

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE & THE FUTURE



R U S S E L L M O O R E

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& THE
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MARRIAGE: THE ROAD AHEAD

It's no secret that the church faces a crossroads as we look to the future of marriage in this country. The ERLC and other like-minded organizations closest to the ground are aware of just how dark the hour is. The courts are hell-bent on redefining marriage, which is why state definitions of marriage, put in place by the citizens of those states, are being struck down. This isn't happening simply in blue states but in the reddest of red states—Utah, Arkansas, Idaho, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Tennessee and so on.

The Supreme Court said in 2013, in an outrageous ruling, that essentially the only reason anyone could have for defining marriage the way every human civilization has for millennia is hostility toward gay and lesbian persons. The answer is not a simple constitutional amendment—though that would be optimal—because any constitutional amendment would require a super-majority in both houses, that, apart from a miracle, no one sees happening in the next several years, now that the Democratic Party is firmly behind same-sex marriage.

What several of us have been saying for quite a while is that, in some form or another, your church will have to address the marriage revolution. My friend Jeff Iorg, president of Golden Gate Baptist

Theological Seminary in California, has courageously called the church to see that everyone will soon have to be standing where he is standing now. He's exactly right. The cultural trends are such that the red-blue divide will not ultimately isolate any congregation from this Sexual Revolution, and all it entails.

Moreover, the situation isn't as easy as just an election or two, given the vast cultural changes that have happened. I—and my co-laborers in other organizations—are fighting every single week in court cases, in hearings, in state disputes for the most basic of conscience protections for those who dissent from the High Church of the Sexual Revolution.

So what should we do? Well, precisely what we should have done before and after *Roe*. We should recognize where the courts and the culture are, and we should work for justice.

That means not simply assuming that most people agree with us on marriage. We must articulate, both in and out of the church, why marriage matters and why its definition isn't infinitely elastic. Above all, we must prepare people for what the future holds, when Christian beliefs about marriage and sexuality aren't part of the cultural consensus but are seen to be strange and freakish and even subversive.

**But we do not give up on
a culture because they
have twisted the family
order. The darkness does
not overcome the Light
(John 1:5).**

THE GOSPEL AND MARRIAGE

The Scriptures present a picture of marriage as constantly under assault in this age, albeit often in craftily veiled ways, that only appear to be incidental. Family chaos did not begin with court rulings. The “culture wars” around the family are not chiefly a matter of what originates in Hollywood, Wall Street or Capitol Hill. The antidote to our myopic vision on the family, whether nostalgic or apathetic, is to see it through the hermeneutical grid of the Scripture’s story line: the mystery of Christ.

Scripture is clear that one cannot understand the universe rightly without distinguishing between those aspects of the creation that are “from the beginning” and thus created good, and those aspects that were unleashed by the curse on the universe’s designated ruler, man (Rom. 8:18-23). This “reign of death” that begins with the revolt in Eden does not simply result in individual alienation from God, but the disruption of the entire fabric of the cosmos—including the familial relationships established in the Garden temple. Indeed, the most immediate disruption in the shalom of the Garden is seen in alienation of the one-flesh union of the man and the woman, as they experience nakedness and shame in one another’s presence. The curse that comes

upon humanity—and all that is under their feet—upends every aspect of their calling as the universe’s regal family. The woman’s vocation as mother of all living now includes pain and anguish in childbirth (Gen. 3:16). The man’s vocation as the tiller of the ground, to bring forth bread for his wife and children, now includes the toil and sorrow of a cursed creation (Gen. 3:17-19).

The marriage union of the man and the woman now includes disharmony and rivalry (Gen. 3:16).

The “fruitful and multiply” command results not just in new life, but also in bloody fratricide (Gen. 4:1-16). Eastward from Eden, the biblical story traces a bloody trail of familial anarchy—even just in the immediate literary context of

Genesis—from polygamy (Gen. 4:23) to rape (Gen. 19:1-11; 34:1-31) to incest (Gen. 19:30-38) to vigilante tribal violence (Gen. 34:1-31) to sexual blackmail (Gen. 39:1-23). Add to this the accounts of the reproductive transgression of the angelic/human divide (Gen. 6:1-4), the dishonoring of the patriarch of the post-deluge new creation by his son (Gen. 9:18-27), and the repeated cycles of familial deceit, sibling warfare, inheritance skirmishes, and it becomes clear that the Edenic peace of the family is no more. This continues throughout the canon and beyond.

