

THE GOSPEL IN MARRIAGE

By Pastor Glenn Pease

Acceptance is the key to a mature marriage. As soon as a couple ceases to try to change their mate, and accept them as they are, they begin to enjoy their marriage. Someone wrote,

If I quit hoping he'll show up with flowers, and
He quits hoping I'll squeeze him an orange, and
I quit shaving my legs with his razor, and
He quits wiping his feet with my face towel, and
We avoid discussions like,
Is he really smarter than I am, or simply more glib,
Maybe we'll make it.....

If I quit looking to prove that he's hostile, and
He quits looking for dust on the tables, and
I quit inviting Louise with the giggle, and
He quits inviting Jerome with the complex, and
We avoid discussions like,
Suppose I died, which one of our friends would he marry,
Maybe we'll make it.....

If I quit clearing the plates while he's eating, and
He quits clearing his throat while I'm speaking, and
I quit implying I could have done better, and
He quits implying he wishes I had, and
We avoid discussions like,
Does his mother really love him, or is she simply one of
those over-possessive, devouring women who can't
let go,
Maybe we'll make it.

Emerson wrote, "Never try to make another individual into a copy of yourself, for God knows, and you should too, that one person like you is all the world can stand." The inability of mates to accept each other for what they are is a primary cause for why people who love each other to stop doing so. They fell in love with a certain person, and were fascinated by their differences. But as they live together they want them to stop being so different and begin to conform to what they expect them to be. In other words, we all like to play dolls with real people, especially our mates, and we like to dress them the way we want. We want them to be somebody else than the one we married. That which made them unique and interesting to us is no longer cute, and so we want to make alterations. We want to shape and mold them into someone better, for we can now see how flawed they are.

It is not that this is not a noble goal, for all of us can use some getting better. It is just that we do not want our mate to be the one making the alterations. We see their flaws also, and we are not convinced their image of what we ought to be is better than what we are now. We also feel that if we were as good as they wanted us to be, we would probably not have anything to do with them. And so what mates really need is to be loved for who they are, as they are. That is why you married them, for you loved them as they are. When you seem to no longer love them as they are, but want to change them, it seems like the opposite of love, and is a form of rejection.

Nobody likes rejection, and especially from a mate, and so the striving to change a partner is seen as negative and not loving at all. So how do you ever get any improvement if you never strive for change? The answer is acceptance. Acceptance provides an atmosphere for change. We see it in God's relationship to man. In grace God offers man eternal life when they put their trust in Jesus as their Savior. God accepts the worst of sinners who will come to Him. He takes them into His family, and they are to be welcomed into the church. This loving acceptance makes them feel secure and a part of the family. As they live in that environment they see they are immature and far from what a believer ought to be, and so they begin to grow. They seek to cut out of their lives those things that are clearly not God's will. They seek to add to their lives that which makes them more like Christ. Much change takes place, and great improvement, but it all begins with acceptance as they are.

This is the process that has happened to millions, and is going on all over the world today. How many do you think would come into the kingdom of God if the plan was to nag the sinner to change and be different? What if every church had a sign out front with all that was expected before you could enter and be accepted? What if it had, not only the ten commandments, but you must stop cussing; stop all bad habits; start reading your Bible, start speaking kindly to those who hate you; start giving regular to the church, and on and on it could go listing all the things that need to change to be a mature Christian? You know there would be few to none who would enter such a church. This is rejection. The Gospel is acceptance, and it says whosoever will may come.

Now apply this same principle to marriage. The mate who accepts the one they married as they are is being loving with the same kind of love God has. It is agape love, and it loves people where they are, and does not demand anything else to be accepted. When mates do this for one another it provides an atmosphere where change is desired, for you want to grow more worthy of such love. That is how the sinner feels. He wants to change and be more pleasing to God, for being accepted when he is so unworthy. A mate who is accepted for who they are will want to become more pleasing to the one who has so accepted them, that is, if they keep doing so, and do not revert to the method of seeking change by shame and rejection. As soon as rejection enters the relationship you become enemies, and no longer partners seeking to please each other.

