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### CHILDISH: LOVE AND MARRIAGE<sup>1</sup>

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~ Ephesians 4:14-15 ~

#### INTRODUCTION

*“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.” [NIV] “When I grew up, I put away childish things.” [NLT]*

*-- [I Corinthians 13:11](#)*

That’s the text for our series. When **I** was a child, I was highly offended by this passage:

- What’s wrong with being a kid? [I thought there should be a Children’s Day to honor kids just like we have Mother’s Day and Father’s Day.]
- Nothing is wrong with being a kid—when you’re a kid.
- The older I get, the more I realize I still hang onto childish ways & ideas. Most of us do.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the arena of LOVE & MARRIAGE.

Matt has laid the foundation over the past couple weeks:

- Childish things need to be “*put away*” == **katargeo**. They do not fall off or drop away.
- Then the truly wonderful news (last week) that the tangled web of the past (e.g.: that complex of memories, feelings, fears) can be healed.

Now we’re going to move forward with the practicalities of how that “healing of memories” works its way through our whole life—starting with our love relationships (especially marriage).

I realize this morning that I am speaking to some who are married...some who have been...some who aren’t yet...some who never will be (again)...some who are in between...some who are about to be.

- HUMOR: This business of being married vs. unmarried is like the CAT standing at the screen door. First he wants out. . .then he wants in. ☺
- No matter what side of the screen you’re on (or want to be on), there’s something for everyone here today.

~ Let’s Pray! ~

Some years ago I was invited to play the organ for a wedding. The bride was the sister of a seminary classmate [John]. During the rehearsal, my friend was standing over by the organ and we were talking quietly. When the pastor asked the father of the bride, “*Who gives this woman to be married to this man?*” John whispered to me, “*What he should say is ‘Who gives this girl to be married to this boy?’*” ☺ I guess he knew his sister pretty well!

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the material in this sermon is drawn from David A. Seamands’ book *Putting Away Childish Things*, Chapter 5 (pp. 52-61).

Truth is, most of us enter serious relationships with some pretty childish ideas about love and marriage. Perhaps the most childish idea is this:

**That love is self-sustaining; and that a good marriage comes about automatically because two fine, committed Christians marry one another.**

You may be looking for love. You may be “in love with love”. But if you are not prepared for the choices, commitments and hard work love demands, it will be a disaster. Philip Yancey writes: “*I went into marriage thinking love would hold us together. I learned instead that it required marriage to teach me what love means.*”

How can we “grow up” in our ways of thinking, understanding, and communicating? Actually, the Bible offers a model in the language it uses to speak about love. The Greek language has many words for LOVE—a much wider vocabulary than we have in English. There are three principle ones (all used in the New Testament): *EROS* + *PHILIA* + *AGAPE*. Let’s look at them.

### A. EROS

*Eros* is physical attraction. . .sexual love. It is an essential part of a mature marriage. *Eros* is God’s gift, His idea, His plan. *Eros* is expressed through the body and the emotions.

The physical side of marriage is like a sacrament—meaning it is sacred and has special significance. So, what’s wrong with *eros*? [It gets a lot of bad press!]

Nothing! Except *eros* alone is not enough to sustain a lifelong marital union. We get older; we’re not always as desirable as when we started out. I don’t care how gorgeous you were on your wedding day. If love is to endure, *eros* must increasingly be based on inner rather than outer beauty.

Just about all romantic relationships start with *eros* (i.e.: falling in love). It’s like a mysterious force from outer space that unexpectedly seizes two people and overpowers them.

I well remember the night Marcie & I first acknowledged we loved each other. I’ll never forget it. In fact, it’s one of the anniversary dates we celebrate every year—February 7<sup>th</sup>. But our love has grown so far beyond that—wonderful as that period of time was. That love could have been measured by the intensity of our subjective sensations. On a 10 point scale, we were off the charts! We were in love with our feelings of love. I felt so good. But it was all about how I was feeling. . . how she was lighting my fire. Do you see how self-centered that is. I’m not saying that is a bad thing. . .just that it was the first (initial) stage we went through to get to a more mature love. It was the rocket that launched our life together and got us into orbit. Those first days-weeks-months of our love were very REAL (not fantasy) and NECESSARY. But if we had gotten stuck in that stage, we’d be in trouble—for *eros* is based on MY needs; it’s me-myself-I. And no relationship can sustain that much self-centeredness for very long.

So we progressed along to the next stage. . . . .

### B. PHILIA

*Philia* is friendship. It is the kind of love that develops between two people who share much of life together. . .who are comfortable around one another. . .who see things (not everything) in the same way. . .who share the same (or similar) points of view. . .who strive together for the same goals. It doesn’t mean either of us loses our individuality; we still have our political opinions, likes & dislikes, food preferences, respective styles of music, art, movies, etc. But there’s enough of a common bond, so that when we’re together it’s like a glove that fits on your hand.

Perhaps the most important area of compatibility is “spiritual compatibility”. We can’t afford to lack unity in this most basic, foundational area. **II Corinthians 6:14** says: “***Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.***”

Oh, that we would take God’s Word seriously here. Amos the prophet asked: “***Can two walk together unless they be agreed?***” (**Amos 3:3**). How can they? How can they love and live together in the most intense, the most intimate, the most demanding relationship there is between two human beings?

Many here are suffering from the disunity of being the one in the family that is spiritually sensitive. I agonize for you. I know how you wish your spouse were sitting next to you here this morning. Don't give up! Keep praying for that husband, that wife. Remember God's grace reaches beyond where we can go and works deep in the heart.