When the Pharisees seek to trap Jesus with a question about divorce, Jesus indicts them for failing to understand the alpha-point of the biblical story line. By pointing to the Mosaic era’s provisions for divorce, they are missing that it was not so “from the beginning” (Matt. 19:1-12). When the Sadducees seek to trap Jesus with

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a question about Levirate marriage, Jesus indicts them for failing to understand the omega-point of the biblical story line. By assuming in the question the eternal relevance of the “fruitful and multiply” clause, they are missing the way it will be in the consummation—when human existence reaches its resurrection goal of a new creation (Mark 12:18-27). In both instances, they are abstracting legal requirements or theological constructs from God’s purpose in Christ, the Alpha and Omega of the creation. Unwilling to recognize Jesus as the Christ, they are unable to see where God’s creational structures—whether the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-14) or worship (John 2:13-22) or dominion over the angelic beings (Matt. 12:22-32) or the family structures—fit into the universe.

It is no surprise then that those who could not see their rebellion against God’s anointed could not see their rebellion against the divine order on the family, be it through divorce or through the refusal to honor their fathers and mothers with financial provision. They are veiled to Christ, so they are veiled to the family order—all the while surrounding both concepts with out-of-context Scripture references and human traditions that excuse their rebellion and self-justify them, they suppose, before God. This is precisely what the Apostle Paul refers to in Romans 1:18-32 when he notes that those who refuse to give thanks as creatures then become darkened in their minds and turn to the creation itself (as Adam does to a reptile in the Garden, and then by hiding himself in the vegetation God has made). This downward spiral results in being handed over to one’s rebellion—a rebellion with distinct implications for the family order, including misdirected sexuality and disobedience to parents (Rom. 1:26-27, 30). But what is this creation order against which humanity rebels? Why does Paul fit this in the context of a discussion of his lack of shame about the gospel of the resurrected Son of David (Rom. 1:1-17)?

This is because, in the apostolic message, the gospel of Christ is the key to understanding the meaning of all of reality. The New Testament repeatedly makes clear that the universe was created through and for Christ as the firstborn and heir of all creation (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:2-3). Adam and Eve seek to usurp God's wisdom through the fruit of the tree, to grasp it for their self-interest in order to be deified by it. The man and the woman seek to know the mystery of the universe apart from the Word of God. But the apostolic message is that the mystery of the universe is the Word of God. Thus, millennia after the Fall, God reveals in his wisdom what the world could not know through autonomous wisdom (1 Cor. 1:21). The apostle announces to the church at Ephesus that God "in all wisdom and insight" has made known the "mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:9-10). In the fullness of time, God unveils that he created the universe as an arena for the kingship of his heir, his Son. He created all that exists in order to recreate them, to set them in line with their archetype, Christ Jesus, who will unite in his own person the fullness of Deity and the consummation of humanity, so that he is both the God whose throne is unchallenged (Heb. 1:8) and the human firstborn among many brothers (Heb. 2:10-17). Jesus unites in his own person the God who creates through his Logos, and the human vice-regent who is to govern through and be governed by the Logos of God. He unites in his own person the God who promises to dwell with his people, and the people who dwell with their God—a unity that, mysteriously, joins in one new man the peoples of the earth fractured by the Fall since Babel (Eph. 2:1-6).

One key aspect of this unveiled mystery is that the family structure is not an arbitrary expression of the will of God. It is an archetype, an

icon of God's purpose for the universe in Christ. Paul's classic text on marriage, for example, from Ephesians 5 makes no sense if it is presented as tips for a happier, healthier marriage. It is part of an argument regarding the cosmic mystery of Christ "which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5). The Genesis 2 mandate to leave father and mother, to cleave to one another, to become one flesh is a "mystery" that "refers to Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:31-32). Paul is emphatically not using Christ and the church as illustrative of human marriage. To say such would be similar to saying that Jesus was crucified, buried and raised from the dead in order to teach us the proper mode of baptism. In both instances, it is the other way around. The husband/wife union is a visible icon of the Christ/church union; a union in which, as a head with a body, Jesus is inseparable from his bride, a bride he protects, provides for, leads, disciplines and sanctifies. He is as inseparable from his body, as a human head is from a human body; a truth Paul heard from the voice of the Galilean himself when Jesus asked the persecutor of the church on the road to Damascus, "Why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4).

Only when we step back and see the fuller mosaic of the Christic mystery behind the family do we perceive something of why family disorder is always with us, in every age between Eden and the New Jerusalem. Paul tells the church at Ephesus that the mystery of the Christ/church union is a sign of the "manifold wisdom of God" that is now made known to the "rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10). It is no accident, then, that Paul writes of marriage in Ephesians 5 and child rearing in Ephesians 6 in the context of an ongoing discussion of spiritual warfare (Eph. 4:14-6:20). In his Patmos vision to the apostle John, Jesus sums up all of redemptive history in the image of a woman clothed with the sun, giving birth to a child who is to rule the nations. Crouched

to devour the man-child is a dragon, which pursues the woman and her child with fury. This dragon—identified as the serpent of Eden—despises the people of God precisely because from this people comes the Messiah. This is exactly the story first unveiled in the curse of the serpent in the oracle of God in the Edenic garden. Yes, the woman will experience the cursed tumult of birth pangs (Gen. 3:17; Rev. 12:2), yet she shall be saved through childbearing (1 Tim. 2:15). It is the offspring of the woman who will crush the skull of the snake-god (Gen. 3:15) and thus through his pierced flesh and spilled blood free the human race from the tyranny of the satanic accusation (Rev. 12:10).

