



A Measure of *Grace*

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My Place to Stand

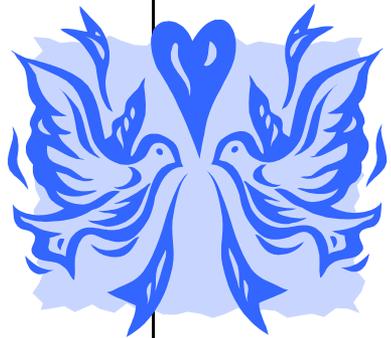
by *Mary Heathman*

I know of a man who married his ex-wife and died four days later. He had divorced her decades ago. She never re-married while he lived out his life as he wanted it--free from the responsibilities of marriage.

In his last months, this man became convinced that divorcing his wife was not only a mistake, but an affront to God. He asked her forgiveness; she gave it. The family gathered to celebrate a wonderful reconciliation. But that wasn't enough for him. He wanted to make it right, so he asked her to marry him again.

He and she both knew he only had a few days, but they felt it was important for them, and

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for their family, that they re-commit themselves to the marriage he had abandoned long ago. In a hospice room, the marriage vows were said, and they brought their marriage back under the covenant they made to each other and to God when they first married. Now there was only peace between them and rejoicing in the whole family.

There is something about being close to death that clarifies one's priorities. People do approach their final hours in ways true to their individual personalities and temperaments. But in all of the people with whom I have shared some of their final hours, I have seen one commonality—they aren't confused anymore about what is true and right and good.

I have another illustration to support my premise. In 1985, I was working a part-time job delivering tax returns for a computerized tax service. One of the other couriers, Tim, was quite a character, openly and proudly gay. When he found out I was a Christian (he dug it out of me, I wasn't waving that information wildly to get his attention), he started almost every morning's conversation with a challenge to my beliefs. Most

of the time, he was trying to convince me how wrong Christians were about homosexuality. He seemed intrigued when I neither agreed with him, nor was put off by the conversation.

When tax season was over, we exchanged numbers and promised to stay in touch. We didn't. Next tax season found us together again every morning sorting packages and organizing our routes. Tim was still fei-

sty and tried to start an argument every morning, but he didn't look well. I asked him if he was okay, and he told me he was HIV-positive.

Over the next few months (we stayed in touch after tax season this time), Tim's conversation changed. He wanted to know more about my faith and about "this God of yours." He accepted Christ with the simplicity of a little child, and I

was blessed to be with him when he prayed. It wasn't long after that Tim came down with pneumonia with complications from AIDS.

I went to visit Tim in the hospital once and found the room full of his buddies. He saw me hesitate in the door and called me to his bedside.

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sincere or
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Two Pastors Reflect

Compiled by Mary Heathman

Pastor A: “Marriage as a ‘social construct’ is directly out of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. It gets nailed down in the creation account itself in Genesis. That narrative account brings us our first moral commentary (though Job is probably older than Genesis) so clearly this is a matter that is important for God to disclose to his people. Since it is right, meant for our good, and has permeated our cultures, it has had wide participation even among those who ignore or even detest the tradition.

“Now it has seemingly become ‘job one’ in terms of social change (and what a flurry there is!). There seem to be lots of motives. Some hate things that have vestiges of Christianity. Some think redefining marriage to be a matter of justice. Some just want to have a legally recognized social contract and the privileges and enablement that go with that.

“The irony in the push for change is that, in the main, part of the tradition is accepted, that is, marriage being between two, while part is discarded, that is, male and female exclusively. (Though there are some voices that recognize the implications of a change, and, logically, it certainly seems that the arguments against polygamy will be lost).

“Yet, is gay marriage really the issue to get into a lather about? At what level do we want a culture war and is this the topic? Do we have the liberty to choose not to fight over this? Would that be the destruction of marriage as we know it? Is there a place for ‘civil unions’ and granting some legal benefits to those so inclined in our pluralistic society? Is that a huge threat to marriage? Where do the adoption and family concerns fit into our discussion? I’ve got many more questions than answers right now.”

