

Malachi 2.10-16

Ancient Message on Modern Marriage

Value of Preaching through Books of the Bible >

- **READY TO BEGIN** > NOT trying to decide > So many great TEXTS!
- **FEW RESOURCES** - make most of study books > Commen. cover to cover
- **MAXIMIZE STUDY TIME** - increasingly familiar with human author's style
- **MORE ISSUES** - "balanced" diet of themes in Scripture / Not Hobbies
- **CONTEXT UNDERSTOOD** - Not backgrounds of several different texts

- **LESS CONTROVERSY** - Sensitive issues come out through series

Text: "Wives submit to your husbands"

People Wonder: Did I quarreled with my wife that week!?

Am trying to "get back" at a particularly stubborn woman in the church?

"No personal attack intended; I am just a textual preacher doing my job!"

We have come to chapter 5 in our study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians

- **BIBLE KNOWLEDGE MEASURED** - leaders assess member's knowledge
- **Effective TRAINING**- favorite reason > equips members to understand Bible
Best **COMPLEMENT** > "I do not **NEED** you to understand my Bible **NOW!**"

LIVING GOD > Ancient Messengers **LIVING WORD** for All People, All Time

Scripture > Written thousands of years ago / Chosen for sermon months ago

SPEAKS ON THIS SUNDAY TO GOD'S PEOPLE IN THIS PLACE

Malachi Reads our Newspaper > God of Malachi is our God & Father of Jesus X

ANCIENT MESSENGER > Malachi > 450 BC

Prophet to Jews in Palestinian homeland after 70 years of exile in Babylon

MODERN MESSAGE > 3.6 "I the Lord do not change"

God's **LOVE** is **UNCHANGING** and **UNENDING** 1.2 "I have loved you"

Man's **HEART** is **UNCARING** and **UNFAITHFUL** to the Lord Almighty

- Worshippers > SACRIFICE Blind, Crippled, Diseased Animals on Lord's Altar
- Priests > EARS and HEARTS are CLOSED to the Lord of the Covenant

Priests had broken their Promises 2.1-9, but so had the People....

MEN of Israel > came to a New Land, New Opportunities, wanted NEW WIVES

v. 15 "break faith with the wife of your youth"

GOOD JEWISH WIVES who MADE GREAT CHICKEN SOUP & MATZOHS

Found PRETTY YOUNG TARTS v. 11 "marrying the daughter of a foreign god"

// Nehemiah > same time as Malachi – FOUGHT THE SAME BATTLE

WORDS of Nehemiah (...includes methods of HOW to Do Pastoral Ministry)

"In those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language the(se) other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah. *I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God's name* and said: "You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves. Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women. Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?" Nehemiah 13.23-27

TODAY – Focus on ONE QUESTION from passage >What is Marriage?

More than 3000 couples have been married this month in city where I was born
San Francisco, California > Couples are of the SAME GENDER

Men married Men / Women married Women > LEGAL BATTLEFIELD

WHY NOT? Why should these responsible, loving, law abiding, committed people not be allowed the legal right of spending their lives together – to BE MARRIED?

DIFFERENCE between what God's Word and Man's State says about Marriage
DEBATE > Does State's Pattern truly reflect what we call Christian Marriage?

TODAY > How would Malachi – God’s Prophet – define Marriage? > 6 POINTS

1. Companionship

v. 14 “the wife of your youth...she is your partner” INTIMACY > DEEP Sharing

v. 12 COMMON LIFE AND RESIDENCE “the tents of Jacob”

SAME SEX Marriage > Sometimes more than DRUNKEN JERK of Husband

COMPANIONSHIP is Unarguable > first same sex marriage in San Francisco
2 Women been partners for 51 Years > Some Glue has kept them Together

(Associated Press) Cambodian King comments on gay marriages

After watching TV images of gay weddings in San Francisco

King Norodom Sihanouk: homosexual couples should be allowed to get Married

2. Creation Design

v. 10 “Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?”

v. 15 “Has not the LORD made them one?”

