

when we get married. Please look at the qualities carefully. Can we really hope to get along well with anyone on a long-term basis if we are not patient, kind, unselfish, humble, forgiving, honest and have our tempers (and ourselves) under control? We cannot hope to make a spouse happy without the disciplined, life-long practice of those qualities directed toward our spouse.

2. Failure to Assess a Future Mate's Character

If two people are selfish takers and do not practice the qualities just outlined, their relationship will explode sooner rather than later. If one is a selfish taker and the other an unselfish giver the relationship is likely to be abusive in some form or other. No matter how physically desirable a potential spouse may seem, no matter how friendly and entertaining, if he or she is incapable or unwilling to practice the actions in 1 Cor. 13:4-6, a marriage to such a spouse would end up as a very painful thing. All too often our physical desires blind us to realities that we would otherwise see. The phrase “love is blind” hasn't been widely used as a truism for nothing. How many young men and women have been warned by friends and relatives that the one they want to marry is a horrible choice – warnings that fall on deaf ears? The reality is that no matter how many times you kiss a frog, he is still going to be a frog and not turn into a prince. A truly accurate and sober look at the true nature of marriage would go a long way to motivate us to evaluate our potential mates in a realistic way rather than being deceived by the fairy tale fantasies of “falling in love” we are so often fed by our media.

Marriage has not failed us, but **we fail marriage** when we:

Fail to take the commitment as solemnly and seriously as it was intended.

Fail to develop our own character and life to meet the demands of that commitment.

Fail to accurately evaluate our future spouse's ability to meet that commitment.

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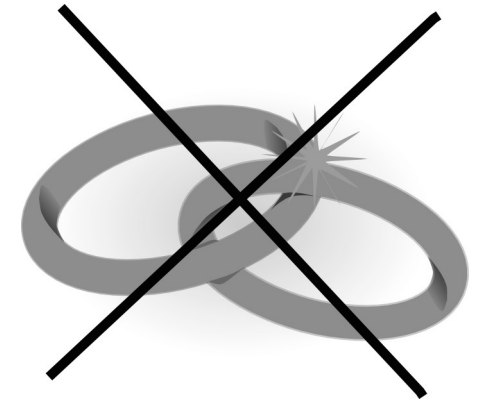
*Sunday Bible Class
9:30-10:15 am*

*Sunday AM Worship
10:30-11:30 am*

*Sunday PM Worship
6:00-7:00 pm*

*Wednesday Class
7:00-8:00pm*

**Did
Marriage
Fail
Us?**



by Jack Birckholtz

In recent decades, more and more people have opted to live together and remain unmarried. It has been argued that the only difference between a marriage and a committed live-in arrangement is a piece of paper. Divorce rates are at an all time high of 40 to 50 percent. Why risk a commitment of marriage when the failure rate is so high? It seems to be much simpler just to live together without vows or legal obligations. A couple can stay together as long as the arrangement continues to “work” for both parties, and can split up if either is dissatisfied. Even though many may claim that marriage is a failed institution, I believe that we as a society, and as individuals, have failed marriage. By failing to understand the nature of marriage, we undermine the marriage institution in several ways.

First of all, **not realizing that marriage is a solemn, lifetime commitment** between a husband and wife, puts marriage on a similar plane as a living together situation. Often marriage is entered into with an “I can always get a divorce if it doesn't work out” frame of mind. This frame of mind is the same as a “let's live together as long as it continues to work out” arrangement, except in this case legal papers are filed. A marriage formed exclusively on the basis of mutual satisfaction of needs will always be in danger. There is a high probability, over a lifetime, that one partner or the other will find someone else who is more handsome, beautiful, understanding, a better listener etc., etc. If we are in a relationship which is solely based on the satisfaction of our own personal needs, it is not surprising that one partner or the other will find a better deal and leave. A leaving partner who was in a live-in situation could comfort him- or herself by truthfully declaring, “I never promised you anything.” Although it is often stated that one partner is “not ready for marriage,” often the hope (expectation) remains in the heart of the other person that he or she really means “not ready yet” or “not ready right now,” rather than “I am not ready now and will probably never be ready.” Even when “no promises” are made, a mutual dependency between the couple tends to develop. There are unwritten and unspoken expectations and when a breakup occurs, a sense of betrayal will still be there even if no formal agreement was made. The heartache, emotional damage, the financial hardships to the partner, and the damage to children left behind will be just as real, even though “no promises were made.” When marriage vows are made, but taken lightly and cast aside, the same pain and damage is caused. Marriage as God designed it is a total lifetime commitment of a man and a woman to each other's welfare and happiness – the two become one flesh. By not understanding the nature and depth of the commitment, and by glossing over the meaning of the vows, the public concept of marriage has become degraded. It is not practiced in the way it should be practiced.

Secondly, by not realizing the seriousness of the marriage commitment, **we fail to do two essential things** prior to marriage:

1. ***We fail to develop the personal strength of character necessary to make a marriage work.***
2. ***We fail to realistically assess the character of our potential mate.***

1. Failure in the Development of Our Own Character

Honor, duty, self-control, personal sacrifice and unselfish service may be common themes in military training in regards to a soldier's duty toward his country, but how often are they even mentioned in our society in regard to equipping us for the marriage relationship? In answering a question about divorce in Matthew 19:4-6, Jesus refers back to the creation of man and woman, and that in marriage the two are one flesh. He did not say that they periodically become one flesh, as in a sexual relationship, but that they are (continue to be) one flesh. The two lives are bound together into one. Paul reminds his readers in Eph. 5:28-29 that a man's wife is his own flesh and should be cherished. The sexual relationship between a husband and wife is an acknowledgment and celebration of the complete life-bond that they have entered into. The children produced will be born to a couple committed to unity and love. The sexual relationship between a husband and wife is holy and blessed by God:

“Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” Hebrews 13:4 NASB

Sexual relations outside of marriage (fornication), and sexual relations in violation of one's marriage vows (adultery), will be condemned by God.

Often a man and woman become friends and also become sexually attracted to each other. This situation is often perceived as “falling in love.” This is all very romantic and can be a beautiful thing, but it is not sufficient in itself to sustain a lifetime relationship. Sexual attraction can come and go. Feelings of camaraderie and the affection of friendship will rise and fall as well. The relationships that I described at the beginning of this article are typically based on the idea of “falling in love.” The fairy tale prince goes through many struggles and dangers to win the princess, they have fallen in love and live happily ever after. The happily ever after part is thought to happen automatically, magically and without strain or effort till death do they part. In real life, most of us know that when things are left to proceed on their own without supervision or effort, they either coast to a stop or crash. The princes and princesses that live happily ever after are the ones who understand that love is an attitude and action that they need to practice on a continuing basis. The love that holds relationships together is described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-6:

*“4. Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant.
5. does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,
6. does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth.”
(NASB)*

It is important for each one of us individually to bring 1 Corinthians 13:4-6 to the table