

The Case Against Homosexual Marriage

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by R. Albert Mohler

The question of homosexual marriage presents the American people with an inescapable moral challenge. The words *homosexual* and *marriage* are inherently contradictory. The very fact that these terms are in public conflict demonstrates the radical character of the social revolutionaries that now demand the legalization of homosexual marriage.

For at least the last one hundred years, America has experienced an unprecedented season of social transformation. Now, this transformation has been extended to experimentation with the most basic institutions and cherished principles of our common life. A conversation about "homosexual marriage" is only possible if the concept of marriage is completely redefined and severed from its historic roots and organic meaning.

Civilization requires the regulation of human sexuality and relationships. No society--ancient or modern--has survived by advocating a *laissez faire* approach to sex and sexual relationships. Every society, no matter how liberal, sanctions some sexual behaviors and proscribes others. Every society establishes some form of sexual norm.

Pitirim Sorokin, the founder of sociology at Harvard University, pointed to the regulation of sexuality as the essential first mark of civilization. According to Sorokin, civilization is possible only when marriage is normative and sexual conduct is censured outside of the marital relationship. Furthermore, Sorokin traced the rise and fall of civilizations and concluded that the weakening of marriage was a first sign of civilizational collapse.

We should note that Sorokin made these arguments long before anything like homosexual marriage had been openly discussed. Sorokin's insight was the realization that civilization requires men to take responsibility for their offspring. This was possible, he was convinced, only when marriage was held to be the unconditional expectation for sexual activity and procreation. Once individuals--especially males--are freed for sexual behavior outside of marriage, civilizational collapse becomes an inevitability. The weakening of marriage--even on heterosexual terms--has already brought a harvest of disaster to mothers and children abandoned in the name of sexual liberation.

The regulation of sexuality is thus a primary responsibility of any civilization. In their review of Western civilization, Will and Ariel Durant noted that sex is "a river of fire that must be banked and cooled by a hundred restraints." The primary restraint has always been the institution of marriage itself--an institution that is inescapably heterosexual and based in the monogamous union of a man and a woman as husband and wife. In postmodern America, the fires of sex are increasingly unbanked and uncooled.

In a very real sense, marriage becomes the civilizational DNA of our social genetic structure. Beyond this, marriage serves as the basic molecular structure for human social organization. Though the family is extended through children and other bonds of kinship, the basic "molecule" of human society is marriage. This molecular reality implies that the structure cannot be changed without destroying the molecule--and the organism--itself.

This is precisely the challenge we now face on the issue of what is called homosexual marriage and the legalization of same-sex relationships. The "molecule" of marriage has always defined human relatedness, and this most venerable institution is rooted in its inherent *heterosexuality*.

The family has undergone transformations throughout time, but at the core of any enduring family structure stands the integrity of marriage as an institution and the stability of marriage as an expectation both within and without the marital unit. Marriage is always both a private and a public matter, and in Western cultures, it has stood as both a civil and religious institution. As such, it has been recognized as inherently and indisputably heterosexual.

The unique role of marriage in civilization is rightly attributed to the social value any culture must place on stable long-term monogamous pairings of men and women. The institution of marriage has been invested with both rights and responsibilities directly tied to the social importance of long-term commitment.

The heterosexual union of a man and a woman in monogamous marriage is the rightful context for procreation. When reproduction is severed from marriage, the society reaps the breakdown of both kinship and parental responsibility. Put most simply, even secular historians are aware that marriage is what explains why a father remains committed to the care of his own children. Societies that devalue marriage provide an automatic incentive for young males to act irresponsibly, fathering children without ever assuming responsibility as father.

Marriage is indispensable for the successful nurture and raising of children. Both boys and girls define themselves and establish their own identity and expectations based upon their observation of both father and mother, husband and wife--male and female.

The extension of the family through other kinship relations links one marriage to another, with the entire family finding its identity and security in the integrity of those marital bonds. The breaking of these bonds leads to social dissolution as well massive economic, legal, and psychological ills. The integrity of marriage is essential for children to know the security necessary for their own self-identity and sense of belonging.

The central function of marriage has been reflected in law, custom, and an entire set of practices deeply embedded in the structures of society. These range from implications in the tax code to various legal supports and cultural expectations extended to

the married couple. Society invests both rights and responsibilities in the institution of marriage and by its various incentives and disincentives, points towards a cultural expectation. When that expectation is something other than marriage, problems immediately arise.

