

HOW SHOULD WE THINK ABOUT "SAME-SEX" MARRIAGE

by Dr Andrew Corbett



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HOW SHOULD WE THINK ABOUT SAME SEX MARRIAGE?

By Dr Andrew Corbett, Director of the Tasmanian Family Institute, and President of ICI Theological College

How should we think about “Same-Sex” *Marriage*? This public debate is as much about the role of language as it is about marriage. The emotionalism involved from both sides of the argument is intense which often leads to the actual issues being lost in the jungle of irrational verbiage. How we settle this issue as a society says a lot about what kind of society we are.

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE

Confucius is reported to have said- “*When words lose their meaning, people lose their freedom.*” Someone has adapted this with the observation that, “*When words lose their meaning, people lose their lives.*” Words have intrinsic meaning. Seasoned debaters know and employ the maxim- “*He who controls language controls the debate.*” Arguably, Language is the battlefield of culture. For Christians, if the components of language can be arbitrarily redefined, then truth, and especially the Christian message, ceases to be coherent and is rendered meaningless.

THE ARGUMENTS FOR SAME GENDER MARRIAGE (SGM)

The arguments in favour of Same-Gender Marriage can be summed up under four categories-

1. Anti-Discrimination
2. Intolerance
3. Secular Society Acceptance
4. Progressive Religion

1. ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

This is perhaps the most compelling argument in favour of redefining marriage to providing for two people of the same gender to “marry”. After all, if marriage is about committed love between two people why should it be restricted to people of complementary genders? Georgetown University (USA) Law Professor, William Eskridge, puts this argument this way-

“Same-Sex marriage is good primarily for reasons of equality. Legal marriage entails dozens of rights, benefits and obligations which are routinely available to different-sex couples. Those same benefits, rights and obligations should be available on the same terms to lesbian and same-sex couples as a guarantee of their equal rights in our polity.”

“Relativism”, Beckwith, Koukl, page 119

Torrie Osborn, former executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, makes a similar argument and has said-

“I think it’s a question of fundamental fairness...People who are willing to accept the responsibilities of marriage, which is about love, caring, commitment, long-term commitment, should be able to have the right to be married...[D]enying our fundamental humanity is not good for society.”

Beckwith, Koukl, p. 119

2. INTOLERANCE

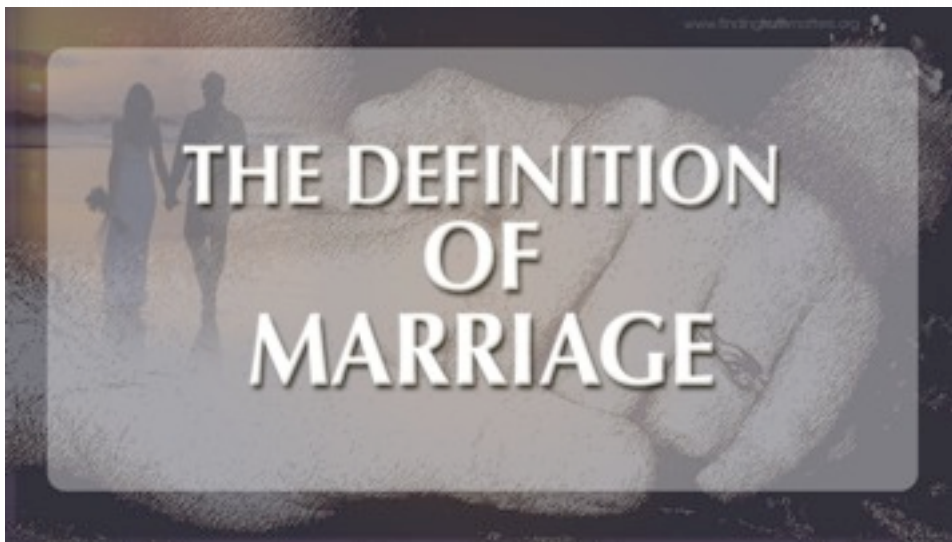
Proponents of Same-Gender Marriage appeal for tolerance from those who oppose their assault. To withstand the push for Same-Gender Marriage is nothing more than socially-unacceptable *intolerance* of people who are different.