It is little accident, then, that the serpent's strategies turn in the biblical story line to disrupting the shalom of the marital covenant, of the integrity of the sexual union, of the parent/child bond and of the church as the household of God. These are icons of the mystery of Christ, visible images of the gospel against which the demonic powers rage in fury. The destruction of those made in the image of God is an act of violence against the God of the image (Gen. 9:6), thus the satanic powers are murderous "from the beginning" (John 8:44). Likewise, the destruction of a Christ-imagining, gospel-announcing family order is as antichrist as desecrating the temple of God. This is why no generation of humanity is exempt from such warfare. The spiritual warfare aspect of the family is also why the Scripture places such a close tie between family break-

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down and occultism, with sexual immorality repeatedly tied to idolatry and vice versa. The Scripture repeatedly shows the people of God drawn away by the demonic through fertility rituals, cultic prostitution, child sacrifice and anointed kings and judges who are led to idolatry through sexual relationships with foreign women. The warfare of the serpent against the seed of Abraham cyclically involves the slaughter of children in the attempt to snuff out the messianic line (Exod. 1:1-22; Matt. 2:16-18). The mystery of the Christ/church archetype was revealed; it should be remembered, to a congregation in the shadow of the temple of a fertility goddess (Acts 19:21-41). In the Scripture, this cosmic rage against the family order is decidedly personal. The counsel of a father to a son in the Proverbs speaks of the pull toward a man destroying his family through adultery as one who is led along as an animal to the slaughter, right to the abode of the dead (Prov. 5-7). The foolish man is not just indulging his urges; he is listening to a voice (Prov. 9:13-18). In forbidding an “unequal yoke” between believers and unbelievers, the apostle Paul echoes the Old Testament tie between paganism and marriage to unbelievers. Paul does not refer to the implications of such a union, first of all, for the couple’s intimacy or the difficulties it would bring to child rearing. He asks instead, “What accord has Christ with Belial?” (2 Cor. 6:15). Paul speaks of the man who scandalizes the church and the culture by consorting with his father’s wife as though he were prey for a predator. He instructs the congregation to hand the man over, through the Kingdom authority granted by Christ, “to Satan for the destruction of the flesh” (1 Cor. 5:5). Paul commands married couples to have sex regularly. This is not just because sexuality bonds the couple together and increases intimacy—although that is certainly true. It is a matter of spiritual warfare, “so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Cor. 7:5).

Like every other aspect of the wreckage of Eden, the curse that tears asunder the family order is absorbed in Jesus who reconciles the universe “by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20). In living out the obedient trust in the Father that Adam and Israel refused, Jesus’ covenant righteousness included obedience to every aspect of the Law of God, including that of obedience to parents (Luke 2:51). Even as he drowns in his own blood, Jesus fulfills righteousness by doing precisely what the Pharisees rebelled against in their own families: providing for his mother’s care (John 19:26-27) even as the sword pierces her own soul just as the prophet foretold (Luke 2:35). Paul tells the church at Galatia that on the cross the sin-bearing Messiah “became a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13-14), referring to Deuteronomy 21 that a man hanged on a tree is cursed by God (Deut. 21:22-23). This text immediately follows a similar instruction from Moses that says:

“If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, and they shall say to the elders of the city, ‘This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst and all Israel shall hear, and fear” (Deut. 21:18-21).

Jesus indeed is charged by the elders of Israel with being a rebellious son, with being a glutton and a drunkard (Matt. 11:19). He is indeed taken outside the gates of the city where he bears the curse of God, not for his own rebellion (for there was none) but for that of Adam’s race.

And, after absorbing in his body the full measure of the curse against the Edenic revolt, after tasting death, Jesus is raised to announce to the women at his tomb, “Go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God, and your God’” (John 21:17). He establishes a community, a household, a family. And as the gospel goes forward through the ages and through the nations, he and his bride are fruitful, and they multiply.

