This file contains the following articles, all of which are required readings:

- McKinnon, “The Pros and Cons of Gay Marriage” Associated Content online (www.associatedcontent.com), 20??
- Unknown, “Should Same-Sex Marriages be Legalized?” Balanced Politics online (www.balancedpolitics.com), 20??
The Pros and Cons of Gay Marriage

An Argumentative Essay

By Ava McKinnon

The issue of gay marriage has been a hotly contended debate in the last few years and has had a significant impact on this past election. The right-wing Christian conservatives insist that homosexuality is morally wrong while gay advocates argue that they deserve the same civil rights that heterosexual couples enjoy. I will discuss the issue of gay marriage from a conservative as well as liberal viewpoint but first we must look at the history of homosexuality in order to be able to understand the controversy behind this debate.

The practice of homosexuality is not one that has recently developed, but rather, it has been around since the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome. Although the term homosexuality did not exist until 1869, the practice of it in ancient cultures was considered be to a normal part of life. Many famous Greek philosophers of the time had male partners as well as their wives. Such men were Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. It was common practice for a male to take on a young boy as his lover until he reached maturity where he would, in turn, take on another young boy as his lover. In Roman society, the emperor himself married his male lover. Likewise, some Native-Americans in North America chose the "Berdache" lifestyle where men dressed as women and dated other men and women dressed as men and dated other women. This practice was less stigmatized because these couples had the appearance of heterosexuality. In many cultures in New Guinea and Africa, it was common practice for men to inseminate young boys at puberty so they could become men in their sexuality. (Mondimore, 1996)

As you can see, the practice of homosexuality has not always been stigmatized but rather, has been widely accepted in many cultures as a normal part of life. So when did it become so stigmatized? Many other countries in the world such as the Netherlands, Canada, Norway, and Denmark have already legalized same-sex marriages. One of the most prominent reasons for the stigmatizing of gay and lesbian relationships is fear. The heterosexual world does not understand this practice and so are afraid of the effects the change might have.

Opponents of same-sex marriage seem to be winning the battle, at least for now. Preliminary rulings in the '90s in Hawaii and Alaska, seemed to legalize a ban on same-sex marriage, however, ratification of state constitutional amendments to ban same-sex marriage ended the short-term victory. (http://www.aclusandiego.org/samesex.htm) In 1996, President Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) which declared that states did not have to recognize any same-sex marriages that may be legalized in other states and defined marriage as between one man and one woman, effectively eliminating any federal benefits for homosexual couples. (Issues, 2004) The final blow came during the hard fought election 2004. 13 states passed constitutional amendments banning gay marriage and nine out of these 13 also banned other forms of partner recognition. (www.thetaskforce.org) It seems as though gay rights groups are losing the battle.

While the gay movement has lost some hard battles they have also had their share of victories. With Vermont allowing civil unions in 1999 and the temporary issuance of marriage licenses in California, New Mexico, and New York in 2004, the move toward gay marriage seems to be picking up. The first major victory was the decision in Massachusetts in February of 2004 to legalize same-sex marriage. Massachusetts is the first state in the U.S. to legalize same-sex marriage, giving hope to gay rights advocates all over the U.S. In a March 14th court decision in California, a San Francisco County Superior Court Judge ruled that ""while withholding marriage licenses from gays and lesbians has been the status quo, it constitutes discrimination the state can no longer justify." (The Muskegon Chronicle, 3/15/05) This is another important decision in the fight for gay marriage equality.

Advocates of same-sex marriage say that denying them the right to marry is to deny them their basic civil rights. By denying them legal status, they are denied access to state as well as federal benefits such as healthcare, hospital visitation rights, social security benefits, and joint taxes. Gay and lesbian couples do not just want the benefits of marriage; they also want the recognition of their love that only a marriage can give. Opponents state that homosexual relationships are inherently unstable due to promiscuity so allowing them to marry would not only increase the divorce rate, but also, ruin the long tradition and honor of the institution of marriage. Advocates counter that argument by stating that allowing them to marry would strengthen their relationships and provide them with legal and economic security. (Issues, 2004)

Opponents also argue that the purpose of marriage is procreation. Since homosexuals are unable to procreate they should not be allowed to marry. Similarly, opponents argue that homosexuals are not fit to be parents even if they adopt and that a traditional heterosexual household is the best in which to raise children. They believe that because homosexual relationships are so unstable they cannot provide children with the security they need. Supporters say that studies have shown that there are no differences between children raised by homosexual couples or heterosexual couples. Furthermore, supporters note that adoption by homosexuals is not only allowed but often encouraged. The states are saying that it is permissible for homosexual couples to adopt children but that they just cannot let them marry. Seems like a contradiction on the state's part. (Issues, 2004)

Opponents of same-sex marriage seem to be concerned about the long tradition of marriage being between a man and a woman. Many opponents of same-sex marriage say that they are not against benefits for same-sex couples but believe the institution of marriage should be reserved for one man and one woman. Otherwise, they argue, it could lead to all sorts of other undesirable marriages such as polygamy, incest, and bestiality. (Seidman, 2003) Proponents argue that legalizing homosexual marriage will have no effect on heterosexual marriage. Married homosexual couples will buy a house, raise their children, and argue over who does the dishes just like heterosexual couples do. Likewise, many religious organizations fear that the legalization will lead to rampant immoral behavior. They say the bible condemns homosexuality and sites Leviticus, 18:22 as its evidence: "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination." (Issues, 2004) Advocates say that Jesus himself has never said anything
against homosexuality.

