

# Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Marriage Repair (Part 1 and 2)

Scripture: Colossians 3:1-17; Ephesians 5:15-30

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: November 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007

## **Marriage Repair** **Episode One: The Little Fixes**

### **Colossians 3:1-17 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup> If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. <sup>5</sup> Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. <sup>6</sup> For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, <sup>7</sup> and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. <sup>8</sup> But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him <sup>11</sup> —*a renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. <sup>12</sup> And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. <sup>14</sup> And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

**Introduction** Michael Patton hosts the Theology Program (which we have been using in DIBS) and also hosts the web site called Parchment and Pen. He has this to share...

Eleven years ago I sat in a premarital counseling session with my soon to be wife Kristie. I don't really remember much that was said except one comment made by my pastor. He said, "There is nothing in this world that you can wish upon a person that is worse than a bad marriage." When I first heard this I thought that it was nothing more than an expedient overstatement that was relevant to the moment. I gave my pastor "grace" since I knew this *was* a counseling session on *marriage* and it was his job to make us understand the vital importance of the decision that we were making. Yet I did think to myself, "There are a lot of things that are worse than a bad marriage. What about cancer, the death of a loved one, or paralysis?" Today, I no longer believe that my pastor made an overstatement. There is nothing worse that you can wish upon a person than a bad marriage.

Let me give you a little background so that you can understand how my experience effects the way I think.

Seven years ago my sister Angie and I were at Dallas Theological Seminary together. We were very close at this time. Her husband of three years was not a believer. They had many problems, not

the least of which was his ever increasing antagonism toward her relationship with the Lord. After some time of unmet expectations and extremely abusive behavior toward Angie, her husband wanted to get a divorce. Angie was *very* upset and sought my council. By this time, she was emotionally exhausted and had little energy left to fight for her marriage. But, like any good soon-to-be-pastor, I gave her the “right answer.” She was already well schooled in the belief that “God hates divorce” and how it is “*never* the right thing.” I told her that she needed to fight for her marriage and to do *anything* and *everything* she could to save the relationship. I especially made it clear to her that she needed to consider the effects that a divorce would have on her new six month old son. She did not want to have the stigma of a divorce attached to her name, so she conceded to fight. I put out a prayer request at seminary. The entire school prayed that this divorce would not happen. I remember the exact words of one student in preaching class as he called upon God: “God, *do not* let this divorce happen.” It was as if a divorce was the absolute worst thing that could happen.

Sure enough, it seemed that God answered our prayers. Angie was able to persuade her husband to stay and give the marriage another chance. We praised God in class the next week. But over the next year things grew worse. Angie’s husband became increasingly abusive. She stayed strong, but her strength seemed to become her husband’s greatest enemy. He seemed to be jealous of it. The love grew colder than ever, even though Angie did all she could to concede to her husband’s apparent narcissistic desires. Finally, if I understand the situation correctly, his anger fueled dissatisfaction turned into a bitterness that sought revenge. Eventually, this revenge turned into a vendetta to completely destroy Angie. Divorce was not the only thing he sought this time. Now he wanted to take her *completely* away from her son, leave her without any support, and expose all her “problems,” smearing her reputation. Of course, he would say it was all in her best interest, but those who were close to the situation understood things differently. “Why is he doing this?” Angie would ask. “Why does he make up so many lies?” Her strength of character and her godly countenance were eventually overcome by persistence of another. After a year long fight with depression, Angie took her life in a hotel room with a gun.

“God, *do not* let this divorce happen.” That was the prayer that was answered. Yet if the divorce would have happened at that time, from a human standpoint, I believe that Angie would still be alive. If she would not have fought to preserve her reputation and would have ceased in her avoidance of the stigma of the scarlet “D,” her son would not be motherless today.

Let me share another experience. A couple of years earlier my younger sister Lindsey had wed her sweetheart. He was a fine and charming young man. Everyone liked him and was overcome by his seeming stability, mature demeanor, and love for the Lord. But it was not six months into the marriage that she began to discover that his life was full of lies, deceit, and manipulation. The problems started out somewhat small and innocent, but as the closets were opened, they distorted her knowledge of him beyond recognition. She came to find out that she did not know him at all. The “graduate degree” that he was working on was really community service for crimes committed prior to the marriage. The supposed good financial credit that he came into the marriage with was soon overwhelmed with a flood of collection agencies that were demanding payments for her husband’s ten of thousands of dollars of past debt. His “spirituality” turned into a fabricated ploy to get the family to approve. She finally sought to do something about this only to find out that the man that she married six months earlier was still married to another woman in Italy.

What was she to do? Didn’t she consummate the marriage before God? Is it “ok” for a divorce in this situation? She ended up getting the marriage annulled, yet she still lives with the shame of the “failed marriage.”

When does divorce become the lesser of two evils? Ever? Is it *always* the worst of all options? <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2007/11/10/is-divorce-ever-good/#more-466>

There is a significant amount of discussion going on today among evangelical Christians about marriage. As we are assaulted about what marriage even IS, on the outside, inside the walls of the “fort” of our faith, people are wondering if marriage is really all its cracked up to be... A noticeable number of people, who grew up in Christian homes, are now just choosing to live together for an indefinite period of time and putting the Getting Married Thing on hold.

So I would suggest to you today that, Yes, every marriage needs repair. Even the best, most blissful, longest standing marriages still need repair. A good marriage is always in an *environment* of repair.

Some of you here today are not married at this time, I am aware of that. But perhaps you might find this interesting to either PREPARE you for marriage or to evaluate a past marriage, or to assist you in encouraging someone you know who IS married. Others of you are in a very happy marriage and you might think, “I don’t need this. I’ve already learned all I need to know about a good marriage.”

Today I want to suggest some “little fixes” for repairing a marriage, even if the damage is only slight. I call these “little fixes” because each one is a little thing, at least in terms of words. Each one, taken by itself, is DIGESTABLE. They are from the thinking of Paul in Colossians 3 and while they’re about general Christian relationships (Paul was writing them to a whole church) they’re also about marriage. This chapter actually DOES include a couple of verses about marriage, but not until after the passage before us. We want to consider the BEHAVIOR AND CHARACTER STRATEGIES that Paul lays out in vss.1-17 and imagine THEM applying the marriage.

1. In verse 1 GET “RAISED UP WITH CHRIST.” I think before you have much of a chance at all with marriage and being ABLE to go to God for help, you need to be crystal clear about whether you even know the Lord yet. If you are a Christian, you should have a different perspective on a great host of things in life. If you were programmed to be a certain way—selfish, self-protective, self-centered, self-indulgent?—have you been redeemed from slavery to those things? ***for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*** Romans 8:13

2. In verse 2 GET A HEAVENLY PERSPECTIVE ON YOUR MARRIAGE. I think in heaven there are no divorces, no arguments and interesting, we have these words from Jesus in Luke 20:34-35 ***And Jesus said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage.”*** Paul tells us to SEEK THE PRIORITIES OF HEAVEN. What are those? They are the things

of Jesus, not of this world. In heaven there will only be the activity of serving Him. Whatever HE says will be most important. We need to start thinking like that now.

3. **Consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed** (vs.5.) FIGHT URGES TO THESE FIVE THINGS. We need to not give in to what we want to do most of the time here with “the members of our earthly body.” In other words, we’re not to give in to being animals here. If you spouse pushes you or threatens you, you don’t just react as an unredeemed person would. You work at cultivating a DIFFERENT response than your old nature calls you to do. Marriage is hard. It is two basically self-infected people trying to live together, sleep together, trying to use the same bathroom, eat at the same table, be entertained with the same , raise the same kids, react to the same in-laws.

4. EXPAND THE LIST OF ENEMIES TO INCLUDE FIVE MORE. **put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth** (vs.8) I know these words don’t address all the specific issues that couples generate, but how many marital problems CAN be chalked up under one of these earthly, fleshly, carnal categories?

