able to say, "I am wed to a god fearing man. He vowed his life to me. He vowed that he would love me with a sacrificial love, for better or for worse."

You see, such a woman, her soul is taken away from that storm tossed seasickness type relationship and her soul is brought beside quiet waters and her soul is made healthy and is restored.

You see, the man who husbands his wife. And, by the way, that word "husband," it means nurtures, cultivates, like a farmer cultivates a plant, his soil. The man who husbands his wife as Christ husbands the Church, that man will seek to—like Christ presenting the Church—to present the glorious Church without spot or wrinkle.¹⁷ Christ beautifies the Church. Christ makes lovely his Church.

And you know what? That is exactly what a Christ like man does to his wife. He beautifies his wife. 1 Peter three. There is the hidden person of the heart that becomes beautiful.¹⁸

Now understand here. I am not at all saying that the woman who is married to a godly man has the excuse and the license to let herself go. I am not saying that at all. You see, a wife who sees that her husband selflessly loves her, that will rightly inspire her to selflessly discipline herself to stay lovely in his eyes.

Song of Solomon 4:1, the husband says, "How beautiful you are, my darling."¹⁹ And if you read the rest of the chapter he inventories the traits of her physical beauty. And so that is the response.

If a woman who is loved by a husband says, "Well, I can just..."

No. "How can I love him back and how can I keep myself lovely and beautiful in his sight?"

That one man writes this and you have heard me say this at a wedding in the past. "It is said that the glow worm never shines after it has become a parent. And some women lose the luster of all delicacy and refinement under the influence of men whom they call their husbands."

¹⁷ See Ephesians 5:27

¹⁸ See 1 Peter 3:4

¹⁹ Song of Solomon 4:1

You see, it is possible that a husband that is harsh and neglectful toward his wife can make her to be, in a sense, less than beautiful. It is like a flower garden that has been trampled down. So, too, the beauty of some women has been trampled down into ugliness, frankly, by ungodly husbands, neglectful husbands.

Now with a woman who is a wife of a godly husband, though there will be realistic wear and tear, the rigors of family life, under Christ like husbanding she will be seen to have a real attractive glow about her. And I can look at some wives among us who have that because you have good Christ like husbands.

I'm not saying that every woman who has a godly Christ like husband is going to be the world's candidate for being on the cover of *Vogue* magazine, but oh, you know what I am talking about. There is something about a woman who has a loving husband that makes her glow.

So we have seen the cornerstone vow. We have seen the resolution to love. Come with me now, thirdly, to the place of feelings, the place of feelings.

I know what you are thinking. "Oh, come on, Pastor Chanski, what about feelings? You make marriage to sound so mechanical. And what is a relationship without feelings?"

I know what you are saying. I know what you are saying. But we need to see feelings for what they are. We need to see what it is to be in love as we are programmed and propagandized by this world. We need to see in love—as it is talked about today—for what it is. It is not love as described biblically. It is romantic infatuation. It is a dream world that is marketed as true love. It is marketed by the theater, isn't it? A loving relationship, the theater will tell us, is to be in the ethereal state where you can't stop thinking about the other person. And that is conveyed as being ultimate. That is conveyed as being deep love. But that is not true.

You think about how the theater presents it. Take *Romeo and Juliet*. Oh, you read that or you watch that in the theater and they are all...it is obvious that they are in love. I mean, the passions are really intense here. But you think about it. How long have they known each other? What, about 15 minutes? And then by the end of the movie they have known each other for maybe what...for a handful of hours at best? And that, mind you, that is presented, that experience of being in love is something that is ultimate and something that is deep? That is something that is counterfeit. That is something that is cheap. It has very little to do with what true biblical love is. You must not make this novel fascination which, frankly...you know what, frankly, often times that novel fascination is? Lust. Because that novel fascination is the kind of thing people can pick up any Saturday night at a bar.

We ought not lust after that as being that which is ultimate and that which is deep. That is interesting stuff. But it is not what true biblical love is.

However, though affectionate feelings aren't of chief importance, affectionate feelings sure make a marriage delightful, don't they? You see, even the Song of Solomon five and verse one it says, "Drink deeply, imbibe deeply oh lovers."²⁰ And it is referring to a blessed set of affections and feelings. But we have got to understand that sweet and mature feelings of affection are not the root of a healthy relationship, but the fruit of the healthy relationship. Mature and sweet fruit it is. Not the root, but the fruit.

Jay Adams says this. "When one gives himself to another feelings of love follow acts of love. So while feelings of love are not essential for establishing a marriage contract, they are an inevitable result of properly pursuing its terms."

But let's go back to the counseling room where we find Emily and Phil talking to the chaplain. The chaplain says this, "If you mean business with God and if you do as he says, within six to eight weeks you can have a marriage that sings. If you love one another you can have feelings of love that will follow acts of love."