Similar to the fear of changing the institution of marriage, opponents of same-sex marriage fear the changing of gender roles and a confusion of the biological need for two different sexes. In a homosexual relationship, at times, gender roles either do not exist or are unclear. Each partner takes on a share of the duties, paying no attention to what society deems "woman's work" or masculine tasks. This confusion of traditional gender roles and the biological differences that go with gender, gives the impression that the sexes do not need each other thus threatening the institution of marriage altogether. (Mondimore, 1996)

The institution of marriage has not been unchanged since it was created. Prior to the American Civil War, African-Americans were not allowed to marry at all but gained that right after the war was over. Interracial couples only gained the right to marry in 1967. With the recent court decision in Massachusetts, same-sex couples were allowed to marry. (www.religioustolerance.org) As you can see, the institution of marriage has been steadily changing for over a century and a half so why can't it change a little more to allow all same-sex couples to marry and be recognized all over the United States? When looking into history you can see that every oppressed group, poor white men, blacks, and women, have all eventually achieved their civil rights. It is only a matter of time before homosexual couples gain the right to marry. Until then, this will remain a heated and controversial debate that will rage for years to come. Until then, this will be an issue that will be debated in American public policy, decide the outcome of elections, and be discussed in classrooms all over the United States.

In my opinion, the question to be debated is not whether or not homosexual couples should be able to marry but when. This country is founded upon equality of human beings and should not discriminate on the basis of who you have in your bed at night. Homosexuality is not a choice, it is a natural part of these people and to be able to pursue happiness, as the Declaration of Independence states is a right, you cannot deny who you are. You cannot and should not have to hide who you are in America. It is supposed to be the land of the free, well at least for anyone who sleeps with the opposite sex. The idea that homosexuals are bad parents is ridiculous. From birth I was raised by a homosexual man. While he was living the heterosexual lifestyle until I was 12, he was still, inherently, a homosexual. At age 16 I moved in with him and have been living with him ever since. I am not messed up in any way, I attend school, to go work, and hang out with friends just as any child raised by heterosexuals does. The idea that homosexual couples only raise homosexual children is stupid too, I'm straight, and I know for a fact that heterosexual couples don't only raise heterosexual children! I understand the reasons why some people don't want gays to marry but it is no justification for denying them the same civil rights that heterosexuals enjoy. In America, all men are supposed to be created equal. When that happens, when gays are allowed to marry, when blacks are no longer discriminated against, and when women make the same amount of money that men do, then America will truly be the land of the free. Based on the fact that every oppressed group has eventually achieved their civil rights, I believe that eventually homosexual couples will be allowed to marry. Until then, it will be a furious debate between the conservative right and the gay rights advocates.
### Should Same-Sex Marriages be Legalized?

#### In a Nutshell

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#### Overview/Background

Traditionally in this country, marriage has been defined as a religious & legal commitment between a man and woman, as well as the ultimate expression of love. Homosexual relationships are increasingly gaining acceptance in this country; however, these couples have not been permitted to marry. Some states have considered a new form of commitment called a "civil union", which essentially is marriage without using the word "marriage". Many politicians have said they are against gay marriage but think it should be left up to the states to decide. However, the "full faith and credit" clause of the Constitution says that if one state makes a law, other states must recognize it. Thus, if one state allows a gay marriage and that couple moves to another state, the other state must recognize that marriage. This in effect allows one state to make same-sex marriage legal in the entire country. Many politicians are calling for amendments to their state constitution or the U.S. Constitution. Many areas of the country such as San Francisco have performed marriage ceremonies in defiance of the law. Lost in all the legal battles and political maneuvering is the basic question "Should we allow gay couples to legally marry?"

#### Yes
1. Denying them is a violation of religious freedom (civil and religious marriages are two separate institutions). The main reason for denying marriage to gay couples is that all major religions consider homosexuality a sin; however, the First Amendment of the Constitution clearly states that a person's religious views or lack thereof must be protected. Marriage by the state is a secular activity; the government cannot start making laws just because a religion says they should. What's next, should we make taking the Lord's name in vain a criminal activity because Christians consider it a breaking of a commandment?

2. Marriage benefits (such as joint ownership, medical decision-making capacity) should be available to all couples. Marriage is more than a legal status. It affects many things in society such as tax filing status, joint ownership of property, insurance benefits, and agency law. It affects critical medical decisions. For example, if one member of a gay couple that has been together for 20 years gets critically ill, visitation may not even be allowed since the other isn't considered a "spouse or immediate family member". Also, critical medical decisions must often be made when one person is incapacitated; e.g. should a certain surgery be done or not? It is completely unfair to deny these privileges to people because their relationship doesn't fit the state's definition of one.

