

Submission to the Commission on the Marriage Canon

In Romans 12:2, Paul writes, “Do not be conformed to [formed according to the pattern or mold of] this world [*aion*, age], but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Our discussions of the question of same-sex relationships, blessings and marriage have, in my view, been marked very clearly by a lack of imagination and a startling willingness to think according to the patterns of the current age.

Very briefly, here are three points along those lines:

1) Would our discussion of celibacy (for those who are unmarried for *whatever* reason) change if we looked back to models of Christian community and friendship that have largely been set aside?

2) Would our discussion of love, acceptance and inclusion be enriched if we remembered that, for Gospel people, none of these are tied to an acceptance of behaviours, or even approval of personal characteristics (whatever they may be), but are rather tied up in our understanding of the dignity of each human being in the sight of God? Unlike our culture, which self-righteously casts aside those whose actions are culturally taboo, *Gospel people* have never thought that to disagree with someone’s beliefs, choices or preferences has any bearing on the call to love. And they certainly have not thought that seeing another’s brokenness does anything less than remind us of our own brokenness and the call, in mutual love, to speak the truth to one another and come to God for forgiveness and healing. Gospel people have always believed that we are *all* broken and in need of grace--and that life in Christian community is one of the ways God heals and transforms us.

3) What do our bodies teach us about marriage? Our bodies’ design points to the glory of God. Despite the amazing proliferation of sexual images and themes in our culture—or perhaps because of the cheapening effect of this, we have failed (broadly speaking) to think deeply, seriously and theologically about our bodies, and about gender.

In light of the above, as well as Christian tradition and Scripture (not just a few texts, but also the overarching themes of God’s design of Creation and the significance of gender differentiation), I do not support the motion or a change to the marriage Canon. I would hope instead for a new discussion to take place—one that takes seriously the ways in which we have failed as Christian communities, and the ways in which we must relearn how to live and think as Gospel people.

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