

Introductory Comments

In writing these views, the elders sought to use sensitive language. Several same-sex attracted people were consulted in regards to this language, however these documents may not get every word and term right.

Secondly, there may be a wide spectrum of views within these two views. The presentations are not exhaustive. The documents seek to present the main points of each particular view. There could be more said about a lot of points. There are many other good and important questions around sexuality, sexual identity and gender that these documents do not address. The focus is the question of same-sex marriage.

Thirdly, these documents were written in order to present these views in an objective and non-emotional way. These are not written to convince anyone, but to convey information.

Finally, as a church who believes the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, these views have sought to be faithful to Scripture.

Historical View of Marriage

Introduction

The historical view of marriage, unfortunately, is attached to a lot of historical baggage. While holding to a historical view of marriage, some churches, church leaders and members have carried out terrible and sinful treatment of the LGBTQ+ community. That treatment and those behaviours are inconsistent with a historical view of Christian scripture and the teachings of Jesus and are to be called for what they are: hateful, sinful and should have no place in Christian community or in society at large.

Homophobia or discrimination of any kind should never be part of what it means to hold a historical view of marriage. The historical view of marriage comes with a posture and attitude of repentance. We can't speak for everyone but as a part of presenting this historical view we want to say to the LGBTQ+ community, "we are sorry, please forgive us."

Some of the most helpful resources used to shape this evening's presentation were books written by queer Christians who hold to a historical view of marriage. There are of course some very unhelpful resources out there that are dismissive, overly dogmatic, prideful and combative. The historical view we are presenting today rejects those unhelpful responses and seeks to respond in humility and in Christian love.

The historical view of marriage is that God created marriage to be the life-long covenant and union between a man and woman. It is for companionship, intimacy, and the relationship of mutual trust where sexual intimacy is to be expressed. It is also meant to bear witness to the covenant love of God in Christ for and with his people, his church.

The historical view of marriage we are proposing today does not suggest someone needs to change their orientation to follow Jesus. To be gay or straight or bi or trans is still to be made in the image of God. But every sexual orientation (including heterosexuality) is a broken form of God's original design and intent. We are all sexually broken people in need of the healing of Christ in an authentic community. It is not sexual orientation that the Bible calls sinful, but rather the act of same-sex eroticism.

The historical view of marriage is based on both the Bible's specific definition and description of marriage and the prohibitions against other expressions of sexuality outside that definition, including same-sex eroticism.

Beyond the Clobber Passages

Unfortunately, the prohibitive passages found in Leviticus in the Old Testament and in 1 Corinthians, 1 Timothy and in Romans chapter 1 in the New Testament, have been used in belittling and unloving ways to condemn the LGBTQ+ community and anyone who would hold an affirming view. These Scriptures have been called the "clobber passages." The historical view we are presenting will seek to address these in a much more humble, loving and sensitive way.

Old Testament

While the passages in Leviticus 18 and 20 certainly condemn exploitive sexual acts such as men with boys and men with slaves and pagan ritual prostitution, there is also good reason to include consensual same-sex acts. Especially in Leviticus 20:13, where the consequences, while being extreme and absolutely irrelevant for Christian belief and practice, are given equally to each man participating in the sex act. This may suggest that there is no victim but rather two consenting people.

One of the challenges of interpreting Old Testament laws is their cultural and religious context. Certainly not all laws in the Old Testament are carried into the New Testament and meant to be applied. We are followers of Jesus and not Moses, but the Old Testament is not entirely irrelevant. And we interpret which Old Testament moral laws are applicable for the Christian based on how they are interpreted and applied by

New Testament writers and Jesus himself.

Laws like capital punishment are not apart of New Testament Christianity. Dietary laws, observing religious days, and even circumcision are not applicable for New Testament non-Jewish believers. But Christians do hold to other Old Testament laws regarding lying, stealing and adultery, for example. And while New Testament writers let go of certain Old Testament laws, we do see them holding on to prohibitions regarding sexuality. The prohibition in Leviticus 18 regarding same-sex relations is listed among prohibitions that we all accept; prohibitions regarding adultery and others.

New Testament

It is debatable whether the apostle Paul's reference to homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1 includes same-sex consensual relationships. The predominant homosexual practice in the 1st century was pederasty or pagan male prostitution. Certainly he is speaking to those. However, there are first century Jewish historians and Greek philosophers who do make reference to the practice of consensual homosexual sex and even same-sex marriage (Sprinkle, 2015, pp. 62-65). It is possible Paul also has these in mind when he is listing homosexuality as sin along with greed, slander and drunkenness (to name a few).