3. Homosexuality is an accepted lifestyle nowadays with most evidence strongly supporting biological causation. For too long homosexuality has been considered a form of "deviant sexual behavior". Those making these accusations should examine the history books and the psychological research. Throughout our history going all the way back to ancient Greece, homosexual relationships have existed. The term "lesbian" comes from a Greek island called "Lesbos" where many such couples lived. An overwhelming amount of research has been done showing that homosexuality has a biological causation; not a genetic one, but a biological one. The easiest way to think of it is as a hormonal switch that gets thrown one way or the other. And if you think about it, it makes logical sense. Consider many gays and lesbians you've seen. Not always, but many times, secondary sexual characteristics resemble the opposite sex. In other words, homosexual males often have softer voices. Lesbians may have strong cheekbones and a more masculine body shape. It's all affected by those hormone switches. And why would someone choose to be gay. Do people analyze the situation..."Let's see, I can be discriminated against, ridiculed by friends and co-workers, rejected by my family, told I'm going to hell by the church, subjected to beatings by gay bashers...hmmm, sign me up!" Now, there will be odd cases where people experiment with different types of sex, but you can't just teach people to be gay or not gay for a lifetime.

4. Denying these marriages is a form of minority discrimination. America was founded on the concept that the majority should rule, but the rights of minorities should be protected. It is the main reason we have a Bill of Rights as well as anti-slavery and equal protection amendments. Denying marriage to a homosexual couple is no different than denying marriage to Hispanic or black couples.

5. It doesn't hurt society or anyone in particular. A marriage is a relationship between two people. How does it hurt society or people not involved in the marriage? It is a personal commitment that really is no one else's business. Society shouldn't be dictating what two people can or can't do when no one else is hurt in the process. If the church or certain groups disapprove, that's their right, but it isn't their right to stop it.

6. The only thing that should matter in marriage is love. The number one reason that heterosexuals marry is not to establish legal status, allow joint filing of taxes, or protect each other in medical decision-making. They marry because it is the ultimate expression of a person's love for another. Marriage is a commitment that says "I love you so much that I want to live the rest of my life with you. I want to share the ups and downs, forsake all others, and be together until death do us part." Should it matter that the couple doesn't fit into what society is used to? Some people talk about living wills and other legal contracts that can give homosexuals essentially the same rights as a married couple. If that is the case, why don't all heterosexual couples use these legal maneuvers instead of marriage? Just maybe there's something more to it.

http://www.balancedpolitics.org/same_sex_marriages.htm
7. The number of child adoptions should increase since gay couples cannot pro-create (although some might see an increase in gay adoptions as an argument against same-sex marriages). Like any heterosexual couple relationship, a same-sex marriage may fuel the desire for a family. Since gay couples cannot have kids naturally, this will likely increase the desire to adopt. Since there are so many kids around the country in need of adoption, this is a good thing. However, others believe a child reared in a same-sex marriage do not develop ideally. Evidence at this point is inconclusive since same-sex adoptions have yet to become widespread.

8. It encourages people to have strong family values and give up high-risk sexual lifestyles. One of the main arguments against gay marriage is that it would further erode family values; however, the opposite is true. The problems related to sexuality in our society such as STD's stem from carefree, frivolous lifestyles; in other words, having frequent, unprotected sex with many partners. Marriage encourages people to settle down and to give up that type of lifestyle. Married people commit themselves to one partner and work to build a life together. Isn't that the type of behavior we want to encourage?

9. The same financial benefits that apply to man-woman marriages apply to same-sex marriages. In today's economic environment, it often takes two incomes to live. A married couple shares rent, utilities, and other bills, which are often difficult for one person to take on alone. This is especially true if a dependent person is involved such as a child. In addition, a married couple can often financially support each other when times get tough, such as when one of the two is out of work. The other can continue to pay the bills until the unemployed person gets back on his/her feet. Owning a house is often impossible without another person to share the financial burden, and owning a home is not only part of the American dream, it promotes stability and community pride.

No

1. Most religions consider homosexuality a sin. Virtually every religion in the world, including the major ones in this country, consider homosexuality unacceptable. It is offensive and a swipe to the religious freedom of the majority to have to recognize a relationship they consider sinful. The legal system in the United States evolved out of the laws contained in the Bible. We shouldn't go even farther to tear down those laws.

2. It would weaken the definition and respect for the institution of marriage. The 50 percent divorce rate has already weakened the definition of marriage. We shouldn't be taking further steps to define what marriage is. A law allowing gay marriage would increase the number of joke or non-serious marriages, such as a couple of friends who want to save on taxes. Marriage is the most sacred institution in this country, and every society considers it the joining of a man and a woman. It makes biological sense since only a man and woman can pro-create.

3. It would further weaken the traditional family values essential to our society. The building blocks of our society and the thing that makes it strong is the traditional family of man, woman, and children. It is what has sustained us through two world wars, a great depression, and numerous other challenges over the centuries. While friends & lovers come and go, your family is always there. The main reason our culture and values have started to crumble is the weakening of families. Introducing another form of "family" would only make the situation worse.

4. It could provide a slippery slope in the legality of marriage (e.g. having multiple wives or marrying an object could be next). Gay rights activists claim that these marriages should be allowed because it doesn't hurt anyone, but it could start a chain reaction that destroys the whole idea of marriage. If someone wants to marry his dog, why shouldn't he be able to? What if someone wants to marry their brother or parent? What if someone wants to marry their blow-up doll or have 10 wives? Unless we develop some firm definition of what a marriage is, the options are endless. If these options sound absurd, remember that all it takes is a few activist judges to use the statute to open the door. It doesn't matter if 95
percent of the population disagrees with the policy, one judge can interpret the case the way he or she wants and use the doctrine of *stare decisis* to impose a law on everyone. Do you remember how two judges in California recently declared the Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional? If the decision hadn't been overturned, it would have prevented millions of children from being able to say the pledge every morning, despite the fact that 95+ percent of Americans disagreed with the decision.

