

Purpose: to encourage you to trust and obey the risen Messiah.
“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...”

'Til Death Do Us Part

Written by Mick Abraham

I approach the topic of marriage with caution. Some of my readers are divorced or in the process; perhaps your family is among the broken. I don't want to beat up on those whose marriages have failed. Instead, I wish to focus on the positive example that our elders set for us.

By and large, earlier generations have done an amazing thing: they kept faith with one another through the marriage covenant. My wife (Becky) and I have matching examples: her parents and mine both achieved over 50 years of marriage, ending only when our respective fathers died.

For Richer or For Poorer

I never knew Mom and Dad when they were poor, but I've seen the evidence. I've heard the stories and seen photos of modest times. By the time I was born, my parents were free from financial hardship. A lingering frugality served as a testimony of the meager times they had seen. Perhaps this is a good thing about lean times. Mom & Dad were sober minded by the time their fourth child was born.

Example: They owned the same bed (in the same room, house, etc.) for decades. When they could have bought “all new bedroom furnishings”, they had no wish to. I remember many visits to their room: my dad was napping on the left side of their bed, and my mom was sleeping on the right.

For Better or For Worse

Guess what? Our family was not perfect. Dad was not Ozzie; Mom was not Harriet. I was far less than a “model child”. As with every family, ours had some tense times. Marriage vows are not cancelled by difficulty, however. Instead, the vows are **activated** by difficulty. Here's the vital message from our elders: Sometimes a couple must hang together simply because they promised before God to do so.

Promises kept; covenants upheld; these matter to God. One reason why the marriage covenant is important is that God wants us to raise obedient children for his kingdom.

...the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. “I hate divorce,” says the Lord, God of Israel... Malachi 2:14–16

Some Suggestions

It's no secret—the families in our country are breaking down at an alarming rate. The divorce rate within Christianity is just as high as it is outside the church. Is our land under a curse? Let us pray: May God be merciful to our nation, and may he give us the strength to uphold our promises during rough times.

Perhaps our oaths should go beyond the spoken word. We must do more than mimic what the minister tells us to say at the wedding altar. Some pastors present a written copy of their marriage vows to each new couple, with the reminder that they may someday need to review the promises they had made. Having those promises in a tangible form may be helpful.

Some teach that if only one party in a troubled marriage would commit to fully obey God, the family could be saved. I know at least one example of this; the man was in default on his commitment, but his wife wouldn't give up, and their family survived. The stubborn determination to never give up—perhaps that's what's missing today.

All generations should be careful to not “swear falsely” before the Lord. Without this “fear of the Lord”, all of our vows are at risk. In Zechariah 5, a curse is sent out over the whole land. It says, **...everyone who swears**



Mick's parents, 1948

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falsely will be banished. The Lord Almighty declares, “I will send the scroll out, and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of him who swears falsely by my name. It will remain in his house and destroy it, both its timbers and its stones.” Also see Romans 1 and Leviticus 19:12

In Sickness and In Health

My parents’ fortieth anniversary party was a catered affair, complete with a large guest list and brightly lit rooms. Contrast this with their fifty-second anniversary. This one was observed quietly in their home, with Dad in bed—barely aware of the proceedings. Mom was worn out from caring for Dad. The guests were two of my siblings and some hospice workers. There was a simple cake. Pop died two weeks later.

Ask yourself—which of these events was the more glorious? I vote for the last one; it demonstrated the humble outworking of their wedding vows.

'Til Death Do Us Part

Becky and I have both seen the painful parting of our parents. However, the story does not end here. I expect to someday see my Mom and Dad reunited in death. I know the place, and I can imagine the time when I will see my dad sleeping on the left side of their bed, and my mom sleeping on the right. Becky’s parents will rest in the same cemetery, waiting for that great day:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

This is the best news that mortal man can receive. Concluding: **Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.** I Corinthians 15: 51–58

It is because of the promised resurrection—because of our faith in God—that we can gain enough strength to run our particular race, even when this becomes very difficult. As we cling to our hope in the resurrection, so are we called to stand firm and immovable in the way we conduct our lives.



Becky’s parents, 1990’s

How?

Do we stand firm by sheer human willpower? No, for we are all too weak. This is the great flaw of the “Just Say No” method that the world promotes. Mere mortals cannot “just say no” to unwise behavior, because they often do not want to say no. Here’s how sanctification works: **For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “no” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.** Titus 2:11–14

We must learn these things. We may begin by observing the faith of our fathers. Once learned, we must obey the very next verse in Titus 2: **These, then, are the things you should teach.** And whom do we teach first of all? Our children.

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