

## **In Theory: Could same-sex marriage become legal?**

### **QUESTION:**

A recent Gallup poll has revealed that, for the first time, a majority of Americans support gay marriage. According to the figures, 53% of Americans say they believe same-sex marriage should be recognized by the law as valid; in 1996, the figure was around 30%. Most of the increase in support came from Democrats and Independents, with Republicans' views staying the same. On the other hand, only two days before Gallup released its figures, Minnesota voted to ban gay marriage.

A few days after the poll was published, Rev. Nancy Wilson, a member of President Barack Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, said the Defense of Marriage Act should be repealed. Wilson, who is gay and married her partner in Massachusetts, said, "We come to our nation's capital to tell our elected officials that our marriages count and that DOMA should be repealed." A recent poll by the Human Rights Campaign says that the majority of Christians (68%) support protection for the LGBT community from discrimination and 52% oppose the Defense of Marriage Act.

Reacting to the poll, Focus on the Family Chief Executive and President Jim Daly said in an interview, "We're losing on [gay marriage], especially among the 20- and 30-somethings...I don't want to be extremist here, but I think we need to start calculating where we are in the culture." But Young Republican National Federation Chairwoman Lisa Sticksan said that there is a "groundswell" of support for traditional marriage in her organization.

Given these changing trends, can you see gay marriage becoming legal across America in the near future? And should gay marriage be a strictly civil matter and not involve religion?

### **ANSWER:**

As a member of the clergy in a denomination that supports the marriage of same-sex couples, I am gratified that current poll data shows a greater openness by people in our country to the freedom of all to marry. I have never taken the bumper sticker opposing Proposition 8 from the back of my car, and I have continued to speak out against the travesty of such a vote in denying couples the right to have their loving commitments recognized by marriage. I am also open to performing marriages for same-sex couples in our sanctuary or other location, with or without the recognition of the state.

Certainly, those in each religious denomination or congregation can, and should, decide if their ministers will bless such unions in accordance with their own theological and ethical beliefs. But codifying that decision into law imposes those same beliefs on people who do not share them, making a mockery of the separation of church and state and causing senseless misery to many in our state who had thought they were finally going to have their long-term relationships honored.

Further, the withdrawal of the rights of a whole group of our neighbors, friends and fellow citizens denies them justice, equity and compassion — things that are basic to virtually all religious traditions. When equity is denied to some, it introduces the possibility that we can all lose our rights. When compassion is denied, it makes all of us all poorer for the losses in our lives.

I am not suggesting that everyone should have the same views about marriage that I espouse as a Unitarian Universalist. But, as the minister of a local congregation that gladly welcomes those of all sexual orientations, it makes me weep to think that people of goodwill of any faith tradition, or none, would deny to others the same benefits that they enjoy. My sincere hope is that other people of faith, whatever their tradition, will come to recognize that marriage is about a loving commitment, not a political agenda.

May it be so!

The Rev. Dr. Betty Stapleford, Unitarian Universalist Church Of the Verdugo Hills, La Crescenta

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How about that? The more people come out of the closet and talk about their lives and loves, the easier it becomes to accept that “you are just like me.” So thank you to all of the courageous gay and lesbian couples who have opened their relationships to public scrutiny. Fortunately for you, straight people seem to be getting bored with your lives as we realize that a gay marriage involves the same issues around money, children and fidelity that you find in a heterosexual marriage. I suppose it’s better said that the challenges are the same but worse, since anti-gay marriage laws make money management and childrearing that much more complicated.

In my opinion, religious values always have a place in our public conversations. If our careful nurturance of love, mercy and compassion does not extend beyond the walls of our churches, what good is it? “God has shown you, o people, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: to seek justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.” (Micah 6:8) Because of this justice requirement, people of faith must always be alert and active in situations where people are being treated differently. Because of this kindness requirement, we must illuminate the world with our compassion rather than darken it with our judgment. Because of this humility requirement, we must always approach God and one another with the assumption that we don’t know all that there is to know — especially when it comes to human sexuality.

The Rev. Paige Eaves

Crescenta Valley United Methodist Church

Montrose

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I can envision homosexual marriage becoming the law of the land, and I interpret it as one more contribution to the decline of America’s morals. The further we turn our back on our biblical moorings, the closer we become like other pagan cultures that have reached their zenith, serving now only as tourist spots for their many ruins. And polls hardly impress me regarding moral decision-making, as we could poll a ship of pirates and get majority support for raping, burning and pillaging the next port — hardly moral.

