

# Straight Bible Talk

Manchester Church of Christ; Share Christ's Love and Share His Message

## The War on Marriage

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We are faced with a mounting cry of hysteria that it is time to save marriage now. Pressure is being mounted in many places to force the authorities in various states to legalize only marriages between same-sex partners. The forces opposing such legal status for same-sex couples are counter-attacking to prevent such laws.

Meanwhile divorces of traditional marriages continue to mount. People go through one, two, three marriages with scarcely the "bat of an eyelash." Those who are married want to get divorced and those who have been divorced want to marry and amidst all this confusion we have those who cannot reproduce wanting to enter into "marriage!" (One of the purposes of marriage in the Bible is the propagation of the human race. "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.")

Now is that not an interesting twist on events? Same-sex people want to get married and heterosexuals want to get divorced. Why is it alright to break up families because people no longer like each other, but wrong to have people get together because they are "in love?" (Whatever that might mean!)

Now do not get me wrong. I am firmly committed to the Bible position on morality and that morality does not condone same sex relationships. Neither in the Old Testament nor in the New does God come out in favor of same-sex relationships in fact just the opposite is true. Homosexuality is specifically condemned in both Testaments, Old and New. But that is another issue entirely than this issue of

marriage.

We live comfortably in our world with sin every day. There is something wrong about that picture also. We condone foul language, public nudity, cheating, lying, stealing, drunkenness, slander and a whole raft of other things that God hates without hardly blinking an eye, so it is not unusual that a large segment of our society has come to view homosexuality just like these other sins. While our television sets glamorize sin, Christians sit mesmerized by what they are watching. "You do your thing and I will do mine."

But back to the issue of the war on marriage. I decided a long time ago that if people want me to get involved in their marriage by performing some sort of ceremony then they are going to have to sit down with me, two on one, and we will have several hours of discussion concerning the meaning and responsibilities of marriage.

I have had people call me a few days before their planned wedding and want to know if I will do the ceremony. They have spent weeks planning everything else and, oh, by the way, we need a preacher. No thanks. That is not the way I do things. Find someone else.

I do not charge for marriage counseling. I expect nothing in return. But you are not going to stand in front of me and say, "I do" until you understand what it is you are going to do!

The war on marriage is being fought in

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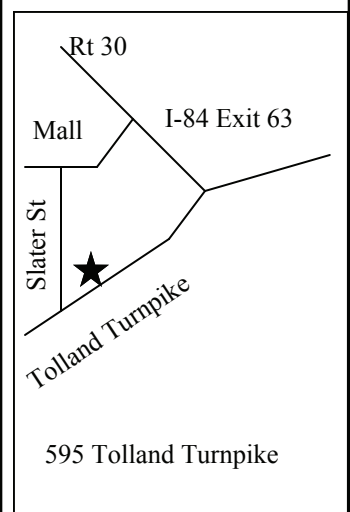
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Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

Acts 17:31

All scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise indicated.



the living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms of millions of households across our country as I write these words. Angry words are being exchanged by people who could not wait to jump in bed with someone of the opposite sex. Marriage is not about sex, it is about two people becoming one in such an intimate sense that they would give their lives for the other person.

Today, married couples will often not even share the same bank account. Pre-nuptial agreements spell out who gets what when they divorce and that is being decided before they get married. What happened to “until death do us part?” Pre-nuptial agreements and every other form of agreement to separate constitute a battle in this war on marriage.

I have a great deal of sympathy for those men and women who find themselves in what seems an impossible situation. Their relationship with their spouse has become irreconcilable, at least in their view. They see no solution but a dissolution of the marriage. Making marriage work seems to no longer be an option and divorce looks like the only way out.

Yet one does not defend marriage by getting a divorce. Neither does one defend marriage by preventing someone from getting married. One defends marriage by getting down in the trenches and making marriage a union of two people, a man and a woman who have professed their love for one another and promised that they will be true to their mate “til death do us part.”

