

SEX & MARRIAGE

A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING

AT THE RED DOOR COMMUNITY CHURCH

WHAT WE BELIEVE

God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.

By addressing some culturally relevant questions that are often discussed in our present day, both within and outside the walls of the church, the following document presents a biblical perspective on the issues of marriage and sex. The purpose in documenting the following is to clarify our position as a church on these incredibly important issues as well to help equip our members to be able to engage in discussion on these topics.

WHY IS MARRIAGE BETWEEN ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN?

To answer this question the logical place to start is at the beginning. What is the original intention and purpose behind the institution of marriage? As God was the one who invented marriage then it would also be logical that in order to fully understand marriage one should investigate what the Bible has to say about it. So as we turn to God's Word we see the very first account of marriage recorded in the book of Genesis.

Genesis 2:18-24

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

From this passage, also quoted by Jesus in Matthew 19:4-5, we learn that one of the core purposes of marriage is to meet the human need for deep, intimate companionship. This is the only instance in the creation story where God says that something isn't good - that "it is not good for man to be alone". So God creates the only companion who can perfectly and completely complement the man.

But couldn't the union of 2 people of the same sex meet God's design for deep, intimate human companionship? The reason why the answer to this question is no is found in the final verse of the above passage. God's intention and design for marriage is that a man and a woman be united by becoming one flesh. Two people of the same sex simply do not have the required anatomy to become one flesh as God designed. The act of sexual intimacy between a man and woman, among other things, is intended to be a physical representation of a spiritual reality. The homosexual sex act is a distortion of God's good and original design.

This leads to a second core purpose of marriage that we see in the following passage from the book of Ephesians.

Ephesians 5:31-32

A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church...

What the Apostle Paul reveals in this passage is that marriage is intended to be an earthly expression and representation of a divine and eternal reality. It is interesting to note that the Bible begins with a wedding - Adam and Eve - and it climaxes in the book of Revelation with the wedding of Christ and his Church. Marriage was designed by God to be a reflection of his saving love for us in Jesus. The gospel helps us understand marriage and likewise marriage helps us to understand the gospel. Each member of the church is a part of Christ's body and by faith, a person is joined to Jesus Christ and to other believers so that we "are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Marriage parallels this gospel reality - just as the husband and wife become one flesh through the act of marriage so Christ and the church become one through the power of the gospel. Marriage is therefore a mystery because it contains and conceals a meaning far greater than can be observed from the outside. What God has joined together in marriage is to be a reflection of the union between Jesus and his bride, the church. Clearly then, the foundational purpose of marriage is far more than the expression of romantic love that our culture has made it.

Because marriage was designed by God to be a representation of a divine reality, it is a relationship that is covenantal and not contractual. The covenant involved in leaving mother and father and holding fast to a spouse and becoming one flesh is a portrayal of the covenant between Christ and his church. Marriage exists to display the covenant-keeping love between Christ and his church. The Lord did not establish a 'contract' with Israel or with the church. He created a 'covenant'. There is a difference. Contracts are broken when one of the parties fails to keep his promise. With a covenant one member's failure does not destroy the relationship. A covenant is not conditional upon faithfulness. It is the unconditional commitment to love and serve. Praise God his love toward us is a covenantal love and not contractual or we would all be lost. Marriage was created by God to be a reflection of his covenantal love for his people. Therefore marriage is incredibly precious, powerful and important.

But can't 2 men or 2 women be married and be an expression of the divine reality of God's love for us through Jesus Christ and the Church? To understand the reason why this is not possible, one must understand how the act of sexual intercourse fits within the institution of marriage and the covenantal nature of marriage.

According to the Bible, Christians believe sex is sacred for three reasons:

1. Sex procreates life and with God it co-creates a new soul.
2. Sex is the analogy of the joyous self-giving love within the life of the Trinity.
3. Sex is a covenantal act where two people become one flesh (marriage).

So while 2 people of the same sex may feel as though their commitment to one another could be an expression of the self-giving love of the Trinity, 2 people of the same sex cannot produce life and cannot become one flesh through the act of sexual intercourse as God designed it as mentioned previously.

