

Marriage and God's Purposes

Preached at 8.15, C@10 and C@6 on Sunday 27th November 2016

Intro

This week I'll be building on what we looked at last week in Genesis 1 and 2.

Just to remind us, we saw that marriage is at the centre of what it means for humanity to be created in God's image.

Humanity fulfils God's purpose of multiplying and ruling as male and female together in a permanent, exclusive, sexual union.

This union that is central to the good of the human race is unique — no other relationship has the same importance for the good of society.

This is the relationship that Jesus affirms in Matthew 19:8 as the only relationship that the word 'marriage' applies to.

And it's the relationship that we saw in Hebrews 13 that is to be upheld by all people.

This is marriage as it's been understood by people and cultures around the world, Christian or not, throughout history.

It can't be changed by a change to the law — it is what it is.

But even though a change to the law won't change what marriage is, it will certainly change many things about the way we live as a society.

Today we're going to look at some of those changes that most people aren't aware of.

We're doing this, once again, to give us confidence to know that defending the Biblical and traditional understanding of marriage is right and something we ought to be doing as Christians.

A change in the law isn't inevitable.

And while we can have confidence that God is sovereign even if the law does change, we need to be loving enough to speak up for the good of all people now and in the future.

Consequences for Family

As we looked at Genesis 1 and 2 last week we saw that founding a new family is part and parcel of the purpose of marriage.

Woman is the perfect complementary helper to the man to enable them together to produce a family as they have children.

It's a sadness that some married couples are unable to have children.

But a marriage that is unable to produce children is no less of a marriage for that reason.

However to change the law to allow same-sex couples to marry would mean excluding the *potential* for children from society's understanding of the purposes of marriage.

Let's unpack that:

The group *Australian Marriage Equality* has said

Marriage equality is about ensuring all couples have access to one legal institution known as 'marriage'

That one legal institution could not include the purpose of establishing a family that is part and parcel of the good of marriage.

It's clear our society values marriage as the best model for establishing a family and raising children.

The 2011 census showed that 84% of couples are married and 16% are in de facto relationships, meaning that the majority of children are raised by married couples.

Of course that doesn't mean that the family life of every married-couple family is better than any other situation that children might grow up in.

What it does show us is that we as a society recognise that marriage as we now have it is the best model for having and raising families.

The same census data shows that 0.1% of people under 25 grew up or are growing up in a family with a same-sex couple.

So, although **some** same-sex couples have or would like to have children, it isn't the norm as it is for heterosexual married couples.

The majority of same-sex couples don't have children — 78% of female and 97% of male couples.

Now, remember we're not talking about creating a new thing called 'same-sex marriage', and retaining another thing called "marriage for the rest of us".

We're talking about agreeing as a society that marriage is to become something fundamentally different to what we've always understood it to be.

One institution can't have one intention for same-sex couples and another intention for everyone else.

The intention of founding a family — as we've seen in Genesis — is either fundamental to the purpose of marriage or it isn't.

It's clear from the census data that the majority of same-sex couples don't consider founding a family fundamental to their relationship.

While it's just as clear that the overwhelming majority of heterosexual couples do consider founding a family a fundamental good of marriage.

We're not talking about respecting personal preferences here.

We're talking about the law of Australia being changed to break the connection between marriage and family that the vast majority of Australians show by the way we live that we value.

To accept this new one legal institution called marriage, we'll be making a huge statement about the value we place on children and family as a society.

For the few same-sex couples who do want children, that one legal institution needs to overlook the fact that they can't establish a family without involving a third party outside of what would be the marriage relationship.

The child of that relationship would be denied by law the opportunity to be raised by one of his or her birth parents, and most likely even be unable to find out who their birth father or mother is because the same-sex couple would legally be on the birth certificate as mothers or fathers.

If the donor or surrogate parent had a change of heart and wanted a relationship with the child they'd contributed to the birth of they'd likely not have the same opportunity that an adoptive parent has to change their mind or to later seek to re-establish contact.

And there are implications for the cost to society as same-sex couples must be given the same access to assisted reproductive technology as heterosexual couples.

Consequences for Gender

A second consequence is what a change to the law says about what we as a society affirm about gender.

To bring all marriages within the one institution called marriage where the parties can be either the same sex or the opposite sex fundamentally says that gender does not matter.

The created complementary natures of men and women are devalued.

In fact we're saying that they're interchangeable.

If we understand and value the differences between men and women we can't accept that.

But if we redefine marriage into a relationship where gender doesn't matter, then that new definition will flow over into other aspects of society.

It gives credibility to the view that every man or boy can, and has the right to identify as a woman or girl and vice versa.

That's the philosophy behind the Safe Schools program, which runs side by side with the Marriage Equality campaign.

That program's focus isn't anti-bullying — it's pushing an agenda to educate all children that their gender isn't something determined by their physiology but that it's a matter of choice and that it's fluid.

