

On Biblical Same-Sex Marriage (Yes, it exists)

For too long, arguments for same-sex marriage in the church have rested on statements like “God made me/them this way. It’s impossible that God should demand that I/they live without the blessing of marriage. God can’t be that cruel.”

While acceding to the truth of all those statements, I find it highly unlikely that God would have allowed some persons to be born as anything other than cisgendered and not provided for them and their relationships in Scripture. For whatever reason, I am a part of a very “progressive” denomination (Episcopal) while remaining utterly convinced of the authority and inspiration of Scripture. I may understand the inspiration of the Bible differently than my “evangelical” siblings (I believe that we’re all supposed to be “evangelical,” not just those who’ve chosen that to describe their conservative interpretations and theologies.), but I hold to it no less fiercely.

Albert Mohler recently quoted himself from his own article in a tweet. “It is impossible to defend a same-sex marriage from Scripture.” A friend of mine on Twitter had responded in a way that was compassionate toward gay and lesbian folk, but without actually contradicting Mohler. I had replied to her tweet, “Except that I really can defend same-sex marriage from Scripture.” She expressed interest in how I’d do that and I answered that I just didn’t think Twitter was the right platform for trying to explain it. (Because we’re so mired in centuries of accepted interpretations of certain texts, it takes more than 240 characters to offer another reading.)

So I offered to try to write it up here for The Vicar’s Keep and then send her a link so that she could read it properly. And that’s what I’m trying to do here.

This journey of mine toward a biblical understanding of the proper place of my LGBTQ+ siblings among us began back in 2004 when the Anglican Communion issued something called The Windsor Report, a document prompted largely by the consecration to the episcopacy of Gene Robinson, a non-celibate, professed gay man, in the Episcopal Church. (A branch of Anglicanism, for my non-Anglican friends.) In that report, the larger Anglican Communion asked that we, the Episcopal church, offer a biblical defense or explanation of what we’d done. How did we square Robinson’s consecration with the Bible?

The response of the Episcopal church left me incensed. It seemed a reasonable request, but we pretty much ignored it. It was as if we said to the rest of Anglicanism, “We don’t owe you anything. You’re just too backward to understand.” I searched and searched and found not one cogent, coherent answer that the request.

So I sat down to write one. At the outset I decided that I would study the applicable Scriptures, and if I could not build a convincing argument in defense of what we'd done, I would admit it, and that we had erred, as much as that might grieve me. What was more, it wouldn't be enough to say that the Bible didn't forbid it, that the Old Testament prohibitions didn't matter in a New Testament context. We had done something rather earth-shaking, at least in Anglican circles. I would not be satisfied unless I found that Scripture not only failed to prohibit what we'd done, but actually commended it.

To make a long story a little shorter, I believe I succeeded. (Not without the 3am urging of Holy Spirit to go and look up something specific in my Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich Greek lexicon!) And a lot of other people agreed. The paper was picked up by my Louis Crew (a leading advocate for gay and lesbian inclusion in the Episcopal Church) and the Gay and Lesbian Movement in the Church of England, who used it as part of their response to the Windsor Report. I will not burden you with the bulk of that paper here. Rather I'll refer you to it if you would like to read more, especially those portions dealing with what the Old Testament has to say on the subject. (The link will be at the bottom. This paper is also on The Vicar's Keep.)

Instead I'll only reiterate those arguments that are some of my own contributions concerning the New Testament and non-cisgendered persons and their lives in the Body of Christ. Much of what I said in the first paper applies here. Then I'll add something that applies specifically to marriage.

I'm going to begin with Paul and Romans. Jesus is silent on homosexuality and only tangentially quotable when it comes to marriage, so I'll deal with the harder text first.

