

the : tablet

tabernacle : penarth

purpose: to reflect God's love in our church, community and world.



15th July Church Meeting

Briefing Paper

The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill was introduced in the House of Commons in January 2013, and was carried over to the 2013–14 session following a motion agreed in the Commons. The Bill would extend civil marriage to include same-sex couples and allow those religious organisations who wished to do so to conduct same-sex marriage ceremonies. The Bill includes protections intended to prevent churches from being forced to hold same-sex marriages. The Bill also includes measures to allow civil partners to convert their partnership to a marriage and enable married transsexual people to gain legal recognition in their acquired gender without having to end their marriage. The Bill provides for same-sex marriage to be lawful in England and Wales only, with certain provisions extending to Northern Ireland and Scotland.

The Baptist Union of Great Britain currently issues guidance stating that accredited ministers are not permitted to engage in or publicly endorse same-sex relationships; to do so would break their guidelines and invite disciplinary action. In their

discussion on human sexuality at their November meeting, Baptist Union Council will revisit these guidelines and also continue the discussion about same-sex relationships with one eye on the potential change to the Law on marriage. They have invited churches to engage in discussion and debate and report their views to the Union in order to assist them with their conversations. The church meeting on 15th July will begin to discuss same-sex relationships and marriages as part of this process, and will continue the conversation in September.

Additionally, if the Law and guidance from the Union is changed next year, Tabernacle will need to make a decision as a church about what our policy will be towards same-sex couples asking for a wedding ceremony or blessing of civil partnership in the church. This should be a church decision, and not left to the individual conscience of the ministers. The discussions in July and September will provide a background of debate to inform any decision we make in 2014 once the full wording of the new Law is known.

Same Sex Relationships and the Bible

The Bible contains 7 main texts which are usually used in discussions about same sex sexual acts.

The texts are:

- Genesis 19:1-11
(The story of Sodom)
- Leviticus 18:22
- Leviticus 20:13
- Judges 19:16-24
(The story of the rape at Gibeah)
- Romans 1:18-32
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11
- 1 Timothy 1:9-10

Additionally, 1 Kings 14 and 15 and 2 Kings 23 talk about male cult prostitutes working at pagan shrines in the land of Israel, and how their destruction was 'right in the eyes of the Lord'. There is also a reference in Jude 1 to the story of Sodom describing the town as being 'filled with sexual perversion'.

Personal Statement by Pastor Roger:

“As the Senior Pastor charged with the care and leadership of the flock at Tabernacle, I want to be clear about my personal position from the outset. **I will not conduct same-sex marriages, even if the church decides that they want to allow them at Tabernacle.** In the future, should the church go ahead and decide that it would allow the marriage of same-sex couples at Tabernacle, I will avail myself of the protection offered in the new law and not conduct such a service.

There are two reasons for this: the first is that, I do not believe that two men or two women **can** be married to one another: marriage is the union of a man and a woman before God. I cannot simply make something a reality by saying it is, and neither can the government! In my view, saying the words of the marriage service over two men or two women does not make them married - it is impossible. In creation God ordained that a man and a woman should become one flesh and this union reflects the image of God in us. Nowhere in the Bible does it talk about the possibility of that union being between 2 people of the same sex: when talking about marriage, the Bible only talks about heterosexual relationships.

Secondly, although I am now an accredited Baptist minister, I am still in Holy Orders as a priest of the Church of England. Although not licenced to an Anglican Parish, I am still an Anglican Minister, and so would be prohibited in law (as proposed) from conducting such a marriage ceremony. This is a happy circumstance for me, as it gives me a ‘get out’ from something I do not want to do anyway!”

I believe that gay couples should continue to be allowed to enter into civil partnerships and should enjoy the full protection of the law. I believe this right should be extended to heterosexual couples. I believe that couples in civil partnerships should enjoy the same privileges, pension rights and equalities of heterosexual couples. I believe that God loves gay people as much as straight people, and they should be welcomed into church alongside all other people who need God’s grace and salvation.

Roger Grafton

Words used in the Bible which we translate as ‘homosexual’

The Hebrew word ‘Qadesh’ means temple prostitute and is inaccurately translated as sodomite or homosexual.

The Hebrew word ‘Shawkab’ means to lie down with someone and can mean to have sex with them, to fall upon them violently or sleep with them.

In 1 Corinthians, the word sodomite or homosexual are sometimes used, but they are incorrect translations of the Greek ‘malakos’ which means something closer to ‘effeminate’ or the Greek practice of pederasty, which is older men having sex with boys.