So the bottom line is that acceptance is crucial for any long lasting relationship. The reason that the same people who get a divorce after a few years can have friends for decades, is because they have learned to accept their friends, even though there may be all kinds of things about them and their behavior that they do not like. But they could not accept their mate's unlikable behavior. The price for non-acceptance is non-acceptance in return. You reject me, and I will reject you. Couples who do this are playing the game called who is winning this marriage. The problem with this game is that nobody wins, but both lose the game and they lose each other.

Michael Emmons said in *Accepting Each Other*, "In their pursuit of fast change, many partners resort to force. In an attempt to get the other person to "shape up," they employ condemnation and even physical force. But the fact is that individuals who use coercive actions to try to get their partners to change are fighting a losing battle. The result is invariably that the other partner rebels, directly or indirectly, in effect responding in just the opposite way to what the first partner had hoped. Harshness will inadvertently create a result you are not seeking. Aggression beget aggression--or withdrawal."

The Gospel in business and real estate is location, location, location. The Gospel in marriage is acceptance, acceptance, acceptance. Marabel Morgan wrote, "The second, you suspect your husband won't ever break out of his rut, face that fact and accept it." Newspaper columnist Sydney J. Harris said, "The most difficult and most essential task in marriage is learning which defects must be ignored and accepted in the other partner. Most unhappy marriages are created by trying to change what cannot be changed."

Since it is true that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, it is inevitable that two people who marry will discover the defects in one another. In fact, they will be aware of defects that nobody else in the world will know about. This led one wit to define marriage as, "That device of society designed to make trouble between two people who would otherwise get along very well." The trouble comes with the desire to change those defects into perfection. Screaming and arguing have been popular methods to achieve this noble goal, but the success rate is less than impressive. The list of people who successfully scold their mate into perfection is about as long as the list of practical uses of a man's nipples.

If you accept your mate, you do not expect them to always conform to your way of thinking. You accept their differences and give them the freedom to express those differences. If two people only agree because one feels bound to do so, that is a form of bondage, and will lead to resentment. Love is to liberate and not imprison another person. Do not be like the wife who said, "I want him to have his opinions-I just don't want to hear them." This is rejection and not acceptance. The golden rule of marriage is "Do unto one another as you would a month before you married." That is when you were so accepting of each other.

Becoming a mate is a great deal like becoming a missionary. You head for a new land with people far different from you, but you are excited for you want to teach them and help them experience the full blessing of knowing God through the Savior Jesus Christ. But after you live with them for awhile you find they are in many ways depraved. They do not see evil as you do. They have customs and habits that are repulsive. Now you are at a crossroads. You either come to a point where you cannot stand how different they are and head back home to familiar territory, and many do this, or you accept these people with all that you do not like about them, because you love them as they are. Your acceptance of them will be the only way you will ever be able to influence them to be more than they are. Do you see the parallel of marriage and missions? Without acceptance you lose before you even begin.

Marriages go through the same stages. We have to come to the point where we realize we are not perfect and we need to accept each other with all of our defects. If you expect your marriage to be perfect you have taken the first step toward despair and divorce. People only feel free to change in an atmosphere where they are accepted as they are. One has to feel security to change and be different. Under threat and rejection we tend to harden in our present state. Acceptance leads us to desire to climb to a higher level.

Someone said, "At best a relationship should feel like home. It should be a place where you feel let in without fanfare or having to be something you are not. A relationship should always be your place. It is where you are accepted when you are not your best, when you have anxious days, when you feel you sound crazy, when you fail as well as when you succeed. Being accepted doesn't mean that your shortcomings are condoned. It means, rather, that you are not being

rejected because parts of you are unacceptable. And just as you want to be accepted, so you must accept your partner. Acceptance is not a compromise. What you accept, you must accept completely. You cannot permit what you do not accept to diminish your love. It is this gift of acceptance that allows us to love each other perfectly in spite of our imperfections."

The most loving attitude you can have toward a mate is that of acceptance. This is loving your mate as Christ loves His bride. He does not like her defects and conduct that is not fitting for her as His bride, but He accepts her, and will never leave nor forsake her. His goal is to make her the happiest bride possible for time and eternity. When two people have this as their goal, they will have a marriage that will be secure, and, though no always smooth, will be always moving forward to better things ahead.