

## FAQs on the bible, sex and marriage

### 1. Why are you so bothered by people's sex lives?

People's sexual behaviour has immense significance biologically, personally, socially, and spiritually. 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 warn those who persist in a lifestyle of sexual immorality will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Sexual immorality matters.

In short – the bible says that what we do with our body matters and is a 'core discipleship' issue.

### 2. 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.

### 3. Is the Bible really clear?

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.](#)

### 4. 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.

5. **Why don't you keep all the Old Testament laws: slavery, not mixing fabrics etc?**

The New Testament, especially the letters to the Romans, Galatians, and Colossians, teaches that Christ fulfils the Old Testament, and is the end of the Law of Moses. The New Testament is based upon and continues to draw lessons from the Old, but moral intentions and attitudes of the heart are more important than ritual, ceremonial, and civic laws. Article 7 of the [39 Articles of Religion in the Book of Common Prayer](#) teaches that the moral principles should be obeyed.

6. **Why don't you take the Bible less literally, and concentrate on central themes, like love?**

The bible is a record and revelation of God's actual interaction with His world and humanity. And there's plenty in it that must be taken literally (e.g. the bodily resurrection of Jesus, the commands not to steal or murder). At the same time 'themes' do matter – and male-female marriage and sexual immorality are central themes of the Bible. Recognising this does not depend on literalistic or anti-scientific interpretations. Marital language describes the relation of God to his people and Christ to his Church. Sin is often described in marital and sexual terms as adultery and unfaithfulness. Sexual immorality is frequently challenged as incompatible with the Kingdom of God.

7. **The CofE has revised traditional teaching on slavery, usury, capital punishment, and women's ordination, so why can't we revise teaching on same-sex blessings and marriage?**

All the revisions listed raise complex questions, but none is a close parallel to removing the male-female requirement for marriage and sexual union, which is honoured repeatedly in the New Testament, along with countercultural teaching and warning of exclusion from the Kingdom.

Within the New Testament church, the gospel brought a momentous shift in terms of how slaves were seen. For example, Paul makes it clear that in terms of status before God, there is no difference between slaves and free people: 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28, NIV). The New Testament does not prohibit slave-owning or condemn slavery as an institution (although Paul does condemn 'enslavers' in 1 Tim 1:10). Yet it is wrong to suggest that the New Testament sanctions slavery. And if/when the Church or Church leaders have supported slavery during history then it has not been on the basis of good exegesis. Paul debunked the 'rightness' of slavery and sought freedom for slaves when the opportunity arose. But he never endorsed same-sex relationships. Thus slavery is not analogous to same-sex sexual relationships.

The ban on usury (lending money at interest), is not absolute in the Old Testament and not repeated in the New. With safeguards, capitalist cultures can benefit the poor without the ban on all usury.

Likewise, despite the prevalence of capital punishment in the time of the early church, much New Testament teaching is subversive of it, stressing mercy and redemption. Nothing in the New Testament commands executing offenders.

Evangelicals who have argued for a change in the Church's teaching on the role of women in ordained ministry see a trajectory on the status of women throughout the Bible from the Fall onwards, as well as very many positive commendations of the ministry of women. There is no parallel trajectory or 'movement' within the Bible in regard to same-sex sexual relationships, nor are there any positive commendations of them.

**8. Other interpretations of Scripture are available. Why should yours be privileged?**

Shunning sex outside male-female marriage seems to be the tradition handed down by all the Apostolic churches from Apostolic times. Other things being equal, those entrusted with the original teaching are more likely to have interpreted it correctly. If they were so wrong about its meaning on such important matters, how can we have confidence in what they handed on, or in Jesus' ability to reveal himself reliably? Given the high stakes, even if other interpretations were equally probable, it would still be unsafe to rely on them. According to [Canon A5 of the Church of England](#), "the doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures" so the Councils and Creeds are not the ultimate ground of doctrine. "In particular such doctrine is to be found in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, The Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal." The opposite-sex understanding of marriage and the requirement for chastity and avoidance of fornication are in the Book of Common Prayer and remain the doctrine of the Church of England.

**9. Aren't you being homophobic or cherry-picking interpretations to suit your prejudices?**

Scholars in favour of revising the Church's traditional teaching, such as William Loader, Ed Sanders, Walter Wink, and Luke Timothy Johnson, agree that the key bible verses on sex and marriage support a 'traditional' understanding but argue that these can/should be overridden by other considerations (e.g. relating to modern culture). Likewise, many Christians who are gay, or have family who are, have disliked traditional interpretations but concluded they are correct. It is unreasonable to argue that either of these groups are being homophobic – yet they agree on what the bible says.

**10. Why can people not tolerate differences over same-sex 'blessings' just like differences over remarriage after divorce are? 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.

**11. 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!<sup>[6]</sup> 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.

**12. Doesn't the fruit of the Spirit that we see in many civil partnerships and same-sex marriages justify them?**

Not necessarily. Don't we find love, peace, patience, self-control and the like in the lives of many people, of all faiths and none? Such good fruit shows that we are all made in the image of God but does not justify or show of itself that the relationships in which they appear are honoured in Scripture. In Galatians 5.19 sexual immorality leads the list of works of the flesh conflicting with the fruits of the Spirit. In Matthew 7.15 Jesus teaches his disciples to know false prophets by their fruits, but not even working miracles, let alone calling Jesus 'Lord', is enough to enter the kingdom. One must do the will of the Father (7.21) and build one's life on what Jesus teaches (7.24-27) to be saved. Thus, neither Galatians nor Matthew means we can ignore Jesus' teaching about marriage and sexual immorality.

