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## **The World Does Not Like Love**

### **I Corinthians 13: 4-8a**

Every couple who has come before me for premarital counseling has heard me ask this odd question:

“Have any of your friends said to you, “Don’t get married.

Things were great in *my* relationship until I got married”?

The couple tends to look sheepish momentarily, then one or the other of them will admit,

“Yeah, somebody at work said something like that.”

Then I’ll ask, “What do you think people mean when they say that?” The couples will usually mumble,

“Uh, I don’t really know.” I will say, “No matter what they *think* they mean,

what they *really* mean is that while they were dating they *worked* to make each other feel special.

While they were dating each went out of their way to let their lover know how important they were.

But once they were married they thought, “Now, they have to love me.

Now I don’t have to do those little things that let them know they are special.”

Ah, my friends, here’s the sad truth: no matter how many thousands of dollars you spend on it,

no wedding automatically makes a relationship last. No wedding vows make somebody love you.

A wedding is just the *doorway* to the adventure.

A wedding simply ushers you and your love into the great challenge

of making love work amidst the real world. And here’s the cold, hard truth: the world does not like love.

Those somber words are exactly what I tell couples considering marriage: *the world does not like love.*

Sure, our culture ceaselessly celebrates love through movies, books and songs,

but the irony is, the nature of normal, everyday existence is to attack love and push lovers apart.

The world does not like love.

For an English major to start talking about science is always a dangerous thing,

but it seems to me that the laws of thermodynamics have a certain applicability to the dynamics of

relationships. According to the laws of science, when a hot object encounters a cold object,

heat is transferred from the hot to the cold, and in the process a certain amount of energy is lost.

There is a name for this lost energy, entropy.

(In truth, many a husband has experientially confirmed this scientific fact

when his wife has stuck her cold feet on him during a winter night.)

Entropy explains why so-called perpetual motion machines are impossible to construct.

Put plainly, when a machine turns energy into work, a certain amount of energy is lost in the transfer,

and eventually, the machine runs down and ceases to function unless more energy is added to it.

Here is the application of the principle: *people think that marriage is a perpetual motion machine.*

They think that love just continues on without further investment. They couldn’t be more wrong!

The way of the world is to take something that is meant to be one of God’s most wondrous blessings and to turn it into something drab and dull.

The entropy induced by the process of everyday living tries to drain a relationship of its special power.

The mundane processes of rising and working and living and working have a way of draining from us the will to invest the energy necessary to keep our love characterized by passion and integrity.

Our relationship to your lover can become just one more allegiance among many. That will not do!

Our love will die unless we are willing to invest a great deal more energy into it to keep it vital.

I try to prepare young couples for this fact early in my premarital counseling. I say to them, you go off on your honeymoon, and you have each other all to yourself – your whole world is each other.

Then, boom, you come back to reality, and the world does all that it can to start tugging you apart. Your job saps your energy; your commitments to various and sundry organizations take your time. Along come children, promotions, social responsibilities, church work; suddenly, you find that your complicated world does everything it can to take your focus off your beloved and turn your love for your spouse into one more dull, habituated commitment. The world does not like love – which is why lovers must do all that they can to make their lover feel special. There's a pastor in Texas recently who made national headlines when he suggested that what spouses need to do to rekindle their marriage is to enjoy physical intimacy every night for a month. (Even Stephen Colbert deemed this Texas pastor worth an interview.) Now I don't want to go on record as opposing this pastor's recommendation, but unfortunately, the pastor missed the point. Even sex can become one more habit, one more obligation, one more act of going through the motions. What relationships are crying out to keep them vibrant is not sex, but romance. I don't mean romance as that giddy flush of elation that comes at love's first blush. Rather, I am talking about a reality that is rooted in courage, rooted in creativity, rooted in a commitment to say to the person we love, "You are God's most special blessing to me." True romance is rooted in courage, creativity and the commitment to do something each day to let your beloved know, "You excite me. You bring me joy, and it is my joy to bring joy unto you." Wives, every week you ought to surprise your husband by throwing your arms around him and giving him a big kiss. You ought to do this at least as often as you yell him, "Hey, get your fat butt off the sofa and take out the trash." Husbands, every day you ought to enact some little surprise to lighten your wife's load and to say to her in an unspoken way, "You are God's great blessing to me." You ought to do this at least as often as you say, "Hey, I need a shirt ironed," or "I need an errand run." Romance is the act of courage, creativity and commitment that says to our beloved, "You are the most special blessing that God has ever bestowed upon me."

