what the CHURCH gets wrong

BUT JESUS MAKES RIGHT

GAY MARRIAGE
EXTENDED VERSION

GROWTH GROUP STUDIES
What The Church Gets Wrong About Gay Marriage, But Jesus Makes Right…

The Bible is clear that marriage is a relationship between two people, one man and one woman, and that it is the created relationship for enjoying sex. The Church gets gay marriage wrong when we worship marriage, when we speak about sex as though it satisfies the real longings of our human spirit, or when we speak as though heterosexuality is necessarily less affected by sin than homosexuality.

Jesus shows us where our true longings should point to, where true satisfaction is found, and calls us to transform and reorient our sexuality as a result of finding our identity and fulfilment as his people. His bride. The church.

In the beginning…

God made people in his image – as male and female – he made us to represent him, to rule under him, to communicate, to love, and to create. He creates life, and then instructs people to become co-creators of life, to “Be fruitful and increase in number” (Genesis 1:28). When God made humanity he said “let us make man in our image” and he makes humanity male and female (Genesis 1:26), we’re made to relate to each other in the same way that the persons of the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – relate to each other. In the Garden this is expressed in Adam and Eve becoming one flesh. Marriage is a picture of relationships in the Trinity. This doesn’t mean marriage is essential to being fully human – in Genesis the two complete individuals join together to become one (Genesis 2:24).

“That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.” – Genesis 2:24

Marriage doesn’t involve two half people finding their completion in “the other half,” it involves two complete individuals joining together. People can bear God’s image by themselves, but in marriage we see another part of God’s image displayed.

In Genesis 2 we see that part of representing God as his image bearers involves speaking and creating – Adam is instructed to work and take care of the garden (Genesis 2:15), and he exercises his rule over the animals by creating names for them (Genesis 2:19), speaking, like God spoke in Genesis 1. But something is missing – God says it isn’t good for this man to be alone, and he makes a woman to help him carry out the job of representing God (Genesis 2:18). In order for the humans to truly represent the triune God (remember God even says “let us make man in our image” in Genesis 1:26), we need to be able to relate to each other. Marriage, in Genesis, is a picture of the relationships in the Trinity.

Where things go wrong

In Genesis 3, things start to unravel. People were created to represent God, by ruling, communicating, loving, and creating like him, especially creating life. This all gets frustrated (Genesis 3:16-19) when an unloving act of broken communication leads Adam and Eve to seek to rule in God’s place (Genesis 3:1-6). This frustration, this brokenness, a result of this pattern of behaviour we call sin, extends to our relationships – the relationships at the heart of creation – with each other (Genesis 3:7) and with God (Genesis 3:8-10).

The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” – Genesis 3:12

This breakdown is first evident in marriage (Genesis 3:12, 16), but we also see it play out in a relationship between brothers (Genesis 4), and then in just about every other relationship in the Old Testament.

In Romans 1:18-32, Paul explores what life looks like in this world broken by sin, a world where people (and cultures and societies) reject God, setting themselves up without God in the picture. He says the heart of the problem is people worshipping...
created things, rather than the creator (Romans 1:21-25).

“They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the creator.” – Romans 1:25

Created things that were meant to reveal God to us (Romans 1:20) are perverted in this way. Marriage is one of these things. If we worship marriage it pulls us away from worshipping the good God who made marriage as a reflection of his goodness, and of the eternal loving relationships within the Trinity (Paul will later say that marriage is also a picture of the Gospel, and the relationship between Jesus and the Church). The result of this exchange is more sexual brokenness (Romans 1:26-27). Marriage was a good thing meant to help us understand God – and our sinful hearts turn it into a god. Even in the Church.

Homosexual sex is a result of this brokenness. It is an expression of relationships between people, and relationships between God and humanity, not being what they were made to be. The Bible consistently speaks about homosexual sex as being outside God’s design for human sexuality – the one flesh relationship between a man and a woman – established at creation. But. This is not the only form of broken sexuality the Bible talks about. In fact, it never speaks about homosexuality in isolation from other forms of sexual brokenness (Romans 1:24-32, 1 Corinthians 6:8-11, Leviticus 18, Leviticus 20). All of us experience sexual attraction in bodies and minds broken by sin, our sexual desire always occurs after Eden, in a broken world. This does not mean that the Bible considers same sex attraction, or any sexual attraction, sinful. Christians run into great difficulty when we define temptation as sin, because, as Hebrews tells us, Jesus shared in what it means to be human, and was tempted “in every way, just as we are” (Hebrews 2:14-18, Hebrews 4:14-16). It’s pretty important for the Gospel that Jesus did not sin, the jump to treating temptation as sin is theologically dangerous, because, as Paul says “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

**God’s plan to fix things**

After the breakdown of Adam and Eve’s relationship with God, and the frustration of the way they were created to relate to one another, God plans to restore his relationship with humanity, and our capacity to relate to one another. He starts the process of creating a nation, a “kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:6), who will represent him again. These people are to take up Adam’s job – to be fruitful and multiply – this starts with Noah, and includes Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the nation of Israel (Genesis 9:1, 17:6, 26:24, 28:3, 35:11, Exodus 1:7, Leviticus 26:9).

