

Our Marriage is not Going Well

Sermon 1

The woman across from us was bleach blonde and about 26 years old. Her eyes were blood red and she was wiping her nose. She kept saying, “My husband is behaving so badly toward me, what shall I do?” The woman, let me call her Karen, was raised as a Seventh-day Adventist. At a young age she abandoned her faith and married an unbeliever. Her life’s dreams were in tatters and she came to the church to get advice.

Karen isn’t alone. We have seen a lot of women in such a situation. Is every marriage between a believer and an unbeliever bad? No, I am not saying that. There are stable marriages like that. But we have seen a lot difficult mixed marriages. Even in marriages between believers there can be great difficulties.

Did Karen come to us seeking an excuse for a divorce? Not Karen, but there are a lot of those. The number of people who want to escape marriage and remain innocent in God’s eyes is not little. What do we say to those who are searching thus? “Are you a believer?” we ask. They say, “Yes.” “Did your spouse cheat on you?” “No.” “Then if you divorce you are still married in God’s eyes. You cannot remarry. Because the Bible says,

1 Corinthians 7:10-14 Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. ¹¹ But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. ¹² But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. ¹³ And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

In these verses when it says, “the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife” it does not mean that the unbelieving spouse will be holy or become a Christian. What was the situation that Paul was addressing that he should write this? Without doubt some believers, because they were married to unbelievers were fearful that God was counting them as unclean. In these verses Paul is saying that if the state recognized the marriage of the unbeliever with the believer that God also recognizes the marriage. It is not unclean. Thus a believer should not seek a divorce.

When they hear this, most of the time people are sad. Why? In their hearts they want to divorce their spouse. Love is gone. But there is a problem with that. O.K., we can expect that behavior from unbelievers. They don’t have access to the source of love which is Christ. But we are sad because there is no love in the believer. Believers want to divorce their spouses. If they divorce,

as Jesus said, they consider themselves married. But in their hearts they want and wait for their ex-spouses to remarry. Why? They themselves want to remarry but they want their ex-spouses to be guilty. Thus they wait for their ex-spouses to get to the point where they can't stand it and they remarry. It goes like that.

Others say, "If I divorce I will stay single my whole life. Promise! If only I can get away from this man. I can't stand it!" Unfortunately we never saw someone keep their promise. After divorcing their husbands they marry again within one year. They have broken two covenants before God. The first is the original marriage vow. The second is the vow to remain single their whole life. Sad. This kind of behavior comes from those who are supposedly Christian.

O.K., where is Jesus in a heart with no love toward their spouse?

Luke 6:27-28 " But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ "bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.

O.K., these verses are not talking about romantic love. But Christians come to us and say that can't even live with their spouses. Anyone can love those who love them. But a Christian can do what an unbeliever cannot do: he can love his enemies. This is an unusual thing. It isn't normal. To do this requires receiving the unrequited love of God by way of the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,

The ministry of reconciliation begins in our own homes. Let the believer receive love from God and begin to love their spouse. People complain saying, "We don't get along." One day, Ellen White received just such a letter. Apparently a husband and wife were not able to get along and at least one of them was considering a divorce because of it. In a letter that Ellen White wrote to his wife, she said, "I have received a letter from your husband. I would say that there is only one thing for which a husband may lawfully separate from his wife or a wife from her husband, and that is adultery. If your dispositions are not congenial, would it not be for the glory of God for you to change these dispositions?" Adventist Home p. 345.

Is this easy? I am not saying that it is easy. But,

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

O.K., if the believer wants to remain married but the unbeliever wants to divorce, does the believer have to stay in the marriage no matter what? No.

1 Corinthians 7:15-16 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. ¹⁶ For how do you

know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

If the unbeliever departs there isn't much the believer can do. Let him depart. Can the believer remarry? That is a controversial question but the expression "not under bondage" strongly implies that they can.

O.K., if the wife is continuously being beaten does she have to remain in that house? No. By being continuously beaten you cannot honor God. The Lord doesn't expect this from you. Find a safe place. But you are still married. If he doesn't commit adultery, you are still married. Marriage is a life-long covenant. Therefore choose carefully!

O.K., what should the believer do if there are problems in the marriage with the unbeliever. Generally the Bible principles are valid for both those marriages in which both are believers and those marriages that are mixed religiously speaking. Let's look at a few principles.

Ephesians 5:33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

In general women want love from their husbands. In general husbands want respect even more than love. This is very important. I will speak to the women today. On another occasion my husband will address the subject of marriage with the men.

How many times have David and I heard a woman criticizing her husband in public! O.K., your husband is an erring person. He makes mistakes. But if you want a good marriage, never, and I mean never, criticize him in front of others. If you do, his respect falls in front of others. Wait. At home when you are alone you can tell him his mistake. But even while explaining it speak in a respectful manner. Don't behave as if he is a small child. He is your head. You must respect him.

Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

"O.K., if my husband does something wrong in front of everyone must I remain silent?" you ask. No. Sometimes if you remain silent it will be good. Sometimes you don't need to remain silent. But how you talk to your husband in front of everyone is very important. A high level of respect is necessary. Especially in this culture! The respect for men in public is very important. Gently, perhaps by asking a question you can offer an alternative to him. "Honey, what if we did such and such?" But absolutely don't order your husband like a commander in the army!

We have seen women belittling their husbands in front of others. "My husband is lazy." "My husband doesn't make enough money." "My husband is not successful. Everything he does flops." "My husband is terrible driver." Whatever! You married him. Are you stupid? Do not put

down your husband. When your husband learns you are saying these things to others he gets made and he has a right to get mad. Shut up! If he makes a mistake, when you are alone, in a polite manner explain that you trust him as your husband and how he can do better. But many believing women while disrespecting their husbands in front of everyone can't understand why their relationship with their husband is not good. But this is part of the problem.

Ephesians 5:22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

This verse does not say that whatever your husband says you will do. Because we are all to submit to all church members.

Ephesians 5:21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

The spirit of Jesus is not a selfish spirit, it is a humble spirit. We must bring this spirit into all of our relationships including our marriage. We must submit to church members. They also can show us things on this subject or that subject and they can see the shortcomings that we have that we cannot see. We must respect church members and we must consider them better than ourselves.

Philippians 2:3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

This concept is valid in our marriages as well. Will your marriage be good while you are trying to be the head of your husband? Don't think that way!

I want to share a quotation with you. Again it is from Ellen White. Ellen White was a mother, a spouse and one of the founders of a church. You can evaluate whether these words are true.

“A husband and wife should cultivate respect and affection for each other. They should guard the spirit, the words, and the actions so that nothing will be said or done to irritate or annoy. Each is to have a care for the other, doing all in their power to strengthen their mutual affection.”

“I tell you both to seek the Lord. In love and kindness do your duty one to the other. The husband should cultivate industrious habits, doing his best to support his family. This will lead his wife to have respect for him. . . .”

“My sister, you cannot please God by maintaining your present attitude. Forgive your husband. He is your husband, and you will be blessed in striving to be a dutiful, affectionate wife. Let the law of kindness be on your lips. You can and must change your attitude.”

“You must both study how you can assimilate, instead of differing, with one another. . . .
The use of mild, gentle methods will make a surprising difference in your lives.”

Adventist Home p. 345.

What good surprises await you in your marriage?