



URBAN CURRENT

Marriage in an urbanized world

Living in a large metropolitan area for a generation and a half, I still find it fascinating and disturbing that the sociology of urban America a generation ago has become the sociology of our entire culture.

Perhaps this is demonstrated most dramatically in the marriage arena.

When Mark tearfully told me 40 years ago he didn't see how his love relationship with John could possibly be wrong, it was part of my education, and a wakeup call.

Historically, homosexuals gravitated to large cities, seeking others like themselves and desiring to live away from the social structures of their smaller cities and towns and the prying, if not condemning, eyes of family and friends. This was known to the general public in some vague, distant kind of way.

Of course, lately, a tsunami of different thinking has covered the land of the free and the home of the brave. The political activism that was confined to a particular ward in a given city has become state and federal law in such a swift sweep that sociologists and historians will be calling it "stunning" years from now. Marriage has been "re-defined."

The sea change did not come from nowhere. The Sexual Revolution unmoored Judeo-Christian mores. Biblical absolutes were washed away in the tide of "if it feels good, do it" and "who are you to judge my pursuit of happiness?" Christians began divorcing their spouses at record rates. Pulpits went soft, if not silent, on divorce and remarriage. If Pharisees were wonders at creating interpretations of interpretations of the Law, contemporary evangelicals seemed to become wonders at finding every loose, loopy interpretation of Scripture to accommodate the selfish individualistic whims of people in our pews wanting to end a marriage.

Arguably, there is a link between the "Christian" "marriage my way" of the last 50

years and the current cultural "marriage my way."

Note the stressors in urban living.

Intensity. There is an intensity that permeates every facet of life. The population density, the traffic, the noise all play to a unique intensity.

Pace. The intensity creates a pace characteristic of urban living. Harried, hurried, late, pushing, pressing, squeezing to make the most of every minute of every day because there's so much to do. It takes longer to do it, and it has to be done now.

Schedule. Naturally, this impacts everyone. Of course it impacts family time, husband/wife time.

Stress. The above creates a stress level that never lets up.

Sexualization. Everything, everything is sexualized. The appeal to sexuality is naked, pervasive, multifaceted, life-sized, relentless.

Baggage. What about the fact that because moral standards have eroded rapidly in the last half of the last century, almost everybody comes into a marriage with relational baggage? This may be one of the greater understatements of the generation.

Expectations. At the same time, people thoroughly "Hollywood-ized" and more self-centered than ever, if that's possible, come to relationships with higher, dare we say unreasonable, and impossible expectations. Naturally, this is a setup for disaster.

Support systems. At the same time, support systems for healthy marriages are fewer and farther between. Also, people take less advantage of existing support systems. Often people have moved away from family. They are anonymous in their neighborhood. Schedule and life demands cut into consistent church attendance. Forget about meaningful engagement with a community of believers. Extended family, church, and social structures, all which used to support the institution of

marriage, aren't in the mix or have no force.

These realities now characterize our culture as a whole.

In cities like Corinth and Ephesus, where the first-century culture surely has enough commonality with the 21st-century to draw our attention, Paul speaks clearly regarding God's design for marriage. Think about it, one church per city consisting of new believers, many of whom are coming out of heathenism and stark hedonism.

Paul affirms God's design. "The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her ..." Ephesians 5:23, 25 (NAS).

Paul teaches God's intention. "... But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. ... Stop depriving one another ..." 1 Corinthians 7: 2-3, 5a (NAS).

Paul reminds of God's boundaries. "... For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God" 1 Thessalonians 4: 3-5 (NAS).

Sexual integrity, without which there is no relational integrity, is not only held up as possible, it is expected. Relational integrity is not only possible, it's expected.

Christ-honoring marriages proclaim God's good news in a bad-news world. In a wounded world, good news is just what the doctor ordered.

by Charles Lyons, Pastor
Armitage Baptist Church,
Chicago, Illinois
charles.lyons@armitagechurch.org

