

Is Marriage in Jeopardy?

by Glenn T. Stanton

Are you confused about what “marriage” really means today?

Many people, even Christians, are confused by the arguments they are hearing today on the subject of homosexual marriage. Superficially, what the advocates are saying may seem fair and logical. Scratch the surface, however, and you’ll find that their assertions don’t hold up.

This article contains some of the frequently asked questions and often-heard statements about this important issue, along with the answers that will help you in the debate. This is a cataclysmic social battle, and it will be with us for some time to come. No Christian, no citizen, can afford to sit this one out on the sidelines.

Q: Shouldn’t two people who love each other be allowed to commit themselves to one another?

A: Absolutely, and people do that all the time. But we don’t call it marriage. There are lots of loving commitments that are not marriage. Friends are committed to each other, a parent is committed to a child, grandparents to their grandchildren, and people are committed to their pets. All of these are forms of love. All of them result in commitments. None of them is marriage.

Q: What’s wrong with letting homosexuals marry?

A: No human society—not one—has ever tolerated “marriage” between members of the same sex as a norm for family life. And that is what is at stake here, making “marriage” between two men or two women as normal as between one man and one woman. It is saying that neither arrangement is any better than the other. As Dr. Dobson writes, only until the last few “milliseconds” of history and experience (i.e. Canada and some European nations) have we arrogantly believed we can improve upon this ancient and universal institution.

This public meaning of marriage is not something that each new generation is free to redefine. Marriage is defined by the God of nature and nature’s God—and a wise society will protect marriage as it has always been understood. Marriage is the way our culture promotes monogamy, provides a way for males and females to build a life together, and assures every child has a mother and father.

Q: Homosexuals can’t have children, but many other couples can’t as well. Why do we let them marry?

A: This is the exception and not the rule. Many of these childless couples adopt, and their adoptive children receive the benefits of both father and mother this way. It is impossible for a

homosexual couple to bestow that benefit—the presence of a father and a mother— on any child, even if that couple adopts or uses artificial insemination.

Q: Isn't it true that what kids need most are loving parents, regardless of whether it's a mother or father?

A: No. A child needs a loving mother and father. A wealth of research over the past 30 years has shown us this. (However, same-sex marriage and parenting intentionally deprive children of a mother or father.) The most loving mother in the world cannot teach a little boy how to be a man. Likewise, the most loving man cannot teach a little girl how to be a woman. A gay man cannot teach his son how to love and care for a woman. A lesbian cannot teach her daughter how to love a man or know what to look for in a good husband. Is love enough to help two gay dads guide their daughter through her first menstrual cycle? Like a mom, they cannot comfort her by sharing their first experience. Little boys and girls need the loving daily influence of both male and female parents to become who they are meant to be.

Q: Isn't that cruel?

A: That's only because of the times in which we live. Our society prizes what seems fair, more than what is true. Children truly need both a mom and a dad. It is cruel to intentionally deny them this. The research supporting this is both substantial and unequivocal!

Q: What about people who are too old to have children, even adopted ones? We let them marry.

A: Yes, of course we allow older folks to marry. Having babies is not a requirement of marriage. The reason for supporting the institution of marriage is not rooted only in childrearing. Man and woman were made for each other, and the State has a compelling interest in supporting it— with or without children.

Q: But isn't it better for a child to grow up with two loving same-sex parents than to live in an abusive home or be bounced around in foster care?

A: You're comparing the worst of one situation (abusive heterosexual parenting) with the best of another (loving same-sex parenting). That's apples and oranges.

Actually, research reveals that child abuse is at its lowest when children live with both biological parents compared with higher rates for children who live with at least one nonbiological parent or caregiver.¹ Same-sex parenting situations make it impossible for a child to live with both biological parents, thus increasing their risk of abuse.

Those who want homosexual marriage are not asking to take the children living in the most difficult situations, so it's intellectually dishonest to preface the argument with that claim. They are asking for the same thing all parents desire: healthy, happy children they can call their own. So let us dispense with the idea that same-sex couples will serve some high social good by only taking children in the most difficult situations. They have never asked for this.

Q: Apart from the issue of children, don't gays have the same legal right to marry that heterosexuals do?