God saw LONELY MAN named Adam: “Not good that man is alone” Gen 2.18
NONE of Animals could Provide > COMPANIONSHIP > Spiritual Union

Garden of EDEN > God made them “male and female” > Adam & Eve (not Steve)

LORD Made Them – Sovereign God w/STANDARDS > MORAL ABSOLUTES
OWNER’S MANUAL> Explain how Something Works> God’s Word in Scripture

Not just CHRISTIAN ISSUE > CREATION Issue > Every Society & Religion
ROMANS 1 > Paul: Homosexuality > AGAINST NATURE

George W. Bush “The union of a man and woman is the most enduring human institution, honored and encouraged in all cultures and by every religious faith. Ages of experience have taught humanity that the commitment of a husband and wife to love and to serve one another promotes the welfare of children and the stability of society. Marriage cannot be severed from its cultural, religious and natural roots without weakening the good influence of society.”

3. Covenant

Worshipper comes to God's Sanctuary

With Offerings – v. 12 “he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty”

With Tears – v. 13 “You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail”

God does not Pay Any Attention v. 13 “He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.”

When MAN IGNORED God > MAN was NOT BOTHERED at All
When GOD SEEMS to Ignore God > MAN IS DEVASTED

v. 14 “You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.”

WHY? v. 14 > Broken Covenant with Wife affects Covenant with God

Promise to God becomes HOLLOW if we cannot keep Promises to our Spouse

v. 10 “Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?”

PROMISE KEEPER or a PROMISE BREAKER > Character, Consistency

Chip Ingraham > Four Aspects to a Covenant > with God and in Marriage

1. INITIATION > God takes the Initiative > Husband (usually) in Marriage
2. CONDITIONS > Covenant Promises & Responsibilities > “till death do us part”
3. SIGN > Rainbow, Circumcision, Baptism > WEDDING RINGS
4. RATIFICATION > Shedding of Blood >> SEXUAL CONSUMATION

Physical Impossibility to Properly Ratify > SAME SEX MARRIAGE
Same Sex Attempt Ratification is ABOMINATION > Breaks True Covenant

MARRIAGE > God Created Institution > First of all INSTITUTIONS
 Children > Education > State > Courts > Medicine > all FLOW FROM Marriage

Jesus & Samaritan Woman > “I want Spring of Water welling up to Eternal Life”

Jesus: “Go call your husband” > God wants Wholeness > Complete People

- contra. Pornography, Masturbation, Casual Sex, > NO CASUAL DALLIANCE

Apostle Paul wrote to Christians in a SEX CRAZED city named Corinth -
 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in
 body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." 1 Corinthians 6.16

Prostitute? One Flesh? > Don't even know name, where she lives, never seen again

Shocked by DESCRIPTION of PERMANENCE > “that was Nothing” “Forget it!”

PROBLEM – Cannot Forget > God Knows > You Know > Others may soon Know

Does NOT sound like Hugh Hefner > contradicts “Playboy Philosophy”

But Hugh does not tell us the “Rest of the Story” >

When Playmates become OLD, Thrown Away, Left only feeling EXPLOITED

David Hubbard “the God given pattern is one wife, one husband for a lifetime. The
 roving eye, the flirting hand, the casual dalliance, the passionate affair, the bored
 fed-upness, the cruel abandonment that we see around us, and are sometimes
 tempted to imitate, are not part of God's pattern”

4. Conception

v. 15 Has not [the LORD] made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And
 why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring.