5. **The gay lifestyle is not something to be encouraged, as a lot of research shows it leads to a much lower life expectancy, psychological disorders, and other problems.** Studies show that homosexuals, for a variety of reasons, have life expectancies of approximately 20 years less than the general population. Just like a lifestyle of smoking, drinking, etc., unhealthy lifestyles should be discouraged.

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Written by: Joe Messerli  
Page Last Updated: 05/24/2009
Our Mutual Joy

Opponents of gay marriage often cite Scripture. But what the Bible teaches about love argues for the other side.

By Lisa Miller

Let’s try for a minute to take the religious conservatives at their word and define marriage as the Bible does. Shall we look to Abraham, the great patriarch, who slept with his servant when he discovered his beloved wife Sarah was infertile? Or to Jacob, who fathered children with four different women (two sisters and their servants)? Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon and the kings of Judah and Israel—all these fathers and heroes were polygamists. The New Testament model of marriage is hardly better. Jesus himself was single and preached an indifference to earthly attachments—especially family. The apostle Paul (also single) regarded marriage as an act of last resort for those unable to contain their animal lust. "It is better to marry than to burn with passion," says the apostle, in one of the most lukewarm endorsements of a treasured institution ever uttered. Would any contemporary heterosexual married couple—who likely woke up on their wedding day harboring some optimistic and newfangled ideas about gender equality and romantic love—turn to the Bible as a how-to script?

Of course not, yet the religious opponents of gay marriage would have it be so.

The battle over gay marriage has been waged for more than a decade, but within the last six months—since California legalized gay marriage and then, with a ballot initiative in November, amended its Constitution to prohibit it—the debate has grown into a full-scale war, with religious-rhetoric slingling to match. Not since 1860, when the country's pulpits were full of preachers pronouncing on slavery, pro and con, has one of our basic social (and economic) institutions been so subject to biblical scrutiny. But whereas in the Civil War the traditionalists had their James Henley Thornwell—and the advocates for change, their Henry Ward Beecher—this time the sides are unevenly matched. All the religious rhetoric, it seems, has been on the side of the gay-marriage opponents, who use Scripture as the foundation for their objections.

The argument goes something like this statement, which the Rev. Richard A. Hunter, a United Methodist minister, gave to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution in June: "The Bible and Jesus define marriage as between one man and one woman. The church cannot condone or bless same-sex marriages because this stands in opposition to Scripture and our tradition."

To which there are two obvious responses: First, while the Bible and Jesus say many important things about love and family, neither explicitly defines marriage as between one man and one woman. And second, as the
The examples above illustrate, no sensible modern person wants marriage—theirs or anyone else's—to look in its particulars anything like what the Bible describes. "Marriage" in America refers to two separate things, a religious institution and a civil one, though it is most often enacted as a messy conflation of the two. As a civil institution, marriage offers practical benefits to both partners: contractual rights having to do with taxes; insurance; the care and custody of children; visitation rights; and inheritance. As a religious institution, marriage offers something else: a commitment of both partners before God to love, honor and cherish each other—in sickness and in health, for richer and poorer—in accordance with God's will. In a religious marriage, two people promise to take care of each other, profoundly, the way they believe God cares for them. Biblical literalists will disagree, but the Bible is a living document, powerful for more than 2,000 years because its truths speak to us even as we change through history. In that light, Scripture gives us no good reason why gays and lesbians should not be (civilly and religiously) married—and a number of excellent reasons why they should.

In the Old Testament, the concept of family is fundamental, but examples of what social conservatives would call "the traditional family" are scarcely to be found. Marriage was critical to the passing along of tradition and history, as well as to maintaining the Jews' precious and fragile monotheism. But as the Barnard University Bible scholar Alan Segal puts it, the arrangement was between "one man and as many women as he could pay for." Social conservatives point to Adam and Eve as evidence for their one man, one woman argument—in particular, this verse from Genesis: "Therefore shall a man leave his mother and father, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh." But as Segal says, if you believe that the Bible was written by men and not handed down in its leather bindings by God, then that verse was written by people for whom polygamy was the way of the world. (The fact that homosexual couples cannot procreate has also been raised as a biblical objection, for didn't God say, "Be fruitful and multiply"? But the Bible authors could never have imagined the brave new world of international adoption and assisted reproductive technology—and besides, heterosexuals who are infertile or past the age of reproducing get married all the time.)

Ozzie and Harriet are nowhere in the New Testament either. The biblical Jesus was—in spite of recent efforts of novelists to paint him otherwise—emphatically unmarried. He preached a radical kind of family, a caring community of believers, whose bond in God superseded all blood ties. Leave your families and follow me, Jesus says in the gospels. There will be no marriage in heaven, he says in Matthew. Jesus never mentions homosexuality, but he roundly condemns divorce (leaving a loophole in some cases for the husbands of unfaithful women).