If you consider with me the ultimate groom, the Lord Jesus, how did the ultimate groom, the Lord Jesus, get his bride to gush with affections toward him? 1 John 4:19. "We love, because He first loved us."²¹ And the contemplation that the Lord Jesus who loved me causes the love of Christ to constrain me. It causes my heart to sing with joy, "Praise the Lord, oh my soul, all my inmost being. He has delivered me of all of my sins. He has healed me of all of my diseases." "We love, because He first loved us."²² That is where the feelings come from, you see.

One counselor says this. "I challenge those who come to me for marriage counseling this way. If you do what I tell you to do for an entire month I can promise you by the end of the month you will be in love with your mate. Are you willing to give it a try?"

When couples accept my challenge the results are invariably successful. My prescription for creating love is simple. Do 10 things each day that you would do if you really were in love. I know that if people do loving things it will not be long before they experience the feelings that are often identified as being in love. But love is not those feelings. Love is what one wills to do to make the other person happy and fulfilled. Often we don't realize that what a person does influences what he feels.

I know that I am probably not telling something new to a lot of you, but I am stirring you up by way of memory and I hope this can bring about a renaissance in some of your relationships.

Also I read this interesting account. "A woman seeking counsel from a psychologist named Dr. George Crane," this is true, "confided," listen, "that she hated her husband and intended to divorce him. 'I want to hurt him all I can,' she declared firmly.

²⁰ See Song of Solomon 5:1

²¹ 1 John 4:19

²² Ibid.

“‘Well, in that case,’ said the doctor, ‘I advise you to start showering him with compliments and kindnesses. And when you have become indispensable to him, when he thinks you love him devotedly, then start a divorce action. That is the way you can really hurt him.’

“Some months later the wife returned to report that all was going well. She had followed the suggested course. ‘Good,’ said the doctor. ‘Now it is time to file for the divorce.’

“‘Divorce?’ the woman said indignantly, ‘Never. I love my husband dearly.’”

And it was a happy marriage from then on in many ways.

You see, the truth is loving kindness begets loving kindness. It creates an atmosphere of warm affections and feelings. It will produce the sweet fruit of love. So that is the place of feelings.

But now come with me fourthly and finally. We have seen the cornerstone vow, the resolution of love and the place of feelings. Now fourthly and finally: The nobility of fidelity, the nobility of fidelity.

And here I am somewhat hearkening back to our introduction. Truly great men and truly great women are those who keep their word. Do you understand me? Truly great men and women are those who keep their word, who stay at their posts doing their duty until the job is done.

I know there are some who say the word “duty” is somewhat of a naughty and undesirable word. But I think that Robert E. Lee was right in saying, “Duty is possibly the most sublime—in other words lofty—word in the English language.” Truly great men are those who stay at their posts doing their duty until their job is done. And the case in point is the greatest man who ever walked the face of the earth, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation five we see there the groom of the Church who is, by the way, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He is presented...what a legacy he has created. He is standing there in Revelation five as a Lamb standing as if it had been slain. And why is he given this prominent place? Because he finished—“It is finished!”²³ He loved his bride to the end. He finished his Father’s assignment. And so listen to the esteem and honor that is heaped on him. “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive...honor and glory and blessing.”²⁴

You know what? Such noble spouses and men and women are worthy of our highest esteem and honors. Those are the individuals who ought to be our greatest national historical heroes.

²³ John 19:30

²⁴ Revelation 5:12

But, you know, I suggest to you others ought to, in a way, in a sense hold our deepest disdain. I am not saying deny and good such individuals have done, but there should be an element in which such individuals who do not stay at their marital posts ought to hold for us the deepest disdain.

Listen to this. It is a letter to Dr. Laura. It is called, "A message to the so called man."

"Dear Dr. Laura, I am writing in response to the man, no scratch that—we'll call him the male caller. He doesn't deserve to be called a man—who called stating that he can no longer love or even maintain an interest in his wife because she is starting to put on a little weight. For him and others who may be, God forbid, harboring the same egotistical selfish, uncharitable thoughts about their own loving wife, I want to send this message. My beautiful wife of 28 years was recently diagnosed with breast cancer. My whole world fell out from under me when the doctor gave us this horrific news. She has always been beautiful to me. From the first day I laid eyes on her to this very day. She no longer weighs 110 pounds as she did when we first met and her voluptuous figure has been altered somewhat from having breast surgery and a breast reduction which became necessary for medical reasons. She has put on some weight as a result of the medication she has had to take as a cancer preventative measure. During chemotherapy treatment her beautiful thick hair fell out one by one until she has lost every hair on her head. That's right. She was completely bald. Can you picture your wife looking like that? When she went through radiation her battered breasts looked like raw meat. Can you visualize that, my friend? And now due to the medication she must take, she has a voracious appetite. She loves to eat, especially sweets and potato chips, her favorite.

