

## How Hard is it to Say “I Do”?

By

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For hundreds and hundreds of years, wedding ceremonies have ended with the phrase “I now pronounce you husband and wife”. However, since the late 1960’s there has been a movement to have the same ceremonies end with “husband and husband” or “wife and wife”. Much in the same way people of different races wanted the right to marry, same sex couples are looking for their own right to wed. Legal definitions have never specified marriage to be between a man and a woman, but yet it has always been inferred to be an inherently heterosexual practice. Once more and more same sex couples began to look to be wed, groups and legislators in some states began scrambling to get man and woman marriage laws on the books. Much like abortion, same sex marriage has become a hot button issue with everybody from presidential candidates to log cabin republicans to southern Christians. Each side vehemently supports their position, but their unyielding nature will lead to a continuing stalemate in which no one will ever be satisfied.

This issue of same sex marriage has turned into a heated political debate at all levels of government. During the recent political election, George W. Bush’s backing of the proposed Federal Marriage Amendment won him support with groups such as Christians, conservatives, and southerners. According to his official web site, Bush

“believes that marriage between a man and a woman is the most enduring human institution, and the foundational building block of our society. President Bush has fought to defend traditional marriage laws from activist judges who threaten to

legislate from the bench to impose same-sex marriage and deny the voice of the people” (www.georgewbush.com, 2004, Defending Marriage, ¶10)

Among his various campaign promises, Bush states he will defend the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and will pursue a Federal Marriage Amendment. Like many issues in the past election, it was difficult to pinpoint John Kerry’s position on this issue, with no information available on his web site. He stated several different stances, but ultimately he was not necessarily in support of same sex marriages but he was in favor of civil unions. Kerry stated that he believes “the best way to protect gays and lesbians is through civil unions. I believe the issue of marriage should be left to the states” (lesbianlife.about.com, 2004, John Kerry, ¶11). Unlike Bush, Kerry is against a Constitutional ban on same sex marriage, but not against a ban if it permits civil unions.

Certain democrats began pointing a finger at the anti-gay marriage amendment on the ballots of eleven states as a reason Bush was re-elected. However, moral values did not play a large role in voter turnout as there were only a 0.4% higher number of voters in states with bans on the ballot (Freedman, 2004, ¶3). Again, only a statistically infinitesimally higher number of people voted for Bush in those same eleven states; Bush averaged 7.3% more of the vote, but four years ago without a ban on ballots he averaged 7% more of the vote in the same states (Freedman, 2004, ¶4).

Amidst all the political parties arguing and the various activist groups fighting for their liberties, Marilyn Musgrave, a Republican in the House of Representatives from Colorado, has sponsored the Federal Marriage Amendment, a proposed constitutional amendment which would define marriage as solely between a man and a woman. The wording of the revised amendment states that “marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the Constitution of any State, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a

man and a woman”(lesbianlife.about.com, 2004, Anti-gay, ¶5). When it comes down to it, there is no room to budge with the wording of that amendment. It is looking to deny same sex couples not only marriage, but any type of legal union they may look to enter into.

When looking at an issue as controversial as this, it is important to see the arguments from both sides of the spectrum. Those who are opposed to same sex marriage have countless reasons behind them along with numerous advocacy groups and politicians. Opponents of same sex marriage believe it would dissolve tradition of family. They fear that same sex couples will only be looking for marriage for the potential benefits, thus destroying the sanctity of marriage. They feel that by allowing homosexuals or wed it will confuse the younger generation on the ideas of “lifelong commitments, emotional bonding, sexual purity, [and] the role of children in a family” (Dobson, 2004, pt 1, ¶5). Certain activists believe the only goal of homosexuals is to destroy traditional marriage. Dobson makes the claim that homosexuals are not really interested in marrying because it would simply tie them up in legal restrictions (Dobson, 2004, pt 1, ¶8). He poses the question of who needs a lifetime commitment to one person. If that is part of his argument, he needs to share that with heterosexuals too, who already have a divorce rate around 50%.

