

FIFTY WAYS TO LEAVE YOUR LOVER

BY: REV. ROGER KOVACINY

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Just 20 years ago it would have seemed like science fiction: that one day the I.R.S. would have to make up an abbreviation like POSSLQ (“rhymes with apostle who”) because there would be so many “Persons of Opposite Sex Sharing Living Quarters” and filing tax returns. This social trend has to be recognized by the church because POSSLQ’s usually realize that they are doing wrong. They feel like hypocrites coming to church and drop out.

The easy way to react to the trend is with fire and brimstone, but the right way is probably to show some very fearful people the love of Jesus.

The church has good reason to give an extra measure of love to POSSLQ’s. They are playing Russian Roulette in reverse. At least in Russian Roulette you have only 1 chance in 6 to end your life. POSSLQ’s have 5 chances in 6 to ruin theirs.

FEAR OF DIVORCE

The most basic reason for becoming a POSSLQ is fear of divorce. Divorces are so messy. And so many people are getting them these days. One reason for the decrease in marriages is faulty statistics. For years we have been told that 1 out of every 3 marriages ends in divorce, because there is one divorce in America for every three weddings. This is like saying that two out [of] three babies born in America will die some day because there are two funerals for every three births. These statistics are inaccurate; the chance of a successful marriage are considerably greater; becoming a POSSLQ is not as logical as it seems.

And we have to ask two questions of that logic. First, does losing your POSSLQ hurt any less than divorce does? And second, is losing your POSSLQ less likely than losing a spouse?

The first answer is that, for women especially, losing a POSSLQ is likely to hurt even more than being divorced. At least a divorce provides a certain amount of respectability and in some cases financial help. But a POSSLQ can just walk out- or kick you out. Like the song says, there are “50 ways to leave your lover. You just step

out the back, Jack. You just hop on the bus, Gus.” Alimony is out of the question and even child support is practically voluntary. You were a kept woman, nothing more, and your self-esteem, low enough to begin with, goes into the cellar when you are jilted.

The sense of betrayal is particularly sharp. Men and women each give something and get something in a marriage relationship, but the female POSSLQ gives it all in advance, and relies on nothing more than a man’s continued good will to give her what she needs. She trusts in the sexual bond to keep him coming back. As a male, I must pity her ignorance. She thinks that sexual attachment means as much to a man as it means to a woman. Unfortunately, it may not. In all too many cases, it means nothing. A promiscuous man may not even remember your name after he’s done with you. Some even lose count.

And when the LTA (living-together arrangement) breaks up, she realizes what kind of relationship had all those years: She gave. He took.

The fact of the matter is that a woman bears all the direct costs of a sexual relationship. She is the one who will bear the burden of pregnancy and childrearing. She is the one who will be condemned to a life of poverty if her lover takes off. She is less likely to be promiscuous and therefore more likely to be the innocent victim of some unmentionable disease if he is unfaithful- and why should he be [faithful]? He hasn’t promised anything!

The second question is whether losing your POSSQL is more or less likely than losing your spouse. The answer is that statistics are only starting to show up, not that a parish pastor need them; any minister knows that the marriage that break[s] up soonest are the ones which started out with an LTA.

But the figures I have seen indicate that at least three out of four POSSLQ’s walk out before marriage- USA Today said only 21% of office affairs result in marriage, and another study says it’s 19%- and that hurts just as much as a divorce does.

So at least 75% leave. Of the 25% who remain, the incidence of divorce is somewhat higher than one out of three, or 33%. Thirty-

three percent of 25% is 8-1/3, and it just happens that 8-13% plus 75% equals 83-1/3%, which equals 5/6, which makes the LTA five times as risky as Russian Roulette. Funny how POSSLQ’s will gamble on an LTA which is stacked 5 to 1 against them, when they won’t gamble on marriage which is stacked more than 5 to 1 in their favor. But fearful people do strange things.

Before we go on we should show all potential POSSLQ’s that even 5 to 1 make lousy odds. Compared to what could be, that is. Because I look over our Lutheran congregations, and I don’t see an average divorce rate. Are there any statistics we can use to base our judgments on? Any figures that show what the experience of Christians like ourselves will be?

