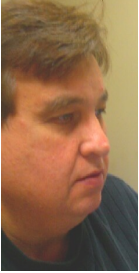


## First Thoughts



Have you noticed the state of marriage has been a frequent news item lately, with media focusing on such topics as: Who can get married? What is marriage? What are the divorce trends? Who's getting married and why? The questions being addressed are certainly wide-ranging even to the point of debates about how marriage should be defined.

What comes through very clearly is how much cultural trends are impacting the discussion of this most sacred institution. Just take a look at this month's *Culture Tracks* to get a glimpse of the diversity of perspectives on marriage held by Americans.

In this issue of *CrossingCurrents* we consider the state of marriage in America. In addition to the *Culture Track* statistics, we include an article by Alonza Jones in which he shares some of his thoughts on the place the Christian Church must have in building strong marriages. Alonza is a Crosswinds Board member and the President of Biblical Marriage Institute.

### Atheism Promoted in Alabama City

You may recall we ran a couple of articles that dealt with atheists, in several major European cities and in Washington DC, using signage to promote their cause. In case you thought it really wasn't much of an issue, be sure and read our *In the News* section to find out which Alabama city has a large billboard proclaiming, "Imagine No Religion". You may be surprised. There is also a video link to a news story featuring some home grown Alabama atheists.

### Speaking of videos

We have just completed filming a mini-documentary that will accompany the main article in this edition of *CrossingCurrents*. It should be on our website next week so watch for it. Our plans are to produce an accompanying video for all future articles appearing in this

publication. We will also work on videos for past articles on evolution and atheism, as well.

### What in the World is Crosswinds Up To

I am also including updates from Don Malin in Afghanistan and about our Romania project. Please be sure and check out the special *World Update* section below.

Finally, let me extend a special thank you to all of you who support us financially. I hear many leaders of nonprofits reporting their donations are down due to the economic situation; I am pleased to be able to report that is not the case with Crosswinds as our regular donors have been faithful in their support of our work throughout this time.

### How Can You Help?

If you are not yet a supporter, let me say that even though our donations have been consistent, with your help we can broaden our efforts, even more. For example, we currently send a postal edition of this publication to over 500 homes, churches, and businesses; and this list is growing. Your one-time gift of just \$50.00 will enable us to send an annual subscription to five additional recipient addresses.

So, I am asking you to please make an investment in Crosswinds for whatever amount you are able so that we can increase what we are currently able to accomplish and meet the increasing demand for our services.

Blessings,

### YOUR DONATIONS HELP

To make a financial investment in our ministry make your check payable to: Crosswinds Foundation and mail to: P.O. Box 12143  
Birmingham, AL 35202

For information on giving by credit card (Visa, MC, Discover, AMEX) contact us at 205-327-8317; or [info@crosswindsfoundation.org](mailto:info@crosswindsfoundation.org)

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## Missing Articles From Past Issues

Just let us know and we will be glad to send copies of those you would like to have. Some of the topics we have covered:

- Becoming a Post-Racial America (2 Parts)
- Oprah and Spirituality
- President Bush, Faith, and Culture
- Atheists and Christmas
- Coming Soon to a Bus Near You





## Upholding Biblical Marriage, One Couple at a Time by Alonza Jones



The Bible tells us that “marriage is honorable.” This is certainly true. In fact, despite disturbing divorce rates and increases in co-habitation among nonmarried couples, marriage is still pretty popular. It is so popular that EVERYONE wants to participate in it. And at a price tag of over \$35,000 on average, weddings are still big business despite runaway deficits.

There is no dearth of opinions concerning marriage these days. Just turn on the TV, listen to the radio, or read the newspaper. The debate over what marriage is and who can participate in it has reached a fever pitch. What’s interesting is very little is being said about what the creator of marriage thinks. How would God define marriage? A quick review of Genesis 2 and 3 would clear up any confusion about God’s definition of and intentions for marriage.

But this article is not so much about how marriage should be defined as much as it is about why there is even a debate over the meaning of marriage in the first place. How did we get to the place of having to restore the integrity of God’s first (and I would argue God’s most important) institution? What role has the church played in the current distortion of marriage in our society?

### *It’s Time to Lead*

Sadly, the church in America has gradually settled into the role of responder rather than leader. In the name of “tolerance,” we have abdicated our responsibility as light bearers and have allowed our spiritual eyes to dilate and adjust to the dark alcoves of moral neutrality. The fact that the divorce rate among Christians is no different than non-Christians might suggest that marriage has no more meaning to God’s people than it does to pagans.

