

# Why I am in favor of conducting same-sex/gender weddings at New Hope Pastor Russ Kane

## Summary:

I believe it is both a consistent and faithful interpretation of the scriptures and God's intention for humanity, to expand the definitions of marriage to include same-sex/gender couples. The reasons I have come to this conclusion are not because...

- It is "politically correct" or culturally driven. This is Douglas County. If I wanted to be politically/culturally correct in Douglas County, I would advocate for a heterosexual-only weddings.
- I don't want to be judgmental: That works on a personal level, not corporate. All groups- including Session define their own boundaries of what is acceptable/unacceptable behavior. That is not being judgmental, that is simply exercising responsible governance.
- I am trying to 'love the sinner and hate the sin.' That is a stance of tolerance and forbearing- generally a good approach for individuals, but it is not my position here.

Rather, I arrived at this conclusion because:

- I don't believe the condemnation of homosexual acts in the Bible are referring to homosexual orientation or a loving committed couple that wants to get married.
- I have come to believe that homosexuality is part of the spectrum of human sexuality that includes about 4% of the population and as such, is not inherently "right" or "wrong". As with heterosexuality, it is part of who we are and the pertinent question is more about the expression of our sexuality within the context of Christian discipleship. I believe that is best done within a covenant relationship.
- I don't believe that that marriage is inherently holy nor that it is made so because of where it takes place, the endorsement of the Church or because of the sex or gender of the couple. It is sacred in that it is a gift of God and an arena in which the love of God is expressed to one another. It is made holy by the way people offer it to God as part of their devotion to God's purposes. For Christians, this means a lifetime of mutual submission that is modelled on the self-giving love of Christ.

## Doesn't this controvert the plain teachings of scripture?

The faithful, consistent reading and interpretation of scripture does not stop with simply reading the text. Faithful reading requires that we go deeper and inquire into the context of the passage: the problems or issues it was meant to address, what was intended and how this fits into the overall witness of scripture. Ultimately, Christians judge an interpretation of scripture by how it aligns with the witness of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Examples where this has been done in the past include:

- Sabbath laws: The teachings and the penalties for violating them, are clear. Even though it is one of the 10 Commandments, most Christians worship on Sunday and feel free to engage in any number of activities on that day that would be in violation of the original commandments.
- Women: They were considered property under the Law and even in New Testament times, were considered the "weaker (subordinate) sex". They were under the authority of their fathers and husbands and their redemption was in their childbearing. All this was considered the plain teaching of scripture with passages backing it all up. Yet the

Presbyterian Church (among others) has seen fit to allow women equal status in all the functions of the church's life and has long been an advocate for women's rights.

- Banking/Borrowing and Credit: Both the OT and the NT (including Jesus) plainly prohibit lending with interest, yet our whole economic system is based on a regulated system of lending with interest (Achtemeier develops this scenario and how it changed in his book).
- Slavery was part of the fabric of the OT and NT world and it was not condemned. A plain reading of scripture would suggest that slavery was endorsed, needing only to be regulated. Paul even commanding slaves to obey their masters. Yet no one today would condone anything but the absolute abolishment of slavery in all its forms- and we would do so as part of our commitment to Christ as attested to in scripture.
- Government: There is no provision for anything but a monarchial form of government in the Bible. The clear teaching in the NT is to honor and obey the king (even as the church was being persecuted by him). Yet that didn't stop our founding fathers and mothers (particularly in the Presbyterian Church) from taking up arms against the King of England to rebel and form a representative democracy.

In all these situations, merely citing the plain teachings of scripture was ultimately not enough to reveal God's intent and will. In each case, the Church needed to interpret the texts in light of the historical context and what they understood to be God's will in light of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. I believe in order to understand the teachings about homosexuality and marriage, we must do the same.

When it comes specifically to teachings about homosexual acts, I believe that what the Bible is condemning and forbidding in both the Old and New Testaments is a perverse expression of sexuality that demeans and objectifies another man. Sometimes it is part of pagan temple practices (which demeans both women and men.) In none of these cases do I believe it addresses the context of a committed, loving covenantal relationship or homosexual orientation, which was simply outside the scope of the foundational assumptions about all sexuality.

The assumptions in the ancient world included:

- Homosexual acts were an expression of unbounded lust and a super-charged libido.
- Homosexual acts degraded men because it put them in the passive/feminine role ("do not lie with a man as with a woman.") This has as much to do with the assumptions about the status of men and women as with sexuality. There is no corresponding commandment against lesbianism in the Old Testament.

These are not that much different than the assumptions that were held about homosexuality even into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Until recently the almost-universal assumptions that were held about homosexuality included:

- It was a behavior that was chosen (there was no understanding of 'orientation' until the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century).
- Homosexuals were depraved and predatory. They would prey on children and youth, and would try to convert others to homosexuality.
- It was at worst a rebellion against God and at best, a symptom of sexual confusion. In the last century, the social sciences began to see it not as a choice but as a mental illness.
- In either case, it could be cured with proper conditioning and treatment.

