

Brothers and Sisters at Zion Wayside,

At the beginning of creation God gave us a great gift that is marriage. I have had the opportunity to officiate many weddings here at Zion. It is always a joyous moment to pronounce a young couple as husband and wife as they begin a new chapter in their life as family.

The joy associated with a new marriage should be recognized here within the church more than anywhere else, as we recognize and trust in God's plan in marriage. The marriage celebrated within these walls is not only a union of the man and the woman, but also a portrait of the union between Jesus Christ and His bride, the Christian Church (Ephesians 5:31-32). A union that you and I are now a part of—purchased by the blood of the cross and given to us in our baptisms.

It is for this reason that marriage in the church is held in the highest regard. And it is for this reason that Zion Wayside must be absolutely faithful in our approach to celebrating the magnificent gift of marriage. The book of Hebrews admonishes and encourages fellow believers saying, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." (13:4)

As Senior Pastor of this congregation, I am called by God to teach you the Word of God in all its fullness. My prayer is that someday when I reflect on the ministry at Wayside I may say with the Apostle Paul that "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:27) One day I will have to stand before God and give an account of my service in ministry. I often pray for courage to speak to all of you boldly and lovingly, calling everyone to repentance, proclaiming to you the forgiveness of sins, and offering guidance in your Christian life.

However, I must preach to myself first and repent of my own sins. I have fallen into the temptation and sin of what is convenient and path of least resistance. Doing so at the cost of a bold and clear confession of God's expectations of marriage.

God does not condone, for any reason, living together prior to the wedding, which implies sex before the marriage. I regret that I allowed this to happen in the weddings I have officiated, giving the impression that our church and God's Word accepts this practice. I ask for your forgiveness.

True repentance leads to a changed way of life. In my own repentance, I will change how weddings are considered for approval at Zion. A couple who lives together and wishes to celebrate a Christian wedding with either myself or Pastor Kyle as the officiant will be expected to show the fruits of repentance and live separately until the date of their wedding. On that day they will rejoice in the forgiveness of God and the gift of marriage, along with the Church by their side.

Pastor Kyle is also in agreement with this decision. And Zion's Board of Elders has reviewed this decision and also desires to follow this path of faithfulness to God's Word.

God continues to richly bless Zion Wayside. May he grant us His grace and help to further grow in our love and service to one another.

Your servant in Christ,
Pastor Austen Welter