YOU WON’T NEED A DIVORCE

About 15 years ago *Christianity Today* did a survey on divorce. They found that there was a major subgroup within the nation that did not have the famous 1-in-3 divorce rate. This group had a 1-in-5 divorce rate. And within that subgroup, there was a further subgroup that had a 1-in-300 divorce rate. Perhaps you can guess what the subgroups are? No, you’re wrong. It wasn’t any particular denomination. Not even mine.

The 1-in-5 group did attend a Christian church weekly, however, that’s “weekly”, not “weakly.” Faithful church attendance at a Bible-oriented church made that much difference.

Then who made up the 1-in-300 subgroup? Those were Christians who not only went to church every week, but read the Bible daily in their homes.

You could almost draw a straight-line graph. Every three times-per-year you and your spouse use the Bible, your chances of a divorce goes down by 1%. But if you don’t use the Bible, rosta ruck.

Put another way, your pastor dispenses a mighty good product. A statistician would say that the total amount of time and money contributed by Lutherans to their churches is at least equal to the time and money they would otherwise have to spend getting divorces. Everything else the church provides- like helping alcoholics and drug users and the depressed and delinquent children

and society in general-is absolutely free. It's as though forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, the main benefits of Christianity were just a "fringe benefit" to the good life which Christianity brings.

The church needs to communicate these facts to potential POSSLQ's. A lot of these people are going to be hurt very badly unless we love them enough to communicate the truth to them.

Even secular sources are starting to recognize the problem. In a basically feminist magazine, *New Women*, a June 1988 article entitled "Is Living Together Such a Good Idea?" points out that "if you are interested in marriage, keep in mind that most live-ins never marry." And if you do marry, divorce may be the price of having lived together first. According to a surprising new study, couples who live together before marrying have nearly an 80% HIGHER divorce rate than those who do not. The National Bureau of Economic Research in Cambridge, Massachusetts, surveyed nearly 5,000 women in Sweden (Sweden was chosen because it tends to prefigure American social trends by ten to 15 years). (p.120).

Furthermore, "Men cohabit mostly for sex, women cohabit for commitment." (p.122.) Notice the difference in attitudes. Here are answers typically given for shacking up: One young woman surveyed said, "It's a first step toward marriage, and if I don't grab him, somebody else will." ... Male responses to the question included, "It's less of a hassle to get laid," and "Sex- when you want it, where you want it." (Ibid.)

FEAR OF SINGLENES

There are two basic fears that come together in a fear of singleness. First is the fear of being alone; second is the fear of low self-esteem and depression that come from being alone, and failing to carry out your destiny as a human being and potential parent.

Being a POSSLQ whether male or female, actually increases our likelihood of being alone. For now of course, there is somebody you can live with. Later on, however, when you are not as attractive, and can't get somebody else perhaps, you are five times likelier to be alone than a married person is. When two people are committed to each other, it isn't so critical that they be physically attractive. Let

me illustrate: There are more men's clubs in Germany than there are in the United States. One such-made up of young bachelors asked another, made up of men who'd been married 25 years or more, whether hair color makes any difference in one's wife. The question was, "Tell us what color hair a woman should have to be a good wife." The old married men discussed it, and sent back this reply: "Gray."

Don't expect a live-in lover to take that attitude. As a matter of fact, the article cited above headlines these findings: "Live-in males are less considerate than husbands are." (The quoted example of "Less considerate" was a man named Josh who said that he could force fellatio on a live-in; "if she doesn't like it, tough. She'll get over it. And if she doesn't, I'll just leave." The article concludes, "Live-in arrangements favor men." "Live-in breakups can be as devastating as divorces." (page 124).

Secondly, there is the fear of low self-esteem and resultant depression that comes upon people who are lonely. If your problem is low self-esteem, being a "kept woman" will do nothing to increase that. Our self-esteem must come from being approved of by Jesus if it is to last.

THE FEAR THAT LOVE WILL DIE

There are further fears that motivate the POSSLQ. He or she fears that the love may not go on unless it is cemented by intimacy. To the girl who is thinking this way, we have to stop and ask what love is.

