

How the Order of Marriage Has Shaped Us All, and What We Will Lose If We Change It

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*This address was given at the BYU Families
Under Fire Conference, October 4–5, 2004.*

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Soldiers, like athletes, hear two kinds of talks—training talks and motivational talks. Motivational talks characteristically come in emotional moments. Training talks come with the daily grind of preparation, when the basics of battle are mastered for the contest to follow. What I will share with you today is more like a training talk; it is meant to set in place one of the basics of a battle being fought in the legislatures and courts of the world, a battle that affects us all, whether we like it or not.

The battle is over marriage—specifically, over who will be permitted to marry. The issue is whether we in various countries, states, and provinces will give our respective governments the authority to “marry” any two adults, even if they are of the same sex. Or will we withhold that authority so that marriage in the future will continue to be reserved for one man and one woman?

To make headway in this highly public battle, the advocates of traditional marriage must show that society would lose something of great significance by extending marriage to same-sex couples—something that governments ought to protect. Showing this requires making a convincing case for the following two points.

First, that there are significant benefits that man-woman marriage brings to individuals and society generally, which can come from no other source.

Second, that extending marriage to same-sex couples would so compromise man-woman marriage that these benefits would substantially cease to flow.

One reason the promoters of same-sex marriage have gained so much ground in public opinion is that defenders of traditional man-woman marriage haven’t been able to say clearly what these benefits are or why they are in jeopardy. This has fed the perception among an activist minority, and a broad band of the population that is listening to their arguments, that traditional marriage has no sound basis, and that anyone who wants to withhold marriage from same-sex couples has to be ignorant, almost cruelly

insensitive, or bigoted. In the resulting widespread confusion, the belief has spread that morality and justice are on the activists' side.

I do not speak critically of the defenders of man-woman marriage, of whom I am one. Indeed, many of them have written remarkably persuasive arguments. But for us, the challenge is far from easy, especially if we are religious, because we are not able to say all that we believe. This, it is widely held, is because our arguments must make sense to a secular audience if they are to count in the public debate. Although we find truth, instruction, and inspiration in the scriptures, the words of the prophets, and the evidence of God's hand in human life, they are not admissible on the secular battleground where the fighting is taking place. This is a point I made in presenting this talk publicly, but since then I have somewhat revised my opinion—not because I think we can convince secular mentalities of views they have already rejected outright, but because it may be best to speak to people who already share our belief in the fundamental rightness of man-woman marriage. There are times when it is better to strengthen one's allies than to preach to the enemy, particularly when the enemy is attacking. Besides, it is built into our legislative system that elected representatives ought to enact legislation that represents the will of the majority and that it should be overturned in the courts only if it clearly violates the Constitution or is demonstrably irrational. These principles have obviously been violated both in legislatures and in courts in our country and other parts of the world. Nevertheless, even with this disadvantage, I have a hope that we will be able to provide “a reason of the hope that is in [us] with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15)—a reason that may strengthen people disposed toward traditional marriage, and that others who are open and honest can at least respect.

To take steps toward accomplishing this—to build up one part of the case for traditional marriage—we must do more than repeat the old arguments. I believe it will help to introduce into the discussion certain aspects of marriage that don't ordinarily get mentioned. In my discussion of these aspects, I will draw connections to our Latter-day Saint background of doctrine and faith.

1. Marriage as a Way of Life

Marriage, as everyone knows, is an institution. Knowing this isn't very helpful because the word *institution* has many meanings. Two of them very clearly apply to marriage; that is, marriage is an institution in two senses of the word. It might even be more accurate to say that it is simultaneously two *different* institutions. It is a *legal institution*, and at the same time it is a *social institution*. This fact, as we are going to see, is the key to clearing up the rampant confusions in the argument for same-sex marriage.

The *legal institution* is a contractually established organization of two people, usually age 16 or older. Traditionally, and currently in most places in the world, one of these two people must be a man and one a woman.

The *social institution* is, the dictionary tells us, “a well-established and structured pattern of behavior or of relationships that is accepted as a fundamental part of a culture” (Random House).

I am going to use the term *way of life* when referring to the social institution of marriage. As the dictionary definition says, a way of life is the pattern of behavior and relationships the people in a particular culture or subculture have in common. For reasons I hope will become clear, I will also use this term, *way of life*, for the customs, language, manners, practices, and social structure that are characteristic of a culture or subculture. Every different people, every different culture, has its particular way of life.

A way of life is pervasive, in that it includes how individuals do just about everything. Their patterns of behavior, speech, and thought make them more or less like one another, and different from the people in other cultures.

