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# The Weakening of the Institution of Marriage (2)<sup>1</sup>

*Marriage as God designed it is all about being one, in mind, goals, aspirations, and commitments.*

Today same-sex “marriage” is in centre stage, and all indications are that it will become a legal form of cohabitation. This distressing state of affairs did not, however, just drop out of the sky. There has been a gradual weakening of marriage in our country long before the present crisis. It may be helpful prior to discussing same-sex marriage to identify briefly two major contributing factors. These relate directly to the two purposes of marriage, which are: first, to help each other in all things that belong to this life and the life to come, and second, under the blessing of God to be fruitful and multiply. Both of these purposes of marriage have been under sustained attack, especially by individualism and the separation of sex from marriage. We need to consider both of these, for today we are left with the end result of the effects of these forces.

## Individualism

Individualism is putting your own interests over those of others. “I come first and everyone else comes second.” Obviously such an attitude undermines marriage, which depends on submitting to each other in love and service (cf. Eph 5:21-33). Marriage as God designed it is all about being one, in mind, goals, aspirations, and commitments. Each partner in the marriage is to help each other to achieve the common good for which they are united in holy wedlock.

When there is no common purpose to help each other and build a solid family, a marriage is under great stress and can fall apart. Then the very opposite of God’s design for marriage takes place. Where God intended love and helping each other to rule, a divorce fuels estrangement and hostility. Where happiness had once been experienced, grief and suffering now take over. Symptomatic of the rot of individualism is the fact that many marriages

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solemnized in the last number of years apparently end up in divorce. This is an enormous tragedy, especially if children are involved. The family, as the basic building block of society, is not something that can be readily taken apart. A child has a blood bond with both parents. When they decide to part ways, the child’s world falls apart, the bottom falls out. Such children need to redefine their identity so to speak. Not surprisingly, these children often become a problem for society, and they are also more likely to cope with poverty and

abuse. They also lack a good model on which to build their own future with a marriage partner, and marital problems tend to be repeated in the next generation. When marriage is no longer a binding force and an honoured institution, much grief results.

A marriage can be undermined in subtle ways by expressions of individualism. In many quarters today there is a degrading of the role of mother and home maker. For example, the message from society today is that you can only reach your full potential with a career outside the home; if you don’t have a job outside the home, you’re a nobody.

Now this is not to suggest that a woman cannot work outside the home. Indeed, there can be legitimate reasons making it necessary to seek employment elsewhere. However, the point here is that we should not underestimate the tremendous importance of a mother and homemaker. It is good to remind ourselves what a beautiful and rewarding role the calling of being a helper fit for him can be as a full-time homemaker who is there for her husband and children. The art of homemaking is an art that is being lost in many homes, but it is an art that binds a marriage and family together, because it counters individualism and knows of service and love.

Unfortunately, in our society marriage and family are often undervalued, also and perhaps especially in the nurturing role of raising offspring. In some ways, government policy undermines the place and duty of marriage and family. Tax laws often benefit those who work outside the home and the promised federal legislation on child care has the potential of further eroding the attractiveness of the role of the stay-at-home mom. We should recognize this as a threat to marriage and the stability of society.

Marriage is about being there for each other and helping each other. And as Christians we may do so in the service of the Lord. When individualism takes over, marriages suffer.

## The separation of sex from marriage

God entrusted his gift of sex to marriage because He wanted the begetting and nurturing of children to take place within the confines of wedlock. This is the second purpose of marriage. The Lord has designated marriage to be the basic building block for society. Not the individual, but the family has been designed by God as the fundamental sociological unit. The tragedy of sin is that sin separates sex from marriage and jeopardizes both the gift of sexuality and marriage.