5. **Do not lie to one another** (vs.9) This might just be the hardest thing to do in marriage—to NOT lie to each other. I don’t mean just the obvious things. But general truth-telling. Being honest with your spouse and not deceiving them. There is a subtle little thing that happens in lots of marriages: hiding the truth because acknowledging the truth can be painful.

6. **put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving each other** (vss.12,13) Here’s the general thing that should repair Christian relationships including marriage. Do not dismiss these verses as not relevant to marriage. Perhaps they are JOB ONE, as Ford used to say. Perhaps feeling sympathy and empathy for your spouse is maybe a really big thing. Maybe just being KIND is pretty important. Being humble. Being gentle. Being patient. I love this one: bearing with one another. Couples sometimes say, “I DID that. For five years. For ten years. I can’t bear with him/her any more.” Yea? Who authorized you to give up?

Two have to tango, by the way. Two have to want to repair the marriage. Two have to sign on to Colossians 3:1-17 as a LIFE ETHIC and a LIFE CREED. And a LIFE PROJECT. One isn’t enough. If both are not willing and broken and committed to engaging what Paul and Jesus and Peter and John and James say about how to live, then prospects for marriage repair are scant.

There's one more in this item: Forgiving each other. Marriage repair begins with a basic willingness to forgive. You say, "Well, I forgave him a few times already." Yea? How many times has your savior forgiven you? Verse 13: ***just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*** I had a Christian say to me one time, "I won't be held hostage by that verse!" No? Then do NOT take the Lord's Table and testify to having RECEIVED forgiveness...

## Part 2

### **Ephesians 5:15-30 (NASB)**

<sup>15</sup> Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of your time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; <sup>20</sup> always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; <sup>21</sup> and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. <sup>22</sup> Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. <sup>24</sup> But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. <sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; <sup>26</sup> that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. <sup>28</sup> So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; <sup>29</sup> for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of His body.

**Introduction** I counseled with a couple, hard, about twenty years ago. Multiple sessions, raised volume, lots of tension. For a couple of months it was exhausting. He accused her of things. She accused him of things. They raged at each other, I tried my best to referee and mediate. And I came away finally realizing that they *both* simply did not want to repair their marriage. I believe wanting to repair the marriage, BOTH partners, is the first key to doing so. All the biblical admonitions in the world will not "guilt" a person to repair a marriage if they simply don't want to. It is too hard and the prospects of success without desire are nill, from my perspective at least. But if the couple, together, however they get to this place, WANTS to do so, almost any obstacles can be overcome. God can do so some quite wondrous work and repair or even create a new marriage if we want Him to be in on the process.

If you come out with an affirmative, "Yes, I want to repair my marriage," and a "Yes, I really think God's will for my life is the best possible plan," then there is always hope.

But wanting a marriage to be repaired rests on something even more basic: wanting what God wants. How badly do you want God's will to be done in your life? That is really something of a deep question, because

- first: some of you have never been asked that before. You're thinking, "Wait. What?" It's a new question.
- Second, we all know that on some days we really want God's will to be done, and on other days we really don't want it.
- Third, we must battle some little voice which whispers to us, "you can't ever really know." Or, "He doesn't really care." Or, "it isn't fun and it doesn't feel good." Or, "He or she doesn't deserve it." Or, "Ya know, Christians have different opinions on this, it isn't black and white, Dr. So & So says it's ok to give up on marriage anyway, so why bust a gut?" The question is deep too, because
- Fourth, we're not real sure His will is fully informed.
- Fifth, it truly engages and requires faith.

If you are just one of the two of you, who wants repair, and the other doesn't want or is unwilling to seek repair, or if there is danger involved, then you have to explore what God wants you to do in that situation. But if you both wish repair, then there is

Another important question: "In what ways are you seeking God's help?" How are you TRYING to engage the work of the Spirit in your marriage? What resources are you willing to access? There is counseling available, a thing which I find you have to have some patience and persistence in... And sometimes each person can greatly benefit by getting their own counseling. Counseling isn't easy, and few start it with eagerness or excitement. Are conferences (like a "Weekend to Remember") something you might consider? Would joining a small support group be something God could use in your life, either as a couple or just you, yourself? Are you praying, in humility, and asking God to repair your marriage?

Let's get back to the rest of the passage we were dealing with last week... We began this series last week by getting into Colossians 3 for a bit and applying the general instructions to the Colossian Jesus-followers to the relationships of a Christian marriage. The same sentiment that Paul wrote to the Colossians (in last week's passage) is found in Ephesians 4:31,32: ***Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*** And basically we said that as a Christian, we cannot weasel out of the apostle's logic that if we have been redeemed by Christ freely, forgiven of grievous sin, we can offer nothing less to our brother or sister in Christ in general, let alone our beloved Christian wife or husband. In other words, if ANY brother or sister in Christ is worthy of the "extra mile," is qualified for your Christian ***heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other*** (Col.3:12,13) that would probably be the one person you specifically promised God you would serve in that way, your husband or wife.

Husbands, if you were married in a Christian ceremony, you promised God you would love your wife *as Christ loved the church*.

Wives, if you were married in a Christian ceremony, you promised God that you would subject yourself in a biblical way to your husband, *as to the Lord*.

There was no conditional *provisio* added in the ceremony which stipulated IF they deserved it, IF it turned out as you hoped, IF they stayed the same as the day you covenanted to marry them. You just made the promise, and you made it to God. You and I might be able to make a case that at the time, we were stupid. But I am afraid God took us seriously. And none of us, to my knowledge, had a gun held to our head when we promised God AND the spouse the things we promised them. As we said last week, the apostle's logic is "brutally" clear: **just as God in Christ has also forgiven you**. Rather than engage in repair, couples sometimes say, "I DID that. For five years. For ten years. I can't bear with him/her any more." But I must ask you, "who authorized you to give up?"

There are other items here:

**put on love** (Col.3:14) Love is a verb even though it's a noun here. What? It's a noun here, but in the Christian life it is primarily a VERB. Love is something we DO. You do not have the right to say, I do not love you. All of us could say that, if we give in to our old selves. NONE of us gets loved the way we would specify. We are told to PUT ON love, not WAIT for love.

One time a wife who was divorcing her husband, and found a new dude, told me, "the new one loves me the way I want to be loved."

We are told to look at love as deliberate as putting on a garment. It is something we CLOTHE ourselves with. What does it involve? It involves putting "on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another, and forgiving each other whoever has a complaint against each other." Christian love involves SACRIFICE, with no time table. That's how HE loves us!

If she is sarcastic or belittling, you must point out the boundary she is violating, and yet forgive her. TEACH her to speak appropriately.

If he is selfish or negligent, you must say something, yes, you do your best to communicate that he is not taking care of you, but without vindictiveness or threat in your voice. TEACH him *how* to pay proper attention.

**let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts** (vs. 15a) Peace is a fruit of the Spirit. It grows gradually in the Christian, but here we're told to LET IT HAPPEN. I think this means, Relax. So often we feel a frenzied need to RIGHT THE INJUSTICE! But ultimately you don't need to strive and stress about yourself, God will take care of you. He has engraved your name in

the palms of His hands. You can have NO BETTER benefactor. Let His peace rule. People say today, lots of stuff rules. Patriots rule. Rap music rules. iPods rule. Here Paul says, Let His peace rule. Let it be number one and DOMINATE your day to day living...

**be thankful** (vs.15b) Gratitude is always appropriate. If you are married, think of the things you appreciate about your spouse. Think of the blessings you HAVE enjoyed because of your spouse. Appreciate what you have been given. Remember that you do have a faithful companion and partner. It may have trouble and involve WORK but you are not alone. Some gratitude can add a little to the marriage repair toolbox.

**Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you** (vs.16) Allow His word to be IN your thinking. Again, get into the Word. Specifically, get into the Gospels. Carry a testament or a Gospel of John around with you. When you hit stress or disappointment or conflict, what's the Bible say? What did JESUS say should be our tact when we hit those things?