SOME MARRIAGES are CHILDLESS > PAINFUL to Many Couples
 Exception does not BREAK THE RULE

Looking for MARRIAGE PARTNER? Watch out for person who says,

“I do not want any kids” > OFTEN > Reflection of their own SELFISHNESS
 Doesn't want to SHARE the ATTENTION
 WHEN God made Marriage He commanded FIRST COUPLE –
 "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." Genesis 1.28

FOLLY of Same Sex Marriage > DON'T have PLUMBING TO FULFILL DUTY

v. 15 LORD GOD “seeking godly offspring”

COLLEGE CLASSMATES > Married > Christian Publishing Ministry out of UK
 9 Children > Visited > Admired > Disciplined, Loving, Bright, Godly
 “We pray our children will change the world for Jesus Christ”

SAME PURPOSE > ONE CHILD or ONE DOZEN > From God and For God

5. Commitment

James BOICE “The marriage vow is the most solemn, official commitment a person can make....If you are a naturalized American citizen, you have sworn loyalty to the United States of America. But you can reverse that commitment, becoming an expatriate, and no one – certainly not God – will be offended. In the army you took an oath of obedience to your commanding officers, but only for a limited period of time...The only thing more solemn is the commitment Christians make to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. But even that is not always so formal. So I repeat: no commitment you or I can make is more solemn and official as the one we make to our husband or wife in the marriage ceremony. It is a commitment involving the other person, the state, and God.”

Marriage NOT Weekend Event > unless you're Britney Spears > Media Attention

1935 Lutheran Pastor > Walter Maier wrote book on Marriage

WARNED about RISING RATES of Divorce in America thru 1930's

AT THIS RATE > 1950's one FOURTH > 1990's one HALF

Prediction CALLED by Critics > “Hairbrained Hallucination”

MAIER WAS NOT HAIRBRAINED ENOUGH

1920 > One Divorce for every SEVEN Marriages

1940 > One Divorce for every SIX Marriages

1960 > One Divorce for every FOUR Marriages

1972 > One Divorce for every THREE Marriages

1977 > 13 yrs ahead of Maier's Schedule > One Divorce for every TWO Marriages

REALIZE > Many more Countries than USA > Pray your nation More Righteous!
 SERIOUSNESS of Marriage evokes some of BIBLE'S Strongest Language
 NOT MANY TIMES in Bible > God HATES Anything

God HATES Divorce v. 16 "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty.

DIVORCE IS LIKE - a man covering self with violence as with his garment

JOYCE BALDWIN "A figurative expression for all kinds of gross injustice which, like the blood of a murdered victim, leave their mark for all to see"

- NOT God hates the CHILDREN of Divorce
 Many HATE Themselves, Blame Themselves > SOME Hate God
- NOT God hates DIVORCED PEOPLE – God hates what Divorce DOES
 To the Couple > Children > Extended Family > Society > Nation > World

Malachi > Permissive View on Divorce > Bad Example of DIVORCED PRIESTS
 What about Christian Church today? > rarely will SPEAK OUT on Divorce

Not easy > ALWAYS PAINFUL, MESSY, AND COMPLICATED
 Divorced People already FEEL BAD > Do not RUB their NOSES IN IT AGAIN

NT - 2 Grounds > Abandonment and Apostasy / Unbelief and Unfaithfulness

ULTIMATELY only God and that Couple > KNOW THE REAL DETAILS
 Church > place of Grace and Hope > AND Truth and Righteousness

DIRECT LINK > Corruption in the Nation and the Collapse of the Home
 SCARED SILENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH > Made Problem WORSE

For Sake of Married Couples > Children > Extended Family > Society > World
 Speak Out > GOD HATES DIVORCE

JAMES BOICE "I am charging evangelical ministers with being part of the breakdown in our national marriage morality. I am not asking them to ignore the (biblical grounds for divorce). But I am challenging them to limit them as severely as the Bible itself does and to let the clear cry of the evangelical pulpit be that God

hates divorce and stands against it as a witness to the original contract of a man and a woman in marriage.”

6. Centered on the Spiritual

INTERESTING DESCRIPTION v. 11 “marrying the daughter of a foreign god”

NOT > daughter of Accountant, or a Teacher, Mr. Jones of Persia
OR > Woman who is a Nurse, University Graduate, Beautiful Blonde

NOT A CONTRACT but a COVENANT > More than the CEREMONY

YOUNG COUPLES seek PASTOR to Perform Wedding Ceremony

What have you planned?

Place, Wedding Party, Guest List, Food, Colors of Dresses & Decorations

What about your Vows? What kind of promise are you going to make?

