

Dearly Beloved Genesis 2:18-25 (Page 2); Ephesians 5:21-33) (Page 1159)

A young man was already 2 years together with his girlfriend and decided to get married.

His parents helped as much as they could and all his friends said it's a really good idea!

His girlfriend? She is a dream!

But there is something that bothers him! This something is her little sister...

Here is his future 20 years old sister-in-law , wearing a super skinny, mini skirts and short blouses.

She always lean ahead and he was often lucky to see her underwear.

She never did that in front of anybody else!

One day she calls him and asks him to go home to see the wedding invitations.

When he arrived she was alone.

She whispered that soon he would get married and that she has had feelings for him for long time and that she thinks she can't overcome them.

She also said that she desperately wanted to have sex with him just once before he marries her sister.

he was shocked and could not say a word...

She said to him that she is going to bed and asked if he wanted to go up with her.

He froze and looked at her going up the stairs.

Going up, she took her panties off and threw them at him.

He stayed there for a moment and then ran to the door.

He opened the door and walked to the car.

His future father-in-law was standing outside with tears in his eyes, hugged him and said: "I'm glad you passed this little test and I am sure that my daughter could not find a better man. Welcome to the family, my son!"

Today we are facing many tests about marriage. We have the very public test about same sex marriage. But there are also the underlying issues of domestic violence, divorce and single parenting that are straining our resources as a church and as a nation.

We must not allow the public debate, as important as it is, to cloud the many tests that marriage is under.

In my work, I am seeing many marriage challenges as people do not seem to be what they presented when they first courted. We are seeing a number of remarriages where people are entering into new marriage relationships with past marriage baggage. We are seeing young marrieds not surviving after ten years because one person does not want the responsibility of children etc. Then with the no fault divorce that was implemented in 1975, we have seen people walking out of their marriages.

We are finding that the numbers of marriage in Australia are decreasing as people opt to live together and at the same time the push for same sex marriage where there is a belief that marriage is the answer. These factors have affected Christians and Christian marriages.

There are a number of battlegrounds that we are facing. I want to look at three in the light of the same sex marriage debate. I have drawn upon the wisdom of people who are far better at articulating the nuances of the argument. There are a number of helpful articles on the ABC Religion and Ethics Website. There are also opposite views that are helpful to understand the opposing view.

1. Gender Identity

He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew

In his address to the ACC, Rev Rod James said:

***A few years** ago all of this was taken for granted, but today the binary nature of gender ('male and female created he them') is under serious and concerted attack. New terms like transgender, genderqueer, genderfluid, gender-neutral, agender, non-gendered, and gender non-conforming have emerged to describe those who identify somewhere other than in the designations of male and female. One website*

lists 112 genders and 70 sexual orientations.

One concerning place where a new view of gender is being promoted is with children in the Safe Schools program. Promoted as being an anti-bullying program it contains a deliberate ideology designed to break down the 'male and female' view of humanity. This in turn erodes the centrality of the biological family.

Children are taught that if you don't like the gender you are born with, you can change it.

When there is ferment for change that is away from a long-established wisdom, it is often promoted by idealising a short term 'good'—if we do this, it will reduce the incidence of that. For example, if we introduce the Safe Schools program into our schools it will reduce the incidence of bullying of LGBTI people and help those children who are suffering from gender dysphoria.

But a perceived short term gain can often obscure much greater long term losses. The normalising of homosexual acts and relationships, the fundamental alteration of the nature of marriage, the affirmation of single gender parenting, and the deconstruction of gender are all being idealised as solutions to minority problems.

It is my belief that they will create far bigger majority problems for human society. Altering the created good, and amending the commandments of God, in order to effect a perceived advantage is the sad and ancient theme of Genesis chapter 3 and following. The outcomes of this process have never been beneficial in the long run, and have opened the proverbial 'Pandora's box'. As Hosea warns, 'they sow the wind and they shall reap the whirlwind' (Hosea 8:7).

It is easy to go tsk tsk, More than ever as parents, grandparents and adults who influence children, we need to affirm them as special and precious as boys and girls, and be open to talk to them about the pressures they face re the identity. We need to affirm them as boys and girls. We need to ask them about any bullying that they have received at school. We need to have open conversations with them and support them as they face many challenges.

We need to actively support them by challenging schools and parliamentarians about what is really happening. A lady challenged the safe school curriculum to the headmaster who denied it. She looked at the school's website only to read it on there in black and white contrary to what the headmaster said.

Four things from the Bible about gender:

1. **Gender is God-given.** The old saying is that 'You can't choose your relatives'. They are a given. If there's one thing the modern world does not like, it is a given. People say, 'No one tells me what to be. I do the choosing', and 'You can be whatever you want to be.'