But how are differences to be reconciled? Here the matter becomes insoluble unless both husband and wife are committed to the same absolute authority. If one is a Christian and the other is not, the differences will probably remain irreconcilable. If one is a luke-warm Christian and the other is a committed follower of Jesus it is likely that the differences may be irreconcilable. There has to be a standard to which both husband and wife are totally committed in order to resolve differences. Otherwise it is just “me against you.”

The war on marriage is but one example of a war that is being fought on many fronts. There is a wider war against almost every Christian principle. It is because people no longer accept the principles of the Bible, that they can find no solution to their problems in marriage. The standard upon which this country was founded is no longer viewed as a standard by most Americans.

God’s principles work. They have always worked. It is people who would rather have their own way instead of doing things God’s way that are the problem. Marriages are failing because people refuse to abide by the Word of

God.

It is only out of a common devotion to the same God that solutions can be found to differences. When Jesus was asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” he replied with a definition of the greatest and with another commandment that he said was like the greatest commandment.

Perhaps the solution to “irreconcilable differences” will be found in accepting what Jesus said were the two greatest commandments. The problem will then be, not that differences are irreconcilable, but that what Jesus demands is judged by one or the other spouse as too difficult.

The first command is: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind.” Maybe you can have a marriage without giving allegiance to this commandment, but keeping it will bring many blessings to the relationship.

To love God is to look with affection upon God. It is to view Him with awe and respect. It is to accept literally all that He has said and in particular all that He has commanded. John wrote: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.”

When what God has commanded is seen as a burden then one of two things is true. One, we have not properly understood what God has commanded. We have failed to consider the command properly using the ordinary means of understanding what words means. Or, we have come to a wrong conclusion and the conclusion we have reached is burdensome, not because God has commanded, but because we have not understood the true thing that is commanded.

The second possibility is one that we often find difficult to face. The command seems burdensome because our heart is not right with God. We have not been truly converted to God’s way. Our thinking has been molded by the world and we do not yet think as we ought to think as Christians. We do not love God. At least our love for God is not as strong as our love for something else.

In our hearts we are idolaters. We have placed some object, some goal, some objective ahead of God. Our lives are not under God’s control, but under the control of some lust that is consuming us. Perhaps we are not even aware of the ways in which we have been drawn away from God to some other object.

The second command presents even greater difficulties. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” That last little phrase on the end has provided endless excuses for those who are selfish. It has even justified some in claiming that you cannot love another until you first love yourself. By that they mean giving endless attention to one’s own needs and wants.

Jesus did not command us to love ourselves. Self-love surrounds us from the moment we awaken in the morning and go about feeding and cleaning ourselves until we drop exhausted into bed to give ourselves some much wanted sleep. Loving self is not the problem, but rather finding the time and the inclination among all of our self-centered activities to love our neighbor.

Perhaps one is thinking that their spouse has moved far beyond being a neighbor and has now become an enemy. Many families seem to live in a perpetual state of warfare, so perhaps that thought hits close to reality. The problem is that God has also commanded us to love our enemies. One cannot escape the obligation to love one’s neighbor by declaring someone an enemy!

Some of the qualities of love are found in a passage written by the apostle Paul to Christians in Corinth. “Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”

I find it difficult to believe that irreconcilable differences can exist where that kind of love is being practiced. This love of which Paul speaks is not an emotional feeling, but a way of acting toward another person. It is love in action not some mushy, kissy, kissy kind of feeling. Unfortunately many marriages begin out of an animal attraction that is mistaken for love.

Practicing real love, as identified by Paul in the passage quoted above, is often very difficult. Taking into account wrongs committed by a spouse is as popular a sport as weekend football games. Arrogance that the fault lies entirely with the other person is a passion not easily deflected. Enduring all things is only popular when there is nothing to endure. Perhaps most of all it is incredibly difficult to believe that if I change, my marriage will be improved whether my spouse changes or not. Or, if my spouse does change it is difficult to believe that the change will last.

