

Sacredness Of Marriage

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It is a privilege to be here today, as well as to watch the festivities last night, and I wonder: How many more years?

Let none of us deceive ourselves. The time of God's wrath upon this world is drawing closer with each passing day. I say that because, even with my limited view of the world, I can see the social fabric—the social order—that formed taking God into consideration, now being turned upside down against the values I grew up with.

One clear example of this is marriage and its sacredness. The old ways are being replaced by the new. And, in the case of marriage and family, the new is not looking so good to me.

Psalm 94 asks a question concerning God's involvement with worldly governments who decree laws that shape our social fabric.

Psalm 94:20 Shall the throne of iniquity which devises evil by law, have fellowship with You?"

Of course we know the answer to that.

In the state of California today, there is a ballot initiative to try and declare marriage as being only between a man and a woman. In the last popular poll taken before the Feast this year, it is finding disfavor with the majority of voters and is likely to fail. [Editors note: It did not fail, it passed.] It appears that the institution of marriage by the majority is no longer considered a sacred covenant between a man and a woman and God, but a contract between any two persons wanting legal rights. And so, it is becoming a sanctioned fornication of men with men, and women with women, with the state throwing a legal covering over it calling it a civil marriage to hide its wickedness.

I do not believe God has been caught off guard with this, but I do believe He is disgusted with it.

I remember watching a World Tomorrow telecast where Mr. Armstrong said that he did not need the newspapers to show him where things were headed. The Bible is just as current as today's headlines, and it foretells future events as if they were written today.

In the portion of Paul's letter to the Romans concerning the ungodly is just such an example. I see Paul's words in Romans 1 being played out openly in our daily news as marriage loses its traditional value in this society.

Turn to Romans 1 and we will see Paul's message to the saints—you and I. It is just as timely today, if not more so, than when it was written.

There are 14 verses that describe this generation we are living in—how men have moved from seeking God's will and supplanted it with gross idolatry, and how they have become lovers of themselves, exalting the creation and their desires over the Creator.

Satan on the prowl coupled with human nature is a bad mix. And, it appears he has the marriage covenant in his cross hairs.

Romans 1:18-22 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and [Divinity], so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.

Romans 1:24-32 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and

worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

Marriage and family are the foundations for any healthy society, and these two bedrocks of civilization are slowly being destroyed before our very eyes. I cannot help but think that when these foundations that God formed in righteousness are weakened further, it is in preparation for a different foundation—a foundation that will be formed in unrighteousness, and supports the coming of the lawless one, the son of perdition, spoken of in II Thessalonians 2.

The two foundations—marriage and family—that are under so much pressure today to change from traditional values, were undefiled when they were given as a gift to mankind before sin had entered the garden.

Genesis 2:18 And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

In this verse God puts into place the first social foundation for mankind, what we call the family, or family government. Then in verse 24 God sanctifies Adam's relationship with Eve by declaring that two would be joined together as one flesh, that a man and his wife should leave mother and father, cling to each other, and become their own family unit.

It shows that marriage was dignified and defined by God as a joining of one man and one woman.

But why did God do it this way? There is a reason.

God could have just kept on creating one man after another to populate the earth. It was not likely He was going to run out of the dust of the earth. But there is a reason He made them male and female.

Malachi shows us a major reason why God created man and women to become one flesh. Malachi also shows that God was also upset with Israel for allowing easy divorce laws for putting away of their wives. And in verse 11, He says that by doing so, Judah had profaned the holy institution of marriage that God so dearly loves.

Malachi 2:14-16 Yet you say, "For what reason [are you angry]?" Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks Godly [children] offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence," says the LORD of hosts. . . .

For this reason—godly children—God made them male and female. And within the structure of a proper married family life, strong in unity and free from worries of separation, it would produce the best results.

