BIBLICAL MARRIAGE AND THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY STRUCTURE ARE FOUNDATIONS FOR A HEALTHY AND PROSPEROUS SOCIETY

**INTRODUCTION**

Contemporary culture is turning from supporting traditional marriage to embracing individualism that erodes stable society (Hollinger, 1983). Contemporary culture promotes selfishness, individualism and the idolization of autonomy which leads many to feel isolated, depressed, and financially weakened. An article by Sharon Sassler and Daniel Lichter Sassler, examines union formation patterns where they explain the Second Demographic Transition theory (SDT). In the Second Demographic Transition, there is declining fertility and an increase in non-marital childbearing. Sassler and Lichter (2020) point out that the central idea of SDT is the shift from society to individualistic norms and attitudes. The trend of individualism is destructive to stable families, children, and society as a whole.

For many, marriage is no longer necessary. The reason for the shift is destructive individualism. Kislev (2018) attributes the rise in singleness to post-materialist values and individualism. Singleness, non-marital cohabitation and partnerships with separate living arrangements are becoming the norm for society with the idea that marriage is a hindrance to one’s self agency and independence (Downey, 2019). Many scholars support the modern belief that Scripture does not mandate monogamy and romantic partnerships can come in multiple forms (Van Eck, 2020).

**Thesis:** Both research and traditional religious teachings support the claimthat the union of marriage between a man and a woman, should be promoted and upheld over the pervasive idolization of individualism that lends to an unstable, broken and mentally despondent society.

In support of this thesis, I argue that traditional marriage promotes individual and societal flourishing. Common experience and social research show committed relational support promotes resilience in life's challenges. Being able to grab someone’s hand when sensing danger, having consistent sexual intimacy to relieve stress and having a listening ear in times of frustration contributes to one’s psychological well-being and reduces health dangers such as the potential to have heart attacks or suicidal ideation. It is comforting to know that one’s designated partner will return home at night and defend their spouse’s position against any opposition and protect them at all costs. Pinar, Selin & Ozge (2020) highlight the importance of spousal support to guard against workaholism and contribute to employee well-being. Presumably this spousal dynamic is a healthy, high quality one versus a low quality, toxic marriage which can cause physical and emotional damage.

 Using horror movies as a stress and anxiety instigator, with pupillary response as an indicator, Graff et al (2021) asserts “findings demonstrate that having a spouse’s support – especially when anxiety is high – can dampen both autonomic and affective reactivity to stressors” (p. 15), in addition “we hypothesized that participants in the spousal support condition, who also reported their current marital relationship quality to be supportive, would show less pupillary response than those reporting an ambivalent relationship” (p. 16).

 Marriage promotes better physical and mental health. When someone loses a parent, a spouse is there as a listening ear, watches over the children and helps to make funeral arrangements. When a spouse’s job is causing undo stress, a committed, permanent partner provides emotional support. Instead of turning to alcohol or risky sexual activities with an uncommitted partner, a husband or wife can provide relief.

 Carpenter, C.S. et al (2021) through their research advocate that marriage is consistently linked to lower risk of death from various causes, higher survival rates from diseases like cancer and better physical and mental health. Carpenter et al (2021) have focused on the benefits of marriage between same sex couples and apply the health benefits of marriage to both hetero and homosexual relationships.

**Economic Repercussions**

In addition to emotional support, marriage has economic benefits. Qualifications to purchase a house, a car and other assets that provide infrastructure for a quality lifestyle improve when banks are able to assess earnings and investments from two individuals. Both the husband and the wife may be able to secure retirement plans and contribute to any debt incurred by both husband and wife, reducing interest penalties. The benefits of joining resources are supported by Kapelle et al (2021), “our results highlight that the personal benefits associated with marital sharing of wealth seem to trump those of economic independence and financial autonomy” (p. 811).

Marriage promotes better healthcare for couples. Here in the US, couples incur significant savings in medical insurance premiums in comparison to singles. This is especially beneficial when one of the spouses cannot or chooses not to work but still needs health coverage. Kapelle and Lersch (2020) attribute many wealth building benefits to marriage such as reduced taxes, intergenerational wealth transfers and joint insurances. Lerman et al (2018) found that the more married parents there were in any given state, the higher the economic growth, and household income. The same states also had lower childhood poverty levels.