It is time to lead! Biblical Marriage InstituteSM was founded, in part, for the purpose of raising up leaders in the church who will join us in elevating biblical marriage while bringing down divorce. We are targeting Christian couples, based on the biblical principle which asserts that “judgment” or purification must first take place within the “household of God” (I

Peter 4:17). As God’s people, we must demonstrate to the world that a consistent application of biblical truth within the marriage context, along with accountability and support, will lead to a lifetime of love and oneness.

Recently, I listened to a sermon by John Piper entitled, “God’s Pursuit of Racial Harmony and Diversity at Infinite Cost.” While the message was on the topic of race relations and the involvement or lack of involvement of the church, it struck a chord with me in a way that went beyond the issue of racism.

As Piper read an excerpt from Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from a Birming-

“Sadly, the church in America has gradually settled into the role of responder rather than leader. In the name of “tolerance,” we have abdicated our responsibility as light bearers and have allowed our spiritual eyes to dilate and adjust to the dark alcoves of moral neutrality. ”

ham Jail,” I was reminded of the silence of the church today when it comes to standing up for something else that is important to God — biblical marriage.

Read the excerpt of King’s letter below and as you read, keep in mind that Dr. King’s original intent was to draw the church’s attention to its apathetic response to racism. I believe you would agree with me that, with slight modifications, these words would easily apply to the church of the 21st century in the context of marriage. Here are King’s words:

“So I have not said to my people: ‘Get rid of your discontent.’ Rather, I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled into the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. And now this approach is being termed extremist. But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label.

Was not Jesus an extremist for love:

‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.’

Was not Amos an extremist for justice: ‘Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.’

Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: ‘I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.’

Was not Martin Luther an extremist: ‘Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God.’

And John Bunyan: ‘I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience.’

And Abraham Lincoln: ‘This nation cannot survive half slave and half free.’

And Thomas Jefferson: ‘We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal . . .’

So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?

In that dramatic scene on Calvary’s hill three men were crucified. We must never forget that all three were crucified for the same crime--the crime of extremism.

Two were extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.”

“Creative extremists.” Hmm... kind of catchy. We must never forget that God created marriage and His way is the ONLY way. We – the church – are God’s voice, His hands, His feet. It’s time to lead. We can change the divorce statistics one couple at a time by modeling marriage God’s way.

Reprinted with permission from *The Marriage Messenger*, June 2009.

Alonza Jones is President of the Biblical Marriage Institute. Sign up for his free newsletter, or contact him, through his website at: <http://biblicalmarriageinstitute.org>; or, by mail at: P.O. Box 59561 Birmingham, AL 35259





### Crosswinds in the World Report

AFGHANISTAN: Don Malin posted the following report: Thanks to all who are supporting our Table of Grace Ministry. This has been so well received that the regular supplies for the Table of Grace is running low. If you can help send items we need your help.

Recently, I was asked to get school supplies for a Primary school in Afghanistan. I can't give names and places but I am looking for those willing to help by sending school supplies to my address. We can call this part of Table of Grace Ministries for this phase. The objective is to get supplies so Afghan students can learn. It needs to be school supplies like notebooks, pencils, tape, glue, crayons, magic markers, etc. Any help you can give, whether for the original Table of Grace supporting the troops, or our new Table of Grace helping the Afghan students, will be most appreciated. Don't forget to pray for the men and women who serve here.

[Editor's note: As a reminder, Table of Grace is a special ministry Don has started to provide free supplies for the soldiers. Now, he is extending this to help some local children, as well. Several of our readers are already sending items to Don. If you would like to join in, here's the info again: Just go to your post office and get a special box, or boxes, for free (tell them you are mailing to someone in the military in Afghanistan). Postage should be about \$11.95 per box no matter how much it weighs. Just fill the boxes with items you would like to give our soldiers and mail them to:

Don Malin  
Task Force Storm  
HHC 168th EN BDE  
FOB Sharana  
APO AE 09311

Items needed by the troops include: hygiene/grooming items in small pkgs, blank post cards (stamps not needed), moisturizing lotion/skin repair cream, wet wipes, hand sanitizer, chapstick, aspirin and Tylenol, sun block, eye drops, bug spray, powders - foot and body (Gold Bond), ointment (like neosporin, bactine, etc), toothpaste, mouthwash, dental floss, large handkerchiefs, batteries (especially AA or AAA), coffee (bags and singles), nuts, dried fruit, trail mix, beef sticks, jerky (nothing with pork), sweets (not much chocolate, it melts).]

ROMANIA: Last month, Nelu Filip was in the US on other business and was able to come to the Crosswinds office for a few days of planning. We were able to begin to sketch out some details of how we might be of assistance to our Romanian brothers and sisters. What was very evident from our conversations is the cultural impacts being felt there are every bit as dynamic as those we are experiencing in this country.

