

Talking with children about **MARRIAGE EQUALITY**

By Chris Parker



I've been reflecting on how to walk my children through all the news reports on 'marriage equality' and 'gay marriage' etc. How do my wife and I unfold for them God's design for godly sexual relationships, and a flourishing society, without sounding like we're just a bit old-fashioned and possibly bigoted? The question is pertinent because the current cultural 'storytelling' has been highly effective at framing the debate around fairness, equality, and human rights. Children are swimming in this storyline and it sounds increasingly reasonable to them—making the biblical view seem less relevant and in need of reinterpretation.

Here are some principles that could frame such parenting discussions:

MARRIAGE IS GOOD

Interestingly, the current debate about marriage is based on the assumption that marriage is good. This has not always been the view held among those promoting individual liberty and sexual freedom—particularly since the sexual revolution of the 1960s. The Bible reveals to us that marriage is not only good by design for people, but is also good for societal flourishing. Elements of this self-evident goodness are again being recognised such that even while heterosexual de facto relationships are increasingly popular, those in same-sex relationships are seeking to have their relationships recognised by the government in the same way that heterosexual marriages are. It shouldn't come as too much of a surprise that the 'good life' that God has designed for humans will have some elements that are attractive to those that don't even acknowledge God.

EQUITY, EQUALITY, AND DIVERSITY

Equity is different to equality. Equity suggests we should consider the rights of those in de facto relationships (same sex or heterosexual) to ensure that they are not disadvantaged over those in a legal marriage. We, as Christians, acknowledge that we live in a diverse society and we seek to honour the rights of those that have differing views—even when we don't agree with them. However, we don't have to make things equal to achieve this. Redefining marriage and changing legislation to make both types of unions equal is not necessary to bring equity and fairness.

We can speak of 'marriage' for heterosexual relationships, with its distinctiveness, as well as a 'civil union' (surely, we can come up with a better name) for committed, life long, same-sex relationships that also recognises its distinctiveness. All the while seeking to frame fair legislation that honours the rights of those in both distinctive unions (with the possible exception around parenting which we will come to shortly). Making everything equal in all ways, misses an opportunity to recognise the distinctiveness of both options.

NOT ONLY ABOUT INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM

In contrast to the 'traditional' definition, the view that seeks to redefine marriage, suggests that what is of fundamental importance in marriage is not society at large, but the freedom and fulfilment of individuals. The emphasis here is on love and personal happiness—typically not something that anyone has wanted a government to have legislative involvement with! From a 'law of the land' point of view, marriage has and ought to be more about society, families, and children, and less about the status of adult relationships and adult love.

THERE IS SOMETHING UNIQUE ABOUT MARRIAGE

The 'traditional' view of marriage, that goes across almost all cultural groups, recognises that there is something distinctive about a committed, sexual union between a man and a woman which has the potential for children and a family to result. Children are fundamental to a society continuing to be a society. Children are important to human flourishing and children flourish in this context. This has been recognised for thousands of years as being something fundamental and worth protecting. Hence, this is why governments have involved themselves with legislating to recognise and protect marriage in this form as an institution.

This view of the fundamental, distinctive nature of marriage, is not necessarily religious, nor is it particularly heterosexual in its perspective. It's a view that recognises the self-evident nature of biology, reproduction, and child raising and the need to nurture these man-woman unions and the families that may potentially result. Of course, the Christian view is not surprised to see that marriage has been recognised this way for centuries and across all cultures, whether Christian or not. The Bible is helpfully clear that it's God's design for humanity and He has called us to honour it.

SUMMARY

When speaking to our children about marriage 'equality', it's important that we are clear that our hesitation to support it doesn't appear in any way to be about a dislike for homosexual people—"I don't like gay people therefore I don't like gay marriage". We need to bring the discussion back to a careful, considered, and compassionate conversation that both seeks to honour God with His revealed desire for how we should live, and seeks what is best for society as a whole. There are still a lot of nuanced questions not addressed in this article, however, in attempting to view all of life through a cross-shaped lens, including the issues in the debate, we will prayerfully err towards a justice that promotes the welfare of the whole community rather than a justice driven by an adult-centric desire for individual freedom and fulfilment.

TEN THINGS WE WANT OUR CHILDREN TO KNOW

1. Marriage has been designed by God and it's a good thing
2. We shouldn't be surprised that lots of people want to experience marriage
3. Marriage has been around for a long time
4. Marriage is found in most cultures
5. God defines marriage to be between a man and woman committing themselves to each other for life
6. Marriages might have children and be a family
7. Governments know that families and children are important for society so they make laws to protect marriage
8. Sometimes men want to live with men and women want to live with women
9. These relationships are different to marriage
10. The government should recognise them and protect these relationships but it doesn't have to change what marriage is to do that 🐦

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