There is an obvious trickle-down economics in a shared household between married partners. Medical expenses can be reduced if one spouse places the other on his or her medical insurance. Also, the two can share one car eliminating a car payment as well as share a mortgage creating more disposal income to contribute to the economy overall. In a shared household the expense ratio weighed against the amount of income entering the household is better for married couples. If only one person is working, the budget must be managed closely. As wealth is passed through husband and wife to the children, the whole family is able to contribute to the economy with purchasing power, acquiring real estate, and by hopefully not needing to depend on government assistance.

Those who do not place a high value on traditional, monogamous marriage argue that non-monogamous and polyamorous relationships provide equal happiness and financial benefits as traditional marriage. Proponents of non-monogamous and polyamorous relationships propose that the dynamic of two or more people consisting of various genders are just as rewarding and emotionally satisfying as a monogamous marriage between a man and woman. Proponents of this union advocate that non-monogamous and polyamorous relationships provide greater reported satisfaction and communication than monogamy. Cox, Fleckenstein & Sims-Cox (2021) cite research by Mogilski et al (2017) indicating “that consensually non monogamous (CNM) persons experienced similar relationship satisfaction (intimacy, closeness, ability to resolve conflicts) and greater satisfaction concerning the amount of communication and openness with their primary partner compared with monogamous partners” (p. 1290). Cox, Fleckenstein and Sims-Cox (2021) conclude that “presumed monogamy has no monopoly on health, happiness, sexual or marital satisfaction” (p. 1305).

Some say non-monogamous and polyamorous relationships provide less risk economically in case of failed relationships. Many do not want the risk of pooling resources and sharing assets. Individuals in a cohabitating relationship or two partners that live apart can spend their money the way they wish and if they decide to dissolve their partnership and not be romantically involved any longer, there are no financial sacrifices or court battles. Vitali & Fraboni (2022) argue “cohabitation is therefore preferred to marriage for its lower level of commitment during periods of own economic uncertainty and therefore could be a holding pattern to marriage, until economic and employment stability is reached (p. 725).

One argument is that marriage is repressive to self-agency and unequal in responsibilities between men and women. (Ishuzika, 2018) opines that in a traditional marriage, the husband is expected to contribute earnings and the wife is expected to be the dominant care provider for the children. In co-habitation, a more egalitarian dynamic is created.

Same-sex marriage proponents argue that this relationship type is as equally beneficial as traditional marriage in legal, relational, financial, and health status. Proponents of same-sex marriage would easily argue that with same-sex marriages being legal, their unions are just as legitimized and dignified as heterosexual marriages because the protections would be the same. Their marriages would also contribute to the betterment of the economy, helping to stabilize society. Carpenter et al (2021) explain various tangible financial benefits of legalizing same-sex marriage such as employer sponsored health insurance and accrued and aggrandized long-term investments. In addition to financial benefits there is also access to hospital visits in dire medical situations and the involvement of one spouse in the other’s medical decisions.

Same sex marriage regions of the country benefit economically. As it relates to the economy, the more income amassed, the more income spent. Same sex couples who are afforded legal marriage, pool assets and resources of significant amounts, open businesses together, heavily support LGBTQ owned establishments and are able to accumulate large amounts of wealth just as heterosexual couples. Zhu, J. Y., & Smieliauskas (2022) found that firms whose headquarters are located in states that legalize gay marriage benefit from the human rights progress as it relates to market value. This would contribute positively overall to the economy.

**Traditional and Non-Traditional Marriage Effects on Children**

 Research supports longitudinal benefits of growing up in traditional marriage homes. Children thrive and flourish emotionally, educationally, mentally and physically in traditional marriage homes. In discussing the well-being of children born into households where the parents are married, Torche and Abufhele (2021) list significant life benefits that emerge from birth such as the child having better cognitive and behavioral outcomes, higher levels of educational attainment, and better health. Torche and Abufhele (2021) also point out long term benefits such as lower rates of non-marital parenting and higher levels of employment and income. Children raised in this dynamic are also less likely to be incarcerated.

 Being reared by two married persons, one man and one woman, provides structure and discipline. A routine is established from birth. Each parent with the balance of male and female characteristics, is able to utilize their respective gifts and talents to contribute to the child’s cognition, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Rules are normally established and maintained under marriage-based parenting. Not only do the husband and wife ideally learn to compromise, but the child learns to compromise, sacrifice and forgive as well. Certain virtues are typically ingrained in the child’s psyche that aid in a healthier well-functioning adulthood.

The male child, throughout adolescence, will observe how to lead a family, protect and spiritually guide a family and a female child will learn how to nurture and care for her loved ones as well as learn the power of femininity to influence and inspire.