If we observe people in a culture different from ours, we can clearly see them behaving according to these patterns. But the individuals who are part of that culture do not experience the patterns in that way. They experience them as *expectations* they must live up to in order to be understood by others, accepted in the community, and effective in obtaining what they need or want. Therefore they adopt the way of life of the people around them as their own.

There is a way of life associated with being married. From culture to culture this way of life varies in minor details, such as how labor is divided between the spouses and how the family is represented publicly. But to a striking degree—there are a few exceptions here and there—the variant versions of the traditional married way of life share the same core elements. These elements have to do with lifelong commitment, mutual trust, sexual fidelity, collaborative rearing of children, and the selflessness and sacrifices required in order to live up to the expectations of the traditional married way of life.

I used the term *expectations* for these major elements of this way of life, but they are loftier than expectations. They are *ideals*. The customs, manners, and practices of human cultures are *expectations* that individuals will act and speak and think more or less as the others do, and these expectations may not be particularly virtuous. But the *ideals* of traditional marriage that I just listed are elevating and ennobling, and meant to lift the marriage partners above the often petty and self-protective ways of ordinary life. Striving to live up to such ideals sets the marriage partners apart from the world.

I'm now prepared to make a startling claim: *Individuals who marry commit themselves to adopt these ideals as their own*. By this I don't mean they live up to these ideals; I mean that entering marriage entails committing oneself to try to live up to them.

“Wait a minute,” someone may object. “My spouse and I are a man-woman couple, and I don't remember making any such commitment. We wrote our own vows and then we were pronounced husband and wife.” The answer to this objection is the key to clarifying the same-sex marriage debate and building the case for traditional marriage.

The legal institution of man-woman marriage is such that the social institution, or way of life, comes with it, inseparably, and so do the ideals of lifetime commitment, trust, fidelity, child-rearing, kindness, and sacrifice.

What does this mean, “a way of life *comes with* the legal institution?” Consider this analogy: In the very nature of a business, if you set up a shoe repair shop you are going to be buying leather, putting up a sign, opening the shop at the announced hours, repairing shoes, perhaps hiring helpers, replacing your tools when necessary, taking people's money, and making bank deposits. You commit yourself to these activities when you go into that business, and if you don't keep your commitment you'll soon find yourself with a very poor excuse for a shoe shop on your hands, and perhaps you will have to close it down. Just so, only much more profoundly, the very nature of man-woman marriage requires that it be carried on according to the ideals of commitment, trust, fidelity, child-rearing, kindness, and sacrifice, or the marriage will fall short of what it ought to be. There will be trouble, and quite possibly the marriage will end. Couples may not realize the all-absorbing commitment they are making when they say “I do” with stars in their eyes, but, as we are about to see, that's the way it is.

2. The Basis of the Traditional Marriage Ideal

I have claimed that the legal institution of man-woman marriage inescapably brings with it the ideals of traditional marriage. I will have four primary points to make on this subject.

Before I turn my attention to this task, let me say why I believe man-woman marriage ought to be treated as sacred even outside of religious contexts. I stress that this is my belief, for I cannot demonstrate it. Although the marriage-centered traditional way of life, in its many variations from culture to culture, is not the pure order of life that God originally established for His children and has from time to time restored, it is traceable to that original order—or would be if we knew enough history. If I am right about this, traditional marriage in its cultural variations has its historical origin in the priesthood (even though it is decidedly not the same as the new and everlasting covenant of marriage, which is called in the scriptures an order of the priesthood [D&C 131:2]). The legal institution derives from a religious institution (indeed, forms of the religious institution still survive in many places alongside the legal institution, and in theocracies the legal and religious institutions are one). Traditional marriage is the order of life that virtually all societies have retained, in one variation or another, from our first parents, and as such has been ordained by God for all of His children.

Now let us turn to the four points about man-woman marriage.

Traditional marriage is rooted in a covenant made with God, or in good conscience. The marriage partners make the covenant with one another. They also make it with God—or, if they know not God, they make it in good conscience. If I understand the matter correctly, they not only make the covenant with God individually, they also make it together. They say, in effect, “We will, individually and together, put our marriage and one another ahead of self for Thy sake, or for the sake of conscience.” This is their first married act.

What’s powerful here is that in making a covenant with God, or in good conscience, we gain a special degree of leverage against our carnal, sensual, and devilish impulses. A higher way of life beckons us, and we pledge to God, the Sovereign of our being, or we pledge in good conscience, that we will follow it. There can be no commitment more solemn. It adds to the strictness of this voluntarily assumed obligation that we make this commitment to a higher way of living to our spouse as well. To the extent that we follow that higher way, we find ourselves liberated from servitude to our former self-centered worldliness.

