

A message from the Senior Pastor of Crossway Baptist Church, Dale Stephenson, regarding the same sex marriage postal vote.

Australians will shortly be given the opportunity to participate in the postal vote about whether we ought to change the definition of marriage to include the unions of same sex couples. I encourage everyone to participate in this process.

There have been few, if any, more divisive issues for Australian society in my lifetime than the same sex marriage debate. Some voices from both the 'Yes' and 'No' camps have been extremely ungracious in their tone and content and I encourage a gracious and loving tone from both sides. Good people have drawn divergent conclusions on this matter and neither side deserves to be demonised for the conclusions that they have reached. In this process much harm has been done to vulnerable people on both sides, especially to young people struggling with their sexual identity, and pejorative comments do little to advance either perspective.

As best as I can understand the Bible and from my Christian faith, I believe that marriage is between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. This definition of marriage has served our Australian society well historically. Jesus said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh." The Apostle Paul wrote to a Roman audience, who had same sex marriage and casual same sex unions, expressing that this was not the Christian way. The major world faiths of Islam, Judaism, Christianity and Indigenous cultures all affirm marriage as between men and women.

It is also worth us realising that the very nature of law is to define inclusion and exclusion. A line is drawn and certain relationships are not called 'marriage' even though they have the right to exist and even be celebrated by portions of society. For example, three people cannot experience marriage equality because by definition marriage is only for two. Some relationships between consenting adults cannot be recognised as marriage because the parties are too closely related. If either person is too young it cannot be called marriage. The definition by law excludes some relationships because that is what law does.

I have serious concerns about the impact on freedom of speech and freedom of religion in Australia implicit in the proposed redefinition of marriage. We are a richer society as a result of our capacity to speak freely and exercise our faith convictions freely even though this inevitably causes friction across the board. In countries that have redefined marriage to include same sex unions the law has been used coercively against people of faith and against people's conviction on these matters. This is not conducive to a free society.

Jesus told us we are to love our neighbours as ourselves, love even those who hate us, pray for those who persecute us and bless them. I take these words to heart and it is with love and respect that I uphold Crossway's official position in support of the traditional definition of marriage.

Dale Stephenson  
Senior Pastor

Crossway Baptist Church