3. SECULAR SOCIETY

The most critical opponents of Same-Gender Marriage seem to be religious. Consequently, their objections also seem to be based on religious reasons. Proponents of Same-Gender Marriage reasonably object to having someone else's religious's standards imposed upon them, especially since we live in a secular society.

4. PROGRESSIVE RELIGION

There is also an alternative to the above argument for Same-Gender Marriage which is used by those who are religious. This is the appeal for "Progressive" religion. It contends that religious conservatism has failed to keep with the changing times in which we live. It argues that the religious objections to homosexuality belong to an unenlightened ancient era that had more to do with pagan idolatry than actual morality.



It's worth noting that wherever provisions have been made for Same-Gender Marriage it has meant not a new interpretation of what marriage means, but a redefining of it.

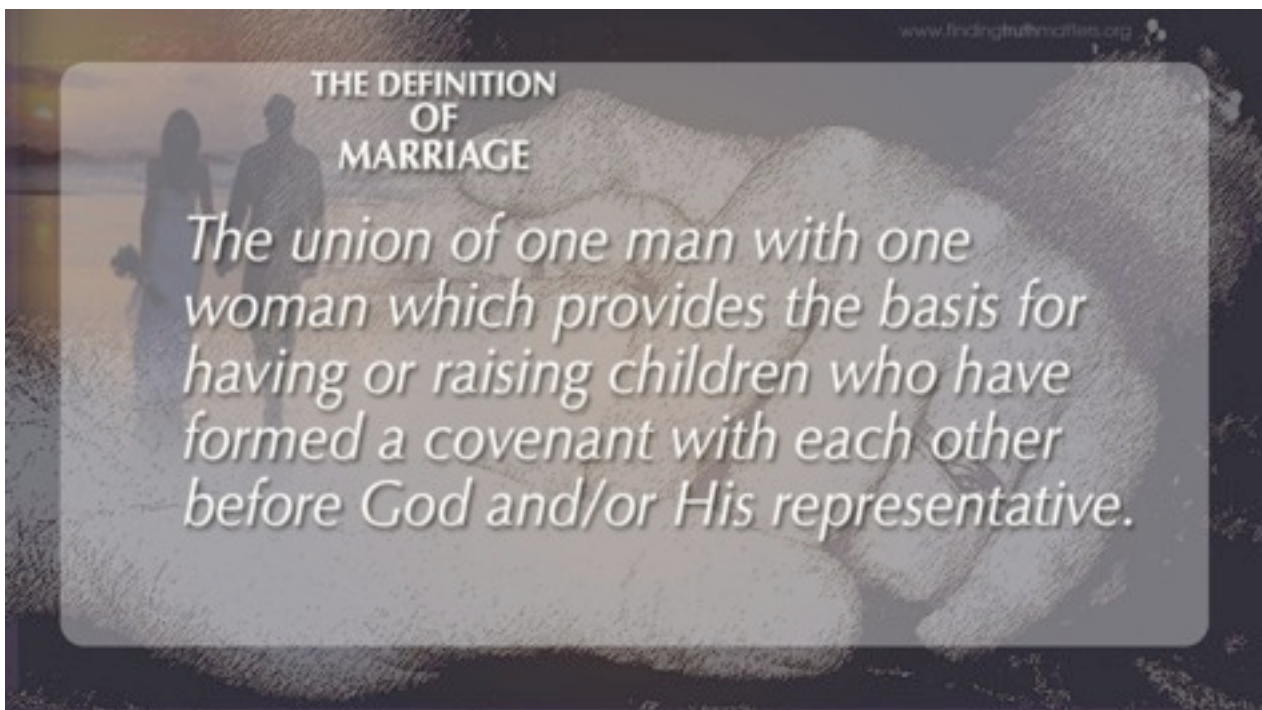
In the USA, The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was passed in 1996 by the U.S. Congress and was signed by President Bill Clinton. Its purpose was twofold: (i) to allow states not to honor same-sex marriages if such unions are allowed in other states, and (2) to define for the federal code that marriage “means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife.”

