

Marriage as God designed it

By Danny Akin (President Southeastern Baptist Seminary) In the News and Observer May 5, 2015

The Bible says the Lord Jesus Christ is full of grace and truth (John 1:14). As a passionate disciple and follower of this King, I pray that my thoughts on same-sex marriage also will be full of grace and truth. In fact, I hope that even those who disagree with what I say will sense my heart concerning the very important issue of marriage and what I believe it is.

My perspective is ultimately formed by my commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and my conviction that the Bible is the inerrant and infallible Word of God. This leads me to affirm the beauty and goodness of marriage as defined by Holy Scripture and taught by Jesus. My understanding of marriage, as created and intended by God, is rooted in rich biblical texts like Genesis 1-2, the Song of Songs, Matthew 19:4-6 and Ephesians 5:21-33. This is not to say that I ignore evidence from nature, history, the common good, public interest and human flourishing. These areas provide significant support to the biblical understanding of marriage. Still, my ultimate source of authority for all matters of life is the Word of God, and that includes my understanding of marriage. In light of this commitment and conviction, what do I believe God teaches us about His divinely ordained institution?

- Marriage is a wonderful gift to be enjoyed in a covenantal union between a man and a woman. We are perfectly designed for each other biologically and even socially. Indeed, we complement each other (Gen. 2:18). This is how God made us. It is an act and demonstration of His good creation.
- Heterosexual marriage is the context for sexual enjoyment. The Song of Songs provides a magnificent poetic commentary on the goodness of conjugal intimacy in this “one flesh” relationship. However, God recognizes the power He instilled in sex and the dangers and sorrow that arise from its abuse. He wisely provides parameters not because he wants to withhold something from us but rather to maximize the goodness of sex and protect us from expressions of it that are ultimately harmful. Those parameters are clear from Genesis to Revelation. Sexual expression is reserved for the marriage bed of a man and a woman. The Bible refers to any sexual activity outside of the marriage bed as being contrary to and in conflict with the divine pattern and plan. The Bible clearly teaches that premarital sex, adultery and homosexuality are acts of sexual immorality and must be avoided. They do not glorify God, and they do not promote our good as God has designed it.
- Marriage is the God-given means for the propagation of the race. When a man and a woman come together in sexual intercourse, the gift of children is a wonderful possibility.

▪ Marriage as designed by God is the proper context for the nurturing and raising of children. Psalms 127, 128, Proverbs 31:10-31 and Ephesians 6:1-4 all affirm the vital role of both a father and a mother in caring for children. This is why single parenting is so difficult and “the absentee father” (or less frequently the “absentee mother”) in so many homes is so devastating. God knows that children flourish best in an environment where both a loving father and mother are present.

In light of the clear and consistent teaching of the Bible, it is simply not possible for me to affirm or support same-sex marriage. In biblical terms, same-sex marriage is not possible because it is not marriage. Biblical marriage by definition is heterosexual marriage. Until our very recent debate, which is taking place almost entirely in a Western secular context, heterosexual marriage has been virtually the universal perspective of the human race historically and globally. It would seem something in nature itself leads very divergent cultures to reach a consensus on this issue.

I recognize my perspective will carry little or no weight for those who reject the Bible as the inspired Word of God. I also recognize biblical and theological revisionists will also disagree with my position given their strong commitments to cultural relevance and personal experience. An atheist friend of mine recently said to me that I am going to find myself on the wrong side of history on this issue. That may prove to be true. However, if being on the wrong side of history puts me on the right side of the angels and God, I will gladly choose the latter. In fact, I must.

Though I cannot affirm the rightness of same-sex marriage, I will not hesitate to affirm the rightness of being both kind and loving toward those in the LGBT community or toward any who disagree with me. As best as I can, I will always seek to speak the truth in love, even when it hurts. God knows that was my goal. He knows that is my heart.

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