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## The Case Against Marriage, Courtesy of Newsweek

*One essential task for the Christian Church is to rebuild and maintain a marriage culture — even when marriage itself no longer makes sense to so many around us.*

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“Once upon a time, marriage made sense.” So write Jessica Bennett and Jesse Ellison in the June 11, 2010 edition of *Newsweek* magazine. The two women who wrote the article are both young adults who identify themselves as “committed to our careers, friendships, and, yes, our relationships.” But, as for marriage, not so much.

As Bennett and Ellison explain their case, marriage once made sense, at least for women, because it “was how women ensured their financial security, got the fathers of their children to stick around, and gained access to a host of legal rights.” But now, thanks largely to the feminist movement, they claim, the financial and legal rights are theirs without marriage. They never actually get around to saying much about fathers sticking around to take responsibility for children.



The *Newsweek* article represents what may be the most direct journalistic attack on marriage in our times. Though only an op-ed column, it presents arguments that had to date been made largely, if not exclusively, outside of mainstream circles. Consider this column an opening salvo in a battle to finish marriage off, once and for all.

Both women identify themselves as secular, and their rejection of marriage reflects the inevitable crumbling of a marriage culture in the wake of a moral revolution. As they explain, reserving sex for marriage is simply unthinkable to them and their peers. “And the idea that we’d ‘save ourselves’ for marriage? Please.” Interestingly, they quote a young man who makes a remarkable case for why the loss of moral stigma for premarital sex breaks down the institution of marriage itself: “If I had to be married to have sex, I would probably be married, as would every guy I know.”

And when it comes to having children without marriage: “We know that having children out of wedlock lost its stigma a long time ago.” They then point with envy to Scandinavia, where a majority of children are now born out of wedlock, but parents claim to spend more time with their children than parents of other nations.

The secular worldview represented by Bennett and Ellison is joined to their status as young professionals. Marriage does not enhance professional prospects, they argue. Women who take their husbands’ last name are considered less professional, less competent, and less ambitious than women who keep their own names.

As they explain, “We are also the so-called entitled generation, brought up with lofty expectations of an egalitarian adulthood; told by helicopter parents and the media, from the moment we exited the womb, that we could be ‘whatever we wanted’—with infinite opportunities to accomplish those dreams. So you can imagine how, 25 years down the line, committing to another person—for life—would be nerve-racking.”

And just who are they seeking as partners, anyway? They explain that their generation of young women is looking for a “soulmate” — a fantasy they admit is hard to define and even harder to find.

And an adult lifetime is just too long for any realistic commitment, they insist. “With our life expectancy in the high 70s, the idea that we’re meant to be together forever is less realistic.” So while their generation of young women is, by their admission, unrealistic in what they are looking for in a partner, they are supposedly cold sober realistic when it comes to calculating the value of marriage, and finding it wanting.

This duo of young women go so far as to claim that “the permanence of marriage seems naive, almost arrogant.” Others, of course, might be forgiven for seeing unbridled arrogance in dismissing an institution that has been central to human flourishing for thousands of years.

They cite authorities who make the predictable arguments that humans are not hardwired for monogamy, anyway. Bennett and Ellison propose that perhaps a series of short, mostly monogamous relationships is best. “For us, it’s not that we reject monogamy altogether—indeed, one of us is going on six years with a partner—but that the idea of marriage has become so tainted, and simultaneously so idealized, that we’re hesitant to engage in it,” they explain.

In their essay, Bennett and Ellison cite a considerable body of research on marriage and make reference to our disastrous divorce rate. Nevertheless, it never seems to cross their minds that the very social trends they celebrate were the cause of marital decline — both in terms of individual marriages and the institution of marriage itself.

The moral revolutions of the late-twentieth century brought personal autonomy to preeminence. These moral revolutions included the rise of “no fault” divorce and a host of other developments that subverted marriage. Chief among these was the “liberation” of sex from marriage. Once sexual intercourse was no longer limited to married couples, marriage lost respect and binding authority, becoming more like a mere legal contract. Once having children out of wedlock was normalized (at least in many sectors of the society), marriage became a lifestyle option and little else.

There is an amazing lack of humility in the article by Bennett and Ellison, and a breathtaking lack of concern for other women as well. What about women who are not so professional, so secular, and so liberated from a desire for marriage? They are simply thrown under the bus, run over by the very social trends and moral revolutions these women champion and celebrate.

The Christian church should take careful note of this essay, not because its arguments are unprecedented, but because its distillation of these arguments in one of the nation’s two major newsweeklies must not escape attention. Christians see marriage, first of all, as an institution made good and holy by the Creator. Its value, for us, is not established by sociology but by Scripture. We also understand that God gave us marriage for our good, for our protection, for our sanctification, and for human flourishing.

In other words, the Bible compels us to see marriage as essential to human happiness, health, and infinitely more.

The essay by Jessica Bennett and Jesse Ellison is an undeniable reminder of our challenge to rebuild a marriage culture, and to start inside our own churches. “Once upon a time, marriage made sense,” Bennett and Ellison assert. One essential task for the Christian Church is to rebuild and maintain a marriage culture — even when marriage itself no longer makes sense to so many around us.

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Jessica Bennett and Jesse Ellison, “I Don’t: The Case Against Marriage,” *Newsweek*, June 11, 2010.

