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# So, What's Really at Stake in the Gay Marriage Debate? Part Two

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Same-sex marriage is, for now, legal in three of fifty states in the United States. Beyond our borders, it is legal in the Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, South Africa, Canada and Norway. This represents a very small percentage of the world's population. Same-sex marriage is, by any measure, the exception rather than the rule. Even when legalized civil unions and domestic partnerships are thrown into the mix, the countries that consider same-sex unions and heterosexual marriages to be equal before the law represent a small percentage of the world's nations.



Keep that in mind when you observe the media's coverage of the issue. By and large, the mainstream media have presented opposition to same-sex marriage as the odd and out-of-step position and support for same-sex marriage as the mainstream assumption.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* now reports that conservative Christians represent the major energy behind the promotion of Proposition 8 in California. The major media generally frame these Christians as out of step with the times. As the paper reports:

*Christian conservatives have come to dominate the religious debate surrounding Prop. 8 - even though the Bible's statements on homosexuality are complex and disputed among Christians.*

*Catholics, Mormons and evangelicals have been contributing millions of dollars and flying into the state from around the nation to lead rallies and services that preach support for the measure.*

The paper describes the Bible's statements on homosexuality as "complex and disputed." Of course, this is only true in very recent years and within a very thin slice of liberal Christianity. Most Christians throughout the history of the church — and the vast majority of Christians alive today — have no problem understanding what the Bible teaches about homosexuality.

Take a very close look at these paragraphs:

*Liberal groups representing Christians, Jews and others are trying to defeat the measure. But their efforts have been far more modest, even though priests and rabbis in the Bay Area have played a pivotal role in creating and cultivating a theology that includes lesbians and gays as equals to heterosexuals.*

*Conservatives and liberals generally use dramatically different lenses to interpret the Bible. Christian conservatives tend to emphasize an interpretation of the Bible that doesn't change with the times. They say the Bible describes marriage as only between a man and a woman.*

*"You've got the California Supreme Court rewriting sacred heritage," said Steve Madsen, pastor of Cornerstone*

*Fellowship, an evangelical megachurch in Livermore.*

*Liberal Christians tend to emphasize that divine revelation can come from many places, even outside the church. For example, many denominations don't allow same-sex marriages, while California law does.*

*"Culture is going to manifest Christ in a way that summons the church to new realities," said Episcopal Bishop Marc Andrus.*

These statements are incredibly revealing. First, note that the paper describes efforts to normalize homosexuality have included "creating and cultivating a theology" that would serve their purposes. That is a very helpful (and accurate) explanation. There is no way that the received tradition can be twisted into support for same-sex marriage.

Second, observe the fact that the paper recognizes that those on opposing sides of this debate "use dramatically different lenses to interpret the Bible." That is an understatement, but represents another helpful explanation. The arguments put forth by proponents of same-sex marriage come down to assertions that the Bible does not say what it plainly does say, that Christians have misunderstood the critical passages until liberal scholars pushing this agenda have just discovered what the passages really mean, or that the Bible just has to be corrected in light of contemporary developments.

Third, note that the reporter explains that conservatives "say the Bible describes marriage as only between a man and a woman." *Any* honest reader must acknowledge that the Bible describes marriage in exclusively heterosexual terms.

Fourth, on the other hand, note that liberals pushing for the normalization of homosexual behaviors and relationships are described as believing that "divine revelation can come from many places, even outside the church." Episcopal Bishop Marc Andrus is quoted as saying, "Culture is going to manifest Christ in a way that summons the church to new realities." In other words, who needs the Bible when you can just accept some new cultural authority in its place?

Proponents of same-sex marriage now attempt to argue that the only opposition to legalized homosexual marriage comes from conservative Christians pushing a narrow theological agenda. They cannot possibly claim that conservative Christians control the vast majority of the world's nations in which same-sex marriage is decidedly not legal.

Still, the fact that the *San Francisco Chronicle* felt the need to publish a chart of Bible passages on homosexuality tells us something. The very existence of these passages still troubles the consciences of those pushing the normalization of homosexuality — whether within or without the church.

