

**March 15, 2011**

**Did You Speak Up?**

Perhaps along with us you can recall certain events you readily participated in without giving it a second thought — until the Spirit of Christ in you evoked a deeper understanding of what was actually taking place. For example, when we first became followers of Jesus we continued to unhesitatingly accept invitations to weddings. But as time went on, we began to recognize our scriptural responsibility to the groom and bride if we were to be "witnesses" to their marriage ceremony.

We also sensed that the Holy Spirit was stirring an uneasiness as we witnessed certain nuptials. Later, we made the connection between our inner discomfiture and the divorces that ensued down the road. We realized that God was warning us that particular couples were unprepared, and that their marriage was not going to last. He didn't want us serving as witnesses to *covenant vows that were going to be broken*.

Sadly, the correlation between our uneasiness at particular weddings and the subsequent divorces was so unmistakable that we began to warn family and friends of impending marital problems before the ceremony even took place. That may sound a little arrogant, but we knew that our God holds witnesses to a wedding responsible for affirming that *He* wants the couple to be joined in matrimony.

Weddings are a communal, collective celebration, a participation in a covenant God established with the first couple in the Garden of Eden. A marriage offers a physical representation of the spiritual relationship between Jesus, our heavenly Bridegroom, and His Bride, the called-out ones of His Body, the Church. This is a holy relationship, intended by God to be a permanent, one man/one woman union parted only by death. Just because marriage has become trivialized in this culture doesn't nullify God's intent for it, especially when it comes to bringing forth children He wants to be raised to love and serve Him!

Do you recall that marriage ceremonies used to challenge witnesses, "Is there anyone here who believes this couple should not be joined in holy matrimony? Let him (or her) speak up now, or forever hold his peace." Perhaps the reason those words sound somewhat antiquated is that today no one wants to get on the wrong side of either the couple or the parents. But those with doubts should have spoken up *beforehand!*

Could this warning be extrapolated to apply to those who remain silent when they know they're witnessing a likely-to-fail marriage: "*If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible*" (Leviticus 5:1)? Consider as well that in many wedding ceremonies the pastor charges the *witnesses* to commit themselves to help the couple succeed in their marriage. The *communal intent* of a wedding extends this responsibility beyond just the Best Man and Maid of Honor. But how few, including the

fathers and mothers of the bride and groom, take this duty seriously.

During our years at the retreat center we heard the woes of so many parents whose offspring ultimately divorced. In so many cases, one of the *fathers* of the couple sensed that this marriage wasn't going to work, or that the prospective bride and groom needed further time to be prepared for marriage. All too often, however, the *mother* persuaded her dubious husband to back off and keep quiet. The most frequent excuses? "They're *in love*," or, "The arrangements have all been made," or, "We worked *our* problems out; they will too." Are you among those who attended a wedding recognizing that the couple was headed for trouble — yet didn't speak up beforehand? Serving as a witness to marriage vows carries a responsibility to God and to the couple!

After the wedding, these same woeful parents admitted they held extreme prejudice against their child's spouse. ("He's so selfish and irresponsible." "She's lazy and self-centered.") Instead of recognizing that *both* partners contributed to marital discord, they always blamed the in-law for the problems. When the marriage really got strained, the parents took obvious sides against their daughter-in-law or son-in-law, expediting the divorce rather than stepping in to mediate and help reconcile. And, when the divorce was final, these same parents were quick to excuse their adult child, slandering the ex-in-law by blaming him or her for everything.

***"Teach them to your children,  
talking about them when you sit at home  
and when you walk along the road,  
when you lie down and when you get up"***  
(Deuteronomy 11:19).

Parents who lack a strong biblical basis for their own marriage may find themselves unwittingly establishing in their children the wrong motives for marriage—motives that will ultimately contribute to divorce. You may have been one of these unmindful fathers or mothers...

For example:

Years ago I (Mike) was talking with a relative (who never read the Bible) and his soon-to-be-married son. Money always came up in the older man's discussions as a basis for happiness. With this materialistic focus he strongly encouraged his son to accept his prospective father-in-law's offer to join him in his business. However, I warned the young man not to do that, as it would hurt his marriage. If his wife saw that her *father* was the means to their provision, she'd never develop the respect for her husband that he needs (Ephesians 5:33). The greed of the young man's father prevailed. And yes, the young woman eventually divorced her husband. His pained but unrepentant father has not seen his two grandchildren for many years.

Have you instilled in your married child(ren) *unbiblical* motives that may seem right to

the world but have only hurt their marriage or contributed to their divorce? Did you ever really let your heart grieve for what *you* did or failed to do, and then go to those younger people to ask for forgiveness? We've found that in many divorces in which the marriage lasted only a few years, the *parents* hold the greater guilt in God's sight. They refused to love that couple in a way that was willing to correct, rebuke and train them in righteousness in their relationship.

**"A truthful witness saves lives,  
but a false witness is deceitful"** (Proverbs 14:25)

Let's personalize this:

- Have you've been present at a wedding where you had grave doubts that this was God's will and/or timing, but still *failed to speak up* before the event took place?
- Did it ever occur to you that you were sinning through *deceit*, pretending that these vows would last by your silent consent?
- Did you ever *ask forgiveness* from the people involved for not having spoken up earlier?

A word to the wise:

**Whenever you're asked to participate in *anything*  
where by your mere presence  
you're affirming the intent of the event,  
be sure you confirm with God ahead of time  
that you should even be there as a witness.**

Pleading ignorance holds no merit with our Lord: "*If you say, 'But we knew nothing about this,' does not He who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not He who guards your life know it? Will He not repay each person according to what he has done?*" (Proverbs 24:12). The two of us seriously weigh before our Father whether our presence at a particular event lends our affirmation of it. His warning about the perils of compromised participation is serious: "*Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure*" (1 Timothy 5:22).

We hope you'll consider and discuss the truths we've shared here. We encounter so many who in their *own* eyes are innocent, but from our Lord's perspective are guilty of negligence and worldly rationale. You don't want to be one of these.

A word to the wise:

**When you have a concern and  
you know you need to speak up,  
there is a *window of time*  
for God's grace to prevail.**

**Once you've chosen to be silently uninvolved,  
you're now part of the problem —  
you've become entangled in the  
codependent, interpersonal tension.**

It takes a lot of love, holy boldness and confidence in the commands of God to face down a wrong that's being committed. But if you're walking in the Spirit of Jesus, you are responsible as our Father's instrument to represent *His* righteousness and perspective: "*Like a muddied spring or a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way to the wicked*" (Proverbs 25:26)

Sharing light to help keep you out of darkness,  
**Mike & Sue**