**do all in the name of the Lord Jesus** (vs.17) If you can do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, go for it. If you cannot, don't. Don't DO anything if you can't do it in His name? Does He ever authorize us to give up on each other? He does not...

Next week we will say some practical things we can do to initiate repair, and then to nurture repair. This may all sound way too simple, I know. But I believe the most powerful tools and aids to fixing a hurting marriage are really simple things. There are lots of points to be covered, but basically the goal is to see Jesus Christ as the head of your home. That means subordinating YOU being head of your home. May God give us much grace as a church and may we always be interested in doing repair in relationships, and never give up on each other...

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Marriage Repair (Episode 2)

Scripture: Colossians 3:1-17

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2007



## ***Marriage Repair*** **Episode Two: Marriage Repair at Special Times**

### **Matthew 1:18-25** (NASB)

<sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly. <sup>20</sup> But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> “And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup> Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, <sup>23</sup> “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.” <sup>24</sup> And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife, <sup>25</sup> and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

**Introduction** Lots of things need repair. We are seriously into repair issues. Our **vehicles** need repair. Our **computers** need repair sometimes. Our **roof** and **front porch** and **stove** need repair. Sometimes our **clothing** needs repair. Even our **bodies** sometimes need repair. Repair is a fact of life, and there is no way to avoid the issue! But maybe the hardest thing to repair is human relationships.

Human relationships are far more complex than even the space shuttle (though the shuttle contains more than 2.5 million parts, 230 miles of wire, 1,060 valves, and 1,440 circuit breakers.) At the same time, we are multi-tasking through relationships with our **parents**, with **our kids**, with our **siblings**, with our **bosses**, with our **neighbors**, with our **fellow church members**, with those who **oppose us**, with **our best friends** and some of us, with one person that we kind of put on a pedestal: **our spouse**. That person (we have said) is more special than all others. Most of us chose that person out of an array of candidates. Many of us felt at least a surge of warmth, a flutter of happy, an inkling of hope, when we first started dating this person...

BUT WHAT IF A MARRIAGE IS BROKEN EVEN BEFORE IT HAS HARDLY BEGUN? What about that? We tend to think this way: a couple meets, gets interested, investigates if there is potential for a happy relationship (“going out”), commits, engages, marries. (Or, just as likely in this culture... meets, becomes intimate, moves in together, learns last names, becomes interested, breaks up...) But in the first century, in Judea, things were a little different.

Jewish law regarded an engaged couple as virtually married. Normally a one-year period of waiting followed the betrothal before the consummation of the marriage. During that year the couple could only break their engagement with a divorce. “. . . a betrothed girl was a widow if her *fiancé* died (Kethub. i.2), and this whether the man had ‘taken’ her into his house or not. After betrothal, therefore, but before marriage, the man was legally ‘husband’ . . .” (M’Neile, 6,7) Joseph being a “righteous” (Gr. *dikaïos*) man could hardly let his fiancé’s pregnancy pass without action since it implied that she had been unfaithful and had violated the Mosaic Law. JOSEPH HAD THREE CHOICES concerning how to proceed.

- **First**, he could expose Mary publicly as unfaithful. In this case she might suffer stoning, though that was rare in the first century. Probably she would have suffered the shame of a public divorce (Deut. 22:23–24).
- A **second** option was to grant her a private divorce in which case Joseph needed only to hand her a written certificate in the presence of two witnesses (cf. Num. 5:11–31).
- His **third** option was to remain engaged and not divorce Mary, but this alternative appeared to Joseph to require him to break the Mosaic Law (Lev. 20:10). He decided to divorce her privately. This preserved his righteousness (i.e., his conformity to the Law) and allowed him to demonstrate compassion.<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes today too, marriages start off on a rough note. The circumstances are different but the basic trauma in a relationship may be just as dramatic. And so REPAIR is what is needed. Whether early or later in a marriage there may be a need for compassion. Of course, Mary was NOT unfaithful OR promiscuous. She had been impregnated by the Spirit of God, miraculously and while remaining a virgin. And Joseph did receive a supernatural appearance of the angel of the Lord in a dream to bring him up to speed. But still there was stress and a certain untangling of the situation. I believe Joseph still found himself facing whether to have compassion or not.

I would like to propose something to you. I would like to propose that we place a moratorium on the use of the word “love” for one year. I would like to propose that for a year we replace it with the word “compassion.” This is what is

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<sup>2</sup>Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mt 1:18 (Galaxie Software, 2003).

needed often in our marriages. We need to find, to feel and to practice compassion.

A woman marries a man and in time he mutates into something she didn't sign up for.

A man marries a woman and he discovers that she is more than he had planned for or was really equipped to deal with—she is more than his match.

A couple gets married and does well for a time, and then some unforeseen circumstance occurs—let's say their child becomes ill, which neither could have predicted. And under the strain of the circumstance, they begin to blame each other. Their communication breaks down. Loneliness sets in WITH EACH.

Each needs to step back, and hear the voice of the Lord—compassion. They need to feel what the other person is feeling.

A couple is married for many years and each begins to notice that the other is aging. YIKES! “Hey old man, you don't move as fast or as nimbly as you did when we met.” “Yea? Well you, old lady, have been studying the profound truths in the world of gravitational physics.” They can criticize each other, forget those lovely words on their wedding day, “for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, till death do us part...” They can withdraw into SELF and self-protection. Or they can hear the voice of the Lord Jesus, “compassion.” Its easy to say, “I love you.” Let's not say it for a year. Let's say, “I compassion you.” Sounds stupid. But it means a lot. If she is ornery, gentlemen, understand her situation a little bit. She has to live with your sorry um, person. She maybe has changes going on in her life. She might have lost a friend, or a job. Your kids might be growing up, growing PAST her. She may be watching her youth slip away. She may be tired. She may have born the weight of financial stresses when YOU were out there just watching the Patriots...

Joseph's response to the angel in the dream, which was the voice of the Lord to him, was OBEDIENCE. He ***did as the angel of the Lord commanded him***, he took Mary as his wife, as was planned, kept her as a virgin until Jesus was born, and named Jesus JESUS as he had been told to do. We might think if was easy for Joseph to obey God because God gave him an angelic vision. But there is something else here I wonder if you've thought about? We have no information whatsoever that tells us he dated Mary. We have no text that says Joseph loved Mary. Their marriage, in all likelihood was like most others of that day—set up by someone or something OTHER than Joseph and Mary hanging out, going out, getting hooked up with each other, falling in love. We don't KNOW the specific circumstances of their early relationship— and SINCE the Spirit did not inspire Matthew or Luke (or Mark or John, for that matter) to TELL us this information, we can assume it was not needed. Matthew tells us, ***Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows...***

Marriage repair would be helped a long way if we do TWO THINGS:

- a. Have compassion on each other. Understand a little of what the other person is dealing with.
- b. Be obedient to God instead of giving in to this *scourge* of he's not meeting my needs, she's not meeting my needs, I'm not happy, I don't love her any more.

When we are with the Lord, and somehow our lives are totaled up for what they were worth, I believe very few will be praised by God for sticking up for our own "rights." We WILL be praised for being obedient. We will be affirmed for exercising compassion.

Now you may say, "He doesn't deserve my compassion. He acts just like his father. He doesn't return it. He has abused it. He doesn't appreciate it."

Men may say, "She didn't tell me she had these problems when I married her. If I had know then what I know now, I wouldn't have married her."

There's one more thing I would like to say from the story of Joseph and Mary—it was a special time, wasn't it? I don't mean the first Christmas. I mean the unusual census that Caesar Augustus ordered. Joseph had to go back to his ancestral home, and he took his pregnant wife with him. They're on the road, they're not at home, there's no room at the inn, we don't know that he had deep feelings for her or not. It is a special time.

Sometimes we really have opportunities at special times like the holidays. The schedule is a little different. There is holiday stress. NOW is the time to learn compassion. We go so out of our way to PRETEND compassion with the whole gift-giving thing. We ought to make the season special by really concentrating on COMPASSION and if that means doing some marriage repair at this season, then there you have it. What could be more honoring to the Savior than to obey Him as a birthday present?

