

STATEMENTS & ADVICE REGARDING RELATIONSHIPS & MARRIAGE

by John MacArthur, in a study guide on Matthew 19:1-12¹

“TODAY’S PERCEPTION OF MARRIAGE. “When the disciples said, ‘...it is not good to marry,’ they were reflecting a pretty common attitude. They were saying, ‘*Boy, if once I get into a marriage I have to stay there the rest of my life, and I can’t get out of it, I’m never going to get into it!*’ Well, we have that same kind of mentality today, don’t we? The reason people are not willing to marry, and the reason marriages don’t last is: People don’t get married for the right reasons. They don’t get married to make commitments. They don’t get married out of an understanding of virtue and character. Let me illustrate this to you:

“The Problem of Pursuing Romantic Feelings.”

“Dorothy Tennov, in a book called *Love and Limerence*, coins the word *limerence*, which is supposed to be a word to describe the bells that ring when you go through the stupor of romantic feelings. In our society, people look for one emotion after another. They’re pursuing romantic feelings, but not real romance in the true sense. This book shows a series of sociological tests and surveys on the subject of romantic feeling. (They call it love, but I call it romantic feeling!). The book’s conclusion is this:

It is short-lived. This book concludes that all giddy, romantic emotion dies. It all dies and will always die. If you’ve been married for a long time, you realize that you no longer feel about your partner the way you did when you had the euphoria of romantic emotion at the beginning of your relationship. Now, from time to time it recurs, but it’s not there as it was in the beginning.

“It is fickle. People make relationships on the high euphoria of romantic feeling. However, when they lose that feeling, they go on to someone else. It’s all short-lived and fickle. People hop from one romantic emotion to another. When they’re with a person for a while, and the relationship starts to settle, all it takes is for someone else to come across their path who attracts them. Then once the romantic emotions are triggered, they dump their old partner and run over to the new one. People go through life doing that until they have burned off everything they ever could have had in terms of genuine feelings. They end up alone with nothing but emptiness.

“That’s the way the world lives, isn’t it? They won’t come to marriage with commitment. So, they flit from one romance to another. The result is what we see in our society today—the saddest of which, is a generation of disoriented, unloved, lonely, isolated kids who are turning into criminals and misfits. Why? Because they don’t have any meaningful long-term relationship to identify with. It’s really tragic.

“Listen, if you get married for an emotional feeling, you’re making a big, big mistake. Now, there should be some of that there, but you better be able to see beyond that to virtue and character. You better understand that you will be sharing common spiritual values and common life values, and that you are making a lifelong, one man-one woman, strong-bond, one-flesh, God-made, no-divorce union. That’s God’s plan, but people in our society don’t understand that at all.

¹ Everything here is quoted verbatim from “*Jesus’ Teaching on Divorce*”, *Study Notes on Matthew 19:1-12*, by Dr. John MacArthur, Jr. (Word of Grace Communications: Panorama City, California, 1983, pp. 58-69). Retyped from the original booklet, retaining as much of the same typesetting and formatting as possible e.g. all bolding, parentheses, ellipses, and most italics (with only 1-2 exceptions), are *in the original*. Outlining has been almost completely eliminated. --Mike Edwards, St. Vincent, West Indies – 14 August, 2006.

“The Potential of Pursuing True Love. “

“I heard a speaker recently who was relating the story of a particular gentleman in the ministry who had been married for nearly fifty years. He was relating the story of the death of this man’s wife, in a Women’s Lib meeting, to illustrate the difference between true love and romance. He said that one morning, this man and his wife were eating breakfast as they had done for years and years. She ate her breakfast and then fell over onto the table. Immediately scooping up her body, he ran out the door, put her delicately into the car, and then sped to the hospital. By the time he got there, she was dead. Well, you have to be with somebody that you love for nearly fifty years to understand the emptiness that he felt. He knew, of course, that she was with the Lord Jesus Christ, which is where his devotion was, as well.

“After the memorial service had taken place at the graveside, the man and his sons got into their car and started home. Suddenly, the man said, ‘*Stop! I have to go back.*’ Stopping the car, his sons said, ‘*Look, Dad, we don’t want you to go back. It’s too much for you. You don’t need any more sorrow. We need to just go on.*’ But the man said, ‘*No, I have to go back...I have to go back.*’

“Unable to argue him out of going back, they turned around and took him back to the grave. When they got there, he went out to the grave, knelt down and patted it, and then stood there for a few moments. Returning to the car, he said, ‘*Now it’s all right, we can go.*’ On their way home he said to his sons, ‘*This is a good day, a wonderful day. This is just the way I wanted it to be.*’ What do you mean?’ his sons asked. ‘*Oh,*’ he said, ‘*I always wanted her to go first. Always. So, this is a good day.*’

“The man who was relating this story to the Women’s Lib group then said, ‘Listen, anybody who knows the meaning of true love, always wants the other person to go first, because they don’t want them to endure the pain, sorrow, anxiety of loneliness, and the burial of the one they have loved.’ Then he said, ‘*I daresay that your romantic relationships are a far cry from that kind of feeling and reality.*’ He was right!

“You see, people settle for a cheap substitute of the rich, deepening, profound, thrilling, meaningful friendship that two souls knit together in love can experience as years go on. And the disciples needed to hear what people today need to hear: Marriage is a lifelong commitment—which is not a reason to avoid it my friend, it’s a reason to get in it! In the genuineness of that lifelong friendship, God will bless you in ways you will never experience as a single person...never.

“The Criteria for Evaluating a Potential Marriage Partner.”

“I don’t know what some of you single people are looking for, but it seems to me that some of you ought to be looking to get into marriage, rather than retreating from it. And you ought to start having different criteria to evaluate people. You better start seeing beyond the advertisements and the Hollywood glamour, and begin looking for real character. And once you find a godly person with whom you share common values in Jesus Christ, and with whom you can build a deep, profound, and meaningful companionship of life, then you’d better grab on to that opportunity. Personally, I believe that God will give you some emotions that will make you happy and thrill you, too. But there had better be more than just that.

“You see, the disciples, like so many people today, missed the point. You ought to rush to get into a lifelong relationship. However, the disciples were right in this regard: You don’t want to get into marriage with the wrong person, right? So when you make that move, you’d better be sure you’re looking for spiritual values. And you’d better be sure you’re getting involved with someone whose spiritual commitments are as deep and as far and as wide as yours are. And if you don’t know that yet, you’d better slow down the process. Otherwise, you may spend your whole life individually trying to keep the relationship together. And that’s tough...very tough.

“So on the one hand, find someone with like precious faith and like values who loves Jesus Christ and has a life goal the same as yours, and see if God might not bring you together. But on the other hand, if you find someone you want to marry real fast, and they don’t have those values, you’d better back off. Marriage is a sacred thing...the greatest gift that God could ever give two people. And I can tell you from my own experience, that when you have two people who love Jesus Christ, and love each other, and live a life together under God’s leading and direction in the power of the Spirit, it gets so good sometimes, you have to pinch yourself to see if it’s real. That’s how God intended it!

“So, instead of saying, *‘Hey, I’m never going to get married if I’m going to get stuck with the same person for the rest of my life,’* say, *‘Now, if that’s the case, I want to get married, because it’s God’s ordained plan. However I want it with the right person so that I don’t get stuck for the rest of my life. I want to find a person who has character, not just someone who makes me feel romantic emotions.’* You see, the truth of the matter is this: If you get married for romantic emotions, you’ll be a basket case for the rest of your life. Why? Because those romantic feelings will continue to spring up as certain people come across your path. If that’s all you have going for you when you get married, you will be dead in the water before you start. Your marriage will never last!