We can also see a second reason why God made them male and female. With the blessing of children God has bestowed on mankind another gift—that of allowing parents to become co-partners with God in His creative works. God has elevated man as a partner in the reproductive process that will one day bring many Sons into the family of God.

This realization places families and marriage far above what most in the world considers them to be. It elevates marriage and family to a moral level unrecognizable in this world of sin.

The wisdom and depths of love that God has for mankind is beyond me to know fully, but I do see marriage and family as being very prominent in God's plan. And, any changes to the divine structure are an affront to God and His plan. Marriage is of divine origin and any changes to it are nothing less than man's rebellion against his Creator.

Many Californians today are currently in a state of rebellion. As Paul said in Romans 1, they profess to be wise, but have become fools who are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness.

The instruction Christ gave us in Matthew 5 during His Sermon on the Mount are plain for all to see, and were exactly the same He gave to His servant Moses for Israel. Both teach us that marriage is permanent with ties so binding that they can only be broken by death, or something worse—moral abandonment by either husband or wife, or both—what we call adultery.

The Pharisees tested our Lord on this point, but His response left no doubt on how binding the institution of marriage is, and that from the beginning of creation the standard had been set. I will read His reply to them:

Matthew 19:4-6 And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

Because proper marriage is a creation of God, it carries a sense of sacredness with it that no man-devised institution will ever have. This world is certainly doing away with the sanctity of marriage to exchange for its complete opposite, the profane. But this secular approach will never produce a healthy society.

And for us, marriage carries an even greater significance. God has elevated marriage beyond its original starting point when He began to use it as a symbol for the relationship between Christ and His church, and also God with the nation Israel. Both the Old and New Testament attest to this, with Christ represented as the Husband, or Bridegroom, and the church, or Israel, as either His wife, or bride.

We can see, then, that besides the importance of marriage to the physical side of God's creation, its importance to God's spiritual purposes cannot be understated.

Ezekiel 16:8, Jeremiah 31:14, and Isaiah 54:5 are three Old Testament examples showing God as Husband to ancient Israel. And Paul says:

II Corinthians 11:2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

All of us look forward to the day when Christ comes to collect His bride, and all of us also should be using our time wisely in preparation for that event.

I remember back about two years ago when my daughter was preparing for her wedding. Of how many different things she worked so hard on in getting prepared for her wedding. So many hours in doing invitations, planning meals, photographer, clothing, silverware and dishes, cake, music—the list seemed endless. And the work involved the whole family in her arrangements. Can those who are preparing as the bride of Christ be any less busy? If marriage is important to Him, truly it has great significance with each of us.

Consider this: Our baptism into the Body of Christ was and is much more than being a part of His physical church. It was just as much a betrothal of marriage, and holds for us just as much intimacy in the relationship, as any betrothal between men and women.

Paul draws a significant word picture between wives and husbands, and between Christ and His church, and sets out before us the proper order for success not only for physical marriage but spiritual as well.

Notice, as we go through the next section, the parallels between husbands and wives, and Christ and His church. The physical and the spiritual are both rooted in the love God has for the marriage covenant. And just as a man and a woman are joined as one flesh, so too is Christ and His church joined.

Ephesians 5:22-33 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Those in the world—who would ridicule the institution of a proper marriage and declare it old fashioned and unnecessary for modern society, and who work to put forward lax divorce laws and have caused the binding claims of marriage to be a trivial thing that can be put aside—are themselves workers of iniquity. Proper marriage and families are the bedrock for all societies, and when these are torn down, or entered into lightly, the fate of a nation toward self-destruction cannot be many years away.

Rome fell not because great armies came against her, but because their marriage and family was undermined as divorce became common. Her foundation was broken.

America is swiftly following in her footsteps with about half of all marriages today ending in divorce, tearing families apart. As long as men and women stay out of compliance with God's laws, this trend toward national ruin within marriage will continue.

