

# Ask The Pastor



*Question: Does Jesus say anything about same-sex marriage and how do we respond?*

This should be a very simple question to answer. Did Jesus say anything about same-sex marriage? No, he did not. But does his silence mean something? Some affirming scholars say this means Jesus is not that concerned with same-sex marriage. But is that totally correct? I mean there are plenty of things that Jesus did not talk about. We can get in trouble by guessing what Jesus may think due to his silence. But here is what we do know. Jesus was a Jew, and a very devout Jew. We know that for 500 years before Jesus and 500 years after Jesus, same-sex behavior was condemned. Jewish leaders condemned pederasty, same-sex relations whether it was men or women, and same-sex marriages. Perhaps Jesus never said anything about it because it was not accepted at all in the Jewish culture. But Jesus did talk about marriage, in a way.

## **MARK 10:2-9**

When some Pharisees questioned Jesus about divorce, Jesus replied, “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh.”

Now, keep in mind that Jesus is talking about divorce, not same-sex relations. And the Pharisees that were asking were trying to trap him. Remember, there were different types of Jewish leaders, some more progressive and some more conservative. Sound familiar? But here is what is interesting about how Jesus responds. First, he said it was because their hearts were hard that Moses even wrote about divorce. Jesus lines himself with the most conservative group and even indicates that divorce was not even God’s intent.

Jesus quotes two parts of Scripture. He quotes part of Genesis 1:27 when he says, “God made them male and female”. Then He quotes Genesis 2:24, “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” Talking about divorce, Jesus did not even need to mention Genesis 1:27, the other verse would be sufficient. Yet, Jesus did mention that God made them male and female. Maybe he was making a point that men and women are on an equal status. But we don’t know that either. If sexual difference is irrelevant, then why did Jesus mention it? Could it be that Jesus is reminding us that God created man and woman for each other? But here again,

we can't really begin to think we know for sure what Jesus was thinking and what He would say.

### ***So, how do we respond?***

I think that most people who know me pretty much gets that I believe marriage is between a man and a woman. When I look at Scripture, and our Judeo-Christian heritage, that belief is confirmed for me. And I believe that Jesus probably had a strict ethic in general. He does with divorce and adultery (Matt. 5:28). And if you read the whole Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), it is demanding. You may think differently, and that is fine with me. But here is what I also see with Jesus. Jesus always led with this radical love. He didn't ask the Roman centurion what his stand was on violence. He didn't tell Matthew and Zacchaeus about how despised they were for being tax collectors. If you remember, the religious folks always got mad when Jesus befriended people they thought were sinners. Jesus had this radical love without affirming that which was not what God originally intended. Here is what Jesus knew, we are broken people in need of His grace. I wonder if we have all hardened our hearts some, so we want what we want and not what God desires. Like the different types of Pharisees, we find ourselves in conflict with each other.

This is what frustrates me about what is happening in our denomination. For the past several years, our Episcopal leader would in essence say that people who do not affirm same-sex marriage and the ordination of self-professing homosexuals are not loving people. I would agree that this may be true of some. Many have hidden behind the Bible as a reason not to love and accept, but to judge and condemn. But not everyone is like that. Many who are opposed to changing the language in our Book of Discipline view marriage as I do and are simply trying to be true to that. But even when we look at Scriptural authority and hold to our convictions, this should not be a litmus test for loving people. So, let me challenge those with beliefs like mine. What are you doing to show the love of Christ to others? In our context, do you see someone as one of our "gay" members or do you seek to be in community with each other? Who have you gone out of your way to get to know? Jesus saw the humanity first and I would encourage you to do so also. That is the radical love that Jesus showed.

The opposite is true also. There are those who think that we love others even if that means ignoring or diminishing what Scriptural truth and tradition have shown us for centuries now. Our denomination has almost made it a "truth vs love" issue when it should be a "truth and love" issue. So let me challenge those with affirming beliefs also. Can you accept that others may not agree with same-sex relations and marriage but still love you and want to be in community together with you? Who have you gone out of your way to get to know? Yes, Jesus saw the humanity first, but he also never lost sight of the truth of God's intent. That is the radical love that Jesus showed. And that is true where we are traditional or affirming.