Beckwith, Koukl

In Australia, The Marriage Amendment Bill was introduced to the Australian Parliament by Senator Guy Barnett on May 27 2004 and passed by the Parliament 12th August 2004. It defined marriage as -

Marriage means the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.

Certain unions are not marriages. A union solemnised in a foreign country between: (a) a man and another man; or (b) a woman and another woman; must not be recognised as a marriage in Australia.



THE CASE FOR MARRIAGE

It's been a clever ploy for advocates of Homosexual-Marriage to use language like "traditional marriage" or "heterosexual marriage". This conveys the idea that there are multiple legitimate forms of "marriage". As clever as this, it is not so. This is why I am not now arguing for such a thing as "traditional" or "heterosexual" marriage, but simply: *marriage*.

1. MARRIAGE IS WHAT IT IS.

Marriage actually is something. The Marriage Act isn't the basis for *defining* marriage, rather it is actually a *description* of what it is. In the same way that a circle is something, and a square is something else, so marriage is something. The description precedes the definition. A square could feel discriminated against for not having its deepest longing to be thought of as a circle recognised by society. Society could even legislate for certain squares to be called circles...but they would still be squares! In the same way, two people of the same gender could have a deep longing for social acceptance by having their relationship recognised as a "marriage" by society. Even if their wish was granted, their "square" relationship would still be a "square" relationship.

2. MARRIAGE IS NOT A RIGHT

Marriage is a *privilege* granted not to couples, but to two individuals. It is therefore nonsensical to protest that two people of the same gender are "*denied the right to marry*" or that they "*don't have the same rights as heterosexual couples.*" *No one* has the "right" to marry whoever they desire!

Marriage is a wonderful gift that can bring sublime happiness to a couple. A *gift*. But not a *right*. If you are the beneficiary of any gift you have been *privileged*. A "privilege" loses all meaning if it were actually made a "right".

The fact that there are even any rights should cause us to wonder: *Why?* That is, we all intuitively know that there are rights shared by us all. We all have the right to own

property and have that right protected in law against theft. Children have the right to a safe upbringing whether in their home or school. But it would soon become apparent to the observer of our various common rights that these rights have not been invented or merely socially constructed. They exist in an objective way and are therefore *transcendent* (outside of us all). The same observer would then recognise the connection between rights and morals (that morality is an objective set of standards derived transcendentally).

3. MARRIAGE IS A PICTURE OF DIVINE UNITY

God is Triune, One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The kind of union they enjoy is the substance while human marriage is the shadow. Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct yet one, so when a man and a woman marry they are united by God. The unity of marriage where three distinct parties come together and are united is fulfilled in the union of a man with a woman before God. Since the Bible reveals that all authority is ultimately from God even when a couple are married by a civil ceremony, the Civil Celebrant is still God's representative in the wedding of the man with the woman. In this sense, God has designed man and woman in a certain physical way to make "wedding" possible. In fact, the "wedding" of two people in marriage is only possible if it is between a man and a woman.

4. MARRIAGE REFLECTS A DEEP FOUNDATIONAL THEOLOGICAL TRUTH

It is not just the unity of God which marriage is intended shadow, it is also the identity of God. As a man and woman before and with God are united in matrimony they are reflecting the Triune identity of God.

...the current push to legitimize homosexual conduct and so-called gay "marriage" represents today's greatest threat to religious liberty.

Chuck Colson, Breakpoint, 25th April 2011



5. MARRIAGE IS A CELEBRATION OF GENDER DISTINCTION

Marriage a celebration of gender distinction. In marriage, a man is complemented by his wife because she is a woman and the wife by her husband because he is a man.

