

April 2008—*A Dangerous Illusion*

Researchers tell us that married, born-again Americans and married, non-born-again Americans divorce at the same rate: 35%.<sup>1</sup> Many factors contribute to our culture of divorce, including our deeply ingrained sense of individualism, pursuit of personal happiness, and vivid personal feelings. These in turn make us particularly vulnerable to harboring illusions about love and marriage that can erode commitment to our spouse.

C.S. Lewis once commented on the illusion of being perpetually “in love” and its dangers.

People get from books the idea that if you have married the right person you may expect to go on ‘being in love’ for ever. As a result, when they find they are not, they think this proves they have made a mistake and are entitled to a change—not realizing that, when they have changed, the glamour will presently go out of the new love just as it went out of the old one. In this department of life, as in every other, thrills come at the beginning and do not last. The sort of thrill a boy has at the first idea of flying will not go on when he has joined the R.A.F and is really learning to fly. The thrill you feel on first seeing some delightful place dies away when you really go to live there...

Another notion we get from novels and plays is that ‘falling in love’ is something quite irresistible; something that just happens to one, like measles. And because they believe this, some married people throw up the sponge and give in when they find themselves attracted by a new acquaintance. But I am inclined to think that these irresistible passions are much rarer in real life than in books, at any rate when one is grown up. When we meet someone beautiful and clever and sympathetic, of course we ought, in one sense, to admire and love these good qualities. But is it not very largely in our own choice whether this love shall, or shall not, turn into what we call ‘being in love’? No doubt, if our minds are full of novels and plays and sentimental songs, and our bodies full of alcohol, we shall turn any love we feel into that kind of love: just as if you have a rut in your path all the rainwater will run into that rut, and if you wear blue spectacles everything you see will turn blue. But that will be our own fault.<sup>2</sup>

These illusions, which in Lewis’s day were fed by books, novels, and plays, are now intensified through television programs and movies which reinforce the fantasy that “being in love” is something that, with the right person, can go on for a lifetime and is the *summum bonum* of human existence. Once embraced, however, this fantasy can subtly undermine our commitment to our own spouse, if we no longer “feel in love.” Surely, then, we do well to heed the insights of C.S. Lewis and be discerning in what we allow to enter our minds—and especially what we allow to shape our desires. If we don’t, we will have no one but ourselves to blame for the consequences.

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

PHILIPPIANS 4:8 (ESV)

1. <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=170>, accessed March 21, 2008

2. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1952), pp. 100-101.