

HAPPY VALENTINES DAY!

By John Temples

Valentine's Day is upon us--the day you send a card to your spouse or sweetheart, containing gushy, mushy sweet nothings--stuff you wouldn't have the nerve to say face to face. Valentine's Day is a celebration of romance, pure and simple. It is not a religious holiday, and is perhaps one that is looked upon by grownups as silly. We assume that romantic, "sweetheart" love is inferior to the Biblical standard of agape love.

Well, I'm here to speak up for Valentine's Day. Of course, I'm not saying that the church should have any kind of observance; but I am saying that we Christians ought to celebrate, preach, and encourage romantic love.

Why should we do this? For one thing, because romantic love is at the very heart of our culture. "Love makes the world go 'round." Christianity deals with real life, and romance is real life. Let's face it--if there wasn't such a thing as young love, and those hormones didn't get all worked up, the human race would die out. Love--romantic love--is the theme of many or most novels, TV dramas and comedies, commercials, and songs. If you took away all the songs, movies, and books that have a romantic theme, we'd all be watching reruns of The Crocodile Hunter and documentaries on Egyptian mummies. (Well, on second thought, we wouldn't be watching Crocodile Hunter reruns, because a big part of that show was how Steve Irwin met Teri, married her, and taught her to love handling crocodiles and snakes.)

Not only is romance at the heart of our culture, it is also a Biblical theme. There is an entire Bible book dedicated to romance between a husband and a wife: the Song of Solomon. Here are parts of it:

- The Bride: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth--for your love is better than wine. Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name is ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love you. Draw me away!" (Song 1:2,3)

- The Bride: “The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag....O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely” (2:8,9,14).
- The Beloved—the husband: “You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes, with one link of your necklace. How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse! How much better than wine is your love, and the scent of your perfumes than all spices! Your lips, O my spouse, drip as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under your tongue; and the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon” (4:9-11).

In Song 4:12, the bride’s virginity is celebrated: “A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.”

And it’s not just the Song of Solomon--who can forget the meeting between Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 29:1-12)?

Even God Himself used romantic language to describe the relationship between Him and His people. Isaiah 62:5, speaking of God’s love for the true Israel, the church, says “...as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.” And in Hosea we see God’s heartache over fleshly Israel’s unfaithfulness, but His joy at the prospect of marriage to the new, spiritual Israel: “I will punish her [fleshly Israel] for the days of the Baals to which she burned incense; she decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot, says the Lord. Therefore, behold, I will allure her [spiritual Israel], will bring her into the wilderness and speak comfort to her....I will betroth you to me forever; yes, I will betroth you to me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord” (Hosea 2:13,14,19,20).

And in the beautiful allegory of Ephesians 5:25-27, Paul compares the church to the bride of Christ: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the

washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”

Revelation 21:2 blends two metaphors, speaking of the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

Romantic love is a blessing, a gift from God that ennobles us and affirms us. Think of the moment when someone first said to you, “I love you.” I was about 13. (Well, the girl said “I like you.” But at 13, “like” was close enough.) You found yourself floating on Cloud Nine, taking baths more often, even putting on smelly stuff. Why? You were assured of your unique worth--someone loved you.

Of course, it is in marriage that romantic love finds its highest point and greatest depth. God gave us marriage so we could, fully and without guilt, romance another person. So should Christians celebrate, appreciate, and encourage romantic, “sweetheart” love? Certainly. But realize two things: (1) God commands that the sexual aspect of romantic love be exercised only in marriage; (2) God intended for romance and affection to grow into respect and devotion. (That is agape love.) Romance might fade with time, but it should grow and deepen into agape love.

Adults--remember and renew that spark of romance with your spouse.

Teenagers--enjoy a holy and innocent courtship. Preserve your purity and honor for marriage; then, when you do marry, give yourself romantically to your spouse with all your heart. Happy Valentines Day! --John Temples