Added to this,

- (i) **Marriage is ordained by God** (it is not merely a social construct)
- (ii) **Marriage is verified by nature** (the sexual union of a husband with his wife is possible because they naturally physically enable it. Their bodies are designed and made for it. Only this type of natural union can naturally produce children. This is not the case with two people of the same gender.)
- (iii) **Marriage is historically demonstrable to be beneficial to society** (Healthy marriages between fathers and mothers produces stable societies. Professor Linda Waite of Chicago University has found this to be case from her extensive social research.)
- (iv) **Marriage is best for children** (children fair best when raised by their married mum and dad. Extensive sociological research by Prof. Sotirios Sarantakas has shown this to be the case. Refer to my booklet, “*What Is A Family? And Why It Matters*”)

COUNTERING THE ARGUMENTS FOR SAME-GENDER MARRIAGE

1. ANTI-DISCRIMINATION?

The claim that to deny two homosexuals the right to marry is against the principles of Anti-Discrimination is not correct. This is because the intent of Anti-Discrimination legislation is to protect against *unfair* discrimination. Unfair discrimination is where there are no reasonable grounds to make a distinguishing choice in favour of someone. Hence, the choice between two equally qualified and equally experienced people would be an act of unfair discrimination if the successful candidate was chosen on the basis of skin colour, or race, or gender. But in regard to The Marriage Act restricting marriage to two people of the opposite gender it can not be argued that this is *unfairly* discriminatory because it treats *all people equally*. That is, everyone is subject to the same legislation.

In addition to this, The Marriage Act reasonably discriminates on the basis of not only gender distinction but also-

- (i) The parties must be unmarried.
- (ii) The parties must be of marriageable age (at least 18 years of age)
- (iii) The parties must not be immediately related to each other.
- (iv) The parties must be a person (not an animal, organisation, or material object).

If Anti-Discrimination legislation is misconstrued to mean that it is unfairly discriminatory to deny two people of the same gender the right to marry each other, then on what basis can we continue to discriminate on the remaining existing criteria listed above? If each qualification for marriage was overturned then the institution of marriage becomes non-sensical!

The moment that marriage is defined as *something* it is by nature defined as *not* being something - that is, *a definition of marriage itself is an act of discrimination!* Therefore, the appeal to Anti-Discrimination is extremely invalid.

To “discriminate” is to *make a distinguishing choice*. Discrimination is not immoral. We must discriminate continually. This is why we must qualify the term by either *reasonable* discrimination or *unfair* discrimination. Since Marriage is *the union of one man with one woman for life to the exclusion of all others* it is not only reasonable to discriminate against other possible combinations - it is demanded!

2. INTOLERANCE?

The appeal for Homosexual Marriage on the basis that The Marriage Act being “intolerant” is actually an argument *against* Same-Gender Marriage. This is because any appeal for tolerance is a tacit admission that what is being appealed for is *unacceptable*. We do not request *tolerance* for something which is *acceptable*. We are only asked to tolerate something that is unacceptable! Therefore, the appeal for “tolerance” is an admission of unacceptability. No society can survive if it legislates for that which is unacceptable!

3. A SECULAR SOCIETY?

This appeal for Same-Gender Marriage commits the error that the arguments for Marriage are entirely religious. They are not. It is very true that Marriage is sacred and has profound religious significance. It is also available to those without any religious convictions in the form of *civil* ceremonies - yet the definition, prerequisites, and obligations are applied without any religious criteria.

4. PROGRESSIVE RELIGION?

Not all advocates for Same-Gender Marriage are irreligious. This however creates a problem for SGM advocates who seek to integrate religious convictions with their position. For them Christianity seems a soft target for accommodating homosexuality. They basically couch their argument in a way that reinterprets Biblical passages to be outdated and culturally irrelevant. This is essentially claiming that the Bible is not *objective* but is rather *relativistic* when it comes to moral standards. To be consistent, advocates of this claim have to assert that there are no objective (or “absolute”) moral standards or right and

wrong. But this assertion becomes self-defeating because in essence it states objectively that nothing can be taken objectively! In other words, they are absolute sure that nothing is absolutely sure! But are they then really absolutely sure?