Most of us of biblical persuasion reject any oppressive or deliberately discriminative policy that abuses those bound by sexual misdirection. However, we also do not have any desire to see the definition of marriage change from societal recognition of heterosexual union to that of same-sex acknowledgment for what can only be achieved by complimentary opposites. We see God as having created us male and female for his purpose, and heterosexual marriage not only achieves his purpose, it contributes to our thriving. When we pervert the created order, it is no different than any other perversion. It’s wrong, and it doesn’t fit the definition. It is something, but not something divinely sanctioned or biologically normative.

It’s not so much that biblical Christians are especially put off by religion playing a part in homosexual marriage; it’s the “marriage” designation that insults us most. People do all sorts of things in America, and there are people who worship idols, or nature, or whatever else their sinful minds may imagine. But to take a heterosexual institution and impose upon it a homosexual inclusion destroys the institution. If homosexuals want to have civil unions for the purposes of life that include insurance and familial rights, then such a provision may be the better of two evils. Calling them “married” in any sense of the word is a moral offense and our bigger objection.

The Rev. Bryan Griem

## Montrose Community Church

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Absolutely I can see gay marriage becoming legal across America. It already is legal in Canada and in some European countries, too, I think. I believe in the concept of the institutional church, but I also believe in a saying I read sometime ago, the gist of which was that if you aren't going to lead or follow, then get out of the way! That's what I believe about the gay marriage issue. It is happening and will continue to happen, and if the church isn't going to lead then it should get the heck out of the way! I know that some of you can throw Scripture passages at me that say that gay marriage is an abomination to the Lord.

Well, the ancients saw nothing wrong with slavery, either, and yet what American, religious or not, believes in slavery? And I'll throw a Scripture passage right back at you: when Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment, he said to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. How can you love the Lord your God with your mind and not let "liberty and justice for all" mean liberty and justice for all? "For all" means "for ALL", not just the straights. And while you use your God-given mind, do you really believe gay people choose to be gay?

Did I choose to be born a white heterosexual male? No. Did gays choose to be born the way they were born? Of course not. Have a little compassion, my fellow believers, and use that God-given head of yours for more than just a hat rack!

Should marriage be a strictly civil act with no religion involved? I wouldn't mind. There are lots of civil marriages in the country, and look at the money those folks saved! They didn't have to hire a preacher or his fancy church (mine is quite nice, by the way!). And those couples who choose to go that way can live just as happily ever after as those who choose to have all the trappings of religion. Amen. May the Force be with you!

The Rev. Skip Lindeman

La Cañada Congregational Church

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As noted in the Gallop Poll's historical polling numbers, support for same-sex marriage has grown over the past 20 years. This trend is reflected in the passage rates for California's Proposition 22 in 2000 (61% to 39%) and Proposition 8 in 2008 (52% to 47%). Over the past 10 years, several states have recognized same-sex marriages.

Will this trend continue, with a corresponding change in state marriage laws? As to the former, likely, but as to the latter, that is unclear, at least in the near future. The recent events in Minnesota are an example of this.

In actuality, the courts will likely play a significant role in determining the outcome of same-sex marriage laws. Currently, *Perry v. Schwarzenegger* (the California Proposition 8 case) is making its way through the federal court system. If it reaches the United States Supreme Court (which will depend on certain procedural issues), a decision will be rendered on the important issues within the case, and that decision's application extends past California (many "ifs"), the decision could have far-reaching implications at both the federal and state levels.

As to limiting or eliminating religious involvement in same-sex marriage laws, I think it is naïve to believe that taking religion out of the equation is the answer. For several millennia, at the very least, religion has been tied to marriage.

As an alternative, religious fever possibly could be reduced if civil unions, rather than marriage, were deemed to be the answer. Civil union laws are on the “books” of many states. However, such laws tend to have at least two important deficiencies. The first is that they often do not grant all the rights, privileges and obligations normally associated with marriage. The second is that civil unions create different classes and run directly into issues of equality and equal protection under the law.

