

HEART AND SOUL; LOVE FOR A LIFETIME

It was said that Claudius II of Rome believed that single men made better warriors than husbands; he therefore made a proclamation that marriages were to be suspended for single young men in the Roman army. Knowing that Valentine was a minister, the young men serving in the army would ask Valentine to marry them. This allegedly got him into much trouble and Claudius had him arrested. Another version of the story says that Valentine wanted to remind the men to stay faithful to their God and to their wives. To help remind them of their fidelity, he cut out paper hearts and gave them to the men to keep with them to remind them to be faithful to their spouses. When Claudius discovered that Valentine was marrying his soldiers, he had him arrested. While in prison, the healing of a girl named Julia was attributed to him. She was the blind daughter of the jailer. Because of her healing and testimony, 44 members of her family came to a saving faith in Christ. The night before he was beheaded for being the love minister who allowed Christians in the Roman empire to live honorably in the state of holy matrimony, he wrote a farewell note to Julia to encourage her. He signed it, "Your Valentine," thus marking the beginning of the traditional Valentine's Day card. His death was supposed to have taken place on the fourteenth of February, late in the third century AD. Now Valentine's Day has morphed into a fun tradition where candy, cards and greetings are exchanged. Many, if not most of the girls and guys claimed as valentine sweethearts in the early days of your youth are no longer considered a sweetheart or boyfriend. This leads me to our thoughts today. What leads to a lifetime love? What is a permanent valentine? Allow me to elaborate.

The Bible says, *"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common"* (Acts 4:32). Having all things in common is what made the church "...of one heart and of one soul...." There are at least three things that bring a married couple into one heart and soul and these three things can keep them in heart and soul love for a lifetime.

1. Common Faith

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (II Corinthians 6:14). It is a given that a saved person is not permitted to be in covenant union with an unbeliever. And the way to never do that is to not date a person (knowingly) who is not a believer. Let me go a step further. It is most advisable not to get serious and marry someone who is not on at least the same spiritual level with you. This leads us to the next point. We should find someone with whom we share...

2. Common Convictions

Paul was going to send Timothy to the saints at Philippi. He made this comment before sending Timothy to represent him, *“For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state”* (Philippians 2:20). This is what makes for a good evangelistic team. This is what makes for a lasting marriage also. I had gotten away from the Lord for a couple of years in my teens and when I got right with God, I had already become serious with a girl. This was not a wicked girl by any means, but she had fallen for the guy that was quickly no longer who I was or what I was any longer all about. My lifestyle had done a 180-degree turnaround. More and more, we had less and less in common. I have known the case when one person in a dating relationship gets on fire for the Lord; the other person also gets dedicated. This is fine, but if it is only borrowed, it will not work. The dedication to Christ must be mutual to have the lasting joy that endures for a lifetime. There should be no person who is more likeminded with you about Jesus, church, Christian service and moral standards than your spouse. The greatest casualties of marriage are the children when a husband and wife don't agree about the issues of life. They are torn. In my observation, as a rule, most kids side with the parent that is most lenient. That creates another problem of increasing the alienation between husband and wife.

My advice therefore to the unmarried is do not even begin a relationship with someone who is not on board with you spiritually. Jesus said in John 15:20, *“...If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you....”* Think of this, if the person you care about doesn't care for the Lord or the things of the Lord, they are part of the crowd that persecutes the Lord; therefore they will have no compunction in persecuting you. I have done enough marriage counseling to tell you that I have been an eyewitness to spouses berating, abusing and, to use the biblical term, persecuting the dedicated Christian to whom they are married.

What a great thing to see two dedicated Christians marry in the perfect will of God. We love it when couples have...

3. Common Goals

I observed Dr. and Mrs. Hancock as they sailed through 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 65 and finally almost 67 years of marriage. They were undoubtedly "Team Hancock." Dr. Hancock obeyed the admonition Ephesians 5:25, *"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."* He showed us it was not only unnecessary to sacrifice our wife for the ministry's sake, it was unscriptural. Mrs. Hancock showed us that a lady doesn't lose her identity by following the command of Ephesians 5:22, *"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord."* She showed us that she finds her identity by being one with her husband in burden and passion for the ministry of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

When Mrs. Hancock taught our ladies, as she did on several occasions, she always lifted up Jesus in the spirit of Mary, *"...which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word"* (Luke 10:39). When she spoke, she conveyed that word she learned at Jesus' feet to those with whom she ministered. As gifted as Nell Hancock was, she never considered her ministry separate from her husband; she saw her mission inextricably connected to Dr. Hancock's mission in life. I watched her attitude toward her husband. He was forever the "hidden man" (I Peter 2:4) of her heart. When he entered the room her eyes lit up. When he preached she smiled continually with only the occasional interruption of a tear. Raymond and Nell Hancock flowed like a confluence of two mighty rivers complimenting and making an even more powerful torrent of effective ministry. Dr. and Mrs. Hancock did everything together. This showed Barbara and me that we not only had permission, but admonition to be what I Peter 3:7 said we are to be, *"...heirs together of the grace of life."*

I find great joy and satisfaction in serving Jesus with my wife. I love the fact that I am the pastor and she is the pianist. As my wife helps plan the music program of the church and I prepare the sermons, I find we have a common goal in getting people who don't know Jesus to get to know Him and for those who know Him to love Him. This is the common goal we both share. Great glory is brought to Jesus when we serve Him together. Let us therefore offer to everyone His love, the love of not only a lifetime, but for eternity. May we show the world the transforming power of His grace through the proactive

involvement of His Church. May we evermore, with heart and soul, be God's Valentine to a world that needs Him.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.