 Torche and Abufhele (2021) point out there are indicators of a child’s health that emerge from birth. These indicators predict health, socioeconomic outcomes and other quality of life factors. Torche and Abufhele’s (2021) research also supports the fact that the mental state of a married pregnant woman is contributory to the child’s well-being. “Marriage has been claimed to improve mother’s mental health during the gestation period – measured, for instance, by mother’s stress and depression – and to increase pregnancy wontedness which in turn can affect birth outcomes” Torche & Abufhele, 2021, p. 933) citing (Freeman and Brewer, 2013).

Children get more emotional nourishment in healthy traditional marriage homes. When a man and women are together in the same household, committed in marriage, they are able to fully invest in the child emotionally, financially and spiritually pulling together resources and engaging in activities together instead of solely one on one, (See Ishizuka, 2018). It is important that children do not have to bounce back and forth between households in the unfortunate co-parenting scenario. In a committed two-person family, Children are given the necessary time and attention and each parent serves as a stable role model see (Torche & Abufhele, 2021).

Non-monogamous cohabitation risks bringing trauma and financial complications into homes. Participating in multiple co-residential/cohabiting relationships before entering marriage brings the risks of past trauma, family dynamic and financial complexity into the marriage. “Because co-habitors are a heterogeneous group, they may exhibit several factors associated with divorce—economic disadvantage, children from prior unions or non-marital conceptions, or prior divorce experience” (Sassler & Lichter, 2020, pp. 45-46).

Children flourish better in two parent homes versus other alternatives. Children feel an abundance of love and benefit from increased affirmation for school and solving life problems raised in a marital household versus a single parent household. Studies show, as pointed out in a study by Usevich & Dufur (2021) children have poorer outcomes in their education when raised by a single parent.

Defenders for co-habitational parenting suggest that it is less damaging to children than divorce from failed marriages. Because many marriages are unhealthy and toxic, it is more advantageous for the child to not have to endure the emotional suffering and trauma as a result. James et al (2022) point out the negative consequences of a low-quality marriage for a child are lower test scores, and poorer health.

To those that argue financial stability only comes in the form of a marriage relationship, others would advocate that government can step in to help children who are raised in a co-parenting dynamic. The research of Hannah & Van Lancker (2022) supports the idea that when a country invests high levels of spending in child-care for single mothers and fathers, poverty is reduced.

Matsumura (2022) illuminates the idea that when monogamous parents divorce, children become part of a larger co-parenting dynamic to include stepparents and step siblings. For children raised in plural relationships or polygyny (more than two people), the same dynamic develops which can result in more support for the child, not less. Some would suggest adults in polygyny relationships are more loving, liberal, intellectual, highly educated and devoted to social justice among other ascribed attributes. Unal & Akgun (2022) provide support for a non-traditional union in that when a marriage is unhappy and toxic, the environment will not be stable and peaceful and in turn this will affect the children’s social life negatively.

**Biblical Interpretation**

Perhaps the most important benefit of all to traditional marriage is that in contrast to co-habitation, homosexual or polygyny, healthy monogamous unions are a witness to God's best design for human flourishing. A community respects and looks up to couples in the neighborhood who take care of each other, raise children together and weather the ebbs and flows of life. Those who are part of this community and able to witness this union, want to emulate such a lifestyle and follow the same trend. Marriage creates community infrastructure strengthening social cohesiveness and increasing social capital. Couples that ascribe to Christian principles and mirror Christ’s sacrificial love for the church will also draw those who do not have a relationship with Christ to want to know God in a deeper way. According to Baldovin (2018), marriage is considered as one of two “sacraments in the service of the church’s communion” (p. 236). Wood (2022) elucidates the Pauline imagery of marriage as a union when two become one. This imagery also represents Christ and the church.

If one wishes to submit to Christ as Lord, then they will want to love God. If one wishes to love God, then they will want to please God. Pleasing God is counter to societal norms and culture because Scripture mandates heterosexual monogamy. “Therefore, shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh” (King James Bible, 1769/2020, Genesis 2:24).

The Bible's interpretation is debated on marriage and homosexuality. Van Eck (2020) has deconstructed the ideology that marriage as a monogamous, life- long partnership between a man and a woman is supported by biblical texts but instead argues that the Scriptures support a myriad of relationship types to include polygamy, homosexual unions and cohabitation. The Bible's authority for life and morality is not accepted by all because its inerrancy is questioned. Furthermore, marriage is not believed by all to be a God ordained institution with one particular structure or meaning.