A: All people have the same right to marry, as long as they abide by the law. You cannot marry if you're already married, you cannot marry a close relative, an adult cannot marry a child, you cannot marry your pet, and you cannot marry someone of the same sex. Let's be clear,

everyone has access to marriage as long as they meet the requirements. This is not about access to marriage. It's about redefining marriage to be something it has never been.

Q: But heterosexuals can marry according to their sexual orientation. Why shouldn't homosexuals be allowed to marry according to their orientation?

A: No U.S. court has ever recognized, nor has any scientific study ever established, that homosexuality is rooted in nature and therefore is the same as heterosexuality. Scientists understand that homosexuality is rooted in a collection of biological, psychological and social factors. We cannot treat them as the same thing.

Q: But I thought homosexuals couldn't help it? This seems intolerant.

A: Then nature itself is intolerant. Marriage has not been "imposed" upon culture by some religious institution or government power from which it needs to be "set free." It was established by God, is enforced by the nature which God bestowed upon mankind, and we tamper with it at our own peril.

Here's what is intolerant. Same-sex "marriage" is being forced upon us by a small, but elite, group of individuals dressed in black robes—judges—who say that thousands of years of human history have simply been wrong. That is a very arrogant notion that will bring great harm to our culture.

Q: Isn't banning gay marriage just like banning interracial marriage?

A: Not at all! Being black or white, Hispanic or Asian is not like being homosexual. Again, no academic institution in the world nor any U.S. court has ever established that homosexuality is unchangeable, as are race, nationality or gender.

But this assertion really implies that opponents to same-sex marriage are bigots and that is not true. They simply believe marriage is between men and women for good reason.

Q: But haven't we seen all kinds of family diversity in various civilizations throughout history?

A: No. Anthropologists tell us that every human society is established by males and females joining in permanent unions to build a life together and bear and raise their children. The differences we see in family from culture to culture are primarily variations on this model: how long the male and female stay together, how many spouses either can have and how the labor is divided. Some cultures make greater use of extended family than others. Family diversity is largely confined to these differences. But there has never been a culture or society that made homosexual marriage part of its family model.

Q: But how does someone's homosexual "marriage" threaten everyone else's families?

A: Gay activists are not asking for just one homosexual marriage, even though they often personalize it by saying, "Don't you interfere with my family and I won't interfere with yours." What the activists want is a new national policy saying that no longer is a mom and a dad any better than two moms or two dads. That policy would turn some very important principles upside down:

Marriage would become merely an emotional relationship that is flexible enough to include any grouping of loving adults. If it is fair for two men or two women to marry, why not three, or five, or 17? The terms "husband" and "wife" would become merely words with no meaning.

Parenthood would consist of any number of emotionally attached people who care for kids. “Mother” and “father” would become only words.

Gender would become nothing. The same-sex proposition cannot tolerate the idea that any real, deep and necessary differences exist between the sexes. It must rest on a “Mister Potato Head theory” of gender difference (same core, just interchangeable body parts). If real differences did exist, then men would need women and women would need men. Our children would learn that sexual differences are like mere personality types. Wait until your kids start bringing those papers home from school.

Q: But doesn't expanding marriage to include homosexuals actually help strengthen marriage?

A: Just the opposite. There is recent evidence from the Netherlands, arguably the most “gay-friendly” culture on earth, that homosexual men have a very difficult time honoring the ideal of marriage. Even though same-sex “marriage” is legal there, a British medical journal reports male homosexual relationships last, on average, 1.5 years, and gay men have an average of eight partners a year outside of their supposedly “committed” relationships.

Contrast that with the fact that 67 percent of first marriages in the United States last 10 years, and more than threequarters of heterosexual married couples report being faithful to their vows.²

No. Watering down the definition of marriage does not help strengthen marriage.

Q: Even so, traditional marriage isn't doing all that well, with so many divorces.

A: You're right. Marriage isn't working well, so what should we do? Erase the marriage laws? Look at it this way. We have laws against murder, but people still commit murder, so what should we do? Erase the murder laws? Of course not. When laws aren't working, legislators try to fix them. We should strengthen marriage, and many are beginning to do just that.

As a matter of fact, the evidence favoring marriage is so overwhelming that the federal government has begun to encourage the inclusion of a marriage training component in all state welfare plans.

Q: But doesn't our culture benefit from trying new things?

A: New does not always mean better. “New” and “improved” have only become synonymous in our consumer age. Anything that departs from specific instruction in the Scriptures is a bad idea, inevitably.

