

Marriage & Singleness: A Series in 1 Corinthians 7
“Why Same-Sex Marriage Doesn’t Preach” (Gen. 2:18-25; Eph. 5:31-32)

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on 5/5/2013

Introduction

- ❖ The story goes that Abraham Lincoln was faced with a thorny issue that could have been quickly settled with a slight twist of words. But in speaking to his associates, who were pushing for a quick resolution, he posed a riddle, “*If you call a dog's tail a leg, then how many legs does the dog have?*” To which they answered, “*Five.*” “*No,*” he replied, “*the answer is four. Calling a tail a leg does not make it a leg.*”
 - ▶ **His point was that a change of name *does not* cause a change in essence.** Now this fact is never more relevant than in today’s contemporary debate on the legalization of so-called “same-sex marriage”.

- ❖ Cultural forces have done an effective job at shifting and shaping the cultural conversation and vocabulary. They’ve managed to change the definition of marriage – if not legally at state levels than at least in the minds of many citizens – to include same-sex unions. So a term like “same-sex marriage” has worked its way into our vernacular.

- ❖ But to imagine that calling such relationships “marriages” will actually make them marriages, makes as much sense as thinking that calling a tail a leg actually changes the essence and function of a tail.
 - ▶ Same-sex marriage is a term that makes as much sense as a married bachelor. It has no correspondence to reality. It’s nonsensical. Part of me hesitates to even preach a sermon on it. Would I stand here and preach a sermon against the manufacturing of two-wheeled unicycles? Can’t I just point out the logical fallacy and leave it at that?

- ❖ The answer is no. Because even though the concept is nonsensical, same-sex marriage carries tremendous cultural meaning for many people. The idea is now engrained in the hearts and minds of many (recent polls indicate over 50% of Americans support it¹). And it’s been codified in the law of nine states. My point is that same-sex marriage apparently does make a lot of sense to a lot of people. We can’t dismiss it. We’ll have to preach on it.

Why This Sermon? Why Now?

- ❖ But some might wonder if it’s wise. Why have a sermon on same-sex marriage? Why now when it’s such a hot-button issue. Aren’t you risking the chance of alienating people or turning them away from the church, from the Gospel? Aren’t you perpetuating the stereotype that Christians are anti-gay? Why this sermon? There are four ways to answer that.

- ❖ **First, we are *not* preaching on this subject because we think our mission as the church is to defeat same-sex marriage.** This sermon is not a stump speech with a political aim in mind. I want to be careful to say up front that I am not here to talk about whether you should actively oppose same-sex marriage or in what particular way.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_opinion_of_same-sex_marriage_in_the_United_States#Polls_in_2013

- ▶ How hard you get involved in the political process to oppose legislation or a certain candidate is a wisdom issue. It's not in the purview of a preacher to give specific instructions on how to carry out your civic duty.
 - But it is my job to lay out biblical principles and to call God's people to live in light of them. **And I do believe, as a matter of biblical principle, that Christians should not support, endorse, or vote in favor of same-sex marriage.** How you should actively oppose it? That's not my focus. That you should not support it? That's what I hope to persuade you of.

- ❖ **Second, we are *not* preaching on this subject because we consider same-sex sex the "great evil" of our day that needs to be stamped out.** This is not a hobby horse issue for this church. Yes, we are against evil and sin *in any form*, but we would never set apart gay sex as more evil or more of a problem than any other sexual sin. And believing that doesn't make you a homophobe who fears or hates gay people.
 - ▶ No matter how much people object, it's not insincere when Christians say we love the sinner but hate the sin. They say you can't distinguish the two, but I say I do it all the time *with myself*. I hate my sin, but I don't hate myself. I love myself, too much.

- ❖ Now as a church, we're sensitive to those struggling with same-sex attraction. **So we've made a point of distinguishing the attraction/orientation from the behavior/practice.** When it comes to the orientation, you can debate whether it's a result of nature or nurture. But anecdotal evidence points to the fact that most people do not initially desire the orientation. It's usually not a person's willful choice to have these feelings.
 - ▶ **And for that reason we don't make the orientation the primary ethical issue.** Theologically, it's understood as a result of the fallenness of our world. In fact, every one of us is born with fallen desires that alone would not condemn us – unless we willfully act upon them. Recognizing we share this commonality hopefully leads to greater compassion for those who struggle with homosexual desires.

- ❖ But now if someone willfully chooses to engage in homosexual behavior, that person is morally accountable and, according to Scripture, their behavior is sinful (cf. Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10). But it's not my goal today to convince you that homosexual behavior is wrong. My goal is to help you understand why Christians, who believe it is wrong, should *therefore* not support the legalization of same-sex marriage.

