

Why Marriage Matters Pt 1

Hebrews 13:4

2/11/01

Dr. Jerry Nelson (Southern Gables Church)

A couple of months ago we made plans to emphasize the subject of marriage today.

Our plan was to speak to the subject in the morning and host seminars this afternoon and evening.

We had to change our plans regarding the seminars but I decided to speak to this important subject anyway.

A good deal of what I will say today is from a message I preached about three years ago.

What you will hear today is not so much a sermon as it is a plea.

This will **not** be an exposition of a text but an appeal to us all to begin to change the way we view and act toward a very important subject.

Scripture: Hebrews 13:4 "Marriage should be honored by all..."

But is it?

Poll after poll indicate that a majority of Americans believe that even if it was true that former President Clinton had been unfaithful to his wife (even repeatedly) it had no bearing on his performance as President.

Many Americans see no incongruity when our government leaders on one hand argue for stronger families and on the other hand privately carry on extramarital affairs.

I heard a man say, "The American moral mind is in a coma - I won't say its dead but the American moral mind is seriously impaired."
(Mars Hill Tapes)

God says "honor marriage" but we live in a culture that increasingly dishonors it - and many in the church have unthinkingly gone along with the culture.

I am not suggesting we honor marriage just because it is marriage!

The issue here is not just to honor marriage because marriage has some great eternal value - the issue is that marriage was designed by God to serve humanity and if humanity honors marriage, humanity will be served.

The issue is that God designed marriage to be honored because he loves people.

And when collectively we don't honor marriage, but dishonor it, we most of all hurt ourselves.

What I want to communicate today is that we must take marriage seriously and begin to defend it as an institution worthy of preserving and honoring in our culture or we all will be the losers.

It matters that we honor marriage because so much of what we need and even want in life depends on whether we as a culture honor marriage.

I am not saying that individuals who remain single are disadvantaged - I am saying that the whole culture is weaker and vulnerable if we don't protect stable life-long marriages as the foundation of our society.

I'd like to give you some of the signs that marriage is being dishonored in our culture today -

Indications that marriage is being weakened as a basic institution.

My sources of information are two-fold:

-Glenn Stanton (Why Marriage Matters) a social research analyst drawing from scores of studies that have been done over the past several years.

-And the Rocky Mountain Family Council (1997 Survey).

1. The first evidence of change in how our culture views marriage is in the number of adults who are living together without being married.

In 1970 only one couple in 100 was living together without being married. We used to call it "living in sin" - now we call it "cohabitation."

In 1994 the statistic had grown to 7 in 100.

And in Colorado 21% of adults have at some point lived in a cohabiting relationship outside of marriage.

There is a growing percentage of adults that sees no good reason for entering into a covenant of marriage.

2. The second evidence of a change in our attitude toward marriage is the rise in the percentage and number of illegitimate births each year.

In the 1960s Daniel Patrick Moynihan, most recently a U.S. Senator, did a study in which he concluded that unless something changed greatly and rapidly the black family in America would be in serious trouble.

He reported that whereas in 1940 16.8% of all black babies were born to single mothers by 1963 23.6% were being raised in single-parent homes nearly all without the presence of a father. I think it is now over 50%.

That rapid rise in illegitimacy has had a profound impact on the black family in America - as evidenced by community after community.

But by 1998 it is not just the black family.

Today's illegitimacy rate, all races combined, is over 30% and that doesn't count the 1 ½ million abortions, many by unmarried women.

In 1970 only 12% of children were living in one-parent households.

By 1994 it was 27% of the children were living without the benefit of both parents presence and 4% with neither parent.

37% of the children in single parent homes are because of divorce

36% of the children in single parent homes are because the parents never married.

There is a growing percentage of the population that sees no reason to be married to have children.

3. A third evidence of the change in America's attitude toward marriage is the number of divorces.

The number of people currently divorced (and not yet remarried) quadrupled between 1970 and 1994.

For every 100 marriages sanctioned this year there will be almost 50 other marriages that are legally dissolved.

24% of Colorado's adults either are now or have at some time been divorced.

There has been a stunning increase in the number of people who see divorce as an acceptable means to change a difficult marriage.