And so we are not surprised when the fallen creation is repulsed by the family order. It pictures for them Christ, the light of the world, from whom the Satan-blinded cosmos retreats into the darkness (John 3:19). The powers will ask us to deify sex, in a hedonism unhinged from the creation purposes of God (Rom. 1:24-28). After all, what could be more cosmically mysterious than the ecstasy of orgasm? The powers will then ask us to reject gender, in a severing of the propagation of sex. After all, who needs “male and female he created them” when we have mastered human cloning? But we do not give up on a culture because they have twisted the family order. The darkness does not overcome the Light (John 1:5). At the root of all sin, including family chaos, there is not some insurmountable obstacle to the advance of the gospel. Ultimately, it is just the same old conspiracy of power-hungry demons and fallen humanity. In the spattered blood stains of Golgotha and the empty grave-clothes of the garden tomb, the demons are routed, humanity redeemed.

**If we have to choose
between Jesus and
Millennials, we
choose Jesus.**

THE CHURCH AND MARRIAGE: RECOVERING A CHRISTOCENTRIC VISION

If the family is under assault by demonic beings, then the ultimate antidote for hurting families is for churches to offer what frightens and disperses the demons: Jesus Christ. Southern Baptist churches believe the gospel, and we know we should evangelize the lost. Too often, however, we preach as though the gospel were for unbelievers only, as though Christ crucified is the initiatory truth of the Christian life, followed by a series of ethical principles and life-coaching. This is not the preaching of the prophets and apostles, and such preaching does little to disturb the powers-that-be. Southern Baptists know they should believe the Bible, and they should preach it. But Southern Baptist churches must present the Bible not as a series of disconnected proof-texts but as a coherent and holistic vision centered on the unveiled mystery of Jesus Christ. There is no passage in the Old or

New Testaments that is not about Jesus Christ and his gospel, because there is no aspect of reality that is not, ultimately, about God's goal for creation in Jesus Christ through the gospel.

Southern Baptist church members should not just see the commands of Scripture or the positive and negative examples of Scripture. Instead, they should see how their small story lines (including their family lives) fit in the overall story line of Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:28-29). Southern Baptist husbands and wives, and children and young adults, should see modeled constantly from the pulpit how to find their identity in Christ, how to be freed from condemnation through the triumph of Christ and how to walk with him in his Spirit (Rom. 8:1-8) towards a cosmic inheritance that demonstrates the paltriness of the satanic offers of the kingdoms of self-satisfaction, self-vindication or self-exaltation (Matt. 4:1-11).

We must ask ourselves honestly whether the divorce culture and the adultery crisis in our churches have not been fueled in part by our own preaching. When we reduce marriage to endless sermon series on "Putting the Sizzle Back in Your Spouse" and "Ten Tips for Couples for a Hotter, Holier Romance," are we not contributing to the very same emphasis on hormonally-driven acquisitiveness as the culture, rather than on the model of a Christ who displays not just affection but fidelity to his bride? Is it any wonder, then, that so many of our men and women—who have professed to believe the gospel—are willing to abandon their spouses and children when they find a new "soul-mate"? Could it be, at least in part because they felt the thrill of the new, the same kind of "spark" their car-radio pop songs and their pastor's marriage workshops tell them they always should feel when they are in love?

This means that family issues must be seen not as merely "moral" issues but gospel issues—because they have everything to do with

God's announcement of Christ to the powers. Our evangelism training cannot stop with teaching our church members how to walk through a tract with a neighbor. It must also include how to preach the gospel through kept wedding vows and disciplined children. It does not matter how insistently we proclaim eternal security; when those growing up in our churches see the icon of the union of Jesus and his church being destroyed week by week after divorce, they are hearing a more compelling message. With our pews laden down with worshippers seeking a counterfeit mystery, an alternative gospel, is it not time that Southern Baptists learned once again to address the "felt needs" of our people by presenting a captivating, imaginative, and biblical portrayal of the one who is both their deepest longing and their scariest fear: Jesus Christ?

Only regenerate church communities, outposts of the Kingdom of Christ, can provide the alternative vision of the family we so desperately need. The Apostle Paul reveals that pastors must have well-ordered households since "if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church" (1 Tim. 3:5)? But the reverse is also true. If one cannot care for God's church, then how can he manage his own household? The church, after all, is "the household of God," which is also to be well ordered (1 Tim. 3:15). How can churches castigate the outside culture for believing the family structure is socially malleable when we fail in our ecclesial households to distinguish between those who are brothers and sisters, and those who are not (Matt. 18:15; 1 Cor. 5:11)?

