

Dear Committee Secretary,

I am writing to explain to you my views of gay marriage. However I would like to start my telling you the story of myself and the story of one of my close friends.

1) Growing up, I attended a strict Seventh-Day Adventist school and attended a Uniting church. I left school and was accepted into a Bachelor of Social Work. During my first year of University I met my partner through work and I have been with them for three years. We share a faith in God, and a passion for justice and for doing the right thing by others.

2) Growing up, my friend attended a strict Seventh-Day Adventist school and also attended a Uniting church (though not the same one as me). She finished school as was accepted into a Bachelor of Social Work. Shortly after she met her partner on a Christian chat site. They fell in love and they also share a passion for justice and for doing the right thing by others, while their faith has changed (but not diminished). They also have been together for three years.

These stories seem pretty similar, however the key difference is that I am now starting to pick out engagement rings that I like and leaving not so subtle hints around the place. My friend however cannot do this as she is legally denied the right to marry the person that she that loves and is committed to. What saddens me even more is that this couple feel that they have to 'hide' their true relationship from people when they first meet them and pretend to be housemates because they 'don't want to rock the boat'. This societal and legal discrimination means that I am able to have my wedding day, while they are not. I am certain that their relationship is different to mine, (they probably fight less about things like cleaning the toilet) as every relationship is different. However I do not think that their relationship is any less valuable or real, or any more harm to society than my relationship is with my partner.

I don't know if God sees homosexuality as a sin, I would like to think not but who really knows what is on God's mind. Sure we can read our bibles, but while inspired by God, it is essentially a book that was written thousands of years ago by people who lived in a very different culture and context when homosexuality wasn't even a word. In addition there have been many translations and interpretations of it, the book we now call the Bible doesn't even encompass the all of the original books. What I do know however is that the bible also states that if a man rapes a women then he is to marry her (Deuteronomy 22:28-29), yet this is not law, because it is no longer contextually or culturally appropriate. This is one example of many 'rules' in the bible that we no longer follow due to a change in culture and context. However, some 'rules' I do feel are still vitally important such as those around not judging others (Matthew 7:1) and loving our neighbour (Matthew 19:19), ones which do not impinge of the rights of others.

Back to the issue of gay marriage, many people will use the religious argument to say that gay marriage should not be allowed. However, given the above examples, I fail to see why someone's personal beliefs (and some people believe that eating certain meats are a sin) should be made into legislation when those beliefs hinder the rights of others and are not held by a large majority. In addition, it appears that in doing so the government is picking and choosing what part of the bible should be legislation (imagine what would happen if everyone stopped work for 24 hours!) Everyone is entitled to their opinion, and I would love to sit down with someone who does not agree with gay marriage and have a respectful, conversation where we share our. However, to say that the Marriage Act should not be changed for this reason is using religious beliefs to impinge on the rights of others. Here it might be interesting to note that the Australian Constitution states that "The Commonwealth shall not make any law ... for imposing any religious observance" (section 116). It

would thus appear that the religious argument for opposing gay marriage is actually unconstitutional in Australia. I know many people who do believe that homosexuality is a sin, but do not feel that this should mean that gay marriage should not be legalised. From this it appears that the religious argument for opposing gay marriage should not be viewed as a valid one.

My second argument is around the argument that gay marriage will ruin the sanctity of marriage. Just recently we saw Kim Kardashian, a very public figure, spend a fortune on a wedding only to annul it 72 days later. I wonder how this does not ruin the sanctity of marriage. It is not only celebrities either. In Australia, 1 in 3 marriages end in divorce, nearly half of whom remarry. I propose that marriage by some people is no longer seen as the serious, lifelong commitment that it once was, yet many of our citizens are being denied this basic right. Back to the religious argument, 60.6% of marriages are no longer religious, so I have to wonder how allowing gay people to marry each other is going to run the sanctity of marriage. I am not suggesting that ministers who oppose who gay marriage are forced to perform the ceremony, as I previously stated, everyone is entitled to an opinion, but 60% of marriages go ahead without a minister anyway. I suggest that the sanctity of marriage on a societal level has already been ruined and that it is now up to individual couples to decide how seriously they are going to take this commitment.

Which brings me to my next point, as I have already said, people who oppose gay marriage do not bother me, that is their opinion. But vice versa, whose business is it what two consenting adults do in their own home? And if they want to make this commitment public and someone doesn't want to see it, then that person can walk away and not attend a gay wedding. Gay relationships do not hurt society,(and when you think about it weddings are a lucrative business which could benefit the economy). Studies have shown that a gay couple can raise a child just as effectively as heterosexual couples, and in many cases the children grow up to be more socially adjusted. Children raised in gay households are not more likely to be homosexual themselves, nor are they more likely to grow up 'damaged'. And I fail to see how homosexual relationships harm adults. They may offend some people, but if I see something that offends me I turn the television of or look the other way, respecting other people freedom of expression. People should be free to express themselves in anyway which does not harm others.

And finally I will briefly address the argument that gay people choose to be gay. I must ask, do you know of anyone who would choose to live a lifestyle that means that they are discriminated against by society and the law? That they risk losing friends and family, that they may have to lie about who they are to potential employers (at least at the beginning) and that some people try to raise moral panics about and educate their children that they are evil? I doubt it. Homosexuality is not a choice, I did not choose to fall in love with my partner and my friend did not choose to fall in love with hers. With this in mind, is it really fair to deny homosexuals the right to share their love with their families and friends in a way which does not harm anyone else? I think not.

I would like to conclude by saying thank you for the opportunity to have my say. I only hope that you will choose the fair option for a marginalised group of our society who are discriminated against.

Amanda Butler