

REFLECTIONS ON NEWSWEEK'S "THE RELIGIOUS CASE FOR GAY MARRIAGE"

I am disappointed in Newsweek's December 15 cover article on "The Religious Case for Gay Marriage." You can read the full piece online. But my concern is not just because I disagree with the premise of the piece. My concern is with the superficial ways in which the authors deal with the Bible. My concern is the one-sided manner in which evidence is treated and authorities are cited. The authors read into the Bible what is simply not there.

But first, let me offer some upfront opinions underlying my response to the Newsweek article.

-I am opposed to anything but respectful treatment for gays and for long-term, same-gender partners. I am sad and angry when fellow believers in Jesus treat homosexuals with anything but the love and respect modeled by Jesus.

-I am opposed to defining anyone on the basis of gender orientation, be it straight or gay. We are first and foremost men and women created in the image of God and loved unconditionally by God as illustrated in Jesus.

-I accept the need for justice-providing domestic partnership arrangements, now provided by our laws. I also accept the reality that our own state may well change its laws regarding marriage.

-I affirm that the state's definition of marriage, whatever it is, does not require churches committed to orthodox Christian faith to change our practice. I declare people married not by the authority of the State of Washington, but by the authority of ordination which qualifies me to act as a representative of the faith community before which covenant vows are taken. For practical and good reasons, we register marriages with the state. But that registration with the state does not make it marriage. What we do before God and God's People does.

But back to the Newsweek article, which superficially and glibly reads the Bible as an outdated document not to be relied upon for guidance in a world vastly different than two to three millennia ago. Says Newsweek: "Opponents of gay marriage often cite Scripture. But what the Bible teaches about love argues for the other side." That may make good headlines, but is very shallow reading of the Bible. We could talk a long time about what love is and who decides what love is!

Here are my objections to the way Newsweek uses the Bible:

1. Newsweek tries to use evidence from the Bible to make a case that the Bible cannot or should not be used to assess currents of thought and practice today. That seems contradictory!
2. Newsweek acts as though all parts of the Bible are equally weighty. Of course, we do not live on the basis of Leviticus and its detailed, time-bound regulations. At the same time, orthodox believers regard the introduction to the whole Bible, Genesis 1-3, as weighty indeed. There, basic principles are stated in poetic, theological language, which provide the underpinning for the rest of the Bible. The introduction to the Bible is very clear about our creation as male and female and about marriage between a man and a woman. (Genesis 1:26,27; 2:24,25) When Jesus was pressed about marriage and divorce, He did

not cite Leviticus, but Genesis. (Matthew 19:3-6) And yes, Newsweek, “most of us no longer need Leviticus on haircuts or blood sacrifices...”

3. Newsweek acts as though orthodox believers think all parts of the Bible are prescriptive and that we should govern our lives today by say, Leviticus. But much of the Bible story is descriptive, rather than prescriptive. The biblical stories of ancient people are mostly mirrors, not models. They help us see what we humans are like. Thus, to stipulate that because biblical people lived in polygamy, the Bible teaches this is the way to structure marriage does not follow.
4. Newsweek does what it critiques Fundamentalists for doing, that is, cites verses here and there with little concern for context and thoughtful interpretation.
5. Newsweek sounds as though the real reason for continuing to understand marriage as between a man and a woman is traditional animosity to homosexuals. And, as Newsweek would imply, everyone knows you can't put much stock in tradition.

Is it not possible in the current conversation about same-sex unions to respectfully accept legitimate differences, honestly valuing opinions which are different than ours?

Is it not possible to accept that some of us, while loving and honoring all people, straight and gay alike, will simply not come to the same conclusion regarding the sacrament of marriage?

Is it not possible to recognize that the Bible is the church's own sacred book to be read, interpreted, and understood in the light of the church's own historical insights, rather than quoted glibly by liberals or conservatives to mean whatever people want it to mean? As one of our own theologians puts it, “the decisions of biblical interpretation on doctrine and practice must be made by the church... They are the ones responsible for articulating the church's interpretation of Scripture—not Newsweek reporters!”

What do you think?

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