

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

A Thoughtful Approach to
God's Design for Marriage



Sean McDowell
& John Stonestreet

» *The conversation starts here . . .*
Same-sex marriage is here. It went from unthinkable to legal at a dizzying pace.
The question is, now what?

Same-Sex Marriage: A Thoughtful Approach to God's Design for Marriage

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Thoughtful guidance for Christians wondering how to approach conversations about God's design for marriage in a culture rushing to embrace same-sex marriage.

Same-Sex Marriage: A Thoughtful Approach to God's Design for Marriage Details

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From Reader Review Same-Sex Marriage: A Thoughtful Approach to God's Design for Marriage for online ebook

Bob O'bannon says

For me, this has now moved to the top of the list of recommended books on this issue. The book gives many practical suggestions for how to show kindness and compassion to LGBT people, while at the same time has the fortitude to call homosexual activity a "grave error."

Yari says

I have friends and family that have asked me questions in regards to same-sex marriage and homosexuality in light of scripture. I was beyond pleased to find that this book included all the questions asked with smart, well thought-out, biblically sound answers and tips on a proper approach. This is an excellent source for apologists as we prepare to make a defense to anyone who asks the reason for the hope that is in us according to 1 Peter 3:15-16. The authors wisely put first things first- Where do we start our defense? OURSELVES! The church must be a place where we show God's love to all who are broken (that's all of us!), demonstrating what a marriage is and if there is a fall, a place for healing. We the Church must teach that He is faithful and just to forgive.

However, this doesn't mean we move the goal posts. To lie is not love! We need to be faithful to God and His Word. Excellent book and teaching. Highly recommend.

Ted Harris says

This is an excellent look at what God meant when he joined the first man and woman in marriage. McDowell and Stonestreet lay out the biblical purpose of marriage which helps define marriage. While looking at our own culture they help the reader understand how we have gone from the traditional, biblical view of marriage to legalized same-sex marriage in such a relatively short time. They then seek to give practical ways that the church today can live out the biblical mandate and restore the cultural view of marriage. This is a must read for every Christian.

Beth Peninger says

Thank you to NetGalley and Baker Books for this free copy. In exchange for a copy I am giving an honest review.

The subtitle of the book, A Thoughtful Approach to God's Design for Marriage, is tricky. Will this be, one wonders, another book on the market degrading people who prefer the same sex for their intimate relationships? Or is it truly a thoughtful approach? It may be the first of its kind if so. Oh sure, plenty of other books have claimed in their own words to be thoughtful but usually it is the same old tired cliches about homosexuality and God and how the two can't meet up. (God made Adam for Eve not Steve - sound familiar? Ugh) What would a thoughtful approach to this controversial, emotional topic sound like, read

like?

