

Marriage, Adultery, Repentance, and Revival

This, was written while I was pastoring in Kansas. It's obviously dated, but I've tried to update it for use in Dundalk. The truths that drive it won't ever need updating, because they're simply biblical.

So many folks had their say about President Clinton's predicament during the Lewinsky scandal, I felt I had to try my pen. Here's what I thought, and still think: I didn't know any family in America more in need of prayer and grace than President Clinton's. And that's coming from a registered Republican, who genuinely abhors many of Clinton's policies.

That is not to say that his behavior was in any way excusable; it was not. It is only to say that, as one who has done an inexcusable thing or five in his life, I thought (and still think) a little personal charity toward the man was in order. But what about public charity? Was it even a public issue? Did he actually sin against us, the American people?

Perhaps you've heard this line: "Bill's affair is Hillary's business, not ours. Adultery is a private matter." That's an interesting perspective. As near as I can tell, it assumes that each marriage is the business only of the couple, and nobody else – as though marriage is really just our private vehicle for romantic self-expression. We express our amorous emotions by dressing up in black and white, by exchanging rings that stand for something or another, by speaking vows that we may or may not have taken time to read. If statistics hold steady, half of us or more will squish our way out of some part of our vows when the pinch comes. But that's nobody else's business, we claim. Certainly the public has nothing to say to us about it, we think.

But are we thinking clearly? If so, why do states issue marriage licenses? Why are there vows and witnesses and signatures involved? Why does it take an authorized representative of the state to join the bride and groom? Why did it take an act of the state legislature to establish "covenant marriage" in Louisiana? Why did the state Supreme Court try to create the travesty of "homosexual marriage" in Hawaii? Why is the state up to its elbows in marriage?

Simply because marriage, whether people want to admit it or not, is a very public matter, one in which the state has a significant interest. Marriage is the joining of two lives into one, including the sharing of property, of financial assets and liabilities, and – much more significantly – of children. Marriage is integral to the strength of the very fabric of society. Those who think otherwise might want to stop playing make-believe games and take a look around them.

Where there are large numbers of failing marriages, there will inevitably be high levels of emotional and social dysfunction. Numerous studies have proven unmistakably that the most emotionally damaging thing any parents could do to their children – short of beating them bloody or some such heinous thing – is divorce each other. The emotional and fiscal carnage divorce creates are well-documented. For all those reasons and more, adultery, abuse, abandonment, and other crimes against marriage are indeed crimes against society. That means they are the public's business.

So how has the American concept of marriage eroded so badly? The same way every other American concept has: we have abandoned our original source of authoritative answers, the Bible. Despite the fact that our entire legal and political system was founded on biblical presuppositions about justice and morality, Americans in the last several decades have been busily ignoring what the Bible says about what is fair and right. We've got our fingers in our ears.

Of course, for those who do not identify themselves as Christians, that's to be expected. But most people in America do still call themselves Christians. The shocker is that most of us think we have more right to define what "Christian" means than Jesus does – that we are more competent to decide what is right for us than God is.

If we want to stand silent while special interests pressure states to call a partnership between two men "marriage," we can do that. It doesn't matter to us what the Bible says about the disgusting na-

ture of homosexuality, or the sacredness of the marriage bond between man and woman. We're not listening any more.

Some states say they want a kind of marriage that can only be broken by the most extreme circumstances – a covenant until death. I'm glad for the fact, but I must notice that it betrays what really happened when the divorce laws were relaxed: America lost marriage entirely. Covenant marriage is nothing new. It's simply marriage the way God created it. The sloppy, toothless commitment that currently stands in the law books of most states is merely a pale, pathetic ghost of real marriage. We're listening to ourselves rather than to God. And so we've lost marriage, and are beginning to lose ourselves.

Of course, I'm talking about professed believers here. We're supposed to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Yet our divorce rate is slightly higher than the rest of the population's, while our rates of promiscuity, abuse, alcoholism, and vice in general, are only a little lower. If judgment is to begin, let it begin with the house of God.

Specifically, let it begin with this church. Our members need to enter into self-judgment as badly as anybody. I certainly do. I'm asking every Christian who reads this to pray for us: that, as we call our community to repentance, we will answer that summons ourselves first. And to every person reading these words who is uncertain whether he is a Christian, I offer an invitation. Come to church, and begin to find out who Jesus is and where you stand with Him.

And then, what about my fellow Southern Baptist, the former President? Well, he sinned. As a fellow sinner, I rejoice that there is full forgiveness where there is true repentance. I pray he has truly repented. Only time will tell whether he has, and whether the American people will forgive him as freely as the First Lady appears to have. So far, they haven't shown any signs that they believe he's a changed man.

For my part, I need to attend to my own repentance, and the church's. We can schedule revival meetings beautifully, but actual revival will only come as we humble ourselves, pray, seek God's face, and turn from our wicked ways. My invitation to every person who reads this is to do the same.