One of the plans we hope to be implementing will be partnering with Churches that would like to make a mission trip to Romania, or that have planned a mission trip and need in country support. If interested, we will be glad to talk with you about this.

While here, Nelu also had an opportunity to share with the folks at Springville Road Community Church. This Church has been a longtime supporter of Nelu's work in Romania. If your Church Mission Team would like to join them in supporting this effort, please let us know.

### Culture Tracks

Statistical data reflecting the cultural footprints of Americans.



#### Cultural Trends Related to Marriage

General Trends (From May 8, 2008 Gallup Poll)

- 70% say divorce is morally acceptable (59% in 2001)
- 62% say sex between unmarried man and woman is morally acceptable (53% in 2001)
- 55% say having child outside of marriage is morally acceptable
- 48% say homosexual relationships are morally acceptable (40% in 2001)
- 7% say married men and women having an affair is morally acceptable (7% in 2001)

Should Same-Sex marriages be legally recognized? (From May 2009 Gallup Poll)

- 40% believe they should (27% in 1997)

Statistics by political ideology:

- 75% of liberals believe they should
- 50% of moderates believe they should
- 19% of conservatives believe they should

Percentage who say they should, by age groups

- 18-29 years, 59%
- 30-49 years, 40%
- 50-64 years, 61%
- 65 and older, 32%

Living Together Before Marriage (From July 2002 Gallup Poll)

- 37% lived together before marriage

Those who lived together before marrying, by age groupings

- 18-49 years old, 51%
- 50-64 years old, 20%
- 65 and older, 6%

Americans and Divorce (From March 2008 Barna Research Poll)

- 33% of Americans have gone through at least one divorce.
- 26 % of Evangelical Christians
- 33% of non-Evangelical Christians
- 38% of those associated with non-Christian faiths
- 30% of Atheists/Agnostics

Commenting on these findings Barna stated: "There no longer seems to be much of a stigma attached to divorce; it is now seen as an unavoidable rite of passage," the researcher indicated. "Interviews with young adults suggest that they want their initial marriage to last, but are not particularly optimistic about that possibility.

Read full reports at:

- Cultural Tolerance for Divorce Grows to 70%** [www.gallup.com/poll/107380/Cultural-Tolerance-Divorce-Grows-70.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/107380/Cultural-Tolerance-Divorce-Grows-70.aspx)
- Majority of Americans Continue to Oppose Gay Marriage** [www.gallup.com/poll/118378/Majority-Americans-Continue-Oppose-Gay-Marriage.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/118378/Majority-Americans-Continue-Oppose-Gay-Marriage.aspx)
- By Age 24, Marriage Wins Out** [www.gallup.com/search/default.aspx?q=By+Age+24%2C+Marriage+Wins+Out&s=&p=1&b=SEARCH](http://www.gallup.com/search/default.aspx?q=By+Age+24%2C+Marriage+Wins+Out&s=&p=1&b=SEARCH)
- New Marriage and Divorce Statistics Released** [www.barna.org/barna-update/article/15-familykids/42-new-marriage-and-divorce-statistics-released](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/15-familykids/42-new-marriage-and-divorce-statistics-released)

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**In the News**

Excerpts from articles reflecting trends in American spirituality (LINKS PROVIDE FULL TEXT)



**ATHEISM BILLBOARD IN AL, ABC 33/40**

The nation's largest atheist group recently put up a billboard in Saint Clair County. It's believed to be the first of its kind in Alabama.

As you drive down I-20 east toward Talladega, just past the Pell City exit sign is a 14 by 48 foot colorful billboard emblazoned with the John Lennon-esque message, 'Imagine No Religion.'

"A lot of people didn't even know there was an atheist group in town. And they do now," says Eleanor Strote, atheist.

The impious billboard was put up by the National Freedom from Religion Foundation. Local chapter president, Pat Cleveland, says its purpose is not to recruit but to educate.

"How do you get to know about it if there's not something to indicate it. It's more like a member information campaign," says Cleveland. A way to let all Alabamians know an atheist and agnostic association exists in the Bible belt.

"There are people of no religion in Alabama. I'm one of them. I was raised in a religious environment and I found it was harmful to me," says Cleveland.

..."This is a free country, yea. But when you go messing with religion you step into people's backyards. We are a bunch a Christians. If you don't like the neighborhood, get out," says Jason McGowin, baptist. "It's not something I want to see. It's not something I want my kids around and brought up to believe, that there's no God," says Calum Naughtner, baptist.

"If the constitution said that we can have freedom of religion you also have that freedom to have no religion. That's your business. But when it infringes on me, I know who I believe in. A sign don't make any difference," says Eddie Anderson, baptist.

