

Opinion: Finding flaws with opposing gay marriage

By Jonathan Dudley

When I was earning my master's degree in divinity at Yale, I never thought that years later, I'd be cheering the legalization of gay marriage in the state of New York. Still, while I was at Yale, I began to see an interesting pattern in some of the biblical passages I was analyzing.

Many conservatives use the Bible as a definitive source for why gays shouldn't be afforded the right to marry. The problem is that there is very little in the Bible about same-sex pairings, and what's there can easily be interpreted in multiple ways.

My point is that the biblical prop that politicians use to condemn gays is an illusion as are other elements of their arguments. My arguments, backed by research, undermine the basis for the far right's objection to gays in America.

If the goal is legislation that both preserves marriage and reflects the Bible's teaching, it is far easier to argue that divorce should be illegal than it is to condemn gay marriage. Although the New Testament only contains one uncontested reference to same-sex pairings, divorce is condemned throughout the New Testament, both by Jesus and the Apostle Paul. What's more, the growing prevalence of divorce poses a far more credible threat to the culture of marriage in America than does the prospect of gay people marrying each other. In today's America, the divorce rate for new married couples is 50 percent.

As gay marriage is still outlawed by the Defense of Marriage Act, we can't blame the divorce rate on gay marriage. That figure is due to the dissolution of heterosexual marriages.

A growing number of theologians and young evangelicals have realized the Bible doesn't require Christians to condemn gay rights. In fact, there is a growing movement that supports the idea that some of the translations and interpretations of passages in contemporary Bibles are errant, and also that the Bible even provides fodder for supporting gay marriage.

The community of evangelical biblical scholars, almost exclusively white heterosexual men, has a history of producing interpretations of the Bible that reflects its own interests and disadvantages those without power. The same leaders that insist on the most rigorous, stringent reading possible on homosexuality have come up with all sorts of nuances and complicating considerations to justify leniency for themselves when it comes to more obvious biblical condemnations of divorce. So, why is it that same-sex relationships don't get the same treatment?

The reason is because it doesn't serve anyone involved with interpreting the Bible for the purposes of creating modern religious canon.

The same community that insists on "the traditional reading" of the Bible on homosexual relationships has embraced tendentious, historically recent interpretations claiming the Bible says life begins at conception. And the same intellectual habits and social structures that led yesterday's white evangelical community to ignore the civil rights movement, oppose the feminist movement, and drag its feet for far too long in the face of environmental destruction are still in place today – and they shape how evangelical leaders are thinking about homosexuality. In reality, the older generation's opposition to gay marriage tells us more about their allegiance to social conservatism than it does about their allegiance to the Bible.

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