Preserving the Definition of Marriage

Marriage has been in the news quite a bit lately. Whether it is same sex marriages, cohabitation, or the impact of divorce on children, marriage continues to remain a hotly debated topic.

During President Ronald Reagan’s funeral, we were reminded of his great oratory skill. Among his many great quotations, Reagan spoke of the importance of marriage and family. He once declared:

Strong families are the foundations of society. Through them we pass on our traditions, rituals, and values. From them we receive the love, encouragement, and education needed to meet human challenges. Family life provides opportunities and time for the spiritual growth that fosters generosity of spirit and responsible citizenship. I don’t believe you can have a strong healthy nation without the family unit at its very base. For as the family goes, so also will go the nation.

Other presidents, politicians, legislators, academicians, and theologians have all posited the same basic principle: Marriage is the basic building block of society and culture.

It has also been demonstrated in history that when one tampers with the definition of something, it will have a large effect on our society and how we live within it. For example, when the definition of an unborn baby was redefined, it became much easier to sway public opinion in support of abortion. Definitions are much more than academic exercises. Definitions can shape our understandings, values, and beliefs. Many heresies within the Church, historically, have often operated with identical religious words. But the insidious nature of a heresy is that those very words were often redefined and understood differently.

What is most needed today is clarity in understanding the real meaning and significance of marriage as seen in the Scriptures and in Luther’s theology.

There will continue to be discussion and heated debate over what defines marriage, what is constitutional and what is not, and issues related to sexual orientation, serial marriages, and the like.

As the old axiom goes, we don’t need more heat on this issue, just more light! We certainly have the heat (political and otherwise!). But where can we find more light? For Christians, light has only one source, and it certainly can’t be found in the darkness of the world. Real enlightenment on this issue comes only from the source of true light, God Himself. And to discover what God has to say about marriage and all the other tangential issues, one only needs to open the Scriptures.

The book of Genesis clearly shows that marriage, by God’s own initial design, from the very beginnings of life was this: One man and one woman in a monogamous relationship for the duration of their earthly life.

Had same sex marriages been in God’s design, Genesis would have spoken of Adam and Thomas! Or Eve and Deborah! In which case, it would have been impossible for God to likewise give the command, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” In this alternate scenario, human beings would have lasted for only one generation!

Scholars, politicians, social scientists, psychologists, and societal engineers can pontificate, debate, and redefine as long as they wish. And what they ultimately define or create will be what they themselves feel is correct.

But if you want to determine what God has defined, what He has created, and what His divine will regarding marriage is, you don’t need Capitol Hill, national think tanks, or constitutional amendments.

You can find what light is on this subject! And that Light is first seen in Genesis. In just the first few pages we can find a very simple answer to what mankind has made, in human sinfulness, a very complex problem.

It isn’t rocket science for a Bible-believing Lutheran Christian. But our world doesn’t always desire to have its comfortable darkness dispelled by God’s Light shining in. That fact hasn’t changed since the beginning of time.

The issues certainly have. But the basic problem of sin has always remained the same. Which is exactly why we need to be always proclaiming Jesus so urgently as we have in days gone by.

The Church needs to be a strong voice clarifying the issues and bringing wisdom and common sense to what only a few years back would have been a moot point.

A movement for strong, healthy families can only advance if marriage is honored and preserved as the union between one man and one woman. We, as the Body of Christ, are called upon to strengthen authentic marriage by helping others understand its definition, preserve its meaning, prevent its permanent alteration and ultimately grow its success.

The definition and understanding of marriage and family for a Christian, ultimately boils down to whether or not the Scriptures are, in fact, God’s inerrant and infallible Word. If the Scriptures are indeed that, then they serve us well as the norm for our definitions, teaching, and beliefs.

But if we don’t truly hold God’s Word to be the highest court of appeals, the ultimate norm of all other authorities, then we will be adrift in a sea of competing definitions and understandings, and ultimately marriage will be defined in the realm of spiritual darkness, being forged by the culture and the courts, rather than by the clear voice of God’s Word being proclaimed strongly by His disciples in this sin-sick world of ours.

One Man. One Woman. Monogamous. For Life. It really isn’t that complicated. We just need to read the first few pages of the Bible to find the correct definition. It isn’t rocket science. But it is just as crucial for the well being of our nation. Marriage is, in fact, a very big deal!

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Until Death Parts Us

If it is broke you fix it; if it is not working properly you find out why. During my grandparents’ 60 years of married life they owned one toaster. Grandpa would never think of throwing it away just because there was a problem with it. No, you find out what is wrong, and you fix it. You might call that commitment. Today, however, we live in a throw-away society. We throw out toasters, televisions, and computers when they become broken or outdated. There are few things that we do fix. We even say, “They can make these things so inexpensively today, that it is cheaper to buy a new one than to fix this one.” Throwing items out seems to be a part of our culture. But tossing things doesn’t end with appliances. Throwing things away is a practice found even in the sacred institution of marriage!

Marriage vows are frequently broken. Researchers report that between 41 and 50 percent of first marriages do not end because of “death parting” them. Rather, dissolution of the marital vows breaks the tie that binds. The death of marriage has long been common, with many marriages ending within the first five years. Today, marriages are ending even earlier. Among those who break the marriage vow there is a trend of couples getting divorced prior to having children, resulting in these marriages being called “Starter Marriages.”