This is why the Bible teaches that sex outside of marriage and homosexual sex are both acts of sexual immorality – they are both outside of the bounds of what God intended for sex. Whilst God's ways may often seem to be unreasonable and even unloving, they are exactly the opposite. All of God's ways are good and all his commands are designed for human flourishing.

Consider this one area of sexual relations. If all of humanity was to obey God's laws surrounding sex and was to keep sex within the bounds of marriage between a man and a woman, there would be no sex slavery, no sexually transmitted diseases and no adultery; children would be born into a home with both biological parents present, no pornography, no paedophilia. This by no means would guarantee a perfect existence but much pain and suffering would be eliminated. God's ways may not always be easy to understand but they are wise and good. In order to be followed they will require the laying down of desires that may seem right to the individual but which are in fact harmful not only to that person but also to the community around them.

One final point. Another vitally important reason why marriage is to be between a man and a woman is that marriage is the intended means by which children are created and raised to adulthood. Two people of the same sex cannot produce life. God's design is that children are raised by the two people who created them. While our culture would have us believe all that children need is a loving environment, and not necessarily one where both biological parents are present, this is not true. Yes, the presence of two biological parents doesn't automatically guarantee a loving home environment but none the less, this is the family unit that society should strive to support and protect, because this environment, and no other is what is best for children to flourish.

In conclusion, marriage between a man and a woman is a sacred institution ordained by God for human flourishing. It is an institution that is meant to reflect the divine reality of God's love for his people and through which, life is intended to be created and nurtured. This institution is the foundation of the family unit and has been so for thousands of years and across all cultures. What is true of a building is true for a society – erode the foundations and the whole structure becomes compromised.

HOW DOES ONE RESPOND TO THE CLAIMS THAT GOD PERMITS HOMOSEXUALITY AND SAME SEX MARRIAGE?

In the current debate there are more than a few voices within the Church claiming that God is ok with homosexuality and that the Bible does not condemn same sex marriage.

One of the more common arguments is that from a biblical perspective, same sex partnership is OK so long as it is committed and monogamous. It is sometimes claimed that all references to homosexuality have to do with promiscuous sex and not homosexuality within a faithful, monogamous relationship. The basis of the argument is that if two people love each other and are committed to each other then God is ok with it.

Two helpful ways to understand why this viewpoint is not biblical is: Firstly, as we have just seen in what has been previously presented, homosexual relationships do not and cannot fulfil God's intention and purpose for marriage. Secondly, in regards to this argument that a homosexual relationship is ok from God's perspective so long as it is committed and monogamous, it is helpful to understand both what Paul does and doesn't say in 1 Corinthians 5. In this part of his first letter to the Corinthian church Paul strongly rebukes the church for its acceptance of a relationship between a man and his father's wife (most likely his stepmother). This relationship is forbidden in Leviticus 18 – as is homosexual relationships (Lev 18:22). In addressing this issue Paul clearly does not inquire about the level of commitment of the two parties towards one another. That isn't the issue. The issue is simply that their relationship is outside of God's order and is therefore sinful. As difficult as it might be to comprehend in our culture, scripture clearly prohibits homosexual activity regardless of whether it is faithful and monogamous, or not.

Another common argument one might hear goes something along the lines of, "Jesus never mentions homosexuality, so how can it be wrong?" While Jesus may not directly mention homosexuality in passages such as the one below, he does address it.

Mark 7:20-23

He went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person."

In this passage where Jesus speaks of some of the things that make one spiritually unclean before God, he includes sexual immorality. The Greek word that the NIV translates as "sexual immorality" is the word *porneia*. From this passage and others (for example Matthew 15:19, Romans 13:13, 1 Corinthians 5:1) one can see that Scripture is clear in its prohibition of "sexual immorality", or *porneia*. But what does the word *porneia* mean? In addition to premarital sex, this term also includes such things as homosexuality, bestiality and adultery – essentially every kind of extramarital, unlawful, unnatural sexual intercourse. In using this word Jesus' original hearers would have understood that he wasn't just referring to premarital sex but all sexual relations that are outside the bonds of marriage.

