

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is the issue of sex and marriage so important?

People's sexual behaviour has immense significance biologically, personally, socially, and spiritually. In short – the bible says that what we do with our body matters and is a 'core discipleship' issue.

The Bible and New Testament strongly connect sexual morality and purity, for example, in 1 Corinthians 6.18-20. This is taught in the Book of Common Prayer Catechism saying I must "keep my body in chastity" and the Book of Common Prayer marriage service stating marriage was ordained "for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication." Fornication is sexual immorality, intercourse between those not married to each other. The context is male-female marriage. Matthew 5:27-30, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Galatians 5:18-21, and Revelation 21:8 warns that those who persist in a lifestyle of sexual immorality, and do not repent, will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Sexual immorality matters.

What is the big problem with same-sex marriage and blessings? Jesus does not mention same-sex marriage and the Bible does not discuss it.

Jesus believed in marriage as being between a man and woman (Mark 10.2-10, Mathew 19.3-11); in replying to questions about divorce, Jesus quotes the verses Genesis 1.27 and 2.24 as God's creation ideal, before the Law of Moses' permission of divorce because of hardness of heart. Jesus also taught against 'sexual immorality' (e.g., Mark 7.21, Matthew 15.19). Jews of the time understood 'sexual immorality' to include same-sex intercourse.

Given his views on marriage, it would be grossly misleading if Jesus did not make it clear he disagreed. Gay-affirming scholars agree that in Romans 1.26-28, that Paul criticises same-sex relations as against nature, likely alluding to Genesis 1.24 in the Greek Septuagint translation, and meaning that they are against the male-female creation ideal. Paul elsewhere uses a Greek word arsenokoitai which combines the words for man (arsenos) and bed (koiten) used in the Greek Septuagint translation of Leviticus 20.13 condemning 'a man who beds a man as a woman.' It thus means 'men who have sex with men' absolutely, not just e.g., in abusive relationships. 1 Corinthians 6.9-10 lists the 'sexually immoral' and specifically 'men who have sex with men' amongst those who will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, the problem with same-sex marriage and blessings is that they redefine Jesus's and the Bible's understanding of marriage and sexual morality to bless what the Bible warns is a sin that, if not repented of, excludes from the Kingdom of God.

Is the Bible really clear on matters of sex and marriage?

Some have claimed that the Bible isn't clear in its condemnation of same-sex sexually active relationships and since they believe it is not, Christians are free to disagree on the matter, and the door is open to "committed, long-term" same-sex partnerships. However, despite the attempts of some to redefine what the bible is understood to say on this matter, it cannot honestly be said that we have come to a fresh understanding of the relevant passages. Only a tortured, twisted exegesis (of the kind that would never be acceptable with any other passage) can make them say something else. A good place to follow this argument is in Sam Allberry's *Is God Anti-Gay?*, Rachel Gilson's excellent *Born Again This Way?* or Ed Shaw's book *The Plausibility Problem*.

If the Bible is so clear, how can church leaders argue differently?

Many simply do not regard the Bible as authoritative in this matter. It is, they argue, fallible and only a book of its times. This tragic misperception can ultimately be traced back (via poor theological education) to a lack of gospel preaching in our churches, for it is only the work of the Spirit of God which makes us trust and love the words of Jesus, and his apostles and prophets. Others do know Jesus but are simply ignorant of the Scriptural teaching because they have not had the Bible preached fully to them. Perhaps their preachers are afraid of venturing on to this territory! Yet others do read the Bible, but have fallen for the teaching (widespread for the past 50 years in Western churches) that the Spirit's words should not be identified too precisely with the Bible; they suggest that God's Spirit may be leading us into new things.

Can't we just agree to disagree? What is 'adiaphora' all about?

Some Christians say that while they personally think that same sex sexual intimacy is wrong, this is a 'secondary' matter on which Christians may legitimately agree to differ (referred to by bible scholars as a matter of 'adiaphora'). They point to passages such as Romans 14:1-15:13 in which Paul deals with disagreements about diet and Sabbaths in the church in Rome, and encourages the believers to get on with each other. This view appeals to many bishops in the Church of England because it allows them to keep the peace between people who are pro- and anti- gay blessings.

We must recognise, however, that same sex sexual relationships are not to be found among the disputable matters in Romans 14-15, but in Romans 1 (see especially Romans 1:24-27), as an example of sin. Sexual morality is never regarded in Scripture as debatable. As Paul put it, writing to the Corinthians, "Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)". This being so, we dare not affirm such practice or we will be leading them down a path that excludes them from God's kingdom.

