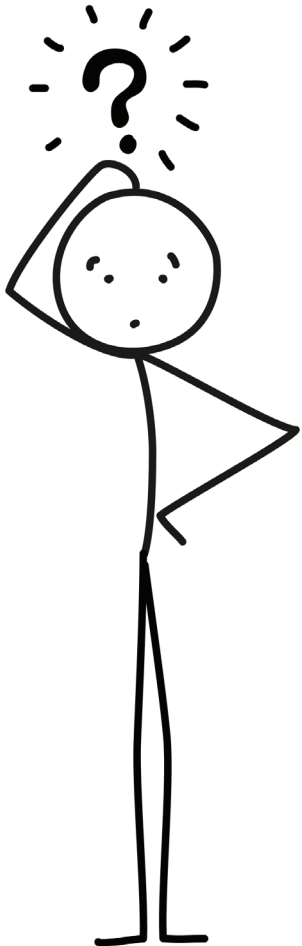


A Compact Guide to the Same-sex Marriage Plebiscite



Confused by the same-sex marriage plebiscite?

You're not alone. But this is where we've ended up at.

Due to their inability to find agreement among themselves, the Government will give the Australian people the opportunity to participate in a postal vote about whether the definition of marriage should be extended to include same-sex relationships. The postal vote is both voluntary and non-binding on the Government. In other words, you can choose to ignore the postal vote and the Government can choose to ignore whatever result it produces. Votes must be returned by November 7.

The Government has said that it intends to allow Parliament to debate and make a decision about extending the definition of marriage if the postal vote comes back "Yes", but will do nothing if the vote comes back "No".

Why are most Christian churches opposed to changing the definition of marriage?

Firstly, because of what the Bible says is God's purpose of marriage. The Bible speaks of marriage as being more than just the recognition of loving and committed relationships. Jesus, when speaking of marriage, draws upon the intentional act of God in creating two sexes, male and female. The coming together of male and female in marriage reflects God's purpose in creating male and female, equal yet different, to complement one another.

Secondly, because Christians hold that marriage is not simply an individual's "right", but a public institution which forms the foundation of a strong society. Marriage remains the primary institution for the raising of children and defining marriage as anything less than a permanent, exclusive, male-female union weakens our society and the opportunity for children to know and/or be raised by their biological parents.



And thirdly, because of the threat that redefining marriage poses to religious freedoms and freedom of speech. By redefining marriage to include same-sex unions, the concern is that individuals and institutions such as parents, schools and churches will be unable to teach a traditional view of marriage without being sued under anti-discrimination or 'hate-speech' laws.

Why are some Christians supportive of changing the definition of marriage?

Firstly, because of their concern for people affected by this issue. There are strong emotions associated with discussing same-sex relationships because it affects real people, and often real people who they know and love. Some Christians have a friend or family member in a committed same-sex relationship and desire to have that relationship recognised through marriage. For them, it really is a matter of equality.

Secondly, because they believe that Biblical teachings should be understood in light of our culture. Society's understanding of relationships and sexuality is very different than it was at the time of Jesus. Therefore the argument is that we need to apply the principles of love, faithfulness and commitment to all unions, regardless of whether it is male-female or same-sex.

Thirdly, because they are concerned for the witness of the good news of Jesus. For some Christians, they consider that by actively fighting this issue, the Church will lose regardless of the result of the vote. The concern is that it strengthens community perceptions that the Church is out-of-touch, intolerant and devoid of compassion.

So what should I do?

Regardless of whether you consider the postal vote important or a complete waste of time and money, we would encourage you to be prayerful and thoughtful about not only your answer, but the manner in which you engage this topic with Christians and non-Christians alike. It is unfortunate that much of the debate has been less than gracious. Opponents of same-sex marriage have been labelled as homophobes and bigots. Proponents of same-sex marriage have been accused of abusing the rights and lives of children.

So in all things be respectful and prayerful. And in the tradition of being 'Baptist', vote in accordance with your conscience, not conformity nor convenience.

Stephen Bates

Want more to read?

There are many good resources (and many poor ones) around the plebiscite. Here are 4 resources written from a Christian perspective worth reading prior to voting. You'll find them on our website in the Resources/downloads page.

For a comprehensive discussion of the topic:

- *2017 Sydney Anglican paper on same-sex marriage*

For a shorter statement by Australian Baptist Ministries:

- *2017 Australian Baptist statement on same-sex marriage*

And for a couple of published articles in the media, have a look at:

- *Michael Jensen's opinion piece in the ABC's "The Drum"*
- *Michael Kellahan's article in the Sydney Morning Herald*