

Yes or No? The Marriage Referendum

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[0 : 00] define marriage as between one man and one woman, it is assumed and implied. So Article 41.3 reads from our Constitution, the state pledges to guard with special care the institution of marriage on which the family is founded and to protect it against attack.

In fact, our laws that we have within our country define marriage as between one man and one woman and this has been reflected in legislation.

However, according to the chairperson of the Referendum Commission, Mr Justice Kevin Cross, he says it's not going to change anything.

All it means is marriage is, and his words, broadened to include two people of the same sex. So it doesn't change marriage.

All we're doing is broadening marriage so that it includes two people of the same sex. So it will mean primarily two things.

[1 : 09] First, that two people of the same sex will be able to marry each other, just as two people of the opposite sex may marry. And secondly, these are the two primary things, a married couple of the opposite sex or of the same sex will be recognized as family and be entitled to the constitutional protection for families.

Now, all the main political parties and the majority of the independents are campaigning for a yes vote because they claim it's all about equality and rights.

So listen to what Ender Kenny said at the Fine Gael Ard Fesh some time ago. Quote, As we approach the centenary of the rising, a yes vote would, I believe, send out a powerful signal internationally that Ireland has evolved into a fair, compassionate and tolerant nation.

I believe that this is the right thing to do. I and the Fine Gael party strongly support a yes vote. And therefore I say to all same-sex couples in our country, this is about you.

It's about your right to say two small words made up of three simple letters, I do. Now this week, if you've been paying attention to the news, former President Mary McAleese gave her views as well.

[2 : 45] She said this, We want to be a human rights issue. We want them to be born into a world where if they fall in love with someone, they can express that love fully.

We believe it to be a human rights issue. Now I think we all want a fair and compassionate Ireland. We all want to be treated with equality regardless of our gender.

We want the rights of all people protected, whatever their orientation may be. So is it not right and fair and compassionate to recognise the unique relationship between a man and a woman?

Wouldn't it be a tolerant society to protect the marriage institution on which the family is founded?

You see, while every relationship, or while every person, we'll go back one, that's not right, while every person should be treated with equality, not every relationship has the same equality.

Okay? Every person should be treated with equality, but not every relationship has the same equality. So let me explain. The relationship between a brother and a sister is different to the relationship of a son and his mother.

[4 : 17] And that is different, again, to the relationship between a husband and a wife. Each individual in those relationships has equal value and worth.

But the relationships themselves are not equal. They're different. Each relationship needs to be treated differently and we have laws to protect those relationships.

You see, the marriage relationship of one man and one woman is unique. Only one man and one woman can make new life.

Only one man and one woman can give a child a mum and a dad. No two men or two women are ever able to do this.

So in this referendum, we are talking about two very different kinds of relationships. Therefore, I think it would be very wrong to treat them as exactly the same.

[5 : 17] In fact, if we are to say it's all about rights and equality, then why not allow two sisters to marry? Or why don't we allow polygamy?

Or why not legislate for open marriages where you can go from one to the other? Why don't we just broaden the definition of marriage to include what...

Well, you fill in the blank. You decide what is right for you in terms of marriage. The point is, marriage is a unique relationship and it should be treated and protected as such.

Now, as the referendum gets closer, each side of the campaign are playing what we call the rights card. Everybody's saying it's this right or that right.

But I want to ask us all this morning, who ultimately decides what is right? Is it our laws? Is it our politicians who say what is right?

[6 : 21] Or is it what the outcome of the referendum says is right? The majority of people, will they decide what is right? Well, ultimately for me, and it should be the same for you if you are a Christian, it's not what I think is right or what you think is right.

But ultimately, it's what God's word says is right. That is where our authority comes from. That is where we must submit ourselves to.

And that's to where we're going to turn right now. We're going to look at two big questions or two big statements. Here's the first one. What has Jesus to say about same-sex marriage?

What does Jesus have to say? Not what I say, not what politicians say. What does Jesus say? So, what does he have to say? Well, nothing.

Jesus mentions or never mentions same-sex marriage. But, he does have something to say about sex and marriage.

[7 : 32] What does he have to say? Well, listen. First, sexual immorality. Have a look at Matthew chapter 15. Matthew chapter 15. We're going to be looking at a few different chapters in Matthew.

So, if you've got your Bibles there, please open to Matthew chapter 15. And I encourage you to take down any notes or any questions.

And if there's anything you want to talk about afterwards or raise on Wednesday, that would be a great time to do it. So, Matthew 15 verse 18. Familiar words?

Matthew 15 verse 18. Now, here Jesus is talking about the different behaviours that make us unacceptable before God.