Gender, however, is an ontological given, which we do not choose. As someone has quipped, God has split the Adam, creating man in his own image, male and female (Genesis 1:26, 2:21-23), giving one expression of humanness to men and the other corresponding expression to women. While men and women can have characteristics in common with the other gender, we can't have it all in ourselves. By God's design the other half of humanness is to be experienced through personal relationship. Part of accepting the authority of God is accepting the gender He has given you. God, your Creator, has made you who you are, a man, or a woman.

2. Human gender is a glorious **gift of God**

The wonderful thing about God's gift of gender is that you don't have to try to be a man; you are one for God has made you one. And you don't have to try to be a woman, you are one for God has made you one. And there is room for diversity in gender; the delicate man is still a man, and the tomboy girl is still a

girl. We are not talking here about rigidly imposed cultural stereotypes.

3. **Gender is about gentilis** (i.e. family)

Gentilis is the Latin word for clan or family. We get our word 'gentle' from gentilis, so a gentleman is a family man, not just a knock about bloke. The Gentiles are the families or tribes of the earth. Gender, marriage and sexual intercourse do not make sense, in the creation of humanity, apart from the family and its generations.

To understand yourself as a human being you have to hold two realities in tension: on the one hand, you are a discrete individual person that you know as 'me'. But, like the members of the holy Trinity, you are not an individual in isolation. Rather you are a person within the matrix of a family and community, and gender is about family. As a man I am part of a human family as son, brother, husband, father, and grandfather. Likewise, a woman is part of a human family as daughter, sister, and possibly wife, mother, and grandmother. In a lovely sense, every man is a brother to all women, and every woman is a sister to all men. In each of these relationships love takes a unique and appropriate form— husband-wife love is different to parent-child love which is different to brother/sister love, and so on.

We need to continue to keep the pressure on the authorities but there will be a price to pay. You will be labelled as a hateful and homophobic.

4. Gender leads us to **God's grace**

So much of our sense of inadequacy arises from our perception of ourselves as a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, and so much of our failure and consequent guilt comes from our family life as a son, brother, husband, father, grandfather, or as a daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother. The problem for us all is that sin has messed, both biologically and socially, with our powers of manhood and womanhood. We have all been raised in a society abounding in false images of what it means to be a man or a woman, and

Western culture and its media constantly bombard us with overtly sexual, and distorted gender, images.

Consequently, although there is a divinely inspired glory about manhood and womanhood, every man and every woman has sinned and falls short of that glory (Romans 3:23). Thus all of us need God's grace and salvation to correct the distortions that we have inherited and received by others and feel good about ourselves. We need God's healing so that we know who we are and whose we are.

Gender Freedoms

The words equality and freedom have been spoken by both sides of the debate. LGBTQI people want to be equal to the rest of the society. In fact most minorities want to be equal to the rest as they perceived what others have and they want. They talk about rights and freedoms to be and to have.

I remember a quote from George Orwell's animal farm "*all animals are equal but some are more equal than others*

Certainly, the UN Declaration of Human Rights (UNHDR) asserts that human beings have the right to form families, so to that extent it can be argued that being able to marry and to form families is a human right. The UN charter, however, is couched in terms of marriage being a right for men and women to form families. It cannot be stretched to include same-sex couples, since by their nature they are incapable of forming families.

This is, of course, what is contested by the marriage equality campaigner - namely, what is being sought is a re-definition of marriage. This is not, however, a question of equality. The demand to re-define marriage assumes that marriage is a matter of definition, but this is not so, since marriage arises out of a description of the natural order - that is, the facts of human biology and evolution. If human beings were naturally inclined to form homosexual unions then, over time, they would have become extinct. The survival of the human race and, hence, of the state depends on men and women having children and forming families, not on homosexual unions.

The argument for marriage equality can only work if it is accepted that gay unions are of the same species (or kind) as heterosexual unions and hence it is discriminatory to reserve marriage exclusively to heterosexual unions. From a metaphysical point of view, this requires us to understand what enables something to be considered of the same species. It is clear that this involves having the same kinds of essential characteristics. A homosexual union is of a different species to a heterosexual union, since it necessarily involves a union of a same-sex couple, while a heterosexual union involves the union of a male and female couple.

We need also to understand what equality is about from a biblical perspective.

St. Paul was to put the equality point in a way which was intended to undermine some of the deepest cultural conventions of his day: *"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28). The early Christian church used its commitment to the equality in worth and inherent dignity of men and women to challenge the conventions of the day; for instance, to insist, counter-culturally, that a valid marriage required the free consent of *both* the man and the woman.

The early church Christian's identity was found in Christ and influenced all relationships but masters were still masters and slaves were still slaves. They were not equal in society but they had the same worth and dignity that set the tone for how they treated each other.

In all the texts about marriage in Paul, marriage is not between two equal persons. This may shock some of you. Liz is not equal to me. In many areas she is better than me. She fills in the

enormous gaps in my personality and attributes that I have in my life so that we can become one. And the opposite is true.