The apostle Paul echoed the Christian Lord's lack of interest in matters of the flesh. For him, celibacy was the Christian ideal, but family stability was the best alternative. Marry if you must, he told his audiences, but do not get divorced. "To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): a wife must not separate from her husband." It probably goes without saying that the phrase "gay marriage" does not appear in the Bible at all.

If the bible doesn't give abundant examples of traditional marriage, then what are the gay-marriage opponents really exercised about? Well, homosexuality, of course—specifically sex between men. Sex between women has never, even in biblical times, raised as much ire. In its entry on "Homosexual Practices," the Anchor Bible Dictionary notes that nowhere in the Bible do its authors refer to sex between women, "possibly because it did not result in true physical 'union' (by male entry)." The Bible does condemn gay male
sex in a handful of passages. Twice Leviticus refers to sex between men as “an abomination” (King James version), but these are throwaway lines in a peculiar text given over to codes for living in the ancient Jewish world, a text that devotes verse after verse to treatments for leprosy, cleanliness rituals for menstruating women and the correct way to sacrifice a goat—or a lamb or a turtle dove. Most of us no longer heed Leviticus on haircuts or blood sacrifices; our modern understanding of the world has surpassed its prescriptions. Why would we regard its condemnation of homosexuality with more seriousness than we regard its advice, which is far lengthier, on the best price to pay for a slave?

Paul was tough on homosexuality, though recently progressive scholars have argued that his condemnation of men who “were inflamed with lust for one another” (which he calls “a perversion”) is really a critique of the worst kind of wickedness: self-delusion, violence, promiscuity and debauchery. In his book “The Arrogance of Nations,” the scholar Neil Elliott argues that Paul is referring in this famous passage to the depravity of the Roman emperors, the craven habits of Nero and Caligula, a reference his audience would have grasped instantly. “Paul is not talking about what we call homosexuality at all,” Elliott says. “He’s talking about a certain group of people who have done everything in this list. We’re not dealing with anything like gay love or gay marriage. We’re talking about really, really violent people who meet their end and are judged by God.” In any case, one might add, Paul argued more strenuously against divorce—and at least half of the Christians in America disregard that teaching.

Religious objections to gay marriage are rooted not in the Bible at all, then, but in custom and tradition (and, to talk turkey for a minute, a personal discomfort with gay sex that transcends theological argument). Common prayers and rituals reflect our common practice: the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer describes the participants in a marriage as “the man and the woman.” But common practice changes—and for the better, as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “The arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice.” The Bible endorses slavery, a practice that Americans now universally consider shameful and barbaric. It recommends the death penalty for adulterers (and in Leviticus, for men who have sex with men, for that matter). It provides conceptual shelter for anti-Semites. A mature view of scriptural authority requires us, as we have in the past, to move beyond literalism. The Bible was written for a world so unlike our own, it's impossible to apply its rules, at face value, to ours.

Marriage, specifically, has evolved so as to be unrecognizable to the wives of Abraham and Jacob. Monogamy became the norm in the Christian world in the sixth century; husbands’ frequent enjoyment of mistresses and prostitutes became taboo by the beginning of the 20th. (In the NEWSWEEK POLL, 55 percent of respondents said that married heterosexuals who have sex with someone other than their spouses are more morally objectionable than a gay couple in a committed sexual relationship.) By the mid-19th century, U.S. courts were siding with wives who were the victims of domestic violence, and by the 1970s most states had gotten rid of their "head and master" laws, which gave husbands the right to decide where a family would live and whether a wife would be able to take a job. Today's vision of marriage as a union of equal partners, joined in a relationship both romantic and pragmatic, is, by very recent standards, radical, says Stephanie Coontz, author of "Marriage, a History."

Religious wedding ceremonies have already changed to reflect new conceptions of marriage. Remember when we used to say "man and wife" instead of "husband and wife"? Remember when we stopped using the word "obey"? Even Miss Manners, the voice of tradition and reason, approved in 1997 of that change. "It
seems," she wrote, "that dropping 'obey' was a sensible editing of a service that made assumptions about marriage that the society no longer holds."

We cannot look to the Bible as a marriage manual, but we can read it for universal truths as we struggle toward a more just future. The Bible offers inspiration and warning on the subjects of love, marriage, family and community. It speaks eloquently of the crucial role of families in a fair society and the risks we incur to ourselves and our children should we cease trying to bind ourselves together in loving pairs. Gay men like to point to the story of passionate King David and his friend Jonathan, with whom he was "one spirit" and whom he "loved as he loved himself." Conservatives say this is a story about a platonic friendship, but it is also a story about two men who stand up for each other in turbulent times, through violent war and the disapproval of a powerful parent. David rends his clothes at Jonathan's death and, in grieving, writes a song:

_I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother;_
_You were very dear to me._
_Your love for me was wonderful,_
_More wonderful than that of women._

Here, the Bible praises enduring love between men. What Jonathan and David did or did not do in privacy is perhaps best left to history and our own imaginations.

In addition to its praise of friendship and its condemnation of divorce, the Bible gives many examples of marriages that defy convention yet benefit the greater community. The Torah discouraged the ancient Hebrews from marrying outside the tribe, yet Moses himself is married to a foreigner, Zipporah. Queen Esther is married to a non-Jew and, according to legend, saves the Jewish people. Rabbi Arthur Waskow, of the Shalom Center in Philadelphia, believes that Judaism thrives through diversity and inclusion. "I don't think Judaism should or ought to want to leave any portion of the human population outside the religious process," he says. "We should not want to leave [homosexuals] outside the sacred tent." The marriage of Joseph and Mary is also unorthodox (to say the least), a case of an unconventional arrangement accepted by society for the common good. The boy needed two human parents, after all.

