

Stuck in the Stone Age

On Wednesday 10 October 2012 Boris Johnson, Mayor of London, opined that marriage "needs to move beyond the Stone Age" (*The Independent*). Is he right?

First, *the claim contradicts the experience of many*. Since the earliest of days marriage has proved popular, life transforming and liberating to countless people. It has been celebrated by couples, families and societies. It has been explored positively in literature and films. And its value has been recognized by educationalists, medical practitioners, psychiatrists and sociologists, to name but a few. Evidently people have not seen it as a relic from the past in need of change. Nor did any political party at the last general election in 2010.

Secondly, *the claim is built upon a questionable premiss*. A false distinction between religious and civil marriage is implied. It is argued that a so-called same-sex equivalent to marriage will not be imposed upon men and women of faith. The claim is, according to Johnson, "in so far as marriage is a legal and secular recognition, by the state, of a union between two people" it "needs to move with the times."

Three facts stand. First, a marriage is not a union of two people. It is a union of a man and a woman. It can never be anything else (*see why below*).

Secondly, marriage was not created by an Act of Parliament. Instead there is a recognition in law of what it is: the union of a man and woman in an exclusive relationship.

Thirdly, people will not be able to live with two definitions of marriage. It is true marriages can be celebrated in two spheres: the civil or the religious. But what takes place in both is

essentially the same: a man and a woman publicly enter into a covenant with each other to love and care for each other for life to the exclusion of all others.

What needs to be recognized is that the advocates for redefinition either fundamentally misunderstand marriage or are selective in what they say about it.

Thirdly, *the claim assumes we are free to change the definition of marriage*. That would be possible if it were a mere social construct from a bygone age. It is not. Marriage is from God; it is a creation ordinance. It is true, as Johnson states, that marriage as an ancient institution predates "the religions that are practised today". And it is true "no religion has ever had a monopoly on marriage". But it is also true that mankind is not free to re-order what God has given. Marriage was designed and provided by him for our good. It was not invented by people. When this point is grasped it is easy "to see what the fuss is about".

Should the government implement this change (of benefit to less than 2% of the population) two things will happen. *First*, competing notions of marriage will exist in the public domain. That situation cannot and will not last long. *Secondly*, the demands of equality legislation at home (and in Europe) will result in the right definition of marriage being driven into the private sphere. In the public domain, freedom of speech and religious liberty will be seriously undermined.

However, "God is not mocked; what a man sows he reaps" (*Galatians 6.7*). To tinker with marriage is to incur God's displeasure. Because marriage was given by him for all people of all cultures, belief systems and political structures in all ages, it is both unhelpful and insulting to describe it as stuck in the Stone Age. Rather that which was conceived in eternity will always be of immeasurable benefit to all peoples for all time.