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What Should Christians Think About Same-Sex Marriage?

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In this article written for Crossway, Kevin discusses the meaning of the term "marriage" and how Christians should view same-sex unions.

Transcript

[MUSIC] Greetings and salutations. Welcome back to Life in Books and Everything. I'm Kevin DeYoung.

I want to read an article today entitled "What Should Christians Think About Same-Sex Marriage?" Certainly been in the news a lot, here in the United States in the past few days and weeks. But wherever you are, whenever someone might be listening to this, no doubt this will continue to be a perennially important, difficult question. And I think it's really important that Christians, and in particular, I'm thinking of Bible-believing, evangelical Christians, think well clearly and deeply on this issue.

Why should Christians, or what rather, should Christians think about same-sex marriage? This is an article right now that's up at Crossways Blog, and I'll make sure I link to it through my website, and it's adapted from parts of my book, "What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?" So you can go there for much more on this topic. Why this issue matters? I'm a pastor. My concern is with the church, what she believes, what she celebrates, and what she proclaims.

Achieving some legal and political end is not my primary calling, and yet I'm concerned that many younger Christians, ironically often those most attuned to societal transformation and social justice, do not see the connection between a traditional view of marriage and human flourishing. Many Christians are keen to resurrect the old pro-choice mantra touted by some Catholic politicians, personally opposed, but publicly none of my business. I want Christians to see why this issue matters and why, when same-sex marriage became the law of the land, the integrity of the family was weakened and the freedom of the church was threatened.

I know this is an increasingly unpopular line of reasoning, even for those who are inclined to accept the Bible's teaching about marriage. Perhaps you believe, like I've heard many others state, that homosexual behavior is biblically unacceptable, and yet you wonder what's wrong with supporting same-sex marriage as a legal and political right. After all, we don't have laws against gossip or adultery or the worship of false gods.

Even if I, as a Christian you might say, don't agree with it, shouldn't those who identify as gay and lesbian still have the same freedom I have to get married? That's a good question. But before we try to answer it, we need to be sure we are talking about the same thing. Let's think about what is not at stake in the state over same-sex marriage.

The state is not threatening to criminalize homosexual behavior. Since the Supreme Court struck down anti-sodomy laws in *Lawrence v. Texas* 2003, same-sex sexual behavior has been legal in all 50 states. The state is not going to prohibit those in homosexual relationships from committing themselves to each other in public ceremonies or religious celebrations.

The state is not going to legislate whether two adults can live together profess love for one another or express their commitment in ways that are sexually intimate. The issue is not about controlling "what people can do in their bedrooms" or "who they can love". The issue is about what sort of union this state will recognize as marriage.

An illegal system which distinguishes marriage from other kinds of relationships and associations will inevitably exclude many kinds of unions in its definition. The state denies marriage license is to sexual threesomes. It denies marriage licenses to eight-year-olds.

There are an almost infinite number of friendship and kinship combinations which the state does not recognize as marriage. The state does not tell us who we can be friends with or who we can live with. You can have one friend or three friends or a hundred friends.

You can live with your sister, your mother, your grandfather, your dog, your three buddies from work. But these relationships, no matter how special, have not been given the designation "marriage" by the church or by the state. The state's refusal to recognize these relationships as marital relationships does not keep us from pursuing them and joining them or counting them as significant.

What's the big deal? In the traditional view, marriage is the union of a man and a woman, that's what marriage is. Before the state confers any benefits on it. Marriage, the traditional view, is a pre-political institution.

The state doesn't determine what defines marriage, it only recognizes marriage and privileges it in certain ways. It is a sad irony that those who support same-sex marriage

on libertarian grounds are actually ceding to the state a vast amount of heretofore unknown power. No longer is marriage treated as a pre-political entity which exists independent of the state.

Now the state defines marriage and authorizes its existence. Does the state have the right, let alone the competency to construct and define a society's most essential relationships? We must consider why the state has bothered to recognize marriage in the first place. What's the big deal about marriage? Why not let people have whatever relationships they choose and call them whatever they want? Why go to the trouble of sanctioning a specific relationship and giving it a unique legal status? The reason is that this state has an interest in promoting the familial arrangement whereby a mother and a father raise the children that come from their union.

The state has been in the marriage business for the common good and for the well-being of the society it is supposed to protect. Kids do better with a mom and a dad. Communities do better when husbands and wives stay together.

