

When Sinners Say “I Do”

Lesson 5

1. **REVIEW:** Since it's sinners who say “I Do” ... “Mercy makes marriage sweet.” (pg. 79)

- **Rhetorical:** Martin Luther called marriage “the school of character” (the instilling of virtues) – what kind of character does marriage produce? How does marriage produce character in our lives?
- Mercy is “loving kindness” or a compassionate willingness to forebear; mercy is a **communicable** attribute of God (an attribute that can be imitated).

“The term may designate both character and actions that emerge as a consequence of that character. As part of character mercy is demonstrated most clearly by such qualities as compassion and forbearance. With respect to action an act of mercy issues from compassion and forbearance; in a legal sense mercy may involve such acts as pardon, forgiveness, or the mitigation of penalties. In each case mercy is experienced and exercised by a person who has another person in his power, or under his authority, or from whom no kindness can be claimed ... And a human being may be merciful to another, to whom neither compassion nor forbearance is due, by free act or thought toward that person.” (Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, pg. 708)

- Mercy is God’s response to His enemies – you and me, you and your spouse – a response of love.

The Bible divides human beings into three relational camps: 1) Enemies, 2) Neighbors, and 3) Brothers/Sisters in the Lord – to each is owed love.

“But deep, profound differences are the reality of every marriage. It’s not the presence of differences but the absence of mercy that makes them irreconcilable.” (pg. 81) Agree or disagree? Why?

Does extending mercy change the need to speak the truth to our spouse?

Does extending mercy mean we overlook abuse in a relationship?

3. The practical side of a mercy-saturated marriage:

- Mercy before the fact: practice kindness

Do you see Lk. 6:27-36 as a call to discreet, isolated acts of mercy or something much broader?

How can a spouse be kind knowing there may be another sin against him/her right around the corner? ANSWER: Kindness is not a personality trait, but a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and an expression of biblical love (1 Cor. 13:4).

How should Gal. 6:7 (sowing and reaping) shape our relationships, especially our marriage?

- Mercy under attack: do unto others

When is using your own desires as the standard for your behavior beneficial to your marriage relationship? How can it be abused?

There are some who wish harm to themselves or think they deserve nothing more than misery or punishment for their shortcomings – applying this verse to that person’s relationships wouldn’t meet the standard of loving our enemies that Jesus has outlined.

Generally speaking, all people seek to be happy or satisfied (even mass murderers find a morbid happiness and satisfaction in killing) – the true standard of properly relating to other people, then, is God’s treatment of His enemies.

The love (mercy) shown to our spouse MUST be motivated by a love for God, and we must follow the model of God’s love toward us.

What influence do parents have on their children’s ability to express love (mercy) to their spouse? Is it possible that some have “learned” to love others in an unbiblical way because of the unbiblical way they were loved when growing up?

- Mercy after the fact: cover sin

CASE STUDY: Bart and Jasmine are headed to church one fine Sunday morning when the conversation in the vehicle turns to Bart’s inconsiderate behavior when he comes home from work. Jasmine is a stay-at-home mom who takes care of a 4 year old and a 2 year old, but Bart seems to have no understanding of why supper is not on the table at 5:30 every weekday. Both insult the other during their “discussion”, but nothing is resolved before they walk into the lobby of the church. Jasmine heads to Jr. Church and Bart to the back of the auditorium. What do you do?

Forbearance (endurance, to bear with, to hold back) is an expression of mercy that can cover both the big sins of marital strife and the small sins of marital tension – it’s the choice to overlook another’s sin by extending forgiveness to the offender even when forgiveness is not sought or warranted. (See Eph. 4:2, Col. 3:13)

Prov. 19:11 & 1 Pt. 4:8 – the glory of overlooking another’s sin.

It’s the little, petty things that swell into tidal waves of bitterness – the toilet paper being pulled from underneath instead of over the top, the good towels being used for garage rags, the basket of clothes that never gets folded, the sudden change of plans without thinking of who it might affect or how it might affect them, the forgotten birthday, etc. (See Song of Solomon 2:15)

Is there a limit to our forbearance? When do we say “Enough is enough!”

4. Mercy and our battle with self-righteousness

- Mercy is most necessary when we think we’ve been sinned against – how we respond can reveal the absence or presence of self-righteousness.

How many have heard statements like: “I can’t believe you did that!” or “I don’t deserve this!” or “I’ve got a right to be angry!”? What is implied by these statements?

- Self-righteousness is a sense of moral superiority that appoints us as prosecutors of other people’s sinfulness – we relate to others as if we are incapable of the sins they commit (pontificating).

- Self-righteousness begins by mentally assigning an evil motive to the crime of our defendant-spouse, and then convicting them internally without any cross examination or defense testimony.

Based on passages such as Lk. 10:29-37 & 18:9-14, what are some outward expressions of self-righteousness (justifying ourselves)? How do these characteristics manifest themselves in marriage?

- Some good questions to ask when struggling with self-righteousness:

Am I self-confident that I see the supposed “facts” clearly?

Am I quick to assign motives when I feel I’ve been wronged?

Do I find it easy to build a case that makes me seem right and my spouse seem wrong?

Do I ask questions with built-in assumptions I believe will be proven right?

Am I overly concerned about who is to blame for something?

Am I able to dismiss questions like these as irrelevant?

- Weaknesses in our spouse will tempt us to be self-righteous – those areas of vulnerability or susceptibility in our spouses that frustrate and annoy us.

How do weaknesses differ from sins?

See 2 Cor. 12:7-10 & Heb. 4:15 – seems to indicate there is a legitimate incapacity to do or experience something. Weaknesses may refer to disease, or human limitations that are the result of our physical make-up.

What should be our attitude and response to the weaknesses of our spouse? (eg. 1 Cor. 15:10 and 1 Pt. 3:7)

5. Jesus says that mercy has a promise of reward NOT results (Lk. 6:35) – there is no promise that our enemies will be changed, but we certainly will be changed by extending mercy!