I think it may read like and sound like this book from McDowell (the son of Josh McDowell) and Stonestreet. In my opinion, they really did take a very thoughtful and respectful approach to this subject. Early in the book they state, "...the if in this debate is one of definition. Same-sex marriage should be legal if marriage is only a way that the government acknowledges feelings of love and affection between people. If that's all there is to marriage, keeping marriage from same-sex couples would be discrimination along the lines of racism and sexism or perhaps based on religious convictions that are not shared by everyone." It's a thoughtful approach to the idea of same-sex marriage. The authors go on to unpack what the definition and purpose of marriage is. Throughout they are respectful and acknowledging of the very real feelings those who are attracted to their same gender experience. They even, at one point in the book, state very emphatically that those feelings and desires are very real and the Church as a whole cannot, rather should not, punish anyone for their feelings. Nor do they believe such relationships should be criminalized or go unprotected. Truly, I didn't know what to expect from this book but I found I was so pleasantly surprised at the very loving and solid discussion the authors hold with the reader. Their reasoning and foundation for their definition and understanding of marriage is logical and lacking in the high emotion that generally accompanies this topic. To define marriage, they claim, is key to the whole debate. And marriage must have a clear definition, a structure to it, or anything goes - even underage and incestuous relationships/marriages. As they say, "If any and every type of relationship should be called marriage, it's no longer a helpful term. Marriage can't mean everything, or else marriage means nothing." They dissect the cultural shift on perspective toward how people are now viewed. The Church, on the whole, is called out by the authors for its gross mistreatment of homosexuals, for its application of double standards when it comes to sexual sins, and for its failure to properly teach marriage and live out true marriage. They contend that the responsibility of the Church is not to fight against same-sex marriage but to fight for marriage. The blind spots of the Church have caused great damage to the hearts of those who have same-sex feelings and the blind spots have rendered our voices ineffective on the issue. It's as if the Church has become white noise within this topic. Christians are called intolerant, bigoted, hateful and usually because they communicate their disagreement with the lifestyle not the people in the lifestyle. But high emotion topics like this one set everyone on edge and then the name calling begins, the refusal to see the actual person behind the harsh words etc. The Church has been told they need to be more tolerant and compliant with this shift in thinking but the same rule doesn't apply to everyone else. The authors tackle this thought head on and refute it. They also refute the argument for equality and their straightforward, logical reasoning is hard to argue against. Again, they are mindful of those who advocate for same-sex marriage and seek to remove the emotion from the debate. They state, quite accurately in my opinion, that, "You cannot move logically from the equality of persons to the equality of actions, choices, lifestyles, or relationships. It simply does not follow." Lest the quotes I use be taken out of context and misunderstood, I highly recommend reading this book for full context and understanding of the authors intentions. McDowell and Stonestreet also don't let the Church get away with anything. They lay blame at the feet of the Church for the ways in which the Church has mishandled and even fed the emotional and vitreous debate. I appreciate not being let off the hook and taken to task for the sin of the Church in this particular area. It's an excellent book and near the end the authors encourage further reading with some suggestions of titles that propose an opposite view from theirs. I smiled when one of their suggestions is the next book I was going to be picking up to read in an effort to do just what they suggested. Great minds think alike I guess?

Dottie Parish says

This is a very thoughtful book for Christians about the issues of redefining marriage to include same-sex couples. The authors make the point that through out the history of the church (until recent decades) there

has been agreement on the definition of marriage and the sinfulness of any extra marital sex.

Part 1 What Marriage is and Why it Matters thoroughly explores marriage from many view points. The authors give valuable insight into how we have reached the many failures of marriage in our society today. They go on to say, "Marriage transcends times and cultures. It commits mothers and fathers to each other and to any children who result from their sexual activity." In contrast the secular, inclusive view of marriage divorces marriage from procreation and parenting.

Part 2 What We Can Do for Marriage defines in detail what we as Christians and as a church can do to stem the tide of same-sex marriage and even turn the tide with time. The authors say we should not give up on our defense of biblical marriage citing the ways in which the tide has turned on the abortion issue over time.

They say we need to learn from the past. We need to repent for our own sinfulness, particularly ignoring the sexual sins in our congregations rather than holding fellow believers accountable.

In Chapter 10 the authors offer a to-do list to use even if the legalization of same-sex marriage spreads. We must continue to love God and love all our neighbors.

In Chapter 11 the authors give Christians ideas for the long haul. They suggest the church "can offer marriage as one of God's best gifts to the world." A final chapter offers guidance on a variety of scenarios. Two helpful appendixes are also included.

Throughout the book the authors make a reasoned, thoughtful, well researched exposition of the issues. They include examples from their own life experiences. The book is offered humbly and winsomely for all Christians to read and for all of us to learn how to address this issue as Christ would have us. We must be humble and winsome yet stand firm.

Megan says

John Stonestreet and Sean McDowell team-up in this dissection of

Written in 2014, before the Supreme Court decision that legalized same-sex marriage across the United States, certain sections of the book can come across as curious snapshots of Christian attitudes and ideas. (For instance, Christians certainly have not, in any numbers, moved to completely separating civil and religious marriage ceremonies, although the idea has merit.) Others, on the other hand, feel just as fresh and relevant as if they had been penned only yesterday.