What is love? Is it a desire to make yourself feel good, or it is a desire to make someone else feel good? If that is the case, does the boy on your doorstep love you? Or does he love himself? Who is he trying to make feel good, himself or you? And who is he using to create that feeling, you or himself? How long do you think that he would hang around if, say, you were injured and couldn't make him feel that way anymore? See what happens if you withhold your favors from him

for awhile. POSSLQ's don't put up with that kind of thing. Husbands hang around until health returns, though, because husbands are committed to you as a person, rather than to their own good feelings.

Of course he says he loves you. Haven't you learned yet that men know the way to make a woman put out is to lie and say he loves you? Shucks a prostitute wants twenty bucks, maybe even 50, and she's probably got herpes and lice. All he has to do is feed you a line about how much he loves you, and he gets all that without the expense and without the risk, and you even pay half of the rent. But did you ever consider that there are a million girls who could make him feel as good as you do? If the sexual relationship stops, will he stay with you, or will he go looking for one of them? Is it you he's interested in, or the feeling? Young men play at love, when they are not ready for its responsibilities, to get sex. Young women play at sex, when they are not ready for its responsibilities, to get love. The men generally get what they want. The women generally don't.

If he really loved you, he'd be taking you to the altar, wouldn't he? Wouldn't he be marking you out as his for life, vowing to stick by you and protect you from anything that might hurt you, including an unshared pregnancy or his own inconstancy?

If he loved you, wouldn't he make more of a commitment than to share what he has with you as long as you benefit him? Ask him what his thinking is on the subject of marriage. Find out whether he's thinking of you or of himself. Whether he's planning to support you and any child you might have no matter what happens to your relationship. And whether he's willing to put those promises in writing, so that you are protected from the vagaries of his feelings.

"But it's just a piece of paper," he may say. He'd better not say it to me, though, unless he's looking for trouble. My commitment to my wife and children is more than a piece of paper. But IF "it's just a piece of paper," why isn't he willing to sign it?"

Yes, you say, we are going to get married, but we can't do it just yet, and we need to keep the relationship going.

And if intimacy is needed to keep the relationship going, what kind of relationship is it going to be?

Let us speak as adults, now. If I went out to buy a house from a private party, and the seller turned out to be a woman who seemed oddly eager to get me into the bedroom, I should have the sense to see what she is trying to do. She is using sex to cloud my judgment so I will take a house, and perhaps be stuck with it the rest of my life, that I otherwise wouldn't want to live in. This face should scare off both men and women from "trying the partner on" first. The sexual bond is so strong, much more for the woman than for the man, that it will make both of you overlook the other's faults until it's too late. As Josh McDowell points out, premarital sex doesn't just ruin good relationships; it makes bad ones last longer, so the cost of breakup is higher.

Put another way, marriage is a 50-year banquet. An LTA gives you the desert first. It may be a few years and a child or two before you find out that the main course is liver. Which is ok if you like liver. You may find out that you don't. A lot of Americans find out they don't.

If this is the case, which of you two is trying to sell the other something? What happens at bedtime will only make up for an otherwise poor relationship for a year or two. After that, it won't. Besides, nothing is likely to happen at bedtime unless there is a good relationship the other 23 hours of the day.

So, a woman may think, if he's that kind of a snook I'd be better off without him. He isn't the only fish in the sea!

By that time, unfortunately, there is a good chance that your youthful beauty will be gone. Now, it is true that some women remain beautiful into their 50's. I knew one retired lady who could only be described as "cute." But I also think of a gorgeous teenage neighbor who became fat, gross, and ugly by the age of 19. With a wife, this is not so important. There is a commitment there, a commitment to the family unit, and to God. But a POSSLQ's only commitment is to his own pleasure.

L.T.A.'s ARE BAD FOR MEN, TOO

Marriage doesn't sound like much of a deal for the man, since it brings so many benefits to the woman. It is true that many of the earthly benefits of marriage come to a man only as he matures-and even more come as he ages; celibacy was OK for St. Paul, but I honestly couldn't hold down my job without the help of my wife. That is why, in a wife, a man should look for the kind of personality and character to build a lifetime on. In a POSSLQ the main consideration is how you look. That's one of the reasons LTA's fall apart so often.