God in His wisdom has placed no less than three of the Ten Commandments directly involved in strengthening the family and marriages. And all of God's commands, if followed, will work to strengthen man's relationship with God and fellow man, but these three, I feel, are aimed directly toward the preservation of keeping the sacred bond between married couples and families secure. When we consider any of His commands, we find they are broad in scope. And, they were not put in place for our physical relationships only, but our spiritual one with Christ as well.

The fifth, seventh, and tenth I see as perfect in preserving unity of the family and the sacredness of marriage when followed by mankind.

The fifth commandment speaks directly to parents and children, and lays the foundation of responsibility that each have to one another. When children follow the command to be submissive to their parents, and parents work to provide a loving environment to nurture the minds of their children toward lawful living and a respect for divine law, and are willing to chastise them when needed and no more, society and the children become the direct beneficiaries of this command. Home government is the cornerstone of national government, and when the home is right, so follows the social structure.

When marriage and family unity are held in high esteem and a fear of tearing down God's standards are instilled, it will work to help keep sin in check. When parents pattern their childrearing after God, as shown in Hebrews 12:5-11, righteousness will follow.

Hebrews 12:11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

The seventh commandment—forbidding adultery—stands directly against anyone who would defile the sanctity of the marriage covenant through sexual sins. Adultery is unfaithfulness to the marriage relationship by either husband or wife. It is probably the most dishonest act against the binding contract of the marriage relationship and the betrayal of a most sacred trust. Not only a sin against one's companion, but as Paul teaches in I Corinthians 6:18, it is a sin against your own flesh.

Many marriages and families have been destroyed by the breaking of this commandment. Marriage can stand against many adversities from without, but this sin destroys it from within, and few if any marriages can recover from such an entanglement.

Christ said in Matthew 5 that it comes from the heart, and that adultery was more than an outward action, but a lust that comes from within us. Sexual acts, or even just the desire for such outside of the marriage covenant is a breaking of this command. Christ has taught us how broad the law is, and that it includes any sexual behavior outside of marriage, and declared it sin. In other words, if the desire is there, but only the opportunity has kept one from this sin, the law has still been broken.

So hurtful to the sacredness of marriage is the breaking of this command that it was the only reason given in Christ's response to the Pharisees in Matthew 19 that allowed divorce.

The tenth commandment, like the seventh, looks to place a defense against anyone who would try and get between a man and his wife. Deuteronomy 5:21 says it simply and forcefully, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife."

This, of course, includes the coveting of your neighbor's husband as well, so it includes all who would work to destroy another's marriage. The breaking of this commandment, like the seventh, also begins in the heart, and is likely the precursor for almost all other sins.

Strong marriages can stand up to outside pressures of another person's coveting of one or the other partners, but weak marriages that are battling other issues may not. Unlike the seventh commandment, which looks to protect the marriage from within, with the tenth commandment God is looking outside of the couple, and tells us it is sin to try and come between them.

How many marriages have been defiled or destroyed by the coveting of another I have no clue, but for God to include it directly in the Ten Commandments, its potential harm against the sacred bond of marriage must be high. Even if desire never reaches the stage of conduct, it is sin and condemned by God.

King David, when he coveted Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, came between the marriage covenant, and disaster soon followed. The breaking of this command led to adultery, and then murder. And, the breakage of this command today is leaving destroyed families in its wake.

There is much, of course, in God's Word concerning marriage and the esteem He places on it. It has both physical and spiritual implications for us, and as we are called out of this world, I can see that to some degree I have not kept God's standards as well as I should have.

Hebrews 13:4 says that marriage is to be honored by all, and marriages are to be kept undefiled. From the first man Adam's marriage to Eve in Genesis, to Christ's marriage to the church in Revelation 19, let all of us realize the importance of marriage in God's creative purpose and plan for us. As this world sinks lower and lower in its care for the marriage institution and the family government, and the times look more and more like the days of Noah, let each of us—His children, His saints, His elect, and His bride—hold on to the values of the sacredness of marriage.