## The Old Testament

This is not a new problem. In the Old Testament, this separation of sex from marriage was already evident in the decadent culture that Israel met when coming from Egypt to take the promised land. However, even before entering Canaan, Israel herself fell prey to the sensuous nature of the fertility cult at Peor, where they prostituted themselves with Midianite women (Num 25:1-9, Deut 4:3, Ps 106:28). Also, once in the land of Canaan, the fertility cult of Baal plagued Israel throughout her history. This was a cult that condoned and

encouraged sexual sin in the name of religion. The prophet Amos lamented the fact that "Father and son use the same girl" (Amos 2:7-8). Hosea wrote, "A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God." Both men and women were into this, both married and single (Hos 4:12, 14). Sexual gratification had become of paramount importance, and everyone seemed to be involved. Jeremiah wrote, "On every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute" (Jer 2:20). It was no longer the worship of God, but of sex. It became an obsession, an end in itself. This happened to the people of God's own choosing, who had seen the mighty deeds of God! Clearly sexual sin has a strong drawing power and we need to be aware of this.

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The Old Testament also teaches us that when sex and marriage were separated, marriage and the family unit came under great stress. God had strictly forbidden extra-marital sexual activity, for He wanted to protect the family and society (Lev 19:29, Lev 21:9, Deut 23:17). To safeguard his people from the lure of sexual sin, God had demanded that Israel destroy the sensual Canaanite population and culture when they conquered the land (Exod 23:23-33, Exod 34:11-16). To the great detriment of God's people, this never happened. Life is a unit, and when God is disobeyed in one area, such as in not honouring marriage, He is also scorned in others, and society drifts into bondage to evil in different forms.

## Today

We see that in our present society. Many men and women want so much to be free and to throw off the supposed restraints of our Christian past. One result is that sex and marriage have clearly become separated in our times. To be sure, the process has been going on for a long time. A defining moment in recent history was when the birth control pill became readily available. For the first time in the history of the world, it was very easy and simple to separate sex from the institution of marriage.

Casual premarital and extramarital sex are very common in our day because the pill is such a convenient way to prevent pregnancy. The beautiful gift of sexuality which was once reserved for marriage is now for many a toy to be used whenever passions are aroused. So-called "sex education" and the ready availability of condoms feed this attitude among youth. Teenagers are often counselled simply to do what feels good whenever you feel ready for it. Instead of counselling teenagers to wait until marriage to enjoy this wonderful gift of God, teenagers are being abused with foolish advice which is sinful and yields only bitter fruits of experiencing guilt, loneliness, and frustration. And if an unwanted pregnancy occurs, there is always an abortion that can be had quickly and easily, paid for by the government.

The consequences of separating sex from marriage are pernicious. It is no accident that our society is now infatuated with sex. Our sensuous culture idolizes it. Sex is everywhere, along with a growing tolerance of pornography. Again the most vulnerable are children. For many, their age of innocence has been taken away from them and they suffer from abuse as a direct result of porn. Many will have difficulty in establishing a healthy view of their own identity, and many will never know the beauty of a normal healthy family and marriage. Other victims

include men who become entrapped in pornography and are unable to function properly as husbands and fathers. A beautiful gift like sex can enslave and hurt if idolized and taken out of its God-ordained context.

The current infatuation with sex is also surely judgment from God for the abuse of his gifts. God says in his Word that He:

Gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator. . . Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.

Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. (Rom 1:24-27)

God's judgment on our society includes the growing acceptance of a homosexual lifestyle. We need to be aware of this. Our society is openly embracing sin; it is defended and promoted, and woe to those who would say anything critical about it or against it. The acceptance of homosexual behaviour by so-called

churches and by the courts of our land is a warning light that something is dreadfully wrong with our country. One cannot at the same time be for Christian values and also promote what God calls sin and an abomination. Our culture needs to be called back from this way of evil, but instead the growing sympathy for homosexual behaviour has only emboldened the gay community to ask for more. They now also demand same-sex marriage. More about that the next time.

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*<sup>1</sup> A short version of this material was presented at "Ignite our Culture Conference" in Burlington, Ontario, on November 13, 2004, sponsored by Equipping Christians for the Public Square Centre.*