By almost every indicator our views on marriage and family have changed dramatically in the past 30 years.

Young adults are marrying later and later not only because they are getting more education but because **they are afraid** of marriage.

More and more couples are opting for living together rather than get married.

A higher percentage of our children are being born without married parents and more and more children are living in single-parent homes.

And divorce has become commonplace.

My grandmother was the talk of the town when she divorced my grandfather in the 1930s. Today divorce is part of nearly every family.

Are these changes bad?

For nearly 20 years, many social scientists and psychologists tried to convince us that these changes were at worst neutral and at best good for us.

We were finally breaking free of our prudish, Victorian past and opening up whole new ways for people to relate to each other.

In the mid 1970s I did a graduate program in marriage and family counseling at the University of Northern Illinois.

In course after course we would read and listen to purported scholars criticize the “bondage of marriage”, herald the merits of “no-fault” divorce and minimize the negative effects of single-parenting.

And 25 years later we are reaping the outcome.

And many social scientists now are saying we haven’t seen the worst of it yet.

In the name of “freedom of speech” we turned our culture loose to glamorize sex outside of marriage.

The advertising industry will spend billions each year using illicit sex to successfully sell us on buying certain products while at the same time, the “free-speechers” will tell us that the sex we are exposed to each day has no effect on us.

And here’s the worst part of that - Christian after Christian believes that- “all that exposure has no effect on me” - as if they are the miraculous exception to the obvious.

In the name of “open-mindedness” we have said that living together without marriage is now acceptable.

In fact we are making it illegal to discriminate against people on that basis.

In the name of modernity (“this is the new millenium you know”) we have taught our children how to avoid pregnancy or to end pregnancy but in our laziness we have not put the kind of constraints on their behavior that will lessen the probability of sexual involvement.

In the name of tolerance and a misinformed kind of love we refuse to tell our friends they are wrong when they are seeking divorce without biblical grounds.

Even in the church - church discipline is perceived by some to be a harsh, archaic throwback to an unforgiving, unloving, judgmental way of dealing with people.

And what have we gotten for all these changes?
Broken hearts, broken homes and broken lives!

There isn't a week that goes by that I don't hear or see the pain caused by a culture that has dishonored marriage:

wives, husbands, parents, singles, and most of all children - like so much flotsam in the wake of our grand experiment of freedom in marriage and family.

But instead of continuing to look at it negatively, I want to turn it around and show you how good marriage is for the well-being of people.

What is absolutely amazing to me is how the social scientists of our day have finally awakened to the truth - the evidence became overwhelming - Marriage matters.

Most of them won't say it the way God does, but God was right all along: "Marriage should be honored by all..."

1. Consider how much marriage matters for adults:

It is striking to see how much healthier both physically and emotionally are the people in life-long marriages in comparison to the rest of the adult population.

a. Those who are divorced or separated are nearly twice as likely to be alcoholics and those who cohabiting are nearly four times as likely to be alcoholics as those who are in stable life-long marriages.

b. Divorced people are three times as likely to commit suicide as married people.

c. Married people live longer and are healthier.

Linda Waite of the University of Chicago reported that research shows that on average, a married man with heart disease will live 1400 days longer than an unmarried man with heart disease.

Several years ago a cartoon appeared in a psychology magazine in which Woody Allen asks Sigmund Freud, "Is it true that married people live longer than the unmarried."

Freud turned to him and said, "No, it just seems longer."

That's just not true!
Married cancer patients live longer,
Married smokers live longer.

- d. Divorced men and women are 2-3 times more likely to die from any cause than are married men and women.
- e. Married men and women are 1/3 as likely to have emotional or psychological difficulties.
- f. Depression is 3 times as likely among divorced and 4 times as likely among those who cohabit as among those who are married and have never been divorced.
- g. Married people consistently report they are happier than their unmarried counterparts.

Stanton wrote, "Married workers are less likely to miss work, are more productive on the job, are more likely to stay employed for longer periods of time, and are more likely to get along better with those they work with than their unmarried coworkers."

This is not to suggest that individual single people cannot be healthy, adjusted, and productive - obviously they can!