“Oh, we haven’t thought about that yet....do you have any ideas?”

MOST PROBLEMS > UNDERLYING CAUSES are SPIRITUAL > View of God

v. 11 “Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, HOW?
by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.”

Psalmist asks “LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?”

God answers: “He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart”

Psalms 15.1,2

v. 12 “As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob --even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty.

v. 14 “you have broken faith with her”

Malachi speaks AGAINST MIXED MARRIAGES > Not Ethnic but Spiritual

Israel OUT OF EGYPT “a mixed multitude went up also with them” Exodus 12.38

Moses’ wife was an African > CUSHITE from Ethiopia

Boaz married RUTH from Moab

MIXED MARRIAGE in Bible = SPIRITUALLY Mixed > Believer & Unbeliever
Apostle Paul to Corinth – “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers” 2 Cor 6.14

When 2 People of DIFFERENT Religions Marry > 1 MUST COMPROMISE
OFTEN > ADOPT the LEAST DEMANDING of their Two Religions

Much Easier to sit around House in your Underwear on Sunday Mornings
Than to Get Dressed up and Go out to Church

Olivia Langdon > Raised by Christian Parents > Professed her OWN Faith in X
Man OPEN CRITIC of Christianity > Courted Her > She Fell in Love
AGREED to Marry > Hoping to Bring the Man to FAITH
BEGAN WELL > Established Family Devotions > Regular Bible Reading & Prayer
SURPRISED MAN’S FRIENDS > All Knew him as GREAT SKEPTIC
One Day – Time for Devotions – Husband > MARK TWAIN: “Livy you may keep
this up if you want to, but I must ask you to excuse me from it. It is making me a
hypocrite. I don’t believe in the Bible; it contradicts my reason. I can’t sit here and
listen to it, letting you believe that I regard it as you do, in the light of the Gospel,
the Word of God.” MARK TWAIN had NO FAITH > Eventually Neither Did Wife
Later in Life > Painful Tragedy Occurred in Family
Twain to wife Olivia: “Livy, if it comforts you to lean on Christian faith, do so!”
Wife: “I can’t I do not have any”

STRONG EMPHASIS > when God says something better LISTEN > 2 X’s

v 15 “So guard yourself in your spirit, & do not break faith with the wife of your
youth

v. 16 “Guard yourself in spirit and do not break faith”

Apostle Paul > Greatest Biblical teachings on MARRIAGE > Ephesians 5

Husband AND Wife > Submit to ONE ANOTHER > Be Like Jesus
HUSBAND > Like Jesus > Loving, Sacrificial, LEADERSHIP
WIFE > Like Jesus > Loving SUBMISSION

JUST BEFORE giving ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE COMMANDS about Marriage

“Be (CONTINUALLY) filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns & spiritual songs. Sing & make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus X”

IMPOSSIBLE to FULFILL God’s Covenant without HOLY SPIRIT’s Power
IMPOSSIBLE to have Holy Spirit without Salvation thru the Lord Jesus Christ

ONLY HOPE for Vibrant, Loving, Dynamic, Life-Long Marriage > Jesus Christ

2000: JESUS attended a Wedding at Cana in Galilee> He’ll come to Yours too!

John 2.2 “Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding”
DID YOUR GUEST LIST INCLUDE JESUS CHRIST > Not TOO Late!

JESUS Says to Church: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”
Revelation 3.20

He’s KNOCKING > Waiting for your Response
NOT Big Bad Wolf > Does not say “I will huff, and puff, and blow house down!”

GOD HATES DIVORCE > Spoils Wonderful PICTURE of His Unceasing Love

BIBLE > All Believers > Global Church > All Time, Tongues, Tribes
WILL BECOME THE BRIDE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

JOYFUL ANTICIPATION of Wedding Feast

APOSTLE JOHN: “heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God. ...Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from

their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"

Revelation 19.6-9, 21.1-5

Nearly All Americans Try Marriage

Thursday, February 26

President Bush wants a constitutional amendment to preserve marriage. But what, exactly, would it preserve? Traditional marriage already has been transformed, not by gays and lesbians who want in, but by straights who want out.

