

A Pastoral Statement on Marriage

One of the first things that God tells us in the Bible is that He created Adam and Eve in His own image and joined them together as husband and wife (Genesis 1:27-28 2:21-24). Through this blessed union God established the family and provided for the physical and spiritual upbringing of children. Thus marriage is the basic building block of our human society.

Jesus reaffirmed the Genesis account of the origin of marriage. He said, "Haven't you read...that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:4-6). Jesus clearly taught that marriage is a creation of God that properly consists of the union of one man and one woman.

Marriage is the most intimate form of human companionship. Married love is designed to teach us that we are loved by God. As one man and one woman live together in faithfulness to their marriage vows, their love for each other is a reflection of the love that unites Christ and His Church. Living together with your spouse day after day can provide a profound appreciation for the fact that Christ is our heavenly Bridegroom and the Church is His Bride.

God is the Third Partner in Christian marriage. As God draws both husband and wife closer to Himself in faith, husband and wife also draw closer to each other in love. That is why Jesus says, "What therefore God has joined together let not man put asunder." Therefore a husband ought to recognize his wife as God's gift to him. Likewise a wife ought to regard her husband as God's gift to her.

Marriage is designed to endure until death separates husband and wife. That is why the bridegroom and the bride solemnly promise to love, honor and cherish each other, and to remain faithful to each other "for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, until death separates us." That is why God says, "I hate divorce" (Malachi 2:16). Jesus says, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning" (Matthew 19:8).

To some people God gives the gift of being able to remain unmarried and chaste (I Corinthians 7:7-9). But no one has the authority to impose celibacy upon anyone else, for the Bible declares that forbidding people to marry is a doctrine of demons (I Timothy 4:1-3).

The Bible portrays marriage as a gift that God gives both to Christians and to non-Christians. But God does not have to give His gift to everyone who desires it. The growing popularity of dating services testifies to the fact that there are many single people who would like to be married, but have not yet found a spouse. In His own good time it is God who gives the gift of marriage to a husband and his wife.

God wants to honor and protect marriage. That is what He does in the Sixth Commandment. This commandment applies to all people in all times without exception: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Both pre-marital sex and extra-marital sex are sins against God that dishonor marriage. But some people's consciences have become so dulled that they no longer feel any guilt or shame when they break the Sixth Commandment.

The Bible defines marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman, and it forbids any form of "homosexual marriage" by condemning homosexual activity. The Apostle Paul says, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness... Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to

sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie... Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion" (Romans 1:18, 24-27).

Obviously our contemporary standards of political correctness do not conform to the language of Holy Scripture. The Bible simply declares that we are without excuse. "For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21). Every human being is born with a natural knowledge of God. But we are also conceived and born in sin, which obscures the natural knowledge of God. It is sin that prompts people to ignore or deny the fundamental standards of right and wrong that God has written on our hearts. Therefore the only way to be certain what is right and what is wrong is to listen to the revealed law of God in the Bible.

It is clear that the Bible condemns homosexual activity. Therefore it is unacceptable to make homosexual activity the basis for marriage. If our government should declare that a civil union grants protected legal status to homosexual activity, that would amount to condoning and institutionalizing sinful behavior that God forbids.

God has given the government the authority and the responsibility to maintain law and order in society. So the government has a legitimate interest in regulating marriage. That is why you have to buy a license in order to get married. That is why you have to go to court in order to get divorced. When a man and a woman get married, many other people are affected: their parents, siblings, neighbors, friends, children and grandchildren. If a marriage ends in divorce, that makes life complicated for all of their relatives and friends. If the divorce is contested, a judge may have to settle issues such as alimony and custody of the children.

Many people assume that the state has authorized common law marriage for couples who simply live together for a certain length of time. But at the present time only 15 states recognize common law marriages. Iowa is one of them. Minnesota is not.

Is the government free to define and regulate marriage in any way it sees fit? If gay marriage is legalized, how shall Christians respond? It is certainly possible that the government will allow and protect sinful behavior that God clearly forbids. But if the state legalizes gay marriage, the Christian Church is still free to refuse to conduct weddings for gay couples. If the state tries to compel the Christian Church to do gay weddings, "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

So what shall we do right now? Pray for our legislators and judges. Pray for our marriages and families. Pray that the voices of those who support marriage will be heard in the media and heeded in our land. As we pray, let us also rededicate ourselves to faithfulness in our own marriage vows. By our words and by our example let us teach our children and grandchildren to honor marriage and to keep themselves pure.

Some Christians are fully engaged in an effort to amend the constitution. We are free to contact our legislators and express our opinions. However, Christians may differ with each other. There is no single perfect Christian legal response to this issue. Reasoned and respectful debate is both helpful and healthy. But we can all agree to honor the marriage bed and keep it pure (Hebrews 13:4). Christ wants repentance and forgiveness of sins to be preached in His name to all nations (Luke 24:47). For when we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I John 1:9).

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