May the Lord slowly burden you and me to make secret commitments to create an environment of repair in our marriages. We may not even TELL our spouses that we're interested in repairing our relationships. We may just start DOING it. With prayer, with determination and a basic DESIRE to honor our vows, the Lord will show up. I guarantee it. He will give aid to your heart when you think your heart has grown cool. That's what He does. He makes the dead come alive!

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Marriage Repair (Episode 3)

Scripture: Luke 6:27-36

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007



## **Marriage Repair** **Episode Three: What Jesus Said**

### **Luke 6:27-36 (NASB)**

“But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup> “Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. <sup>30</sup> “Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. <sup>31</sup> “And just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way. <sup>32</sup> “And if you love those who love you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> “And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> “And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is *that* to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, in order to receive back the same *amount*. <sup>35</sup> “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*. <sup>36</sup> “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

**Introduction** Do you ever wish the Lord would give us a break and just let us BE CARNAL sometimes? Don't you sometimes wish you could just operate in the flesh for like, one issue per year? You know, come on, just let it all hang out and DON'T “fight the good fight” on just one item per year. A special dispensation for just going with what feels “natural” on say, one item per year. You could maybe strike a deal with God—“Lord, let me just do what I want, what feels good, on THIS issue, and I'll be Your faithful disciple on all the rest for the rest of the year.” If you can relate to this, what would be your item? ❶ Road rage? ❷ Porn? ❸ Knock off a corner store? ❹ Non-stop, double-fudge, chocolate death? <sup>3</sup> Do you ever feel like making a deal with God like that? I think there's another item, a more seductive temptation than any of what I've mentioned--that we might opt for before any of these, at least those of us that are married. ❺ It would be to just go with the flesh, my natural tendencies, and give up on marriage repair. There is a delectable delight far more insidiously and conspiratorially attractive to many!

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<sup>3</sup> Candy turtle tart; Chocolat-Banane (caramelized bananas, praline crunch, hazelnut dacquoise); Toblerone chocolate cheesecake; “essential chocolate,” “Mad about Plaisir Sucré.”

We have been talking about ways to THINK about doing marriage repair. The assumption I am making in this little series is that every marriage needs repair, and an environment of repair. Are we willing to always be open to the Holy Spirit, who (I believe) always prompts us, moves us, leads us towards repairing and reconciling relationships. We should not and cannot say, “He is leading me towards fracturing a relationship” because fracture is contrary to godliness. And so, He never leads us that way. He leads us towards repair, and I believe, will strengthen and rejuvenate us to do repair, even multiple times in the same relationship, over years. When it comes to our marriages I don’t think the Lord ever allows us to sit stagnantly either. It may be hard to keep moving forward but the Spirit will simply not allow us to sit and just accept the *status quo*. He will tell us to WANT to ever improve the relationship, even when we think that will not happen. If we listen to His voice, He will tell us BOTH to want repair. Well, this is where we’ve been, so far. Today we want to consider some words that Jesus spoke which Luke wrote down. And it has to do with LOVE, always an appropriate “virus” to inject into our marriages.

In our passage today, we see in verse 27 that love is to extend even to ***our enemies*** and ***those who hate us***. That *might* apply to marriage! At least to some marriages. I don’t actually think that Jesus was thinking about marriages here, but to relationships far worse! To the worst relationship that a person can have. With THOSE people we are to love them.

***Blessing those who curse us*** and ***praying for those who mistreat us***. You get the distinct impression that Jesus wants HIS followers to do the exact opposite with difficult people, from what we naturally want to do.

This continues in verses 29 and 30: ***Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back.*** Jesus wasn’t inviting His followers to become DOORMATS, I do not believe. But He wants them to live ABOVE the normal flow of things—to go beyond how we might normally react to people’s demands or requests. And this applies to marriage too. Marriage is not exempt from kingdom living principles and really ought to be the FIRST laboratory for them. And it strikes me that an important phrase is in the middle of verse 35: ***expecting nothing in return...*** In relationships, as Jesus followers, we are not supposed to be about ourselves. And that is hard, I know. But it is there in the Word. And it has bearing on marriages too. Repair often must happen because damage has happened because you have two self-infected people trying to live together and find ways to be happy. Damage happens when one or both get too self-focused. Expectations go unmet. Needs go unmet. Feeling “in love” begins to fade... But if two people (covenanted together and first and foremost are committed individually to follow Jesus until death) work at TREATING EACH OTHER THE WAY THEY EACH LIKE TO BE TREATED the necessary repair environment can happen. And will happen.

Jesus didn't make the idea up. It was in the Law of Moses: Leviticus 19:18 **'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.** And also in Leviticus 19:34 **'The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.**

Matthew has Jesus' words this way, and we can assume that Jesus may well have taught and spoken these words more than once... Matthew 7:11-12 **If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.**

So here's where we're at: in marriage, and especially when repairs are being done, but not ONLY in marriage, and yet in marriage... We need to treat each other as we like to be treated. The next logical question would be: HOW DO YOU LIKE TO BE TREATED?

**First**, I would suspect you like to be respected.

- You like that as a **resident** of your street. You like that from your local town or city or state **officials** when in dealings with them. You like that in the **doctor's or dentist's** office. You like it from the **checker** at the grocery store. You like it from **your kids**. You like it from **other people's kids**. You like it from **your pastor** and from **people at church**. You like it from **your professors or students**. You like it from **anonymous drivers** on the road or in the parking lot. You like it from **your parents**.

In fact I can't think of anyone we DON'T like to receive respect from...

How about your beloved? How about the one to whom you promised, to whom you gave your word, to live with, to partner with, to endure with, to grow with, to grow *old* with? How about to that person who gave up some other path of possibilities to stay with YOU? How about that person? Do you like to receive respect from that person?

SO: you should give that person respect. You should not speak to them disrespectfully. You should not neglect them or their needs. You should not gloss over their feelings or dismiss their likes and dislikes. You should not speak to them, or AT them in a way that is disrespectful. You don't like that, right? Therefore, treat them, speak to them and make decisions toward them that are like how YOU like to be treated.

- John 13:14-15 **If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.**

**Second**, I would suspect you like to be **treated with kindness and celebration**. You like to be acknowledged and honored. Maybe your beloved does too? If you do this, as a rule for yourself you make repairs in your marriage. Your beloved starts to LIKE you again. They start to WANT you around. Hey—who WOULDN'T want to have someone around who communicates to you pleasure with your company, delight in your uniqueness?

- 1 Peter 3:7 ***You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.***

**Third**, I would suspect you like to be **listened to**, even when AFTER been heard they don't necessarily agree with you? You LIKE being heard. So heard that they can feed back what you actually SAID. Do that. Listen. Listen hard. Listen so well that you hear what they actually said. And more, don't you like it when more than your actual words are heard, your FEELINGS are detected by the listener?

- James 1:19 ***This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger***

Here's an IDEA:

Try using these words of Jesus for one day:

Intentionally mark a day (secretly) and consciously work at it from when you get up until you go to bed.

Ask God to help you remain aware of this throughout the day, and

See what you learn.

Marriage repair is possible. We know that the challenges can be considerable. But the Holy Spirit is more than considerable and the presence of Jesus Christ makes all things new.

# Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church  
 Series: Marriage Repair (Episode 4)  
 Scripture: Ephesians 5:21 etc.  
 Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.  
 Date: December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007

## **Marriage Repair Episode Four: Who's in Charge?**

### **Ephesians 5:15-21** (NASB)

<sup>15</sup> Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of your time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; <sup>20</sup> always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; <sup>21</sup> and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

### **Introduction**

A typical Christmas decision matrix for a family might include these questions:

| <b>CHRISTMAS 2007</b>                                  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| <b>Cards</b>   | <b>Who gets them?</b>          |
|  | <b>Who's DOING them?</b>       |
| <b>Decorating?</b>                                     | <b>When?</b>                   |
|  | <b>Who's doing the work?</b>   |
|  | <b>Who's cleaning up?</b>      |
| <b>Where do we spend the Eve?</b>                      | <b>Your family?</b>            |
|  | <b>My family?</b>              |
|  | <b>Christmas Eve service?</b>  |
| <b>Where do we spend the Day?</b>                      | <b>Is the Day split?</b>       |
|  | <b>Who decides?</b>            |
|  | <b>How is travel arranged?</b> |
|  | <b>How is travel financed?</b> |
| <b>How much money will be "invested" in Christmas?</b> |                                |
| <b>Me?</b>   |                                |
| <b>You?</b>  |                                |
| <b>Them?</b>   |                                |
|  | <b>Our Kids</b>                |
|  | <b>Grandkids</b>               |
|  | <b>Their kids</b>              |
| <b>Others?</b>   |                                |
|  | <b>Work</b>                    |
|  | <b>Church</b>                  |
|  | <b>Relatives</b>               |
|  | <b>Neighbors</b>               |

So many Christmas decisions to make for families... Sometimes decisions that Christian couples face are deeper and more weighty.

Where will we go to church?

How much do we tithe to the church, or do we give anything at all?

In fact, who makes the financial decisions?

Do we rent or buy?

Do we send our kids to public or private school or to any school at all?

Do we take a far away vacation, or a closer, cheaper one?

Do we drive a 1995 Toyota or a 2005 Navigator?

And in the midst of all these decisions, some friction might occur, maybe even some conflict. Marriage repair often interfaces with the matter of **who is in charge?** The usual and expected answer to the question, “Who’s in charge in our marriage?” would probably be one of these three:

1. Me.
2. Her/Him. (the “pointing finger syndrome”)
3. Nobody.

The real answer to the question, “Who’s in charge in our marriage?” should be one or more of the following:

1. Neither.
2. Both.
3. God.

Now, ultimately each family needs a CEO. There has to be a place where the “buck” stops, one person who is ultimately responsible for the family. That should be the husband, assuming there is a husband. On the overall, it seems clear from Scripture that God designed the family so that the husband is the one responsible for the overall tone and health of the family. If he walks with God, the others will benefit. If he does not, it is very difficult for the rest to grow. But we are not talking overall CONTROL. That is the question we’re probing when we ask, “Who’s in charge?”

From Ephesians 5:15 Paul tells us to **be careful** and to walk **wisely**. That means to not live carelessly, haphazardly or to fall into a lot of unwise decisions. Let the world live that way—disciples of Jesus Christ should look different; they should LIVE different. We should be careful.

We are to be conscious of the time we have (verse 16), and that the times in which we live are dominated by evil forces, until the Lord Jesus returns. This is part of our world-view, and it will influence our decision-making. We are not to be foolish.

Verse 17 tells us that **foolishness** is to miss what God’s will for our lives is. Instead, we are to understand what that will is. That involves HOW we live and the choices we make. That means six immediate choices (verses 18-20), from Paul:

1. Avoid getting drunk. Which means, “avoid getting drunk.” Don’t go there. It is a state of being where God does not want us to be.

2. Be filled with the Spirit. Which means many things probably, but in general to be controlled and filled up by the Lord Jesus, where we are more and more yielding ourselves to His control, and thus gradually growing the fruits of the Spirit in our lives.<sup>4</sup>
3. Speaking to each other with biblical things on our minds. The ***psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*** means that we are communicating in a musical way. There is always room for good Christian music in how we share with each other. This is really true today where we can do this in lots of ways! It is edifying, and it builds each other up. Christian marriages can work Christian music, singing, songs into their lives.
4. Worshipping God, consciously, deliberately, from the heart. Worship should be a significant part of our week. Not just occasionally, when it is convenient or when it is seasonal. It should be as frequent a feature as is not getting drunk and being filled with the Spirit.
5. Giving thanks. It is always healthy and good to make gratitude a part of a family. Our culture is so “gimme gimme” it almost has become countercultural to place an emphasis on giving expression to being thankful.
6. Subjecting, subordinating ourselves to one another. In this 6<sup>th</sup> item (verse 21), we have an overall principle for the Christian life...

The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* explains this to mean, “willingly serving others and being under them rather than dominating them and exalting themselves.”<sup>5</sup> Applying that to marriage, it would imply a mutual servant approach to how we view our relationship, because we are Christians. It would mean neither partner feels dominated by the other one. Some days and in some decisions one person concedes the issue to the other person. On other days, with other issues, the other one defers to the first one. There is give and take, not just take.

So we need to, in one sense, have no one in charge. In another sense, we are BOTH in charge. And ultimately we recognize and we seek for ways, more and more, to see that God is in charge. Here are some suggestions as to how to play this out:

- a. Pray together together about decisions. This may take some time to learn how, and to become comfortable but it is a worthy goal. The benefits are huge.
- b. Lean on each other's strengths. Don't be threatened by your spouse's area of giftedness or ability. If one is better at one area of

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<sup>4</sup> Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.

<sup>5</sup> John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985).

- thinking, use that to your advantage. Finances, people-skills, communicating, child development, gifting, mechanical ability, etc.
- c. Wait on the Lord, at times when a decision is murky. Pray and give thanks for what you have, and ASK Him to make His will clear. No one is dominant; no one is in charge. God is sought as the decision-giver.
  - d. Make joint decisions, with listening, compassion and discussion. Try to minimize threat and speaking poorly; Sing and make melody in your hearts somehow when you're talking about a decision. BOTH are in charge.
  - e. Support each other once a decision is made. If it didn't come out the way you wanted, be cheerful about the joint decision. There is a rottenness in decisions where only one really made the decision. There is joy in decisions made together.

The biggest decisions Renée and I have made were the decision to enter the ministry, the decision for Renée to become a legal secretary, the decision to go to Dallas, the decision for Renée to work for a major law firm in Dallas, the decision to have a baby, the decision to move to New Bedford and this church, the decision to have a second child, the decision to purchase a home, the decision for Renée to return to college and become a teacher, the decision for her to work at a Christian school, the decision to leave that school and enter public education, the decision to move and buy our second home, the decisions around colleges for our girls.

We have made all those decisions jointly. We sought the Lord's leading in every one. Neither she nor I dominated in them. He has been faithful. I have been the CEO of our family, but Renée has been the Chief Operations Officer, which in business terminology is a person who is very high up in the organization, a second in command. This CEO hasn't always functioned perfectly but with a good COO backing me up, we have been blessed.

The alternative is to have one person who dominates. That creates a hollowness and a distance between the two partners. Sure, one person gets their way but they damage the affection and the trust. They also miss out on each other's full giftedness if only one person makes the big decisions.

Marriage repair can sometimes be enhanced by taking a close look at who is in charge. Ultimately, every Christian home should really see that the Lord Jesus is in charge. That creates a healthy set of boundaries, when you know that we must answer to the Lord for every decision. May the Lord give us grace to always work at having an environment for repair, where the sweetness of the Lord is used to repair and strengthen!

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Marriage Repair (Episode 5)

Scripture: 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:1-17

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007



## **Marriage Repair** **Episode Five: When Repair is Unlikely**

### **1 Corinthians 7:1-17 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup> Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. <sup>2</sup> But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. <sup>3</sup> Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. <sup>4</sup> The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*. <sup>5</sup> Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control. <sup>6</sup> But this I say by way of concession, not of command. <sup>7</sup> Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. <sup>8</sup> But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. <sup>9</sup> But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn. <sup>10</sup> But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband <sup>11</sup> (but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not send his wife away. <sup>12</sup> But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away. <sup>13</sup> And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away. <sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. <sup>15</sup> Yet if the *unbelieving* one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such *cases*, but God has called us to peace. <sup>16</sup> For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? <sup>17</sup> Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And thus I direct in ***all*** the churches.

