

# There Ain't No Such Thing as 'Free Love'

TANSTAAFL with its triple repetition of the letter "A" is an acronym popularized by science-fiction writer Robert Heinlein meaning, "There ain't no such thing as a free lunch."

TANSTAFL with a double A is my play on Heinlein's contrivance: "There ain't no such thing as free love."

Free love may bring to mind that term embraced by the 1960s, which my online dictionary defines as "the idea or practice of having sexual relations according to choice, without being restricted by marriage or long-term relationships," but that's not the meaning I have in mind. No, TANSTAFL here refers to real love, particularly the love between a man and a woman, and the costs of that love.

Most of us have gone to weddings where the bride had requested this reading from 1 Corinthians, probably because the words ring with romance:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

The sentiment is beautiful, but if we ponder the meaning of this passage we find that love comes loaded with obligations: patience, kindness, endurance, respect, and duty.

In other words, real love is many things, but it is never free.

Any adult recognizes this truth. The soldier who loves his country may earn a grave on a desolate plain in a backwater

country. The mother of three teenagers pays every day for her love for them. The middle-aged woman caring for her beloved elderly father from sunrise to sunset performs dozens of tasks to keep him healthy, clean, and alive. Even the man who enjoys the unconditional affection of his dog has the duty to feed his pet and take him on walks several times daily.

True love between a man and a woman also imposes demands of duty and obligation. Let's return to that wedding and listen to the traditional vows made during the ceremony:

I, \_\_\_\_, take thee, \_\_\_\_, to be my lawful wedded wife/husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge thee my faith.

Most wedding vows offer some variation of this noble promise. They may omit any mention of God or religion; they may be personal vows written by the bride and groom; they may even contain some humor. But always they imply commitment and responsibility.

Yet it seems that ideal of mutual commitment may have eroded. In the last 20 years, [marriage rates](#) in the United States have plummeted. Some commentators have blamed the economy for this decline, but that factor doesn't explain the falling numbers in those times when the economy was in good shape. More Americans are cohabiting than ever, [Pew Research reported](#) in 2019, though that increase has leveled off, and the numbers still fail to offset the decline in marriages.

In that same article, the writers found that only 18 percent of those under the age of 30 are married, compared with 31 percent in 1995.

So what accounts for these dwindling numbers? Have young people in particular grown afraid of the commitments and demands of marriage?

Certainly this sea change has brought some consequences. Our birthrate is now well below replacement level, and we heap praise on single motherhood while neglecting the traditional, two-parent family.

Indeed, to praise the value of marriage can bring repercussions. In his book [\*Ship of Fools\*](#), Tucker Carlson mentions Barack Obama's 2013 speech in which "Obama noted that 'we should do more to promote marriage.'" After being castigated by feminists, blacks, and liberals for that viewpoint, Obama never publicly mentioned the topic again.

And we rarely promote the opposite side of the marriage coin, which offers joy, companionship, stability, and children. All sorts of other social issues dominate today's public debates—transgender athletes, LGBT Pride Month, sex education in our schools and on our children's television shows—but little to nothing is said of the value of marriage and family.

Yet if we truly wish to restore the institutions, laws, and ideals of our republic, we must begin that restoration with that most basic of building blocks—the family—which in turn means we must promote marriage. We don't need some expensive faux federal program to do so. What we need are some of our politicians—Republicans and Democrats—and others with powerful voices to find the guts to speak in defense of the two-parent family.

In [\*The Curmudgeon's Guide to Getting Ahead\*](#), Charles Murray writes, **"A good marriage is the best thing that can ever happen to you.** Above all else, realize that this cliché is true. The downside risks of marrying—and they are real—are nothing compared to what you will gain from a good one."

It's time for others in our culture to recognize that notion.

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