What I appreciate most about this book is the clear heart that beats through it to uphold biblical truth and morality in a loving and thoughtful way. This book dedicates far more page space to untangling false and unhelpful ideas that Christians hold about marriage and homosexuality and to convicting the church of unloving and unChristlike attitudes and treatment towards gay people than it does decrying same-sex marriage. Anyone who reads this book for an answer to "What are we going to do about those gays?" will be in for a rude awakening, as the question the book is primarily concerned with is "What are we going to do about *ourselves*?"

Be prepared to be convicted and challenged, but also be encouraged. There are other Christian brothers and sisters who are willing and prepared to do the incredibly hard work of proclaiming biblical truth about marriage and sexuality while simultaneously living a life of compassion and understanding towards gay individuals. There are Christian brothers and sisters ready to encourage and applaud same-sex attracted Christians who desire to walk in chastity. There are other Christians who are not willing to overlook hateful words and actions in the name of truth.

Overall, while somewhat dated, this is still an excellent cultural primer and timely engagement on one of the most controversial topics of our time.

Brianna Silva says

I learned a lot from this, mainly on what marriage is (in general) and why it matters for society. It made me more of an advocate for marriage (in general), particularly when children are involved, because that stability is healthy for them as they are being raised.

However, I found a lot of holes in this book's reasoning when it comes to condemning same-sex marriage, specifically. It left me with more questions than answers.

If anything, this book almost accomplished the opposite of its goal for me: it convinced me that marriage is important, and for this reason we should encourage our culture to embrace it... both for opposite-sex AND same-sex couples. Why should we deny this powerful institution to loving, committed same-sex relationships? Why EXACTLY?

The authors' answers to that question left me unsatisfied and, frankly, unsettled. Something felt inherently wrong about their reasoning, though I knew I'd have to read many more books on the topic to know exactly what.

In short: if you're going to convince me that it's wrong or unhealthy to welcome gay or lesbian marriages into our culture, you're going to have to do a lot better than this book.

George P. says

Sean McDowell and John Stonestreet, *Same-Sex Marriage: A Thoughtful Approach to God's Design for Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014). Paperback / Kindle

On September 21, 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) into law, which Congress had passed with overwhelming bipartisan majorities (85–14 in the Senate, 342–67 in the House). Section 3 of that law provided a legal definition of the words *marriage* and *spouse* for federal laws and regulations: “the word ‘marriage’ means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and the word ‘spouse’ refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife.” On June 26, 2013, the Supreme Court ruled Section 3 unconstitutional by a 5–4 vote. And although DOMA was enacted with significant Democratic congressional support and signed into law by a Democratic president, the current Democratic party platform explicitly endorses “marriage equality.”

The enactment and demise of Section 3 of DOMA illustrate the tectonic shift in U.S. public opinion regarding same-sex marriage particularly and homosexuality generally. Over the past two decades, public opinion has become increasingly favorable to both. The Pew Research Center has tracked public opinion on these matters since 2001. Its polling data show a reversal of fortunes for the anti- and pro-same-sex marriage positions. In 2001, the public opposed same-sex marriage, 57–35 percent. Now it favors same-sex marriage 52–40 percent. Furthermore, the trend line of opinion regarding same-sex marriage is increasingly favorable in every demographic category: generation, religious affiliation, political party, political ideology, race, and gender.

This tectonic shift in U.S. public opinion and law is dispiriting to those of us Christians who affirm the biblical and traditional understanding of marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman. Given the way this understanding has shaped marriage law in America, the rapid shift of opinion represents more than political or legal defeat. It represents a cultural defeat as well.

“In light of this reality,” Sean McDowell and John Stonestreet write in their new book, “Christians should shift their mindset from *preserving* or *conserving* to *proposing* and *building*. Christians should no longer wish for a massive judicial or political victory to save marriage. When an institution has been culturally compromised the way marriage has been, it cannot be saved. It has to be redefined and reestablished” (pp. 86–87, emphasis in original).