There are five principles that must be acknowledged if you are going to summon the courage and creativity necessary to battle the world's animosity to love. Start with this one: *Nothing, outside of your relationship with God, is more important than your marriage.* Next to your relationship with God, nothing should be more important in your life than your marriage. That sounds incredibly basic, but it is amazing how many people refuse to acknowledge this simple truth. How many marriages fail to ground themselves on the rock of this fundamental principle! The kids become the center of the household, the job becomes the all-consuming priority, the demands of family, friends, soccer, baseball, basketball, swimming, school, even church, can so orient your lives that you turn your lover into one more allegiance among many. All of these activities are good things, but when you allow these good things to make your relationship to your lover just one more relationship among many, that is a sin! When you allow good things to push your beloved out of the center of your attention, that is a destructive act! It sounds so simple: *make sure that nothing is more important than your marriage.* Yet how many people on the brink of -- or in the wake of -- a marriage break-up have said to me, "Boy, that principle has never been true for us." You want a vibrant marriage? Start with this simple truth: summon the strength of will to keep a portion of yourself, a portion of your time, a portion of your energy, a portion of your creative attention reserved just for your beloved. That is the only way to keep true romance alive.

A second principle: *a healthy relationship hinges on the interplay between similarity and dissimilarity.*

The highest compatibility requires enough commonality to give couples a shared vision of life in concert with enough diversity of interest and personality to give a relationship its necessary creative tension.

I try to bring this principle to the fore in counseling sessions by asking each person,

“Do you see the glass half-empty or half-full?” Couples look at each other, trying to figure out the right answer. Frequently, they will say, “Oh, we both think of the glass as half-full.”

But when I probe their psyches a little more deeply that usually turns out *not* to be case.

They’re lying. One of the lovers is indeed very sensitive to the positive, sunnyside of life;

The other is more sensitive to life’s shadowside.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is the way it is supposed to be! Opposites attract.

Naturally, this dissimilarity in outlook brings an unavoidable tension to a relationship,

but that tension is actually necessary to the couple’s growth and development.

Both halves of a relationship are meant to complement each other and create a whole.

*Each half in a relationship is meant to complete the other by bringing attributes to their communal unity that the other desperately needs.*

The complementary principle of a healthy relationship reveals that we bring to our beloved a certain orientation that they do not have. They bring to our relationship gifts that we do not have.

Each of us is meant to bring into the other’s life qualities that truly complete the other so that together, we become whole.

A healthy relationship hinges on this interplay between similarity and dissimilarity,

and there are times when a couple has to trust one person’s instincts on a matter,

and times when they have to trust the other’s. A couple has to develop the wisdom to know

when is the right time to trust one set of instincts or the other.

This brings us to a third, simple, and absolutely essential principle of healthy marriages: *love takes two*.

This is the simple math of love. It takes two people to build a relationship.

Ah, Dr. Kremer, that statement is so simple. Yes. But so many people cannot grasp it.

Making love work in a world that does not like love requires a profound investment from both people.

*One person’s investment, no matter how total and sincere, will not make a marriage work.* It takes two.

Conventional spiritual wisdom says that your choice of Christ as Savior is the most important choice you can make. I agree. Conventional wisdom says the second most important choice in your life is the choice of

your spouse. I also agree. Yet there is a parallel weakness in both of these statements.

One doesn’t choose and accept Christ as Savior once and for all.

One must continually reaffirm one’s choice of Christ as Savior day after day after day after day after day.

So, too, we must day after day after day choose to be a true lover to our beloved.

It is not a one-time choice.

