

****Is Genesis 2:24 Applicable to Same-Sex Partnerships?****

****Evaluation of Queergedacht – Chapter 15****

****Martin Pröbstle****

In Chapter 15 of **Queergedacht**, the author examines the question of what constitutes a marriage from a biblical perspective.¹ He starts with the understanding of marriage in Germany, then investigates the biblical findings regarding marriage based on Genesis 2:24, considers whether there are further biblical elements of marriage, answers the crucial question of whether this applies to same-sex partnerships, and compares the elements found with the current legal basis of marriage in Germany.

Let us consider his argumentation: First, the author shows how changeable the concept of marriage is. Marriage is a “time- and culture-dependent construct.” This has changed significantly in our society over the past decades, allowing for same-sex marriage (p. 229). Marriage and the understanding of marriage are diverse, and a general definition is “difficult” (p. 231). Christians turn to the Bible. However, even there, the biblical marriage stories are culturally bound and hardly transferable to today (p. 231).

So, can anything fundamental about marriage be found in the Bible? The author refers to Genesis 2:24. He acknowledges the “general validity” (p. 232) of this text and identifies three steps or elements of a marriage relationship: leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh (pp. 232–235). These indicate autonomy, publicity, permanence, and exclusivity (pp. 235–236). These are timeless and culture-independent principles. Additionally, there is the agape love that Paul speaks of (Col 3:18; Eph 5:25, 28, 29) (pp. 236–237). According to the author, these are the elements that constitute a marriage.

Reproduction, however, is neither seen as a fundamental element nor as the primary purpose of marriage. It was important at the beginning of human history, but no longer necessary for today’s marriages (p. 237). Therefore, the fact that same-sex couples cannot have children should not be an argument against them (p. 240). Moreover, the author believes that Genesis 2:24 speaks of an ideal. Not all marriages conform to this ideal. He also takes the lives of singles as an example to illustrate that Genesis 2:24 does not address all life models. Perhaps alternative forms of marriage are conceivable as well (pp. 238–239).

Now, while it is true that the text does not present marriage as the sole life model, it also does not impose a duty to marry. A Christian can also live as a single, which Jesus and Paul confirm (Matthew 19:11–12; 1 Corinthians 7:7–8). However, this does not imply that same-sex marriage is permissible. The text indicates the opposite. It assumes the difference of genders.

For the author, the gender difference is not necessarily part of marriage. The first marriage was necessarily heterosexual. After all, people had to reproduce. Adam and Eve both had a heterosexual orientation that they simply followed; they were designed that way. He now compares this with a homosexual orientation, which he believes is equally involuntary and unchangeable. It is constitutively inherent in their nature. Therefore, “the elements derived from Genesis 2:24 of a partnership are also applicable to same-sex relationships!” (p. 240).

This is his core thesis: The biblical understanding of marriage, with its three steps (leaving, cleaving, becoming one flesh), is transferable to same-sex partnerships.

The author advocates that a church that promotes freedom of faith and conscience should also open up to the reality of different sexual orientations. After all, legislators and society treat heterosexual and homosexual partnerships equally. The secular zeitgeist shows us the way here. In the concluding sentence, even the “pragmatism of Paul” and the “mercy of Christ” are invoked (p. 241).

To summarize: The author proposes that the elements of marriage known in theology from Genesis 2:24 can also be applied to a same-sex relationship. What reasons does he provide for this reinterpretation of Genesis 2:24? The gender difference is not necessary for marriage. The text says nothing about singles. The understanding of marriage is time- and culture-dependent. Today, same-sex partnerships are equated with marriage. The homosexual orientation is unchangeable. Therefore, if two people naturally feel same-sex love, a transfer of the three steps to a same-sex partnership must be possible. Thus, homosexual orientation becomes the ticket to marriage.

In this regard, two fundamental criticisms can be noted: one exegetical and one methodological.

Exegetical Considerations

The crucial exegetical question is: Does the Bible consider the gender difference between man and woman as indispensable for marriage? My answer is yes. There are four texts in Genesis 1 and 2 that explain why a man and a woman must be the partners in a marriage. In all cases, it is about equality and difference, namely the fundamental equality of both as human beings and the gender difference between them as man and woman.

1. After God created man in His own image, it is said that He created them “male and female” (Gen 1:27). This makes it clear that both man and woman are images of God, and it also shows that the difference between the sexes is necessary, at least for reproduction, as the following blessing shows (1:28). The Hebrew terms for “male” (*zachar*) and “female” (*nekevah*) in verse 27 particularly express the binary nature of human sexuality, in contrast to the terms for “man” (*’ish*) and “woman” (*’ishah*). The Hebrew text emphasizes that “the only creation-given difference is that of male and female.”²
2. In Genesis 2:18, God describes His intention to create a helper for man. The Hebrew word *kenegdo*, literally “as his counterpart,” consists of two prepositions: *ke* (“as”) emphasizes equality because the woman (in contrast to the animals) has the same human nature, and *naged* (“opposite”) emphasizes the difference because the woman is the counterpart to the man. In *kenegdo*, “the concept of equality is contained along with that of complementarity.”⁴
3. The joyful exclamation of the man in Genesis 2:23 expresses equality in the first part: “Bone of my bone... flesh of my flesh.” The two are made of “the same materials.”⁵ The second part expresses difference: “She shall be called Woman (*’ishah*), for she was taken out of Man (*’ish*).” The different naming of *’ish/*’ishah* shows that the difference lies solely in the