Yes, there is a war on marriage. It is not a war that will

be won in the legislatures of our states or our national congress. It is a war being won or lost in the homes of Americans. The fate of millions of children consigned to a life without one of their parents can be viewed as “collateral damage.” It is a war that is winnable by those who dedicate themselves to the principles of God. It can be won in no other way.

### **In the News**

(Article taken from Apologetics Press, Reason & Revelation, February, 2006, by Eric Lyons)

As the creation-evolution debate rages in courtrooms throughout America, and while lawsuits are being filed continually in objection to various visible vestiges of America’s Christian heritage, one court case in Viterbo, Italy is drawing worldwide attention. Atheist Luigi Cascioli is suing Catholic priest Enrico Righi for teaching that Jesus lived on Earth 2,000 years ago. Cascioli contends that Righi and the Catholic church have deceived many people by teaching that Jesus was a real historical person who actually lived in Palestine during the first century. After Judge Mautone initially refused to hear the case, his decision was overruled in December 2005 by the Court of Appeal, “which agreed that Signor Cascioli had a reasonable case for his accusation that Father Righi was ‘abusing popular credulity’” by teaching the historicity of Jesus (Owen, 2006). Righi has now been ordered to appear in court “to prove that Jesus Christ existed” (Owen).

A mountain of evidence exists for the reality of Christ (none more important than the historical, inspired New Testament documents), and yet skeptics continue to allege that he is merely a figment of our imagination, and/or has been confused with one of several “known” historical persons from the first century. If skeptics and atheists are now going to take “Jesus” to court (which should not concern Christians in view of the evidence supporting His historicity), perhaps those same individuals will be consistent and put their beloved theory of evolution on trial. After all, evolutionary science professors world-wide teach students the “fact” that the Universe is the product of a Big Bang, yet no one has ever proven such to be the case. (In reality, a growing number of scientists are beginning to reject this explanation for the origin of the Universe—see Harrub, 2005). What’s more, students are repeatedly taught that life came from non-living chemicals billions of years ago, even though no one has ever witnessed spontaneous generation take place, and the law of biogenesis flatly contradicts this theory. The fact that Cascioli’s case has reached this far is a sad commentary on today’s society. The fact that the unproven

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theory of evolution continues to get a free pass among "enlightened" skeptics who (allegedly) want only "the facts," is also telling.

#### References

Harrub, Brad (2005), "Big Bang Breakdown," (Online), URL: <http://www.apologeticpress.org/articles/309>

Owen, Richard (2006), "Prove Christ Exists, Judge Orders Priest," *The Times Online*, January 3, (Online), URL: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,13509-1967413,00.html>.

### **The Role of Government**

"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men."

The above words of Peter define the Christian's relationship with government. From Jesus on, those who have called themselves disciples have lived in obedience to their government. They have the example of

Jesus to imitate.

Christians, in the first century, served their government well in all cases except where the government required that they deny their faith. "We ought to obey God rather than men" was the reply to all attempts to get them to deny Jesus.

In all other matters they went about their business of preaching the gospel and left the matters of government to Caesar and his minions. Christians did not seek a change of government, but rather they sought to change the hearts and lives of those living under the government of Rome to conform to the standards of God.

Governments are imperfect bodies that reflect the views and opinions of imperfect men. The Bible reflects the will of an awesome and always just God.

Governments have sometimes supported what is right. At other times, governments have supported what is wrong. Governments ought to be interested in always supporting what is right, but being composed of fallible men, that will not always be the case.

God did not ordain government to preach the gospel. He set up a church for that purpose. God did not ordain government that people might be converted to the right way. He sent forth disciples of Jesus to preach the gospel that alone has the power to change people.

Government can and should punish evil doers. Christians can and should preach the gospel to evildoers to the end that they might convert to God's way.

When Christians look to the government to institute laws to change society, they have missed the purpose for which God ordained government. In addition they have misdirected their own energies away from God's plan for changing the world, to man's plan.

The world will not cease to do evil because the government has defined evil. The world will cease to do evil when the people of the world will have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Messiah.

God's plan worked in the first century. God's plan will work in the 21st century in America, in Iraq and all over the world.