When asked why they don't support same sex marriage, people often respond that they believe marriage should be between a man and a woman. Often times the only backing for this argument is a religious one. Passages from the bible state that marriage is between a man and a woman and that man shall not lie down with man. The churches have taken this stance and teach it in various parishes, which is why many opponents of same sex marriage, and homosexuality in general, are those who are devoutly religious. The first judicial ruling on same sex marriage relied directly on a passage from the bible. The 1971 Minnesota court ruling in the case of *Baker*

*v. Nelson* directly cited a passage in the bible as their reasoning, stating “The institution of marriage as a union of a man and woman...is as old as the Book of Genesis” (Lahey & Alderson, 2004, pg 22).

As Maude Flanders once said in an episode of *The Simpsons*, “Won’t someone please think of the children”, opponents are citing the protection of their children as one of the most fervent justifications for their argument. They believe that a child cannot live a normal life with two daddies or two mommies. Dobson states that the children will be hurt because “homosexuals are rarely monogamous, often having as many as three hundred or more partners in a lifetime, [with] some studies say it is typically more than one thousand” (Dobson, 2004, pt 2, ¶1). Aside from the outlandishness of that statement, Dobson goes on to say children coming from fractured home typically do not do well in life and that those who grew up in a loving home with a mother and a father are less likely to drop out of school and less likely to become juvenile delinquents among other things. People feel that having two parents of the same sex will cause gender confusion along with confusion about the roles of parents. It may be harder for the child socially in school do to the inherent cruelty of fellow students who may likely ridicule a child for having two mommies or two daddies. These criticisms will likely not be of their own, but just regurgitating statements from their parents at home.

Other concerns have come up in relation to adoption and education. The fear is that homosexual couples will have an equal chance to adopt a child as a traditional husband and wife combination. It is not fair to a child to be raised in a biased house where they will only learn from one sex and from one parenting perspective. While mothers would tend to play house, fathers would tend to roughhouse. Also, homosexuality would have to be taught in the schools. Even in extremely conservative parts of the nation, teachings on homosexuality would need to be

integrated into the curriculum. Once same sex marriage is legalized, the belief is that “every public school in the nation will be required to teach this perversion as the moral equivalent of traditional marriage between a man and a woman” (Dobson, 2004, pt 2, ¶6). Especially in elementary schools, it is hard to believe children will be able to fully comprehend the concept of adult sexuality. Parents and educators find it now a difficult subject to teach and adding homosexuality into the mix will only make it harder.

With so many people in the nation undecided in terms of a firm position on same sex marriage, whatever literature is put out or whatever column is written on the subject will be looked at as that side’s position. Even for moderates with an open mind, some statements are really out there. In articles written by Jerry Falwell and Lynn D. Wardle, they refuse to use the phrase same sex marriage, but instead calling it same sex “marriage” (Falwell, 2003 and Wardle, 2003). It is as if they do not believe the institution is a real concept. Dr. James Dobson goes on in his book to describe other arguments he has against same sex marriage which include that the gospel of Jesus Christ will be severely curtailed, religious freedom will be jeopardized, other nations will follow our lead in the “march toward homosexual marriage” and that polygamy will become rampant (Dobson, 2004, pt 4, ¶6). Lynn Wardle opens her paper on the “Growing Threat of Same-Sex “Marriage”” by pointing out that those in America who are looking at a constitutional amendment to stop same sex “marriage” “deserve credit for recognizing the seriousness of the threat that exists to the institution of marriage” (Wardle, 2003, ¶1).

Those who believe marriage is a liberty to everyone, no matter of race or sexual preference, they are facing a battle. Many legislators are against same sex marriage, making it especially difficult to protect your liberties when those in a position of power are against you. Currently in the internet, much like the other side, there is an online petition looking to stop the

Federal Marriage Amendment. The Washington, DC based group Human Rights Campaign are sponsoring the petition, which states that the signer believes gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender couples deserve the same rights as others who look to marry and that they will support efforts to make bring equal marriage to fruition and stop any decimation attempts ([www.millionformarriage.org](http://www.millionformarriage.org), 2004).