Both people have to make that choice, not just once, but continually, day after day, for love to stay vital.

I make this observation because I encounter plenty of divorced people walking around carrying a load of guilt about their broken marriage, even when they did everything they could to make it work.

They berate themselves, saying, “I made the wrong choice.” Maybe they did.

But maybe they didn’t. Maybe the person they chose to marry became a different person over time.

Maybe the person they chose to marry stopped making the choice to make love work.

Again, one person’s investment, no matter how total and sincere, cannot make a marriage work.

It takes two! Ideally, marriage is a process where both partners lay a railroad rail in place

at the same time, in the same direction, along parallel lines. Then the love train rolls smoothly.

But what often happens in relationships is that people start placing their rails in different directions and at different times. Over time the rails are placed farther and farther apart.

Then it is very possible over time to evolve in such different directions within a marriage that one day you wake up in bed with a stranger who happens to be your spouse.

*It takes two* is the basic math of love.

The fourth principle designed to keep love vital stands as something of a paradox:

*to keep love new and vibrant you must choose healthy ruts.*

There is a great sign that stands outside a forbidding Canadian wilderness that reads,

“Choose your ruts carefully. You are going to be in it the next twenty-five miles.”

I tell new couples the same: “*Choose your ruts carefully. You could be in them the next twenty-five years.*”

My point is, you cannot structure a life without creating habits. Make sure they are good habits.

Make sure that they are habits that feed your soul, feed your spirit, feed your love.

That doesn't mean that you must stay locked within habits. Then life would be a prison.

But life is always an interplay of structure and chaos, and that is as true of you as it is of the squirrel in your back yard.

The squirrel in your backyard has picked a tree with acorns, built a nest, found your birdfeeder, and created a structure that will allow him to live a healthy life.

Along comes a tornado that blows the tree down, scatters the acorns, frees the neighbor's cat – and the squirrel dies, because the chaos of his world has overwhelmed his structure.

Make sure that you create habits that feed you with positive influences

and gives you a structure able to handle the chaos that life will inevitably send you.

I close here with a fifth and final principle that is not news to anyone who has ever heard me perform a wedding: *remember that your love for each other is ultimately God's gift.*

The love that binds a person heart to heart and soul to soul to another is rooted in God's graciousness. *Your love is divine in origin, divine in its orientation.*

*If you want your love to remain vibrant, you must remain rooted and grounded in God's Spirit, allowing the Spirit to nurture you ceaselessly.*

I remember doing pre-marital counseling with a young businessman years ago,

and it was obvious to me that this prospective groom was very career-driven. His whole life was his job.

I finally asked him, “What are the values that you cherish most?”

He answered, “I want to provide for my wife and family.”

His answer brought to my mind the image of one of America's most successful businessmen,

Bud Paxon, founder of the Home Shopping Network, as he sat in his palatial home on Christmas morning, surrounded by incredibly lavish presents that he had bought for his wife and family.

Only, no one was home. Since he had missed most of his children's lives, they had all chosen to be elsewhere on Christmas morning.

His wife was nowhere to be seen. Instead, she had left him a note under the tree,

a terse message explaining that she had fallen in love with another man and was leaving him.

Here he was, Bud Paxon, a great success, sitting in an empty mansion, surrounded by luxury, wrapped and unwrapped. *He had provided for his family, but what he had provided had fed neither their need nor his.*

That realization started him on a spiritual journey that moved him to root his life and his love in God.

This realization did not save his marriage.

But it helped ensure that he didn't make the same mistakes in his next relationship.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things – and love never ends.

Those statements can only be true when one's life is rooted and grounded in God's nurturing Spirit.

The world does not like love. But God does. *God is love.*

The only way you can keep your promises of love vital and vibrant

is when you know your organic love is rooted in the ground of God's nurture.

When two people can nurture their love every day and allow themselves to be nurtured by God's love, then their relationship can stand the test of time and the winds of chaos,

even in a world that does not like love.

Dr. Wm. Richard Kremer

May 10, 2009 - Mother's Day