

# Wages for Sin

*Marriage benefits are starting to go to those who are shacking up.*

By Gene Edward Veith

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Under most employee-benefits packages, a married worker receives health insurance that also covers his wife and kids. “That’s not fair!” said the homosexual lobby. “What about same-sex couples? If a man gets health coverage for his wife, why shouldn’t a man be able to get the same treatment for his same-sex lover?”

In another example of homosexuals exerting an influence far beyond their number, much of the business world and many government agencies dutifully agreed. Now, homosexual couples can claim health care and other family benefits.

But it still isn’t “fair.” “If homosexual couples can get benefits without being married,” a new group is saying, “why not us heterosexual couples who aren’t married but are living together?” Now marriage benefits are going to couples who are just shacking up.

The city of Milwaukee has just joined other municipal governments in granting family benefits—at taxpayer expense—to couples living together, no matter what their gender. Ironically, a provision to extend benefits to same-sex couples had earlier failed to pass the Common Council. Broadening the proposal to include heterosexual couples was enough to pick up the necessary votes. Never mind that there are lots more heterosexual couples living together out of wedlock than there are homosexuals, so that the price tag to taxpayers will be much higher. And never mind that the one practice is just as much “living in sin” as the other.

Now the city has to figure out how to administer the new benefits. When should the benefits for an unmarried couple begin? How many consecutive nights do they have to spend together? How is the benefits administrator supposed to know when the relationship is over? How do these benefits apply in the on-again, off-again, move-in, move-out relationships that characterize single people who, by definition, do not want a permanent commitment?

Under the emerging framework, there will be no difference between a married couple, a homosexual couple, or a couple in a temporary sexual relationship. As many advocates are putting it, “What difference does it make to the government or an employer whom you are having sex with?”

This sort of reductionism—a spouse is nothing more than a sex partner, so a sex partner is the same as a spouse—misses the point of what marriage is and what its role in society amounts to. Why should employers give their workers family benefits at all? Why not just pay

the single worker what he or she is due, leaving any family ties as a purely private matter, having nothing to do with work?

Originally, having a job was precisely a matter of working to provide for one's family. The “breadwinner” worked hard as a way of caring for his wife and children. Work was a means to a family end. This remained true, for the most part, even when women entered the work force in large numbers. Married couples compile their earnings for the family as a whole. Medical benefits became as important as salary in making sure that the family was taken care of.

Men and women who live together out of wedlock presumably do so because they do not want the commitment that marriage entails. But taking care of each other's medical bills is that kind of commitment. Some are saying, “Well, let Christians and other religious people get married if they want to, but nonbelievers should not have to follow a religious code, and the government shouldn't care one way or the other.”

Governments may not have an interest in who is having sex with whom, but they do have an interest in marriage. Unlike homosexual or temporary heterosexual relationships, marriage is open to having children. Nothing carries more social importance than having and raising children, so society has a strong vested interest in supporting, with laws and cultural pressure, the institution of marriage. Conversely, the family is the basis for every other social institution, so that every society requires a high view of marriage.

Marriage is not just a religious convention. Though some churches consider marriage a sacrament, others note that non-Christians can also get married and have families. According to the Reformation theologians, marriage is indeed established by God, but it is part of His civil reign, how He orders, blesses, and provides for His whole creation. Marriage is not, therefore, a sacrament, but a civil rite—a distinction that, far from decreasing its importance before God, broadens its significance.

So far, governments are resisting recognizing same-sex marriages. But instead marriage is being defined down. As marriage becomes unnecessary—not just for job benefits but for adopting children, inheriting property, and being socially acceptable—the whole nation will be “living in sin.”