If we remove the importance of gender to marriage we'll find it more difficult to object to this view being taught in our schools.

Our children and grandchildren will learn at school a way of life that's at odds with what we as Christians, along with the great majority of people in our country believe about the goodness of gender diversity.

In Ephesians 5:31-32 marriage is spoken about as a pattern of the relationship between Christ and the church.

As husbands and wives — Christian or not — selflessly love and serve each other in complementary ways, we reflect the relationship of Christ with his saved people.

If we remove gender from marriage, we separate it from this spiritual reality that it's modelled on.

The church does not love and serve Christ in the same way that he has loved and served us.

The beautiful distinction between the genders in marriage pictures the beautiful distinction in the coming together of Christ and his church.

The one-flesh relationship that only male-female marriage achieves is modelled on the one-ness that created humanity has with its Creator through Christ's selfless love at the cross.

As Paul says, this is a profound mystery that God has revealed to us through marriage!

We can't stand in awe of what marriage reveals to us about our relationship with God, and at the same time think that it's okay to change it.

Just as it's sad that some married couples can't have children, some people do actually struggle to understand how they can be the gender that they are... and that can cause great pain to them and to their families.

But the answer isn't to make a new 'normal' where gender is irrelevant in society.

Re-defining marriage is a significant step towards a genderless society.

Most people haven't thought this through.

But once the law of marriage is changed, changes like this will certainly follow... maybe not straight away, but over time.

Other Consequences

Finally for today, just a heads up to the kinds of consequences that will likely follow from changing marriage.

There will possibly be protections for some freedoms in the proposed new marriage law but we haven't seen any legislation appear as yet.

From the church's point of view, the proponents of marriage-change are offering to protect ministers who refuse to officiate at the wedding of a same-sex couple from legal action.

There's no indication that civil celebrants who refuse on conscience grounds will have the same protection... nor will photographers, reception venues, caterers and the rest of the wedding industry.

Public servants at registry offices will have no protection.

Overseas experience has shown that people who refuse to provide their services for religious or conscientious reasons are publicly shamed and/or taken to court.

Church or para-church groups like Anglicare, Compassion and a whole range of others may lose government funding or tax-deductible giving status if they refuse to comply with or even just recognise the new legal definition of marriage.

Private schools, including Christian schools, would risk losing government funding if they continue to uphold the Biblical and traditional concept of marriage in opposition to the law of the land.

Australian Marriage Equality realises that this is what Christian schools would be compelled to do and has stated that it does not support any exemptions in the marriage law for this.

In this year's Federal Election the Greens campaigned for the removal of any exemptions from anti-discrimination legislation for any religious organisation from the moment that organisation either accepts government funds or provides social or welfare services.

In other words, churches and organisations including hospitals, retirement villages and nursing homes who provide valuable services to the community may be forced out of participation in the community if we continue to stand opposed to the new legal definition of marriage.

Likewise, just our freedom of speech will be under threat as anti-discrimination legislation gets used to silence anyone — not just Christians — who continue to hold onto the traditional view of marriage, contrary to the law.

We've seen this happening already without even the change to the law — the Roman Catholic Archbishop in Tasmania had a complaint made against him by the Federal Greens candidate for authorising a booklet distributed to Catholic children in Catholic schools that affirmed the Biblical teaching of marriage.

Churches like Church@thepeak who meet in school halls have already received complaints that could see them lose their meeting place if they preach the Bible's position on marriage.

What to do...

Friends, this is not just about allowing same-sex couples to have a legitimate wedding and call themselves husbands or wives rather than partners.

There are many more reasons we could come up with as to why changing the definition of marriage is not good for society.

We need to talk to each other, and we need to talk to the people in our lives why we think marriage as it has been revealed and established by God is good.

We need to let our members of parliament know why we think that retaining the Biblical and traditional model of marriage is best for our society.

Remember we're not trying to win an argument for argument's sake.

If we're convinced that no change to the marriage law is the best thing for all people, then we'll want to say that in love for the good of all people.

If the law changes and we're at odds with the law of our land over a significant and fundamental institution of society for the first time in living memory, then God will be sovereign over that too.

But let's not use that as an excuse for complacency while we have the opportunity to do something.

Don't think that because we haven't got a silver bullet that will silence any opposition to Biblical marriage that we shouldn't speak.

Be prepared to be ridiculed and howled down by some people.

Not everyone will be open to a rational and respectful conversation.

Speak to those who'll listen.

Speak with love and gentleness.

Our compass is the gospel. Our motive is love for others even if it costs us.

And firstly — not finally — pray!

Pray that God will overrule to protect our present and future society from the effects of a change to the marriage law.

And pray that he'll glorify Jesus in us as we seek to love all people as we honour and uphold the truth of his word.