

What's Wrong With Gay Marriage?

By Jim Denison

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(ABP) -- President Obama made history with his recent endorsement of same-sex marriage. Several prominent evangelicals were quick to disagree. Why? What's wrong with gay marriage? Space does not permit exploring such controversy in detail, but we can survey the options and suggest three conclusions.

The Bible speaks to the issue of homosexuality at least six times. The first, in Genesis 19, relates to the sin of Sodom. Most interpreters believe this to be an attempted homosexual rape. Since it does not address consensual relations, it holds little relevance for our discussion.

The second and third references are in Leviticus 18:22 (prohibiting same-sex relations) and 20:13 (punishing such activity with death). Advocates for homosexuality claim that these passages are no longer relevant today, especially since the latter prescribes capital punishment for gays.

Opponents respond that an Old Testament precept repeated in the New Testament retains the force of precept today. The New Testament does not require execution for homosexuals, but, according to the traditional view, it prohibits homosexual activity. The other three biblical references are Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:8-11. Many advocates interpret the first as prohibiting homosexual activity by heterosexuals. Opponents note Paul's depiction of all homosexual activity as "shameful lusts" and "indecent," and his description of heterosexuality as "natural."

The second and third texts include "homosexual offenders" (1 Cor. 6:9) and "perverts" (1 Tim. 1:10) in lists of prohibited activities; both translate *arsenokoetes*, the typical Greek word for a person who has sexual relations with the same gender. Advocates either claim that the traditional interpretation of these texts is wrong, or that Paul was wrong.

They also note that Jesus never spoke to the issue of homosexuality. Opponents note that Jesus didn't need to address this issue since homosexual activity was forbidden in his culture.

Only when Christianity spread into the larger Greco-Roman world did the issue gain relevance. Paul had to address it in writing to the Romans, Corinthians and Ephesians (1 Timothy), because homosexuality was a problem in their cultures. However, letters written primarily to Jewish Christians (such as Hebrews and James) didn't discuss the issue since it was not an option for them.

Not surprisingly, advocates and opponents of homosexuality come to similar conclusions regarding gay marriage.

Advocates make the following claims. Marriage is a civil activity regulated by the state, so religious objections should not be relevant or recognized. All couples deserve marriage benefits, including patient visitation, a role in medical decisions and tax and insurance benefits. Homosexuals are a minority whose civil rights must be protected. And gay marriage would encourage family values, lessen high-risk behavior, and increase adoptions.

Opponents counter: Legalizing gay marriage could force religious employers to extend spousal benefits to same-sex partners. Civil contracts can provide the economic and legal benefits of marriage to same-sex couples. If anyone can get married, what is to prevent polygamy, adult-child, or direct-family marriages? The "full faith and credit" clause of the Constitution means that a law enacted in one state must be recognized in another—would this mean that a gay couple married in Massachusetts must be considered married in Texas?

I have come to three conclusions regarding this divisive issue. First, I understand the Bible to prohibit homosexual activity and gay marriage. This seems to me the clear teaching of Scripture, and has been the traditional view across Jewish and Christian history. The Bible intends marriage to be a covenant between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24). Scripture never endorses homosexual relations on any level. Second, homosexual activity is not the unpardonable sin. All sex outside of marriage is unbiblical (1 Cor. 6:9). Which has split more congregations, homosexual or heterosexual sin

Third, homosexuals deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. I am not tempted by homosexuality, but my homosexual friends may not face some of the temptations that trouble me. God loves the "world" (John 3:16), whatever our failings may be.

If my brief survey generates more light than heat on this divisive issue, I will be grateful.

Dr. Denison is a senior columnist for the [Associated Baptist Press](#). This article originally appeared in his [Faithlines](#) column and is copyrighted by ABP and used here with its permission.