**13. 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).

**14. But isn't this a matter 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 words 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.

**15. Doesn't Jesus say celibacy is a calling for those who can accept it, not for all (Matthew 19.10-11)? Isn't it more pastoral to offer same-sex marriage than expect people to burn with frustrated passion for their whole lives, as in 1 Corinthians 7.7-9?**

In Matthew 19.10 the disciples suggest "it is better not to marry." Jesus responds that not everyone can accept this. He goes on to talk about "those who make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom" and says, "those who can receive this let them receive it". Thinking it better not to marry and making oneself a eunuch for the kingdom is not for everyone, but this view and undertaking never to marry for the sake of the Kingdom is not the same as remaining chaste and avoiding sexual immorality, which is a universal Christian duty. For reasons of orientation, personality, appearance, or other circumstances, Christians may realise they are unlikely ever to find a suitable spouse, but this is different to making a decision or vow, as some do, never to marry.

To suggest Jesus allows those who have not made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom to enter a same-sex marriage is implausible considering Jesus' teaching on marriage and sexual immorality. Paul likewise commends singleness for the Lord (1 Corinthians 7.7, 32-38) and remaining unmarried even to one's fiancé, but explicitly says marrying is not a sin (1 Corinthians 7.28). It is against the evidence in 1 Corinthians 6, Romans 1 and more broadly (that same-sex intercourse is a serious sin) to argue that it is better to marry someone of the same-sex than burn with passion. Only some voluntarily commit to celibacy and never to marry, but all are called to avoid sexual immorality.

**16. Aren't we 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.

**17. What about 'celibate' partnerships?**

Some suggest that one way forward is that same-sex-attracted people should be able to form covenanted relationships such as civil partnerships so long as they don't engage in sexual intimacy. But if the relationship is fuelled by mutual sexual desire, it is actually based on a temptation, and we

are called to flee temptation. The basis for the relationship would not be the covenant one God has established (marriage), nor could it be heading for that. Rather, all of us should seek to serve one another's deep need for friendship in the means that God has appointed, particularly loving our sisters and brothers in our church family.

**18. Isn't traditional teaching on sex and marriage akin to discrimination based on skin colour or left-handedness, since we now know people can't change their sexual orientation voluntarily?**

No, skin colour is not a behaviour, let alone a sin. Left handedness might be seen as an orientation towards behaviour, using the left hand more than the right, but this is not a sin. Traditional practice treats behaviour, sex outside of male-female marriage, as sin, disobeying New Testament teaching about God's revealed will for creation and risking one's salvation.

**19. Doesn't holding the Biblical line encourage bullying or abuse of LGBTQI+ people?**

Sadly, some same-sex-attracted people have experienced bullying or rejection in some churches. There can be no place for such attitudes in the Christian heart; we are to clothe ourselves *with compassion, kindness humility, gentleness and patience* ([Colossians 3:12](#)). But we must also be alert to the claim that even *saying* that same sex sexual relationships are wrong is itself abusive. If so, the Apostles themselves are abusive!

**20. Don't you care that LGBTQI+ youth have worse mental health and commit suicide because of traditional teaching?**

All should care about people suffering with their mental health and suicidal thoughts, but [the relationship between traditional teaching, LGBTQI+ issues, and mental health is complex and multifaceted](#). Those who attend church and feel a sense of belonging can find it helps their mental health. Research is at an early stage. We have a duty to uphold key teachings for the eternal good of people and to work to support and improve the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQI+ people, especially in our churches.

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

One 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).

**22. Why are CEEC churches complaining about the potential pastoral repercussions if they refuse to bless same-sex couples? Aren't they proud of their theology and practice and glad to have an opportunity to preach it?**

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.

**23. Isn't it bullying and coercive behaviour to withdraw funding (i.e. parish share)?**

Not necessarily; it depends on the intent and reasons. If funding and cooperation is withdrawn because it is believed the Diocese is acting to undermine and depart from its own foundational beliefs and doctrines then it may be an expression of conscience, refusing to cooperate with such actions, not bullying or coercive. CEEC recognises churches should try to cover their costs to the diocese and that non-payment of share will have a relatively small effect on most diocese's finances and so be unlikely to bully or coerce them.

**24. Why don't you leave the CofE and join GAFCON or FIEC?**

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.

**25. Isn't CEEC effectively schismatic? What unity would remain after differentiation?**

CEEC is not calling for a split or separation into separate institutions. It is the proposals to depart from the Church of England's biblical-rooted doctrine and belief which are causing schism. Partial unity can exist in a visibly differentiated future, but not cooperation in what is understood as false teaching and practice. Cooperation and unity could exist, for example, in social action, governance, administration and some aspects of finance (eg clergy pensions, strategic development funding etc.).

**26. Won't we end up with different bishops and structures for every contentious issue?**

No. There are different levels of contentious issue. Some issues, like sex and marriage, touch on salvation and the Kingdom. Other disagreements over order and ordination may not touch on salvation but still make it difficult to be in one structure. There are other issues, e.g. over the nature of communion, that have long been tolerated and encompassed in the life and liturgy of the Church of England. And it is the case that the principle of differentiated provision is established - Extended episcopal oversight has already happened over the consecration of women, and this, as briefly noted above, is a less serious issue than sexual morality.