Thirty years ago, our nation entered a dramatic social experiment on the family called “no-fault divorce,” thinking this would improve family life. The research that examined the next 30 years of experience, however, has judged this experiment a massive failure. Children and their parents have been hurt far more deeply—and for much longer— than we ever imagined.

The revolutionaries of the no-fault divorce movement claimed that the “til death do us part” portion of marriage wasn't that important. They were wrong. The same-sex proposition claims the “husband” and “wife” portion doesn't matter. Here we go again.

Q: Surely, though, homosexuals need marriage to feel like full members of society, don't they?

A: Need marriage? No. What we are talking about here is self-esteem and it is not the place of government to bestow self-esteem on any individual or group.

Q: Why do you have to be so narrow in your definition of marriage?

A: Nature is narrow in its definition and for very good reason. Research over the last 100 years consistently shows us that marriage provides a treasure chest of good things for adults, children and society.

Q: What benefits does marriage provide?

A: Research consistently shows that married adults do better in virtually every measure of well-being. Married people live longer, happier lives. They enjoy higher levels of physical and mental health, they recover from illness quicker, earn and save more money, are more reliable employees, suffer less stress, and are less likely to become victims of any kind of violence. They find the job of parenting more successful and enjoyable and they have more satisfying and fulfilling sex lives. These benefits are largely equal for men and women.³

Compared with children in any other situation, children with married parents need to visit doctors less often for physical or emotional problems, and they do better in all measures of intellectual and academic development. They are more sympathetic toward others and much less likely to be in trouble at school, at home or with the police. They are much less likely to use drugs and be involved in violent behavior or premarital sexual activity and childbearing. It is uncommon for kids who live with married parents to live in poverty or be victims of physical or sexual abuse.⁴ Research is clear: marriage makes a substantial, positive difference in people's lives.

Q: So wouldn't opening marriage to same-sex couples mean more people benefit from marriage?

A: Just the opposite. Marriage is more than an emotional, committed relationship. It is the permanent union of the two complementary parts of humanity who complete each other in their differences. *This* is why marriage provides good things for adults and children, which same-sex relationships, by definition, cannot provide.

The ultimate result of expanding the definition of marriage is that marriage would mean everything—and nothing. The goal of most influential gay leaders who are spearheading this movement is not to broaden the benefits of marriage, but to strip it of any meaning. They see redefining marriage in this way as the first step toward abolishing marriage and the family altogether thus eliminating the benefits of marriage for everyone.

Q: But isn't same-sex marriage all that is being argued for?

A: Yes, gay marriage is viewed by many as a civil right. But, if such a right is established, then on what basis can marriage be denied to any coupling or group? In a remarkably sobering article in *The Weekly Standard* writer Stanley Kurtz explains that polygamy is getting more widespread endorsement than ever before, with friendly commentary in several major newspapers recently. Kurtz predicts the ACLU will soon rise as its foremost defender.

And it won't stop there. Kurtz reports further on the coming popularity of something called polyamory, which is a \$10 word for group marriage. Already polyamory is on the cutting edge in family law, and is promoted by professors at some of our nation's leading universities. Kurtz explains that this "group marriage" movement is marching down the same trail blazed by the same-sex proponents.⁵

For all the other problems this will cause, government and industry would be forced to pro-

vide health and legal benefits for any grouping of people who declare themselves to be “married” under these laws, or more likely, court decisions. Could your business afford health-care benefits for 5 or 9 people in a group marriage? In fact, in this brave new world, what would keep two heterosexual single moms—or even six of them—from “marrying” simply so they can receive family health, tax and social security benefits together? The increased cost to business and government would be crippling.

Conclusion

Marriage is not just a private affair. Every marriage is a public virtue in that it responsibly regulates human sexuality, brings the two parts of humanity together in a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship and it delivers mothers and fathers to children. Society benefits from the well-being of marriage; nearly every dollar spent by our government on social welfare is in reaction to a marriage breaking down or failing to form. Good things happen when we honor what marriage is. Bad things happen when we try to change it.

Ultimately and inevitably, the future and the health of humanity rests upon the health and future of marriage.