The loss of the disciplined church is especially tragic in the wake of the scandal within the family structure within our own churches. What would happen if Southern Baptist churches, en masse, began to involve the entire church household in a marriage in crisis? What would happen if rather than quietly allowing a divorcing man to join

a different Sunday school class with his new wife, we called him to repentance, publicly, with the authority of Christ? What would happen if we, on the first word of accusation about spousal abuse, handed the unrepentant pugilist over to Satan spiritually for the destruction of the flesh (1 Cor. 5:5) and over to Caesar legally for the avenging of wrongdoing (Rom. 13:4)? What would happen if single mothers in our communities were treated as widows, cared for by the entire congregation spiritually, socially, and, where needed, economically?

Perhaps if such churches were more common, we would have a decreasing need for parachurch organizations to train our people how to love their spouses and discipline their children because our people would see such on display every Lord's Day in the assembly of Christ.

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Christ/church union;
a union in which... Jesus
is inseparable from his
bride, a bride he protects,
provides for, leads,
disciples and sanctifies.**

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE: SHOULD WE GIVE UP?

From time to time we hear some telling us that evangelical Christianity must retool our sexual ethic if we're ever going to reach the next generation. Some say that Millennials, particularly, are leaving the church because of our "obsession" with sexual morality. The next generation needs a more flexible ethic, they say, on premarital sex, homosexuality, and so on. We'll either adapt, the line goes, or we'll die.

This argument is hardly new. In the early 20th century, this was precisely the rhetoric used by liberal Protestant Harry Emerson Fosdick and his co-laborers. Fosdick was concerned, he said, for the future of Christianity, and if the church was to have a future we would have to get over our obsession with virginity. By that, Fosdick didn't mean the virginity of single Christians but the virginity of our Lord's mother. The younger generation wanted to be Christian, the progressives told their contemporaries, but they couldn't accept outmoded ideas of the miraculous, such as the virgin birth of Christ. What the liberals missed is that such miracles didn't become hard

to believe with the onset of the modern age. They always had been hard to believe from the beginning.

Joseph's reaction to Mary's announcement of her pregnancy, after all, wasn't, "Well, it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas." He assumed that she had been sexually unfaithful. Why? Because he and his contemporaries knew how people get pregnant. But the Christian message isn't burdened down by the miraculous. It's inextricably linked to it. A virgin woman conceives. The lame walk. The blind see. A dead man is resurrected, ascends to heaven and sends the Spirit. The universe's ruler is on his way to judge the living and the dead. Those who do away with such things are left with what J. Gresham Machen rightly identified as a different religion, a religion as disconnected from global Christianity as the made-up religion of Wicca is from the actual Druids of old.

The same is true with a Christian sexual ethic. Sexual morality didn't become difficult with the onset of the sexual revolution. It always has been. Walking away from our own lordship, or from the tyranny of our desires, has always been a narrow way. The rich young ruler wanted a religion that would promise him his best life now, extended out into eternity. But Jesus knew that such an existence isn't life at all, just the zombie corpse of the way of the flesh. He came to give us something else, to join us to his own life.

If we withhold what our faith teaches about a theology of the body, of marriage, of what it means to be created male and female, we will

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breed nothing but cynicism from those who will rightly conclude that we see them not as sinners in need of good news but as a marketing niche to be exploited by telling them what they want to hear.

You can't grow a Christian church by being sub-Christian. That's why there are no booming mainline church-planting movements. But even if it "worked" to negotiate away sexual morality for church growth, we wouldn't do it. We can only reach Millennials, and anyone else, by reaching them with the gospel, good news for repentant sinners through the shed blood and empty tomb of Jesus Christ.

If we have to choose between Millennials and Jesus, we choose Jesus. Some think the Christian sexual ethic is akin to our congregation's constitution and by-laws, that it can be amended by a two-thirds vote. But this isn't the case. Sexuality isn't ancillary to the gospel but is itself an embodied icon of the gospel, pointing us to the union of Christ and his church (Eph. 5:29-32).

This is why the Bible speaks of sexual immorality as having profound spiritual consequences (1 Cor. 6:17-20), ultimately leading, if not repented of, to exile from the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Sexual immorality isn't simply a matter of neurons firing. A Christian view of reality means that the body is a temple, set apart to be a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. Sexual immorality isn't just bad for us (although it is); it's also an act of desecrating a holy place. There's little surprise then that the Jerusalem Council, while not placing the burden of the Mosaic ceremonial law on the new Gentile believers, did decree that the new brothers and sisters in Christ must flee sexual immorality (Acts 15:20). In a world of concubines and temple prostitutes and public pornography, a Christian sexual ethic was just as freakish and counter-cultural in the first-century Greco-Roman world as it is today, if not more so.