The traditional marriage partners covenant to become as one. This part of the covenant is one of the main reasons for marriage. In any lifelong commitment the partners set their relationship apart from all other relationships. In the nature of the contract, there is an exclusivity. Even in “open marriages” where the partners agree to “date” other people, they concurrently commit to keep coming back to each other. So in a very real sense, all who enter marriage both seek and pledge to a greater or lesser degree to become as one, in contrast to their separateness from all others. So it shouldn’t be news to anyone when I say that each of the partners binds himself or herself, irrevocably, to become as one with the other, and to place the other’s welfare ahead of his or her own. Each says, in effect, “I will not go back. I will not turn to the side. I will persist in striving to overcome the world and work out whatever shortcomings stand in my way, and I will give whatever time and resources I have to help you do the same, until we become as one.”

It is with one’s natural complement that the covenant is made. We come now to the heart of the case. It is that the oneness and personal growth and fruitfulness attainable in man-woman marriage cannot be matched by any other human possibilities. To marry in the traditional way is to step into a world of opportunity that cannot be measured on any scales familiar to people trying to live as individuals.

Why is this so? It is because of the fundamental differences between man and woman. These differences are not like any of the other differences that distinguish persons. They are, despite the opinion of some, much more fundamental than differences of race, nationality, or talent. The features of the male-female difference that make it fundamental include two that I want to mention here: First, as the Proclamation on the Family says, “Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.” Second, the differences of male and female make them complementary to one another in such a way that they require one another for completeness and fruitfulness. Because of his masculinity and her femininity, a man and a woman *together* possess the capacity, under God-given conditions, to form a unity endowed with powers and blessed with enjoyments unattainable in any other way.

Said President Hinckley, “In his grand design, when God first created man, he created a duality of the sexes. The ennobling expression of that duality is found in marriage. One individual is complementary to the other. . . . There is no other arrangement that meets the divine purposes of the Almighty. Man and woman are His creations. Their duality is His design. Their complementary relationships and functions are fundamental to His purposes. One is incomplete without the other” (*Ensign*, November 2004).

This male-female duality has deep practical dimensions. Husband and wife think and feel differently in ways no socialization can change. Each has his or her own singular and irreplaceable contributions to make to their union and their family. This fact of nature makes marriage burdensome and frustrating if we are worldly—our partner seems to demand that we give up what we think we need to be happy. *But if we are seeking to be faithful to our marriage covenant, this same call to sacrifice self-interest in favor of our partner and our marriage is precisely what will stretch us enough to become, individually and together, more virtuous, loving, long-suffering, and forgiving. In regards to our character and personality, it will quite literally stretch us out of shape—our worldly, self-absorbed shape—as it transforms us into beings who begin to resemble their highest destiny.* Though it does not seem so to the worldly, the marriage partners flourish individually and together, and rear flourishing children, in proportion to the moral and spiritual requirements to which they rise. And the requirements for this transformation of human beings are nowhere more completely provided than by the complementary and demanding differences of a man and a woman in a traditional marriage.

Let us take a commonplace example. Trying to get along with each other as best they can, however awkwardly, two relatively immature people will find themselves undergoing changes, little by little. Each will become more long-suffering and patient. Each will sacrifice. In spite of himself, the male will discover that he can actually live without Monday Night Football. Alternatively, you know married people who have remained as they began, selfish and miserable and fundamentally lonely—but you have not met two people striving to live their marriage covenant who have remained that way. Entering a traditional marriage is deliberately choosing to live according to a way of life that will elevate the partners far above worldly self-indulgence, break down their selfishness, and install the other’s needs as the primary concern in each of their hearts.

In saying all these things, I do not downplay the growth in goodness available to people outside of marriage. In their private relation to God, their churches, their organizations, and their personal relationships, many become sublimely refined—one cannot read of St. Francis or Corrie and Betsy ten Boom or Mother Teresa and not believe it. How did these people achieve such growth, not being married? By being nurtured in families and in communities bound together by family life. By making the family ideals their own ideals. I believe that goodness in this world comes from Christ directly, and also from Him indirectly through those who live as He has ordained. Moreover, though the associations available to single people may be rich in ideals, they cannot equal the order of marriage. They may engender many of the solicitous attitudes and feelings found in a worthy example of traditional marriage. But they fall short of eliciting the fullness of growth into Godhood that is the highest possibility of every soul. That is why, I

believe, our loving God will not withhold the order of marriage from any soul willing to live by all of its ideals.

