

A New York Parent Wants to Marry Their Child - Why Not?

A person in New York wants to marry their adult child and is suing the government to “overturn laws barring the incestuous practice, calling it a matter of ‘individual autonomy.’” Yes, you read that right. A parent wants to marry their child (and presumably the child wants to marry their parent). The genders of those involved aren’t disclosed, but they claim to be a “Parent and Adult Child Non-Procreationable” couple.

They argue that the only real reason a parent and child shouldn’t be allowed to marry is if they could potentially produce offspring, which this couple apparently cannot. Using the same arguments as the LGBT community, their lawyer argues that “they want to propose, but would ‘sustain emotional harm’ if they did so while the current laws are in effect” and barring them from doing so would “diminish their humanity.” They also argue “through the enduring bond of marriage, two persons, whatever relationship they might otherwise have with one another, can find a greater level of expression, intimacy and spirituality.”

Even though this story comes from the United States, doesn’t mean it can’t happen here. Christians and conservatives have argued for years that once you arbitrarily redefine marriage to be two men or two women, where do you stop?

If the only factor that matters is consent, then why not marriages or sexual relationships between close family members, children and adults, multiple people, and more? When there’s no ultimate foundation, anything goes, and there’s no longer any standard by which to stop the onslaught of human depravity. This kind of behaviour reminds me of Judges 21:25, where “*In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what he thought was right.*” These are the closing words of Judges, stressing the horrific consequences of the lack of social authority and the practice of moral relativism.

From a biblical worldview we can say that such a “marriage” would be categorically sinful. Leviticus 18:7-8 reads, “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife; it is your father’s nakedness.”

This is affirmed in the New Testament when Paul writes, “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. (1 Corinthians 5:1-2)

We shall continue to see court cases like this present one in the United States, but as Australia has the tendency to follow in the footsteps of the US, so we won’t be surprised if the same thing happens here. Without an ultimate standard by which to say such things are wrong, the “anything goes” mentality will only continue to spread and take hold. As Christians we need to start with God’s Word in every area and understand there are moral absolutes that don’t change if culture or laws change.

But what about what we call incest today in the Old Testament? For example, Cain had to marry his sister (or maybe his niece), and Abraham married his half-sister.

Well, first of all, there are no positive examples of parent-child incest in the Bible, and Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 5 that parent/child marriages are naturally abhorrent even to “Gentiles.” But what about brothers marrying sisters or first cousins? We do find examples of that, particularly in Genesis. However, the law forbidding close relatives marrying was not given until the time of Moses (Leviticus 18-20). Provided marriage was one man for one woman for life (based on Genesis 1-2), there was no disobedience to God’s law originally (before the time of Moses) when close relatives (even brothers and sisters) married each other.

In all, there appear to be three interrelated reasons for the introduction of laws forbidding close intermarriage:

1. There was the need to protect against the increasing potential to produce deformed offspring.
2. God’s laws were instrumental in keeping the Jewish nation strong, healthy, and within the purposes of God.
3. These laws were a means of protecting the individual, the family structure, and society at large. The psychological damage caused by incestuous relationships should not be minimised.

With this issue we can’t start with our feelings or our culture - we must start with God’s Word and biblical thinking.