But the apostles maintained the pattern of sound words they were given because to do anything else would be to replace King Jesus with

another lord, and to preach “peace” where there is still war, “Spirit” where there is still flesh. They wouldn’t do it, and neither should we. Virgin births and empty tombs are hard to believe. Fidelity and chastity are hard to live. That’s why we don’t have a natural gospel but a supernatural one. And that’s why Jesus isn’t a means to where we want to go. He’s a voice calling us to where we don’t, left to ourselves, want to go: the way of the cross. If we want to reach the next generation, they must hear from us a Galilean voice saying, “Come, follow me.” Anything less is just more marketing for an already well-marketed Broad Way. And the end thereof is death.

**We need to be explicit
gospel people in the call
to repentance and in the
offer of mercy.**

TOUGH QUESTIONS: MARRIAGE AND THE FUTURE

So what does the future of marriage mean for church ministry? This new reality raises questions about faithful Christian ministry in this age:

1. How should same-sex marriage change the church's witness?

The conversation about marriage gives the church the opportunity to point to a different word, the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4).

In one sense, nothing has changed. Jesus of Nazareth is still alive. He is calling the cosmos toward his Kingdom, and he will ultimately be Lord indeed. Regardless of what happens with marriage, the gospel doesn't need "family values" to flourish. In fact, it often thrives when it is in sharp contrast to the cultures around it. That's why the gospel rocketed out of the first century from places such as Ephesus and Philippi and Corinth and Rome, which were hardly Mayberry.

In another sense, though, the marginalization of conjugal marriage in American culture has profound implications for our gospel witness. First of all, marriage isn't incidental to gospel preaching. There's a reason why persons don't split apart like amoebas. We were all conceived in the union between a man and a woman. Beyond the natural reality, the gospel tells us there's a cosmic mystery (Eph. 5:32). God designed the one-flesh union of marriage as an embedded icon of the union between Christ and his church. Marriage and sexuality, among the most powerful pulls in human existence, are designed to train humanity to recognize, in the fullness of time, what it means for Jesus to be one with his church, as a head with a body.

Regrettably, same-sex marriage is on the march, see especially in recent court decisions, and is headed to your community, regardless of whether you are sitting where I am right now, on Capitol Hill, or in a rural hamlet in southwest Georgia or eastern Idaho. This is an opportunity for gospel witness. For a long time in American culture, we've acted as though we could assume marriage. Even people from what were once called "broken homes" could watch stable marriages on television or movies. Boys and girls mostly assumed they had a wedding in their futures. As marriage is redefined, these assumptions will change. Let's not wring our hands about that. This gives Christian churches the opportunity to do what Jesus called us to do with our marriages in the first place: to serve as a light in a dark place.

For too long, we've acted as though the officers of Christ's church were Justices of the Peace, marrying people who have no accountability to the church, and in many cases were forbidden by Scripture to marry. Just because we don't have two brides or two grooms in front of us, that doesn't mean we've been holding to biblical marriage. The increased attention to the question of marriage also gives us the opportunity to love our gay and lesbian neighbors as Jesus does.

Some will capitulate on a Christian sexual ethic. There are always those professional “dissidents” who make a living espousing mainline Protestant shibboleths to an evangelical market. But the church will stand, and that means the gospel Jesus has handed down through the millennia. As we stand with conviction, we don’t look at our gay and lesbian neighbors as our enemies. They are not. They are, like all of us, seeking a way that seems right to them. If we believe marriage is as resilient as Jesus says it is (Mark 10:6-9), it cannot be eradicated by a vote of justices or a vote of a state legislature. Some will be disappointed by what they thought would answer their quest for meaning. Will our churches be ready to answer?

This also means we must change the way we preach. Those with same-sex attractions, who follow Christ, will be walking away from what their families and friends want for them: wedding cake and married life and the American Dream. Following Jesus will mean taking up a cross and following a hard narrow way. It always does.

If we’re going to preach that sort of gospel, we must make it clear that this cross-bearing self-denial isn’t just for homosexually tempted Christians. It is for all of us, because that’s what the gospel is. If your church has been preaching the American Dream, with eternal life at the end and Jesus as the means you use to get all that, you don’t have a gospel that can reach your gay and lesbian neighbors—or anyone else for that matter.

Same-sex marriage is headed for your community. This is no time for fear or outrage or politicizing. It’s a time for forgiven sinners, like us, to do what the people of Christ have always done. It’s time for us to point beyond our family values and our culture wars to the cross of Christ as we say: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

And that’s good news.

2. How should you explain same-sex marriage to your children?

First of all, you should, I think, talk to your children about this. No matter how you shelter your family, keeping your children from knowing about the contested questions about marriage would take a “Truman Show”-level choreography of their lives. That’s not realistic, nor is it particularly Christian.

The Bible isn’t nearly as antiseptic as Christians sometimes pretend to be, and it certainly doesn’t shirk back from addressing all the complexities of human life. If we are discipling our children, let’s apply the Scriptures to all of life. If we refuse to talk to our children about some issue that is clearly before them, our children will assume we are unequipped to speak to it, and they’ll eventually search out a worldview that will.