The covenant includes rearing a posterity together. The covenant that the man and woman together make with God or conscience includes an unreserved commitment, a commitment without an expiration date, to bear children and rear them collaboratively, and to do this in such a way that their complementarity and unity as man and woman will become a model of the order of marriage to which their children may aspire. The ways of the parents become the ways of the children, and thus righteous parents and their children become as one. This is the fullest expression of their masculine and feminine natures. It is an integral part of the end for which they were themselves begotten, and the capstone of all the contributions either of them singly, or both of them together, can ever make.

So what have we learned? That to make marriage work, the partners are constrained by their natural differences to stretch themselves toward their highest potential, and thus leave behind the disinclinations toward goodness that may have previously held them back. The perfect wholeness comes not to a lone individual but to a larger unity of which that individual can become a fitting part.

3. Like a Temple in the Profane World

I invite you to think now about society as a worldly environment. Think of those who have suffered themselves to be shaped into worldly people. Living for one another's approval, and for pleasure and distraction, they proceed through this world essentially alone, in the anxious hope of somehow measuring up and finding acceptance and belonging.

As you contemplate the worldly society they share, with its base and pandering expectations, imagine a traditional family. To the degree that the parents are living up to their marriage covenant, this family is organized according to an order special to itself, one uncontaminated by worldliness. The family members are connected to one another by privileges and obligations they share with no one else. They have together developed all manner of qualities that do not come automatically upon entering adulthood, such as serenity, patience, and self-reliance. These qualities have nurtured trust and consideration among the family members, so that each of them has become bound to each of the others, and to all of them together. The bonds that unite them are made secure by the irrevocable quality of their parents' covenant with and sacrifices for one another. Over the years these bonds have been strengthened by countless accepting, caring, patient, and forgiving responses of the family members one to another—responses that originated in the parents' way of life. This is how the order of man-woman marriage can structure a family and develop children prepared to bring the same order to their own families.

An image is forming. You can see with your mind's eye the worldly inhabitants of the world, essentially separate and single (even some of the supposedly married ones), connected one to another only by associations, contracts, obligations, oaths, vows, and expectations that are tenuous and temporary. You can see also, in this field of scattered souls, clusters of individuals who have each been reshaped so as to be able to live together in love. These clusters are families. The family in this image is like a complex architectural structure, built of various natural pieces, such as timbers and stones, that have been formed over time to fit one with another. Some of these pieces represent unmarried adult children, and some represent persons without family connections who, having adopted family ideals, treat others as their brothers and sisters. And scattered all around lie more of those pieces, separately and singly as it were, that are either not formed for family life or have become twisted to fit well in a family.

In this image, the family is standing within the worldly order of persons while not being worldly itself, just as the temple stands in the profane world. Both the temple and the family ideal are in but not of the world.

Outsiders cannot come into the “temple” of the family. They can enter the house; they can even invade the master bedroom. But they cannot enter the family, because they have not paid the consuming price to become one of the family. Theirs may be the identity, the personality and character, of a lonely hermit, an obsessive stock trader, or a surfer living to catch the perfect wave; theirs may even be the identity of a member of some other family. But it is not the identity of a husband, wife, son, daughter, or sibling in *this* family. The family is not a place where the individual members merely come; the family *is* these individual members. You cannot enter their family unless you are one of them, and you cannot destroy it by evicting or even killing some of them.

Explore this image of the family standing, temple-like, in a profane world. Within the family, like an inner room within the temple, are the marriage partners. To their relationship, as I have already said, no other relationship is comparable. Because the unity of the rest of the family depends upon the wholeness of the marriage, the marriage, insofar as husband and wife are striving for the ideal, can be thought of as the family’s sacred heart or center. And within this sacred center is found the wife, the mother. The husband and father leaves betimes to obtain provisions and to secure protection, but the mother abides. Even if she must help to provide necessities for the family, she continues in such devotion to her husband and her children that, in her soul, she never ceases to abide in the inner chamber of the family, unspotted from the world. She is the heart within the heart. And for at least a time in the infancy of each child, her offspring abide there with her, first one and then the next. In some manner that I do not understand, even the father cannot intrude himself into the fathomless, holy intimacy of mother and child.

4. The Case for Traditional Marriage

Using the discussion so far as background, we can now turn to the challenge made to traditional marriage by the same-sex marriage movement and clearly state the issue that must be addressed. The issue is: If marriage is changed so that it can consist of any two adults—a man and a woman, a man and a man, or a woman and a woman—*what will be the way of life that accompanies that arrangement? What will be the norms, expectations, standards, obligations, privileges, and enjoyments to which the two partners aspire? Will they include the ideals of traditional marriage?*

Once the issue is framed this way, in such stark clarity, the answer becomes obvious. Whatever way of life may be associated with an “any two persons” legal institution, it must flow from characteristics that are common to every couple that might enter into that institution. Both man-woman and same-sex couples must share these characteristics. Therefore, this gender-indifferent way of life with its accompanying expectations *cannot* be the way of life of traditional marriage; it cannot include the traditional ideals—or, for that matter, the hard-won benefits that these ideals make possible. For it is specifically and exclusively from the complementary differences of man and woman that these ideals flow.