In Romans 1:26-27, the apostle Paul again names homosexuality as sin, but this time he includes same-sex relations between women. Many scholars address this inclusion as good reason to include consensual same-sex relations as a New Testament prohibition, because there is really no cultural example of exploitative sexual relations between women. These were quite possibly consensual same sex relations (definitely in

the minority in first century culture) and Paul is saying they are out of bounds for Christians, both male and female.

Christ's Teaching

It is true, Jesus doesn't mention homosexuality or same-sex marriage. His greatest command was to love God with heart, mind, soul and strength and to love neighbour as you love yourself. And what we see in Jesus is compassion and inclusion for those in his day who would have been considered sexually unclean or impure; prostitutes and adulterers.

While Christ's emphasis on love and compassion may be indications of how his followers should speak and act about matters of sexual sin, it does not mean that sexuality was unimportant to him. But rather as a devout Jew who observed and followed Old Testament laws, he took for granted that his audience understood that marriage was exclusively for a man and a woman.

Jesus' clearest teaching regarding marriage is in his response to a question regarding divorce in Mark 10 and Matthew 19. In his response Jesus appeals to the original purpose of God in establishing marriage: namely, to create an indissoluble bond between man and woman.

In Matthew 19 Jesus' response also includes a reference to eunuchs; people who for various different reasons are not called to marriage. He says that some people will be born "eunuchs" – in other words, some people are not given the necessary biology for marriage. This is a fact of life that applies to a variety of people for more reasons than sexual orientation. Jesus also adds that some people will choose to be

eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom (Cavey, 2005, p. 7).

The Meaning and Uniqueness of Marriage

The historical view sees Scripture as highlighting sexual difference as unique to marriage and theologically important for understanding creation, covenant and the image of God. Both Jesus and Paul refer back to Genesis 1 and 2 when speaking to sexuality and marriage: Genesis 1:26-27, “God created humans in his own image... male and female he created them.” And Genesis 2:24, “... a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

The historical view understands these passages to mean that while each gender reflects the image of God it is when both genders are brought together and united in loving covenant that God’s image is most powerfully seen (Cavey, 2005, p. 6).

One theologian explains the connection between sexual difference in marriage and God’s design for creation this way: “Male and females are very different... Something deep within the structure of the world responds to the coming together of like and unlike, something which cannot be reached by the joining together of like and like” (Wright, 2005, p. 21). Sexual difference in marriage conveys the image of God in a unique and powerful way.

Sexual difference seems to be emphasized in Genesis 2 as God provides a “suitable helper” Eve, for Adam. The Hebrew word for “suitable” means both, “likeness”; Eve is another human being like Adam and not an animal, and “opposite”; Eve is sexually different (Sprinkle, 2015, p. 33). Genesis 2 suggests that three things need to be present for marriage: (1) two humans; (2) both partners come from different families;

and (3) both display sexual difference (Sprinkle, 2015, p. 33).

Throughout Scripture God's relationship with his people, a relationship of love and of difference, finds a powerful analogy in the marriage of a man and a woman. We see this throughout the Old Testament, in Paul's writing in Ephesians and in Revelation 21 as heaven comes to finally be united with the earth, like a bride coming to meet her groom.

Sexuality and Singleness

The historical view of marriage affirms the apostolic witness, that Jesus, the perfect human, completely bearing the image of God, full of confidence, humility, grace and truth and was most likely not in a sexual relationship.

While our culture in many ways has made sex an idol and equated sex with love, the church has made heterosexual marriage an idol and in many ways held it up as the ultimate fulfilment when it comes to human relationships. The historical view of marriage sees the need for the church to reframe sexuality and to recapture a vision for singleness as a fulfilling and beautiful calling or choice. Sex and marriage are not the ultimate goal of a follower of Jesus, but rather spiritual friendship with others and a growing intimacy and friendship with Jesus Christ.

A Way Forward: Supporting our LGBTQ+ Brothers and Sisters

The historical view recognizes that a life of singleness and celibacy will not be an easy road to walk for many same-sex attracted people. And the church needs to work diligently at exploring creative ways for encouraging and building communities where single people can flourish in relationships of deep friendship and intimacy. The church

needs to be asking questions like: is there a place in the church for covenant same-sex relationships that do not include same-sex eroticism? And, how can same-sex attracted people be intentionally invited and included into the lives of families?

The historical view recognizes that a healthy way forward is to have less conversations about the LGBTQ+ community and more conversations with them. To continue to listen to the longings and dreams and struggles of queer Christians and learn ways of providing support and encouragement for the challenges and opportunities of being single.

The historical view of marriage may not be able to stand with all LGBTQ+ people on marriage, but there can be other ways to stand with them. Places to stand together against bullying of LGBTQ+ persons in schools and workplaces, and places to stand together for human and civil rights for the LGBTQ+ community.

