

Meeting the Challenges of 21st Century Culture

The challenge of the redefinition of marriage (How the culture sees sexual conduct)

Intro: As we continue to think about meeting the challenges of 21st century culture, we surely should include the challenge of the redefinition of marriage.

Most of us could have never imagined a generation ago that the highest court of our land would overrule the majority of the population and the moral principles of our founding fathers to make same-sex marriage legal throughout the United States. This was done in disregard of the original intent of the framers of both state and federal constitutions.

For example, the Mass. Supreme Court decreed that homosexuals should have the right to marry; yet totally ignored the fact that the framers of that constitution had also enacted in their state laws a prohibition against homosexual acts.

The logic with which they allowed homosexual marriages could also in the same way allow for polygamy, incestuous relationships, bisexual relationships, marriages to children. In fact this was one of the points made in the dissenting position of the minority justices of the Supreme Court.

In our previous lesson I demonstrated the shift in world view that has taken place in our culture. This shift from a theistic to secularist world view resulted in a changed view of morality. We saw four principles of the secularist world view:

- Matter/energy is the ultimate reality.
- Humans are autonomous and self-actualizing.
- All moral values are relative, not absolute.
- Human law abrogates and replaces divine law.

This shift in world view leads to a drastically different standard in morality and ethics. Consider...

The Humanist approach to ethics

*This point of view is eloquently expressed in the **Humanist Manifest II of 1973:***

...we affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human needs and interest. To deny this distorts the whole basis of life. Human life has meaning because we create and develop our futures. Happiness and the creative realization of human needs and desires, individually and in shared enjoyment, are continuous themes of humanism. We strive for the good life, here and now. The goal is to pursue life's enrichment despite debasing forces.... Reason and intelligence are the most effective instruments that humankind possesses. There is no substitute: neither faith nor passion suffices in itself. The controlled use of scientific

methods, which have transformed the natural and social sciences since the Renaissance, must be extended further in the solution of human problems (Humanist Manifesto II, 1973, pp. 17-18).

Not surprisingly this secularist approach to morality and ethics would lead to a much more liberal view toward marriage and sexuality.

In the area of sexuality, we believe that intolerant attitudes, often cultivated by orthodox religions and puritanical cultures, unduly repress sexual conduct. The right to birth control, abortion, and divorce should be recognized. While we do not approve of exploitive, denigrating forms of sexual expression, neither do we wish to prohibit, by law or social sanction, sexual behavior between consenting adults. The many varieties of sexual exploration should not in themselves be considered "evil." Without countenancing mindless permissiveness or unbridled promiscuity, a civilized society should be a tolerant one. Short of harming others or compelling them to do likewise, individuals should be permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their lifestyles as they desire. We wish to cultivate the development of a responsible attitude toward sexuality, in which humans are not exploited as sexual objects and in which intimacy, sensitivity, respect and honesty in interpersonal relations are encouraged. Moral education for children and adults is an important way of developing awareness and sexual maturity (Humanist Manifesto II, 1973, pp. 18-19).

This quote makes clear that the restrictions of religious faith should be removed; and people should be given the liberty to pursue whatever sexual relationships they want as long as there is adult consent. Clearly this shift would have a profound influence on marriage and sexuality as ordained by God. So let's start with God's creational mandates.

Marriage was ordained and defined by God from the beginning of creation (A survey of Biblical teaching).

Human sexuality is God's creation.

"And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." (Genesis 1:27)

Originally God defined the relationship in terms of a man and a woman being joined together in a life-long committed relationship

"For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24)

This one-flesh relationship was supported by prohibitions against adultery, the possession of another man's wife or another woman's husband (Ex. 20:14)

And though there was an accommodation to the cultural custom of polygamy, even these relationships were guarded by the same laws concerning adultery.

To counter balance this, there were laws that required those in marriage to provide for the needs of a husband or wife and not deprive them of their marital rights (Ex. 22:10-11).

Those found to be sexually active before marriage were required to marry (Ex. 22:16).

Only the hardness of men's hearts could justify the Law's permission to put a wife away for her protection and that with the provision that the divorcing husband could never take her back as his wife again (Deut. 24:1-4)

Jesus taught that God's original intention for marriage would be the law of His kingdom.

"And He answered and said, "Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, 'FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? "Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. "' (Matthew 19:4-6)

His law would not only remove the practice of polygamy; but also the Mosaic toleration of divorce. Jesus teaching pronounced the divorce of a spouse and remarriage to another as resulting in the committing of adultery except in cases of marital unfaithfulness (Mt. 5:32; 19:9)

His teaching upheld God's laws concerning unlawful sexual acts such as incestuous relationships, relationships involving those not married, relationships with the spouse of another, and homosexual relationships.

Thus, the teaching of Jesus underscores two important truths:

A divinely sanctioned marriage consists of a man and woman who enter a covenant to live together for life.

Sexual relationships outside a divinely-sanctioned marriage are sinful.

The recent redefinition of marriage could be seen as just another step in the ongoing erosion of respect for God's order.

Clearly marriage as an institution has lost the respectability that God's word gives it.

In a 2010 Pew Research Poll, 44% of 18- to 29-year-old Americans believe marriage is becoming obsolete.

In 1960, 72 percent of American adults were married. In 2011, 51 percent were married. If the trend continues, the number of married adults will become a national minority in the next few years.

We can see several contributing factors to that lost respectability.

The common acceptance of people "living together" without marriage.

In the previously cited poll: "About 29 percent of children under 18 now live with a parent or parents who either are divorced or never married.

Broken down further, six percent of those kids have parents who are live-in couples who never got married.

What this indicates is that younger people are waiting much longer to get married (the median age is 26-28); but they are living with someone and engaged in sexual activity and having children in those years prior to getting married.

The easy availability of divorce

Though divorce is still not an easy process to go through, the social stigma attached to divorce has been lessened greatly.

Social scientists now estimate that 42-45% of all people marrying today will get a divorce.

The problem of adultery (marital unfaithfulness)

The General Social Survey conducted by the University of Chicago has indicated that consistently 10% of married people admit being unfaithful to their spouse (12% men, 7% women).

That of course causes onlookers to be skeptical of marriage.

The widespread availability of pornography

We only have to remember the words of the Lord in Mt. 5: *You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.*" (Matthew 5:27-28)

The purveyor of pornography provides for this very thing and the viewer of pornography engages in what Jesus called the committing of adultery in the heart.

It is a terrible A women who must bear children, work hard day by day fulfilling her role as a mother and wife, must experience the natural changes of age is having to compete with a fantasy model who is

The practice of homosexuality and same sex marriages simply continue the erosion of respect for marriage that has been going on for decades.

Homosexual behavior is itself sinful according to the teaching of Scripture.

A marriage of two men or two women is not divinely sanctioned and therefore sinful.

How we can meet the challenge

Though unpopular we must uphold God's definition of marriage and His laws concerning sexual conduct in relation to it.

We must exemplify in our marriages these principles of permanence, commitment, and love as the Lord has taught them.

We must stress these truths to our children from an early age.

Conclusion: Everyone knows that the home is the basic building block of society and civilization. When God's order for marriage and family is removed the very fabric of society is torn apart. We must do all in our power to keep that from happening.