

MARRY IN THE FAITH
1 Kings 11:1-4, 2 Corinthians 6:14
By Raymond White

Families have enough to worry about without having arguments over religion. And it's not trivial. Conflicting religious views wreak havoc on families.

I heard a statistic on the radio (Dr. Laura). The lowest divorce rates are of couples that share the same faith. The next lowest divorce rates are of couples that have no faith. And the surprise is that the highest divorce rates are of couples that have different faiths.

Let's see what the Bible says. Warning: it's not all agreeable.

[1] FAMILY OR FAITH

Here is a verse that we commonly use to make the case for marrying in the faith. The problem is, it doesn't do that. It is the story of Abraham wanting to find a proper wife for his son Isaac.

Genesis 24:3 ...thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell. :4 But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Issac.

There are good Bible verses to argue for marrying in the faith, but this is not one of them. Abraham did not have religion in mind. For him, the issue was family. If religion were the issue, Isaac would have married a local girl, a Jebusite, the people of Melchisedec. They had the true religion, which is why Abraham came to Canaan in the first place, to find God.

But Abraham would have none of that, he wanted his son to marry in the family as he himself had done — Abraham married his half-sister Sarai, Isaac married his second cousin Rebecca, and Jacob married his full cousins Leah and Rachael. Today we'd think that incestuous, but in those days, that was not uncommon.

Abraham's own family was idolatrous. Laban was an idolater and so was his daughter Rebecca. (*Genesis 31:19*). That Abraham wanted Isaac to marry a girl in the family means only that — and as I said, it had nothing to do with religion.

We could take this to mean that marrying in the faith is no big deal, but let's note that in those days, true religion was rare, and any notion of marrying in the faith was not yet important. What was important was cohesion, and for Abraham, that meant family.

[2] OUT-OF-THE-FAITH MARRIAGES

I'm not trying to un-do my own argument that marrying in the faith matters, but to be true to the Bible I have to say what the Bible says and not hide facts. Keep in mind that the Bible is a journey of discovery, for us, and even more for the people who lived it.

Genesis 41:45 And Pharaoh...gave him [Joseph] to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On.

Joseph married an Egyptian girl, a non-Israelite. Later, Rabbis tried to explain how Asenath either converted to Joseph's religion or was actually an Israelite after all (e.g., daughter of Dinah), but none of that is Biblical. However, that such stories exist show us how seriously the Rabbis took the matter of marrying in the faith.

***Ruth 1:4** And they [the two sons of Naomi] took them wives of the people of Moab; the name of the one was Orpha, and the name of the other was Ruth ...*

If these good Jewish boys had not married outside their faith, Ruth would never have met Boaz, and David would never have been born.

***Esther 2:17** And the king loved Esther ... and made her queen ...*

So this good Jewish girl, Esther, married the king of Persia, Ahasuerus. Was that good or bad? Well, because of that marriage, she saved the Jewish people from extinction and certainly that was a good thing, But it was a marriage outside the faith none-the-less.

[3] SOLOMON

***1 Kings 3:1** And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took the Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David...:3 And Solomon loved the LORD walking in the statutes of David his father...*

Solomon began his reign in peace. He made treaties with surrounding nations by marrying the daughters of their kings, and he started with Egypt.

That seemed like a good idea at the time and Solomon saw no conflict with practicing his religion and marrying outside his religion. After all, peace is a noble goal, and if a few international marriages will achieve that, then why not.

Time would tell if he is right or wrong. As it turned out, he was wrong.

***1 Kings 11:1** But King Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonites, and Hittites. :4 For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.*

No doubt Solomon thought he was immune to their influence, but who could be immune to 700 wives and their constant discussion of religion and politics. Later, after the Jews returned from the Diaspora, they did not forget the damage that Solomon had done to them. Nehemiah reflected back on it thinking, we'd better not do that again.

***Nehemiah 13:25** ... Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. :26 Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. :27 Shall we then hearken unto you*

*to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?
:29 Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites.*

So now, at their return, the Jews began to think that their problems began with inter-faith marriages. Nehemiah made himself clear: marry within your faith or you soon will not be true to your faith.

This concept led directly to Ezra's mass divorce.

Ezra 10:3 Now therefore let us ... put away all the wives [non-Jewish], and such as are born of them ...

This mass-divorce must have been horrendous, especially for the abandoned children. But they felt it was necessary. Later, a prophet said that God hates divorce.

Malachi 2:16 For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away.

Malachi probably shook his head in disbelief when he read about Ezra's mass divorce. How could things get so messed up that divorce would be necessary? But divorce is often what happens when we let our hearts attach us romantically to people outside our faith.

[4] UNEQUALLY YOKED

So the Jews came to understand the importance of marrying within their faith, and that understanding continues in the Jewish faith today. For a sense of that, you might enjoy watching the movie, "Fiddler On the Roof."

Amos 3:3 Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

Christians too understand the importance of marrying within their faith.

1 Corinthians 7:39 The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

2 Corinthians 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers...

Of course at that time there was only one Christian faith, not the hundreds that we have today. Back then, there were us Christians and there was everyone else, so it was pretty simple to stay on the us side of that line. With today's splintered Christianity, it's more challenging. Should a Methodist marry a Presbyterian? That's not so clear. Can they get along well enough to be peacefully married? At least it warrants a discussion.

For Mormons it is a serious matter because it is not just about peace in the home, it is more about the nature and objective of the marriage ceremony itself. A temple marriage is forever, every Mormon knows that. But you can't have a temple marriage

unless you are in the temple, and only Mormons can go into a Mormon temple. So Mormons have to marry Mormons or forfeit that temple blessing. That's the deal.

[5] OTHER ISSUES

But let's go back to the notion of cohesion. Diverse religions is only one thing that splinters families. There's culture, and race, and language, and social status, and money, and even tribalism. In some countries a person can't marry a person from the next village because the two tribes hate each other.

None of these diversities are insurmountable, but all warrant at least discussion. And then there is politics.

I knew a couple back in the 60's who divorced because she was anti-VietNam war, and to him, that meant she was a traitor.

How about animal rights? I know a man whose wife is a vegan. He is anything but a vegan. I can imagine the discussions that go on in that household, especially when it's time to feed the children. But so far they seem to be doing alright.

And then there's my issue: abortion. When my three kids reached marriageable age, I gave them two instructions: marry in the faith, of course, but also marry someone who is pro-life. If any of them brought home a pro-choice person, I would not approve of that marriage.

It is a sad commentary about my church that too many of its members are pro-choice — a small percentage to be sure, but still too many. Fortunately for me, none of them ended up in my family. I explained to my kids that I can't imagine for any of them a life of constant bickering about what an unborn baby is and is not and its right to live.

Differences are okay, but core differences are not. Before you get married, you need to understand this much about yourself: what are your real core beliefs? What do you feel so strongly about that you will fight for it, argue for it, and defend your position against anyone? You need to determine those issues before you choose a lifelong partner. If you ignore that part of who you are at that critical juncture of life, you are likely to spend your entire life in constant confrontation with your spouse, that one person whose company you should enjoy above all others. Your marriage and happiness could be marred by a difference of opinion that neither of you can leave alone.

Falling in love is not like catching a cold, it doesn't just blow through and gets you. You have choices. Use your freedom of choice wisely, at least at that one important time in your life, when you decide who you will marry.