What the president called civilization's "most fundamental institution" is, in America, a rather peculiar one.

It's an institution that 59% of us currently inhabit and that more than nine in 10 of us eventually embrace, at least once and for a little while. It correlates with health, wealth and happiness. It's the acknowledged gold standard for raising children. And it has been extolled in cultural touchstones from Father Knows Best to Sex and the City.

But it's also an institution that over the past four decades has been increasingly severed by divorce and mocked by adultery. It has been ignored by couples who live together and have children out of wedlock. And it has been postponed by those with better things to do first.

Americans believe that love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage, but they also have introduced the concepts of the seven-year itch, the starter marriage and Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire. Feelings about marriage are complex, and contradictory, and nothing short of an amendment to the national psyche is likely to change that.

Marriage is such a great idea that Americans seem to love it too much -- the idea, that is. The reality of marriage -- crumbs in the bed, toilet seat up (or down), meatloaf again -- suffers in comparison. And since the introduction of no-fault divorce, it has gotten easier across the nation to leave a real marriage behind and move on in search of the ideal one.

Everyone is an expert on marriage. Here's Homer, 29 centuries ago: "There is nothing more admirable than two people who see eye-to-eye keeping house as man and wife, confounding their enemies and delighting their friends."

And here's twice-divorced Donald Trump, two years ago: "Marriage is a great institution if you get it right."

A lot happened between the ages of these sages, including Leave It To Beaver, The Donna Reed Show and The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet. Television, in its first 30 years, was fixated on the perfect marriage as the basis for the perfect family. But anyone who compared their marriage with the Cleavers' found it wanting.

'Diluted and polluted'

At the moment, the institution is beset by these challenges:

* Divorce. A Census study showed that 73% of women who married between 1980 and 1984 reached their 10th anniversary, compared with 90% of women who married between 1945 and 1949. Although divorce leveled off in the 1990s, as many as 50% of new marriages end in Splitsville.

Peggy Vaughan, the author of The Monogamy Myth, says marriage's meaning "is getting diluted and polluted," not by people who refuse to marry, but by those who marry too often. "We have serial monogamy as multiple marriages become the norm." And the chance of a single, long-term marriage fades. "Somebody has to be willing to say the emperor is not wearing any clothes," she says.

Skeptics could point to "starter weddings," which might cost, on average, \$20,000, but end before the couple have kids or turn 30.

The brevity of some marriages both amuses and enrages gays and lesbians lobbying for the right to marry. Syndicated columnist Dan Savage wondered recently whether "allowing me to marry my boyfriend (of nine years) would imperil lasting, stable heterosexual marriages like the one Britney Spears enjoyed for 55 hours."

* Cohabitation. At least half of all newlyweds have lived together first, researchers say. And David Popenoe, a Rutgers University sociologist, estimates that two-thirds of people who marry have lived with somebody else first.

Live-in unions are more fragile than marriages. About 41% of unmarried opposite-sex couples living together have children younger than 18 at home. But sociologists Pamela Smock and Wendy Manning have found that children born to couples who live together have about twice the risk of seeing their parents split than those with married biological parents.

* Children out of wedlock. About a third of children are born out of wedlock, and roughly the same percentage live with only one parent or neither parent.

* Later marriages. President Bush married at age 31 -- past the median age of 27, which has risen since World War II. John Wall, a professor of ethics and religion at Rutgers University-Camden, says the children of baby boomers, often scarred by divorce, are reluctant to try marriage.

* Adultery. Estimates on those having affairs are notoriously unreliable. But after 25 years of studying extramarital affairs, Vaughan estimates about 60% of both husbands and wives have had an affair, if not in their current marriage, then in a previous one.

Other researchers have different takes. A 1992 landmark study by Edward Laumann of the University of Chicago found 25% of men and 10% of women had strayed.

