An Evangelical War on Marriage?

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP) -- "Lord, thank You for the life of this beautiful little girl. Thank You for adding to the heritage of this family. Help her parents raise her in the fear and admonition of Your holy name. Even as we celebrate her birth, I pray that by Your sovereign grace she will experience new birth through faith in Jesus Christ. Lord, give her a future husband who loves You and serves You and will protect, provide and love her as Christ loves the church. In Jesus' name, Amen."

As I lifted my head in that hospital room after praying for the family and their newborn baby, I carefully gave the child back to her mother. I saw the grandparents who were in the room glaring at me with astonishment on their faces. The grandfather spoke up and said, "What kind of prayer was that? Why would you already be talking about a husband? She may not even get married! Who knows what she will become?"

These grandparents were not liberal progressives. They were Bible Belt conservative evangelicals who would heartily defend every word of the Bible as God's inerrant Word and would be appalled at the notion of legalizing same-sex marriage.

The moment hit me like a ton of bricks. Without a doubt, the proponents of same-sex marriage have lost an understanding of what marriage really is -- but, in alarming ways, so have evangelicals.

The end result of the widespread legalization of same-sex marriage will not be a broadening of the definition of marriage but the destruction of the institution. We evangelicals must acknowledge that our own failure to communicate the meaning and Gospel significance of marriage has hastened the cultural confusion and decline of the sacred institution. Evangelicals often tell children that their education, career and individual success should be firmly in place before they should even think about marriage. After all, if they marry too young, they won't be able to accomplish their individual dreams and become successful people who lead lives of significance.

At the same time, we act befuddled that a generation we have taught to put themselves first does not understand the importance of self-sacrificial relationships beginning with marriage and family.

Too often we feed our children the junk food of narcissistic self-esteem along with a side of the American dream then wonder why they do not have a healthy Christian worldview. We pair culturally shaped dreams about what our children will become along with a romanticized view of love and marriage, which is rooted in notions of self-fulfillment rather than self-sacrifice. Christian marriage, however, is a Gospel-magnifying, self-sacrificial commitment that teaches us what love is over time as we practice long-term fidelity.

The current divorce culture is grounded in the same perverse idea of marriage as a means of self-fulfillment. If marriage is simply about your means to a personal end, then it's right to consider it an addendum to the pursuit of your personal goals and to walk away when it's no longer functioning to your benefit. After all, many evangelicals reason in abandoning their spouse, God would not want them to live in an unhappy, unfulfilling relationship -- a reasoning that sounds eerily similar to the contemporary argument for same-sex marriage.

In some ways, the younger generation has become more conservative in recent years, as seen by its growing opposition to abortion, while at the same time approving of same-sex marriage. Why? Evangelicals must be willing to face the reality …

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