Now, here Jesus is talking about the different behaviours that make us unacceptable before God.

[8 : 49] And the phrase there in the middle, sexual immorality is a catch-all term for any distortion on God's design for sex.

So, it includes things like pornography, adultery, premarital sex, prostitution, same-sex, or any distortion or forced sex within heterosexual marriage.

So, in one statement, Jesus is saying, we are all sexually flawed.

Every single one of us. But notice, he's not just talking about sexual immorality. He includes things like evil thoughts, slander, false testimony.

In other words, Jesus is setting a standard before every single person that we all fail to achieve, married or not.

[9 : 50] You see, it's not just the area of marriage that we need to get right. Jesus is saying, it's actually bigger than that. What we need to get right is our whole life.

We need to get our hearts right. Look at verse 19. For it's out of the heart that come all of these things. So, it's not just about defining marriage.

Jesus is saying, it's much bigger. We need to get our hearts in order. But Jesus does have something to say about marriage.

Have a look at Matthew 19. Matthew 19. And verse 3.

Matthew 19, verse 3. Some Pharisees came. They were coming to trick Jesus. So, some Pharisees came to him to test him.

[10 : 57] They asked, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason? So, the Jews at the time had an understanding that a husband could actually divorce his wife for very petty things like not producing a good dinner.

That was the way their laws worked. So, verse 4. Haven't you read? He replied that at the beginning the creator made them male and female and said, for this reason a man will leave his

father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. So, they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate. Now, the primary issue here is about divorce. That's what the question is. But as Jesus addresses it, he defines clearly what marriage is. So, three things under this. First, we see that marriage is initiated and provided by God. So, look at verse 4. Jesus takes us right back to the beginning. He says, haven't you read, he replied, that at the beginning the creator. He takes us right back to Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 which he quotes from. [12:15] So, he's saying right up front, marriage is not man's idea. It's the creator's idea. Marriage is a gift from God to people.

It's not something that we invent and that we decide what's right or what's wrong. It's something initiated and provided for by God. Second thing, marriage, he says, is the union of one man and one woman. So, let's read verse 4 again. He says, at the beginning the creator made them male and female and said, for this reason a man will leave his father and mother. And be united to his wife and they will become one flesh. So, marriage is about one male and one female. They leave their father a male and they leave their mother a female and they become one flesh.

It's two people of the opposite sex that define marriage. Now, the fact that we are created as men or as women means we have this relationship called marriage. [13:24] Marriage exists because we are sexually different. Because we are made differently, we have the marriage institution. So, marriage is clearly defined by the union of one man and one woman.

The third thing under this that Jesus has to say is that the only alternative to heterosexual marriage is singleness.

The only alternative to heterosexual marriage is singleness. So, as Jesus goes on to talk with the Pharisees about what it is to be faithful, what it is to live in a lifelong committed marriage relationships, it makes the disciples a little bit uneasy about marriage. So, look what they have to say in verse 10. The disciples said to him, if this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry. In other words, the standard that Jesus sets is so high, he said, what if we can't actually live up to this standard? Then what are we to do? So, look how Jesus answers. He starts talking about celibacy or singleness. So, verse 11.

[14:40] Jesus replied, Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs or some are celibate, because they were born that way.

Others were made that way by men. Others have renounced marriage. In other words, Jesus is saying, if we are not in a heterosexual marriage, the only alternative to that is singleness. Jesus doesn't say to the disciples, look, if that marriage doesn't work out with that person and it's not going so well, well, you can go and marry somebody else. Or he doesn't say, if your orientation is same-sex attraction, then go find somebody of the same sex and marry them. No, he doesn't say any of that. He says, look, singleness is the only godly alternative to heterosexual marriage. So, Jesus does have something to say about sex and marriage, and it challenges every single one of us.

It's not just about same-sex marriage. It's not just about heterosexual marriage. It's much deeper than that. It's about our sexuality, and as we have seen from Matthew 15, we are all sexually flawed.

[16:04] None of us live life as God intends. Every one of us, whether we identify as gay or straight, whether we are married or single, we all need God to change our hearts on the inside, to clean us up, so that we live life His way.

But Jesus says something else about marriage that is more important than the marriage relationships that we may find in this life.

This is the third thing He says about marriage. Have a look at Matthew chapter 22. Matthew 22. Here's another group of religious leaders. We have the Pharisees, and here's the Sadducees. If you want to know the difference about them, you can ask me afterwards. And here they're trying to catch Jesus out with another question.