This doesn’t mean that we rattle our children with information they aren’t developmentally ready to process. But we know how to navigate that already. We talk, for instance, about marriage itself, and we give age-appropriate answers to the “Where do babies come from?” query. The same is true here. There is no need to inform small children about all the sexual possibilities in graphic detail in order to get across that Jesus calls us to live as husbands and wives with fidelity and permanence and complementarity. Some parents believe that teaching their children the controversies about same-sex marriage will promote homosexuality. Christians and non-Christians can agree that sexual orientation doesn’t work that way. Moreover, the exact opposite is true. If you don’t teach your children about a Christian way of viewing the challenges to a Christian sexual ethic, the ambient culture will fill in your silence with answers of its own.

You can tell your children that people in American culture disagree about what marriage is. You can explain to them what the Bible teaches, from Genesis to Jesus to the apostles, about a man and a woman

becoming one flesh. You can explain that as Christians we believe this marital relationship is different than other relationships we have. You can then tell them that some people have relationships they want to be seen as marriages, and that the Supreme Court is addressing that.

You can then explain that you love your neighbors who disagree with you on this. You agree that they ought to be free from mistreatment or harassment. But the church believes government can't define or redefine marriage, but can only recognize what God created and placed in creation. Explain why you think mothers and fathers are different, and why those differences are good. Find examples in your own family of how those differences work together for the common good of the household, and point to examples in Scripture of the same.

Don't ridicule or express hostility toward those who disagree. You might have gay or lesbian family members; be sure to express your love for them to your children, even as you say that you disagree about God's design for marriage. You probably have already had to do that with family members or friends who are divorced or cohabiting or some other situation that falls short of a Christian sexual ethic. If your children see outrage in you, rather than a measured and Christlike biblical conviction, they eventually will classify your convictions here in the same category as your clueless opinions about "kids these days and their loud music."

The issues at stake are more important than that. Marriage isn't ultimately about living arrangements or political structures, but about the gospel. When your children ask about the Supreme Court, be loving and winsome and honest and convictional and kind.

3. Should churches stop performing civil marriages?

No, not yet. Marriage is, of course, more than a matter of statecraft. That's the reason we deny that the state can, for instance, call

marriages into being without creational essentials such as sexual complementarity. Marriage is grounded in the natural order itself (Gen. 2:21–23) and points beyond nature to the gospel mystery that stands behind and makes sense of the cosmos (Eph. 5:31–32).

Churches should join together only those who meet the creational criteria for marriage. A church that accommodates itself to the sexual revolution is no longer a church of Jesus Christ. Moreover, churches should only marry those who are accountable to the church and to the gathered witnesses, and who are held to their vows. The marrying parson who stands where the wedding coordinator tells him to, reads his script and signs the paperwork for whatever couple shows up is a disgraceful hireling and ought to do an honest day's work as a justice of the peace rather than as a steward of the mysteries of God.

When a congregation certifies a biblically married couple to be also civilly married, the congregation is not affirming the state's definition of marriage. Instead, the church is witnessing to the state's role in recognizing marriage as something that stands before and is foundational to society. We are bearing witness to the fact that these unions are the business of the larger society in ways other unions aren't.

We are witnessing that the state has no business in recreating marriage, but the state does have a responsibility to safeguard children, by holding mothers and fathers to their vows to each other and to the next generation. In this sense, we are acting much as Jesus did when he was asked about the payment of the temple tax. Jesus believed himself and his disciples to be heirs of the Kingdom and thus free from this obligation. Nonetheless, he paid the half-shekel "so as not to give offense to them" (Matt. 17:27).

If the state ever attempts to force us to call marriage that which is not marriage in our churches and ceremonies, let's obey God, even if that means we sing our wedding hymns in the prison block. But, for

now, by registering gospel-qualified unions as civil marriages and not officiating at unions that not gospel-qualified, we call the government to its responsibility even as we call attention to its limits. We gladly render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar, but the image imprinted on the marriage union isn't the union of Caesar and his court, but of Christ and his church.

4. What about the conscience of Christian cake-bakers, photographers and other creatives?

There are really two different questions here. First, we are asking how a Christian should think about whether to use his creative gifts in a way that might, he believes, celebrate something he believes will result in eternal harm to others. Secondly, we are asking if the state should compel a Christian to violate his or her conscience by lending personal creative gifts for a marriage he or she opposes.

Let me tackle the first question. I would say that the decisions you'll make, as a Christian, will correspond often with the Corinthian dilemma of whether to eat meat that had been offered to idols (1 Cor. 8). The Apostle Paul says, first of all, that the idols don't represent real gods (1 Cor. 8:4), in the same way that you would argue that a wedding without a bride or a groom isn't really a marriage. If something's put before you, the apostle writes, eat it to the glory of God, no questions asked.

