

By Rabbi George Gittleman | Santa Rosa Press Democrat

Thanks to the California Supreme Court ruling affirming same-sex couples' right to marry, a number of couples in the community I serve have chosen to seek official recognition for their unions. I asked one such couple, a family of four with two young daughters, ages 8 and 10, if being officially married had made a difference.

"I am surprised to say, yes, it has," one of the women responded. "We've been together for years, have kids, own a home, but there is something about being officially married that deepens things . . ." She was surprised, but I was not. Being married makes a difference. Public recognition and acknowledgment adds a level of legitimacy and commitment, difficult to gain on your own.

The proponents of Proposition 8 argue that same-sex unions threaten the building block of American society, the family. My experience suggests the opposite. The right to marry, while far from a guarantee, only strengthens families of all kinds, thus helping to shore up rather than tear down this basic element of our society.

Those who argue for Proposition 8 state that same-sex unions go against the teaching of the Bible pointing to, for example, the prohibition in Leviticus against "a man lying with a man like he lies with a woman." The Bible also commands us to stone to death the rebellious child, and execute people for lighting fires on the Sabbath. Why follow one biblical mandate and not another?

Any invocation of the authority of scripture includes a process of selection and interpretation. One could also cite the book of Genesis's pronouncement that we, all of us, regardless of the color of our skin, our gender or our sexual orientation, are created in God's image. Gays and Lesbians and their families are vulnerable in our society. Until they have the same rights and protections as everyone else, my religion as I understand it, commands me to fight for their inclusion and acceptance.