This partly natural and partly social fact cannot be changed by calling the “any two persons” union by the name “marriage.” When you plant your corn patch next year, you may carry the seeds in the same jar, labeled “corn,” that you’ve always used, but if it contains bean seeds you are going to get a different crop than you expect and different vegetables on the dinner table, the label notwithstanding. Whatever name you give it, the “any two persons” legal institution will not *be* marriage. It will be a different institution altogether, associated with a dramatically different way of life. You can authorize magistrates to pronounce a same-sex couple married, but you cannot thereby thrust them into the covenantal order of responsibilities and rights of traditional marriage. In a misguided effort to announce their special friendship, their romantic liaison, their intention of sexual exclusivity, or their commitment to continue their companionship for a very long time, you can record their names in the city or county marriage records, but you cannot thereby provide the unique conditions and ideals that make man-woman marriage so fruitful. That you cannot do.

Now we are ready to face the objection that traditional marriage defenders have found the most troublesome. “Even if we grant, for the sake of argument, that there’s something special about man-woman marriage,” the objectors say, “you still haven’t shown us why marriage shouldn’t be extended to same-sex couples. Doing so isn’t going to hurt man-woman marriages in any way. Your man-woman marriages will be able to go on providing all the personal, familial, and social benefits you claim for them. But others who yearn for companionship and fulfillment with a partner of their own gender will also be able to have what they want—the legitimacy of their unions that the State can bestow, the respect of society that this will bring, and certain economic and legal benefits. To refuse to grant them the privileges you enjoy is discriminatory and just plain wrong.”

What will be lost by changing the legal institution of marriage so that same-sex couples can marry? We can answer this question quite precisely. The order of marriage will be lost. Our civilization’s fundamental social institution will be lost. The source of the highest human ideals, the most refined customs, proprieties, qualities of fellow-feeling, and virtues that have graced our civilization—this will be lost. Although a man and a woman will still be able to marry one another, the expectations socially associated with the institution they enter into will require little of them. This will teach them to minimize their male and female differences in their minds, for they will be able to consider themselves decent spouses without being called to respect those differences. The idea that children might be needed to enrich and complete their union will disappear. And instead of commitment, the basis of their relationship will be emotions and feelings in all their transitoriness. All this will follow because both the legal institution and the social institution that are the bases of the traditional married way of life will exist no more. “Marriages” will be more casual and impermanent. The ideals and possibilities found in traditional marriage will no longer be part of most young people’s aspirations. Our children will aim for far less in their marriages than their forebears, and therefore achieve far less; their commitments to their partners will be conditional and their unions temporary. We are already seeing this happen, for the changes in the understanding of marriage which we don’t want made into law have already taken place in the minds of many people, particularly younger people.

If the loss I have described does not seem alarming, consider this: I am speaking not simply of losing the marriage ideal, but losing also the means by which this ideal is communicated naturally to the next generations, across all cultures of the world. It seems that God has built a corrective into human nature to prevent the waywardness of some from infecting everyone who comes after. The next generations are always male and female, and hence their marriages bring them face to face with requirements that will stretch and refine them. Thus He seems to have secured the natural passage of the marriage ideal from one generation to the next in spite of the failures of many to live up to it. But what is happening now is more than failure or waywardness. The natural mechanism for passing on the marriage ideal is being tampered with by a few of God’s headstrong children, and the possibility is suddenly very real that this mechanism might not work in the future.

But why, some may ask, must we let the *form* of a legal institution have so much influence? Can’t we traditionalists ignore it and just go on living by our own rules? The answer to the question begins with a focus on what will happen to our language if the legal institution is changed. If we give the name *marriage* to the union of any two people, we will change the very meaning of that word. It will mean a different order of living, a way of life that any two people can enter into. In legal documents and public schools and the media, the word *marriage* will be used to refer to this different, far more casual institution. Our children will look at us quizzically when we speak of the challenges and joys of traditional marriage. What words will we use to tell them what we have learned from our experience? How will we teach them of the possibilities attainable only in man-woman marriage?

As I was pondering the consequences of this change in language, Maggie Gallagher published this:

What some dismiss as protecting “merely” the word marriage is actually 90 percent of the loaf. If a married couple no longer consists of a husband and wife, we lose the shared meaning of the word; we lose the ability to speak the idea in public and be understood. . . . The opponents of marriage understand what many of its friends do not: Capturing the word is the key to deconstructing the institution.

