

DECEMBER 2005 — *True Love*

The growing individualism and self-centeredness in American society has been widely documented. One of the areas where these values are most evident on the personal level is in the culture of divorce, a plague which ravages those inside and outside the church in equal measure. Aggravating this problem is the nature of today's workplace, where men and women are vulnerable to attractions to co-workers. Further aggravating it are those who have taken it upon themselves to expand the two justifiable reasons given in the Bible for divorce.

C.S. Lewis offers very helpful, if countercultural, advice which can assist us:

Love in this...sense — love as distinct from “being in love” — is not merely a feeling. It is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit; reinforced by (in Christian marriages) the grace which both parents ask, and receive, from God. They can have this love for each other even at those moments when they do not like each other; as you love yourself even when you do not like yourself. They can retain this love even when each would easily, if they allowed themselves, be “in love” with someone else. “Being in love” first moved them to promise fidelity: this quieter love enables them to keep the promise. It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run: being in love was the explosion that started it.

While *eros* may figure prominently in the early stages of dating and marriage, only *agape* can sustain it in the long run. Speaking of this *agape*, Lewis, referring to it as Charity, says,

Charity means “Love, in the Christian sense.” But love, in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state not of the feelings but of the will; that state of the will which we have naturally about ourselves, and must learn to have about other people.

Simply put, this means that regardless of our emotional state at any given time, we are called to an act of the will that is unwavering in commitment to our spouses. Of course there will be problems — sometimes very difficult ones. Of course there will be times when spouses no longer “feel in love.” But the covenant of marriage expressed in traditional wedding vows was written the way it was for precisely that reason.

While this may seem hard, many of those who stay together and work through their problems find the early romantic love they once knew returning in a mature form. For those who are already divorced, God's grace and love are inexhaustible and can bring healing. And, by embracing these truths in a second marriage, you will have a foundation to sustain you.

*...each man must love his wife as he loves himself,
and the wife must respect her husband.*

EPHESIANS 5:33 NLT

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, a division of Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 100.

² *Ibid.*, p. 115.