In the Christian story, the message of acceptance for all is codified. Jesus reaches out to everyone, especially those on the margins, and brings the whole Christian community into his embrace. The Rev. James Martin, a Jesuit priest and author, cites the story of Jesus revealing himself to the woman at the well— no matter that she had five former husbands and a current boyfriend—as evidence of Christ's all-encompassing love. The great Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann, emeritus professor at Columbia Theological Seminary, quotes the apostle Paul when he looks for biblical support of gay marriage: "There is neither Greek nor Jew, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ." The religious argument for gay marriage, he adds, "is not generally made with reference to particular texts, but with the general conviction that the Bible is bent toward inclusiveness."

The practice of inclusion, even in defiance of social convention, the reaching out to outcasts, the emphasis on togetherness and community over and against chaos, depravity, indifference—all these biblical values argue for gay marriage. If one is for racial equality and the common nature of humanity, then the values of stability, monogamy and family necessarily follow. Terry Davis is the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Hartford,
Conn., and has been presiding over "holy unions" since 1992. "I'm against promiscuity—love ought to be expressed in committed relationships, not through casual sex, and I think the church should recognize the validity of committed same-sex relationships," he says.

Still, very few Jewish or Christian denominations do officially endorse gay marriage, even in the states where it is legal. The practice varies by region, by church or synagogue, even by cleric. More progressive denominations—the United Church of Christ, for example—have agreed to support gay marriage. Other denominations and dioceses will do "holy union" or "blessing" ceremonies, but shy away from the word "marriage" because it is politically explosive. So the frustrating, semantic question remains: should gay people be married in the same, sacramental sense that straight people are? I would argue that they should. If we are all God's children, made in his likeness and image, then to deny access to any sacrament based on sexuality is exactly the same thing as denying it based on skin color—and no serious (or even semiserious) person would argue that. People get married "for their mutual joy," explains the Rev. Chloe Breyer, executive director of the Interfaith Center in New York, quoting the Episcopal marriage ceremony. That's what religious people do: care for each other in spite of difficulty, she adds. In marriage, couples grow closer to God: "Being with one another in community is how you love God. That's what marriage is about."

More basic than theology, though, is human need. We want, as Abraham did, to grow old surrounded by friends and family and to be buried at last peacefully among them. We want, as Jesus taught, to love one another for our own good—and, not to be too grandiose about it, for the good of the world. We want our children to grow up in stable homes. What happens in the bedroom, really, has nothing to do with any of this. My friend the priest James Martin says his favorite Scripture relating to the question of homosexuality is Psalm 139, a song that praises the beauty and imperfection in all of us and that glorifies God's knowledge of our most secret selves: "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." And then he adds that in his heart he believes that if Jesus were alive today, he would reach out especially to the gays and lesbians among us, for "Jesus does not want people to be lonely and sad." Let the priest's prayer be our own.

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*With Sarah Ball and Anne Underwood*

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While opinion polls have consistently shown most Americans in favor of maintaining current marriage laws, two-thirds of high school seniors and a majority of those in their twenties favor gay marriage. The reason for this divergence is clear. There has been less public argument against gay marriage than in favor of it. While older people nonetheless tend to retain an older view of marriage, many young people have concluded that opposition to change merely reflects prejudice or squeamishness. Moreover, the case for gay marriage largely boils down to the simple claim that everybody should be treated the same way. This is always a powerful claim in a democracy, especially among the young. Clearly it’s just a matter of time before gay marriage becomes the law of the land, unless supporters of traditional marriage begin to make their case — and make it well.

Before we rush to radically change an institution as old as our oldest records, or to passively allow such changes to be made for us by lawyers and judges, surely we have an obligation to ourselves and to future generations to seek out and carefully consider all the reasons for marriage as we have received it, under whose success or failure we have been raised, as have our parents and their parents and so on back in time. We have a lot to answer for if we get this wrong; whatever happens, with so much at stake, we want to be able to say that we were not frivolous and that we tried our best to do the right thing.

The most effective advocates of gay marriage have been a small number of self-styled gay conservatives, most prominently Andrew Sullivan, former editor of The New Republic and author of Virtually Normal and other books. While many gay authors treat marriage (and other institutions) with derision, and therefore appeal only to a small audience, Sullivan is in some ways genuinely moderate or conservative, which enables him to speak effectively to a large number of readers. Nonetheless, his argument for gay marriage is neither conservative nor sound.

Sullivan demands “public equality” for homosexuals. He doesn’t seek to outlaw private disapproval or even discrimination; he simply wants homosexuals to receive what he considers equal treatment by the state, including the right to (civil) marriage. He views marriage as a “social and public recognition of private commitment,” and as a contract which constitutes “an emotional, financial, and psychological bond between two people.” In these matters “heterosexuals and homosexuals are identical,” so there is no reason to prevent people of the same sex from marrying.