Hundreds of studies confirm both of these statements, though we can all think of individual exceptions I'm sure. Same-sex marriage, so-called, assumes that marriage is redefinable and the moving parts replaceable. By recognizing same-sex unions as marriage, just like the husband/wife relationship we've always called marriage, the state is engaging in or at least codifying a massive re-engineering of our social life.

It assumes the indistinguishability of gender and parenting, the relative unimportance of procreation in marriage, and the near-infinite flexibility as to what sorts of structures and habits lead to human flourishing. But what about equal rights? How can I say another human being doesn't have the same right I have to get married? That hardly seems fair. It's true.

The right to marry is fundamental. But, to equate the previous sentence with a right to same-sex marriage begs the question. It assumes that same-sex partnerships actually constitute a marriage.

Having the right to marry is not the same as having a right to the state's validation that each and every sexual relationship is a marriage. The issue is not whether to expand the number of persons eligible to participate in marriage, but whether the state will publicly declare, privilege, and codify a different way of defining marriage altogether. Or to use a different example, the pacifist has a right to join the army, but he does not have the right to insist that the army create a non-violent branch of the military for him to join.

Redefining marriage to include same-sex partnerships publicly validates these relationships as bona fide marriage. That's why the state "sanction" is so critical to same-sex marriage proponents and so disconcerting to those with traditional views. The establishment of gay marriage, in quotes, enshrines in law a faulty view of marriage, one

that says marriage is essentially a demonstration of commitment sexually expressed.

In the traditional view, marriage was ordered to the well-being of the child, which is why the state had a vested interest in regulating it and in supporting it. Under the new morality, marriage is oriented to the emotional bond of the couple. The slogan may say, "Keep the government out of my bedroom" as if personal choice and privacy were the salient issues, but same-sex marriage advocates are not asking for something private.

They want public recognition. I don't doubt that for most same-sex couples, the longing for marriage is sincere, heartfelt, without a desire to harm anyone else's marriage, and yet same-sex unions cannot be accepted as marriage without devaluing all marriages. Because the only way to embrace same-sex partnerships as marriage is by changing what marriage means altogether.

Enough is enough. So why not call a truce on the culture war and let the world define marriage its way and the church define marriage its way? You may think to yourself, maybe if Christians were more tolerant of other definitions of marriage, we wouldn't be in this mess. The problem is that the push for the acceptance of same-sex marriage has been predicated upon the supposed bigotry of those who hold a traditional view.

The equal signs on cars and on social media are making a moral argument. Those who oppose same-sex marriage are unfair, uncivil, unsocial, undemocratic, un-American, possibly even inhumane. If Christians lose the cultural debate on homosexuality, we will, afraid to say this will likely be the case, if it's not already becoming the case, we will lose much more than we think.

David S. Crawford is right. "The tolerance that really is proffered is provisional and contingent. Tailored to accommodate what is conceived as a significant but shrinking segment of society that holds a publicly unacceptable, private bigotry.

Wherever time it emerges that this bigotry has not in fact disappeared, more aggressive measures will be needed, which will include explicit legal and educational components as well as simple ostracism." It must not be naive. The legitimization of same-sex marriage will mean the de-legitimization of those who dare to disagree. The sexual revolution has been no great respecter of civil and religious liberties.

Sadly, we may discover that there is nothing quite so intolerant as tolerance. Does this mean the church should expect doom and gloom? That depends. For conservative Christians, the ascendancy of same-sex marriage will likely mean marginalization, name-calling, or worse.

But that's to be expected. Jesus promises us no better than he himself received, John 15, 18-25. The church is sometimes the most vibrant, the most articulate, and the most holy when the world presses down on her the hardest.

But not always. Sometimes when the world wants to press us into its mold, we jump right in and get comfy. I care about the decisions of the Supreme Court and the laws our politicians put in place.

But what's much more important to me, because I believe it's more crucial to the spread of the gospel, the growth of the Church and the honor of Christ, is what happens in our local congregations, our mission agencies, our denominations, our paratrooch organizations, and in our educational institutions. I fear that younger Christians may not have the stomach for disagreement or the critical mind for careful reasoning. Look past the talking points, read up on the issues, don't buy every slogan, and don't own every insult.

The challenge before the Church is to convince ourselves, as much as anyone, that believing the Bible does not make us bigots, just as reflecting the times does not make us relevant.

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