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Defending Marriage by Brian Watson

We envision a congregation whose love for Jesus and one another leaves a clear and compelling witness for Christ.

Perhaps the defining issue of this moment in Christian history is how the Church responds to the issue of homosexuality, particularly same-sex marriage. This issue is one that simply will not go away. We can hide our heads in the sand, or hope that politicians will make the right choices, but either option would be misguided. Instead of putting our trust in men, we must urge others to put their trust in Christ by repenting of sin and believing in him. We should be active politically, yet we must never put our hope in politics or government.

The point of this article is to assure you of the need to defend the biblical definition of marriage and to equip you to present a compelling argument against same-sex marriage as you speak to the people around you. Remember, while you have but one vote, you can have multiple conversations with many people.

In order to lay out the argument, I will ask and answer a series of questions.

Is homosexuality a sin?

It is important to start with what the Bible says about sexuality. Proponents of homosexuality often ignore the obvious fact that God created men and women to be married. Genesis 1:27 states that God created men and women. In Genesis 2, we are told that it was not good for Adam to be alone (v. 18), so God made him a helper (vv. 20-22). God's plan was for man and woman to become one flesh (v. 24). This is the biblical paradigm for marriage, one that Jesus

affirmed (Matthew 19:4-6).

A few Old Testament passages condemn homosexuality as a sin. The ugly episodes that occurred in Sodom (Genesis 19, particularly v. 5) and Gibeah (Judges 19, particularly v. 22) reveal that rape—particularly homosexual rape—is a sin. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 speak more clearly against homosexual activity, calling it an “abomination,” the same word used with reference to Sodom in Ezekiel 16:50.

I think the best tactic is to focus on God's created order (Genesis 1-2) and the New Testament passages that refer to homosexuality: Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; and 1 Timothy 1:8-10. The key passage is Romans 1:26-27. Romans 1:18-32 shows how all humans have a tendency to worship creation rather than the Creator, and because of that, our thinking becomes futile and our hearts become darkened. Therefore, God gives us over to evil desires. For some, those desires may lead us to be divisive, to be proud, to gossip, or to disobey our parents. For others, evil desires lead to murder. And for a relatively small percentage of the population, evil desires include homosexuality. Before we look at that specific sin, it is important to acknowledge that part of being human is having disordered desires. All of us are sinners. When you talk to others, tell them that you are a sinner and that you need Jesus for salvation. It is important to know that we all have the same condition and we all need the same cure.

Back to the issue at hand: Romans 1:26-27 says, “For this reason [their idolatry] 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.” This passage is quite clear. Women exchanged natural relations, the way that God had initially created women to be, in order to pursue sexual relations with other women. Likewise, men “gave up natural relations” to pursue homosexual relations. These homosexual relations are unnatural because they are contrary to the created order of heterosexual relationships within the context of marriage. We know Paul is referring back to the created order of Genesis 1-2 because he refers to God as the Creator in verse 25.

To Christians who believe in the authority of Scripture, the meaning of this passage is clear. Yet proponents of homosexuality will try to do one of two things with this passage. The first option is to say that this passage is obscure and irrelevant. Consider the words of our president: “I am not willing to have the state deny American citizens a civil union that confers equivalent rights on such basic matters as hospital visitation or health insurance coverage simply because the people they love are of the same sex—nor am I willing to

He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Matthew 19:4-6

accept a reading of the Bible that considers an obscure line in Romans to be more defining of Christianity than the Sermon on the Mount.”¹ Anyone who believes Romans 1:26-27 is obscure has a very poor understanding of Christian theology. President Obama wants to make the Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12 the lens through which all of the Bible must be filtered. However, once we say that “Do unto others what you would have them do unto you” is the core message of the Bible, we could make many activities permissible. Perhaps our president should consider how that verse might affect his stance on abortion.