Sullivan’s case boils down to a demand for equal rights — a liberal argument, which obviously doesn’t in itself mean an inadequate one. Jonathan Rauch, another gay writer on the subject, makes a more conservative case. He argues that if marriage is good both for individuals and for society, as most people think it is, then there is no good reason to prevent gays from marrying.

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The problem is that Rauch and Sullivan both fail to grasp what marriage means in most people’s lives. They are not alone. Marriage is so much a part of our world that we have trouble imagining how things would look without it. Sullivan concedes that some people think marriage “is by definition between a man and a woman,” and rightly adds that “it is difficult to argue with a definition.” However, he doesn’t seriously consider what stands behind this definition, or why people are so attached to it.

For the record, I myself am a gay man, and have been attracted to men for as long as I can remember. Nonetheless, it seems to me undeniable that the potential for reproduction constitutes something unique about the union of one man and one woman. Science may eventually change that; but sexual reproduction is sure to remain the easiest and manifestly most natural way. While many marriages are childless, all marriages are between people who are by nature complementary in this respect.

Sullivan makes much of the fact that a small but significant percentage of marriages are between couples who are infertile, or who choose not to have children. Harsh though it may sound to contemporary ears, however, I think a marriage without children is, all else equal, less of a marriage than a marriage with children. I don’t mean that it isn’t a valid marriage, or a worthwhile one; I simply mean that it isn’t everything we mean by marriage. I think most people feel this way, though many might not say so. We Americans have grown awfully reluctant to make such judgments, even in private. (As the gay marriage debate shows, our reluctance to articulate thoughts or feelings that might be considered undemocratic forces us to risk sacrificing many things.)

More importantly, however, it surely makes a difference that all marriages are between men and women, even if many marriages are childless. Marriage as we know it is bound up with, even a product of, natural sexual differentiation, whose most massive and undeniable feature is the potential for reproduction. This gives rise to a feeling that marriage is part of the natural order, an order bigger than ourselves and our desires. To be sure, widespread divorce has weakened this feeling over the past thirty years; but it remains a powerful force in people’s lives, one that we perhaps take for granted precisely because of its ubiquity. Permitting marriage between people of the same sex would make marriage a different thing — and not a better one.

More than any other institution, marriage provides guidance that helps people live their lives. One need only think of the times in one’s youth when one wondered whom one would eventually marry. (I can attest that even young homosexuals wonder about this — though with a certain ambivalence.) Those youthful daydreams, which are so important in shaping and coloring the rest of one’s life, would not be possible in a world without marriage, and would not even be easy in a world where marriage was merely one choice among many. Our youthful (and not so youthful) daydreams presuppose marriage as a touchstone, a choice which isn’t simply a choice but is somehow the choice: we all must define how we stand in relation to it.

Unlike some conservatives, I don’t think allowing gays to marry would cause many people to view marriage as “just another contract,” similar to buying a car or taking a job. Most people feel that an intimate connection to one other person is an indispensable part of a good life, and I don’t think gay marriage would change that. (Legalized polygamy might be another story, at least after several generations.)

However, disconnecting marriage from procreation would make it seem less bound up with a world larger than we are. Marriage would seem more like a commitment we make, an act of the will, and less like an acceptance of or conformity to the fundamental order of things. Perhaps such a change would, to some extent, constitute greater realism. However, I don’t think it would produce greater happiness, either in itself or in its consequences, which would include people taking their marriages less seriously, considering alternatives more readily when the going gets rough, and seeking guidance more often in desire, whim, and fashion.

Moreover, true conservatives are wary of fundamental changes in laws and institutions, even when those changes are improvements. Humans are not so rational that we can dispense with awe or the sense that some things are greater than human enactment. Sullivan doesn’t exactly ignore this aspect of the issue; rather he makes the surprising claim that “a law institutionalizing gay marriage” would not be a radical change, but would “merely reinforce a healthy trend. Burkean conservatives should warm to the idea.” He sees no important difference between protecting homosexuals from persecution and changing the meaning of marriage.

Any major change in marriage laws would weaken people’s sense of marriage as something slightly awesome that must be accepted or rejected on its own terms. Any such change would encourage us to pay less attention to the demands of marriage and more attention to ourselves, to consider how we might gratify the desires we feel, even to look within ourselves to see what desires we find.

We humans are ambiguous creatures. We are of course unhappy if our desires are thwarted; but we are also unhappy if we have no guidance apart from desire. Our desires themselves need to be guided or informed by a view of what is good, what constitutes happiness. Some desires can lead to happiness, others cannot; distinguishing between the two is sometimes a
delicate task, one at which we all need help, especially when we’re young. No institution informs the desires of most human beings in as profound and salutary a manner as marriage.

Of course marriage in its current form fails to provide such guidance for those who are homosexual. Now there are some people who believe homosexuality to be a mere perversion, akin to bestiality or taking drugs, which can in no way lead to a good life. To such people I can only say that my experience, and that of most gay men I know, is that this attraction is at the core of what we are. (The experience of lesbian women seems somewhat different; their sexuality is perhaps more fluid or socially determined.) Whether or not scientists have “proven” that homosexuality has a natural or genetic basis, those who oppose gay marriage are unwise to base their case on an insistence that it doesn’t. I suppose it’s possible that some subtle observer might understand gay men better than we understand ourselves; but so far this superior understanding has not made itself apparent. Freudian accounts of the emergence of homosexuality offered by self-styled “reparative therapists” are even more convoluted and unconvincing than Freudian accounts of other things.