Some even recklessly invoke Jesus Christ's endorsement of homosexuality by claiming that He never condemned it. But this is a *disintegrated* religious appeal. The consistent moral standards of the Bible are not subject to time, culture, or geography. Sexual conduct is defined in the Bible as either appropriate or inappropriate in an entirely consistent manner. The Bible forbids homosexual practice because it is morally wrong. It lists it within the section in Leviticus 18 on what defines sexual immorality. Jesus Christ refers to this section in Matthew 15:19 and emphatically stated that these things spiritually defile a person - put them in wrong standing before God! It is simply factually wrong to claim that Jesus Christ did not condemn all forms of sexual immorality (including fornication- *sex without marriage*, and adultery- *sex beyond marriage*).



THE APPEAL

I suspect that this entire debate is actually *not* about marriage. The SGM campaign has attempted to politicize marriage. But marriage is not a political football. Marriage should not be politically hijacked in a veiled attempt to baptise same-gender relationships in social legitimacy. The SGM agenda calls for a reasoned response from those it challenges. For those of us being challenged to redefine Marriage I would appeal for the following.

1. INAPPROPRIATE EMOTIVE LANGUAGE

Proponents of the Same Sex Marriage agenda (SGM) use very emotive language to paint those who agree with the Marriage Act as ‘bigots’, ‘intolerant’, ‘religious fanatics’, ‘discriminators’. But none of these terms are actually an argument. This tactic from the SGM agenda is just name-calling. Therefore, two things are necessary in response to this. Firstly, when under attack, we should not resort to name-calling. Secondly, we should not be distracted by name-calling and stay focussed on the real issue that what is being called for is a redefining of what marriage is. By redefining it, its new definition ceases to apply to what it actually is.

2. LANGUAGE CONFUSION

“Discrimination” has been redefined to be a morally negative term. But it’s not! Reading is an act of discrimination (you have make distinguishing choices between the options of meanings of words when they are grouped together). When we choose to fly with a certain airline we are discriminating against other airlines. When we insist that the pilot of that airline’s plane must be suitably qualified, we discriminating against unqualified would-be pilots. Discrimination can be bad but it has come to mean that *it is always bad*. When we are accused of *discrimination* we need to ask in what way are we being unfair since the Marriage Act treat all people equally?

3. NEED FOR CIVILITY

Because this is such an emotive debate where language is used vitriolically it often arouses an uncivil response from those defending marriage. Our case looks weaker when we are not civil toward our opponents. Conversely, our reasons look stronger if they are made courteously.



4. STRENGTHEN YOUR OWN MARRIAGE

What a tragic thing to be fighting for marriage generally and failing to fight for the welfare of your own marriage in particular. One of the best cases we can make for marriage is our own marriage. I have, at the time of writing this, been married 23 years. Added to this I have been preparing couples for marriage for nearly 20 years as well. I know that good marriages don't just happen - they result from hard work and diligence. Sometimes the other side points to our general apathy about our own marriages and our high divorce rates to claim that we don't live up to our own theories about marriage. Unfortunately all too often this criticism is valid!

Marriage can be the closest thing to heaven on earth - but if you abuse or neglect it, it can also be the closest thing to hell on earth! Anyone who has gone through the emotional, financial and physical cost of a marriage breakdown will readily admit this.

The arguments for Same Sex Marriage (SGM) are illogical, unsatisfactory, and lacking any merit when considered in the light of a reasoned case for what marriage actually is. This is not discriminatory to point this out. Neither is constraining marriage to one man with one woman imposing a particularly religious view on a largely secular society.

Marriage is something. The Marriage Act describes it - not merely defines it. It is worth defending for what it is because what is at stake is so high. It is not about rights or unfairness. It is a privilege made available to eligible *individuals* not couples. It has teleological grounding in nature by virtue of the unique sexual compatibleness of a husband with his wife. It is an ancient institution as old as humanity itself. It has profoundly deep theological significance. It is a celebration of gender distinction and unity. It is the best and most natural seedbed for raising and rearing children. This is why Marriage should only be regarded as the legal union of one man with one woman for life to the exclusion of all others for the ideal purpose of having children raised in the most loving home possible.

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26th April 2011
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