- ❖ **Third, we are preaching on this subject because the cultural moment demands it.** You literally can't go a day without seeing a headline that deals with homosexuality in general or same-sex marriage in particular. This past week it was an active NBA player coming out. Last week it was the Boy Scouts of America announcing its compromise of allowing open homosexuals to participate in scouting.
 - ▶ In the past month it was prominent Republicans announcing their support of same-sex marriage and two landmark cases being argued before the Supreme Court (with a decision expected in early June).

- ❖ In short order, there is a possibility the Court could rule against the constitutionality of all state-level legislation that defines marriage as only a union of a man and a woman. That means by this summer there is a potential (though arguably slim) that same-sex marriage could be a reality even here in Texas.
 - ▶ With all this going on and with the culture's voice being so loud and so strong in favor of this societal trend, it would be amiss for the church to stay silent.

- ❖ **Fourth, we are preaching on this subject because we want to help the church regain her voice, her public voice.** There once was a time in our nation's past when the church had a privileged voice. It's no longer the case, and there is no use in complaining about it. But having lost a privileged voice doesn't mean we lose a public voice. Christians have a theological obligation (as citizens of God's kingdom) and a civic right (as citizens of this nation) to speak our moral convictions into the public square for the welfare of the public.
 - ▶ God once told his people who were living as exiles in a foreign land to seek the welfare of the city where they were sent (Jer. 29:7). They were not to draw away, huddle up, and isolate themselves from the public. They were to seek the good of the city and its inhabitants, and that would involve speaking up and sharing a biblical vision for human happiness and human flourishing.

- ❖ That's what we want to do today. This is a message about helping Christians understand why marriage matters, why we should be pro-marriage, why we should care about this issue, and why we should lend our voice to the conversation.

What is At the Heart of This Debate?

- ❖ Now before we get to the heart of this message, we need to get to the heart of this cultural debate. I think there is a big myth that needs to be dispelled. Proponents of same-sex marriage have been trying to shape the conversation and they've been quite effective.
 - ▶ They've used to their advantage moral and legal arguments developed during the civil rights era. **So the general impression today is that to be against same-sex marriage is to be against the civil rights of gay people.**
 - This would make an opponent of gay marriage no better than a racial segregationist. Now that's a highly effective strategy. No one wants to be lumped in the same category as a white supremacist. So understandably there is great pressure to simply concede and walk away from the debate.

- ❖ But I believe we need to stay in it and demonstrate how this is not a civil rights issue. Now if our neighbors were being mocked and abused because they're gay, if they were being unfairly treated or victimized, then Christians ought to rise up and speak out in their defense. Those would be civil rights issues. But I wouldn't put gay marriage in that category.

- ❖ **Notice how the conversation is often framed as a choice between preventing or allowing gay people to marry.** If we accept that and try to argue within that framework, the debate is already lost. We'll come across like we're trying to obstruct someone's civil rights.

- ❖ We can't accept that framework because the fact is no one is preventing a gay person from getting married. Granted that we understand marriage to be what it has always been throughout human history, the union of a man and a woman. No one is preventing a gay man from marrying a woman or a gay woman from marrying a man.
 - ▶ I'm not trying to be facetious. This is a real point. **The argument that gay marriage is a civil right only holds water if you have already redefined what marriage is.**
 - Think of Lincoln's riddle. If you could convince enough people that a leg is just an appendage somewhere on a dog's body, nothing more, then you could call a tail a leg and it would make perfect sense.

- ❖ The key is to redefine and alter the essence of the object. So in our case, if you can convince enough people that marriage has always been and only been the voluntary union of two persons who love each other and are committed to each other – if gender complementarity is unessential – then same-sex unions could be called "marriages". Then it makes sense.
 - ▶ And then it makes sense to compare those who oppose same-sex marriage with those who once opposed interracial marriage. If we recognize how wrong it was to prevent interracial couples from marrying, why repeat the mistake with gay couples?

- ❖ This is where we need to pause the cultural conversation and show how this premise is built on faulty assumptions. If you're comparing same-sex marriage with interracial marriage, then you're assuming exactly what is in dispute. You're assuming gender is irrelevant to marriage. But the gender complementarity between the couple is essential to what marriage is. Race is irrelevant but gender is not. Marriage should be color-blind, but it can't be gender-blind. Otherwise it's something other than marriage.

- ❖ My point is that no one is trying to take away anyone's rights. In all 50 states, two persons of the same sex are free to bind themselves to each another for life. And there is nothing preventing any religious body, any organization, any company, or any individual from recognizing that union as a marriage and treating it as such. You have the right.
 - ▶ But the question is: ***Does anyone have the right to redefine marriage and then force everyone to recognize this new conception when applied to same-sex unions?***

- ❖ Gay marriage proponents will say, "*Yes, the state has that right. Government has that authority.*" Now we're getting to the heart of this debate. ***Who gets to define marriage?*** This is where the two sides will give starkly different answers. One side will point to God or nature. The other side will point to society and the state.
 - ▶ Cultural progressives see marriage as a social construct created by the state through positive law. Marriage is whatever the state says marriage is according to its laws. But cultural conservatives see marriage as an institution that preexists the state. Christians, in particular, believe it was instituted by our Creator *not* by any nation.
 - That means the state has no power to create marriage or redefine it. It only has the power to recognize – to declare whether this relationship constitutes a marriage or not. That's the limitation of the state's authority.

