

“THE LAW OF THE OTHER FELLOW”

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Despite the fact that most fairy tales end on an optimistic note with the prince and princess riding off into the sunset to live happily ever after, real life seldom works out that way. As a matter of fact, there's about as much kinship between marriage and that world of make-believe, as there is between the army and a recruiting poster.

The *poster* is all glamor, novelty, appeal, color, excitement and promise. While, the army is, well, just the army! I hope I am not being unpatriotic when I suggest that an army post rarely matches an army poster!

In all fairness, the same must be said of marriage. It simply cannot measure up to the false image some imaginative souls have conjured up of it. I'm still romantic enough to know that the night has a witchcraft all its own, and that under the spell of its magic charm, lost in the revelry of a "midsummer night's dream," caught in the ecstasy of skipping through stardust, a young couple are apt to dream of marriage -- at least *theirs* -- as a state of perfect and perpetual bliss. But, believe me friend, that's a definition of heaven, not marriage.

The simple truth, is that no one is happy all the time. There is no such thing as a perpetual honeymoon. Nobody -- no matter what they say -- is married to a perfect mate. Perhaps you recall the story of the minister who asked anyone who knew a perfect person, to stand-up. After a long pause, a meek-looking fellow in the back row stood up. "Do you really know a perfect person" the minister asked? "Yes, sir. I do," answered the little man. "Won't you please tell the congregation who this rare, perfect person is," persuaded the preacher? "Yes, sir. It was my wife's first husband!" Well, no matter what she might say *now*, I am inclined to think she didn't say it when the old boy was still living. I repeat, no marriage is a perpetual state of perfect bliss.

To be sure, there will be many genuine joys. But, there will also be some sullen smolderings. And, if you are going to survive these sudden storms which sometimes descend upon the sea of matrimony without warning, there are several things you must learn to do. The operational word in that sentence is *learn*, for what I am about to suggest does not come naturally.

Work At It

The first of these is a commitment on the part of both of you to really work at your marriage. If you could ask a couple who have made a success of their marriage, for the secret of their success, I am sure most would say there is no secret, except that they *just did it!*

How does one make a success of anything? How does a student get good grades at school? How does a man get a promotion at his job? How does a gardener grow a flower bed bright as a stained glass window? The answer is, by working at it.

Glenn Dennis, one of our parishioners, is a very successful salesman. I remember something Glenn said when a mutual friend attributed his success to luck. He replied, “Well, I guess you’re right. I am pretty lucky. But you know, it seems to me the harder I worked the luckier I got!.”

The key to success in any field is just plain ordinary old-fashioned hard work. And, if you want a successful marriage, you have to *work* for it. Not for a day, or a week, or a year, but always. You have to *work* at being less selfish and more patient. You have to *work* at cultivating gentleness and self-control. You have to *work* at smiling through the dark times and being content when the going gets rough.

Marriage is that marvelous merger accomplished by the equation one times one times one equals one ($1 \times 1 = 1$). And such a merger is not easily managed. As someone has suggested,

“You didn’t marry something like a bouquet of flowers which you can take apart and rearrange to your own liking. Instead, you married someone who is more like a book, ‘already bound and the pages numbered.’ All you can do, is thank God for

the good qualities which are there and pray to God about the bad ones.”

The second thing you need to learn to practice is--

The Law of the Other Fellow

Is there anything which can help alleviate the strain involved in this merger? I think so. It's found in our text. I call it “The Law of the Other Fellow.”

“Whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it.”

I remember the very first time I read this passage of scripture. I came away feeling it just didn't make sense. How can anyone find something by losing it? That's contrary to everything we hold true. Then I got married!

I discovered that in these few words, Jesus enunciated one of the great laws of life. It is only by losing myself in love for Lucille, that I will ever find the fulfillment I seek for myself. To the degree that I cling to my own will and wants and way -- whether it be a little or a lot -- I am a little or a lot unhappy. But, when I lose my will and wants and way in love for her, miraculously I find everything for which I have been looking. I am sure she would say the same.