Van Eck (2020) cites “this article argues that the current ‘stock’ understanding of marriage (theology of marriage) is not based on ‘the Bible’, but rather on a cultural construct shaped by a variety of factors and influences. Above all, it will be indicated that the roots of our current understanding of marriage owe more to Roman Imperial beliefs than the assumption that our understanding is based on Judeo-Christian norms and values” (p. 3). Some Christian denominations now accept same-sex marriage.

It is also important to note that many religions sanction religious marriages, but the marriage may not be legal in the eyes of the government if a civil union has not been registered with the local jurisdiction. Same-sex marriages, common law marriages and non-marital relations obviously have a place in our current society. “Some states may find, based on the couple’s actions, that the individuals are common law married. Other states will simply never recognize the parties as married, (Broyde & Peltzer, 2020, p. 1).

**Comparative Analysis**

Both scholars and statisticians have highlighted both the benefits and disadvantages of a traditional marriage. A traditional marriage is typically defined as a man and women living together in holy matrimony. Outside of a traditional union, couples (heterosexual or homosexual) may co-habitat (live together without being married) or engage in a polyamorous relationship where there are at least three people in a romantic relationship. Some couples may be involved romantically but not live together. Any of the mentioned partnerships may or may not have children.

Proponents of a traditional marriage union argue that two people living together and raising a child together in the same home provides stability and constant engagement in the child’s life. Co-mingling funds teaches trust, grooms discipline, responsibility, and reduces the temptation to engage in greed, avidity and covetousness. Statistics prove that marriage provides increased socialization and decreases experiences of loneliness and isolation. In a study by Ohllso-Wijk et al (2022), they conclude, “at the same time, cohabiting unions still dissolve to a greater extent than marriages, including when there are children present, indicating a higher level of commitment and stability in marriage compared to cohabitation” (p. 1085)**.**

Kapelle et al (2022) finds “Descriptive differences between the two groups reveal that respondents that eventually experience a marital dissolution have marginally lower life satisfaction and overall, less wealth, but also lower debt levels compared to continuously married respondents” (p. 828).

A local government may provide resource support for single parents, the current culture may be advocating same sex marriage and many individuals may choose to not live with their romantic partner in the context of marriage but according to God’s mandate in the holy Scriptures, there is only one way to raise a family and partner with another individual for life. The biblical mandate is for a man and a woman to come together in Holy Matrimony and bear fruit by conceiving, bearing, and raising children together (if they are biologically able). Marriages have proven to be stronger than co-habitation.

In my conclusion, biblical marriage and the traditional family structure are foundations for a healthy and prosperous society. Marriage is representative of God’s holiness and purity. In the Holy Bible, (King James Bible, 1769/2020, John 4: 16-18) Jesus makes clear the distinctive status of a “husband”. When living with an actual spouse, it is a legal union. It is both legally recognized by God and by natural, local jurisdiction. When living with a partner who is not your spouse, it is unlawful in the eyes of God. A cohabitating union is not recognized by God.

It is only a lawful union between a man and woman that God will bless and prosper and from this union should come forth children. While there are some denominations that now support same-sex marriage, organizations such as the United Methodist Church have lost over 5000 churches due to the disagreement over homosexual unions.

In regard to the sharing of household duties and spousal equity, I propose that within a marriage, an egalitarian dynamic can indeed be created with mutual respect, sacrifice and the equitable division of labor. This is only achieved if the both the male and female respect each other’s contribution to the home. Marriage is used by God to shape individuals into Christ like beings. This will only work if two people are willing to be held accountable by the other person and have a desire to be a better version of themselves than when they entered the marriage. “Moreover, we must understand marriage as the exchange of duties and obligations, not merely of emotions and experiences” (DeYoung, 2022, p. 8).

What if God’s intention for marriage is that iron sharpen iron? What if God’s intention is that humans learn to compromise and resolve conflict, learn how to adjust, and become less self-centered. In discussing conflict resolution, Unal and Akgun (2022) state “couples who try to resolve the conflict by engaging with issue, typically express themselves openly and listen to their partners’ explanations and take their partner’s feelings into account” (p. 326). It is difficult to gain these qualities if one lives alone or lives apart from their partner.

A commitment to spirituality and morality, certainly has an impact on the survival of marriage which supports the need for God, the one who designed the institution, as the head of the triangle. Norouzi et al (2022) cite “the low role of moral religious commitment in choice with the lack of income stability of one of the couples, reduces the survival of marriage”, p. 9). A marriage commitment between a husband and a wife, as defined by God, lends to happier children and a healthier, safer, economically stable society. This traditional union should be promoted and upheld over the pervasive idolization of individualization that lends to an unstable, broken and mentally despondent society.

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