- ❖ As it now stands, federal law and the laws in 41 states only recognize committed relationships between opposite-sex couples as marriages. That are, in fact, discriminating against same-sex couples. Their unions are not being recognized as marriages.
 - ▶ There is discrimination going on. I know that sounds bad, but remember the law always discriminates. It's supposed to discriminate between unions the state will recognize as marriage and those it will not. Unions that include more than two people or two people too closely related are discriminated against and not recognized as marriages. And the same goes for two people of the same sex.
- ❖ There is no denying these federal or state laws are make discriminatory judgments in favor of opposite-sex unions. Only these unions are recognized as marriages. They are privileged in this sense. The question is not whether we discriminate. It's whether such discrimination is right or wrong. It's a question of whether or not there is a compelling reason to do so.

Why Should We Privilege Marriage?

- ❖ And I'm arguing there is. I believe government has a vested interest in preserving and privileging marriage for opposite-sex couples – and so do Christians! I want to approach this in two ways. First an argument from a secular perspective and then from a Christian one.
- ❖ Ryan T. Anderson, co-author of the book *What is Marriage?*, presents an secular defense of marriage and offers many compelling reasons why government has a vested interest in preserving and privileging marriage. One in particular is the overwhelming evidence that points to the fact that marriage is “*the ideal institution for childbearing and childrearing*”.
 - ▶ **The argument is that it is in the best interest of children (and society indirectly) if children are raised by their mom and dad.** Let me read you a quote, “*According to the best available sociological evidence, children fare best on virtually every examined indicator when reared by their wedded biological parents. Studies that control for other factors, including poverty and even genetics, suggest that children reared in intact homes do best on educational achievement, emotional health, familial and sexual development, and delinquency and incarceration.*”²
- ❖ If that's true, then government has a vested interest to see fathers married to mothers and committed to raising any children their union may produce. But if the state allows what Anderson calls a “revisionist view” of marriage to carry the day, then you're sending the wrong signal. “***It would be very difficult for the law to send a message that fathers matter when it has redefined marriage to make fathers optional.***”³
 - ▶ Anderson's point is that by legalizing same-sex marriage the state is basically putting the desires of consenting adults over the needs of children. You're weakening marriage and its societal benefits. It's not good public policy.

² Ryan T. Anderson, “*Marriage: What It Is, Why It Matters, and the Consequences of Redefining It*”, The Heritage Foundation, March 11, 2013 (available online at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/03/marriage-what-it-is-why-it-matters-and-the-consequences-of-redefining-it>)

³ Ibid.

- ❖ I commend his work to you. He makes an excellent case that will hopefully make your non-Christian classmates or co-workers (who could care less what the Bible says) think twice before just going with the flow of this massive cultural tide.
- ❖ But this morning I'm talking to you, the Church. To fellow believers who affirm the authority of Scripture, who agree that homosexual behavior is a sin, who believe that marriage is a union between a man and a woman.
 - ▶ **Here is where I want to open up the scriptures and show you why Christians have a vested interest in preserving and privileging marriage** – why we prefer, if the Lord wills, that the government continues to do the same.
- ❖ Look with me at **Genesis 2** starting in v18. God created Adam, the first creature made in his own image. He's the first man and, at this point, the only man. Now after continually saying that the results of creative acts were "good", in v18 God calls something "not good". *"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."*
 - ▶ So the Lord parades all living creatures before the man, and he names each one. "But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him." (v20) So we're told that God put the man to sleep and took one of his ribs and with it made a woman and brought her to the man. V23, *"Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.'"*
- ❖ I want you to notice there is **an interplay between the themes of unity and diversity**. Adam celebrates the unity that he shared with Eve. She is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. No other living creature shared this unity. No other creature was fit for him.
 - ▶ But at the same time, there is diversity and difference. For example, Eve was not created in the same way as Adam. If God only wanted to stress unity and sameness, then he should have created her also from the dust. But instead she was *"taken out of Man"*, and for that reason *"she shall be called Woman"*. There is diversity.
- ❖ And then we get to v24 where God designs and defines marriage. *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."*
 - ▶ Again we see unity and diversity in play. Marriage is described as the one-flesh union between two who are alike, as creatures made in the same image, and yet unlike as male and female (Gen. 1:27). **In marriage there is a oneness with diversity.**
 - That's intentional. It's supposed to mirror the image of God. God is Three in One. There is unity with diversity in the very nature of God. And marriage is the earthly institution that He created to mirror and reflect His heavenly being through a unity with diversity – male and female in one flesh.
- ❖ **My point is that marriage was never intended to be an end in itself. It was designed to be a signpost pointing to a greater reality.** Marriage was meant to be a sermon that preaches and proclaims a greater, more beautiful reality!