Practical Applications

The law of the other fellow applies to every aspect of life. From the most simple to the most sacred of relationships. It relates to such mundane things as what you eat.

The other day I heard about a husband who was complaining about the bill of fare in his home. His wife said, “I just don't understand you. Monday you like beans. Tuesday you like beans. Wednesday you like beans. Now, all of a sudden, on Thursday you don't like beans.”

Well, maybe John loves corned beef and cabbage, but it makes Mary ill to cook it. There are two ways to handle the situation. Mary can say, “I'm not going to cook it. It makes me sick.” John can say, “You cook it or else.” The result is conflict. And, while I am not a betting man, I'd be

willing to prophesy you fifty-cents Mary wins! But when she wins, she loses. For something of closeness goes out of their relationship.

How much better if each of them applied the law of the other fellow and Mary said, “Since it makes him happy, I’ll cook it in spite of the fact that it makes me ill.” And John says, “Gee, she shouldn’t have to go through all that torture. I can have corned beef and cabbage in a restaurant.” Neither tries to throw his or her weight around. Neither seeks to force the other to conform to his or her pattern. Instead, both have been prepared to conform to the pattern of the other person.

Or, moving from the ridiculous to the sublime, we might say that the law of the other fellow is most applicable in most sacred of relationships. As we said last Sunday, there is nothing smutty about sex, except as we make it so. When God completed his creative accomplishments which included the human body with all of its complex emotions and drives he said, “Behold, it is very good.”

But, if either one of the marriage partners conceives of the physical relationship as something which is solely designed for self-gratification, it becomes cold, personal and mechanical. There must be a losing of yourself in love for your partner, if this physical relationship is to fulfill this highest and most holy purpose, which is communication. The non-verbal expression of that oneness which exists between you and your mate through your marriage vows.

To me there is something very beautiful and profoundly significant in the fact that only by giving love is it possible to receive it. Only by losing yourself in love for your mate can you experience the fulfillment which you need. And, as I ponder that wonderful fact, I am made aware again, that only a God of infinite wisdom could have made such a blessed arrangement. Third, if you and your mate faithfully abide by the law of the other fellow, it will enable you to --

Discover the Mutuality of True Marriage

Mature marriage consists, not of two people looking into each other's eyes, but two people standing shoulder to shoulder, both looking in the same direction.

It is a mutual relationship. It is not a one-sided arrangement provided for the benefit of an over-lording husband or an overbearing wife. All of its relationships and obligations, all of its privileges and duties, are mutual. It is nowhere, nor at anytime, a one-sided affair accruing to the benefit of one of the partners at the expense of the other. If the two of you can realize this and respect it, many, if not most, of your marital difficulties will vanish.

I am told there was a time when the man ruled the roost with an iron hand. Women were thought to be the “weaker sex” and were obliged to submit to the authority of the male. Now, in most instances, this patriarchal concept of the home is gone. We now know “the weaker sex is the stronger sex because of the weakness of the stronger sex for the weaker sex.”

But, in place of the patriarchal model we have a matriarchal model when, more often than not, it is the woman who dominates the scene today. It is the woman who shapes the destiny of those who live in her domain. But, this is as wrong as the former. I know all homes are not that way. The other day I met a man who claimed he ran things at his house, and he does: the lawnmower, the washing machine and the vacuum cleaner. I also have heard of a lady by the name of Mrs.. Smith, who was slicing bread for sandwiches, when the knife slipped and she cut her little finger. Her neighbor, who was helping her, said, “Oh, you poor dear. You'll need something to wind around that. I better call Mr. Smith!”

Well, both the matriarchal and patriarchal patterns of a home are wrong. As someone has said,

“When God made women, he indicated by the method of creation just what place she should have in the world. He did not make woman from man's feet.

