

Question: I recently heard a woman say that she loves her husband, but she is not “in love” with him. How can this be? How would Jesus define love and marriage?

The concept of loving but not being “in love” sounds to me like a way of saying that I still care for my spouse, but I no longer feel the romantic passion for him that was once a part of our relationship. For some people, such a situation has become a way to rationalize either having an extramarital affair or asking for a divorce. However, the whole scenario reflects a failure to understand the true meaning of love.

Love between a man and woman usually begins with an attraction that may move to feelings of romance and passion. If this romantic feeling is love, it is not a very fully-developed love. Couples who get married at this point often end up in divorce court because the everyday routines and responsibilities of life have a way of quickly dampening romance and passion. However, true love is an intelligent and willful choice. Those who continue to deepen their relationship and choose to love and commit themselves to one another for life in marriage, have a bond that transcends the challenges of life. In this chosen and committed love, romance and passion may rise and fall with the seasons of life; but it also can grow richer, fuller and freer because of this secure atmosphere of unconditional love commitment.

This choice to love unconditionally is the love of which the Bible speaks, and it is not a feeling that comes and goes. Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). The love that is commanded, like the love of Jesus, is an intentional decision to seek the highest eternal good of the one loved.

We are also told, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10-11). This unconditional, self-sacrificing love of God creates value in those who are loved. The greatness of his love is shown by the greatness of the sacrifice of his Son to save us from sin. His love values us that much. Only a committed, self-sacrificing and unconditional love will lead a person to lay down his life for another. Of his own love for us, Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). In contrast, a love based on the emotions of the moment

does not feel like giving up self for another person. Emotional love is more concerned about satisfying selfish desires of the moment and often leads to some very unwise choices. Some of these choices result in a trail of miserable, broken relationships.

Only a marriage based on love modeled after the love of Christ can build a genuine romantic love affair of a lifetime. “Husbands, love your wives,” we are told, “just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church” (Ephesians 5:25-29). With this kind of marriage, we will both love and be “in love” at the same time.

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