- ❖ Marriage was established in the beginning, but for thousands of years no one understood. The true meaning and purpose of marriage remained a mystery. Questions remained: *Why is it a union of only two people? Why is it a permanent union until death do you part? Why is it an exclusive union that demands strict fidelity?* And the big question for us: *Why is it only the union of a man and a woman?*
 - ▶ Marriage remained a mystery, that is, until the Apostle Paul one day sat down to write a letter to the church in Ephesus. In **Ephesians 5:32**, after quoting Genesis 2:24, Paul explained, *“This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”*

- ❖ **Marriage refers to Christ and the Church. It’s a sermon intended to preach Christ and the Church, to preach the Gospel!** Now it starts to make sense!
 - ▶ **Marriage is a union of only two people because Christ has only one Bride.** Jesus is not the Head of multiple brides. He has only one universal Church. For that reason, polygamy doesn’t cut it. It doesn’t preach well. It gets the Gospel wrong.
 - ▶ **Marriage is a union unto death because its permanence reflects the permanence of the New Covenant that Christ established with his Church when he shed his blood on the cross.** As Jesus promises His Bride, *“Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you”* (Heb. 13:5), so to should every couple promise each other. For that reason, you could argue that divorce preaches heresy. It adulterates the Gospel.
 - ▶ **Marriage is an exclusive union that demands strict fidelity because its intent is to preach the jealous love that Christ has for his Church.** Jesus has eyes only for His Bride and sacrificially loves her even to the point of death. For that reason, adultery is another way of preaching heresy. It fails to convey the unwavering love for Christ.
 - ▶ **Marriage is a union between opposite sexes because only a man and woman united as one can mirror and reflect the unity with diversity also found between Christ and the Church.** Holy God and sinful man – never was there a greater diversity. And yet through the Gospel, Christ and his Church are one in perfect unity. For that reason, a same-sex union doesn’t preach. It doesn’t communicate the intended message. Instead it distorts and confuses.

- ❖ Why should Christians get married? Companionship, romance, sexual intimacy, childbearing and childrearing, the welfare of society? Well yes, these are all good reasons. But in the end, get married because it’s a God-ordained means of preaching his Gospel with your very life – with the most important earthly relationship you have.

- ❖ **Married people, preach the Gospel with your marriage, so that when non-Christians encounter your marriage, they realize there is something missing in their relationships.** Love each other in such a way that people detect in your marriage a taste of heaven, and they're left dissatisfied with their empty relational pursuits and left longing for only what God can provide in Christ.
 - ▶ Anyone who receives the salvation he provides by turning from your sins and to him in faith, can share in this exclusive, permanent love relationship with Christ.
- ❖ If this is what marriage was always intended for, then you can see why Christians have a vested interest in preserving and privileging marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Same-sex marriage just doesn't preach the same.

Where Do We Go From Here?

- ❖ So where do we go from here? **Because it's hard to deny when people say the legalization of same-sex marriage is a forgone conclusion in our country.** Now if that day comes, then it comes. But in the meanwhile, we have a public voice, and we need to use it to speak into our morally-confused culture. And it will do us well to learn to communicate our Christian ethics in such a way that we don't have to always appeal to a Scripture verse.
 - ▶ Of course, our moral convictions have to be rooted in Scripture, but as one ethicist put it, "*Christians need to learn to be bilingual, at times speaking the language of Zion, which undergirds the specifics of our ethics, and at times also speaking a broader language that is not dependent on the particularities of the biblical faith.*"⁴
- ❖ And if one day gay marriage is universally accepted, then Christians have to carry on. **We need to gird up our loins and learn the hard lesson of how to operate out of the fringes of society.** Because that is where we're going to be pushed.
 - ▶ Unless you cave in to cultural pressure, you'll be marginalized and vilified for your moral convictions on sex and marriage. Like I said, if you don't support gay marriage, you'll be considered on the same level as a white supremacist.
- ❖ Friends, it won't be the first time the Church has been forced to carry out its mission from the fringes of society. But it will likely be the first for many of us. Are you ready?
 - ▶ If that day comes soon, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to love my wife and strengthen my marriage. I'm going to raise my child in the way of the Lord, and I'm going to try to be fruitful and multiply. I'm going to make every effort to preach the Gospel with my words and my marriage, and I'm going to pray for revival.
 - And I'm going to keep telling myself that in the world I'll have tribulation, but take heart; Jesus has overcome the world (Jn. 16:33).

⁴ Dennis P. Hollinger, *Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World*, 254.