So where do we stand for the “near” future? Until the resolution of *Perry v. Schwarzenegger* (assuming it has the potential to go to the U.S. Supreme Court), it’s hard for me to predict the timing and final outcome of same-sex marriage laws throughout the United States

Rick Callister

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

La Cañada

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It is interesting to think about Focus on the Family’s Jim Daly saying “we’re” (meaning conservative Christians) losing the gay marriage battle. Is he so sure “we” doesn’t include a few gays in the pews who haven’t yet come out to others or even to themselves? Odds are, it does.

I don’t know whether it will be in the near future, but I do believe we will look back at these times and shake our heads at the backwardness of not including all persons under the big tent of so-called traditional marriage.

Speaking of tents, it is weddings that are religious or secular celebrations of life-unions. Marriage is (and always has been as far as I know) a civil contract between two persons.

According to the Encyclopedia of Gender and Society, when state laws barring miscegenation (i.e. interracial sex/marriage) were finally declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1967, 20% of whites still supported these laws, and 60% of whites opposed marriage of a relative to an African-American.

Yet, fewer than 50 years later, the idea of interracial marriage or dating being illegal seems like something out of the Paleolithic Era. I am glad, and not surprised at all, that a majority in the U.S. now support gay marriage; however, our constitutional rights shouldn’t depend on opinion polls.

Roberta Medford

Atheist

Montrose

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Of course I hope gay marriage becomes legal. I also think it’s time we stop calling it “gay marriage”

and just call it “marriage,” no matter which combination of brides and grooms is involved. I think that either all marriages should be strictly a civil matter, or all marriages should have both civil and religious options — in other words, I think the rules should be the same.

I’ll go further: Within the church, I wish that instead of developing new rites for ‘the blessing of same-sex unions,’ we would just use the existing rite of marriage for everyone. In the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, the words man/woman and husband/wife are in italics — italics being our way of indicating that the priest can use either word. Flexibility is built into the language already; there’s no need for a whole new rite.

And of course I’d like to see DOMA repealed. More to the point, I’d like to see a public dialogue on the whole idea that marriage needs defending — because that impulse, I think, is behind a lot of the resistance.

God knows the institution of marriage is and always has been a fragile thing. I’ve been divorced twice myself, and am married to my third husband. And in my role as priest, I’m privy to the agonies of adultery and abuse and the life-destroying drift into loveless estrangement, which plague all too many marriages —not to mention the recurring squabbles over money and child-rearing and dueling careers, which are part and parcel of a shared life.

Marriage is fragile and may well need defending, but not from gay people and not from the senseless idea that if gay people get married it takes something away from marriage for straight people.

It’s time to call all marriage “marriage” and make it all legal. And then maybe together we can talk amongst ourselves, gay and straight, and say, “Jesus, this marriage thing is really hard — and glorious and fragile and redemptive and healing and confusing and sweet and miraculous. Right?”

The Rev. Amy Pringle

St. George’s Episcopal Church

La Cañada

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I do not see homosexual marriage becoming legal in America in the near future. Even when our own very liberal state’s court proclaimed it legal, our citizens rose up and brought it down. Some try to liken this issue to the racial rights that were appropriately fought for in the 1960s. But this particular battle isn’t about equal rights for a poor, oppressed segment of our society. It’s an attempt to radically redefine the God-designed fundamental building block of any society — the committed union of one man and one woman. It is very much a moral issue, and it’s a line that, before God, our nation cannot afford to cross. And if we do cross it, what’s next? Legalized polygamy? Under-age marriage? Let’s not be naïve. Moral compromise is never satisfied. It always demands more and more.

Whether or not it’s defined as strictly “civil,” as opposed to religious, ultimately, there is no such thing as a homosexual marriage. Marriage was God’s creation and God’s gift to mankind, and from the beginning He has irrevocably defined what it is: “For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife [literally: “woman”]; and they shall become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24). Jesus Christ Himself reaffirmed this precise definition of marriage in Matthew 19:5.

Denying this group's request sounds very negative. But let's understand that we're defending marriage, not attacking homosexuals. We're not talking about whether or not anyone is nice or deserving or friendly - Jesus Christ gave His life for us all. We're talking about what God says marriage is. None of us likes to hear the words, "You can't". But when our desires contradict the wisdom and the will of God and contribute to the moral decline of our nation, they're the very words that need to be spoken.

Pastor Jon Barta

Valley Baptist Church

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