Finally, in providing understanding with these types of questions it is important to hear what Jesus has to say about marriage. In Matthew 19 the Pharisees confront Jesus on the topic of divorce hoping to trap him and therefore have grounds to condemn him.

Matthew 19:3-6

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

In this passage Jesus affirms God’s design for marriage. Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman to become one flesh and in so doing the husband-wife relationship illustrates the complementarity and unity-in-diversity that characterizes God’s own nature.

A WORD OF WISDOM FOR THOSE ENGAGING IN DISCUSSION ON THESE TOPICS

What has been presented above is a biblical understanding of marriage and sex. This document has been an attempt to present the theology behind the position we hold to as a church on these subjects. However, it is important to note, that while it is imperative that Christians “watch their life and doctrine closely” (1 Timothy 4:6) and clearly understand what the Bible has to say on topics such as these, it is also imperative that Christians engage with others, who may hold a different view, with great humility and compassion. We must always seek to communicate the truth in love.

Firstly, it is not possible for the church to impose the ethics to the Kingdom of God on a secular, democratic, self governing, autonomous society, that has a right to self determination. You can not expect people who have not accepted Jesus as LORD to live like he is. We must recognise when people hold a completely different worldview and system of belief from ourselves, and approach these moments with care and respect.

Secondly we must recognise that those who are struggling with same sex attraction, those who are involved in a same sex relationship, and those within the LGBTI community, are not in some different category of persons in our society, but are people who are to be treated like every other person. We are all broken people in need of acceptance.

When entering into discussions on these topics then, our beginning point and our motivation is always to be one of love. We may not agree but we can still love someone and not agree with them. If love is conditional on agreement, then it is not really love. Love by definition must be unconditional.

If our first response is not love, but correction, we run the risk of demonstrating a false gospel. The false gospel, also known as religion says “I obey; therefore I am accepted”, while the real Gospel says “I am accepted by God through Christ; therefore I obey.” We accept the person because that is exactly how God treats us.