[www.abc3340.com/news/stories/0609/636208.html?ref=rs](http://www.abc3340.com/news/stories/0609/636208.html?ref=rs)

Watch Video at: [www.abc3340.com/news/stories/0609/636208\\_video.html?ref=newsstory](http://www.abc3340.com/news/stories/0609/636208_video.html?ref=newsstory)

**NO RUSH FOR PEWS, The Economist Jun 18th 2009,**

On the campaign trail, Barack Obama famously claimed that blue-collar workers in Pennsylvania clung to religion because of bitterness over lost jobs. Americans are now truly fearful, as unemployment has mounted and house prices fallen. Yet the theory that church attendance grows in times of economic crisis seems to be a myth.

Last year David Beckwith, an assistant professor of Economics at Texas State University, examined historic patterns in the size of evangelical congregations and found that, during each recession cycle between 1968 and 2004, membership of evangelical churches jumped by 50%. This report filled the newspapers and TV news-

shows at the height of the depression panic just before Christmas; but the report's findings focused on evangelicals, and do not apply to Americans at large.

According to Frank Newport, the editor-in-chief of Gallup Poll..."to guess that attendance would increase [in recessions] is a common-sense assumption with no basis in data." John Green, a senior fellow at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, which recently published a study on the correlation between church attendance and economics, has found no link in the past 20 years.

Interestingly, says Gallup, the percentage of Americans who tick the "no religious preference" box has steadily grown, from 0-3% 40 years ago to 12-15% now, while church attendance has remained steady... Evidently, this recession is "not providing a society-wide worry about the future."

[www.economist.com/world/unitedstates/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=13875548](http://www.economist.com/world/unitedstates/displaystory.cfm?story_id=13875548)

**PRESIDENT WADES INTO GAY ISSUES, The Washington Post, June 18, 2009**

President Obama moved yesterday to reset his relations with a gay and lesbian constituency that supported him by wide margins in the last election and whose leaders have been disappointed ever since.

In an Oval Office ceremony, Obama signed a presidential memorandum that gives same-sex domestic partners of federal employees access to long-term-care insurance benefits and allows civil servants to use sick leave to care for ailing domestic partners and children not related by blood or adoption. He also ordered the Office of Personnel Management to advise agencies within 90 days on how to comply with anti-discrimination regulations.

..."It's a day that marks a historic step towards the changes we seek, but I think we all have to acknowledge this is only one step," Obama said.

[www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/17/AR2009061702578\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/17/AR2009061702578_pf.html)

**BLACK, WHITE CHURCHES MELD IN WORSHIP, SF Chronicle, May 23, 2009**

One of the most intractable racial divides in America - the self-segregation of churches - was being bridged before his eyes.

"The God who calls us to be together, calls us to oneness," said Cummings, pastor of Imani Community Church. "Amen," said someone in the crowd.

"We are not always there yet, but we are on our way," said Cummings, who is black. "That's right," said another voice from the pews.

Cummings' church and Piedmont Community Church decided that they would come together as one people. They will worship together periodically. They've started to mix into each others' Bible studies. Their choirs sing together. Their children have gone on a mission trip together to Tijuana. On Sunday, May 3 and May 17, they had ceremonies affirming their covenant with each other.

Piedmont Community Church is predominantly white, as much as Imani is black. They are only 10 minutes apart by car, yet before this relationship began, neither pastor had been to the neighborhood of the other's church. All sides see bridging the divide as bearing fruit.

"We're in danger of being isolated up here in the hills," said the Rev. Bill McNabb, who is white and is pastor of Piedmont Community Church. "It's an enriching thing. As this relationship deepens, I think we'll find ways to mutually serve each other."

The connections began, in part, because of then Sen. Barack Obama. Obama gave a speech on race in March 2008 that, in part, described the racial divides perpetuated by churches. He paraphrased the oft-repeated, half-century-old words of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who described 11 a.m. on Sunday morning as the most segregated hour in America.

The speech prompted McNabb to invite Cummings to come to Piedmont to talk about race at his church. And over dinners at each other's homes, the two began forging a relationship that they presented to their churches. Both said they've yet to hear of any opposition.

The visits to Piedmont have surprised Imani members and already challenged their assumptions, Cummings said. They knew that the 1.7-square-mile city of Piedmont was one of the wealthiest in America, an island of excellent schools and tony homes long set apart from Oakland.

"The people who grew up in Oakland, in particular, have been surprised by the openness of the Piedmont church family to be in relationship," said Cummings. "I think they have an idea, grown out of their own historical experience, that 'those' people didn't really want to know black people."

Some of the Piedmonters have been surprised by how different worship is in a black church.

[www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/05/23/BA0317MPAQ.DTL](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/05/23/BA0317MPAQ.DTL)



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