

MARRIAGE MEANS... WHAT?

Preached at FBCD in mid-July, 2004

This past Wednesday, the American Civil Liberties Union filed suit against all the county clerks in the state of Maryland, seeking to require them to issue marriage licenses to homosexual couples when they apply for those licenses – even though it is against the law. They say that the law is unfair and contrary to the constitution of the state of Maryland. So they have entered a suit. If they should win that case, “gay marriage” will become a reality in our state.

At the same time, two days ago, the U.S. Senate began debating whether to pass what is known as the Federal Marriage Amendment on to the U.S. House of Representatives for their approval. That amendment, if it is passed, will read: Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the constitution of any State, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman.

If that amendment is passed and goes on to become a part of the U.S. Constitution, that will mean that “gay marriage” cannot exist in our state or our country.

Interesting days, aren't they?

Of course, just in case there is any doubt, it doesn't matter a whole lot what happens in the courts or the Constitution. This preacher will never perform a wedding for two men or two women. Beyond that, no matter what happens in society around us, as long as there is breath in my body, this church will never recognize such a union as a marriage, no matter what.

So then, why do we care what happens in the courthouse or in the Constitution? Well, that's what this sermon is about.

After all, for me to stand up here as the preacher and say, “As long as I have breath in my body, we will never...” is one thing. It is another thing entirely for the congregation as a whole to realize why that is so and why it must be so. You see, repeated, reliable surveys of Christians across America show that a couple of things are startlingly true:

1. A few of us who say we are Bible believing Christians, and especially some of our youth, aren't yet fully convinced that homosexuality is 100% wrong for 100% of the people 100% of the time. That's a problem.
2. Many of us, particularly among our youth, don't see any real harm, even if it is wrong, in allowing two men or two women to be considered a “married” couple in America

That's why this sermon is so important: God's people seem not really, fully to believe God's Word.

I realize I could be preaching something that goes along comfortably with the Far-Out, Far-East Rickshaw Rally that we will be engaging in tonight. And in some ways, I would rather be doing that. But it seems more important today to ask, “What kind of world do you want these kids to grow up in? More to the point, what kind of world does God want them to grow up in?”

I promise you that tonight, Vacation Bible School will occupy all of my attention. But what I'm asking for right now, First Baptist Church of Dundalk, is your undivided attention to this issue. This is today's issue. And if you don't know why I'm saying that yet, you will before this sermon is done. Listen to what Jesus had to say about this issue – the very nature of marriage.

Matthew 19 ³ *Some Pharisees came to Jesus to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”* ⁴ *“Haven't you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female, and said, “for this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife, who will become one flesh.”*

That's what Jesus said. And in saying it, He was repeating what had been laid down in the book of Genesis long before. Marriage is the union of one man with one woman. Pray with me, please.

Father, I pray that You would make it somehow possible for me to preach this both with absolute clarity and complete conviction, and yet also drip with charity and compassion. I want to preach the truth, but I want it to be smothered in love. I don't know how to strike that balance. I need you. Your Word is true, and not only is it true, it is good. It is good for people to believe what You say. It is a blessing to them to orient their lives according to what Your Word commands. The most loving thing I can say to someone who has chosen a path of sin in his life, is this: “Please turn now.” Make your love known, and make your justice known as well. Somehow make them both known.

Lord, I want to pray especially for those people in this room who have loved ones that have been ensnared in the homosexual lifestyle. I know that this sermon has been and will be hard for them to sit through. I don't know any way that I could reach their hearts. But God, You reach their hearts. Open their minds to see Your truth, to believe it, to accept it, even when

Your truth says things about their loved ones that they don't want to see, don't want to believe. There may well be somebody in this room right now who is a homosexual. If he is here (or she), then I'm certain that he's fuming inside that I am even talking about this in this way. There is absolutely no way that I could ever reach that heart. That heart is closed to me right now, I know. But Lord God You can open that heart. You can show them Your love; You already showed them Your love when You sent Your Son to die on a cross for homosexuals and preachers and drunkards and Baptist deacons and all of us sinners. "God has commended His love towards us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Father, help us to speak and to hear the truth with love. Come, please. Would You come? This sermon has every likelihood of failing miserably, if I preach alone, but every hope of eternal success if You will come and help me. Help us in this hour, I pray, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Before we go any further, I need to say something to the children in the room. Parents, don't worry. You will be happy about what I say when I am done

Already in this sermon, I have used a word that you may not yet fully understand. I hope you never fully understand it. It's the word *homosexuality*. And if you think, "Well, I'm just gonna have to go to sleep right now and not even pay attention, because I don't understand it," let me try to explain what that word is in very simple terms

God made man to be with woman and woman to be with man. He made them to be with each other in a very special way that really belongs only to husbands and wives. Homosexuality is when two men or two women try to be with each other in that very special way that God has reserved only to husbands and wives. The Bible teaches that it is sin.