In Romans 1 we have the New Testament text to which opponents of same-gendered relationships most often turn:

Romans 1:21–27

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are ***contrary to nature***; and the men likewise gave up ***natural relations*** with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (ESV)

First, Paul here describes the behaviors of those who have “exchanged the truth about God for a lie and served the creature rather than the Creator.” As much as some might like to, you cannot argue from that specific to the general. That is, while some who have chosen a lie over the truth about God may have chosen relationships that are *para phusin*, “alongside nature,” you can’t argue that everyone who has chosen these relationships has made the same choice about God. Paul never says that.

But here’s the kicker. Even those who have chosen same-gendered relationships are in fact likely to be those who have chosen God over a lie. That’s because the word for “natural” (*phusikos*) in Greek doesn’t mean quite what we usually think it does. The antonym for “natural” in Greek is very specific. It’s “learned.” What is natural is the opposite of what is learned. So when it comes to one’s own sexuality, what Paul commends here (even though he didn’t know he was doing it) was expressing one’s sexuality according to what is found to be true, not taught to be true.

What the Bible says in Romans 1 is that people who exchange the truth about God for a lie also choose to live out a sexuality that they have learned. Not the one they’re born to. I’ll grant you, Paul had no idea that people could be born to love other people of the same gender. But I believe that this is inspired text, that while Paul may have had one thing in mind when he wrote it, God led him to write it in a way that would make provision for all His children. Just like Isaiah, when he spoke of the child to be born of a woman. He probably didn’t know he was talking about Jesus, but he was. So also with Paul. He chose those words for a reason.

And think about it. People who choose to live as a cisgendered person even though they’re not, these people are exhibiting *learned* behavior. Why? Because they’ve chosen a lie (God demands they change) over the truth about God. (God loves them as they are.) We Christians are forcing people to live in a way that denies the truth about God. That’s heart breaking.

Once we’ve dealt with the reality that the passage from Romans 1 means quite the opposite of what we’ve taken it to mean for centuries, we still have to deal with the issue of marriage. I’ll begin again with Paul. Some of my more conservative brothers and sisters don’t have any problem with their gay/lesbian siblings *as long as they stay celibate*. This is just as troubling a way of pushing *learned* behavior on someone over

what is natural as requiring them to act as though they were “straight.” What’s more, Paul disagrees. In 1 Corinthians 7 we read:

1 Corinthians 7:6–9

Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. (ESV)

Paul recognizes that celibacy is a *gift* and that trying to live that way if you don’t have that gift is wrong. “It is better to marry than to burn.” Why? Because we still believe that sex still belongs in a committed, married relationship. If we deny marriage to persons who have chosen to live out what is *natural* for themselves, to accept the truth about God rather than a lie, it is more than cruel to deny them a relationship status (married) that blesses and validates them. It is more than cruel, it is contrary to Scripture.

Jesus doesn’t really deal with the issue of marriage much, except as it speaks to divorce. I’m not going to deal with that particular issue here, but when He’s asked about divorce He cites Genesis 2:24. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” This is another of those occasions where we cannot argue from the specific to the general. Jesus is using this passage from Genesis to protect women from indiscriminate use of divorce by their husbands, which would usually leave them penniless and without any protection. The text does not say that this is the *only* expression of marital relations that God intended. Only that His will is that we be faithful to one another.

I have been as good an ally to my gay and lesbian friends as I could since I was a young man. Even now I struggle to wrap my mind around everything that “queer” seems to denote in today’s world. Sexuality exists on a spectrum. It is not a duality. I understand this intellectually but I still struggle with it. So it took me a long time to come to the place where I could confidently say that it is not biblical to withhold marriage from same-gendered persons. (That is, persons assigned the same gender at birth.) But now I can. I may not “get it” completely, but what I do get is this. The Bible cannot be used to deny marriage to any committed couple.

One last thought. I did not write this to “convert” anyone. I wrote it because it needs to be said, this truth from Scripture needs to be out there. I won’t argue any of this. If you don’t buy it, I still love you. I just disagree, and I firmly believe that I have Scripture in

my corner. (I am however, open to editing this if there are things you think I've overlooked.)

Oh, and here's the link to that paper about the consecration of Gene Robinson. (CLICK HERE)