Despite the opposition, there are currently one hundred and twenty four national organizations, including the United Farm Workers Union, the American Bar Association, and Lambda Legal, along with seven state and local organizations who do not believe in a federal marriage amendment banning same sex marriage ([www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org), 2004, Organizations Opposed). Those against same sex marriage have many reasons behind their position but those who are for it have answers to each one of their claims. When focusing on a child needing a mother and a father to grow up to good people, there is nothing that shows children with same sex parents do any worse in life. Currently it is believed that the relationship between parent and their ability to create a loving, supportive household for a child is more important that what sex the parents are.

It is imperative to remember one of the principles our nation was formed on: the separation of church and state. Those with religion as their major opposition to same sex marriage need to learn to separate their religious beliefs from their democratic values. This issue is no longer a moral or a religious one, but it is a legal debate and therefore people need to remove their religious preconceptions when ruling on legislation. Just because one person's religion frowns on a certain practice does not give them the right to deprive the liberty of those who believe in it.

Marriage equality is just another step in this nation's tradition of overcoming civil rights barriers. We have lived through eras with segregation in schools and laws banning interracial

marriage and no matter how longstanding the discriminatory tradition had been going on, the nation eventually did what it aims to, which is to protect the individual and their rights. One thing that needs to be remembered above all else is that the constitution of the United States promised liberty to all Americans, not just those in the majority. Amending the constitution to take away liberties would make the document hypocrisy. What the founding fathers worked for was the individual rights of every American and in the past “[the constitution] has never been amended to single out a class of people for unequal treatment, but it has been amended to grant freedom of speech, religious liberty and voting rights for women” (www.hrc.org, 2004, Top 10, ¶8).

It is hard for college students, most of which are liberals, to see why people would be opposed to letting two people who love each other marry. Claiming that not allowing same sex couples to wed will destroy the sanctity of marriage is not that strong of an argument; heterosexual couples are not exactly preserving the sanctity themselves with the ridiculous divorce rates and the countless ones who have admitted to adultery. Like any person, those engaging in a same sex relationship face the same temptations in the world that heterosexual people do and will occasionally give in. Claims have been made but there is no concrete evidence to prove that homosexuals are the promiscuous devils some conservatives make them out to be.

Also, what right does the government have to fling open the doors to a person’s bedroom and tell them how they are to love? There are no laws on the books banning homosexuality but people look to put laws on the books banning homosexual marriage? It is the same as obesity: the government can tell you all they want that fast food is bad for you but the second they begin to close McDonalds’ across the nation they have overstepped their bounds. What people choose

to eat is part of their unalienable individual liberties given to them as citizens of this country.

Individuals often claim that they do not care what goes on in a person's bedroom, but the second it is in public, they will turn away in disgust. No one wants to be labeled a bigot so they look to offer the least amount of freedoms possible. Civil unions are fine and all, but often the rights do not cross state borders and do not contain the full benefits available with a marriage.

To those who are not devoutly religious, agnostic, or atheist, the bombardment from religious zealots against same sex marriage and homosexuality in general are infuriating. When all you have backing you is a book that you choose to follow blindly it is hard to side with you. Those of us who do not believe what you believe should not be pressured and forced to fall in line with your thinking. Claiming that homosexuality is not what God wants is not exactly the most persuasive agreement when you are unsure about or do not believe in God. To claim that homosexuality will take down the Christian church is ridiculous. Sometime in the past, religious followers have said the same thing about Jews, television, Muslims, rock music...the list goes on. At last check, it is 2004 and the church is still standing.

So apparently having two people in love say "I do" is more complicated then it used to be. There are realistic reasons both for and against the institution of same sex marriage. Zealots from both sides of the spectrum believe strongly in their position and will fight tooth and nail to get what they want. However, we must not lose sight of what is ultimately important: not whether one side wins over the other, but that the individual rights and liberties of people are protected. Jason West, the mayor of New Paltz, NY, has performed many same sex ceremonies this year and made a statement that summarizes how all defenders of individual liberty feel: "Just like the women's suffrage movement in the early part of the 20th century, just like the anti-

slavery movement and the civil rights movement of the 60's, a generation from now people will look back and wonder why it was an issue at all" (www.hrc.org, 2004, Quotes, ¶12).

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