The Bible also teaches that God loves homosexuals and has mercy stored up for them if they will receive it. And he will forgive them their sins just as he forgives us our sins – if they repent and believe in Jesus Christ, just like it is for us. There is nobody who cannot be saved by Jesus Christ, through His death and resurrection.

And that is as much as I am going to say, kids. If you need to know more about it, you should talk to your father or your mother. They will say more to you if they think you need to hear more. Okay?

In the next few minutes, I want to give you two reasons that homosexuality is simply, utterly always wrong. (In case there are some in this room who have not yet come to that conviction, I want to make it clear.) I also want to give you ten reasons to oppose same-sex marriage in general, and three reasons to support the Federal Marriage Amendment in particular.

Two reasons homosexuality is simply, utterly, always wrong

a. God's Word says so

Both God's design and God's decree, as communicated to us in the Bible, tell us without question that homosexuality is sin. God has designed men for women and women for men. He tells us that from the very first chapter of the Bible, from the very first summary of how God created man. It says, "In the image of God He created him, male and female He created them." The only way to understand those words is to understand that, in a very real way, the image of God in man encompasses both the maleness and femaleness of mankind. Just as God has diversity within His unity – three persons in one God, one God in three persons – so mankind was made with diversity and unity. We are one race, made up of two very different kinds of people: men and women. There are at least a dozen different passages in the Bible that make this clear: God's design is man for woman, and woman for man.

We find, not only God's design in the Bible, but also God's decree in the Bible. Throughout, the Old Testament makes it very clear, sometimes viciously clear, that homosexuality is sin. Yet that did not pass away when the New Covenant fulfilled and replaced the Old. The first chapter of Romans is one of several places in the New Testament where it is repeated. I hope you noticed that in Romans 1, it does not just say that the deeds of homosexuality are sin. The desires are sin, as well. God's Word says so. That's why homosexuality is simply, utterly, always wrong

But then, beyond that, I would say that homosexuality is simply, utterly, always wrong because...

b. God's world says so

Maybe you might call it creation's design, and creation's decree. Creation's design says that men were made for women and women were made for men. You don't need to know much to know that that's so: just a basic familiarity with the plumbing. Men are designed for women, and women for men. That's creation's design.

Consider also, please, that creation's decree is final. No same sex couple will ever be blessed with natural children by the natural means of procreation. Creation itself has slammed the door shut in judgment on homosexuality. The verdict is that it is defective; it's wrong; it doesn't work.

No doubt some people will say, "But homosexuals didn't choose to be the way they are."

First of all, I don't know whether that's exactly true. It may be true about some; it may even be true about most; but in point of fact, many did choose homosexuality, and go on choosing it without regret or apology. But even if it were completely true that homosexuals are born the way they are, it still wouldn't excuse them.

Let me give you a parallel. I didn't choose to have a temper, but I've got one. You didn't choose to have yours either, but I guarantee you have one. So, since we didn't choose our tempers, does that mean we can lose our tempers whenever we want to? It won't be sin, because we never chose it... right? Wrong! We know it's sin. The Bible tells us clearly that it's sin. We know it's sin even if we don't read the Bible.

We know it just by seeing the out-workings of it in our own lives and friendships and families. But we don't even really have to talk about the outward workings of anger to know it is sinful. Most all anger is wrong. It is a feeling of active ill-will toward someone else, and it's just about always wrong. How many times in my life have I had actually, truly had righteous indignation? It might be that I could count them on one hand. Most of the time, I get mad because I am just not getting what I want. And don't look at me like that, because that is why you get mad, too!

Okay. We all struggle with it, and it's always sin. It doesn't do me any good, and I'm not doing you any favors, if I tell you that your outbursts of wrath, or your inward-directed, simmering grudges and resentments, are just natural – that you didn't choose them, so they're not your fault, so they're not sin. Would I be helping you if I told you that? No. I'd be hurting you. I'd be sowing seeds of complacent carnality where God wants the fruit of the Spirit to grow instead.

No, we didn't choose sin. None of us chose sin. Adam chose sin. We are his children. Now we have got to deal with it. People will say that you can't be loving and tell homosexuals that their whole chosen lifestyle is wrong and contrary to God's will. But that's just not so. The fact is, I can't be loving to a homosexual and fail to tell him the truth about this sin.

