

CAN SWEETHEART BE PLURAL?

“Let love be without hypocrisy.” (Romans 12:9)

At our house it seems that everyone is required to buy a valentine for everyone else in the family. I always balk at this tradition because of my aversion to shopping. There are many holidays on our calendars which are designed and propagated solely by Hallmark, FTD, and WalMart. Valentine’s Day might be one of those holidays.

Does anyone know the origin of Valentine’s Day? There is good reason that we celebrate the birthdays of the past presidents and dead civil rights leaders. Christmas, Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, and Labor Day all make sense in their own way. But, why Valentine’s Day? It is nice to set aside a day for Mother and Fathers (although now the card stores and flower shops are also pushing for Grandparents, secretaries, bosses and various sundry other obscure personalities).

Thinking back to my own childhood, Valentine’s Day was always a special time. We would construct elaborate boxes, decorated with red and white construction paper hearts. These boxes would soon be stuffed with colorful valentines from all the other kids in our grade school class.

Did your mother bring home a cellophane package of valentines for you to give to the kids at school? Mine always did. There was always one special valentine in each package. I remember carefully reading each of those little cards for the one with the perfect, carefully worded message. The people who made the valentines must have known what package I would get. They always designed one card with the ideal message for that special girl.

As hard as it may be for you to believe, I was not much of a ladies’ man in grade school. However, I could sure tell the cute girls from the not so cute ones. Every class had at least one. At Ben Franklin Elementary School in Colorado Springs, Colorado, her name was Lisa. Lisa’s heart decorated box must have been jammed with all the best valentines from every boy’s package.

At the school party, I would glance over at her occasionally to see if she was reading my valentine. In my childish ignorance, I must have believed that my valentine would turn her heart to mush. It never did.

When I perused the valentines I had received, I carefully read and reread the one from Lisa. I knew there must be some concealed meaning. Surely she had chosen the best valentine for me. However, the next day at school was always the same as before. My carefully designated card had made no impact, and I was back to admiring her from afar.

The teacher would also give everyone a valentine. It was an excellent opportunity to determine your standing in the class. It was good to be the teacher’s valentine but at the same time, no one wanted the other kids to know that they were really liked. At the time, I didn’t know that she probably gave everyone in the class identical valentines.

Everybody always distributed a valentine to everyone in the class. We all understood this process and it made everyone feel good because no one was left out. Not even the Sander’s boys who were disliked by everyone. But, the only thing that truly mattered was the one received from the blonde girl names Lisa. I was never her only valentine but from my perspective, “sweetheart” was not plural at Ben Franklin Elementary School.

Junior High came and went; then Senior High. I was too busy with other things and soon lost interest in girls. We had moved to Denver and Lisa was only a vague memory. There were other girls that created a crush in my heart but the opportunity was gone. We did not exchange valentines any more. At this age, to give a girl a valentine meant that you were genuinely in love. I was never that serious.

Sharon and I did not become sweethearts when we first met. It took some time. However, when Cupid’s arrow hit, it stuck firmly and Valentine’s Day took on a whole new

meaning. We were sweethearts for two Valentine's Day before we married. She has always loved chocolate candy which made buying valentines an easy shopping experience. Pick out a nice card and the largest box of candy I could afford (which was not much) and I was finished.

We would get together on the evening of February 14th in order to exchange our valentines. Somehow, I always knew that she spent more time selecting my gift than I had in selecting her gift. For Sharon, shopping for a card is not a task; it's a holy crusade. She reads every card in the store, just to make sure she selects the right one. Nothing is left to chance.

Sharon also understands that I detest shopping, so, she has been patient with my gifts. She knows my heart is right, even if the card may not be perfect.

With the coming of the computer age, I can now write my own cards. It is also a way to strike back at Hallmark for imposing so many holidays upon us.

Well, I seem to be a long way from my original question – can sweetheart be plural? I know some people who get divorced and remain the best of friends. They get together on Christmas, send birthday gifts and go out to dinner together. I have often wondered if they send valentines to one another. If so, I guess for them, sweetheart can be plural.

For others who consider themselves to be especially attractive to the opposite sex, they think of sweetheart in the plural. I have heard of those who date three or four different people in a week's time. That has never been my problem. I can count all of the girls I ever cared about on one hand, and still have a few fingers left over.

Perhaps those with children will also say that sweetheart should be plural. Even when they are not sweet, the little ones can still be called sweethearts. God has made the heart a very special organ. I don't mean that fist sized muscle which pumps blood throughout the body. I refer to the heart which holds the love we have for one another. The heart never gets so full of love that it cannot hold love for another person. The birth of children only serves to enlarge the capacity for love.

But are children sweethearts? When you think of Valentine's Day, do your thoughts first go to your children? Perhaps it does. As I am writing these words, it is three o'clock on Valentines Day. Mothers are flocking to the school, arms laden with cupcakes and cheap toys. They are making their annual pilgrimage to the class parties.

However, when I think of sweetheart, I do not think of school parties nor loving children. I do not think of little Lisa or those other cute blondes from my school days. I readily admit my hatred for shopping, but in truth, I only want to give one valentine.

As far as I am concerned, sweetheart is a singular term. There is no such thing as "sweethearts." There might be room for more valentines, but I do not think there is room for more than one sweetheart.