

Submission to Commission on the Marriage Canon

Marriage is the sacramental union between a man and a woman. The evidence for this is scriptural, historical and biological. The use of the term “marriage” to refer to the union between two men or two women requires an arbitrary change in the definition. It also requires ignoring what the Church has taught for two thousand years.

The Anglican Church of Canada should be looking primarily at Scripture and Church tradition when making decisions. This is especially true when suggested changes in Church canons are being considered. The Church holds up a standard to guide the secular community, not the other way around. The church's role is to guide us into obedience to God, to encourage prayerful reading of the Scriptures, to provide a place of worship and prayer.

The scriptural evidence begins with the first chapter of Genesis. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”. All references to marriage in scripture refer to a man and a woman. Also throughout the Bible, marriage is an allegory that points to God's relationship with his people. In the Old Testament, God is the Groom and the nation of Israel is the bride. In the New Testament, Jesus is the groom and the Church is his bride. If God did not intend that marriage be between one man and one woman, why did he create them male and female?

Scripture has a great deal to say about obedience to God. Adam and Eve did not obey God. Whether they were historical people or mythological characters does not matter. One of the main lessons of the Old Testament is that man has always been disobedient to God. Christ came to die on a cross so that our sins may be forgiven. Sexual sin is dominant throughout the Bible. The sixth commandment is “You shall not commit adultery”. This puts the sacredness of marriage central in our relationship with God. To allow marriage other than between one man and one woman may be putting our salvation in danger.

In a recent interview, Bishop N. T. Wright compared changing the definition of marriage to a legislature passing a law that said black is white. On page 528 of the Book of Alternative Services it says, “Marriage is a gift of God and a means of his grace, in which man and woman becomes one flesh”. How can we change what God has created?

There are a number of misleading arguments that supporters of gay marriage use.

1. "The Sin in Sodom and Gomorrah was lack of hospitality". Outside of the original story in Genesis, I found 21 references to Sodom and/or Gomorrah. Only one refers to the sin of hospitality. All the rest refer to sexual sin.
2. "Same sex marriages have been common throughout history". In my extensive reading over the past twenty years on this subject, I have not seen any convincing evidence of this. There may have been some formal arrangements between same sex partners that were something like marriage, but it is only in recent years that the definition of marriage has been extended to same sex couples.
3. "Jesus does not mention homosexuality". This is true. But he does quote Genesis in Mark 10:5-9, which ends, "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate". He addresses adultery in John 8:3-11. He does not condemn the adulteress, but says, "Go and sin no more". He points out to the Samaritan woman at the well that she is not married to the man she lives with, and in Matthew He talks about divorce. Whenever Jesus addresses marriage it is assumed to be a relationship between a man and a woman.
4. "Paul's references to homosexuality did not refer to the modern concept of sexual orientation". Perhaps this is true, but it is irrelevant. Paul was talking about behaviour. It is clear in the Bible that all sexual activity outside of marriage is sinful. The sin of homosexual behaviour is no different than fornication or adultery. It is sin. This does not say that it is sinful for two people of the same sex to love each other. Same sex attraction is not a sin in itself. But it is sinful to express this in sexual activity.

Sin is in the action, not the desire.

5. "Orientation is genetically determined". This is simply not true. At best, there are one or two studies that suggest the possibility of genetic cause, but most studies indicate that homosexual orientation has a complex variety of causes. I have known a number of homosexual people in my seventy four years. Every one can point to some form of family history that contributed to their development. I had a cousin who was raised as a girl

from the day he was born. Others endured sexual abuse as a child. Many gay people can point to a history of an absent father. It is same sex 'behaviour' that the Bible calls sin. Behaviour is learned, and always involves choices. We may want to do something very strongly, but to act or not to act is our choice.

6. Along with the "I was born that way", we hear the statement, "it is not healthy to suppress my sexual desires." All of us have an inclination to sin. Sexual sin is only one of many listed in the Bible. Part of maturing is learning to discipline ourselves. This includes controlling our desires. In several places in his letters, Paul lists a number of sins. No two lists are alike. These lists are not arbitrary taboos that God is imposing on us. On the contrary; each item listed is a behaviour that tends to harm us as individuals or as a society. For example in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 no one questions that it is wrong to be a thief, or an adulterer, or a slanderer, or greedy. But it is argued that Paul was talking about something else when he talks about "homosexual offenders."
7. I have heard it said that homosexuality as discussed in the Bible is really about idolatry. It can also be argued that all sin stems from idolatry. We understand idolatry today to mean much more than worshipping carvings of wood and stone. Anything that is more important to me than God is an idol. Some 'worship' their home. Some put their job above all else. Our secular society puts pleasure above all else. Sexual pleasure has always been a very strong motivation. I am afraid that the Church is following the secular society in its changing attitude towards sex. We have moved from an attitude of prudishness to what the Bible calls lasciviousness. The Church speaks of conviction of sin, repentance and forgiveness. We want to deny sin, and then ask God to bless it.

What is the biological evidence? ". . . and the two will become one flesh". It is biologically impossible for two people of the same sex to "become one flesh". What possible reason could God have for creating people with two different sexes other than to come together to create new life?

It is obvious that God intended the union between a man and a woman to produce children. Some reasons for marriage are to provide a stable family

environment to raise children, to protect women in societies where men were the providers, to allow for the family unit to be the principle unit of society.

The Bible defines love as caring for the welfare of others. 1 Corinthians 13 gives God's definition of love. To define love in terms of sexual pleasure invites abuse of love as God intended it be used. We can confuse lust and love. The Greek language shows a clear difference between eros and agape. I can truly love someone other than my wife; parents, siblings, friends, even enemies, but to define that love in terms of sexual pleasure is sin. Jane Jones in the spring issue of Anglicans for Renewal wrote: "Love makes the world go round.' Many understand this to be physical love, or lust, but the power that really is moving the world is the agape love of God".

The Church has taught for two thousand years that sex outside of marriage is sinful. To change what Scripture and society have taught should not be taken lightly. The so called "sexual revolution" has taken some activities that were considered sin and made them socially acceptable. I believe it is a mistake for the Church to consider blessing same sex behaviour. How can we declare God's blessing on something without a clear direction from Him?

I believe governments have made a huge error by changing the definition of marriage. Marriage as an institution has enough difficulties. More and more people are living together and having children without getting married. The number of single parents is growing. Social Scientists say children need both a mother and a father. To change the definition of marriage just does not make sense to me. Please leave the Marriage Canon as it is.

Chuck Lockart

Diocese of Central Newfoundland