**Introduction** We have been working our way as carefully as I know how, through a number of biblical passages which I have been relating to marriage. For most Christians, marriage will be ONE OF THE GREATEST EXPERIENCES in life

and it will provide some of life's GREATEST BLESSINGS, as God intends it to do. It will also impose some of life's GREATEST CHALLENGES.

But we would be less than realistic if we did not acknowledge that a high percentage of Christian marriages end in divorce, only a few percentage points less than the general population's abysmal divorce rate. The culture seems to have overtaken the church on this; the world has become our maestro: we listen more to what society is saying is acceptable than to the traditions of Christianity or even to the Word of God. I cannot explain why this is so, but it is. Therefore we are forced to look at what happens when marriage repair becomes unlikely.

I say "unlikely" because I believe marriage repair is *always possible*, at least up to the point that one or the other begins to step out with a *new* partner—then it truly becomes near impossible. But up to that point, I believe that two people can always find the grace, the strength and the will to turn back to their one-time beloved, and repair the relationship. This is because such is always the way with Jesus Christ. He does not want divorce or even separation. He wants repair, and I believe He will give the graces and the resources to BRING ABOUT repair, when both people want it.

Now, none of this is new to our culture. The apostle Paul addresses some of the tension with difficult marriages—among young Christians struggling to live in a very pagan city--in what we call "First Corinthians," (although within this book he mentions a previous letter [5:9], not preserved for us today.)

Let me say that for those of you who have struggled to repair your marriage at different times, it (repair) can happen. That is my motivation in this whole series. It hasn't been my intention to rant or to pontificate about marriage, and certainly not to imply that I have all or even most of the solutions. But clearly we can say that repair...

...takes **TWO** (a mindset of willingness in both partners) and it takes **WORK**, and then **MORE WORK** and no small measure of basic determination... It requires **COURAGE**—to look at yourself as you really are. It requires **LOVE** to accept your spouse for who they are,

But love is what *we're supposed to be about* anyway. Did you know that? Love—real love--isn't looking for "**EVEN-STEVEN**." It isn't looking for the **RIGHT DEAL**. It isn't **KEEPING SCORE**. It **DOESN'T GIVE UP**. In fact Scripture says that *Love is PATIENT, love is KIND, and is NOT JEALOUS; love DOES NOT BRAG and is NOT ARROGANT, does NOT ACT UNBECOMINGLY; it does NOT SEEK ITS OWN, is NOT PROVOKED, does NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT A WRONG SUFFERED, does NOT REJOICE IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, but REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH; BEARS ALL THINGS, BELIEVES ALL THINGS, HOPES ALL THINGS, ENDURES ALL THINGS. (1*

Corinthians 13:4-7) It would DO US WELL to spend a week meditating and praying through this list, instead of just thinking, “Oh I know that passage so well...”

We model the love we try to craft in our own hearts after none other than our Savior, Jesus Christ, Himself. We seek to emulate Him. We ask Him to LET us emulate His love with our children, with our non-Christian friends, and even our enemies. And we do so, with our spouses. This is what marks us as truly different from the world. The world may *simulate* love. But it does not generate it. Disciples of Jesus Christ can generate it. The apostle John wrote, ***we love because He first loved us*** (I Jn.4:19). And if you look at these things and say, “I can’t do that” or “I can’t do it any more,” I would agree! That is why we continually need to go BACK to the grace of God, back to God Himself and appeal for new energy, and fresh grace and renewed ability. And He gives it!

and **COURAGE AGAIN** to accept that *your* dreams of marriage may have to undergo some alteration, in view of reality.

But if there are not TWO, willing partners—so committed to Christ that they are willing to hurt and risk for His kingdom and His purposes, then it will not likely be repaired, and all the rest of those things become pretty much irrelevant...or DO they?

What about, when it marriage repair becomes unlikely—or when a marriage just falls apart?

Are we, as evangelical Christians supposed to put our heads into the sand?

As Paul wrote the words we have read this morning to the early Corinthian Christians, there is emotion in his writing. The Corinthian church was one which evidently had written openly to him about their problems. And Paul responded plainly and clearly. Marriage is holy. Divorce is not to be named among believers in Christ, if possible. It is to be avoided at pretty much all cost. But there are times when it occurs.

Sometimes one spouse abuses the other one. I would never tell a person to stay in a truly abusive situation. I would counsel the abused person to separate as an act of “tough love” but not to divorce. If the abuser is also an adulterer, or abandons his or her spouse over the long-term then perhaps—depending on your interpretation of Jesus’ words, a divorce would be understandable. Even then, great care must be taken. What we have today in this country are rarely justifiable causes for divorce, in my opinion.

Paul indicates in chapter 7 that most people are going to need each other. And that EVEN IN THE CASE of being married to a non-believer, the believer should not leave that person. What does that say about a believer leaving a believer? He doesn’t even address that situation because I don’t think the

Corinthians thought to ask him about that scenario. They had new converts, married to unbelievers who perhaps had no acquaintance at all with Christ. For purposes of our witness for Christ, we should stay WITH the unbeliever, if we can.

In the beginning of the passage he states a sort of, mutual authority over each other. We cannot say “No” to each other, because we OWE each other. We’re certainly not to send each other away.

So, caught in the twilight zone of not being supposed to dissolve a covenanted relationship, and yet being in a bad or even thought to be non-meaningful, let alone fulfilling marriage, what about if it DOES come crashing down?

Well, I can suggest several things that are true or likely true:

1. For the true Christian, no sin is beyond God’s forgiveness. Jesus died on the cross for people like you and me—sinners. He asks us, tells us, prays for us and teaches us NOT to sin. But then sometimes, we do. And His forgiveness is there.
2. For the true Christian, no mistake or error in judgment is beyond God’s forgiveness. Paul warns us in Romans 6: ***Shall we continue in sin that grace might increase? God forbid. How shall we who died to sin, still live in it?*** A true Christian takes sin seriously, even as he or she flees back to the cross countless times.
3. When a marriage becomes unrepairable, it will take its toll in other ways. It will leave a gaping emotional wound. This is one reason I think Paul counsels the Corinthians ***it is good for [the unmarried] to remain as he is***—single. Marriage gets complicated, as God intends it to be. He intends it to be the joining together of two persons. You do not lose that joining without pain.
4. Fourth, if the two people give up—or it is just not going to be repaired, there will almost always be others who are damaged in the wake. We do not live in bubbles. We are connected more than we even realize and there is serious heartbreak, confusion and perhaps anger that is infused by a broken marriage.
5. Ministry is hindered because of the distraction and the disabling power of divorce. It can take years to recover a personal ministry for Christ. We might write this off easily. But when we stand before the Lord, He will evaluate our lives in part by what we did for Him.
6. People going through marriage breakup need the body of Christ more than even, although they most often separate themselves from their brothers and sisters at this point. The one thing that is most valuable, they fear will become judgmental and they most often distance themselves from other Christians. I am stung when I hear people say, I would rather commit

suicide than face up to the church... As if any of us are better than they!!! No. We need to stay connected. There may be sin to confront. There may be exhortation and encouragement to give. There may be other kinds of help to render, but we need to do what we can to stay together. The realities of the body of Christ do not evaporate because someone is having difficulties of ANY kind.

May the Lord give us all the grace we need. May He burden us each to keep working on our marriages, and to support each other in this. Yes, we need creativity and courage sometimes to ask the hard questions, to pray in a committed way for each other. God will give us the help we need, daily, weekly, monthly, as we seek to truly BE the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, even when it is costly.

May He give us happy marriages. May He give us healing. May He remind and enable us to be forgiving. As He is to us.

# Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Marriage Repair (Episode 6)

Scripture: Acts 18:1-4, 18-21

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008

## ***Marriage Repair*** **Episode Six: If Repair Happens...**

### **Acts 18:1-4,18-21, 26** (NASB)

AFTER these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. <sup>2</sup> And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, <sup>3</sup> and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers. <sup>4</sup> And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks...