Conclusion

There is still a lot of repentance and reconciliation to be done by the church with the LGBTQ+ community. The historical view of marriage recognizes that its view can sound unfair and unjust to many. It hopes and prays that love and acceptance of one another can be a reality even when we disagree. A healthy and Christ-like historical view of marriage must communicate first and foremost love and hospitality before disagreement. Christians need to be known for their radical love and grace rather than being “morally right”. This is the way of Jesus the One Lord who unites us despite our differences.

References

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Sprinkle, P. (2015). *People to be loved: Why homosexuality is not just an issue*.

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Wright, N.T. (2005). *Paul for everyone: Romans*. Westminster John Knox Press.

Other resources

Book by Wesley Hill - *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness & Homosexuality*.

Book by Jenell Williams Paris - *The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex is too Important to Define who we are*.

Affirming View of Marriage

Introduction

As we begin, it is important to mention that most resources used to write this affirming view included heartbreaking stories of LGBTQ+ people who could not find people within their church community they felt they could trust and feel safe with to process the questions they had regarding their sexuality. Many stories included LGBTQ+ people being silenced, judged and even shunned for questioning a heterosexual orientation.

While an affirming view of marriage does provide a much needed compassionate and just response to the treatment of and questions facing LGBTQ+ people, it is also committed to a faithful treatment of the Bible as the inspired word of God. The affirming view of same-sex marriage does not differ from the historical view based on questioning the authority of Scripture but rather the interpretation of Scripture.

The affirming view of marriage believes that a marriage between two people of the same gender is equally accepted and blessed by God as between a man and a woman. While celibacy is open to both heterosexual and LGBTQ+ people, the most God-honouring way for same-sex attracted people to express their sexuality is within the covenant of a life-long monogamous relationship blessed by God - what we have historically called marriage. Just as heterosexual couples can enjoy the intimacy and pleasure of sex as an expression of love in the sacredness of marriage, so should same-sex couples.

The affirming view of marriage does not ignore or turn a blind eye to the

passages in both Old and New Testament that call homosexual sex sin. Rather, this view has come to understand and interpret those passages as not applying to what we understand as sexual orientation and a committed monogamous relationship. Simply put, the affirming view of marriage believes that the Bible does not have a moral category for a loving, life-long committed relationship between same-sex people.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament passages in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 that prohibit sexual activity between two men, are very possibly speaking to sexual activity that was a part of pagan ritualistic religious prostitution and therefore called an “abomination” as also described in Deuteronomy 23:17-18. The prohibition in Leviticus is part of other Old Testament laws including laws against eating shellfish or getting tattoos.

Another Old Testament passage that is often used as a prohibition against homosexual sex is the story of Sodom in Genesis 19. It is a bizarre story which basically describes men in Sodom who want to gang rape two visiting strangers. This sin of Sodom is seen as an evil act throughout Scripture but in no way should it be understood as the same as a loving committed homosexual relationship.

New Testament

In the New Testament, in both 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:9-11, the apostle Paul names homosexuality as sin and is wrong for a Christian to engage in, along with other sins including drunkenness, lying, greed and slander.

A good number of Biblical interpreters confirm that the Greek words used in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy are most likely speaking to either men having sex with boys

(pederasty) or men having sex with male prostitutes, or slaves or other exploitive same-sex acts.

New Testament scholar Scot McKnight, who holds a historical view of marriage agrees. He writes, “I am of the view that Paul’s strongest words about same-sex relations were most likely directed at married males carousing with boys, prostitutes, and slaves” (2015).

Affirming scholars interpret the more difficult passages in Romans 1:26-27 describing same-sex sexual relations for both men and women as possibly being a description of homosexuality as a pagan idolatrous practice. These verses describing same-gender sex are set in the context of Paul’s condemnation of idolatry in verses 23-25 saying, “they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images”... and, “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped created things.” And therefore Paul was quite possibly describing ritual prostitution in some of the pagan temples and linked to idolatry (Hamilton, 2016, p. 270).

Romans 1 also refers to exchanging natural sexual desires for unnatural ones. The affirming view appeals to the cultural reality that Paul would not have known about sexual orientation or how natural it is for a gay or lesbian person to feel naturally attracted to the same sex.

To recap: There is good reason to believe that the condemnations of same-gender sex in Scripture applies to the following situations: gang rape, temple prostitution, idolatry, exploitative sexual activity and pederasty. These practices and the motivations behind them are very different from two people sharing their lives together

in the covenant of marriage (Hamilton, 2016, p. 271).

Creation

How does an affirming view respond to the creation narrative in Genesis as it relates to the description of marriage? Simply, the description of marriage affirms the union of man and woman but that does not have to exclude same-sex marriage. It is also worth noting that the language of “becoming one flesh” in Genesis 2 is a phrase found elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe kinship bonds, and not male-female sexual encounters. Becoming one flesh is not exclusive to the concept of heterosexual marriage and has connotations of two people coming together to form a new family. (Sprinkle, 2015, p. 30).