A major reason for infidelity, and a subsequent divorce, is "people don't want to give up what they think is the ultimate high, the newness, the excitement phase of marriage," Vaughan says.

To some, it all adds up to a crumbling Gibraltar. Thomas Coleman of the American Association for Single People says that, in the future, "marriage will no longer be on a pedestal. It will share the benefits and protections of society with all sorts of other legitimate living arrangements, whether that is solo singles, unmarried families, domestic partner arrangements."

Robert Thompson, who studies and teaches pop culture at Syracuse University, says, "A lot of people in the '60s and '70s thought they could escape the gravitational pull of marriage. But it proved to be a lot stronger than they thought."

Too many old wedding photos, too many bridal gowns in the attic, too many stories about the time "when your father and I . . ." Americans may be dissatisfied with marriage, but we don't know anything else. Marriage fills a certain need, and there's nothing to take its place.

"The alternatives -- single parenting and cohabitation -- are available to people, but they are making a bargain that requires less of them and gives them less in return," says Linda Waite, a University of Chicago sociologist and co-author of *The Case For Marriage*. Like spinach, marriage is good for you. In a report released last week, Maggie Gallagher of the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy says that people in long-term marriages "live longer, healthier lives with higher levels of emotional well-being and lower rates of mental illness and emotional distress. (They) make more money than otherwise similar singles and build more wealth and experience . . . than do single or cohabiting couples with similar income levels."

And it's good for kids. David Blankenhorn, founder of the Institute for American Values, a think tank that studies family issues, calls marriage "our society's most pro-child institution. . . . If you want kids to do well, then you want marriage to do well."

Marriage is, by many measures, doing just that. According to the most recent figures, 65% of men and 71% of women marry by age 30. By age 60, those figures rise to 97% for men and 95% for women.

"The institution of marriage itself strikes me as being in no trouble at all," says Robert Lang, a demographer at Virginia Tech. "How many things do 95% of people do? . . . They should have a Defense of Voting Act." (The "Defense of

Marriage Act" defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Congress and 38 states have passed versions of the measure.)

Many of those who divorce more than once also try again, and thus spend much of their lives, for better or worse, married.

In recent years, there have been many attempts to strengthen marriage. "We know that it is fragile, and we -- the collective we -- are responsible for it," says Diane Sollee, who hosts a yearly "Smartmarriages" conference.

Florida requires marriage education courses in high school. Louisiana, Arkansas and Arizona have approved "covenant marriages" in which couples voluntarily limit their ability to divorce. Arizona provides state funds to help couples attend privately run marriage-skills workshops. Oklahoma has used welfare money to reduce the divorce rate. There is a National Marriage Project at Rutgers to study and promote marriage and all sorts of courses in marriage, from Marriage 101 at Northwestern University to "Couple Communication" in suburban Maryland.

Expand the franchise?

What stumps some people is why, if marriage is such a bedrock of traditional values, the franchise should not be expanded to gay men and lesbians.

"Because it's morally wrong," says Terry Calhoun, 47, a Catholic who lives in Stockton, Ill., with his second wife. His first marriage was annulled. "Marriage has slipped a lot," he says, and reserving it for one man and one woman would strengthen it.

This makes no sense to John Plessis, 69, of Scottsdale, Ariz. He's a retired steamship company executive who says he has lived with several women over the years but never married. "Gays are people, too," he says. "I don't see what difference it makes if they're allowed to get married."

Cheryl Jacques of the Human Rights Campaign, a gay civil rights group, says same-sex marriages taking place in San Francisco and ordered by the court in Massachusetts starting in May will reassure marriage's protectors.

When gay men and lesbians marry, she says, "for the vast majority of Americans, absolutely nothing bad happens. . . . All that does happen is that the . . . gay or lesbian family is made stronger, safer and more secure."

Lang, the demographer, notes that "there was a time when you couldn't marry between races. It was always to protect marriage. Isn't that what this is going to be 10-20 years from now? Culture absorbs redefinition of marriage."

Â© Copyright 2004 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Co. Inc.

Top Stories