sexual distinction of male and female. This is the only and thus decisive grammatical difference of the Hebrew terms. **Ishah** “designates the gender; it does not specify the person.”⁶ Thus, verse 23 honors Eve’s human similarity while simultaneously acknowledging her gender difference.

4. Immediately following is verse 24. This begins with a “Therefore.” In 155 instances in the OT, this adverb refers to directly preceding reasons for a derived statement (e.g., Gen 10:9; 11:9; 16:14; 19:22; 20:6; 32:32). Previously, in verses 22 and 23, the gender difference is mentioned by **ish** and **ishah**. Then comes the “Therefore” and a repetition of the same terms with **ish** and **ishah** in verse 24. This shows: The equality of humanity and the difference of the genders (vv. 22, 23) lead to the conclusion that “therefore” humans can become one flesh. Both are embedded in the meaning of becoming one flesh.

The statement in Genesis 2:24 is not to be understood descriptively, as if it merely describes an ideal from which deviations can occur. Rather, it has the character of a binding model for partnership. Marriage as egalitarian complementarity is a creation order of God. For a prescriptive understanding, the following reasons speak:

The introductory “Therefore” combined with the switch to the third person singular with the subject “a man” expresses a general fact. “A man” (**ish**) does not refer to Adam but to any man who wishes to enter into a marriage. The mention of “father” and “mother” also indicates that it concerns future men, as Adam had no earthly parents.

Above all, however, Jesus confirms that this statement originates from God Himself and is still valid in His time (Matthew 19:5-6; Mark 10:7-8). This gives it an authoritative, timeless character. No wonder, then, that Paul also repeats parts of it when making important statements about marriage and morality (1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31).⁷

The statement of Jesus is particularly interesting in this regard. He explains His understanding of marriage in Mark 10:6-9 (cf. Mt 19:4-6). In doing so, He incorporates statements from the creation narrative:

6 But from the beginning of creation, [“beginning” from Gen 1:1]
“He made them male and female” [quote from Gen 1:27].

7 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother,

8 and the two shall become one flesh” [quote from Gen 2:24].

By “from the beginning of creation,” He refers to Genesis 1:1. Then He quotes 1:27, but only the last part: God created them “male and female,” followed by the complete quote of the one-flesh becoming from 2:24. In His logic, the creation of the two genders “male and female” is the prerequisite for the marriage formula. Jesus is thus saying: God has created the gender difference, and “therefore” there is marriage based on this gender difference.

Paul also quotes Genesis 2:24 in Ephesians 5:31. In doing so, he concludes a description of marital roles and bases it on the difference of the genders. At the same time, Paul sees in marriage a symbol for Christ and the church (5:32), which are fundamentally different. This also implies a fundamental difference between the two spouses, which can only be found in the difference of the genders.

The gender difference is part of the definition of marriage. Because, in biblical ethics, sexual acts are only intended within marriage between a man and a woman, same-sex acts are unanimously condemned in the decisive biblical passages (Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26, 27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10).

The gender difference does not exist solely for the purpose of reproduction.^{^8} Reproduction does not appear in Genesis 2 and thus does not seem to be the decisive criterion. Jesus maintains the difference of the genders as the basis for marriage without mentioning reproduction (Mark 10; Matthew 19). At His time, reproduction was no longer decisive. Nevertheless, the New Testament restricts marriage to man and woman and values same-sex sex as immoral.

God's intention with the gender difference extends beyond reproduction. Marriage points to a greater reality. It is a symbol of the gospel itself. This theme runs like a red thread through the entire history of salvation. Paul perfectly summarizes: Marriage represents Christ and the church (Eph 5:32). This symbolism permeates the entire Bible,^{^9} but it only works with two different genders.

10. Thus, supporters of same-sex partnerships would need to provide a more convincing reading of Genesis 1 and 2, Matthew 19, and other relevant passages and show that the gender difference is not a constitutive element of marriage.^{^10}

****Methodological Considerations****

The crucial methodological question is: If a homosexual orientation is inherent or predetermined (the author assumes this), should we then reinterpret the biblical definition of marriage? Does life reality dictate how we should read and apply biblical texts?