And they're asking about, well, what about marriage in heaven, or what about marriage in the afterlife? What about that? So, Matthew chapter 22, verse 24. They come up with this scenario. [17:20] Teacher, they said, verse 24, Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him.

Now, they say, there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother.

The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died.

Now then, here's the question. So, she's married seven times to seven different people. They're all brothers. Now then, at the resurrection, at the end of life, whose wife will she be of the seven since all of them were married to her?

Hmm, good question. Will she have seven husbands in heaven? Or does she just have one? And which one is she going to pick? What's the answer going to be?

[18:23] Well, look what Jesus says, verse 29. Jesus replied, You are in error because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God.

At the resurrection, at the end of time, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage. Look, says Jesus, there's something that is much more important than marriage in this life.

In fact, our married relationships are all temporary. What's important is not whether we marry, but what we will be like.

Look at the end of verse 30. He says they'll neither marry nor be given in marriage. They will be like the angels in heaven. That is, we will become pure.

However, the intimacy and joy of human relationships will be replaced by a new kind of relationship, an ultimate relationship with God that the angels now enjoy with God in heaven.

[19:40] That is what's important. Verse 31. But he continues, but about the resurrection of the dead. Have you not read what God said to you?

I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. Jesus is reminding them that God is the one who enters into a permanent, faithful covenant with his people.

That quote there in verse 32 is this covenant God who comes to his people who said, I am the God of Abraham. I am the eternal, living God who enters into a relationship with my people, into that ultimate married relationship.

You see, the problem with this marriage referendum is it's so short-sighted. It's not about same-sex marriage.

It's not about heterosexual marriage. It's about eternity. It's about the ultimate, eternal marriage between God and his people.

[20:52] That's where every marriage is headed. So the question is, not what our view of marriage, but am I, and are you, are we ready to meet God?

we can have marriage right, we can have our definition right, but are our hearts right?

That's the real issue. You see, the big thing, if we can just take this away, is that Jesus has been saying through these different passages we've looked at so far, listen, we are all sexually flawed.

Our hearts are all broken. But get this, we are so loved, we are infinitely loved by God. So much so that he sent his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave up all of his rights.

The only one who did have rights. He gave up all of his rights to come and serve people like you and me, to take on all our impurities, to become and to be treated as if he was sexually flawed, so that we might have his purity be accepted and welcomed into the ultimate marriage relationship with God, to know him and enjoy him.

[22:18] That's the big issue. And we can go on and on about defining and saying, get this, get this, but as Christian people, our role is to point towards Jesus and the relationship that we can have with him and what it means to live life under him.

So that's what Jesus has to say about same-sex marriage. The second thing that we're going to look at is what Jesus has to say about children's rights.

You see, in this referendum, it's not just about adults saying, it's my right to get married. It's about the rights of children or perhaps ignoring the rights of children.

Have a look back at Matthew 19. Matthew 19 and verse 13. So this comes just after the teaching on marriage that we looked at just a moment ago.

And in Matthew 19 verse 13 we read this, Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them.

[23 : 39] But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Now, we might get a bit surprised there at the reaction of the disciples. Why are the disciples telling all the parents who are bringing all the children, take them away?

You shouldn't be here is basically what's going on. We don't want any kids around here. Why would the disciples react like this?

Well, we must remember that children in the first century had no rights or status. At very best, they were to be seen and not heard.

In fact, under Roman law, a father had the right to kill his child if they displeased him or were unwanted. So children in the first century were legally sold and used as slaves.

That was allowed to happen. That was in the laws. So children had no rights and they had no laws to protect them. So the disciples at this point are expressing something of the culture that has begun to shape them.

[24 : 47] It's wrong, but they're only expressing what they have been shaped by. Jesus, however, challenges and confronts the culture of the day.

So look at verse 14. Jesus said, Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.

Jesus is making a bold statement to the culture and the people of his time. Children are of equal value and worth. They are welcomed and accepted.

And we have to change it is what he is saying. And it was because of that very teaching of Jesus that the Christian community in the first century were the first people who were known for rescuing and protecting vulnerable children and adopting them into their own families.

They would make it their business to go and take the children that the Roman fathers would want to get rid of and take them in. And it's this teaching that has shaped many of our laws since.

[25 : 59] Interestingly, our Minister for Health, Leo Varadkar, although this is speaking back in 2010, who has since identified himself as gay, said this.

He says, Every child has the right to a mother and father and as much as possible the state should vindicate that right. That is a more important right than that of two men or two women having a family.

That is the principle that should underline our laws regarding children and adoption. So the rights of children matter.