Those who want to write off Paul’s teachings on the sinfulness of homosexuality will often say that Jesus did not teach against homosexuality. As we have already seen, he affirmed the created order of men and women in marriage. Since he taught in a Jewish context, he didn’t have to explicitly address homosexuality, since the Jews thought that practice was beyond the pale. Also, just because Jesus didn’t condemn homosexuality certainly doesn’t mean that he endorsed it. He didn’t teach about rape or drugs, but I’m sure he wouldn’t condone them. Paul, however, was writing to Christians within the Roman Empire, and homosexuality was an issue in that society.

More frequently, people try to redefine the passages on homosexuality, including Romans 1. I have heard two creative interpretations of this passage. One interpretation says that the people in Romans 1:26-27 who were acting “contrary to their nature” were born gay and were trying to be heterosexual, and that is the error they were committing. This reading avoids the context of creation as well as the phrase in verse 27 that says “men [were] committing shameless acts with men.” Another interpretation says that Paul was condemning gay people who wanted to have sex outside of committed, loving relationships. However, that very idea stands outside of Paul’s

worldview. No good Jew would endorse a homosexual relationship. Reinterpreting this passage in such ways reveals a lack of honesty and integrity.

If someone wants to reinterpret Paul’s words to suit their own agenda, simply play this game yourself: “So you’re telling me that Paul was condemning homosexual activity outside of a monogamous relationship [or whatever their statement is], but what you *mean* is that he said homosexuality is a sin.”

But don’t stop there, of course. Tell them that homosexuality is a sin, but so is your pride. Share the gospel. We don’t know who God has predestined for adoption as his sons. But we do know this: after mentioning the sin of homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9, Paul writes in verse 11, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

Born this way?

Most, if not all, homosexuals will say that they were born with their sexual identity. (I don’t doubt this, and I don’t think it’s productive to debate that issue.) Their argument goes something like this: I was born this way, so how could it be wrong? It’s a powerful argument because it cuts to the core of their identity, and this is why same-sex marriage advocates equate their cause with civil rights. This line of reasoning states that homosexuals cannot control their sexual identity any more than a person can control his or her race. We all know that racism is wrong, so any attempt to deny the “rights” of homosexuals is wrong.

Christians should remember two things. One, we are all born with disordered desires. Most of us struggle with disordered sexual urges, such as lust. All of us are born with other sinful desires and inclinations. For example, I was born a proud and selfish person. Therefore, following the same logic of gay rights advocates, I should be allowed to be proud and selfish. Any

attempts to limit my pride and selfishness deny my identity. But we know better than to make such arguments. We all are born sinners. That means we “naturally” have wrong desires, yet these desires do not excuse our guilt before a holy God. All of us are called to repent of our sins and to follow Jesus. We are called to be self-controlled and to fight against our sinful nature. This fact means that both heterosexuals and homosexuals are sinners and stand in need of God’s grace. All of us must acknowledge our sin, which is to say we must agree with God’s Word about what is sinful. When we repent and believe, our identity is no longer “homosexual” or “luster” or “selfish jerk,” but “child of God.”

The second thing we must keep in mind is that the very concept of civil rights comes from Christianity. (I suppose we could also say civil rights comes from a Judeo-Christian-Deist worldview.) Christianity says that since God created all people, all people should be treated as valuable. We are God’s special creatures, made in his image, not cosmic accidents evolved from lesser species. That is why the Declaration of Independence states that all men “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” This idea only belongs properly to a Christian worldview. It is the reason why Christians should fight against racism. However, being any given race is not a sin, but homosexuality is. The same beliefs that give us civil rights tell us homosexuality is wrong. You can’t have it both ways.

There happen to be a number of examples of Christians who were “born this way,” and yet fight against their inclinations. Recently, British pastor and author Vaughan Roberts indicated that he has struggled with his homosexual desires. But he has remained celibate because he loves the Lord more than his sin. This is not an easy path to take, but it is the path of repentance and faith.

¹ Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 222.

The next time someone claims that same-sex marriage is a civil right, ask that person where civil rights come from. Ask that person if any two people, such as twin brothers who are gay, should have the right to marry. Don't be fooled into thinking that people have the right to do whatever they desire.

Are Christians intolerant?

Those who advocate for homosexuality and same-sex marriage have been running the same play against Christians. It's simple: if people disagree with your position, call them intolerant or hateful. Better yet, call them bigots. That will shut down the opposition. Tolerance has come to mean not making any moral judgments about anything . . . except intolerance.