First, one should take into account the state of scientific understanding. It seems a consensus is forming that the cause of a homosexual orientation is a complex mix of predisposition and environment, biological and social factors.^{^11}

More importantly, however, sexual orientation should not be seen as a moral permission to act. Justin Lee, a supporter of homosexual relationships, puts it succinctly:

Just because an attraction or drive is biologically determined does not mean it is okay to act on it... We all have innate tendencies to sin in various ways. If homosexual attraction were innate, that would not necessarily mean it is okay to live it out, and even if we all agreed that homosexual intercourse is sinful, that would not necessarily mean that homosexual attraction is not innate. "Is it sin?" and "Does it have biological roots?" are two completely different questions.^{^12}

The acceptance of same-sex attraction does not have to come with the ethical right to live out that inclination with a same-sex person. Predispositions do not justify behavior.

****Conclusion****

Biblically and exegetically, an extension of Genesis 2:24 to binding same-sex partnerships is not sustainable. This interpretation is more likely a reaction to the acceptance of same-sex partnerships in today's society. It is based on the argument that homosexual orientation serves as the ticket to marriage. However, this does not provide moral justification for living it out.

Rather, it is the case: The statement marked as a marriage paradigm in Genesis 2:24 reveals in context the fundamental components of a marriage relationship: Two people of different genders enter into a monogamous relationship, which represents a new, lifelong bond for both. The gender difference is integral to marriage. This is the testimony of the creation narrative, as confirmed by Jesus and Paul.

1. Andreas Bochmann, "Was konstituiert biblisch eine Ehe? ?", in *Beiträge für eine offene Diskussion über gleichgeschlechtliche monogame Beziehungen *, ed. Werner E. Lange, Dennis Meier, and Reinder Bruinsma (Adendorf: STAB, 2023), pp. 229–242. This article initially appeared in the community magazine of the Free Church of Seventh-day Adventists in Germany: Andreas Bochmann, "Verlassen, anhangen, ein Fleisch werden: Was definiert eine Ehe aus biblischer Sicht? " *Adventisten Heute*, September 2023, pp. 10–13.

2 Irmtraud Fischer, "Egalitär entworfen – hierarchisch gelebt. Zur Problematik des Geschlechterverhältnisses und einer genderfairen Anthropologie im Alten Testament , " in Der Mensch im alten Israel: Neue Forschungen zur alttestamentlichen Anthropologie, , ed. Bernd Janowski and Kathrin Liess, Herders Biblische Studien 59 (Freiburg: Herder, 2009), p. 267.

3 Wilhelm Gesenius, Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alten Testament, ed. Herbert Donner, 18th ed. (Berlin: Springer, 2007), p. 778.

4 Gerhard von Rad, Das erste Buch Mose, 9. Aufl., Das Alte Testament Deutsch 2/4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), S. 57. And Franz Delitzsch, Neuer Commentar über die Genesis [Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1887], S. 92, für den kenegdo auf ein Wesen hinweist, „welches bei relativer Verschiedenheit und wesentlicher Gleichheit eine passende Ergänzung“ zum Mann bildet.

5 Georg Fischer, Genesis 1–11, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2018), p. 213.

6 Phyllis Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, Overtures of Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), p. 100.

7 The universal and timeless character of Genesis 2:24 is also emphasized by Ellen White: "When the Creator united the hands of the holy pair in marriage and spoke the words: 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh' (Genesis 2:24), he [English: enunciated] the law of marriage for all the children of Adam until the end of time. And what the heavenly Father himself designated as

good was a law that should aid humanity in achieving the greatest blessing and highest development." *Das bessere Leben* (Hamburg: Saatkorn, 1978), p. 55 [my emphasis] = *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1896), pp. 63–64.

8 See Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody: Baker, 2007), pp. 49–50.

9 See, for example, Gerlinde Baumann, *Love and Violence: Marriage as a Metaphor for the Relationship between YHWH and Israel in the Prophetic Books*, *Stuttgarter Bible Studies* 185 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000); Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., *God's Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 2 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003); Colin Hamer, *Marital Imagery in the Bible*, *Apostolos Old Testament Studies* (London: Apostolos, 2015), pp. 112–141, 184–222; Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Marriage, Scripture, and the Church: Theological Discernment on the Question of Same-Sex Unions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), pp. 43–52.

10. Thus, Preston Sprinkle, **Does the Bible Support Same-Sex Marriage** (Colorado Springs: Cook, 2003), p. 45.

11. See, for example, Andrea Ganna et al., "Large-Scale GWAS Reveals Insights into the Genetic Architecture of Same-Sex Sexual Behavior," **Science** 365 (2019), eaat7693 (August 30, 2019). DOI: 10.1126/science.aat7693; Dean Hamer et al., "Comment on 'Large-Scale GWAS Reveals Insights into the Genetic Architecture of Same-Sex Sexual Behavior,'" **Science** 371 (2021), aba2941 (March 26, 2021). DOI: 10.1126/science.aba2941; cf. also [Wikipedia](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexualit%C3%A4t#Ursachen_der_Ausbildung_der_sexuellen_Orientierung) (accessed December 18, 2023).

12. Justin Lee, **Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate** (New York, Jericho, 2012), p. 62.