"But do you know what, buddy? I love her even more than the first day I met her and when I look at her she looks more beautiful than the first day I laid eyes on her. I love her so. I love her more than life itself. And I thank God each and every day he allows me to have her by my side. Each morning I awake and I beg him to let us grow old together and watch our children and their children grow. God has taught me not to take her or anything else precious to me for granted. She is God's gift to me and he can take her back at any time at any moment. I can't imagine this world without her. Fat, wrinkled, old or gray, I want her by my side forever."

Now, that...that is what I believe is a worthy lover to be imitated.

Let me bring somewhat of a refreshing contrast to today's love. Let me lay before you a true American hero, Robert E. Lee. You know of him? Robert E. Lee was heroic not only in the trenches of warfare, but he was also heroic in the trenches of his marriage. During the Civil War he was a man of such valor that Robert E. Lee, the general of the Confederate army became basically the George Washington of the South, the bigger than life hero of the confederacy.

When he would walk through the streets of the South, do you know, what men would do? They would take off their hats before Mr. Lee. Do you know what women would do? Women would swoon before Mr. Lee.

Humanly speaking Lee could have had the pick of the southern belle litter to be his trophy wife. But Lee was a man of true nobility and fidelity.

Let me just read for Steven Wilkens, Lee's biographer. He is quoting on, "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her."²⁵

"Paul's admonition was not lost on Robert E. Lee. From the day he first took Mary Custis to be his bride, Lee devoted himself to her sacrificially. Mrs. Lee never enjoyed complete health after the birth of Mary, her second child in 1835. She developed a pelvic infection that was not treated properly. And from that time on she experienced a steady decline in her physical well being. By 1857 when Lee returned home from Texas upon the death of Mr. Custis, Mrs. Lee had become an invalid. Due to the ravages of arthritis she had lost the use of her right arm and hand. Kept awake by the pain she was seldom able to get a full night's sleep and she was barely able to move about the house under her own power. At the age of 49 Mrs. Lee had become an old woman.

"Though Lee was truly shocked over his wife's condition, she had made no mention of the deterioration of her health in her letters to him, it only caused him to become more devoted to her as he sought to comfort and uphold her in affliction. In fact, the severe suffering Mrs. Lee was called to endure in God's providence deepened the Lee's love for one another. The sight of Mrs. Lee suffering drew forth more of her husband's love. And the love he gave strengthened her love for him. He delighted to pamper her. She delighted to honor him."

Last section.

"Lee was ever solicitous of his wife's well being, seeking to be sure that everything that might contribute to her comfort was provided. After the war Lee delighted to be with her. Most evenings were spent quietly, she knitting and he reading to her. Before retiring he always read her a portion of the Scripture and then they prayed together. He purchased a small carriage for her so she would have the opportunity of fresh air without too much discomfort. He often claimed the privilege of taking her on rides around the countryside. His love for his wife became a shining example to the young men at the college in Lexington." You see, he became president of the Washington College. He was a beloved president. "Mrs. Lee's room was on the first floor of the house and opened out on a large porch that extended around three sides of the house. It was the general's custom every afternoon, weather permitting, to roll her out on the porch in her chair. Many of the students knowing the hour of this ritual would arrange to be walking very slowly by the president's house at the appointed time in order to get a glimpse of their hero serving his invalid bride. Stooping down to kiss her cheek, making sure that she was comfortable, putting her on the shoulder, his great pleasure in her company was clearly manifested. Lee's attentiveness and solicitude provided a picture of what Peter meant when he called upon husbands to honor their wives as the weaker vessel.

²⁵ See Ephesians 5:25

“The love of a man causes his wife to flourish. Without question, it was her husband’s love that kept Mrs. Lee from bitter despair at the end of her days. Ill health, the loss of children, family life and estate would have all conspired to embitter a woman with a less obedient husband. But Mary Lee was known for her contentment, kindness, grace, thoughtfulness, hospitality and joy. She was a testimony to the blessings of having a husband who loved her as Christ loved the Church.”

Now that, my friends, that, my friends, is Christ like nobility. That, my friends, is a greatness worthy of our imitation. And such a man receives a commendation from something far better than *Time* magazine being called “Man of the Year.” But to receive the commendation of the, “Well, done, good and faithful servant,”²⁶ from the Lamb who was slain for his bride, now that is something worth aspiring toward.

May God enable us to not dare rend asunder what God has joined together. May he make us to have marriages that are like Christ and the Church.

Let’s pray together.

Our heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word that brings to us no uncertain sound in a world that is full of noisy cacophony. We thank you, heavenly Father, that we are able to find stability here in the Scriptures. And we pray that you would give to us the Holy Spirit that these things which are written would be true in the lives of your people. We pray that those who don’t have this kind of sweet and mature fruit, that they would find it by going to the Lord Jesus Christ believing upon him and enjoying the fruit of the Spirit. We pray it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

²⁶ See Matthew 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17