

In Defense of Marriage

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The voters' approval of Nebraska's Defense of Marriage Amendment in the November election reminded me that a vow of marriage does not need to be defended with a vote in the ballot box. The word "vote" comes from the Latin word *votum* which means to vow, as in a promise to a god, solemn pledge, or religious engagement. Therefore, marriage does not need a defense but anyone who advocates a sexual union outside of marriage needs to defend himself in the face of marriage. Let me explain.

Once upon a time there was a group of people who were going to stone a woman for committing adultery. They refused to tolerate her actions because she had broken the law, not to mention upsetting at least one family in their town. And maybe she even upset some of the members of the crowd who thought she might talk, exposing them, who also knew her in the carnal sense. Who knows; the story does not go into detail. All we know is that the mob was ready to execute the law: "anyone who is caught in the act of adultery is to be stoned." They were ready to pick up stones and throw them, until they were stopped by a question: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

This question was not addressed to the mob; it was addressed to each member of the mob. They stood there for a moment, and they thought. The question did not ask them to tolerate the woman or appreciate her "lifestyle"; nor did it ask them to stop throwing stones. It simply asked if they were innocent. They voted with their feet, "being convicted by their own consciences."

Then the woman was asked by the one remaining man, "Woman, where are thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?" She said they had not. The questions may have led her to believe that her life had been spared from a death by stoning, at least from her accusers; however, there was still this one man who had not left. Perhaps he was going to throw a stone. Then he spoke again, "Neither do I condemn thee." She was undoubtedly relieved and, moreover, she perhaps thought this meant that he tolerated her actions and that she was justified. She might have continued her speculation into the night, but then the man finished speaking with a command, "Go and sin no more." The rest is history.

This story draws a line in the sand between the law which requires tolerance, and love which requires forgiveness. When you love someone, you will not tolerate all of his actions. You will not allow one to harm himself. Imagine a nation where spouses simply tolerated each others' actions, parents simply tolerated their children's actions, siblings simply tolerated their siblings' actions, friends simply

tolerated their friends' actions, and neighbors simply tolerated their neighbors' actions, no matter how vicious or cruel? Furthermore, imagine a person who was tolerant of his own actions, who was never ashamed.

That we as Christians are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves means that we ought not tolerate our neighbors' actions any more than we ought to tolerate our own actions. It is more difficult to love another person than it is to be tolerant of another person. In order to be moral, a human being frequently needs to be intolerant of his own actions. Having a free will is not the singular action of a person deciding whether to do right or wrong, good or evil; it is the act of choosing amongst a multiplicity of wills fighting for control of one's soul and believing that there is a way to become more than just human. To do so we must be intolerant of the various voices of gossip, hatred, lust, sloth, avarice, and pandering, which are wrestling for our souls luring them from their proper end.

Those who suggest tolerance and appreciation of other values and "lifestyles" think every spirit in their souls deserves to be heard, sampled, and appreciated. They even go so far as to speak of values in the same breath as "lifestyles." If values were relative, they would be "life styles," and each person could fashion a self to his or her liking. "If wishes were horses, beggars would ride." Today it may be fashionable to marry and raise children; tomorrow it may be fashionable to father children like a bull in a field of heifers; the next day for men to marry men; the next day it may be fashionable for fathers to marry their daughters, and the next day to justify these actions at the ballot box.

A similar group of people, like those who were ready to stone the woman, asked Christ when it would be lawful for a man to divorce his wife. He responded to their question about divorce reminding them of the original union between man and woman, when God said,

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

After returning these men to the foundation of marriage as a divine act he concluded by stating, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

I suspect the legalistically minded man who asked this question of Christ had forgotten about the God who joins a man and a woman into one flesh. Furthermore, scratching his head, he may have wondered how it could be that wherever he went she would be with him; and conversely, wherever she went he would be with her? Then, maybe, his thought was enlightened from questioning Christ about when a man might divorce a wife to remembering his wife, as did Adam of old, as this "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." Remembering how they spoke of their life together, how he sent her roses, the day they decided to marry; how nervous he was before her mother and father, and the rehearsal, the dinner afterwards; how he could not sleep the night before thinking about her; how he got up and went over to the window and looked upon a star and saw his beloved's face in the starlight;

how he practiced his vow to his love before the face in the dark; to love and to hold, through good times and bad times, through health and in sickness, till death do us part. How he would say “I do” and seal his promise, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder,” with a kiss.

By this marriage vow a husband and wife are admitted and committed to a divine union. Through their vows they stake their lives on each other and begin the daily winding of their time together as husband and wife, into one flesh which began with the simple words of the vow, “I do.”

It is good to remember that love and marriage are not of this world, not natural but supernatural. Marriage is far grander than civil relationships legalized by the state. Civil relationships only last as long as the government or its law does. A marriage vow is the beginning of a relationship which came before and will last longer than any government on earth.

The stand taken by those who voted for the Defense of Marriage Amendment in the voting booth is an easy vote to cast. The marriage vow is a harder stone to cast. It is usually done with a diamond because once you have cast this stone there is no calling it back. This is not to say that what God has entwined together man and woman cannot or will not unwind; but it is to say there is no better place to defend marriage than at home with the daily rewinding of the vow and a simple, “I love you.” Ω