

Marriage, Dogs, And Sacrifice

By

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I have often advocated to couples that are having marital difficulties to "give up the dog." To illustrate the need to put the marriage above all else, I present the following scenario along with a question. "A man has a pet Rottweiler, and upon his marriage he informs his wife he will expect the dog to stay in the house. She, afraid of dogs, pleads that he not bring it home. The dispute grows and eventually develops into a major issue. Unless something is done, irreparable harm will be inflicted on the marriage. What should be done to preserve this union?"

The answer is: Give up the dog, and save the marriage. The point I am trying to make in advising the man to give up the dog is one should be willing to sacrifice anything, including a pet, for the sake of the marriage. Most tend to agree with this until it is their dog. Then the retort is "It's not fair that I have to give up what I want." It seems to me that many think they have vowed to love, honor and cherish so long as they perceive it to be fair, with fair being defined by them. This is rank self-centeredness and it will destroy a marriage. This kind of "fairness" is less about the preserving of a marriage and more about ME.

It used to be that those entering marriage understood that it was truly "for better or for worse," and they stuck it out even during the "for worse" years. Today, however, most couples with stars in their eyes haven't even thought about the fact that life with their spouses will change as time moves along. Many enter marriage with the express idea that they are getting married because they want to "capture the moment." These savor the way things are while dating; they have this feeling of euphoria and believe these feelings will remain permanent. What they don't realize

is that such things are impossible. Time and circumstances stand still for no one. Every relationship will face difficulties and change. Coping with these depends upon "giving up the dog." (Please remember I am speaking metaphorically).

Young people often ask, "How can I know whether I really love this person?" This is an excellent question because there is a great difference between love and infatuation. Infatuation is being obsessed with a feeling, while love is caring deeply about another. Therefore, I usually answer something like this: "Picture him or her in a wheelchair permanently with you doing the pushing. If that happened, would you still be in love?" To do this one must give up much more than a dog for the marriage.

Sure, no one wants such things to happen, but all need to realize changes will occur, some of them desirable and some of them not so desirable. Those who have lasting marriages are people who have determined to be what they should be when change comes. They have determined to cope with whatever comes, no matter what the cost (what must be given up).

Even though most do not recognize it, marriage is to be "as long as you both shall live," (Rom. 7:1-3; Matt. 19:3-9). This means my marriage must take preeminence over my feelings, my sense of fairness or my desires. This means I must be willing to sacrifice for the betterment of my marriage. Many among God's people fail to believe this.

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love

your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her," (Eph. 5:22-25).

No husband can love his wife as Christ loves the church without a willingness to give (sacrifice) for the marriage. Likewise, no wife can submit to her husband without a willingness to give (sacrifice) for the marriage. A heavy-handed, abusive, thoughtless husband is not sacrificing for the betterment of his marriage. And a flippant, disobedient and rebellious wife is not sacrificing for the betterment of her marriage. Those loving and honoring God will be willing to give up anything for the bettering of their marriage. And sacrifice, by its very nature, demands nothing in return.

Those who qualify their giving by the giving done by the other is not really giving. "If I give up the dog it's not fair, what does she have to give up" is often said in response to the scenario I presented above. This demonstrates that one is not giving unless he/she gets in return. My responsibility to obey God is not established by whether another obeys Him. If my marriage is important to me then I will willingly give up anything that will help, improve or strengthen it. If, on the other hand, I am unwilling to part with something to better my marriage, then whatever I cling to takes preeminence.

Are you experiencing marital difficulties? Try giving up the dog!