McDowell and Stonestreet divide their book into two parts. Part 1, “What Marriage Is and Why It Matters,” offers biblical and prudential arguments for understanding marriage as the lifelong union of a man and a woman. Their biblical case focuses on the Genesis creation accounts (Genesis 1–2), which Jesus affirmed as normative for believers in Matthew 19. They identify three “essential characteristics” of marriage: (1) union, (2) procreation, and (3) permanence. Interestingly, they don’t discuss the biblical passages that proscribe homosexual behavior. This is the right move, in my opinion, because marriage can be positively defined without reference to proscribed sexual behaviors.

McDowell and Stonestreet’s prudential case builds on an argument made by Maggie Gallagher: “Sex makes babies. Society needs babies. Babies deserve mothers and fathers” (p. 44). As they explain it, “societies have a vested interest in the process that most often produces children. That’s why every society cares about sex. Societies also have a vested interest in supporting an environment that best *rears* children. That’s why every society cares about marriage” (p. 45).

If the traditional view of marriage acknowledges the essential connection between sex, procreation, and marriage, the revisionist view of marriage denies it. As same-sex marriage proponent E. J. Graff puts it, “Allowing two people of the same-sex to marry shifts the institution’s message... If same-sex marriage becomes legal, that venerable institution will ever stand for sexual choice, for cutting the link between sex and diapers.” Similarly, Andrew Sullivan writes, “From being a means to bring up children, [marriage] has become primarily a way in which two adults affirm their emotional commitment to one another” (p. 60).

Stated this way, readers should be able to see that the revisionist view predates advocacy of same-sex marriage by many decades. Long before gay activists began to champion same-sex marriage, advocates of the so-called “sexual revolution” were advocating changes to opposite-sex marriage, emphasizing sexual choice and emotional commitment, while simultaneously untying the knot of marriage, sex, and procreation. The results of that emphasis are all around us: sex outside of marriage, widespread use of contraceptives and abortifacients, the prevalence of nonmarital childbirth, no-fault divorce, etc. Same-sex marriage is the fruit of the sexual revolution, then, but not the root of it.

Part 2, “What We Can Do for Marriage,” offers practical suggestions for how the Christian church can go about rebuilding a culture of marriage in America. To me, the most interesting suggestion is the authors’ call to repentance in chapter 9. “If, in response, we spend the next 20 years point out discrimination and lost religious freedoms to the world *without addressing concerns in our own community*, we will become our own worst enemies. It’s time to take a long, hard look inward, admit our shortcomings and ask forgiveness from God, from each other and, where appropriate, from the gay community. There is no path forward to building a strong marriage culture that does not begin with a revival of God’s people to His design for marriage” (p. 100, emphasis in original).

That revival means we must address the practices of nonmarital sex, cohabitation, and nonmarital childbirth within the Christian community, not to mention of divorce. It also means that we need to address unbiblical attitudes and actions toward homosexual people. What might those be? McDowell and Stonestreet provide a list of questions:

Have we told inappropriate jokes that dehumanize gays and lesbians?

Have we treated some persons differently because of what we knew or suspected about their sexual orientation?

Have we listened as someone entrusted us with his or her deep struggles and sexual identity or behaviors, only to break off the relationship in disgust and fear?

Have we slandered others, whether or not they’ve slandered us first?

Have we spread gossip?

Have we condemned another, using their homosexual sin to justify and coddle our own heterosexual sin?

Have we re-tweeted or re-posted harsh and uncharitable words about the gay community on Facebook?

Have we physically or emotionally abused someone because they identify as gay? (p. 106)

McDowell and Stonestreet offer many other suggestions for building a culture of marriage in the United States, but their emphasis on repentance is both welcome and the best place to start. Didn’t Jesus himself say, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (Matthew 7:3–5)?

Same-Sex Marriage is a short book, written to persuade the average Christian and thus ideal for use in Sunday school classes, small groups, and book clubs. Its tone is consistently gracious. It touches on the main points of the argument about the nature of marriage without getting bogged down in details. A short list of books for further reading would’ve been helpful, though readers who want to study the topic at greater length can mine the endnotes for that information.

P.S. If you found my review helpful, please vote yes on my Amazon.com review page.

