

Theology and same-sex marriage

By [Dennis Sanders](#)

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In a few weeks, my partner Daniel and I will celebrate five years of marriage. Since we live in Minnesota, where same-sex marriage is not legal, it was not something recognized by the state. But our marriage, our joining together, was blessed by the church. We had our ceremony at an Episcopal church in the southern Twin Cities suburbs.

As Minnesota gears up for a vote on the state limiting marriage to just between a man and a woman, I've been thinking about same-sex marriage and marriage in general. What is the theology behind it? Is there one? I know that conservatives will say that heterosexual marriage is ordained by God and liberals will talk about same sex marriage with talk of equality and love, but frankly none that really satisfies me. What does it mean for two people, regardless if they are same sex or traditional, to come before God and the gathered community to have their union blessed? Is it important to be married? Why is infidelity wrong within a marriage?

I don't think the church has done a good job of figuring this out. We haven't done it with heterosexual marriage and we seem to be doing the same thing when it comes to same-sex marriage. As followers of Christ, what does it mean to be married, especially in a culture where marriage seems to not be taken so seriously?

[An Episcopalian](#) has written a blog post where he tries to talk about marriage in the context of the church and what this all means, especially when it comes to same-sex couples. He writes it as a response to a Catholic friend. Here's a little snippet:

“And the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.’ -Genesis 2

This seems exceedingly clear to me. Many people have made the argument that men should be with women and vice versa. It's terribly important to separate out the arguments here.

1) It is not good that the (human) should be alone. ["Adam" is not yet gendered at this point in the Hebrew Scriptures.] I believe this in my heart of hearts.

We are all called to live in society. It would be placing unreasonable burdens on the people to block them from forming loving relationships. We should – of course – test everything to see if it really manifests the gifts of love in society. This applies to marriage, friendship, monastic communities, even states.

2) The Bible does not say every man should have a wife. Marriage and procreation are wonderful blessings, but the idea that every man should have a wife and every woman a husband is an import from other forms of philosophy. Indeed tradition is abundantly clear in the examples of Jesus, Paul, and countless saints. There seems to be a strange notion that procreation is an obligation in Christianity. It is in Judaism, but Jesus and Paul both argue for celibacy (vowed singleness). Modern thinkers have argued that “biology is destiny.” We’re built that way. As an evolutionary biologist, let me say that we are also built for promiscuity, selfishness, and greed. Christian testimony has been unequivocal on this; we are more than our bodies. Whether you say, “biology is destiny” or “natural complementarity” or “the design of our bodies” you have made a profoundly anti-Christian argument.

3) Not all people are called to celibacy (I Cor 7:8-9). This has never been about whether a woman should find another woman to marry or find a man. It is a question of pastoral advice for her. If she has no romantic, emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual attraction to men, should she live alone, or do we give her an option for an intimate relationship with another woman. Can a pastor bless and advise a same-gender romantic relationship? The church has said yes. In the Anglican Tradition, we say “all may, some should, none must.” Many relationships, both heterosexual and homosexual are unhealthy. Some heterosexual relationships are healthy. The church has said to priests, if you believe (with due reverence, prayer, and study) that a particular same-sex couple has a healthy relationship – you may bless and advise that relationship.

At some point the church needs to have a discussion about what marriage means to Christians. Not simply who can get married, but why marriage matters. It’s not the

only way for Christians, but it has to have some sort of meaning more than what the wider society bestows upon it.

What is the theology of marriage?

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