There are other reasons why LTA's are bad for men. Zig Ziglar took his son aside at the time of puberty and gave him this list of reasons for celibacy before marriage:

1. To begin with, fornication is a sin and God is mocked. Eventually, you will sit down to a big banquet of consequences, among which are the following:
 2. The girl you sleep with might be the wrong one for you but if you sleep with her, you delay finding out.
 3. Sex makes a bad relation last and makes a good one stop developing.
 - A. You focus on the physical.
 - B. Nothing else is important anymore. You stop communicating about anything except her body and your glands.
 - C. You sneak around and become a liar.
 4. If you abstain, however, you have established the foundation for marriage, which is trust.
 - A. Because your wife will be sure that, when you're away on a business trip, you're trustworthy.
 - B. Because you will be sure that she is, too.
 5. It eliminates wrenching premarital decisions.
 - A. You won't even be tempted by abortion.
 - B. You won't have lifelong memories of your child, given up to adoption.

C. And you won't have all of your plans and all of her plans for a lifetime thrown out if she conceives.

6. If you don't get sexually involved, you are unlikely to become promiscuous. Sex is for a moment, but herpes is forever, and if you get AIDS, "forever" comes pretty fast.
7. So save yourself for your wife.

Speaking of wives, I asked my own wife why girls got into LTA's. She thought a moment and said, "Because they're stupid." Ruth is not given to strong statements and I asked, "Do you mean that it is a dead-end relationship with nothing in it for the female?" She thought harder and said, "Absolutely nothing."

Or, as we said before, she gives and he takes. *Redbook* magazine made headlines a few years ago with its survey showing that religious women have better sexual experiences.

The reason, according to the psychologist who interpreted the study, was that women have a fundamental need for security-an instinctive desire for permanence. Women feel best with a man who will always be there. And a religious woman is a lot likelier to be able to hold a marriage together, because she has the resources of the church: prayer, the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, and pastoral counseling.

A POSSLQ won't be there always. He might not even be there tomorrow. Which has some interesting implications. Especially if she forgets to use her contraceptives. There is nothing easier to do in the heat of passion. Besides when many women have a subconscious instinct to have children which makes them "forget" their pills occasionally. Besides which even the best of them advertise only 97% effectiveness.

KEEP THE BABY, FAITH!

Now, perhaps the father of your love child will stick around. Or perhaps one of the reasons he got a POSSLQ instead of a wife is that he doesn't like kids that much and doesn't want the responsibility of a family. In that case, you are going to find out in short order why God gives us two parents. Here's the riddle: Can you guess the

difference between a baby and a dolly? Simple. You have to play with a baby whether you want to or not.

And I'm not just thinking of the two A.M. feedings and the times when the baby starts to cry just after you've fallen asleep. I'm thinking of the times when you and the baby both have the flu. I'm thinking of those times when you can't sit up with out throwing up. I'm thinking of the time my wife and I both had the flu, and the baby didn't, even so it was all that we could do between us to take care of him. But when you are there all by yourself, and you both have the flu and he needs five times the normal amount of care... If there had only been one of us, that time when we were both sick, it's like the lady said- where does a mother go to resign?

We in the church love you, sister. That's why we are trying to let you know what you're getting into. Unwed mothers have to go through things that would make a galley slave go on strike.

PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR

Love is the key. You think you are getting into an LTA because of love. We believe that if you think deeply and honestly, you are getting into the LTA because of fear. You fear that your love will not go on, will not deepen, will not last; that you are not desirable enough to become a wife. Let's talk about that for a minute.

There are very few women who have seared their consciences as badly as Gloria Steinem, the feminist who is against marriage because "I can't mate in captivity." But she is a distinct minority. The normal woman doesn't want to shack up; she wants to be married. We all know instinctively that love is something that is supposed to go on forever. The poets do not say, "I'll love you for at least three weeks-or until next winter-or for two years and a half." No. If it isn't forever, it isn't love.

What you want to do, therefore, is have a lifelong love, in short get married. But you have heard that there are 7 million more single women than men in this country, and fear that you will have to

settle for an LTA (As though it is better to be used up and cast aside then it is to remain fresh and free); but your fears will not lessen when you become a POSSLQ. They will increase and there will be new kinds of them. Your need for security will increase as you age, not decrease. Your responsibilities and therefore your vulnerability will increase, not decrease. Your youth and beauty will decrease and your insecurity will increase. And so you will get a whole new set of fears as you age.