Joanna says

LOVED

Panda Incognito says

This book is both excellently written and highly accessible, which is already a feat. More amazingly, it manages to deal with this explosive cultural topic in a calm, analytical, gracious manner without watering down the importance of God's design for marriage. Because most anything conservative Christians write on this topic is full of gloom and doom, I put off reading this book for a while, thinking life is hard enough without getting depressed over what a disaster culture is. This book was a delightful surprise: it took the consequences of wrong ideas seriously, but never veered into vitriol or despair.

This is the single best thing I have ever read about same-sex marriage. In addition to maintaining a correct and respectful tone, it provides clear, concise answers for a variety of topics, most importantly what the institution of marriage is supposed to mean according to the Bible. You cannot make an argument for or against same-sex marriage without first understanding what marriage is and isn't, and this book explained it more simply, correctly, and effectively than anything I previously have encountered. Another chapter also addresses analytical, "common sense" reasons for why marriage should be defined as a union between a man and a woman, so if someone does not accept the Bible as their starting point, this is not inherently off-putting and can help them to better think through their own beliefs. However, it sets forth a Scriptural view of marriage without concession or apology, detailing a holistic worldview of sexuality and not just throwing out the types of fallacy-ridden arguments which you'll see on Facebook.

There are many Christian resources which I would recommend to fellow believers but would cringe at the thought of someone "outside" reading. This is not one of those books. Even though many people would balk at its unflinchingly claims, the book is intelligent, logical, gracious, and well-articulated enough that there is nothing that would prevent me from sharing it with a proponent of same-sex marriage. It is not affronting or belittling, but deals with the big picture in a sensible way that honors God and never demonizes gays. This is an excellent resource which deals with broad worldview concepts, the ideological history of how things changed in our culture, and practical tips for how to engage our current culture. I am very thankful that I read this, and recommend the book with no reservation.

Adam Robinson says

In the current debate about same sex marriage there's a lot of emotion, hurt feelings, name calling, and misunderstanding but very little thoughtful dialogue. But if we're ever going to be able to discuss this together, much less influence others in their thinking, thoughtful dialogue is going to be necessary.

McDowell and Stonestreet do their best to achieve this in their book. While written clearly and unapologetically from a Christian perspective they avoid the knee jerk reactions and arguments many would expect and instead offer a clear and thoughtful defense of the conjugal/old view of marriage versus the revisionist/new view being advocated by proponents of same sex marriage (SSM).

There's no such thing as a perfect book and there are a few things left out that I wish they had tackled. But on the whole this book is sincere, respectful, and thorough in outlining the ideas behind SSM and how we as believers can do a better job of understanding marriage, defending marriage, and communicating those beliefs to others.

If you're worried about the changes in the culture around you don't let your fear or worry lead you to react in ways that would dishonor Christ or others. Instead educate yourself and be ready with a reasoned response. If

you are leaning more towards SSM examine your reasons as well and see if they are based on feelings or a full understanding of what marriage is. Instead, educate yourself by interacting with a book like this, even if you don't fully or even partially agree with it. Only through prayer and respectful dialogue can we truly learn to love one another well and find the Lord's will in the midst of a very touchy issue.

Leah Good says

What This Book Is: This is a calm, logical exploration of one of the hot topics in our culture. The authors begin by challenging readers to define marriage. They point out that we cannot pass judgement for or against same-sex marriage until we understand what the words means. They then explore the Biblical and historical understanding of the word. From there, they move on to helping readers understand the roots of the LGBT movement. What sparked this cultural revolution? Why and how did it gain so much momentum? The final chapters of the book lay out suggestions for how the church should respond to this significant part of our culture. They challenge Christians to first look within--to begin change by repenting of the sins we have swept under the rug. Christians should be able to show our culture by example what healthy marriage looks like and why it is desirable. They continue by encouraging Christians to find ways of interacting with members of the LGBT community with unapologetic truth and courageous compassion.

What This Book Isn't: This is not a book designed to help readers determine if homosexuality is right or wrong. It assumes a Christian worldview, and challenges readers to avoid assuming an "us versus them" mentality.