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Notes:

- ¹ Catherine Malkin and Michael Lamb, “Child Maltreatment: A Test of the Sociobiological Theory,” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 25 (1994): 121-133; David Popenoe, *Life Without Father*, (New York: The Free Press, 1996).
- ² Maria Xiridou, et al., “The Contributions of Steady and Casual Partnerships to the Incidence of HIV Infection Among Homosexual Men in Amsterdam,” *AIDS*, 17 (2003): 1029-38.
- ³ Glenn T. Stanton, *Why Marriage Matters: Reasons to Believe in Marriage in Postmodern Society*, (Colorado Springs, Pinon Press, 1997); Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially*, (New York: Doubleday, 2000); Robert Coombs, “Marital Status and Personal Well-Being: A Literature Review,” *Family Relations* 40 (1991) 97-102; Lois Verbrugge and Donald Balaban, “Patterns of Change, Disability and Well-Being,” *Medical Care* 27 (1989): S128- S147; I.M. Joung, et al., “Differences in Self-Reported Morbidity by Marital Status and by Living Arrangement,” *International Journal of Epidemiology* 23 (1994): 91-97; Linda Waite, “Does Marriage Matter?” *Demography* 32 (1995): 483-507; Harold Morowitz, “Hiding in the Hammond Report,” *Hospital Practice* (August 1975), p. 39; James Goodwin, et al., “The Effect of Marital Status on Stage, Treatment, and Survival of Cancer Patients,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 258 (1987): 3152-3130; Benjamin Malzberg, “Marital Status in Relation to the Prevalence of Mental Disease,” *Psychiatric Quarterly* 10 (1936): 245-261; David Williams, et al., “Marital Status and Psychiatric Disorders Among Blacks and Whites,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 33 (1992): 140-157; Steven Stack and J. Ross Eshleman, “Marital Status and Happiness: A 17-Nation Study,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60 (1998): 527-536; Robert T. Michael, et al., *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1994), p. 124-129; Randy Page and Galen Cole, “Demographic Predictors of Self-Reported Loneliness in Adults,” *Psychological Reports* 68 (1991): 939-945; Jan Stets, “Cohabiting and Marital Aggression: The Role of Social Isolation,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53 (1991): 669-680; “Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1992,” U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, (March 1994), p. 31, NCJ-145125; Ronald Angel and Jacqueline Angel, *Painful Inheritance: Health and the New Generation of Fatherless Families*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), pp. 139, 148; Richard Rogers, “Marriage, Sex, and Mortality,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 57 (1995): 515-526.

- ⁴ David Popenoe, *Life Without Father: Compelling Evidence that Fatherhood and Marriage Are Indispensable for the Good of Children*, (New York, The Free Press, 1997); Glenn T. Stanton *Why Marriage Matters: Reasons to Believe in Marriage in Postmodern Society*, (Colorado Springs, Pinon Press, 1997); Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Deborah Dawson, "Family Structure and Children's Health and Well-Being: Data from the 1988 National Health Interview Survey on Child Health," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53 (1991): 573-584; Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi, *A General Theory of Crime*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 103; Richard Koestner, *et al.*, "The Family Origins of Empathic Concern: A Twenty-Six Year Longitudinal Study," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58 (1990): 709-717; E. Mavis Hetherington, "Effects of Father Absence on Personality Development in Adolescent Daughters," *Developmental Psychology* 7 (1972): 313 –326; Irwin Garfinkel and Sara McLanahan, *Single Mothers and Their Children: A New American Dilemma* (Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 1986), pp. 30-31; David Ellwood, *Poor Support: Poverty in the American Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 46; Ronald J. Angel and Jacqueline Worobey, "Single Motherhood and Children's Health," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 29 (1988): 38-52; L. Remez, "Children Who Don't Live with Both Parents Face Behavioral Problems," *Family Planning Perspectives*, January/February 1992; Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances: Men and Women a Decade After Divorce*, (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1990); Judith Wallerstein, *et al.*, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study*, (New York: Hyperion, 2000); Nicholas Zill, Donna Morrison, and Mary Jo Coiro, "Long-Term Effects of Parental Divorce on Parent-Child Relationships, Adjustment, and Achievement in Young Adulthood," *Journal of Family Psychology*, 7 (1993): 91-103.
- ⁵ Stanley Kurtz, "Beyond Gay Marriage," *The Weekly Standard*, August 4-11, 2003, p. 26-33.