In order to understand this issue, consider the words of two Christian philosophers, Garrett DeWeese and J. P. Moreland:

Tolerance has become the supreme virtue in our culture, such that the only thing that can't be tolerated is intolerance (and never mind that this is self-refuting).

Of course, the refusal to make a judgment about the morality of an action is not genuine tolerance; it's moral cowardice, or intellectual laziness or plain confusion. True tolerance is the view that even if I believe that you are wrong, I will not use coercive force to enforce my belief.²

If intolerance is making some kind of moral judgment, then we are all intolerant. One person says homosexuality is wrong. The other person says it is wrong to say that homosexuality is wrong. But if we use the definition of tolerance found in the quote above, we are free to disagree. The one thing we must agree on is that we won't bully, we won't call names, and we won't force the other person agree with us. The recent Chick-fil-A dust-up showed that one side was willing to resort to bullying, and it wasn't the Christians.

Christians should never resort to bullying, manipulation, name-calling, or force. We must state our case reasonably, respectfully, and lovingly, even if the other side reviles us. Christians are committed to love. We should not express hatred to anyone, even those with whom we disagree. This is true tolerance.

Most people don't seem to understand that you can love someone but disagree with them. However, this happens in our families all the time, particularly with parents and children. Parents unconditionally love their children, yet they often see that their children are doing wrong things. So parents confront their children and discipline them. In the same way, Christians are called to love people and urge them to repent. This is not self-contradictory. This is true love: wishing the best for the other person. And the best for the other person is God and his will for their life.

Who are they hurting?

Another argument for gay marriage is that it won't hurt anyone. Why should anyone care that two people of the same sex want to get married? And, after all, aren't heterosexuals doing a fine job of messing up marriage?

It's true that heterosexuals have made a mockery of marriage. This, too, is surely an abomination in God's eyes. But heterosexual adultery and divorce do not excuse homosexuality. I would argue that both are very harmful to society.

That brings me to the crux of the matter. What harm could same-sex marriage possibly do? Well, I think there could be serious unintended consequences to legalizing gay marriage. A number of Christians have focused on what same-sex marriage could mean for Christians. For example, they worry that any talk of homosexuality as a sin could be labeled hate speech and therefore would not be protected by the first amendment. But I think there are other consequences that could be more damaging for all of

society, and that is why everyone, including non-Christians, should be opposed to same sex marriage.

The basic point of this argument is simple: there is no firm philosophical foundation for same-sex marriage. Once we start redefining marriage away from the firm foundation of religion, tradition, and science, we are on sinking sand. Once we define marriage as the union of any two people, there is no reason why we can't add a third or a fourth person to the party. And if we can redefine marriage as we please, perhaps we can redefine other things, like gender and race.

Let me explain. As we have seen, Christianity is firmly opposed to homosexuality, as is Judaism. Islam, too, rejects homosexuality. We also know that Christian cults like the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses oppose homosexuality. Traditionally, Sikhism, Jainism, and the Bahá'í faith have forbidden homosexuality. (Eastern religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism are less clear about the issue.) Most of the world's population for most of history has believed that homosexuality is not natural and is opposed to God's will. Same-sex marriage, therefore, is not founded on religion.

Throughout history, nearly all societies have only approved of marriage between a man and a woman (or, to be honest, a man and many women). This is not to say that homosexual activity was not present throughout history. On the contrary, homosexuality has been around a long time, at least since Sodom, and it has appeared in various cultures at various times. But societies have almost universally recognized that marriage is only between people of the opposite sex. Same-sex marriage, therefore, has little historical precedent.