In my view instituting homosexual marriage would indeed provide guidance to some young homosexuals, and would thereby improve some people’s lives. This is a serious argument; however, I don’t think marriage could be as crucial to us as it is to other people. Marriage has developed over many centuries to meet the needs of heterosexuals. Our needs are somewhat different, and I doubt that marriage is generally the best way to satisfy them. Moreover, gay marriage would inevitably be a kind of imitation. Like most imitations, it couldn’t wholly succeed, and would therefore result in more or less self-conscious parody.

Many gays want the right to marry, without actually wanting to marry. This boils down to a form of “me-too”-ism, a desire to have whatever rights heterosexuals have. Regarding marriage, however, we already have the rights that heterosexuals have: A gay man can marry a woman, a lesbian woman can marry a man. That such marriages would not satisfy us is unfortunate, but also beside the point. The state can go no further without fundamentally changing marriage. Widening marriage to include people of the same sex means stripping it of much of its meaning and diminishing it for everybody. This would have a relatively small effect on the lives of people who are already married, and whose notion of marriage is already largely settled; but it would have a profound effect on future generations of Americans. This, it seems to me, is the most important argument against same-sex marriage. However, as a gay man I must add that there is also legitimate reason for concern on the empirical question of how married gays would behave, with serious consequences for the upbringing of children.

No sensible observer can deny that gay men are generally more promiscuous than heterosexual men. (Believe me, I come to this conclusion reluctantly.) Sullivan and others have suggested that this is because gay men’s couplings are not restrained or civilized by the presence of women, as are those of heterosexual men. Sullivan also hypothesizes that a desire for “anonymous or promiscuous sex” results from the harsh environment which surrounds young homosexuals, including their isolation, secrecy, and fear; the taunting, cruelty, and rejection they endure from classmates; and the hostility of their parents and society. All of that can indeed be expected to produce unhappy results, one of which might be promiscuity in certain individuals; but I doubt that the promiscuity would be so widespread and would continue well after adolescence, in much more lax and tolerant times, and even in the face of a deadly venereal disease, were it not for some strong natural and innate predisposition, taste, and desire.

If allowed to marry, gay men will, I predict, be more adulterous, and more openly adulterous, than heterosexual couples. Gays will separate and divorce more often. Adultery and divorce will become more common than they already are; and in some subtle way the institution of marriage will be further weakened. There is already evidence that should give cause for concern. In Sweden for example, demographers Gunnar Andersson and Turid Noack report that male same-sex partnerships have a 50% higher divorce rate than heterosexual marriages. Female same-sex partnerships have a 170% higher divorce rate. This remains true after controlling for age, education, and other factors. Keep in mind that we’re looking at those most committed to making it succeed, a very small fraction of gays. At any rate, the damage that gay marriage might do in this respect probably won’t occur in the first decade or two. It is precisely once marriage becomes a normal part of gay life that gays will adapt the institution to their own tastes and beliefs. I have nothing against that, except that their example will inevitably influence how marriage is seen by the heterosexual majority.

To be sure, gay marriage wouldn’t be as harmful as polygamous or group marriage. While gay marriage should be opposed on its own terms, it’s hard to see how polygamy won’t eventually follow if gay marriage is established. I realize this suggestion has a ridiculous sound to it (as did gay marriage not long ago); but there are already groups in America supporting polygamy and group marriage, including the American Civil Liberties Union. Believe it or not, since 1991 the position of the ACLU has been that “criminal and civil laws prohibiting or penalizing the practice of plural marriage violate constitutional protections” (national policy no. 91). In other words, the state must treat “plural marriage” no differently than marriage as we know it.

Supporters of polygamy or “plural” marriage view their position as the logical conclusion of supporting gay marriage; and there is evidently something to that. If marriage has no intrinsic
connection to procreation, but simply means two people who love each other, then why not three, or four? On what principled basis does the state reject a definition of marriage embraced by consenting adult citizens, and deny them what their hearts desire? (Similar arguments might also be made on behalf of incestuous marriages.)

To be sure, there are arguments against polygamy apart from those against gay marriage. Feminists oppose it as tending to exploit women, and people who genuinely care about marriage feel that “plural” marriage is a travesty of the core meaning of the institution. If same-sex marriage becomes the law of the land, however, arguments like the latter one will already have taken a beating. On the other side will be the right of individuals to make their own decisions in life, the importance of consent as the bedrock of our democracy, and above all the illegitimacy of judging or discriminating against people who harm nobody and simply wish to pursue happiness where they believe it lies. One can even imagine proponents of polygamy claiming to hold the true “Burkean” position: Polygamy will mean a lower divorce rate and fewer single-parent homes, since many married people (notably mothers with children) will prefer allowing their spouses an additional spouse to seeking divorce, and so on.

My guess is that if gay marriage comes, polygamy will eventually follow. If it does, American life will take a giant step towards the restless and unhappy hedonism that characterized the Roman Empire. Gay marriage by itself would be a smaller step in the same direction.

Congressman Barney Frank has asked what harm it does if he is allowed to marry his boyfriend. This is a reasonable question; the answer is that it would do little harm to those who are already married, but considerable harm to future generations of Americans.

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Endnotes