In its own interest, the government must value stability and reward the healthy raising of children and fulfillment of parental responsibility. To this end, the government does discriminate in order to reward and to support marriage as the centerpiece of self-government and the commonweal.

Government has within its power the ability to institutionalize its own expectation in the form of laws, regulations, and a cultural approach that either strengthens or weakens the institution of marriage. Just as the tax code discriminates in favor of homeowners (because the government rationally sees homeownership as a common social interest), a set of financial and legal incentives is directed towards a social preference for marriage. In the same way, even as the law protects corporations in order to encourage financial activity, the government also favors marriage (and thus married couples) in order to encourage procreation, childrearing, and cultural stability.

Nevertheless, government does not have the right to reorder this most basic institution of human organization. Marriage predates the establishment of government, and any governmental authority that would presume to redefine marriage apart from its inherently heterosexual nature will do so at great peril. Furthermore, advances toward legal recognition of same-sex relationships have been propelled by the action of courts, rather than legislatures. This is another example of the "judicial usurpation of politics" that threatens the integrity of democracy itself. A government that would claim the right to redefine marriage in this way demonstrates an arrogance that would cause Rome to blush and Babylon to quiver.

Inevitably, once marriage is redefined as something other than a heterosexual pair, there is nothing to stop further redefinition but sheer arbitrariness. Once marriage is no longer "one thing," but now "another thing" as well, there is nothing to stop marriage from becoming virtually "everything." Put simply, if marriage can be redefined so as to allow same-sex pairings, there is nothing in the logic of this transformation that could justify discrimination against those who would transform marriage in other ways. Why just two people? If the consent of all partners is all that is requisite, why laws against incest, polygamy, or any number of other alternative arrangements? We can be certain that proponents of these transformations will be waiting in line for their turn to use the courts to reverse what they claim to be unlawful discrimination.

Marriage has already been weakened to the point of dire social peril. The acceptance of "no-fault" divorce laws, the ethic of sexual liberation, and even the rise of new reproductive technologies have weakened the foundation and superstructure of marriage to the point that this most basic molecule is hanging together by a thread. The redefinition of marriage in order to accommodate same-sex relationships would not mean the mere transformation of marriage--but its dissolution. The very concept of marriage cannot survive such a denial of its inherent meaning and historic structure.

Of course, I speak as a Christian theologian. Based upon divine revelation, I believe and teach that God created man and woman in His image, created us as male and female to His glory, and gave us the institution of marriage for our health, our happiness, and our holiness. Furthermore, based upon this same revelation--the Holy Scriptures--I am absolutely bound to declare the inherent sinfulness of all sexual activity outside of the marital bond. Procreation, reproduction, child-rearing, and other essential rights and functions are divinely invested in the institution of marriage. Thus, to tamper with this divinely-established institution is to risk not only social peril but the divine judgment that will most surely come.

Nevertheless, even those who do not share my Christian commitment must recognize the cultural wisdom and historic knowledge that points to the primacy of marriage and the disaster which will befall a society that would weaken--much less destroy--this most precious institution. The historic wisdom of human happiness and moral knowledge points to the centrality of marriage. A review of history proves its necessity to civilization itself. Marriage is a given--and is therefore not infinitely negotiable. Marriage cannot be severed from heterosexuality without dissolving into meaninglessness. Social experimentation must meet some limitation--and the controversy over same-sex marriage presents us with that limitation.

Homosexual couples cannot fulfill the functions of marriage. They cannot procreate. Severed from even the possibility of natural procreation, their relationship is inescapably unnatural. Rather than reinforcing heterosexual responsibility and sanctioning heterosexual monogamy, same-sex sexual pairings undermine the very notion of a sexual norm. Acceptance of homosexual marriage flies in the face of both biblical revelation and millennia of accumulated moral wisdom.

This nation stands at a dramatic moment of decision. Our stewardship of this question--our decision on the question of same-sex marriage--will determine the future state of our society, the moral status of our culture, the health and well being of our children, and the inheritance we leave to the world. The choice before us is not between two visions of marriage--but between marriage and madness.

This is the text of Dr. Mohler's opening statement during a debate on homosexual marriage sponsored by The Louisville Forum, January 14, 2004. Links to press coverage and an audio recording of the entire debate will be posted as soon as available.

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