Listen, when I was young, homosexuality was just a joke, something to sneer about. Homosexuals were just people I heard about, folks to make snide comments about. That was unloving and sinful, and God rebuked me. Do you know how? He let me get to know some homosexuals. And I found out that they are real people like me – people with real needs and real feelings. I have come to see that the most real and helpful and loving thing I can say to a homosexual is the same thing I would say to any person enslaved to any sin: *Your lifestyle is sinful, and will destroy you if you don't change. But God will set you free, if you turn from your sin and trust in the Savior.*

I have given you two reasons homosexuality is simply, utterly, always wrong. One is that God's Word says so. The other is that God's world says so. And although people may raise objections against these truths, those objections don't hold. But now I want to give you, as well...

Ten reasons that you as a Christian ought to oppose same-sex marriage in American society in general

Now this is mostly going to be read from an article that was taken from *For Faith and Family* magazine, put out by the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. It was written by a guy named James Smith, whom I've met a couple of times. He's a very decent fellow. This is what he says, and he is right. Ranking in the order of least importance to greatest importance, here are ten reasons to oppose same sex marriage.

Number 10: *Many homosexuals know better.*

While the homosexual movement has pushed for the "right" to "marry" as part of its broader public policy strategy to gain acceptance and endorsement in American society, it's clear that many homosexuals really don't want to marry. In fact, even in places where they have begun granting marriage licenses to homosexuals, comparatively few have showed up. You see, for the more extreme homosexuals – and I would say the more consistent and more honest with themselves – marriage is just the key feature of an entire culture that is heterosexual. That is, it defines "normal" as being comprised of a man and a woman. That definition in itself is oppressive to them, and they want to do away with it. Perhaps they might hope for a day in which, when the children sing, they'll no longer sing "first comes love; then comes marriage." Instead, perhaps, they'll sing "first comes love, and then comes... fill in the blank." Many homosexuals know better, and don't even want marriage.

Number 9: ***Americans believe better.***

Especially after last summer's Supreme Court decision that overturned the Texas law against sodomy, American public opinion has been galvanized against same-sex marriage. In fact, in the last two polls that I saw, when people were asked, "Do you support the Federal Marriage Amendment," 60% of Americans indicated that they did. In another poll, 69 percent of Americans said, "Yes, that amendment needs to go into the Constitution." Americans know better and believe better.

Number 8: ***History reveals better.***

Never in human history has marriage meant anything other than the union of man and woman. Never in 5,000 years! Homosexuality has been around for a long time. That's why it's talked about in the Old Testament. But never was anyone under the illusion that homosexuals could be married to each other. They always knew it was a form of illicit recreation for some enslaved and needy people. History reveals better.

Number 7: ***Language defines it better.***

The words "homosexual" and "marriage" cannot be combined logically to mean anything; they are two words that contradict each other. It is literally a redefinition of language to suggest marriage could mean anything other than a union of a man and a woman. If you doubt that's so, go get any dictionary that's over twenty years old, and look up the word "marriage." It will define the word in terms of man and woman, or husband and wife. That's what the word means.

Number 6: ***Religious liberty promises better.***

America's First Amendment protects the free exercise of religion. Nevertheless, homosexuals who now push for "marriage" will not stop at mere governmental endorsement of their activities. They will one day insist that all of society – including our churches, must condone, and protect, and even bless these "marriages." Or if churches will not condone, and protect, and bless them, they must be silenced, marginalized, made into pariahs, given no voice in society whatsoever.

Is that alarmism? Look around you; it's happening right now. If you think that's not really what they are pushing for, then consider the fact that if brother John had read Romans 1:16-32 over the air waves in Canada this morning, the radio station would have been levied a heavy fine by the government. In Canada, you are not allowed to broadcast anything, including Scripture, that says anything negative about homosexuality. If you think America is not going to go the same way that Canada has gone, you'd better think again. Religious liberty promises better.

Number 5: ***The "slippery slope" shows it better.***

Those who demand that same-sex marriage must be legalized have an obligation to explain why marriage should include only pairs. If it is appropriate for two men, why is it not appropriate for any other group of people or animals or objects? If two men can marry one another, why would it be inappropriate for a man to marry his sister, or his desk, or his poodle?

"Oh," you say, "people wouldn't do that!" Have you noticed recently how people are treating their pets? It's very weird. Very, very weird.

You say, "That's just a joke. In real life that wouldn't happen." No, I guess it wouldn't. Except it does.