If the word marriage includes same-sex couples, we proponents of the marriage culture will be silenced in the public square because we will no longer have a word for the idea of marriage as we and our forebears have always understood it. . . . (“Massachusetts vs. Marriage,” *The Weekly Standard*, December 1, 2003.)

5. What’s Likely to Happen?

Now in spite of the ominous implications of tampering with the legal institution of marriage, I do not believe traditional marriage will quietly disappear, even in the worst-case scenario. Groups of people will fight to keep the old concept of marriage alive, and to use the terms *marry* and *marriage* in the traditional way. They will struggle to monitor and censor their children’s contacts and experiences. This will require a sustained, uphill effort to isolate the children from worldly influences in order to maintain a linguistic enclave in which the crucial words don’t slip away. To those who carry on this fight will come the strength that valor always produces. The tragedy will be that, even if they are successful, their children’s salutary impact on the society around them will be reduced. Fewer and fewer individuals will encounter the traditional marriage and family way of life with its altruistic ideals of personal sacrifice, domestic order, lifelong fidelity, patience, inward security, modesty, sobriety, and reverence. Increased numbers of children will be reared in environments of unopposed worldliness. More and more, I must suppose, the preaching of the gospel will become the only lifeline for individuals disturbed by the course of their culture.

The enemies of traditional marriage will say there is no adequate empirical basis for making such predictions. But I wonder if the predictions are not being fulfilled already. Look at the gangs of children reared without fathers, look at the hundreds of thousands of marauding Chinese males with no prospect of finding a mate, look at the dependent mentality of scores of millions of children reared by the Soviet state. In the absence of experimental trials showing that we are not marching toward disaster, it is madness to tamper with the most venerable of our civilization’s institutions just because a relative minority of intellectual faddists has taken to the notion that their social theory will work, and a lot of passive people are willing to believe them. At the very least such a radical, far-reaching social experiment ought to be tested as rigorously as medical equipment and drugs before they can be put on the market. The burden of proof should be on those proposing the radical alternative, and not on those who have centuries of culture on their side.

Over a half-century ago Paul Tillich wrote, “This generation is living on the unreinvested capital of the faith of its fathers.” It seems to me that, save in faithful families, our generation is handing our successors a nearly depleted inheritance, and consequently they are about to be dispossessed of the fundamental blessings of life. Mormon cried in a day at least as dark as ours, “O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! . . . O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen!” (Mormon 6:17, 19.) Well did Nephi record the words of his father, Lehi, for us to read. “O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe” (2 Nephi. 1:13).

Yet in spite of the awful prospects, President Hinckley has declared that the future is bright if we are faithful. This suggests to me that we must be engaged in defending traditional marriage and all the benefits it brings to humanity not because we are worried about the destruction of everything, but to protect our children, and to prepare as many souls as possible against the calamities that will surely befall the wicked.

6. Apostasy from Marriage

Let us consider one more objection. “Now you have shown your mistake,” the objector says. “You have been claiming that traditional marriage is different. But instead of talking theory, look at *actual* marriages. More and more as time goes by, man-woman couples do not live differently than same-sex couples do. They make their vows with the realistic understanding that if things don’t work out, they’ll leave each other and start again. A great many of them choose not to have their own biological children, and some of these decide to adopt instead. The large majority of couples have independent careers. And the percentage of marriages following these patterns is sure to increase with time. What you have to face up to is that nothing you can say about how contemporary couples live is not equally true of same-sex couples. Marriage has progressively become a less exclusive institution in which same-sex couples can find their legitimate place in society. If you withhold marriage from homosexuals, you should withhold it from heterosexuals too.”

As this objection asserts, it is indeed true that the way many married people live falls far short of the ideals of traditional marriage. Large social shifts, like the movement of tectonic plates when the earth quakes, have removed those ideals from public discourse. For many, the waning of religious belief and the advent of contraception changed the meaning of sex from a sacrament to a recreation. Then in short order interested groups sought to redefine the family as consisting of any mix or number of people, insurance companies and governments adopted no-fault divorce (which made exiting from marriage as easy as possible), cohabitation grew in popular acceptance as an alternative to marriage, and abortion on demand turned mothers against their own deepest and holiest instincts. These seismic shifts separated marriage from its roots in nature—they broke the tie between physical love and conception, the tie between conception and the birth of children, the tie between the birth of children and nurturing them collaboratively, the tie between collaborative nurturing and perpetuating the order of marriage in the next generation, and, in general, the tie between the reproductive acts of human beings and the natural consequences—the natural blessings—of those acts. In the name of a wildly misconceived freedom, individuals in their apostasy from personal discipline are making themselves into irresponsible and ineffectual persons. The deterioration in their chosen way of life and in the qualities of their selfhood is obvious and undeniable, at least in the perception of those of us who embrace traditional marriage and family.

