

Real Marriage

Should the Marriage Act allow two people of the same sex to be married?

Over the years, I've said little about same-sex relationships. My opposition is known but I hope I put my views with respect. I have supported legislation to register relationships and to extend economic rights. I condemn violence against homosexual people. Like most Australians, I prefer to live and let live. Furthermore, I am all too aware how close to home this is for a number of us, either personally or through family members and I appreciate that this discussion can be painful.

Nonetheless, since change is being actively advocated we need to be clear that what is at stake is not simply an extension of marriage 'rights' but a change to the definition of marriage itself.

The nature of marriage

Think what marriage is. Marriage is the union of a man and a woman, from different families, publicly joined through an exchange of promises committing them to life-long exclusive fidelity. That marriage involves a man and woman is by design.

The sexual union of a woman and a man is unique. They need time to teach each other how to respond and to love in accordance with their special differences, preferably within the secure relationship which marriage provides. Two men or two women may have sex but even so their psychosexual experience is made up by two who are identical, rather than two who are different. It is the unity of different sexes that alone creates marriage.

It is to protect the uniqueness of marriage that God's word teaches all sexual intercourse outside of marriage is wrong. God's way, however difficult, is always best for our physical and spiritual wellbeing. As the complementary design of our bodies shows, sexual intercourse is intended for men with women. Human experience confirms that this is best enjoyed within the security of marriage.

One of the essential public purposes of marriage is to ensure the necessary commitment to bring children into the world and to nurture them through the special things that a mother and father contribute to their upbringing. It uniquely links children to biological mothers and fathers. It is a calling, given to us by God, with which to bless each other and our society through the creation of stable families linked across generations. It is publicly honoured. Allowing for a same-sex variation will undermine one of the central tenets of marriage.

The present law defining marriage is not a denial of rights. It is not a denial of my rights that I cannot wear the uniform of the Australian Army. I simply do not qualify. Same-sex unions, by definition, can never qualify as marriages. This is not unjust – it is not even discrimination in the current sense of the word – but a refusal to call different things by the same name.

Unwelcome consequences

Why this push for same-sex unions to be called 'marriage'? The change is highly symbolic, for it implies that homosexual and heterosexual sex are both morally valid and equally worthy of affirmation. Its advocates are fully aware that they are seeking the particular honour which society gives to marriage.

Should we agitate about this? Emphatically yes, for the good of our community now and for the future. We now treat real marriage as one of the indispensable foundations of community. Ensuring public honour of same-sex relationships by calling them marriages is an abuse of marriage itself. It imposes, through social engineering, a newly minted concept of marriage on a community that understands it in quite another way. It would be a chaotic addition to current confusion about sexual ethics and leave the next generation even more bewildered as to what marriage is all about.

There will be other consequences that, even with our 'live and let live' philosophy, we will regret. If same-sex unions are declared to be marriages, there will follow a demand for equal treatment in sex education. The normalisation of homosexuality will be assumed. Children will be instructed that there are no moral or other grounds for preferring 'heterosexual marriage'.

This claim for a 'right' to be married could open the way for other forms, such as polygamous marriages or perhaps even marriage between immediate family members.

Ministers of the gospel will find it increasingly difficult to teach Christian sexual ethics in schools, in the media and even from their own pulpits, since what they say will be contrary to what the state says. If we will not speak now in public, we may lose our right to speak at all.

Is this inevitable?

A homosexual activist once told me he was annoyed that Christian leaders were the last significant people in the community still teaching clearly that sex outside marriage is a sin. But he believed that even if we were silent, society at large would still not normalise homosexual behaviour. I think he was right. Deep down, society will not honour same-sex relationships like real marriage.

This is not intolerance. Same-sex relationships will still exist. But they will not be called something that they are not. Our society reserves honour for marriage where lifelong vows are exchanged, between a man and a woman, to the exclusion of all others.

This is a painful subject but we must continue to uphold real marriage as an act of love for our neighbour and for future generations.