What it does suggest is that marriage should be honored by all because marriage is healthy - and a culture that honors life-long commitments of marriage is a culture that will have a healthier and happier population - single and married.

2. But marriage doesn't only matter for adults - marriage matters for children.

Back in the 70s they tried to teach us that divorce didn't have to negatively affect children.

They tried to tell us that children in fatherless homes were not disadvantaged.

They said Daniel Moynihan was just racist when he proclaimed that the rising single-parent homes among blacks indicated a dismal future for children.

But they were wrong!

Divorce is devastating to children - and we must, as a culture, stop pretending otherwise.

Certainly we are not saying that children whose parents are divorced cannot lead healthy productive lives - again, of course they can.

But let's stop pretending they will be better off.

A person whose arms are cut off may be able to manage in life but it will never be the same.

Divorce does deep and permanent damage to children.

a. Children who live with both parents are $\frac{1}{2}$ as likely to drop out of high school before graduating.

And of those who stay in school their grade point averages are higher, they miss fewer days of school, and they are more likely to attend college.

And of those who attend college, those who come from two parent homes are 20% more likely to finish.

b. There is a significant advantage of children of two-parent homes when it comes to finding and keeping jobs.

c. Study after study has demonstrated how much less likely children of two-parent homes are to be involved in delinquent behavior.

Children of divorce are 70% more likely to have been expelled or suspended from school.

Sociologist James Q Wilson of the University of California said it this way: "Neighborhood standards may be set by mothers, but they are enforced by fathers, or at least by adult males. Neighborhoods without fathers are neighborhoods without men able and willing to confront errant youth, chase threatening gangs, and reproach delinquent fathers. The absence of fathers...deprives the community of those little platoons that informally but effectively control boys on the street."

Life-long marriages enable children to be productive.

d. A two-parent family reduces by ½ the chances that a daughter will be sexually active or bear a child while still in her teens.

e. Girls in single-parent homes are
53% more likely to marry as teenagers.
111% more likely to bear children as teenagers.
164% more likely to have a child outside of marriage.
And 92% more likely to divorce if they do marry.

f. Life-long marriages enable children to develop sexually.

What about economics? All of us have seen statistic after statistic on how much better off, economically, children are when they are in two-parent homes.

g. Divorce and single-parenting are the most significant factors related to children in poverty.

David Ellwood of Harvard wrote, "The vast majority of children who are raised entirely in a two parent home will never be poor during childhood. By contrast, the vast majority of children who spend time in a single parent home will experience poverty."

Life-long marriages enable children to live in economic security.

h. Children in two-parent homes are more likely to be physically and emotionally healthy.

For example, children in two-parent homes are less likely to die of SIDS (Infants in single-parent homes are 2.5 times as likely to die of SIDS)

Life-long marriages enable children to live healthier lives.

And just as significantly - remarriage after divorce does not help children.

Some studies indicate the 62% of remarriages of women under age 40 end in divorce.

And if children are present the % who divorce is higher.
 Love is not lovelier the second time around - at least
 not for the children.

Mavis Heatherington of the University of Virginia studied 60 families who experienced divorce and then followed them for 10 years to study the affects.

She wrote: "The earlier view of divorce as a short-lived crisis... has given way to a more sober appraisal and rising concern that significant numbers of children suffer long-term...effects from divorce and that others experience submerged effects that may appear years later."

She found that many of the women who divorced and then remarried expressed that **they** were much happier, had a greater level of freedom and felt better about themselves than in their previous marriages but Heatherington wrote, "they gained their satisfaction at the expense of their children's well-being."

The point of all this is not that single-parents should never marry or remarry but that life-long first marriages are clearly to be desired and must be honored, encouraged and protected - **for the sake of our children.**

We must honor marriage because Marriage matters for adults.
 We must honor marriage because Marriage matters for children.

Our culture, including people who attend church, is going the wrong way on this.

By the lax attitudes toward sexuality, by the illegitimacy, by the ease of divorce, by the numbers of people willing to live together without marriage - we are dishonoring marriage and bringing down a storm of social problems with it.

We need to be outraged at where we have gotten ourselves.

We need to be morally outraged at divorce and the causes leading to divorce - at illegitimacy and the causes leading to it - **not to be angry at the victims of divorce or illegitimacy** but angry at the very real and deep and permanent suffering they cause.