I know a young lady who grew up in a Southern Baptist church who is married to her brother. She has four children by him. You say, "Well, how'd that happen?" Call it a bureaucratic oversight. But does it matter? The point is that the unthinkable does, in fact, happen.

If homosexual marriage is allowed, why wouldn't an incestuous marriage like that be allowable? If it's OK for a man to marry a man or a woman to marry a woman, why isn't it OK for anybody or anything in any group or combination to marry any other person, or thing, or group, or combination? The whole homosexual movement has never yet come up with a good answer to that question.

Number 4: ***Nature proves it better.***

We've already made this point. One need not hold to any particular religious conviction to understand that men and women are different, and for a reason. You don't need a Bible to figure that out; you don't need a book at all to figure that out. Homosexuality itself is contrary to nature, and so is "homosexual marriage."

Number 3: ***Children grow better.***

A primary reason for marriage is procreation — bringing children into the world and bringing them up in the world. Two people of the same sex will never be able to have children together naturally. The Creator has built that safeguard into the whole thing. Beyond the obvious, there are credible and multiple studies that confirm that the best atmosphere in which to raise children is with a mom and a dad. You don't need a study to figure that out, I know. It's common sense. But this is America, after all, and we need a study to figure out what everyone knows anyway. Helps us waste taxpayers' hard-earned money, you know.

Number 2: ***Restoring the family is better.***

Even before the current campaign for same-sex "marriage", it was clear that America is in the midst of a massively dangerous, destructive experiment with marriage. Between 1960 and 2000, U.S. households with married couples declined from 78 percent to 52 percent. Between 1990 and 2000 the total number of households with unmarried parents increased by 72 percent. An explosion of no-fault divorces and serial marriages has further undermined the biblical ideal for marriage. Same-sex marriage will accelerate these damaging trends, at severe cost to families and society.

Number 1: ***God's truth is better.***

Number one is the same number one that I've already mentioned: God said so. Take all these other reasons and wrap them all up nicely as a very large package. They amount to nothing beside the much larger and much weightier consideration that God said homosexuality is wrong.

During the Civil War, a visitor to the White House confidently asserted to President Lincoln that God was on the side of the North. Lincoln famously answered, "Sir it is not my concern whether God is on our side; it is my concern that we be on His side." And I will say "Amen!" to that. On this issue, it is not a question of whether God is on our side. Are we going to be on his side? Not just for His glory in His sovereignty. Not just in order to do things the way He created them, and to say we are being submissive, but also for the good of people, for the joy of mankind. Will we be on God's side?

Those are ten reasons to be opposed to same sex-marriage in general.

Three reasons to support the Federal Marriage Amendment in specific

Number 1: Our nation's laws were founded on God's laws, and they should be still.

You say, "Oh, I don't know about that 'our-nation's-laws'-being-founded-on-God's-laws' thing. I mean didn't it all just come out of English common law and whatever?" I hear you. And where did English common law come from? It came from the blending of Anglo-Saxon and Danish common law with biblical law. The roots of our legal code are shot through with Christian principles. If you think that's not so, then ask yourself why that lady that married her brother never could have done it if the courts had known of their blood relation. It would not have been legal. In any state of the union, it is illegal for someone to marry a sibling. In any state of the union, it is illegal for a man to have more than one wife. Why is that? Because a bunch of secularists got together and decided what would be good? No! It's because our laws were based on the Bible from the git-go. There's not any law on the books over a hundred years old that didn't come out of the Bible in some shape or form. And that's the way our nation's laws ought to be still. That's one reason to support the Federal Marriage Amendment. It writes into the highest law of the land something that is purely biblical, right, and godly.

Number 2: Although our nation's laws were founded on God's laws, put in place by a largely Christian people, they are being hijacked by activist judges in many places in America.

Supreme Court justices need to be reminded that their judgments are not supreme; God's are. They need to have their memories refreshed: a free people swear unswerving fealty only to God, and to no other judge.

What do I mean? Just this: the state of Massachusetts used to define marriage as the union of a man and a woman, as the elected representatives of the people had done for four hundred years. But the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, not one of them elected by the people, says, "We say that that definition contradicts what our state constitution says about non-discrimination. Therefore that law has got to go." In one swoop, a panel of un-elected judges, by a vote of four to three, was able to say to the entire state of Massachusetts, "The definition you have had for the last 400 years is out. This is going to

be the new definition.” Four to three, it was, which means that one person’s vote redefined marriage for an entire state. I just don’t see that as democracy, myself.