Rather it is between two people who will complement each other so that they become one. For Christians the marriage of man and woman comes under their personal Lordship to Christ and then the marriage under the Lordship of Christ.

Leadership ie headship must be defined as Jesus defined it by not lording over another and as Paul defined it as loving as Christ loved the church viz sacrificial service that wants the best for the other and works for it.

It has never meant to be about power but two different people coming together as one and living in harmony, having difficult conversations but coming out agreeing on a plan of action. It must never become personal ie hit below the belt by slandering the person or bringing up past mistakes that have been recorded in a little black book.

Marriages break down because they have lost the art of being one where they have failed to manage difficult conversations about personal wants and needs, work, finances, children, and relatives.

Gender Love- All love is equal

The fact of the matter is that all love is not equal. Love takes many different forms. There is: (i) romantic love, including erotic, intimate love; (ii) there is agape, or Platonic love, the love between friends, altruistic love, love parents have for their children and vice versa; (iii) there is love of truth, beauty and wisdom; (iv) love of God.

Each of these is different and will be of different intensities. It makes no sense to say that romantic love is equal to Platonic love or the love between friends. We need to ask what we mean by "equal" here. It cannot mean the same, since it is obvious that these forms of love are not the same. Nor is it the case that we love all individuals equally or with the same intensity or degree at the same time.

Equal cannot mean to the same intensity or degree. Neither can it mean that all love is to be equally respected, since we make distinctions between kinds of love. The love of neighbour, for instance, will not be of the same quality as love of one's children or those to whom we owe a duty of care. Respect, in fact, demands that we observe the distinctions between different kinds of love. The kind of respect we show will depend on the kind of love we are distinguishing. It will not be the same. The premise needs to be modified, since all love is not equal in any obvious way.

Nor is all romantic love is equal. The argument is now that the romantic love between a homosexual couple is the same as that between a heterosexual couple. Romantic love here is taken to mean the kind of intimate love that is expressed through sexual relations.

Without taking away from the positives that there are in a faithful monogamous, homosexual union, there is, in a heterosexual union, apart from obvious social, phenomenological and physical differences, one very important and fundamental distinction. The love between a man and a woman has the possibility of not just intimacy but also of the procreation of life. This is a fundamental element in the relationship between a man and woman that is not available to same-sex relationships. The latter are intrinsically barren and hence cannot be life giving.

Reproductive technology does nothing to alter the fundamental situation of infertility and requires third parties (that is, reproductive scientists) to facilitate reproduction. For heterosexual couples with infertility problems the resort to either assisted reproductive technology or surrogacy is the exception, whereas for homosexual couples it is the only way in which they can have children. Their relationship per se cannot be open to procreation. That technology could one day make it possible for a man to bear a child does not change the situation, since it would only be possible through the interventions of reproductive technology.

The bible affirms that God is love and thus God's activity of love defines what true love looks like. That love is defined by sending his son to die for all that robs us of true life and the reality that the robber is our human frailty where we have this desire to be in control and do our own thing!

Love is defined not as a feeling but an act of the will in relationship with another. The well known Corinthian 13 passage is written in the context of a church that had divisions and

spiritual elitism as its core problems.

There is more to love than a feeling that encourages you to want sex with the other. There is more to marriage than just loving the other.

Some possible consequences for our future:

Firstly we will undergo a time of persecution as Christians. Jesus warned us in Matthew 10:32-36 .¹ *“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven. “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn “a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’*

You will have a different opinion about same sex marriage as your children and grandchildren because they have grown up in a different climate where feelings define life and if it does not affect them now, they will not worry about any consequences down the track. You will have difficult conversations as our society is forced to adopt the view of a minority who have a loud voice through the media, powerful groups and social media.

Secondly, we will also face the prospect that we will lose certain religious freedoms of speech and the right to believe in an opinion that goes against the rushing stream. We may be asked to do something against our personal belief or else go to jail. Jesus warned us in Mark 13:9-13

“You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the

synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.□ Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Thirdly, **we will have** an enormous opportunity to share the gospel and see people including LGBTQI people become Christians and be healed of their gender dysphoria. We will see God move in mighty ways to bring salvation to all people and we may see a revival move over our land when people see the impoverishment of their lives and the emptiness of their ideologies.

After Stephen’s death, the early church was persecuted by the Jewish religious authorities through Saul and Philip went to Samaria and many people were healed and saved.

Mark Conner shared with us when pressed about the same sex marriage debate. He pointed out that in Sweden, same sex marriage is legal. He pointed out that a number of same sex couple are coming to the Pentecostal church in Sweden looking for Jesus.

God will not be limited by the laws that man makes. He will do what he does best. He will draw all people, straight and gay, to himself to Jesus to be saved. The Holy Spirit will bring conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment. All he needs is a loving church community to embrace what God is doing and whom He is leading to be a part of God’s community. Amen.