All of this was simply assumed as true, so of course it was considered to be perverse. There was no understanding of homosexuality as an orientation. There are still some of the residual beliefs connecting homosexuality as a corruption of masculinity. Homosexual men are sometimes identified as such because their actions are “effeminate”, and that is never said as a compliment.

I don't believe past assumptions (ancient and modern) about homosexuality have proved to be true. Homosexual orientation is no more chosen than heterosexual orientation. I believe homosexuality is a natural sexual orientation that seems to include about 4% of the population. As such, homosexuality and homosexual relationships should no longer be evaluated in the category of perverse behavior (which the Bible is always opposed to) but rather in the categories of responsible sexuality and relational integrity.

This is not a rejection of biblical teaching, but recognizing that the assumptions upon which the earlier teachings were based, have changed. Once the foundational assumptions have changed, it is in the best tradition and responsibility of the Church to then rethink how their teachings of the Bible apply. We have done so many times from issues large and small, including:

- Shellfish were labeled an ‘abomination’ in the OT (the same word used for homosexual behavior). They lived in the sea but didn't have fins or scales and so were seen as a violation of the natural order. Science has shown that they are simply a different species than fish and not inherently defective. Most of us therefore, give no thought to eating crab, lobster or shrimp today.
- When science suggested that the earth was not the center of the universe around which everything else rotated, it was considered by many of the time to be a rejection of the clear teachings of the Bible. To speculate a different model of the universe was considered blasphemous, called into question the veracity of the Bible and threatened the foundation of faith. With the continued introduction of new evidence however, a new understanding of the universe developed. The expression of our faith was not undermined by this evidence. It was informed and our understanding of God expanded.

To be clear, I do not think the core teachings of the Bible have changed, but our understanding of homosexuality has. It is therefore appropriate for the teachings of the church to adjust to include homosexuality under an expanded view of normal human sexuality.

**Even if that is true, marriage is meant to be between a man and a woman. Doesn't allowing same-sex weddings and marriages violate the sanctity of marriage?**

I believe that puts the emphasis of what makes a marriage ‘holy’ on the wrong aspects. There is nothing inherently ‘holy’ about marriage and people were getting married long before the Bible was written. The Bible doesn't institute marriage but informs the institution of it so that it better corresponds to full and flourishing life that God desires. If the Bible intended to endorse only one form of marriage as an absolute standard, it could have stated that. In fact, the Bible instructs and informs marriage in its various forms. In the OT, there are rules for marriages that are polygamous, involve a slave, concubine or spoils of war. The Bible doesn't sanction these forms of marriage (as some critics charge) but rather instructs on how people are to live faithfully within all these contexts. That explains why the Bible so often is giving instructions for guarding the rights of the weaker party; because that reflects the character and heart of God.

I don't believe marriage is made 'holy' because of the sex or gender of the people, any more than I think it has to do with the blessing conferred by the Church or the location in which it takes place. All these address the forms of marriage and not its critical essence. The essence of a Holy Christian marriage is a covenantal relationship, in which two people promise to submit themselves to love one another in imitation of the covenantal love Christ has for the church. This is what sets Christian marriage apart from every other expression of marriage and when it is freely entered into, become parts part of a holy and Christian union. Marriage is sanctified as people live out these commitments in reliance upon the grace of God.

### In Conclusion:

Ultimately, the truest expression of God's will is found in Jesus Christ. The actions of the early church in Acts (Acts 6 & 15) show that people had already begun to reinterpret God's intent for the world through the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Much of Paul's teachings to the new Gentile Church, show the same interpretive filter. Throughout its history, the Church is at its best when it has sought to be faithful not to just what was written in a particular time and place, but to the underlying intent of the Bible. In every age, that intent has been to promote human flourishing. When the Church has sought to be guided by this intent in the past, the world has been blessed and the Church was judged to be faithful to the intent of Scripture and the leading of the Spirit. I believe it is time for the Church's teaching on homosexuality and marriage to do the same.

I do not claim to be certain of my conclusions above nor believe they are the only true, biblical interpretation for this issue. I am aware that not everyone shares this interpretation and that it is not even the majority opinion in this country let alone the world communion of Christianity. I take that seriously. I also take seriously the testimony of gay and lesbian brothers and sisters in Christ. I believe they are acting not out of a perverted sexuality or rebellion to God, but out of their true, God-given nature which happens to include being gay and lesbian. They are not seeking to subvert the Church, but to simply be fully included in it.

In times like this, I fall back on Jesus's teaching that the sum of the Law & Prophets is ultimately contained in what we call the Golden Rule: to do to others what I would have them to do me. When I listen to my Gay and Lesbian brothers and sisters, what they are ultimately asking for is that we give them the benefit of the doubt in the integrity of their faith. While there is much that I do not understand about human sexuality, I am comfortable that I know enough of what is required in the Golden Rule to extend the same dignity, identity, respect and grace to our homosexual brothers and sisters that I would that I would want for myself.

We have such brothers and sisters in our community and in our congregation. Since I believe it is not only consistent with the scriptural witness and the mission of Christ, but also in the best tradition of the Church, I believe we should expand our understanding of marriage and include same-sex/gender weddings as part of our ministry at New Hope.

Respectfully,  
Pastor Russ Kane  
May, 2015