Of course, one of the major purposes (though certainly not the only purpose) of marriage has been the conception and nurturing of

¹ Garrett J. DeWeese and J. P. Moreland, *Philosophy Made Slightly Less Difficult* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 86.

children. Indeed, the family unit has long been recognized as one of the major building blocks of society. I hardly need to point out that two people of the same gender cannot produce a child by natural means. That is certain. Less certain are studies that show that children raised by gay parents are less likely to succeed in life. Still, a recent study conducted by University of Texas sociology professor Mark Regnerus made waves because it suggested that children raised by homosexual parents are more likely to have drug problems and an increased number of sexual partners and less likely to earn as much money or have as much stability as children of married heterosexual parents. The results weren't clear enough to be conclusive, but they do suggest that the ideal parents are heterosexual and married. Some people who didn't agree with Regnerus's findings accused him of dishonesty, which forced UT to investigate the issue. The University ultimately found that Regnerus conducted this study with integrity, and they supported him. At any rate, it appears as though biology and even sociology are not on the side of same-sex marriage.

That leaves the case for same-sex marriage with no firm philosophical foundation. The only thing same-sex marriage advocates can appeal to is public sentiment. In other words, a growing number of people now believe that same-sex marriage should be legal. Ultimately, these people don't have good reasons for their beliefs, but they make emotional appeals. "People should be free to marry whomever they desire because it makes them happy." More likely, people would point to a real-life example of a gay monogamous couple. Look at them, they might say. They are committed to each other; they should be able to marry.

Again, this seems like a decent argument, but not under the light of serious scrutiny. Since there is

no philosophical foundation supporting same-sex marriage, the only thing that can support it is the majority vote. But the majority of people once thought slavery was permissible, or that institutional racism was acceptable. In other nations, the majority has allowed genocides to occur. Just because the majority of the citizens of a nation wants something doesn't make it right.

If same-sex marriage is legalized, why not legalize polygamy? If gay people are allowed to marry, why can't a bisexual marry both a man and a woman? (I'm not saying that bisexuals want to do this, but surely this case will be made.) A bisexual, in the face of laws that forbid polygamy, might say, "You are denying my civil rights. This is who I am! I should be free to express fully my sexuality in the context of marriage." And what is to stop a person from simply saying, "I was born to desire multiple spouses, therefore, I should have the right to marry many"? (To be clear, I'm not saying that people are lining up to make this argument—not yet. But there would be no reason to deny all kinds of different definitions of marriage once the traditional one has been revised.)

This may seem far-fetched to some, but in California, a bill was proposed that would allow children to have more than two parents. (Governor Jerry Brown just vetoed this bill.) Increasingly, people are trying to redefine gender so that it is not linked to the, uh, gender (biologically speaking) of a person. I have seen more than one article this year about parents who believe their children are "gender fluid." Saying a boy (biologically) is not male is like saying that race has nothing to do with skin color. It is absurd. Once we start blurring obvious boundaries, there will be no end. Our society has already redefined the unborn; they are no longer considered human beings with a right to life, but impersonal and inhuman fetuses that are disposable.

The implications for this trend are massive, and they are depressing. The rebellion against God will not stop with marriage.

What can we do?

We can do a number of things to defend marriage. First, register to vote and vote against Referendum 74 in November. Second, go to www.preservemarriagewashington.com to read about the issue. If you're in a position to contribute financially to Preserve Marriage Washington and feel led to do so, give. Third, consider signing the Manhattan Declaration (www.manhattandeclaration.org). This statement defends life, marriage, and religious liberty. You could also donate to this cause.

Fourth, share the gospel. The reason we are in this predicament is because the Church in America has been weak for many, many years. (No, this hasn't happened overnight.) When the gospel, theology, and passion for God are all minimized, culture decays, and the government follows. When the gospel is shared and received, culture changes, and when culture changes, our government will follow. Many people try to change the culture through government, or even hope that political changes will advance the gospel. This is simply wrong. I don't think that a ban on gay marriage will in any way decrease homosexual activity. Sin will only decrease through changed hearts and an increased Christian influence on society. We must share the gospel and we must defend the faith in a reasoned, respectful, and loving way. Again, when the gospel goes forth, the culture will change, and the government will follow.

Finally, and above all, pray. Pray that God would turn the hearts of people in America toward himself. Pray for revival. Pray for courage to share the gospel. Ask God to stir up Christians in America to be bold and loving witnesses. If real change is going to occur, God and his people will have to act.