<sup>18</sup> And Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. <sup>19</sup> And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. <sup>20</sup> And when they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, <sup>21</sup> but taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again if God wills," he set sail from Ephesus...<sup>26</sup>and he [Apollos] began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

**Introduction** I sometimes wish we could easily turn in the Bible to stories about people who wrestle with the same challenges that we have. Don't you wish you could go to some passage and read about a guy struggling with STRETCHING HIS MONEY TO PAY ALL HIS BILLS? Don't you wish there was a place that you could go with a woman who had PMS, A SCREAMING BABY, A HUSBAND WHO ISN'T HOME NEARLY ENOUGH AND A CAR WITH A CRANKY HEATER? Don't you wish, just once in a while, that you could read about somebody who wrestled with SMOKING, OVER-EATING AND AN ADDICTION TO SPORTS (like the Cairo Cougars or the Jerusalem Jaguars?) But we study whom we DO know about in the Bible, and

In the book of Acts, there are two married couples mentioned: in chapter 5 there is the infamous Ananias and Sapphira, whose fate becomes defined by their lying to God. The other couple is a little less known. They are in our reading

this morning from Acts 18. Their names are Aquila and Priscilla and they are Jews. They are mentioned in Acts 18:2,18,26. Aquila at least is from Pontus originally, northeastern Turkey today. He moved to Rome with Priscilla and then are forced to leave Rome and they move to Corinth. That is where they meet Paul. They then are mentioned in Ephesus where they become acquainted with Apollos, and whom they disciple, explaining to him ***the way of God more accurately..*** They are mentioned briefly in three other places in the New Testament...

In addition to Luke's mention in Acts we have

***Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, Romans 16:3***

***The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. 1 Corinthians 16:19***

***Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. 2 Timothy 4:19***

I would love to meet this couple. They are tent-makers, which means they are business people and they work with their hands. They are hospitable because they hosted a house-church for some time. And we know they were risk-takers because in Romans 16:4 we read, ***who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.*** Tent-making, hospitable risk-takers. Whom Paul loved and teamed up with in the spread of the Gospel in the early days...

According to church tradition, Aquila did not long dwell in Rome: the Apostle Paul made him a bishop in Asia. Aquila zealously laboured at preaching the Gospel in Asia, Achaea and Herakleia: he converted pagans to Christ, he confirmed in the faith newly-converted Christians, he established presbyters and destroyed idols. Priscilla constantly assisted him in the apostolic work. Aquila finished his life a martyr: pagans murdered him. Priscilla was killed together with him.<sup>6</sup> (At the end of these notes I have included the notes for an interesting and recent address given by the Pope about Aquila and Priscilla!)

But for our purposes in this series, you wonder: **DID THEY EVER HAVE MARITAL STRESS EVER?** I think there is a hint in what we DO know about them that they had a good marriage. They were busy in their work, they were busy in helping people, and they were busy in their faith because taking risks for the Gospel means you're living by faith. Interestingly, in the second place in our reading, the order of Luke's mention of them draws notice for the name Priscilla (or Prisca) is mentioned first in a couple of places. The implication is that she was the more profoundly gifted Christian, but that really is only speculation. I think they had a good marriage because they worked on repair all the time, not different from repairing tents constantly.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priscilla\\_and\\_Aquila](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priscilla_and_Aquila)

There are only two married couples mentioned in the Book of Acts—one couple, though Christians, did things wrongly. The other couple evidently did things rightly.

I would like to suggest a few symptoms of a marriage that has undergone repair, or at least a marriage wherein repair is on the incline, and growing, and *seeing a regular process* of Spirit-filled repair. Aquila and Priscilla lived well together, ministered well together and relocated several times—with all the stress that would entail—until their deaths. I imagine there are several characteristics of couples who have worked hard to work through their stresses, challenges and differences. They have managed an environment and a commitment to the work of repair. These characteristics might include:

1. DEPENDENCY WITHOUT CO-DEPENDENCY. A couple that has been through some things and learned, and repaired their relationship or just “grown” it, have learned to depend on each other in healthy ways. Paul tells us to be **subject to one another in the fear of Christ** (Ephesians 5:21) and that implies a willingness to depend on each other. Our natural inclination is to be dependent only on ourselves, especially if we have suffered some disappointment in relationships. He also tells us, just as Christians together, that ***the whole body, being fitted and held together, by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love*** (Eph 4:16.) A marriage that lasts finds that each person needs the other one, in healthy ways. They are not “co-dependent,” a term which has probably become over-used and misunderstood. Generally it means “*the tendency to put others needs before your own in unhealthy ways, to the point where your own self-esteem has come to depend on how well you can please.*” We are to give to each other, meet each other’s needs but not in a co-dependent way. Repair has happened, or IS happening, when that is being realized.
2. PEACE WITHOUT PRETENDED JOY. The simplest definition of the word “peace” is the absence of conflict. After some battles, some forgiveness, some starting over, again and again with some issues, there settles in a certain peace in the relationship. Each partner doesn’t have to pretend a false joy or act in a pretending way. There has been achieved a kind of peace between two people--born into a raging self-focus that all of us are--but after lessons learned, a peace comes between them. It is a real peace. Neither partner feels the need to go to war any more.
3. BOTH HEAR GOD’S VOICE. This of course, presumes both partners are true Christians, and eligible to really hear God’s voice beyond the call to the Gospel. When repair is happening, and peace is present, the noise of conflict and striving has died down to a level where each partner can hear the Holy Spirit speaking. Each hears, of course, at this point, a similar plan for them, and also a unique plan that is different and tailor-

made for each Christian. I envision this between Ruth and Boaz in the Old Testament, though I can't refer you to a verse which says it this way. I like to believe that each of Aquila and Priscilla heard the voice of the Lord for them each individually, and as a couple. They knew what God's plan for them was. It took them from Rome to Corinth and to Ephesus, and who knows where else. I don't think they put roots down in any one place for very long. But they knew what God wanted them to do. They didn't live in the noise and confusion of conflict and self striving against self.

4. TRUST WITHOUT THREAT TO ESTEEM. When a couple have been repairing their relationship, I think they start to trust each other. They do so in ways that are not insulting in any way. Others may not necessarily understand or even approve, but they themselves trust each other's love and ENtrust themselves to each other. They have learned over years what TAKES years to learn. Perhaps some young couples achieve this wonderfully early in their relationship, but I think most do not. They have to earn the stripes of years of learning, first. Then they have learned to trust each other and honor each other so that no blows to self-esteem have to be endured. Perhaps, a simpler way to say this is, they have earned and give respect, now. They know what gestures of respect each needs, and they grant them to each other willingly. They have become students OF each other and they pay attention to each other. Therefore, they have learned to trust each other...
5. ACCEPTANCE WITHOUT IDEALISM. It is fine to dream and have fantasies about marriage when you're young. I would never want young people to NOT be idealistic and IN love. But after a time and some battles, idealism fades. It fades hopefully for a more realistic vision of each other. Especially as aging sets in. A couple that has repaired itself, accepts each other for who they really are. They have gotten past feeling the need to always point out how each does not measure up to the other's "ideal mate profile." Without the harsh taskmaster of idealism, each partner accepts with thankfulness what they DO have in their partner. I'm not suggesting we give up on self-improvement, on learning more and better ways to love, but that a couple in repair accepts each other in a godly and merciful way. The man who is not a perfect specimen of social graces or is maybe pretty good in other ways. The woman who is not the perfect *Cosmopolitan*-grade model maybe offers strengths in other ways. And each sees those strengths, thanks the Lord for them, and accepts a less than perfect relationship. Idealism is given a decent burial when repair is happening.

May the Lord make us a church body where we pay attention to each other's needs for repair, assist each other in it, allow realness and transparency while we're going through repair in our families and do not beat each other up for being less than perfect. May we esteem and celebrate our

strengths, be patient with our weaknesses and grant much forgiveness and the grace of frequent fresh starts along the way.

