

# Why No One Hears Arguments for Marriage

## WHAT THAT MEANS FOR US



by: [John Stonestreet](http://www.breakpoint.org/author/stonestreet/) (<http://www.breakpoint.org/author/stonestreet/>)

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If you have the impression that most arguments for traditional marriage fall on deaf ears, you may be right. But make them anyway. For more, stay tuned to BreakPoint.

The writer Upton Sinclair, commenting on his loss in the 1934 California gubernatorial election, wrote, “It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends on his not understanding it.”

Sinclair’s quote came to mind after reading a piece entitled “The World Can’t Hear Us On Marriage” by theologian Peter Leithart. It was the second of two pieces about the “difficulties that Christians have, and will continue to have, defending a biblical view of marriage to the American public.”

These difficulties don’t arise from a lack of good, even compelling, arguments for the idea that true marriage is the union of one man and one woman. It’s that the culture is increasingly incapable of hearing these arguments, much less making sense of them.

This is true even when we’re careful to avoid biblical or theological language in our arguments. As Leithart points out, an appeal to what’s best for children or the differences between the sexes is no more likely to receive a fair hearing than directly quoting scripture.

Why? Well, part of the reason has to do with an under-appreciated aspect of culture and the forces that shape it: the imagination. What you believe is true not only shapes how you see the world, it shapes what you think the world can be, that is, it limits what you’re able to imagine.

When Christians make arguments for the traditional family, they're invoking a world and a way of living that many people literally can't imagine.

People steeped in liberal individualism cannot imagine a world in which marriage is anything other than a private expression of mutual affection. While most of them hope to have children, they don't see procreation as one of the ends of marriage. Instead they see children, like marriage itself, as a chosen product based on mutual affection.

When someone speaks about the social dimension of marriage and the centrality of child-rearing, they may as well be invoking the idea of arranged marriages and dowries.

A limited cultural imagination has made appeals to marriage as an institution worth preserving unintelligible.

And it could hardly be otherwise. Our culture defines "freedom" as liberation from constraints, especially institutional constraints. So any appeal to millennia of tradition, however carefully

<http://archive.breakpoint.org/resources/subscribe-to-bp>articulated, is

going to sound like "theocracy" to people who can't imagine a world different from the one they live in.

Not only can they not imagine a different world, they've come to view this impoverished notion of freedom as essential to their way of life. Like Upton Sinclair's voters, their way of life depends on their not being able to imagine an alternative.

Thus, we can expect an "extended period of dullness, when truth about sexuality and marriage will fall on deaf ears until the obvious is relearned."

But it will be relearned. After all, "no one can defy creation forever."

So we should continue to "defend marriage, invoke the weight of tradition, make all the arguments [we] can invent with all the passion, compassion, and cunning [we] can muster." We shouldn't hesitate to make "theologically rich, biblically founded arguments against gay marriage."

Doing this even when people can't hear us puts us "in the good company of Isaiah and Jeremiah, Jesus and Paul."

But we should also start offering things to the culture to recapture people's imagination about the family: like stories, songs, art, and everyday life lived in front of others.

For example, a few years ago I received a letter from a student who attended a Summit Ministries conference. It was one of those tough weeks for my family. My wife and I had a few disagreements; my daughter, who was very young at the time, had a tough time adjusting to new living arrangements for the week. We struggled.

But the girl wrote, "I didn't want to hear what you had to say about God, truth, and especially marriage. But when I saw you with your family, I was forced to take your talk seriously." God is gracious. As I said, it was a difficult week, but He can speak through the imagination just like He can the mind.()

FURTHER READING AND INFORMATION

### **Why No One Hears Arguments for Marriage – Next Steps**

**Watch this recent example** (<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/getreligion/2013/03/who-knew-that-piers-morgan-could-be-thought-provoking/>) of what it looks like when a proponent of traditional marriage (Ryan T. Anderson of the Heritage Foundation) makes all the right arguments, but is rejected and insulted rather than treated fairly and his points considered.

This is part of the process by which a dominant cultural narrative deafens people to the reason and logic behind supporting definable, true marriage modeled after the procreative union of a man and woman. **Read Peter Leithart's explanation**

(<http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2013/03/the-world-cant-hear-us-on-marriage>) of this at First Things, where he counsels us not to give up, because preaching to the deliberately deaf is an old and venerable undertaking, as ancient as the prophets of Israel.

He also reminds us that no culture can fight against God's design forever. Eventually, they must recognize that, like the laws of gravity, the laws of creation don't care about political persuasions. The tide can still turn.

But until it does, the Church must stand firm and be willing, with love and winsomeness, to resist popular trends and hold to the truth.

To **strengthen your own understanding** of God's design for marriage and **prepare for your moment in the hot seat**, read Ryan T. Anderson's powerful resource, "[Marriage: What It Is, Why It Matters, and the Consequences of Redefining It.](http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/03/marriage-what-it-is-why-it-matters-and-the-consequences-of-redefining-it)"

(<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/03/marriage-what-it-is-why-it-matters-and-the-consequences-of-redefining-it>)

#### ARTICLES:

**[The World Can't Hear Us on Marriage](http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2013/03/the-world-cant-hear-us-on-marriage)** (<http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2013/03/the-world-cant-hear-us-on-marriage>)

Peter J. Leithart | First Things | March 15, 2013

**[Marriage: What It Is, Why It Matters, and the Consequences of Redefining It](http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/03/marriage-what-it-is-why-it-matters-and-the-consequences-of-redefining-it)**

(<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/03/marriage-what-it-is-why-it-matters-and-the-consequences-of-redefining-it>)

Ryan Anderson | Heritage Foundation | March 11, 2013

#### BOOKS:

**[What is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense](http://www.colsoncenterstore.org/product.asp?sku=9781594036224)**

(<http://www.colsoncenterstore.org/product.asp?sku=9781594036224>)

Sherif Girgis, Ryan Anderson, Robert P. George | Encounter Books | December 2012

#### OTHER RESOURCES:

**[Fresh off his Piers Morgan confrontation, Ryan Anderson explains his 'un-American' views on marriage](http://dailycaller.com/2013/03/30/fresh-off-his-piers-morgan-confrontation-ryan-anderson-explains-his-un-american-views-on-marriage/)** (<http://dailycaller.com/2013/03/30/fresh-off-his-piers-morgan-confrontation-ryan-anderson-explains-his-un-american-views-on-marriage/>)



James Weinstein | Daily Caller | March 30, 2013

**Who knew Piers Morgan could be thought-provoking?**

(<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/getreligion/2013/03/who-knew-that-piers-morgan-could-be-thought-provoking/>)

Get Religion | Patheos.com | March 28, 2013

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