Therefore, woman was not intended to be a slave to man. Neither did he create woman from the brain of man, therefore he did not woman to be man's head. But, God created Eve from out of Adam's rib so that for all time, woman would be at

man’s side. His helpmate and his companion.”

When either partner forgets the mutuality which is the mark of true marriage, they are in for trouble. I am not a scientist, but as I understand it, when two chemicals are put together in a test tube and treated in a certain manner, something new evolves. The new substance is not just a combination of the two, nor does it simply combine the characteristics of the two. The new substance will have characteristics not found in either of the primary substances.

It’s possible, of course, to so mix the two chemicals that the stronger will dominate the weaker and a kind of adjustment is made between the two, but it is a “creative interaction” which produces a new substance. The same is so with the home. That new and wonderful entity at which marriage aims -- and which we might call the “us”-- can never be achieved so long as either of the partners are unwilling to surrender the “I”.

There must be a losing of the one for the benefit of the other. A surrendering of the old independence for the sake of a new interdependence. A submerging of the loud word “me” to the proud word “we.” There must be a learning and a keeping of the law of the other fellow, so that in time, the couple discovers the mutuality of which true marriage is made. Then, a faithful keeping of the law of the other fellow will be beneficial to any married couple because it will enable them to --

Achieve the Maturity of True Love

In the making of steel, there must be a catalytic agent if a new creation is to come out of the mixture. In marriage, that catalytic agent is the love of Christ. And, I say the love of Christ, for it is he who demonstrated the fact that

“The loftiest act of love is not in receiving , but in giving.”

Selfish or human love (*eros* is the Biblical word for it) is concerned with its own happiness. It centers upon what it can get instead of what it can give. But, mature love (*agape* as the Bible defines it) is just the opposite. It recognizes in the words of the French philosopher Jean Guitton,

“There is no real gift without a sacrifice of self.”

The other day it was my great privilege to share in the wedding of Bud and Betty Mc Culloch. At the wedding supper, Buford Mc Culloch told me a cute story about a couple of teenagers who were convinced they were in love and asked their parents if they could be married. The parents refused at first, but the teenagers persisted and confronted their folks with the ultimatum,

“If you don’t let us get married, we are going to run away and get married.”

Under the pressure of this ultimatum, the parents consented. When it came to the place in the ceremony where the groom says, “and with all my worldly goods, I thee endow . . . “ the mother of the boy turned to his father and said, “There goes Junior’s bicycle!”

That strikes me as a very funny story. But, I am afraid that there are many couples who enter into holy matrimony with an emotional or spiritual dowry about as skimpy as Jr.’s bicycle. As a result, because they do not understand the real meaning of love, the responsibilities and demands of marriage are seen to be a hindrance of their own happiness rather than an opportunity to learn the maturity of true love by losing oneself in the needs of the other.

Most marriages fail, not because of infidelity, but because of immaturity. One or both of the partners refuses to make the sacrifices which are needed. One or both of them insists the *other* person make all of the adjustments. But, faithful abiding by the law of the other fellow -- the losing of your *self* in love for your mate -- will soon lead a couple to the maturity of true love. The love of Christ, which means loving that which is unlovable and does not ask to be loved in return. The love which puts love where it does not find it, even as God did when, in the words of Romans 5:8,

“God commended his love toward us, in that *while we were yet sinners* (rebels, enemies, estranged from him) Christ died for us.”

When the love of Christ is the catalytic agent in a home, there is not only a merging of lives, but a creation of new life, a new spirit and a new entity which has never existed before. And even

more wonderful, a new atmosphere in which that new entity can live.

What is this law of the other fellow? In the last analysis it comes down to loving understanding.

The ability to put yourself in the other person's place. To feel as she feels. To see as he sees. To think as she thinks. And thus, with that love which comes from knowledge -- and the more we know of someone the more we inevitably love them -- through that perfect love which comes through perfect knowledge, you willingly and joyfully lose yourself in, and for, the sake of your mate. When you do, miracles of miracles, you awaken to discover

you have lost nothing and gained everything.