Israel is called keep their sexual practice to marriage (Exodus 20:14), and to be different from the nations around them, especially in how they practice their sexuality (Leviticus 18). But they fail. Beyond the Garden of Eden, marriage is broken, full of sin, riddled with deception, we see all sorts of examples of this – in Genesis alone we see it with Abraham (when he’s still called Abram) (Genesis 12:10-20), and again, later (Genesis 20), where Rebekah conspires with her son Jacob to fool her husband Isaac in his old age (Genesis 27), we see it when Jacob’s father-in-law deceiving him into marrying both his daughters (Genesis 29), and we see it when his son Judah is duped into sleeping with his widowed daughter-in-law who is dressed as a prostitute (Genesis 38). This brokenness is hereditary. The book of Genesis – like the rest of the Old Testament– seems to want to show us, over and over again, in a downwards spiral of brokenness, that all sexuality is broken. Sexual immorality in the Old Testament, amongst God’s people, degenerates. The best example of this is in the family of King David. David’s adultery is followed by the sexual brokenness of his sons (2 Samuel 11, 13, 16:21-23, 1 Kings 11:1-6). Prostitution and adultery are used throughout the Old Testament as the symbol of humanity’s unfaithfulness to God the creator (Hosea, Ezekiel 16, 23, Jeremiah 23:9-24).

And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that not one of them turns from their wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah. – Jeremiah 23:14

Sexual expression outside of marriage doesn’t just demonstrate that God’s people aren’t committed to one another the way they should be, but that their commitment to being God’s people is not what it should be, sexual immorality and idolatry (often linked) are the two big indicators that humanity, Israel, and individuals from Israel’s history were not living the lives they were created for, and that they desperately need intervention from God.

Despite Israel’s failure to be fruitful and multiply while faithfully bearing His image, God promises to restore his relationship with them, and restore their hearts in a way that enables faithful, fruitful, relationships with him, and each other, he’ll do this through a king who will be called “the LORD Our Righteous Saviour” (Jeremiah 23:1-8), this hope is to shape the way they spend their time in exile, where they are to start to be fruitful again (Jeremiah 29:4-14).

“Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease” – Jeremiah 29:6.

Jeremiah describes the return from Exile as a reversal of the breakdown of relationships in Genesis 3 (Jeremiah 29:6).

“How long will you wander, unfaithful Daughter Israel? The Lord will create a new thing on earth—the woman will return to the man.” – Jeremiah 31:22
God will do this through a new covenant with Israel, a relationship just like a marriage where he is the husband who forgives his people’s wickedness (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

In the Old Testament, fruitfulness was linked to offspring – to the growth and expansion of God’s people, and this is spoken about as the result of God’s generous love for his people, and something he provides for them (Ezekiel 36:8-15, 37-38), God’s commitment is to dwell with Israel, in relationship with them, as he did with Adam and Eve in the Garden, and as he did with Israel in the Temple (Ezekiel 37:14-28), only this time he will change their hearts (Ezekiel 37:24-32). The Psalms anticipate a time when those who fear the Lord are described using the picture of a faithful and fruitful marriage (Psalm 128, Proverbs also describes the pursuit of Wisdom, which begins with the fear of the Lord, as a marriage). Fruitfulness, the way God designed it in the Garden, always flows, first, out of the relationship between people and God, not marriage.

How Jesus makes things right

Jesus doesn’t say anything about homosexuality directly – but he does say plenty about sexual immorality. When he talks about sex he never walks away from the standards of the Old Testament, rather, he goes so far as to say that lust is committing adultery in the heart (Matthew 5:28). The Old Testament is clear about God’s design for sexuality, and the natural, born this way, brokenness of our human experience and desires.

Jesus says God’s design for marriage, one man and one woman becoming one flesh, has been around from the beginning (Matthew 19:4-6). Jesus says his Kingdom redefines how we approach marriage, sexuality, and our desires (Matthew 19:10-12). Jesus uses the first century example of the eunuch, men who had no capacity for marriage or sex, typically because others had made that decision for them.

“For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” – Matthew 19:12

Being part of God’s kingdom, the Church, changes our approach to sex, so that some people might even choose not to engage in sexual activity or marriage because their identity is tied up in God’s kingdom (Paul makes a similar case in 1 Corinthians 7). Our future reality – where there is no marriage – helps us understand what relationships should define us in the present (Matthew 22:23-33). Jesus redefines what fruitfulness looks like – children of God are now born of the Spirit (Romans 8:5-17), and God’s people are fruitful in the way we were created to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, when the Gospel is preached to all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).

Just as marriage, in the beginning, reflected God’s self-giving love within the Trinity, our approach to marriage, as God’s people, the Church, is to reflect God’s faithful “covenental” commitment to us. This love is demonstrated at the Cross, where he secures us as his and shows us his great sacrificial love for us. The physical complementarity of male and female, where two unite to become one flesh, and the capacity for creating new life through this union, is part of the way we reflect the Trinity in our relationships. Loving sacrifice from one party, the husband, acting to love and protect the other, the wife, is a picture of God’s sacrificial love for us in Jesus (Ephesians 5:21-33, 1 Peter 2:12-3:7).

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” – Ephesians 5:31-33

Being part of God’s kingdom, and receiving the Holy Spirit changes the way we see and understand everything in the world, including our sexuality, so that we start to see things the way Jesus does. While we might be naturally oriented towards sinful expressions of sexuality – our heart is naturally inclined to sinful sexuality, no matter who we are attracted to – Jesus has the power to change us so that we are first oriented towards him. This means we find our identity in him, not ourselves, other people, or acting out our sexual desires.

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. 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. – 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Being part of God’s Kingdom means we become new creations with new longings. These new longings redefine where we seek satisfaction and wholeness. They change the way we think of what it means to be human, and how we relate to God, and to each other.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” – 2 Corinthians 5:17