

“ I Pledge You My Troth”

Hello Dear Listeners;

Here we are, back at it again. Discovering some more biblical truth concerning Christian marriage. I’ve borrowed the title of today’s message from a book written some years ago ago by Dr. James H. Olthuis with the title “ I Pledge You My Troth”¹ Olthuis was a senior member of the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto from(1968–2004) and continues to hold an emeritus position there.

Olthuis’ book has many excellent things to say about the biblical, covenantal understanding of courtship, marriage and friendship. Among other things he describes marriage as “ *A partnership of troth*”.² He looks to the Old Testament, especially the prophecies of Hosea, ch. 2 where the Lord promises, that despite the sins of His people, -(and I quote Hosea 2: 19, 20

I will *betroth* you to me forever;
I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,
in love and compassion.
I will betroth you in faithfulness
and you will acknowledge the Lord.

Now “troth” is really and Old English term for *truth, faithfulness, loyalty and honesty*.³ Troth captures the nuances of *trust and reliability, of authenticity, as well as integrity and fidelity*. In a marriage a man and a woman face each other and, before God, witness, family and friends, they say in effect, “ *I pledge you my troth.*” They commit themselves to faithfulness. In a Christian marriage that faithfulness is founded on God’s own faithfulness, his “troth” in maintaining a couple in that life-long marriage bond.

“ Commitment”, says R.E. Hawkins in his Strengthening Marital Intimacy

¹ Olthuis, James H. I Pledge You My Troth. New York: Harper and Row, 1975

² idid p. 20, 21.

³ according to David Wegener, Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, March, 1998, p.7

Is a surrender of personal pleasure and comfort. It demands that each desires to pursue the best for each other and guard all actions in the light of that commitment. “⁴

There are not a few ‘gremlins’ afoot that try to tear the fabric of commitment in marriage apart. Selfishness and egoism, are two of those gremlins. Selfish persons never seem to have enough and constantly demand more. It’s an addiction which is fuelled by never-ending advertising that insists people should have, should buy, more of a host of things. Often we’re told you have a right for that “more”. “You’re worth it” says one. It’s only “X’ number of dollars” entices the other. It plays on our human nature, which would like you to be king of the castle’ at the expense of the other.

To be a true servant, and to enjoy doing things for others in genuine love and devotion doesn’t come naturally. Remarkable, isn’t it that Jesus Christ, who ruled the universe with the Father humbled Himself and took the form of a servant, even a slave, in becoming man. (Philippians 2:5-8)

Now the bible says, (I’m thinking of what the apostle Paul writes in I Corinthians, ch. 2) that ” We”, (that is, sincere Christians) “ Have the mind of Christ.” Surely this means that, rather than letting one’s sinful nature, (that which older bible translations called “ man’s flesh) have the upper hand, true Christians are led by the Holy Spirit. For that Spirit want to live inside of those who belong to Jesus Christ. Following the Master, that means a couple in marriage will serve each other in humility considering the other person better than oneself.

While selfishness is “ *as ugly as an oyster*”, (sorry about that scallop lovers!) humility is as beautiful as the wedding ring on your hand!

A great big road block that stands in the way of carrying out one’s commitment in marriage is an unwillingness and a failure to forgive. Yet that’s exactly what God, requires and not just the apostle Paul, when he says in Ephesians 4:32, “ *Be kind*

⁴ Hawkins, Ronald E. Strengthening Marital Intimacy Baker, MI 1991. p. 36

and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Holding grudges destroys intimacy. A mindset that always comes back to one's marriage partner with, “ You always do that” and proceeds with a recitation of the wife's or husband's past wrongs is a fearful detriment to happiness and commitment in marriage.

It can ruin a marriage. You really can't say you've forgiven the other if you allow what the other person has done to determine your response to him/her. The bible says that *love covers a multitude of sins*. (Proverbs 10:12; 1 Peter 4:8) Furthermore, only consider the volume of our sins that the Lord Jesus Christ is willing to cover with his blood on Calvary's cross. This surely that should make us more than willing to forgive the wrongs of one's wife or husband, quickly and sincerely.

One could go on to make a comprehensive list of all the clouds that can arise even on a marriage that was joined in the sunshine of genuine love. There's a terrible pit called “unfaithfulness” or “adultery” that can break up a marriage, especially when its repeated and unresolved. True it is that when Christians fall into the trap of unfaithfulness even that can be resolved, forgiven, so that reconciliation results. That's due to the amazing grace of God. Yet it will require that both parties, especially if both are guilty to re-commit themselves day by day. Commit themselves, day by day if not hour by hour, to God's norms of faithfulness and that basis of trust which is spelled L-O-V-E.

Often things go wrong and lead to dissatisfaction with one's spouse when no quality time is taken to communicate and spend time with each other. “Quality time especially with prayer and Scripture reading are essential elements in which to focus on the Lord and His counsel.

We live in an egalitarian age which would erase any and all distinctions between men and women. Does the bible speak about roles of husband and wife as the

Lord has designed it? “Ah but these need to be changed, reversed even.” Even such an astute scholar as Dr. Olthuis in that book of his we mentioned doesn't want to think at all of authority in leadership when the bible says the husband is the head of his wife.

Another area of discontent that can threaten to break things apart in marriage is different and conflicting view on money management. In fact, there are marriage counsellors, like Wayne A. Mack who are of the opinion that

*The subject of finances can be one of the most divisive forces in marriage”
⁵ The husband has his ideas about money and the wife has hers. While this is no problem at all if there is love and understanding and good communication about such an important issue what is often the case? Selfishness, pride, discontentment take over and a whole lot of grief is the result.*

This while the bible continually confronts you with the fact nothing we have is absolutely ours. All riches and honour come from God. (1 Chronicles 29: 12) What does Paul say, in 1 Corinthians 4:7? “ What do you have that you did not receive”?

What all individuals and couples should covet is *God's blessing*. For, as Solomon said in the Book of Proverbs, “ *It is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich and He doesn't add sorrow to it*” (Proverbs 10:22). If you desire His blessing, and His peace to rest on your relationships then you need to cherish that blessing and stop being greedy, insisting on your so-called “rights”.

To be sure, then if the husband clings to an authoritarian attitude in doing things, “ *My way or the highway!*” one's marriage is headed for failure. If the wife does not cherish his leadership and fails to submit to her husband in “ everything” . That is, everything that is right and good, and serves one's awesome God, then disaster threatens as well.

⁵ Mack, Wayne A. Strengthening Your Marriage p. 92.

It is one thing to pledge each other one's "troth". To be faithful to the promises we made is another thing. Yet this faithfulness is what the Lord wants to see and to bless in my marriage and in yours.

For this Christ Jesus laid down his life. That rescued from arrogance, violence, sins and evil, we might embrace his faithfulness and love For His is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever. Amen, and thanks so much for listening.