But, the apostle says, if the food is advertised as sacrificed to idols, abstain from it for the sake of the consciences of those around you (1 Cor. 8:7-9). This is the difference between investigating a doughnut shop owner's buying habits before eating there and stopping in for doughnuts when the sign out front flashes: "Eat here and support our owner's cocaine and prostitutes habit." The photographer or baker or other artist has, in most cases, no ability or authority to find out the sorts

of things a pastor or church elders would about a marrying couple. Most evangelical Christians, this one included, believe there are circumstances in which it is biblically moral for a divorced person to remarry. And all Christians—regardless of what we think about a church’s responsibility—think that marriages between otherwise qualified unbelieving men and women are good things, grounded in a creation ordinance.

You need not investigate, for instance as a wedding photographer, whether the wedding you are photographing is Christ-honoring. It’s possible, of course, that the man and woman who’ve contracted with a wedding singer are just marrying to get a green card. It’s possible that they don’t plan to be faithful to one another. It’s possible that she’s already married to three unless the photographer has a reason to think this, he needn’t hire a private investigator or ask for birth certificates and court papers to make sure it’s not. But when there is an obvious deviation from the biblical reality, sacrifice the business for conscience, your own and those of the ones in your orbit who would be confused. It’s always worth asking the question of whether and when your creative contribution might imply, “Hath God said . . .?” (Gen. 3:1)

In the case of a same-sex marriage, the marriage is obviously wrong, in every case. There are no circumstances in which a man and a man or a woman and a woman can be morally involved in a sexual union. That said, don’t be mean. The couple asking you to do this wedding aren’t your enemies (Eph. 6:12). They are made in the image of God and are loved by him, and so should be loved by us. As orthodox Christians we don’t believe this leads to the happiness they’re looking for, but we must stand with kindness as well as with conviction. Tell the couple that you wish them well, but that you have beliefs about marriage that won’t allow your conscience to participate in this way. Thank them for asking you but recommend a photographer who can click away with a clear conscience.

Now let me tackle the second question. Should the state compel individuals to lend their creative gifts in an implicit endorsement of a union with which they disagree? The state should never coerce persons through fines and penalties and licenses to use their creative gifts to support weddings they believe to be sinful.

This is broader than just homosexuality. Should a Christian (or Muslim or Orthodox Jewish or feminist New Age) web designer be compelled to develop a site platform for a legal pornography company? I don't want wedding singers forced to use their lyrics and voices to tell us how great it is that Herod and Herodias or Henry VIII and fill-in-the-blank wife's name are soul-mates.

We must be very diligent about making sure we wind up with the kind of public square that allows the sort of pluralism where people can disagree on these sorts of issues without having the state coming in and saying you can have your cake and eat it too, because you have to be forced to bake and to use your creative talents; you have to be forced to arrange those flowers; you have to be forced to photograph; you have to be forced to write the script. I do not think that the state ought to come in and pave over the conscience of that person. That's not the sort of republic that many people fought and bled for. And more importantly, the Scripture tells us that's not what God created in his image when he created the conscience to be free.

5. Why should Christians continue to fight for religious liberty?

When it comes to religious liberty, many churches are silent, and I think there are a couple of reasons for that. The first is that churches have become accustomed to the American constitutional guarantee of religious liberty, such that they do not perceive an immediate threat. Congregations don't recognize that most threats to religious liberty do not come suddenly

with the shock and awe of a gun barrel. Most violations of religious liberty come first with the insidious slowness of a bureaucrat's pen. Secondly, I think many congregations have become burned over by hysterical claims of anti-Christian bias in every arena of life by political activists.

When genuine religious liberty threats emerge, as we are facing now in a way I believe unprecedented since the founding era, many Christians see this as simply the same thing they were hearing before with the 'war on Christmas' and so forth. We must do a better job educating pastors and church leaders on how religious liberty is not simply a matter for constitutional scholars and Washington activists but birth-right granted by God which must be guarded by all of us.

The early Baptists were insistent that this is religious liberty not just for themselves, but for everyone, because there's a theological grounding for that. The early Baptists were saying, "Because there won't be a government bureaucrat standing with a soul at the Judgment Seat—that means that there shouldn't be a government bureaucrat between God and the soul and the conscience." And so they were insistent that religious liberty isn't about carving protections for just us, it's about maintaining liberty for everyone. And that's one of the reasons why one of the burdens that I have is to make sure that we have guaranteed freedom for everyone, not simply for evangelicals, not simply for Christians, but for all people.

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