We must hear the words of the Lord Jesus: "Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble." (Luke 17:1-2).

No wonder the risen Christ in Revelation warns the church at Thyatira as he does! How terrible it would be for future generations, and all those in our churches who are tempted in this area, if the churches bless what God declares sinful. We would be liars.

Why can people not tolerate differences over same-sex 'blessings' just like differences over remarriage after divorce? Why isn't an opt out from celebrating Same Sex blessings enough?

There are substantial differences between remarriage after divorce and the blessing of two people (straight or gay) in a sexually active relationship outside of male/female marriage. Whilst a case can be made in Scripture for exceptions and allowances of divorce (in both Old and New Testaments), the same argument cannot be made with regard to same sex intercourse - rather, it repeatedly condemns it in the strongest terms. The "blessings" proposed by the House of Bishops celebrate and pray for blessing of relationships which people naturally assume involve same-sex intercourse. They are silent about sexual sin, they are perceived by the media and public as "blessings" and so are indicative of a departure from doctrine.

A further set of conscience problems arises about bishops and ordinations. Will bishops still be able to exercise discipline according to traditional doctrine? Will bishops have to accept same-sex blessing services in their dioceses? Will they have to ordain or license leaders who are in same-sex sexual relationships? At the moment, special legal permissions are required when those involved in remarriage after divorce are ordained or consecrated bishops.

Can we not simply "walk together" and accept "prayers that bear a nuanced variety of understandings"?

The prayers are based on contested legal advice and theological ambiguity and do not provide an adequate basis for the unity of the Church. This would be the first occasion in the history of modern liturgical revision (post 1928) that prayers have been authorised or commended which cannot in conscience be prayed in common with the whole Church of England. The criterion for liturgical revision under the provisions of Canon B2 up till now has been that all such prayers have been pray-able by the whole Church. This is true of commended material as well as that which has gone through the full liturgical revision process in Synod. The attempt to swerve this by using the provisions of Canon B5 merely places the onus on the officiating minister to defend the use of these prayers against the accusation that they do not fit the criterion of Canon B5 that they are "neither contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter" – which is, of course, contested. If *lex orandi, lex credendi* is still the position of the CofE, it is unfeasible that these prayers can be commended as not in conflict with the doctrine of the CofE.

Isn't the doctrine of the Church of England remaining unchanged?

This should be the case given what the bishops have said and the amendment passed by General Synod. We believe, however, that the actions we set out in the declaration are contrary to the doctrine of the Church of England. That is why they have in the past always been rejected by the bishops even when they have sought to allow maximal freedom within the current doctrine of the church. Our doctrinal concern has been spelt out on many

occasions, and if you wish to understand it further there are clear explanations by Lee Gatiss from Church Society, a paper from CEEC, an exploration by Andrew Goddard of the muddle into which the Bishops have plunged us in their attempts to claim they are upholding the doctrine of marriage, and critiques of the legal advice in GS Misc 1339 from Martin Davie and from a number of lawyers. It does not follow that simply because Canon B30 "Of Holy Matrimony" remains (at present) unchanged, no doctrinal change is taking place. We believe we are being asked to approve the Church of England making provision to bless and commend that which we do not believe its formularies permit us to bless and commend.

How can you say all are equally loved if you discriminate based on who people fall in love with?

We are members of Christ's body by faith and baptism, regardless of sex, gender and sexuality; equally loved in him. But it would not be loving to celebrate, bless or commend behaviour that might exclude anyone from Christ and his kingdom. Discriminating among relationships on that basis is therefore not unloving. As Jesus proves, romantic, sexual, and married relationships are not necessary to be loved. Rather, marital imagery points us to the consummation of God's love and Kingdom (e.g., Revelation 19.7-10, 21.1-2).

Isn't this an issue of equality?

Many of those advocating change see this as a fundamental question of justice, like racial equality. The rights of gay people are seen as similar to the rights of people of different ethnicities by those advocating change, and think it is as outrageous to deny them their rights as it would be to deny rights to someone of a different skin colour.

It is very important to grasp that the Bible does not view the issue this way. This is about behaviour, not orientation. It is not like race. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul uses a Greek word to describe men who practise same sex sexual intimacy, rather than those whose feelings point that way. Such, he tells his readers, were some of you – clearly referring to behaviour now in the past. He is not referring to an orientation which has been changed but a set of behaviours dropped. It cannot be orientation, because his pastoral purpose is clearly to help people with a present, on-going temptation.

