

Ephesians: What's God Saying to You? What are You Going to Do About It?

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I. Introduction

God wants us to take a hard look at who we are now, which is supposed to inform how think about the things of life. We're not supposed to see life the way we used to before He found us. We may've been clueless before, but we're not supposed to remain clueless about the world around us. The culture has a way of defining things like love, romance, and commitment. What does God think of the definitions that the culture gives us?

II. Ephesians: What is God Saying to You and What are You Going to Do About It?

In Ephesians, since we are now God's children who've been rescued from the culture around us and Satan's way of thinking (2:1-2), God wants us to see life differently. The last thing He wants is for us to return to our old way of thinking (4:17-19). To that end, He doesn't want the culture around us dictating what we think about anything, whether the subject is the Bible, love, money, charity or anything else. To allow the culture to define our beliefs is to be deceived and fall prey to a culture that causes people to go with the flow (4:14). As Christians, we're supposed to take every thought that crosses our minds and run it by Jesus first before we accept it as true and right (2 Corinthians 10:5). The culture has much to say about love, things that shape not only our view of love but of romance and commitment.

What does God say about love? Many see the 2004 film *The Notebook* as a beautiful, romantic love story. Why? Because it's about a couple, Allie and Noah, who fell madly in love, were then separated by Allie's parents, and just when it looks like all hope is lost (Allie's about to marry another man), Allie and Noah are reunited. They pick up right where they left off and they end up married for the rest of their lives, in fact, they die holding each other's hand. This truly sounds like a very romantic story full of love and tremendous commitment and this is exactly how the culture interprets this story. Is it what the culture tells us, is this romance, is this true love and commitment? Not exactly. How would God review this film; what would He say about it? First, something is not romantic or loving simply because it's an *act* of romance or love. There's nothing romantic or loving about an engaged woman who runs off to have sex with another man, whether or not that man was her "soul mate," which is what Allie does. Our actions are not divorced from our character; if our character is dishonorable so will our actions be, i.e., we may've done an act of romance (Allie ran off to spend the weekend with Noah), but our actions were not romantic (Allie hurt and humiliated her fiancé in the process). We may've done an act of love (Allie had sex with Noah for several days), but our actions were not loving (Allie in effect committed adultery against her fiancé).

Second, God's definition of love is not solely as an emotion or an action taken by itself. Yes, true love involves deep emotion but it's MUCH more than that. True love would never do anything selfish or dishonorable because it's never supposed to be divorced from honorable character. This is why true love never thinks of itself; it always thinks of the one it loves. If you're having a hard time seeing the point, take God's definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 and map it over Allie's actions. Replace the word "love" with Allie's name and then ask yourself if Allie's actions were loving and romantic, if they spell true commitment.

If you're still having a hard time seeing the point, pretend you're the mother or sister of the man Allie was about to marry. If you saw Allie disgrace and humiliate him like that, would you think her actions romantic, loving, or full of commitment? Why not? It's clear as the nose on our face: true love doesn't treat a person like that, true romance doesn't disgrace a person, true commitment doesn't trash the commitment it made to you! Allie's definition of love led her to commit to marry a man and then disgrace him when Noah came back into her life. This is not true commitment or love. You might say, "But Noah's her one true love; she would NEVER do that to Noah." First, we're capable of falling in love multiple times, that's why Allie fell in love with the other guy and was about to marry him. This is how God designed the human race, to fall in love, get married and live happily ever after. God is love (1 John 4:8) and since we're made in His image, so are we, i.e., we're able to love strongly, deeply and multiple times just like God is. Second, how do you know that Allie wouldn't cheat on Noah? You might say, "Because she loves him more than anything in the world! He's her true soul mate!" What if she ran into another "soul mate," another man that made her feel just like Noah makes her feel? Is it possible to have more than one "soul mate"? How many times has someone said, "I found my true 'soul mate'!" You reply, "What about that other guy you said was your soul mate?" We're made for love but if we allow ourselves to be ruled solely by the emotional sensation of love, we will do the most unloving and despicable things imaginable.

We've been talking about Allie's actions, what about Noah's, were his actions that of a man who truly loves his woman? Not exactly. Why not? Because he turned his beloved Allie into a woman who would cheat on her fiancé on the eve of her wedding! If Noah truly loved Allie, he would never damage her character this way, never! True love doesn't think of itself, of what it wants. Instead, it thinks of the one it loves, it looks out for their interest not its own (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). If Noah was still in love with Allie and wanted to spend the rest of his life with her, he should've urged her to settle things with her fiancé first.

But couldn't we still see Allie and Noah's story as a beautiful, romantic love story? "I mean how much more commitment do you need preacher? Noah stood by Allie; he dedicated his life to her even after she got Alzheimer's. Isn't that true love and commitment?! Don't you Christians believe in redemption?" Yes, a thousand times, yes. Of course God can and does redeem people from their wicked behavior no matter how wicked. And yes, what Noah did in standing by his wife even after such a horrible illness, that's true love and commitment. But we can't call their entire story a beautiful love story when their marriage began with such wicked actions by both of them. We must not allow the culture's deceptive definitions drive our thinking. If we do, we'll excuse the worst behavior in the name of love and romance. And love will no longer be true love, romance will no longer be true romance, commitment will no longer be true commitment. Instead, they'll be pale, miserable versions of the real thing. Whenever we're tempted to accept the culture's ideas on life, we must first run those ideas by the Lord and see if they conform to His definitions, no matter the issue, no matter the subject.

III. Conclusion

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.