For those of you looking to be married someday, my message is simple. If Christ is #1 in your life, find someone who shares that. *Philia* love starts with both of you being on the same page spiritually. . .having a similar outlook and interest in spiritual things. . .being one in Christ with the person you are dating, courting, or preparing to marry.

Of course, that doesn't mean just because two persons are committed to Christ they will have a good marriage. *Philia* includes much more. But it does start with spiritual unity.

### C. AGAPE

*Agape* is love that is totally focused on the other person.

If *eros* is where my needs get met. . .if *philia* is where both our needs are met mutually. . .then *agape* is where your needs outweigh mine.

If *eros* is expressed through the body and emotions. . .and *philia* comes through the mindset / perspective / beliefs & attitudes a couple shares. . .then *agape* has to be grounded in the will. You choose to love in this way. You commit to love—in spite of and regardless of.

Victor Hugo: “*The greatest happiness in life is the knowledge that we are loved for ourselves. . . rather, loved in spite of ourselves.*”

That's how God loves. He loves us “in spite of”. And it takes the fullness of God's Holy Spirit working in the hearts of two people to pull it off in a marriage. I'm talking about the kind of love that cares for and protects. . .that cherishes. . .that assumes responsibility for the welfare of one another. . .that weathers all sorts of changes (of circumstances) that life throws at you.

### HERE'S THE POINT

Mature Christian marriage combines *eros* + *philia* + *agape*. It combines physical attraction & desire WITH genuine friendship, unity of interests & purpose WITH deep committed devotion. You don't go from one to the other to the other. You always have all three, but in different proportions. Grown-up love probably was not a reality on your wedding day. It wasn't for us, even though each of us had 26 years of marriage behind us. We were (are) no experts. Even though we were fully married when we exchanged our vows on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1998, there is a very real sense in which we are much more married today!!!

The proportions have shifted over the years:

- Have we lost the *eros*? No way jose. You can't ever afford to lose the *eros*. It's like the oil in the car—it keeps the engine running!
- Have we passed beyond the *philia*? Of course not! The sense of partnership is stronger than ever today.
- Are we good with the *agape*? Well, we're getting there. Everyday, I see Marcie getting more attentive to my needs. NO, just kidding! ☺

What I do see happening between us is that we are becoming less concerned about being RIGHT and more concerned about LOVING. . .about hearing and understanding one another, and being there for one another. I don't fear so much anymore that we'll fall out of love with each other. In fact, I've come to the conclusion that people don't “*fall out of love*” (even if they do fall in love). They choose to stop loving. We're becoming more secure in the knowledge that that will never happen. . .and at the same time finding more freedom to be who God made us to be.

That doesn't mean there aren't "issues". There are—some real hot ones! But as I said at the outset, a good marriage takes a lot of hard work.

That's why I say to couples who come to me whose marriages are in trouble: "Don't make any major decisions (at least for 4-5-6 months)! Let's get a plan together. . .let's work on your relationship. Let me help you get help."

[Of course, for those who do separate or have separated, we're here for you. We're here to mend broken lives. You can count on us to accept you and help you in any way we can. To those of you here today who are hurting, dying inside, and reeling from relational pain, let me say Jesus' love is very real. I pray you will experience it even today!]

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Here's a practical way to *katargeo* some of those childish ideas of love & marriage, and move toward the fullness of mature love. This is the "take away" . . .

We all know that communication is one of the greatest problems in any relationship (especially marriage). Remember how Paul said: "*When I was a child, I speak like a child. But now, having grown up, I have put away childish things and am communicating on a mature level.*"

I wonder if we can't put away some of our childish ways of communicating.....and **SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE**. That's what he says in **Ephesians 4:14-15**: "**No longer be immature like children, tossed to and fro. . .but grow up in every way more and more like Christ, speaking the truth in love**" (RSV).

There's nothing here about avoiding conflict. A healthy, strong marriage is not a marriage without conflict. It is a marriage of two people who have worked hard at finding their way through conflict. There's a **DO** and a **DON'T** here; let's begin with the *DON'T*:

**DON'T BE TOSSED TO AND FRO.** What does it mean to be "*tossed about*"? It means to be unpredictable:

- One moment emotionally high- -the next emotionally low
- One night affectionate and lovy-dovy- -the next cruel and mean
- One day strong, secure, upbeat- -the next weak, insecure, despondent
- In a good mood- -then after one off-the-wall thing is said, a bad mood

**DO SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE.** It's not one without the other. That's how kids do it:

- Some can speak the truth point-blank. But children can be cruel and hurtful at times.
- Others cannot speak the truth for the life of them. They're afraid of their own feel-ings—for a lot of reasons (e.g.: maybe they've been ignored. . .or seen too much conflict. . . or never really been around open, honest communication). They may be loving children, but everything's bottled up inside and they can't get it out.

Some of us have grown up good at speaking the truth (telling it like it is), but forget to be loving. Others of us have gotten good at being loving, but don't have it within to level or tell the truth (especially when it's painful, and can potentially generate conflict).

The Word says to do (blend) both!

- Some of you may need more SALT == to sharpen it up a bit
- Some of you may need more SUGAR == sweeten it up a bit

## CONCLUSION

So, let's get rid of some of the childish ideas that have governed our marriages & relationships—especially the approach that says a good marriage comes about automatically because two fine, committed Christians (both with solid upbringing) marry one another. Mature Christian love is the result of commitment and a lot

of hard work to get all three aspects of love—*eros*, *philia*, and *agape*—working together. But it is worth it; and you can enjoy it. No marriage is beyond repair.

Since we're going to be spending all eternity together, we might as well begin now. Marriage may just be the best preparation for heaven there is!