That’s already happened in Massachusetts. The only way they will ever undo it in their state will be to amend their state constitution. They are trying to do that, and probably will do it; but it will take them three years to get it done. In the meantime, how many couples are going to be issued marriage licenses that will be considered valid? According to the news report I was reading yesterday, this week or next week the Supreme Court of Oregon will do the same thing. With this lawsuit that has been brought here in Maryland, it will probably happen here. I’ll be shocked if it doesn’t happen here. This is not exactly known as a bastion of conservative biblical values.

Activist judges are hi-jacking our nation’s laws, and it needs to stop. Law should be made by state houses, by the elected representatives of the people, not in court houses, by appointed judges.

Number 3: Our nation’s laws can only be fully protected by an amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Yes, there are several states that have already amended their constitutions to define marriage sensibly. And yes, it is possible that as many as thirteen states will pass marriage amendments by this November. And that’s all good.

But we as American Christians need to understand that, if the courts of this land are not reined in, it’s probable that every attempt by the elected representatives of the people – perhaps even every direct vote by the people of the various states – will be overturned by an appointed judge in federal court. If “gay marriage” is created in even one state, there is the potential that every state may be forced by a federal judge to recognize that relationship as legal and legitimate.

There is a provision in the U.S. Constitution, known as the “full faith and credit clause,” that requires every state to recognize the legal proceedings of any state. If the courts determine that that clause requires every state to recognize “gay marriages” performed in Massachusetts, then that will be it. There is no appeal... other than to amend the Constitution itself. That is why Bible-believing Christians should support the Federal Marriage Amendment. It is the only way to safeguard marriage in this land.

While I was on vacation, the local news in Kansas City reported that a particular liberal political group was planning to send “spies” into the worship services of churches known to be conservative, Bible-believing congregations. These “spies” were to be charged with the task of making sure that “political speech” that crossed the IRS’s line of what is “allowable” in a tax-exempt organization would be reported to the proper authorities. In other words, it was a blatant, public attempt to intimidate preachers into silence.

I’ve never before really wanted to live in Johnson County, Kansas. All of a sudden, I dearly wish I did. I’d be eager to say there what I’m eager to say here: the IRS has no authority before God to dictate to me what I can say to God’s people from God’s Word. None. How dare anyone presume to prescribe what a preacher may preach? I have long said that this pulpit is no place for partisan politics, but that has nothing to do with any buffoonery from the IRS. I keep partisan politics out of this pulpit because I wouldn’t dare to soil this place with anything so sordid and petty. This pulpit it is the place for God’s man to show God’s people what God has to say about the pressing moral and cultural issues of the day. That’s not party politics; that’s principled preaching. And that is exactly what this church and every church is called to do: proclaim God’s truth, in season and out of season.

I realize I could be preaching something that goes along comfortably with the Far-Out, Far-East Rickshaw rally theme. But it seems more important today to ask, “What kind of world you want these kids to grow up in, anyway?”

So what would God have us do? First, He wants us to pray, pray, pray. This is not a political battle; it’s not even a moral or ideological struggle; it’s spiritual warfare. So pray. Second, educate yourself. Debate continues tomorrow in the US Senate, beginning at 1:00. Find out what it’s all about, and pay attention to what is said, and by whom. In particular, pray for and pay attention to Paul Sarbanes and Barbara Mikulski, our senators. Right now, they’re both on the wrong side of this issue, but God can change their hearts. Third, contact your elected officials. They keep track of how many calls and letters they receive. Your voice may be only a tiny squeak, but it will heard.

So this is how we’re going to pray right now. First, we’re going to ask God for honesty, humility, and purity of heart and doctrine. Call to mind what Jesus said about the sanctity of marriage.

Matthew 19:3-9 ³ Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” ⁴ “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ ⁵ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? ⁶

So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”⁷ “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”⁸ Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.”⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Be honest. Are you treasuring your marriage? Or have you been trashing it, as so many others have? It's not enough to stand against "gay marriage." We have to stand for real marriage – beginning with our own. So pray for a renewal in your own heart of real commitment to real marriage.

Second, pray for our nation as a whole. This is a land desperately in need of revival. Ask God for a Third Great Awakening. Third, pray for our leaders, as God's Word commands us to do. Third, pray especially for Senators Sarbanes and Mikulski.

The fourth may well be the most important of all. Pray for homosexuals who hate and fear Christians, and for Christians who hate and fear homosexuals. Gay people need to know that we love them and long to see them saved, changed, forgiven, and free. And if that's not what you feel when you think of gay people, then you need to repent. Right now. Put off the mind of the Accuser, and put on the heart of the Redeemer. Pray for a new heart.

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