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Op-Ed: Prop 8 goes against God's love for every person

By

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As the citizens of California prepare to go the polls on November 4, they will do more than help elect the next President of the United States. They will also cast a vote on Proposition 8. A No vote will allow the citizens of California to express their support for a simple religious-legal-moral proposal already affirmed by the California Supreme Court – the notion that the fundamental right to marriage be granted to all citizens of California, regardless of sexual orientation. The State constitution guarantees equal protection under the law. Every Californian should be treated fairly and with dignity. Proposition 8 seeks to eliminate fundamental rights. As a rabbi and an individual of faith, I would urge all residents of California to vote No on Proposition 8. In voting NO on Prop 8, you are upholding a fundamental right of our California constitution and issuing a moral-religious proclamation about fairness and equal rights of all persons to our nation and the larger world.

In reflecting upon this issue, I recall a play, “The Laramie Project,” that my then fifteen-year-old daughter performed in at her high school five years ago. The powerful drama has as its subject the infamous and cruel murder of Matthew Shepherd, now ten years ago.

I am painfully aware that the attitude that caused Shepherd's death stems from the passage contained in Leviticus 18:22 that defines homosexuality as an “abomination.” The unfortunate power that this biblical passage has played in shaping the attitudes of so many--particularly persons who define themselves as “religious” -- towards gays and lesbians is undeniable. The Rev. Louis Sheldon and his Traditional Values Coalition have often taken the lead in attacking marriage for same-sex couples and celebrate the findings that “religious” people oppose gay marriage. Indeed, religious fundamentalists have generally claimed a monopoly on the stance that religion takes towards same-sex marriage.

Yet, I refuse to allow such negative judgments regarding gays and lesbians to go unchallenged from a religious perspective. As Catholic scholar Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza has maintained in her powerful [In Memory of Her](#), the divinity of any passage in Scripture that diminishes the humanity of another – as this one does -- must surely be questioned. The Bible commands us to treat the poor and the stranger with fairness and respect 36 times because we have a tendency to let our fears of the strange or different take over our judgment. It is not acceptable for these admonitions for compassion and fairness to be ignored while focusing on one verse among thousands that puts forth a contrary view. The thrust of one such passage should not override an overarching biblical ethos that teaches us that God loves and affirms the full humanity of each human being.

This approach to the core message of the Bible has caused hundreds of us to officiate as clergy at same-sex weddings. I see no reason why religious believers like me have any less right than my more fundamentalist brothers and sisters to speak for religion in the public square. A vote for Proposition 8 will discriminate against gays and lesbians and runs counter to the ethos of love that the Bible teaches. A vote for Proposition 8 discriminates against those of us whose religious beliefs mandate us to perform same sex weddings.

The Bible also says that one should not “bear false witness.” However, that is exactly what the ads and messages of the Yes on 8 campaign are doing as they distort the truth. Proposition 8 will not affect the tax status of any church or synagogues that decides to perform or not to perform a same sex wedding. Proposition 8 will not prevent clergy who do not wish to perform a religious ceremony for gay and lesbian couples from refusing to do so.

As a rabbi, I applaud the Supreme Courts of California and Connecticut for affirming the legal right of same-sex couples to marry. By doing so, the Courts asserted that gays and lesbians should receive the equal treatment under the law that all persons require to live a life of dignity. Religious persons must declare this truth loudly and clearly in order to influence public opinion on this matter. As the President of the oldest Jewish Seminary in America, I declare this as well. Gay and lesbian couples must be treated with dignity, fairness and equality under the law.

When I was a teen-ager, I was moved, as were millions of other people, by the vision Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King expressed when he dreamed of a just world where people would be judged by the content of their character. This vision was inspired by the Biblical prophets, and proclaims that all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are equally beloved by God and are equally entitled to the pursuit of happiness.

The desire that full rights – including marriage -- be extended to lesbians and gays reflects a simple religious truth – all persons, not just heterosexuals, are created in the image of God. This truth requires religious persons – especially in 2008 when the issues of gay and lesbian marriages occupy such a central place on the political landscape -- to demand that our society acknowledge that gays and lesbians are no less holy than their heterosexual brothers and sisters. Same-sex couples display the same capacity that heterosexual couples do to create warm and loving relationships, and those lesbian and gay couples that are blessed with children possess the exact same ability to care for and nurture these children that heterosexual couples do. The time has come for such recognition to guide our culture, and religious people should not be hesitant in stating this truth.

When the day arrives that this truth is completely fulfilled, no more Matthew Shepherds will be scorned or tortured. By voting NO on Proposition 8, the voters of California will allow righteousness to pour down like a mighty stream.

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