But—and this is the answer to the objection—*the deterioration we speak of here is a deterioration of people’s fidelity to the order of marriage; it is not a deterioration of the order of marriage itself.* That order is an ideal that cannot be corrupted by the failure of human beings to live up to it. It can be abandoned, replaced, and forgotten, but it cannot be corrupted.

7. Can There Be a Secular Argument for Traditional Marriage?

Can we effectively use, in the public arena, the defense of traditional marriage based upon the natural differences of man and woman? Can this defense convince secularly minded people? The answer to the second question is No, but this does not mean the defense cannot be used in the public debate. Let me explain.

The claim that certain kinds of virtue originate in one sort of social institution rather than another is notoriously difficult to establish. Not the smallest reason is that the more worldly people are, the more likely they will regard patience, kindness, and self-sacrifice as weaknesses rather than virtues. To them, the benefits to individuals of traditional marriage are invisible. Moreover—and this may at first strike you as unbelievable—an elite contingent of the well-organized same-sex advocates is ideologically committed to the idea that every characteristic of personality and character is the product of our socialization, including gender. The masculine and feminine differences upon which I have based so much of my position are, for them, not grounded in nature at all, but in the subtle influence of the social institutions in which children are reared. For the militants who take this position—they are especially prominent in academic circles—the case I have built in this talk simply falls to the ground.

Nevertheless, the public arena, especially in the United States, includes many who intuitively grasp the fundamental place man-woman marriage has in any sustainable form of human life. The task—unlike convincing many of the proponents of same-sex marriage, it is a feasible task—is to show that their intuitive position is neither unreasonable nor unethical, as the opponents of traditional marriage often claim. In this way we reinforce those who are disposed to stand with us.

There is another argument, which I have not developed here, that ought to become the thrust of the public defense of man-woman marriage. There is already a good deal of evidence that the children of traditional marriages are less involved in delinquency, gangs, and drugs—they cost society less—and they pay more taxes in adulthood, being better educated and more idealistic. This evidence seems to me the very best argument at our disposal in building the case for traditional marriage, and we ought to focus on it. To those who want to delve into these matters more deeply, this seems to me the most promising opportunity—especially because, as I see it, the welfare of the children is arguably the only topic relating to the same-sex marriage debate in which the State has a legitimate interest.

But nothing is objectively dealt with in this debate. In those legislatures and courts that have adopted same-sex marriage or civil unions, the evidence relating to the welfare of children has not been factored into the deliberations and decisions. Moreover, same-sex marriage proponents contest the evidence by challenging the studies, usually one at a time, dismissively rather than analytically, claiming bias or methodological flaw. More sweepingly, they contend that the culture that has grown out of man-woman marriage and traditional families has kept alternative family arrangements from thriving—hence the poor performance to date of these alternative lifestyles. These arguments, like so much else in the same-sex marriage debate, are red herrings. They draw our attention completely away from the fact that the burden of proof lies not on the defenders of man-woman marriage, but on the innovators—on those who propose to change the institution out of which we all have come. They are the ones who need to produce evidence for their position, evidence that same-sex marriage will visit no grave consequences upon the children. How I wish this point could be brought to people’s attention!

So we have arguments at our disposal, but we cannot be successful if we employ them naively. None of them is likely to convince the hard-line opponent. All of them should strengthen our allies. And if handled deftly, the challenges to evidence of the child-rearing superiority of man-woman marriage might be redirected. Nothing would be more helpful in this debate, because what is being proposed is a blind experiment upon children, an experiment rooted solely in the radical, quasi-religious ideology that gender and gender differences have no social consequences whatever—or will have none if only we will stop believing that they do.

8. Clarifying the Immediate Choices

Grave issues face us. For me, the preservation of traditional marriage is all-important. For reasons I will mention in a moment, I believe it desirable to block the legalization of same-sex “counterfeit marriages”

that go by the name of *civil unions* or *domestic partnerships*. But if in particular states it becomes clear that the fight against these unions cannot be won, it would, I believe, be better to concede that fight in order to preserve the name *marriage* for man-woman unions. If an electorate and its legislature demand, or the courts require, that same-sex couples must be allowed either to marry or enter civil unions, then the choice is obvious. Better domestic unions than losing everything.

We do not face this choice with the proposed Amendment 3 in Utah. Amendment 3 prohibits domestic unions. And, if it's not read carefully, it *seems* to say that same-sex couples get marriage or nothing. This is the proposed amendment:

Marriage consists only of the legal union between a man and a woman. No other domestic union, however denominated, may be recognized as a marriage or given the same or substantially equivalent legal effect.