Starter marriages end young, with divorce papers often delivered before the 30th birthday candles are blown out. Starter marriages, like all marriages, are meant to last forever. But they don’t. Instead, they fizzle out within five years, always ending before children begin.
These young people who experience marital death are a bit different than their predecessors. Rather than becoming single moms and alimony dads, they end their marital pledge before having children. Some researchers see this as an upside. Their rationale is that if people are going to divorce, better to do so after a brief marriage in which no children suffer the consequences.

What does God have to say about breaking the marriage vows? We turn to Matthew 19:4–6: “Haven’t you read,” [Jesus] replied, “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 not man separate.”

Marriages that work do so not because the couples are 100 percent compatible, but because they are 100 percent committed. St. Paul writes in Ephesians 5:25 “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Instead, husbands give up their wife. Commitment is lacking. Marriage requires work and ongoing maintenance of the relationship.

Ask most people how often the oil should be changed in their vehicle, and you will hear the correct answer, “Every 3,000 miles.” Ask any domesticated person how often they should change filters in the furnace, and you’ll hear, “Every three to four months.” Ask a man how often he says to his wife, “I love you.” and he might say, “I told her that on the day we married, and if it changes I will let her know.” So many machines in our lives need regular attention or maintenance, and we don’t give it a second thought that there is a commitment to maintain that item. If we have so much commitment to maintaining appliances, why would we not give consideration to maintaining marriage which should be far more dear to us?

How often do we hear about the maintenance which is needed to keep marriages strong? When was the last time you took your spouse on a date? When was the last time you spent time just talking about your relationship? When was the last time you saw a professional about strengthening your marriage?

It is interesting that in our culture not one person would think it strange for you to say, “I’ve got to get the oil changed in the car and buy filters for the furnace.” But what looks would you get if you told your friends, “My wife and I are going on a marriage retreat this weekend,” or “My husband and I are seeing a marriage and family therapist”? “Something must be wrong!” are the thoughts that would run through most people’s minds. In fact, their marriage might be marvellous; they just want to work at maintaining it.

We must change the stigma of marriage enrichment and marital counseling. If we are not ashamed to get our car tuned up by professionals because we don’t know everything there is to know about engines, then neither should we be afraid to seek professional guidance in our marriage because we don’t know everything there is to know about relationships.

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Marriage? What’s the Big Deal?

What IS THE FIRST thing you think of when you hear the word marriage? Some may picture a perfect couple living happily ever after. Others may shy away from any form of marital commitment. Still others may think of homosexual couples wanting the privilege of marriage. Our society is torn between the worldly view and the Godly view of this subject.

Marriage? What’s the big deal? This is a loaded question. Men and women cohabitating say, “What’s the big deal about marriage? We need to live together first; then we will know if we are compatible to get married.” The opposite is being said by homosexual couples who are saying, “We love each other, so what is the big deal about us getting married?” One couple says, “Why should we get married?” and another couple says, “Why can’t we get married?”

When God created the world, He designed it in an orderly way. God’s order was for man to leave his father and mother and be united with his wife. In His wisdom, God instituted marriage between man and woman. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Again God states in Hebrews 13:4: “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” He knows what pain is caused when this order is not followed.

God also gave us the commandments as a rule and guide to live by. The Sixth Commandment states, “Thou shall not commit adultery.” To do so is sin. The world tells us we need to cohabit so we will know for sure if we should get married and be committed to each other as husband and wife. It is interesting what statistics tell us. In 1960, 439,000 couples in the United States cohabitated; in 1984, 1,988,000 cohabitated; and in 2000, 4.9 million couples cohabitated. It is estimated that 50 to 60 percent of couples today cohabitate before they marry. Statistics tell us there is a 50 percent greater chance of divorce for those who cohabitate compared to those who wait to live together until after their marriage vows. Statistics show us cohabitating isn’t the answer. God knows what is best for us—that’s the big deal about marriage!

God did not say in the Genesis passage, “Man, leave your father and mother to be united with a man, and then you will become one.” Homosexuality is contrary to God’s order of creation. God tells us in Leviticus 20:13 “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable.” The voice of the world tells us, “They should be married because they love each other. They are entitled to their partner’s insurance and retirement plan. They deserve to receive the same benefits that heterosexual married couples receive.” God is very clear in the Scriptures that being in a homosexual relationship is sin.

Marriage? What is the big deal? The big deal is that people are living outside of God’s plan for marriage. They are building their lives around lies instead of following God’s Word. That’s the big deal about marriage!

As Christians, we can throw our arms up and complain that it is hopeless. We can look at this as the most terrible time to be a follower of Christ. Or we can look at it as being the greatest time to be a follower of Christ because people are searching for love and relationships. Some are finding out that finding the answer to their quest is not in cohabitating or marrying the same sex. For most of them, their lives are empty and they feel hopeless.

We, as followers of Christ, have the message of hope for those who feel hopeless. We are called to imitate Christ. We are to build relationships with people who are cohabitating or living a homosexual lifestyle. Out of love, we are to share what the big deal about marriage is all about. We are to share the truth that God instituted marriage between man and woman. We also are to share that God is the one who changes lives that are broken by sin. Christ left His perfect home in heaven to live among sinners. Christ went to the cross and gave up His life on that cross to pay the price for all sins. That includes the sin of cohabitating and living in a homosexual relationship. Marriage is a big deal in God’s eyes!

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