In fact, they have a right to a mum and dad. You see, the teaching of Jesus is affirmed and built upon as you go through the New Testament.

The Apostle Paul consistently writes about children's relationship to a mother and father. In Ephesians chapter 6, have a look there if you like, Ephesians chapter 6 verses 1 to 3.

[27 : 01] Ephesians 6 verses 1 to 3. So this is all being built upon what Jesus has said, what Jesus had built upon from what God had said in the Old Testament.

So chapter 6 verse 1. Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Well, who are the parents?

Verse 2, honour your father and mother which is the first commandment and it has a promise. And here's the promise, that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

Now isn't it interesting you're saying, look, there's a design here. This is what family life is to be like. Children in a family as far as possible with a mum and dad.

Why? Because it's going to be best for them. You see, a family consisting of a mum and dad is the best environment for a child to be raised. UNICEF, the worldwide organisation protecting the rights of children, make it abundantly clear what is best for the development and care of children.

[28 : 21] and this comes from their early childhood development studies. Child development, they say, is largely influenced by the family structure in which a child is raised.

Children living without their mothers or fathers or without both biological parents are at special risk of being denied the care they need for their physical and psychological well-being.

So it's not just a biblical idea, it's seen in practice that that's what's right and what's best. Biological parents are the best.

But let's be real about this. Sometimes our biological parents are not always the best parents and sometimes they're not always able to care for their children.

So sometimes it is best and loving for those children to be cared for and to be provided for by another family. But that should, as far as possible, be a mum and a dad.

[29 : 26] Because if we get it wrong, then it leads to all kinds of terrible experiences. Listen to this.

This past week an actress in England told of her experience being raised by her biological mother and her mum's gay partner. This is what she said, far from being a healthy, nurturing state of affairs, this arrangement where I was caught in a destructive, triangular battle for my mother's affection with another woman while forced to watch helplessly as my father was emasculated and airbrushed from our lives was simultaneously damaging and confusing.

So that is the experience of one child in the home that they were raised. But the implications are further. A website that I encourage you to look up and check out, Mothers and Fathers Matter. It's an organisation campaigning on the no side and they spell out very clearly what it would mean if the referendum is accepted. It says, the right to found a family will become a constitutional right of any two men or two women.

What will that mean? Well, for two men they will be legally entitled to seek out a surrogate. Two women on the other side will have the legal right to seek a sperm donation and create a child.

[30 : 55] That means the child themselves, the child who is born will have zero identifying information until they reach the years, until they reach 18 years old.

So an entire childhood will have passed before their true identity and genetic heritage can be revealed to them. Now that has medical consequences as well because there may be something hereditary from their biological parents that now they know nothing about because they are now living with somebody else and they can't be told about it.

Not to say anything of the psychological damage that it may cause. Now from my understanding of what all that means is that children just become made to order.

They are not only denied a mother and father, they are denied knowing who their actual biological parents are. So just as Jesus sought to set out at the very beginning the rights of children and to protect them, so we should also be on the side of protecting the rights of children because the unborn can't protect themselves.

So those are the two big things that Jesus has to say about marriage and about the rights of children. So where does this leave us leave us all?

[32 : 24] Well I want to encourage you to vote no. Primarily because of what Jesus has to say about marriage and the rights of children.

But that does not mean by voting no we have to somehow choose between loving and opposing. We mustn't split that. We must do both. love.

And I want to stress this as people. We should be loving to all people and welcoming of all regardless of their relationship status whether they are married or single.

We should be people who are at the forefront of protecting the rights of all people whatever their gender or orientation. it is the Christian community who should be saying you have the right to say what you want to say.

You have the right to freedom of speech and declare what your interests and desires are. That is what we should be protecting and we should do it lovingly but at the same time opposing with gentleness and care any change to God's good design for marriage and the family.

[33 : 41] loving to all but gently opposing any change to God's good design for marriage and family.

Let's pray together. this is the prayer of the apostle Paul.

He says let your conversation be always full of grace seasoned with salt so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Father we ask that for each one of us here that we would be able to clearly explain our reasons but that we would also be able to explain the hope that we have that there is something of far greater significance and consequence than our earthly relationships relationships or our married relationships but the ultimate marriage relationship to come between God and his people in the new heavens and the new earth.

Father would you please forgive us for we are all sexually flawed we have all messed up would you please forgive us would you cleanse us afresh and would you please by the power of your Holy Spirit help us to live life as you call us to protecting every marriage relationship here protecting every family unit here and that together as a church family we would be loving and caring and

welcoming of all who would come we pray that you would help us to do this well in Jesus name we ask amen