I picked this book up not knowing what to expect. This subject is riddled with strong, stressful emotion. The thought of engaging in the issue more than necessary was more than a little daunting to me. However, the LGBT movement is having a huge effect on our country, and as a young adult who will be interacting with the changes it causes, I feel that it's important to study, study the Bible, and have a firm understanding of where I stand and why. To my joy, this book was not intimidating at all. Instead it helped me understand how we got here. It also took a lot of the fear out of the subject.

I'm still processing what I read. I'm still wrestling with how to determine practical applications in my own life. I still want to learn more. But I'm definitely deeply grateful for the book these two authors put together. I would love to see this become more of a discussion in the church--not "how do we stop it" but "how do we interact with them."

Don Hollis says

Helpful

Clear and thoughtful discussion on how to love and serve others. I will read it again is the reason for my rating.

Mike Johnson says

Whatever side of the same-sex marriage debate you are on, you should be clear about how you define

marriage. We have to know what it is to hold any kind of position on what it isn't.

Sean McDowell and John Stonestreet's new book, *Same Sex Marriage: A Thoughtful Approach to God's Design for Marriage* is an excellent articulation of the definition of marriage, Biblically and otherwise, in light of the normalization and legalization of same-sex marriage. It outlines the challenges the Church now faces and offers a truly thoughtful response to this massive and unprecedeted cultural shift. It's an easy and insightful read with well-footnoted content laid out in a very sensible format.

WHAT IS MARRIAGE?

Helping nail down an objective marriage definition is in my opinion the book's most immediately accessible feature, and what makes it a much-needed apologetic tool for engaging a culture that is evidently very confused about the topic. It may be surprising to see how similar the definition of marriage put forth in Scripture is to the one recognized by governments and societies all over the world for millennia. Consider first the Biblical definition and purposes for marriage.

What marriage is:

One man and one woman (Gen. 2:24, Matt. 19:5, Mark 10:6)

Permanent (Mal. 2:16; Matt. 19:6; Mark 10:9)

Exclusive (see above)

What marriage is for:

Companionship and help (Gen. 2:18, Prov. 5:18)

Procreation (Gen. 1:28, Psalm 128:3; Mal. 2:15)

A picture of Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7-9; 21:2,10)

What if we leave out the Bible? Over the long span of history, cultures around the world, religious or not, have most highly regarded the very same type of marriage. With the exception of the past few decades in a few countries in the West, the marital union of people of the same sex was virtually unheard of (and still is rare globally). Practically, the complementary relationship between men and women is pretty obvious to most. For thousands of years and in everywhere in the world before the year 2000, one-man/one-woman marriage was simply nature and the norm. Anything else was the exception.

Overall, societies have always regarded marriage unions as permanent. Divorce is ancient, but was never the ideal or the goal in any marriage. Many gay marriage advocates argue that the high divorce rate among heterosexual couples shows that the traditional match-up may not be so ideal after all. The problem with this argument is that divorce is and has always been an example of a failed attempt at marriage. In fact, divorce is not part of marriage; it's the end of marriage. Divorced people are not married, so divorce can't really be an argument against traditional marriage. If anything, it's an argument for the fact that we get many things wrong.

Around the world throughout history, societies have considered the marriage union to be an exclusive relationship. Husbands and wives are not considered free to wander in and out of the commitment. Couples do unfortunately cheat on their spouses, and this is another example of marriage done incorrectly. Marital infidelity is a broken promise. Like divorce, it's never the ideal and never in the plan at the outset of a marriage.

Natural marriage has always been in part about companionship and how one completes the other for the good of family and society. Love and romance are happy features in most marriages, but it is not a fundamental

purpose. Proverbs says to “rejoice in the wife of your youth,” but the Bible doesn’t emphasize feelings of love as a condition to lifelong marriage. Likewise in the secular world, what couple applying for a marriage license is ever asked by the clerk, “How do you feel about each other? Are you sure you’re in love?”? As Sean and John note, “The government does not care how a couple feels (it’s not on the form), but rather how they fit into the larger social context.” (pages 25,158) To the state (here in the US and most other governments), feelings of love and romance take a back seat to other more lasting purposes of the union.

