

## A Biblical Response to the Culture Shift on Marriage

- Last week we talked about the culture shift that has already taken place on the issue of marriage and how we define it. We talked about how the shift has taken place, how we went from “same sex marriage is unthinkable” to “same sex marriage is unquestionable” in just the last 20 years. And that marriage was defined as between one man and one woman in every culture, civilization and nation since the beginning of human history...until the last 15 years. We looked at God’s design for marriage from Scripture, beginning in Genesis when He said, “It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.” And we looked at how Jesus responded to a question from the Pharisees about divorce by going back to beginning, that marriage is to be the result of a man leaving his father and mother and holding fast to his wife, and the two becoming one flesh. We saw that marriage, as designed by God, is between a man and a woman. And that marriage is oriented toward procreation. And that marriage is a holy estate we enter into for life, before God as our witness. And that marriage is a creation of God for all people, not just Christians. It came from God, not from governments. And finally, we saw that marriage is a picture of the Gospel, and the covenant God made with us when He sent the bridegroom to lay down His life.
- That’s how precious a thing marriage is. But we stand at a crossroads as a culture. And it looks like the car is turning the wrong way. The debate is still going on, but for all practical purposes, same sex marriage is here. So the question we want to try and address today is, “What do we do now?” To quote from Stonestreet and McDowell’s book again, “How can we be faithful to God’s design for marriage in a culture that considers it outdated, hateful and repressive?”
- I was at Saxapahaw for the Saturday night shindig two Saturdays ago to hear “Love and Valor” play and some of you were there as well. That place on a Saturday night is really “Carrboro-north,” evidenced by the fact that they even run a Blue Bird bus between Carrboro and Saxapahaw every week for these concerts. Cindy and I were getting some food from one of the vendors there and I saw a man with a t-shirt that said, “I’m openly Carrboro.” On the back it said, “You’re in Carrboro. Be free!” I told Cindy, “We should have t-shirts made for the next time we come here that say, ‘I’m openly Christian.’ On the back it could say, ‘I’m in Christ. I am free, indeed!’ Well, I know that we are not going to win the culture war with t-shirts. But there are some things we can and must do. Not to win the war, but to be faithful to the One who has already won it for us.
- **First, we must be in the world.**
- Christianity is not an escapist religion. Consider such commands as these: “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?” (Matt. 5:13) “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” (Matt. 5:14) “I wrote to you not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.” (1 Cor. 5:10) Jesus prayed for us to the Father, “I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” (John 17:15-16) Jesus is clearly praying that the Father would send us into the world, just as he was sent, for we have a mission and a purpose that cannot be accomplished if we withdraw. Rod Dreher has written about what he calls the Benedict Option, a reference to Pope Benedict in the 6<sup>th</sup> century who started monasticism, disgusted as he was by Rome’s decadence. There are some Christians who believe we need to pull away, build Christian communes, withdraw from modern society, in order to keep ourselves unstained from the world. But we have not been given that option by the Lord; just the opposite. Instead, we are to stay engaged as long as we still have the freedom to do so openly. To be openly Christian. There may come a time, as Al Mohler said this week in The Briefing, that Christians are forced out of the public square and no longer are allowed a place at the table, but that time has not come. We must be in the world. AND we must stand together as the church. We will not be allowed to sit this one out, and we need each other.
- **Second, we must speak the truth in love.**

