

Towards a Theology of Gay Marriage?

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As the UK Government begins to explore the possibility of new policies on marriage for same-sex couples, do we need to revisit our theology of marriage and ask "Is it really as Biblical as we think?"

I often find myself feeling sorry for the Pharisees in the Gospels. It is easy to dismiss them as legalistic 'stick in the muds' but at least they tried their best to be faithful to the Word of God, and to hold the line against the secular influences of Roman politics and culture.

Their problem however, was that in their zeal to be faithful, they often got the wrong end of the stick. As a result, over and over again, they missed the point of what God was doing, and ended up fighting against His purposes in the process.

It was in this context that they ran up against Jesus over and over again.

Food laws are one example - their focus on [clean and unclean foods](#) led to a theology which implied that it is what goes into your body which makes you unclean, rather than the declaration of Christ that it is what comes out of your heart that matters.

The Sabbath is another example. They spent so much time and energy upholding the Sabbath that they transformed something which God intended as a blessing and made it a burden. What God intended as a means to an end - that we should have time for rest and recreation - became the end in itself. Again Jesus countered this by turning it on its head, pointing to the purpose of the Sabbath, rather than the institution. "[The Sabbath was created for man, not man for the Sabbath.](#)" The Pharisees saw the 'end product' and allowed that to become pre-eminent, rather than seeing the intention of God. As a result, the need which God was addressing in the creation of the Sabbath became overwhelmed by their observation of the institution of the Sabbath.

But we too can fall into the same trap when it comes to understanding marriage.

In the [account of Adam and Eve](#) we find our paradigm for marriage. Although not the only consideration in forming our theology of marriage, it is the foundation which is taken up by both Jesus when questioned about divorce, and Paul in his advice to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5.

In the account we observe that male and female come together in joy to 'complete' one another, and become 'one flesh' in a way which is unique in creation. If we follow this form, then marriage must be between one man and one woman.

Such an observation precludes, of course, any contemplation of same-sex marriage. 'God made Adam and Eve - not Adam and Steve,' is one way of expressing this, and silences all argument to the contrary.

Yet if we merely look at the 'end product' in Genesis 2, without seeking to understand God's intentions, we run the same risk as the Pharisees whose limited view of the Sabbath went so far out of kilter with what God had intended.

Genesis 2 is not primarily about understanding creation - it is about understanding relationship - our relationship with God, the world, and each other. Neither is it about procreation - the command to be fruitful and multiply is found in the first account of creation, not in the story of

Adam and Eve. In Genesis 2, we find Adam created first and placed in the garden of God's blessing. He has everything he needs to feed his body and a pure untainted relationship with God to feed his spirit. Yet there is still something missing. God says, "It is not good for the man to be alone". There is still a need for another relationship to complete the paradigm of life in all its fullness.

God created the animals, but still no suitable partner was found. So finally God created Eve as the one who is "bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh" and Adam rejoices in the one who completed his need for that unique relationship. In their coming together that 'one flesh' is re-united in what we call marriage and we can all relate to that yearning desire for the one who completes us - the one with whom we fall in love, and express that love in life-long commitment. Whilst we must recognise that not everyone finds their life-partner, there is always that hope, that possibility, of meeting the person who 'completes' us.

But what of those whose attraction is not toward the opposite sex? What if the person who we fall in love with - who completes that God-given need within us - is of the same sex? Does that negate the fundamental human need which God addresses?

Those who are attracted to people of the same sex still have the same yearning for that relationship which will bring a sense of fulfilment, a sense of completeness, a re-uniting of 'one flesh' from what God has created.

By focusing on the 'end product' (male and female) rather than the need which God is addressing in the Garden of Eden (relationship), we risk making the same mistake as the Pharisees did with the Sabbath at the [beginning of the same chapter](#).

They elevated the Sabbath to monumental proportions because they thought it was something greater than our human needs, and Jesus had to correct them by reminding them that the Sabbath was created by God to meet human needs, not to be an end in itself.

When we elevate marriage to the same monumental proportions and restrict it to our observation of Adam and Eve, we need to be reminded that marriage was ordained by God to meet a human need, not to be an end in itself. This is radical thinking sure enough, but it is just as Biblical as the challenges which Jesus brought to the Pharisees.

Is it not possible that the yearning to find the one who 'completes' us is the same for everyone - gay straight, bi, or transgendered? Is it not possible that God's response to that yearning is also the same for everyone, irrespective of their sexuality - the opportunity of marriage for all, with the person who 'completes' them, no matter what sex they are?

Until we are prepared to look deeper, and frame our theology of marriage around God's purposes, rather than just the 'end product' we continue to run the risk of following the Pharisees, and completely miss the point.

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