

In my experience the defensive positions in team sports are the most significant in determining the outcome. The missed tackle, the failure to stop the ball getting to the attacking zone; over the line, into the net, through the hoop is usually the talking point or the focus of team attention. The day I was goalie for the East Lismore Under 16 B's hockey team is still a painful memory. We lost 14 nil. Defending on the sporting field may be dangerous and difficult. Defending biblical principles and truth is even more dangerous and difficult. Yet when fundamental Christian truth is under attack determined defence is necessary. Defending the faith is an honourable role. One of Queen Elizabeth's official titles is Defender of the Faith. This morning I want to encourage us to consider our roles as defenders of the faith in relation to marriage. Marriage is under intensive attack. Yet, Christians recognise its fundamental role in maintaining healthy, stable societies and fulfilling God's purposes for humanity, Christians know it needs defending. It is tempting to leave the defence to others better equipped. By the time a number of hockey balls whizzed past my face or ricocheted off my body into the net I was convinced there was a better goalie than me in the East Lismore Under 16 B's. There probably was but on the day I was the defender for better or worse. Brothers and sisters, frankly I don't believe all of us here this morning are equipped to publicly defend marriage. It is a scary, daunting prospect to speak up about controversial, emotional, potentially unpopular issues. The defence of marriage has been damaged by ill equipped people trying to defend it in public. What I do believe is that all of us can play some part in the defence of marriage. Here are three biblical reasons for involvement in defending marriage. First, the institution of marriage belongs to all humanity. Its origins are part of the very fabric of creation. Those who study cultures testify that marriage between a man and woman is almost universally sustained in diverse cultures and religions. So the institution of marriage is fundamental to healthy societies throughout the world. Its breakdown and distortion is a key factor of disharmony and decay. The root cause of much relational, psychological and physical dis-ease in our communities. Marriage is worth defending as a means of contributing to humanity's wellbeing. Second, Christians are dual citizens with dual citizenship responsibilities. As citizens of heaven we are to live lives worthy of the Lord with our eyes firmly fixed on our glorious inheritance. As we look forward to fully enjoying our heavenly citizenship we are to continue exercising our earthly citizenship consistent with the Bible's teaching. An example of this is

seen in the experience of God's exiled people in Babylon. Citizens of the Promised Land forced to live in a foreign land. Though they experienced great anguish and personal torment, they were to be committed to the welfare of the Babylonian people they lived amongst. The prophet Jeremiah wrote a letter to the exiles in the name of the Lord saying, *'Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.'*

Jeremiah 29:7 Christians are to so live, act and pray that they will be a blessing to those with whom they live. Defending and honouring marriage in word and action is one way of seeking the peace and prosperity of our nation. Third, Christians are to be imitators of Jesus. The Apostle Paul said, *'Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.'* **1 Corinthians 11:1** Jesus defended marriage. The biblical intent for marriage was undermined during Jesus' earthly life. One source of the undermining came from religious leaders deliberately interpreting the provisions for divorce in the Law of Moses for their own sinful purposes. In their teaching, mere dislike of one's spouse was a ground for dissolving the marriage. A blatant attempt to water down the covenant commitment of marriage. Sadly, threats to the biblical definition of marriage also come from within the church. Jesus stands against this watering down of marriage by reaffirming its creation definition. Jesus defends the institution of marriage as a lifelong one flesh union between a man and a woman united together by God. Walking in the footsteps of Jesus we should defend marriage too. It is a difficult responsibility. The assumptions each side brings to the debate about the nature of marriage are fundamentally different. The Christian foundation is the authority of the Bible and the existence of a moral universe ruled by a loving, just, personal Creator God. Others reject outright that foundation and so the discussion takes place from fundamentally different starting points. Without the work of the Holy Spirit our defence will not change people's minds. Sisters and brothers this brings us to the question of how we publicly defend marriage. All of us are able to play some part. Some of us are gifted by God to think and speak into the public debate. All of us can pray; that the Holy Spirit will soften hard hearts; that God's word would not return to him empty; that Christian public defenders of marriage will be Christlike, wise and discerning; that those in authority who legislate on marriage do so for the common good. All of us can actively participate in the democratic process by voting wisely and talking or writing to our local members. All of us can actively seek to

strengthen individual marriages. All of us can positively advertise the benefits of marriage whether currently married or not by acting in ways that honour marriage. All of us can act counter-culturally and with Christlikeness by honouring the dignity of each human being made in the image of God through our loving behaviour toward them. No bullying, belittling or demeaning those who disagree with us or are living immorally in the sight of God. For those able to speak publicly to defend marriage 7 points to consider in your preparation. Be a good listener, seeking to understand the assumptions and positions people are arguing. Shape your input so it helps others understand that Christian teaching on marriage is reasonable with a logical pattern to God's will and purposes for human sexual behaviour. Challenge those seeking to redefine marriage as to what their definition is and be prepared to point out any obvious flaws in their definition. Point out that even one redefinition leads to a redesigned institution that is no longer marriage. Indicate that any redefinition opens the door to further changes that legitimately and logically could include a marriage of three or more partners or a marriage between people of any age. Question who has the authority to change a long held, universal definition of marriage and who decides the limits of any redefinition. Open up the issue of the long term consequences when the link between biological parent and child is no longer secured by marriage. Defending marriage is necessary and costly. May we have the courage and grace to protect this great gift God has given his creation. Ironically, as we defend marriage we know from experience that it is both a source of great blessing and deep hurt and damage. Next week we will open up the bible's teaching on dealing with marriage.