

Midweek Lent II**Hebrews 13:4****“Marriage Should Be Honored By All”**

Those who work with large amounts of money, such as in banking, are trained to recognize counterfeit bills. This training takes place, not by showing them examples of fakes, but by teaching them to know the real thing well. Since they are so familiar with true currency they will be able to spot phony money in whatever form it takes. When it comes to God’s valuable gift of marriage, there are counterfeits around us that we must be aware of. But even more important is for us to know and appreciate the real thing: God’s joining together of a man and a woman in marriage, the one-flesh intimate union of a husband and a wife for life.

I. What Are the Counterfeits?**A. Living Together**

Over the last 50 years there has been an increasing number of couples living together apart from marriage. In general I see three reasons for this: some want to avoid marriage; they want benefits of marriage without having a commitment to it or each other. They see marriage as being an institution and, after all, who in their right mind would ever want to be put into an institution. For them living together is a convenient arrangement: two people agreeing to take advantage of one another for as long as it serves them, but still available just in case someone “better” comes along.

A second reason for living together is that they think it will be audition, a test-drive, to see if they can marry each other. They think that this will be a chance for each one to try the other out just to make sure he will be a good husband or she will be a good wife. Don’t we test drive a car before we buy it? Yes, but would a car salesman let you test drive a car for two yrs? No, of course not, that would cheapen the vehicle’s value (two

years is the average length of couple living together before either separating or getting married). There is nothing like being married other than being married. This difference is downer that drives up divorce rates for couples who had lived together before marriage.

Others will live together because they already have decided to marry, the wedding is coming, so they get “head-start” on the marriage by living together in the weeks before the ceremony. While these three reasons for living together reflect different views of marriage and will affect the marriage differently, each one harms a couple’s chances for enjoying a successful marriage.

The evidence of social science is overwhelming. Couples who live together before marriage have divorce rate 50% higher than those who don’t live together. Couples who do not live together before marriage describe themselves as satisfied with marriage at a far higher rate than couples who have lived together first. This evidence simply tells us what God already has revealed to us. His plan and will for man and woman is to be husband and wife. What we do contrary to that plan of God is sin in His sight and it is bad for us. What God wants for us is not to take away our fun, or be burden on us. It is quite the opposite. He wants what is best for us. God tells us in His word of the Bible that what is good for us is the one flesh union of a man and a woman as husband and wife.

B. Homosexual “Marriages”

The latest counterfeit to the one flesh union of man and woman in marriage is this idea of homosexual “marriages.” Twenty years ago I told member in the Hoyleton congregation that before I retire from ministry, I expect to be asked to perform such a “marriage.” The person responded, “Never, it won’t happen.” It doesn’t

sound so far-fetched now, actually it is coming even faster than I thought it would. Homosexuality has been part of this rebellious world from early history, but this is the first generation that dares to call this relationship a “marriage.”

Two men together or two women together simply cannot create the one-flesh union that is holy marriage, especially when we take into account the reproductive purposes of a man and woman in marriage. Once marriage is redefined from one man and one woman to a man and a man or a woman and a woman the next step will be to change it from one and one to however few or many or with whatever you want (even oneself). Marriage is not our creation to fool around with as we like. It belongs to the One who gave it to us, God (Genesis 2). To receive His blessings upon our marriage unions, we are to follow His will and do it according to His plan.

C. Divorce

Before we get too eager to go on the warpath against homosexual marriages, we must admit that we are not doing a very good job with man and woman marriages. The divorce rate is right at 50 percent. It takes two people to make a marriage and it takes two people to break a marriage, so distinctions between an innocent party and a guilty party in a divorce are not always as simple as we might think. While some divorces may happen as the lesser of two evils, such a rejection of God’s gift of marriage is a sin against Him and is the result of sin by husband and wife against one another.

While we say that marriage is “until death do us part,” far too many enter the marriage covenant as if it were a contract. The difference is that a covenant is “I want to give to you even more than you give to me.” This

is a nice contest to be in for the rest of your life. A contract, however, is “I am in this as long as I get what I want from you.” When not satisfied with what we are getting, we fight it out before a judge.

If in getting married we convince ourselves that divorce is a back door thru which we can go if marriage doesn't work, it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy and we eventually will find that back door. One reason divorces happen is the sin of adultery, or unfaithfulness. The text tells us “let the marriage bed be undefiled.” Inviting a third person to come in between the one-flesh union of husband and wife defiles that marital bond. Marriage is the earthly image of the spiritual and eternal union that we, the church, the bride, have with Christ, the groom. To ask another person to come between a husband and wife is like asking Satan to come between us and Jesus. The sin of adultery will have a devastating effect on the God-given blessing of marriage and in many cases end it.

II. Let Marriage Be Held in Honor Among All

That is actually a whole lot more about the counterfeits to marriage than I wanted to say, so let's get to the real thing. Marriage is part of God's original creation. In the perfection of Eden's garden God's gift to His first person Adam was that of another person to complete and complement him, in a sense, to make him whole. There is much truth in the phrase “opposites attract.” Ideally, we find in a spouse that person who fills in our gaps, who has strengths where we have weaknesses, whose abilities make up for what we lack.

The purpose of God's gift of marriage was companionship for His people, Eve was “a helper suitable for” Adam. God has made us to be social creatures. We are people who need people, especially someone close. Marriage is God's way of insuring that we would not be lonely, but would have a partner for life. In this

partnership a husband and wife work together. They provide for each other's material needs. They care for each other's physical needs. They walk together in Christian faith and worship and, as God wills and provides, they have and raise children with one another.

Within the marriage union God grants us the privilege of being His agents in continuing the human race. While modern methods may make us think that we are in control of this process, God is still the one who blesses us with children when and how many times He knows is best for us. In providing a loving home for those children, a home in which mom and dad are husband and wife, we are repaying the parents who provided such homes for us as we were growing up. In this sense we will live on in the lives of our children who learned about life and the giver of eternal life, Jesus Christ, from us, their parents.

Over the span of our lives the lover of our youth becomes the companion of our adult years and then our strength during the infirmity of our old age. Such transitions are blessings from God but are becoming increasingly rare. When the time comes for God to call one marriage partner out of this life into the life to come where Jesus tells us there is no marriage or giving in marriage, we can thank God that instead of letting us be satisfied with a counterfeit relationship in this life, He had blessed us with the real thing, that in the here and now He gave us a husband or a wife with whom we shared life in Jesus' name. This earthly example reflects the perfect love our Savior Jesus, as husband, has with us, His bride, the church. AMEN