Pastor B: “In the Bible, the God-ordained design seems to be uniformly that of heterosexuality. Consequently, if I was the king of the United States, and I loved the citizens of this country, and I was required to make a binding mandate on marriage for the well being of my people, I could not allow homosexual marriage.

“My perspective is one of design. That is, the best functioning of human beings is not determined by a democratic process. There is a design for optimum performance that, in my view, includes heterosexual marriage. There is the freedom for a couple, who consider themselves of homosexual orientation, to share a sexually celibate life - till death do

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Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Patrick Maschka

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32).

I was raised with plenty of exposure to the teachings of Jesus. From an early age I learned that the truth about life, the world, and the universe is found in the Bible, or at least what was taught about the Bible in church. Often the rebel questioner in my younger adult years, I asked myself and others, "If people pursue truth, will they necessarily find the gospel of Jesus Christ?" As I've asked this, I've imagined myself as a person with no religious background whatsoever. Starting from nothing in my pursuit of the answers to life's biggest questions, would I find that Almighty God through his son Jesus Christ by the working of his Holy Spirit holds the answers I am seeking?

Not surprisingly, no person, including myself, has ever been able to answer my question definitively. It is a question that finds its way in one

form or another into lengthy books of philosophy and theology. I once read a warning from the great preacher Charles Spurgeon that the theses found in such books are not the place to find and nurture our faith. I'm left, then, with the sincere, deep inclination of my heart, where I have learned and continue to learn that



God's voice will speak to me the pure and everlasting truth. This is not an easy voice to hear, especially with other, much louder voices seeming to prevail. All I have to do, though, is look at my life and the lives of many around me to know that it is being heard. The current voices in our society suggest that my life should look like this: A man married to another man, enjoying my choice

of pleasures with restraint only if excess hurts me or someone I care about, pursuing monetary wealth and material possessions as representations of success, and generally living in accordance with popular, modern, intelligent and well-researched ideals touted by influential and successful people. I have personal desires and

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opinions just like everyone, so why don't I embrace such a life? I know and associate with plenty of people who wouldn't call any of this scenario "bad," but Jesus' desire for us as his disciples is that we do not live as the world prescribes (see John 15-17). Following the way of the world means ignoring what I know in my very being as truth. As painful and lonely as it is sometimes to go against the grain, the truth means freedom to this questioner, because I

could easily choose a more widely accepted (and often more fun) path on this journey through life.

I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts (Jer. 31:33).



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He asked all the others to leave us alone a while. They lingered at the door, curious about me. Tim whispered, "I need to tell you something. You are right, you know."

"Right about what?" I asked.

His words rushed out, "Right about homosexuality; it isn't right; we all know it isn't, deep down, when all the fun and games are over, in the pit of my gut, I have always known it wasn't right. I just wanted you to know that before I check out of here. Don't give up on us."

Under no external pressure, Tim and Bernie both came to know in their final days that God's intent for marriage and sexuality is good and right. Any deviation from His plan is not right, no matter how one may feel about it, no matter what choices have

been made otherwise. One's personal opinion, no matter how sincere or heartfelt, does not change God's intent for marriage and sexuality.

It is clear from scripture and the witness of generations of people, believers and unbelievers alike, that marriage is a covenant made between one man and one woman, and sexual relations should be reserved for the enjoyment of man and wife in an exclusive relationship. Any relationship other than that just described is not a marriage as God ordained it and cannot be endorsed by the Church. (See article, "Two Pastors Reflect." for further food for thought on this issue.)