What are the purposes of marriage that the state is really interested in? The fact that most traditional marriages produce children, and the ideal (supported by study after study) that children are better off with both a mother and a father. The companionship of marriage plus children makes a family. Every society seeks good replacements, and so governments encourage and even incentivize marriage as a way to ensure children become good and productive adult members of society. Families are the basic building blocks of civilization. Granted, not every marriage produces children, but every human being on earth comes from a mother and a father (and generally fare better growing up with both).

Secular society will on the whole have little interest in the picture of Christ and the Church that marriage bears, but this picture is the result, not a precondition, for Biblical marriage. The criteria that the Bible sets up for marriage are pragmatic and mirrored almost intuitively by every culture for all time, up until very recently.

And just as you can’t get a pie with just sugar, any of these criteria alone do not make a marriage. The sexual union of a man and woman can be done without being married. All kinds of relationships are permanent (as are markers and glue). Boyfriends and girlfriends can be exclusive. Companionship can be had with any human and most animals. You can hire a “helper.” And we can make babies without, except for the opposite sex pairing, any of the above conditions being met. A marriage is a marriage when all of these are in view or at least categorically possible.

While the case for traditional marriage can be argued very well without using the Bible or religion, we will never really know WHY we have always recognized (not invented) one-man/one-woman marriage without starting at the foundation. Even Jesus, when fielding a question about divorce from the Pharisees (Matthew 19, Mark 10) went straight back to the design phase, quoting Genesis 2.

“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?” “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 mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

Notice that the Lord answered a question about divorce (which is not actually marriage) with the fundamental origin and purpose of marriage. If we know what marriage is, we can always identify the many things it is not—divorce, cohabitation, gay marriage, polygamy, or whatever else might come down the pike.

For Christians, our appeal has no real authority without the Word of God as the foundation for marriage, but the fact that societies everywhere around the world have historically validated the same kind of marriage outlined in the Bible is affirmation of God’s design of a very good thing.

MORE ABOUT THE BOOK

That is more or less where my understanding of marriage has landed after a bit of refinement from reading

Same-Sex Marriage: A Thoughtful Approach to God's Design for Marriage. But back to the book: Get it and read it. In addition to clarifying what marriage is and why it matters, Part 1 of the book outlines the societal shift that has happened in recent decades and recounts the history of recent changes in views on marriage. Part 2, What We Can Do For Marriage goes into the Christian responsibility for marriage, learning from the "gay liberation" agenda, some serious introspection with a call to repentance, things churches can and should do, and answers to common questions.

Throughout the book are brief interviews with other Christian authors and otherwise notable folks addressing key issues related to marriage. For example, on page 88-89, Eric Teetsel fields several questions on What Same-Sex Marriage Means for the Church's Role in Culture. Very insightful.

It was very interesting just how influential one book could be to the gay movement. After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90's by Marshal Kirk and Hunter Madsen (1989) was a playbook for many in the movement (Chapter 8, pages 90-98), which outlined a 3-step process to change public opinion: Desensitize the public to the gay culture, portray anti-gay voices as bad guys "without reference to facts, logic or proof," and convert the public through propaganda. It worked. Lessons to learn from this kind of movement are that sometimes a good story is better than a good argument. We have great stories to tell about life-long, natural marriages, and we should be telling them.

The emphasis that the authors put on the need for introspection and repentance by the Church was a surprise for a book written as a defense of marriage, but it's warranted and appropriate. Christians corporately need to self-examine our motives and our approach, past and present, in how we treat our gay neighbors. Biblically, we are called to tell the truth about marriage and sexuality, but we are called to do it out of love and respect for gay people as fellow image-bearers of God. We need to humbly admit we've made mistakes before moving on. Here are a few questions from Sean and John (page 106):

- Have we told inappropriate jokes that slander or dehumanize gays and lesbians?
- Have we condemned another, using their homosexual sin to justify and coddle our own heterosexual sin?
- Have we physically or emotionally abused someone because they identify as gay?