Theology of Marriage

While marriage is used throughout scripture to illustrate the loving relationship between God and his people, and Christ and his church, marriage is not the only imagery in the Bible that speaks to this relationship. The New Testament also uses the illustration of being members of one body with Christ as the head. Other Biblical metaphors include God as a shepherd and his people as his sheep (which is not the most endearing comparison).

The Ephesians 5:31-32 passage which speaks to the mystery of marriage being like the relationship between Christ and his church, sees the coming together of man and woman in “one flesh” to be a reflection of the love of Christ, not through the sexual act itself, but through the mutual love and tender care of the couple, reflecting the self-giving love of Christ for the whole world (The Anglican Church of Canada, 2015, p.

47). The affirming view of marriage believes a union of same-gendered people can also express the same self-giving love of Christ with his church.

What did Jesus Teach?

While it is easy and logical to assume that Jesus would be against homosexuality as it relates to pederasty, and temple prostitution as outlined above, Jesus does not refer to homosexuality or mention his disapproval of same-sex marriage in the Gospels. Jesus' obvious approval of traditional, heterosexual marriage does not imply that he would necessarily disapprove of same-sex marriage (Achtemeier, 2014, p. 62).

Jesus refers to the Genesis description of marriage as between male and female in response to a question about divorce in Mark 10 and Matthew 19. Jesus offers a very strong teaching on divorce and remarriage, yet many of our churches have the grace to allow divorced and remarried people into places of leadership and involvement in the life of the church. Why would we not do the same for same-sex couples?

The Biblical Trajectory of Justice

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann explains that in the Old Testament we find a tension between a holiness tradition and a justice tradition. The justice tradition is concerned with love of neighbour and the holiness tradition concerned with purity and fidelity to God. Brueggemann considers these traditions "interpretive trajectories" (Oudshoorn, 2005). They help us interpret both Old and New Testaments.

When we follow the trajectory of the justice tradition into the New Testament, we discover that Jesus is a champion of this tradition while his opponents were advocates of the holiness tradition. This is not to say that the holiness tradition is to be completely

discarded but it does set the tone for a Christian response to a justice issue such as same-sex marriage and equality for LGBTQ+ persons (Brueggemann, 2005 pp. 193-196).

We see this justice trajectory when looking at the role of women. We meet women in the New Testament who are in places of leadership and teaching within the church. We also see it with slavery. While slavery is not abolished in the New Testament, within the church there are great strides to a more just and compassionate treatment of slaves. Women, as well, in the New Testament aren't always seen as "totally liberated", but the trajectory is towards justice and that is where we find ourselves today in many Protestant and evangelical churches on the question of women in leadership.

The Principle of Accommodation

Some who hold the affirming view of marriage accept that the Bible does teach that marriage between man and a woman is God's revealed ideal. Yet God throughout Scripture, does make accommodation for the less than ideal. In the Old Testament, God asks his people not to be ruled by a human king like the pagan nations around them, but they still ask for a king and God eventually accommodates and lets them have one. Jesus actually comes through this kingly line.

Again, in the Old Testament, God's people ask for a temple that they can worship God in. God makes it clear that he is not to be contained in a temple, but the people ask and he makes accommodations. Jesus himself calls this temple, "his Father's house". Could God's people ask God to make another accommodation? This time for marriage

to include same-sex attracted people? And in the spirit of grace and justice could we hear the voice of the Spirit to make room for this expression of human love and intimacy?

The Appeal to Love

The call to love our neighbour should govern how we process decisions regarding same-sex married couples. Not only does the affirming view of marriage invite the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community into the life of the church but to also allow them to practice their companionship, devotion and sexual intimacy within the strength of a life-long committed marriage. One would hope that a same-sex couple who joins a church after spending years together in faithful covenanted love would be able to continue their marriage relationship and remain as a strong family.

Conclusion

While by far the majority of pain and struggle regarding this question is found in the lives of LGBTQ+ persons, the affirming view recognizes the challenges facing those who hold to a historical view of marriage. The affirming view recognizes that it is suggesting a move away from a practice and tradition that has been part of many cultures for thousands of years and has been cherished and significantly held in high regard by the Christian church. The affirming view recognizes the marriage union in our culture has weakened over the years as divorce rates have increased. The affirming view desires for all marriages to flourish and endure. Finally, the affirming view recognizes that some will feel like this is a departure from what the Scriptures teach, but would appeal again to this being a matter of difference of interpretation and pray for

unity despite disagreement.

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Other Resources

Book by James Brownson - *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*.

Book by Justin Lee - *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from Gays-vs.-Christians Debate*.