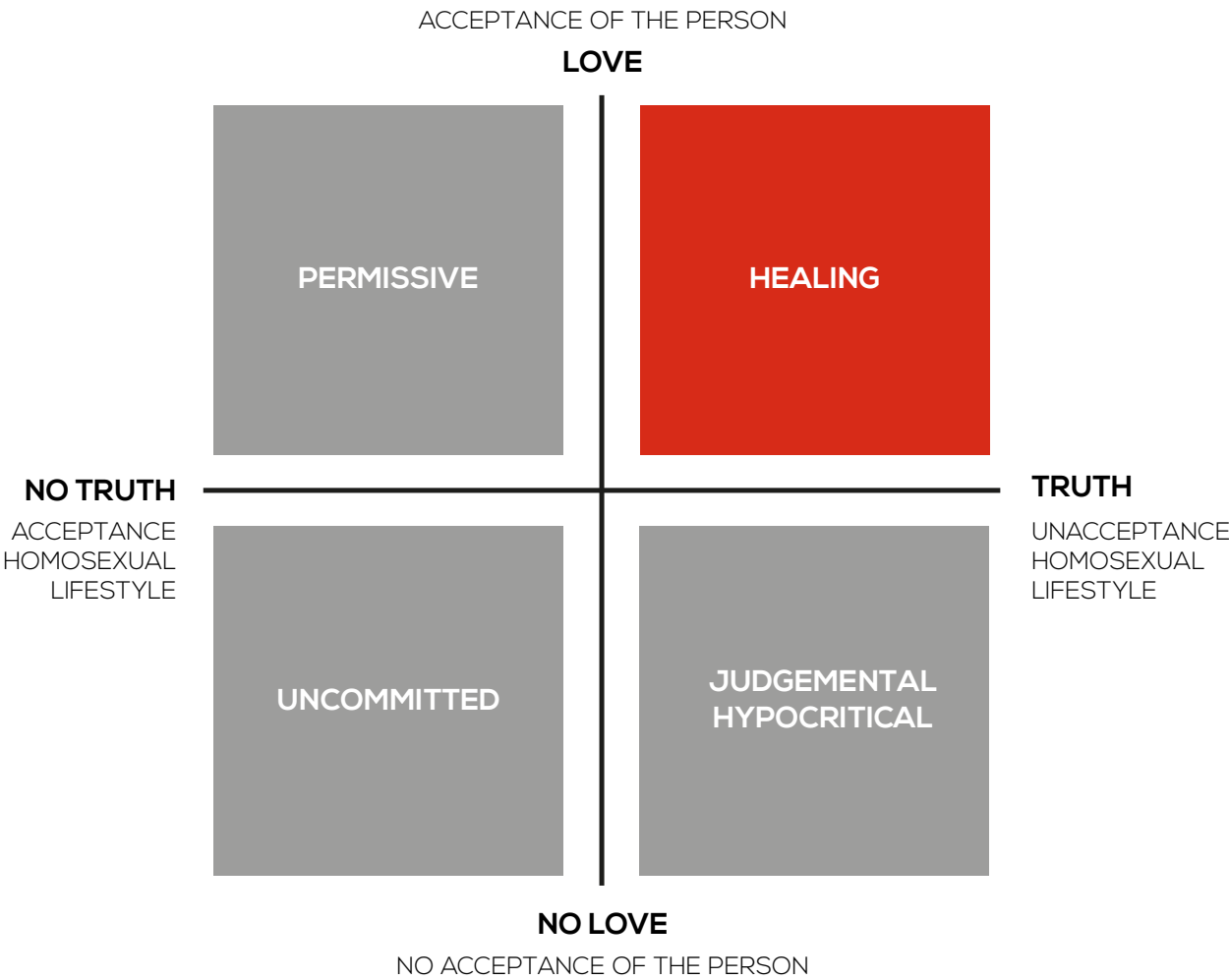
Timothy Keller

“The reason that marriage is so painful and yet wonderful is because it is a reflection of the gospel, which is painful and wonderful at once. The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope. This is the only kind of relationship that will really transform us. Love without truth is sentimentality; it supports and affirms us but keeps us in denial about our flaws. Truth without love is harshness; it gives us information but in such a way that we cannot really hear it. God’s saving love in Christ, however, is marked by both radical truthfulness about who we are and yet also radical, unconditional commitment to us. The merciful commitment strengthens us to see the truth about ourselves and repent. The conviction and repentance moves us to cling to and rest in God’s mercy and grace.”

Therefore there is a difference between acceptance of the person and acceptance of a lifestyle. It is possible to accept a person and not accept their lifestyle. We accept a person because they are made in the image of God and worthy of respect. The example

of parents best demonstrates this - parents should love their children because they are theirs, even when the child's choices do not line up how the parent would choose.

So when you are in a loving conversation with anyone where there is disagreement, the goal is to reveal the distinction between accepting the person and accepting their lifestyle. When this distinction isn't made, the perception is often one of "you don't accept my lifestyle therefore you don't accept me" and when this is the case communication shuts down and relationship becomes impossible.



Finally, in relation to engaging in discussion on the same sex marriage issue it is helpful to ask and the address the question, “what problem is same sex marriage trying to solve and does attaining ‘marriage equality’ answer this problem?” It would seem that the main motivation behind the ‘marriage equality’ movement is one of acceptance. Unfortunately, if anyone expects that within marriage they will find acceptance, or value, or happiness or equality they will be disappointed. The satisfaction of these deep needs is not the ultimate purpose of marriage. One could well conclude that the heterosexual example of marriage has clearly shown, to which the divorce rates testify, that marriage is not the answer to the problem of acceptance. Jesus is the only answer to the deep longing for acceptance that resides within every human heart. If we look to our spouses to fill up our tanks in a way that only God can do, we are demanding an impossibility.

Further reading

Timothy Keller “The Meaning of Marriage : Facing the Complexities of Marriage with the Wisdom of God”

Nancy R Pearcy “Love Thy Body”

Sam Alberry "Is God anti-gay?." And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible, and Same-Sex Attraction.

The Centre for Faith “Video: Dear Church: I’m Gay”, www.vimeo.com/thecenterforfaith/dearchurch or www.vimeo.com/231166638

Need to talk

As always if you would like to discuss any of the above, please make a time with one of our pastoral staff by emailing us at enter@thereddoor.cc



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