Within the laws of civil society, marriage has been defined similarly as within the Church. In the last few years, however, definitions have been

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challenged and statutes are being tested. Currently, in Massachusetts, according to their Supreme Court, marriage is a relationship between two “persons,” not a “man and woman” (for a concise and clear synopsis of the Massachusetts decision, see <http://www.gurus.com/dougdeb/politics/Goodridge.html>). Civil law sees marriage as a secular institution, not a religious one (see *Commonwealth v. Stowell*, 389 Mass. 171, 175 (1983)). The laws in civil society regarding marriage are there primarily to protect the children spawned by marriages, and to conserve state resources. Presumably, any changes made in the laws will be decided upon the merits of the research being done on what seems best for children and what will best serve the state. So far, the research is overwhelmingly in favor of the traditional marriage of one man and one woman as the best environment within which to raise children (The American College of Pediatricians, www.acped.org).

In light of the vast differences between marriage in the Church and marriage in civil society, it seems important to separate these two contexts for the debate on gay marriage. It is one thing for any people group to petition their government for rights and privileges enjoyed by other citizens. It is quite another for those folks to demand that the Church change its fundamental understanding of mar-

riage to accommodate their personal or even collective viewpoint. As I have heard quoted often lately, “Personal opinion is not God.”

So, I will pray diligently for our government, vote my conscience according to my convictions when these issues come to the polls, but I will not condemn or drop out of society if the laws change to accommodate civil unions for homosexual men and women. I believe I can live in the world without being formed by it.

If and when the issue is debated within the Church, I will speak my mind respectfully. I will lobby passionately for a compassionate response to homosexuals, yet without compromising God’s standard for marriage and sexuality. And if my own Church were to conclude that it will bless same-sex unions as we do marriages, then I would leave that fellowship. *In fact, I would*

have to leave if there were any purposeful compromise of God’s standards on any point. We may, and often do, fall far short of the standards, but the appropriate response is confession and restoration to fellowship and a renewed pursuit of holiness, not rewriting the standards to suit our behavior or opinions.

To do otherwise would seem to me to join Thomas Jefferson in his infamous treatment of the Bible, cutting out

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passages that he didn't agree with. (I understand that his Bible is on display at Monticello; it is a copy of the King James Version of the New Testament, full of holes.)

My prayer is that we as believers will humble ourselves and pray and turn from our own wicked ways, so that God will hear our prayers, forgive our sins, and heal our land (2 Chronicles 7:14). And in the meantime, may we be witnesses to God's truth and grace and bring the light of Christ within us to illumine dark

places in our world, both civil society and the Church.

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(Two Pastors... continued from page 3)

them part. I know of one such couple, and as near as I can tell, it is a good thing. However, to call that "marriage" crosses the line of compromising God's design.

Of course, the decision will not be mandated by a king. It will ultimately be determined by popular opinion (even in the courts). We are now determining our moral code by vote, if not by interest group pressure. Our country is not the kingdom of God. Consequently, I do not yet see an option emerging other than 'social' unions recognized by the State, and 'marriage' unions recognized by the church. 'What then?' I ask myself, and the answers are very troubling to me. I need more clarity, too."



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Thursday Night Group

May 6th - 55 people
 May 13th - 57 people
 May 20th - 49 people
 May 27th - 61 people
 Orientation meeting - 4 new people

Discipleship Counseling and Mentoring
 The WGA staff provided about 13 hours of discipleship counseling and mentoring each week last month.

May 1st - Presented to a group of youth at The 3rd Christian Reformed Church

May 14th - WGA Men's event - Rockies Baseball Game

May 15th - WGA Women's event - played games (Bunko)

May 23rd - Booth at Corona Presbyterian Missions Fair.

JUNE & BEYOND

May 1st - Mary Heathman presented to a group of youth at The 3rd Christian Reformed Church

June 4th - WGA will be presenting at a dinner party hosted by the WGA Board of Directors

June 11th - WGA is participating in the Rocky Mountain Yearly Meeting

of Friends.

June 25-27th - Family & Friends Retreat

July 20-24th - Exodus International Conference at Azusa Pacific (Greater LA Area)

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Purpose Statement

Where Grace Abounds exists to guide and support men and women who seek to understand sexuality and relationship, and to inspire all people to know and personally appropriate God's plan for their sexuality and relationships.



A Measure of Grace
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