That said, most of the arguments put forth in defense of same sex marriage are flat out fallacious, most notably Strawmen (replacing the actual argument with one that is easier to defeat) and Ad Hominem (attacking a person's character instead of the argument). We need to be aware of this and respond with well-reasoned answers (but "do so with gentleness and respect."—1 Peter 3:15). We need to be aware of manipulative buzzwords, like discrimination, and realize that "not all discrimination is wrong. It's often appropriate and necessary." (pg. 26) The authors walk us through some "What if" scenarios and close with appendixes providing answers to pertinent questions and common challenges, including "Isn't opposing same-sex marriage the same as opposing interracial marriage?", and "Don't you believe in marriage equality?" and the complex question (a trick question that assumes something not necessarily true), "Why do you hate gay people?" (pages 155-160).

But Christians have had their share of fallacious arguments in this debate. On John Stonestreet's Breakpoint program, he featured a letter from a Christian condemning something she called "the Argument from Ickiness." This is summed up in the sentiment "Being gay is icky, and the people who are gay are the worse kind of sinner you can be. Period, done, amen, pass the casserole." Aside of being ignorant and wrong, this argument relies on pure emotionalism and zero rationale. For the past 30 years many who spoke against homosexuality have generally not had a real argument against it, but a childish "Yuck" reaction. After the influence of media and pop culture had finally succeeded in normalizing homosexuality by portraying gays as ordinary people looking for love like the rest of us, it led a lot of people, gay and straight, including our

vice-president, to conclude that “I think *Will & Grace* probably did more to educate the American public than almost anything anybody’s ever done so far.” The Argument from Ickiness was all many had against the movement, and it didn’t work anymore.

Sean and John’s book brings to light not only a right-headed, rational position against same-sex marriage, but a right-hearted, compassionate position for gay people—a clear answer for the need for both grace and truth that Christ calls us to. Marriage affects everyone eventually, and there is not a single Christian who will escape the question of what marriage is and the need to respond with a definitive position on same-sex marriage. This book is an incredible source for equipping Christians for what is here now and what lies ahead.

Ho Christopher says

Do you personally think same-sex marriage is permissible? Well... According to the authors, they think it should be, IF marriage is nothing more than just a way we acknowledge our feelings of love and affection between people. And that is the crucial point that Sean McDowell and John Stonestreet talks about in this book.

In the first part, the authors defines what marriage is, and also find supports for it, both within the bible and also from historical and sociological records. What the authors brings across clearly is that marriage is not a social norm that is gradually formed, rather it is instituted all the way in creation and predates any civilisations or governments. And thus far, no civilisation has tried to do what the society is trying to do.

In the second part, the chapters centres about the “so what” aspects since we have a definition of what marriage is from the bible. First, there is a call for christians to be willing to take a bold stand for the truth, there is also a clear call for christians not to mis-represent what is found in the bible, such as by telling others that it is ok for same-sex marriages to happen. The authors also calls the christian community to repent. This is a particular topic that has not been discussed by other books on this topic. It is true that christians have had a hard time trying to show others marriage as defined by God, we’ve been a poor example and representation of it. This is one area that the churches have to work hard on in the future in order for us to show the world that marriages as defined by God, is right, true and beautiful.

Lastly, the book ends off with several suggestions on what to do in various situation, however this book is rather short and many may not find it to be sufficient. (Look out for the upcoming book, ‘*Loving My (LGBT) Neighbour*’ by Glenn Stanton, which will fill this gap very well). Included in the 2 appendixes are what the churches can and should do in order for churches to be better equipped to support our brothers and sisters who are struggling with homosexuality, and also how Christians can answer honestly to questions that are commonly raised by non-christians. The 2 appendixes are really helpful and in my opinion will prove to be helpful for all christians, and worth the price of the book!

This book is to be praised for their call to christians to take marriage seriously, and for christians not to give up in this fight. It is both a call for christians to take our stand, and also a call for us to recover the biblical definition of marriage. I hope that church leaders will take a serious look into this book and train your congregation to be better equipped to deal with the situation, and to take God’s definition of marriage seriously.

Rating: 4.5/5