1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 refers in Greek to ‘arsenokaitai’, which is unclear in its meaning. There are three uses of the word ‘arsenokaitai’ in ancient times. Firstly, in the Sybelline Oracles, dating 6th Century BC, it says, "The ARSENOKOITAI from the north will abduct our children". Secondly Paul uses the word, in the 2 places mentioned above, and thirdly St. John the Faster of Constantinople, says that ARSENOKOITAI is something that some men do to their wives.

Some English translate Jude 7 as “homosexual practices”. This is an inaccurate translation of ‘hetera sarx’ which means, literally, ‘strange flesh’ to describe the flesh of the angels who were sent by God to evaluate Sodom and Gomorrah.

The word 'homosexual' does not appear in any of the original texts of the Old or New Testament, and in fact does not appear in the English language at all until the mid-19th century. The King James Bible does not use the word homosexual and various Bible translations use different words and language to translate the original texts into English. The word 'homosexual' first appeared in an English Bible in 1946.

We need to be careful in our language when discussing the issue of same-sex relationships: In the ancient Greco-Roman world of the New Testament the concept of same-sex relationships was very different to what we are talking about when discussing same-sex marriage law. The Bible simply does not talk about life-long committed relationships between two consenting equals. We should avoid the temptation of using 'clobber texts' in our discussion as the Bible passages and modern proponents of same-sex marriages are talking about fundamentally different things.

The following very brief descriptions are necessarily over-simplified. They do not cover the full range of conservative/progressive beliefs, but broadly describe the positions of conservatives and liberals:

Text	Typical interpretation by religious conservatives	Typical interpretation by religious progressives & secularists
Genesis 19 Judges 19	Condemns all same-sex sexual behaviour.	Condemns rape and breaches of hospitality customs.
Leviticus 18:22	Condemns all same-sex sexual behaviour.	Condemns gay ritual sex in a Pagan temple and/or males having sex in a woman's bed.
Leviticus 20:13	Condemns all same-sex sexual behaviour.	Condemns gay ritual sex in a temple and/or males having sex in a woman's bed.
Romans 1:26-27	Condemns all homosexual behaviour as unnatural.	Describes a group of heterosexuals who, against their basic nature, engage in same-sex behaviour during ritual orgies.
1 Corinthians 6:9-10	Sexually active homosexuals will go to Hell, not Heaven, at death. Once truly saved, homosexuals will become heterosexuals.	Male child molesters and the children they molest will go to Hell, not Heaven, at death.
1 Timothy 1:9-10	Condemns all same-sex sexual behaviour.	Refers to child molesters and the children they molest.
Jude 1:7	Sexually active homosexuals will go to Hell, not Heaven, at death.	Humans who have sex with other species - angels in this case - will go to Hell, not Heaven, at death.
1 Kings 14:24, 15:12 2 Kings 23:7	Translations differ: The King James Version (KJV) calls for exile of homosexuals from Israel. The New International Version (NIV) calls for the exile of all shrine prostitutes.	Hebrew word "Qadesh" is mistranslated as "sodomite" in the KJV. God actually condemns ritual sex in temples. These verses are unrelated to modern-day homosexuality.

Conclusion

We may find it difficult on the basis of the texts we have briefly looked at in this paper to express a cogent position about what God is AGAINST. Some honest, well intentioned and trustworthy evangelicals find that the more they look at the relevant texts, the less they are able to say that they are about homosexuality at all.

However, we are more clearly able to contend that God is FOR life-long, committed relationships within the marriage bond of one man and one woman. Whatever we want to say about homosexuality and whether it is sinful or not, we can be clear that God is FOR marriage between heterosexual couples.

We also need to be cautious when saying, 'we want to follow a biblical pattern of marriage'. This is overly simplistic and dangerous: the examples of marriage given in both the Old and New Testament are often polygamous and sometimes based on forced marriage or marriages based on political alliances and power rather than love and consent between two individuals.

King David is recorded as having 7 wives who bore him 19 sons and one daughter. David was married to Ahinoam, Abigail, Maacha, Haggith, Abital and Eglah (or Micah) during the 7½ years he reigned in Hebron as king of Judah. After David moved his capital to Jerusalem, he married Bathsheba. When thinking of King Solomon we read: "He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines".

The reason that Paul warns Timothy to only select elders who are the husband of one wife is because there were members of the early church who had more than one wife! If this was not the case, Paul would not have felt the need to mention it.

Preparation

As we prepare for the discussions on the 15th July, I would ask you to do the following:

- Pray and read your Bible
- Come prepared to join in the conversation and express your views and also your doubts
- Come prepared to listen, and if necessary, change your mind
- Come prepared to be gracious to people who hold a different view to you
- Come with an understanding that there are a number of gay people in church and most of them are not public about their sexuality. You may find yourself in a discussion group with a person who is gay. You may find yourself in a small group with people who have homosexual children or siblings. We are not talking about 'them' we are talking about 'us'. Please be loving in your conversation.