We need to see through the confusion at this point. In a lot of the discussions about the treatment of LGBTQI+ people, orientation and practice are not distinguished. If you are gay, it is assumed you will enter gay relationships. But God's Word distinguishes behaviour from temptation. All of us are called to live with self-control, not giving in to some of our desires. There are many Christians who face the particular temptations of same sex attraction and who choose not to give in to them. Because the word "gay" makes no distinction between orientation and practice, they prefer the term "same-sex-attracted."

Almost everyone is tempted sexually in one way or another, and more could be same-sex-attracted in certain situations. In our sex-preoccupied society we assume that only a person who has sex is fulfilled; we forget about the Lord Jesus, who was single and fulfilled – and the large number of single Christians, to whom God holds out a positive vision.

Aren't you condemning people to loneliness?

Loneliness can be a real issue for same-sex-attracted people, as it can be for many single and

married people. But church can be family – and should be. All of us should do what we can to love one another deeply, from the heart (1 Peter 1:22). In his book *7 Myths About Singleness*, Sam Allberry debunks the myths that singleness means no intimacy and no family. May we as a church be a place of real, lasting and deep friendships! I suspect that some of the impetus for gay blessings has come from people who have not yet experienced real, deep Christian fellowship, or have tragically suffered at the hands of a church family failing to live up to its Biblical calling – how we must pray and strive for deep fellowship to be a genuine feature of our church. It is also worth observing that for some same-sex-attracted people, heterosexual marriage is possible and can be very good, though of course not for all.

How can you really welcome people if you do not affirm their deepest relationships?

We can love people and recognise and respect their relationships, without agreeing with, endorsing or celebrating all their beliefs and actions. Many may agree that, though they may have some impressive features, it would be problematic to affirm unconditionally 'open', polygamous or polyamorous relationships. Rather than welcoming everyone, Paul commends avoiding those who cause divisions contrary to apostolic doctrine (Romans 16.17, 2 Thess. 3.14, Titus 3.10).

DIFFERENTIATION

What's the problem with the House of Bishops' proposals?

We believe that the House of Bishops' proposals and subsequent public communications are erroneous for a number of reasons, including:

- Decoupling sex from its place in marriage between one man and one woman
- Failing to explain and defend why they have departed from previous statements and decisions of the House of Bishops and the General Synod
- Failing to offer a theological account of their claims regarding the distinction between civil marriage and holy matrimony, and the nature of blessing
- Blatantly disregarding the convictions of the vast majority of the Anglican Communion and other major global Christian denominations
- Failing to critique the modern sense of self and individualism and the sexualisation of our society, which is leaving our children and young people confused and vulnerable
- Failing to provide a vision of the holy life in following Jesus as Lord.

We believe that the responsibility of the Church of England is to serve the nation by proclaiming the gospel, not by compromising with prevailing culture. We are convinced that these proposals will undermine and damage the mission and discipleship of our churches, especially among young people.

Furthermore, CEEC believes it is inappropriate for the General Synod to consider the House of Bishops' proposals before revised pastoral guidance has been issued, which could redefine the discipline and teaching of the Church of England.

What does the CEEC suggest as a way forward?

CEEC remains committed to the highest degree of unity possible within the truth and doctrine of the Church of England. However, we believe that the current proposals will prevent us from walking together and promote disunity, even schism.

It is clear that the strength of feeling amongst parties with differing convictions indicates that we have to find a better way forward. In the event of the current proposals being pursued, CEEC will continue to advocate a settlement, without theological compromise, based on a permanent structural rearrangement resulting in visible differentiation.

What are the potential pastoral repercussions if they clergy refuse to bless same-sex couples?

The Church's offer of same-sex blessings with opt-outs moves the arguments and campaigning from an institutional to a personal level, risking couples feeling personally rejected and exposing clergy personally to social media campaigns, cancellation, and threats of legal action for discrimination.

Why don't you just leave the CofE?

Some already are leaving, and more will do if doctrine is officially changed. Many want to stay to defend and preserve the historic doctrine in the national church. Consider how people deeply involved for years in the Church with all of its attendant relationships feel at the thought of leaving. Many clergy and their families depend for their livelihood and home on the Church. If the question is turned around, so those who want the doctrine to change are asked why they don't leave, it may help show the range of reasons there are to stay.