- The one who stays engaged in the world but does not speak the truth in love is really no different in any practical way from the one who simply keeps his head down and tries to avoid being confrontational with anyone over anything. The heroes we celebrate and emulate in the Bible were not men and women who kept quiet when it was too dangerous to speak. We will study the life of one of them, Esther, beginning next week. She was tempted to stay quiet when she heard of Haman's plot to destroy the Jews. But Mordecai told her that was not an option. Certainly we are to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves," but we are called to follow the Lord, and be willing to speak truth to power, even if it costs us. Paul pleads with the church at Ephesus to be men and women of prayer, to "keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak." (6:19-20) Twice he uses the same Greek word for boldness which means "freedom or frankness in speaking; to speak openly, boldly, and without constraint." Notice though that he also asks them to pray that words may be given him. There's the tension. We are to make sure our words are His words, but then we are to speak boldly, as we ought. Charles Spurgeon said this:
  - *The Word of God can take care of itself, and will do so if we preach it, and cease defending it. See you that lion. They have caged him for his preservation; shut him up behind iron bars to secure him from his foes! See how a band of armed men have gathered together to protect the lion. What a clatter they make with their swords and spears! These mighty men are intent upon defending a lion. O fools, and slow of heart! Open that door! Let the lord of the forest come forth free. Who will dare to encounter him? What does he want with your guardian care? Let the pure gospel go forth in all its lion-like majesty, and it will soon clear its own way and ease itself of its adversaries.*
- The debate over marriage gives us incredible opportunities to let the pure Gospel go forth. To tell people that they are created in the image of God, which is perhaps the most powerful truth we could share with them until they are ready to hear the Gospel. The world has its defenses up and ready against Christians who just want to tell them what we are against. We have so much more to talk about that we are for! As Chuck Colson said, "When we say no to the world, it's because there's a much bigger Gospel YES!"
- One biblical truth we are for is marriage. We are called by God to champion marriage and family because as we said last week, it is God's means of grace to produce, protect and preserve future generation of image bearers. Look at **Jeremiah 29:4-7**. The reason I wanted us to memorize that passage is for us to see that even when Israel was going into exile, under foreign occupation by pagan rulers, the followers of God were to do these basic things: occupy the land by building houses and planting crops; occupy society by marrying and having children; bless society by seeking its welfare and praying for it. That brings us to the third point, which is...
  - **Third, practice what you preach**
  - 1. Marry somebody. Young men, you are called by God to marry, unless you have been given the gift of celibacy. Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 7 that "each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another." Some, and the percentage is very low, have been given the gift of singleness. Most have been given the gift of marriage. I will be so bold as to say that if you are in a position to provide for a wife, spiritually, financially, emotionally, then you should pursue marriage.
  - 2. Have children. If you are married, then you should pursue having children. There are some who cannot have children, and for them, perhaps adoption is the way to "preserve and protect" the next generation.
  - 3. Stay married. Matt Walsh writes, "I sat down to type a scathing rant about gay marriage. I sat down to tell the world that gay marriage is the greatest threat to the sanctity of marriage. But then I remembered a sign I saw on the side of the road that said, *Divorce for sale! Only 129 dollars!* Then I remembered an article I read about the new phenomenon of 'divorce parties.' *Divorce is the new single*, the divorce party planner tells us. Then I remembered that there is one divorce every 13

seconds, or over 46,000 divorces a week in this country. And then I remembered no-fault divorce. I remembered that marriage is the only legal contract a person can break without the other party's consent and without facing any legal repercussions." Sobering words. That's why the Bible says in Hebrews 13:4, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." How can we have any integrity at all as followers of Jesus if we are saying with our lips, "God created and blessed marriage as between one man and one woman for life," and we are saying with our lips, "we must preserve and protect the definition of marriage!" and at the same time we are saying with our actions that we can get a divorce any time we want for any reason or no reason at all. Especially if things just don't work out. Or we just don't love each other any more. No! Get help. Fight for your marriage. Seek help from the elders. Or from others who have a godly marriage. Meet with Eric Pace, who is a trained biblical counselor. Do whatever it takes in order to practice what we preach.

- **Fourth, we need to repent of our thoughts, words or actions that have made the Gospel a stench to others**
- This is my last point but it may be the first in importance. Repentance is not an action; for the Christian, it is to be a way of life. It is how, by God's grace, we came to life in the first place. And it is how, by God's grace, we maintain healthy relationships with people in our family, in our church, and at our workplace. It is the first step to reconciliation, and is the only way to build bridges instead of walls between us and those with whom we disagree. Let's be very careful not to adopt an "Us versus Them" mindset. Or to see people as just their self-described sexual orientation. Each person is an image bearer, created by God. Because of that, every person's deepest need is a personal relationship with the God who made them. They look just like their Daddy, even though their lifestyle choices may not line up with what He clearly says in His word.
- Let's be careful how we speak about this subject. I am convicted by a verse I recently memorized in Ephesians 5: "Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving." (verse 4) How many times have we been guilty of demeaning with foolish talk or crude joking those with same sex attraction? That type of talk doesn't represent Christ, doesn't qualify us as ambassadors of reconciliation, and doesn't create bridges and tear down walls. We must stand for the truth. We must not compromise our convictions. We must not cave to the culture. But we also must not vilify those with whom we disagree, even when we have biblical grounds upon which we base our disagreement. Jesus was a friend of sinners. We must be as well. Sean McDowell wrote, "My heart broke recently when a gay atheist told my students that Christians have been his greatest enemy. How sad that he doesn't know Christians as those who extend love, grace and understanding, even if we see the issue differently."
- Let's be careful to not give in to fear or despair or surliness or 'gloom and doom' about what is going on in the culture. Matthew Lee Anderson is the lead writer at Mere Orthodoxy.com and is quoted in Stonestreet and McDowell's book as saying this: "Christians also haven't been people marked by joy. Yes, the message of Christ can be tough and unpopular, but Jesus is Lord and all will be well. Eat, drink, be merry and make the arguments—because tomorrow is in the hands of God."
- That's a good place to end. We know the truth: we are to be in the world, but not of it. We are to make the arguments and speak the truth in love. We are to practice what we preach and fight not just for marriage but for our **own** marriage! And we are to walk in repentance with one another and offer love and grace to those who reject the Gospel, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. And...we are to be marked by joy. Elisabeth Elliot, who went home to be with Jesus this week, always opened her radio program with this: "Remember, you are loved with an everlasting love; that's what the Bible says, and underneath are the everlasting arms!" Amen.