### **The Pope on House Church & Marriage<sup>7</sup>**



Date: 2007-02-07

On Aquila and Priscilla

"Every House Can Be Transformed Into a Small Church"

VATICAN CITY, FEB. 7, 2007 (Zenit.org).- Here is a translation of Benedict XVI's address at today's general audience. The Pope spoke about Aquila and Priscilla, a married couple active in the early Church.

\* \* \*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Taking a step forward in this kind of portrait gallery of the witnesses to Christian faith that we started a few weeks ago, today we consider a married couple. The couple in question are Priscilla and Aquila, who have their place among the circle of numerous collaborators drawn to the apostle Paul, and whom I already briefly mentioned last Wednesday. Based on the information we have, this married couple developed a very active role at the time of the post-paschal origins of the Church.

The names of Aquila and Priscilla are Latin, but the man and woman who bear them were of Jewish origin. However, Aquila, at least, came geographically from the Diaspora of northern Anatolia, which overlooks the Black Sea, in what is now Turkey; while Priscilla, whose name is sometimes abbreviated to Prisca, was probably a Jew originating from Rome (cf. Acts 18:2).

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<sup>7</sup> <http://trinitypastor.blogspot.com/2007/04/pope-on-house-church-marriage.html>

In any case, it is from Rome that they arrive at Corinth, where Paul met them at the beginning of the 50s; there he became associated with them, since, as Luke tells us, they also practiced Paul's trade of tentmakers for domestic use, and he was even welcomed into their home (cf. Acts 18:3).

The reason for their coming to Corinth was the decision of Emperor Claudius to expel from Rome the Jews living in the city. The Roman historian Suetonius tells us that he expelled the Jews because "they were rioting on account of someone named Chrestus" (cf. "The Lives of the Twelve Caesars, Claudius," 25).

One can see that he did not know the name well -- instead of Christ he writes "Chrestus" -- and that he only had a very confused idea about what had happened. In any case, there were disagreements within the Jewish community about the issue of whether Jesus was the Christ. And these problems were the reason the emperor simply expelled all Jews from Rome.

One can deduce from this that the couple had already embraced the Christian faith in Rome during the 40s, and had now found in Paul someone who not only shared with them this faith, that Jesus is the Christ, but who was also an apostle, personally called by the Risen Lord. Therefore, their first encounter is in Corinth, where they welcome him into their home and they work together making tents.

In a second moment, they move to Ephesus, in Asia Minor. There they played a decisive role in completing the formation of the Alexandrian Jew, Apollo, of whom we spoke last Wednesday. Since he only had a superficial knowledge of the Christian faith, "Priscilla and Aquila heard him, then took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26).

When the apostle Paul writes his First Letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus, together with his characteristic greetings, he explicitly mentions "Aquila and Prisca, together with the church at their house" (1 Corinthians 16:19).

In this way we come to know the hugely important role this couple played in the sphere of the primitive Church: that of welcoming in their own home the group of local Christians when they got together to listen to the Word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist. [the text does not say this – NCD.]

It is precisely that type of gathering that in Greek is called "ekklesia" -- the Latin word is "ecclesia" -- the Italian "chiesa" -- that means assembly, gathering. So, in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, the Church gets together, the Church summoned by Christ, which celebrates here the Sacred Mysteries. [again, the texts about A & P do not tell us this.]

In this way we can see the very birth of the reality of the Church in the homes of the believers. Christians, in fact, until around the third century, did not have their own places of worship: At first, they gathered in Jewish synagogues, until the original symbiosis between the Old and New Testament was dissolved and the Church of the people was forced to give itself its own identity, always deeply rooted in the Old Testament.

Then, after this "split," they gather in the homes of Christians, which in this way become "Church." And finally, in the third century, authentic buildings for Christian worship were born.

But here, in the first half of the first century as in the second century, Christian houses become true and proper "church." As I have said, they read Scripture together and celebrated the Eucharist. [again...--NCD.] That was what used to happen, for example, in Corinth, where Paul mentions a certain "Gaius, who is host

to me and to the whole church" (Romans 16:23), or in Laodicea, where the community would get together in the house of a certain Nympha (Colossians 4:15), or in Colossae, where the gathering would take place in the house of a certain Archippus (cf. Philemon 2).

Having subsequently returned to Rome, Aquila and Priscilla continue to develop that most precious function in the capital of the empire as well. Paul, in fact, writing to the Romans, sends this precise greeting: "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I am grateful but also all the churches of the Gentiles; greet also the church at their house" (Romans 16:3-5).

What extraordinary praise is found in these words! And it is the apostle Paul, no less, who offers it! He explicitly recognizes in them two true and important collaborators of his apostolate.

The reference to their having risked their lives for him is probably linked to an intervention in his favor during an imprisonment of his, perhaps in Ephesus itself (cf. Acts 19:23; 1 Corinthians 15:32; 2 Corinthians 1:8-9).

And that Paul should associate all the Churches of the Gentiles with his own gratitude, although the statement may seem to be hyperbole, allows us, in any case, to intuit how great their range of action and their influence for the good of the Gospel was.

Later hagiographic tradition has conferred singular importance on Priscilla, even if the problem remains of her identification with another Priscilla who was a martyr. In any case, here in Rome we have both a church dedicated to St. Prisca on the Aventine, and the Catacombs of Priscilla on Via Salaria.

In this way, the memory of a woman who has surely been an active person of great value in the history of Roman Christianity is perpetuated. One thing is certain: Together with the gratitude of those first Churches, of which Paul speaks, our own must be added, since due to the faith and apostolic commitment of faithful lay people, of families, of married couples such as Priscilla and Aquila, Christianity has reached our generation.

It was not only able to grow thanks to the apostles who announced it. In order to take root in peoples' land, in order to develop in a living way, it was necessary that there be the commitment of these families, of these couples, of these Christian communities, of faithful lay people who offered "humus" to the growth of faith.

And it is always in this way that the Church grows. In particular, this couple proves just how important the action of Christian spouses is. When these are supported by faith and a strong spirituality, their courageous commitment to and in the Church becomes natural.

Their daily community of life is prolonged and somehow sublimated in the taking on of a public responsibility for the good of the Body of Christ, even if just a small part of it. This is how it was in the first generation and this is how it will often be.

One further lesson we cannot neglect to take from their example: Every house can be transformed into a small church. Not only in the sense that, therein, Christian love, typically made of altruism and mutual care, should reign, but even more in the sense that the whole of family life, founded on faith, is called to revolve around the sole lordship of Jesus Christ.

Not by chance, in the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul compares the relationship of matrimony to the spousal communion between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:25-33). Even more, we can maintain that the Apostle shapes the life of the whole Church on that of the family. And the Church, in reality, is the family of God.

For this reason we honor Aquila and Priscilla as models of conjugal life, responsibly committed to the service of the entire Christian community. And we find in them the model of the Church, family of God for all times.

[Translation by ZENIT]

[At the end of the audience, the Pope greeted the pilgrims in various languages. In English, he said:]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In today's catechesis, we consider a married couple, Priscilla and Aquila, who played an active part in the early Church, and particularly in the ministry of Saint Paul. The Apostle first met them in exile in Corinth, and then again in Ephesus and finally in Rome. At Ephesus, they instructed Apollos in the faith and in every city they opened their home to the local Christian community for worship. Paul praises them in his Letter to the Romans as his "fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I, but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks" (Rom 16:3-4). This remarkable tribute bespeaks their great influence in the apostolic Church and reminds us that we ourselves have received the faith through the witness of countless committed Christians like them. Priscilla and Aquila show us the important role played by married couples in the life of the Church. Every home is called to become a "domestic church" in which family life is completely centered on the lordship of Christ and the love of husband and wife mirrors the mystery of Christ's love for the Church, his Bride (cf. Eph 5:25-33).

I extend a cordial welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims present at today's Audience, especially those from England, Ireland, China, and the United States of America. May your visit to Rome inspire you to live the truth of the Gospel ever more fully. Upon all of you I invoke God's blessings of joy and peace.

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