One of those fears will certainly be the fear of God. Did you make a definite decision to stop coming to church, or did it just creep up on you? Is it the disapproval you sense from the married women, or is it your conscience? When did you notice that you stopped praying? Was it when you realized that there's no point praying to God when an unconfessed, unrepented sin lies between you and Him, a sin that you have no intention of giving up? The Bible tells us that our sins and iniquities do exactly that: They separate us from God, so that our prayers are not heard. (Isaiah 59:2)

PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT FEARS

Something has to be done about all this fear.

And only one thing can be.

The Apostle John gives us the answer when he says, "Perfect love casts out fear." Perfect love is rather different from the second-class type you have been considering with your boyfriend. In the first place, it has to come from God. In the second place, it can go through you.

Perfect love comes from God. This is the love of God, who didn't use women to make Himself feel good, but used Himself to make them feel good, for ever and ever. This is the love of Jesus. It can never be said of Him that you give and He takes. Rather, Jesus gives, and you... you learn to give too. Which is what love should be like.

WE'RE NOT TRYING TO BREAK YOU UP

Such a shame that the church has given the impression that we would like to break up the relationship between POSSLQ's. The last thing the church wants to do is to decrease love. We don't want to decrease love; we want to help you deepen your love and your commitment, make it grow and last for all time and into eternity. We can do that by helping you cast out fear.

The church can, in the vast majority of cases, end the fear of divorce. We can end the fear of abandonment and insecurity. We can end the fear that your love will not last. We can end the fear of God and the fear of death and your never-even-admitted fear that both you and your lover will be separated for all eternity, confined in different parts of hell, instead of praising God together for the wonderful things He will keep doing for you in heaven. We can end the fear that your children will grown up without a father and without much character.

These fears can only be cast out by God's perfect love. What you have to realize is just how perfect it is. Your mistake lies in thinking that you are capable of making better decisions for yourself than God can. You think that somehow, what you decide for yourself will make you happier than what God permits you to do. You forget that He can see far beyond the first ecstatic months to the misery of later years when you may be old and fat and gray and alone while all your friends have their children and grandchildren bringing meaning to their lives. You aren't even thinking of the life of poverty you will probably suffer if your POSSLQ abandons you- and it's 5 to 1 that he will.

Your first mistake, in short, is that you think you love yourself more than God does. Your second mistake is that you think you know how to love your lover better than God does.

But stop and think of Jesus for a moment. Jesus, leaving heaven itself to come into this world in a smelly barn, born to a poor woman in disgrace before the world, persecuted by Herod, flogged by the

Romans, crucified by men and cursed by God. All of this was purely for love of you. Does your boyfriend love you that much? We're not asking him to die for you, just to sign a contract protecting your interests and those of your children.

If you were the only person who ever lived, or who fell into sin, still Christ would have died on the Cross for you. We know this because Jesus hung on until salvation was fully paid for and He could say "It is finished!" He did not quit when salvation was mostly paid for, or when He had taken all He could stand. He did not suffer all but the last two cents worth for you. Although most of us could probably have paid in our two cents worth for salvation, one or two perhaps could not. So Jesus did the whole job, to guarantee forgiveness for everyone -even if the "whole job" only had to be done for one or two. That's how much He loves you. So how can you imagine that you love yourself more than He does? If you were told that poverty and crucifixion would somehow be good for you in the long run, would you be willing to do it? Even for yourself? Not to mention other people, including your enemies? You can hardly stick to a diet. How could you die on a cross-for yourself, or for somebody else?

But Jesus did it. Not for Himself either. For you. For you, and for the one you think you love-although you are sinning grievously against him or her by giving in to these sinful wishes. Both your consciences will be dulled, and you may be leaving your lover to face God with all those sins hanging around his neck. Is it really love if what you do is encourage those selfish desires? It is NOT love. "THIS is how we know we love the children of God," the Bible says, "if we love GOD and obey HIS commands," (1John 5:1-2)

No, you don't want a POSSLQ. Tell him to go home. You have a much more loving guest. It is Jesus. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with Him, and he with Me." (Rv. 3:20.) Amen!