Opponents of the amendment claim that the consequences of passing it will be terrible not only for same-sex couples and their children, but for unmarried heterosexual couples and others in dependent domestic relationships. These people will be deprived, they say, of many economic and legal rights—for example, the rights of hospital visitation, of naming one's partner in one's will, of being able to decide the partner's medical treatment when the partner cannot, of including the partner in one's health plan, and so on. *But these claims are not true. The means to secure all the rights in question are available now, and the passage of Amendment 3 will do nothing whatever to jeopardize them.* Indeed, a reciprocal benefits legislative package has been proposed that if passed will make access to these rights easier than it is now.

This being so, the real issue is not whether same-sex couples and others can have access to the rights in question, for they already do. The real issue is whether the door is going to be left open in the State of Utah for civil unions and possibly even same-sex marriage.

The legal research and analysis that shows these rights are not in jeopardy has been publicly disclosed and can be obtained from www.utahamendment3.com and www.yesformarriage.org.

So in our state, this is the situation:

- If you are against same-sex marriage and against any sort of civil union for same-sex couples, vote for the amendment.
- If you want to leave the door open for legalizing civil unions or same-sex marriage in the future, vote against the amendment.

Your vote for or against the amendment will have nothing to do one way or the other with whether same-sex couples will have the rights they are asking for, for these rights are available now.

To these observations about the same-sex marriage debate in Utah, I would like to add two comments about the debate nationwide and worldwide. First, it is claimed that same-sex marriage is an equality or human rights issue. From what I have said, you can see why I do not believe this. A same-sex couple *cannot* enter into traditional marriage, for the simple reason that any legal institution they *can* enter will be a fundamentally different legal institution than traditional marriage. The real issue is not about equality or human rights, but about what we as a society will value most—preserving traditional marriage and the way of life it creates, or trying the experiment of building society on a different sort of institution altogether.

What about the question of civil or domestic unions? After I gave this talk on October 19, 2004, the First Presidency issued a statement that closed with these sentences:

Any other sexual relations, including those between persons of the same gender, undermine the divinely created institution of the family. The Church accordingly favors measures that define marriage as the union of a man and a woman and that do not confer legal status on any other sexual relationship.

That of course defines my own stance. In addition, we can comprehend in part something of the strength of the Church's position as it bears upon the particulars of the civil union debate. It is true that in this period when same-sex couples are bringing children into their relationships, there seems to be a strong case for providing the rights needed by the children in their care. But I think it both unnecessary and profoundly dangerous to provide these rights by means of civil unions. I do not think that the way of life that accompanies a same-sex relationship requires and builds sufficient character to serve as the foundation of a noble and sustainable culture. Moreover, I believe that government sanction of this way of life will establish it in many minds as a true equivalent of marriage, and increasingly our children will think of it as an acceptable alternative.

9. Summary

I have tried to make the case that if marriage is extended to mean the legal union of any two adults, the traditional order of marriage will *thereby* be set completely aside, as far as the state and the general public are concerned. A *different* order, which imposes drastically diminished expectations and therefore offers drastically diminished potential growth, will replace it. The following are the main component points:

Man-woman marriage is an order or way of life found in no other relationship. What makes it different are the complementary differences of man and woman.

In this order of life, the complementarity of the spouses' natures requires adaptation and stretching, as the two strive to become as one. This striving brings about a degree of growth, flourishing, and fruitfulness otherwise not available to human beings. No other gender combination can make these personal benefits available to human beings in this degree.

The family order of life is structured around the order of marriage, so that unity among the parents tends to produce whole and upright children who, in the main, bring great benefit to society generally and who tend to perpetuate the order of marriage and its benefits.

Because the complementarity of gender would not be an essential feature of an "any two persons" order of marriage, it could not possibly produce the benefits that flow from the traditional order of marriage. Extending marriage to same-sex couples will take the traditional marriage ideals from public consciousness and deprive individuals and society of access to its benefits.

I close with a reminder of President Hinckley's recent call for us to oppose the evil around us. He asked us to do so by lending our voices, so that leaders will not suppose a vocal minority is a majority. He counseled us to make sure our voices are not shrill. And he called upon us to go forward in prayer, in the strength of the Lord. I pray that as good foot-soldiers we will do this faithfully. (testimony)

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I thank Monte Stewart for teaching me much about the legal issues in the same-sex marriage debate, and Terry Olson, Ben Unguren, Clark Webb, Jamison Noorlander, and most especially my wife, Susan, for helpful comments and suggestions on this talk.