How can we be silent when we see a whole generation in more pain than we can describe and not be angry and do something about the causes.

I think Glenn Stanton is correct when he says there are two things that must be done to bring back a strong marriage culture - a culture that honors marriage.

First of all, we must teach personal commitment as a stronger value than personal satisfaction.

Why don't warnings about cigarettes work to keep kids from lighting up? **Because immediate personal gratification is more highly valued** than anything else.

Why don't warnings about diseases and unwanted pregnancies deter people from illicit sex?

Because immediate personal gratification is a higher value than anything else.

We must become a people who can and will see beyond today.

People who will see responsibility as a higher value than personal happiness.

People who see service to others as a greater good than getting for themselves.

How do we teach that?

What message are we sending our children?

Do they see in us a commitment to others, a willingness to sacrifice, commitment to a cause that is bigger than our own happiness or comfort or pleasure?

When they look at our lives and see the way we treat people, spend our money, make decisions, use our time - what are they learning about commitment, sacrifice - who do they see is "first" in your life.

I can't tell you how sick I am of hearing "I have to take care of me first."

Letter to Neil Rosenthal in Denver Post - Thursday May 28, 1998 8E

I am convinced that selfishness is the driving force leading up to most divorces.

We must teach and model a different way - the way of sacrifice.

2. But there is a second factor necessary to change the culture to honor marriage - we must re-stigmatize certain behavior.

As a culture, we made a decision some years ago - we said that **racism was wrong**, that it hurts people, that it weakens the society, that it eats away at what is good and desirable in a culture.

We said that we would make it politically incorrect and socially unacceptable to tell the old jokes, make the former snide remarks, act, dress, or in any other way denigrate another's culture or ethnic or racial background.

And we changed the culture! Not yet completely but it is changing.

We stigmatized cigarette smoking and we have dramatically reduced the number of smokers in the U.S.

And interestingly enough our government (the ACLU notwithstanding) got behind these efforts and we changed the culture.

It is time to re-stigmatize certain behaviors **because they are damaging** to the men and women and children of our country.

We must wake up to the fact that there is a cancer that is eating away at our culture that has far more serious consequences than racism or tobacco - **that cancer is the depreciation of marriage as a one-man, one-woman commitment of life** wherein children can be raised in love and security.

It is **time to strongly censure parents who abandon their children** - including fathers who abdicate their responsibility by walking out.

It is for good reason that it is said that the best thing you can do for your children dad, is love their mother.

We must re-stigmatize premarital sex, cohabitation, pregnancy outside of marriage, adultery and divorce.

People who engage in those activities ought to know there will be severe social implications.

Yes we must treat repentant people with grace and forgiveness but we also must still be able to say those things are wrong.

For example, friends tell friends that divorce is a bad option!

We must change our standards for television and movie viewing.

We must care enough for our younger children and teenagers that we **place limits on their social lives** - expect and inspect their behavior - guard them as if their lives depended on it -for they do.

As their father, their happiness is not my highest goal for my children. As your friend, your happiness is not my highest goal for you.

I want most, for you to be good - to do what is right - because I know that out of goodness - responsibility, commitment, and sacrifice will come not only happiness but a life worth living.

Jesus said Christians are to be light in our culture.

We are to show the way to a better way of life.

We are a sub-culture that models for the rest of the culture what life can be.

What will you do to invest in marriage?

Are you married?

How will you invest in that marriage to make it stronger?

Do you know another couple that is struggling?

How will you invest in them and their marriage?

Can you see ways you can help young couples protect and strengthen their marriages?

Can you give them some time away by caring for their children?

Can you give them a weekend marriage seminar as a present?

Is your marriage in trouble?

Will you take the focus off yourself and determine to be toward your spouse what God commanded -

“Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her”?

We can help to change the culture - we must change the culture - **our** lives and **our children's** lives depend on it.

Prayer

The Statistics cited in this message are drawn from the “1997 Colorado Marriage Health Index of the Rocky Mountain Family Council and from Why Marriage Matters a Pinon Press book by Glenn Stanton (1997). Other sources are noted below.