

CHRIST CHURCH COURSES

LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH

SESSION 5: THE CASE FOR CHANGE

Learning Aim: by the end of the session participants will have a good understanding of the arguments being put forward to change the teaching and practice in the Church of England about same sex relationships and marriage.

Pastoral aim: that the group have explored the reasons that some members of the church want to change the teaching and practice of the church and are able to weigh those against the current teaching. The pastoral implications of making changes will be explored in the next session.

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1. Introduction and welcome (3m)
2. Aims and structure of the session (2m)
3. Story Time (5m)*
4. Same-sex marriage : things have moved on (5m)*
5. Change in the church (10m)
6. Theological debate – introduction (1m)
7. Marriage and sex as gifts from God (9m)
8. Marriage between a man and a woman (10m)
9. The rightful place for sex (25m)
10. Abstinence (5m)
11. Same sex attraction (1m)

LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH

0. Engaging Well

1. What does the church believe?
2. The Beautiful story 1
3. The Beautiful Story 2
4. Living out the Beautiful Story
- 5. The case for change**
6. Implications of change
7. Gender

12. Story Time (5m)***13. Time for reflection (4m)*****1. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME**

In last session we considered the implications of living out the current teaching of the church:

- Marriage and sex are gifts from God
- Marriage is between a man and a woman
- The rightful place for sex is between a man and a woman within marriage
- Those who are not married should exercise abstinence

This week we consider the case for change made by those who take an alternative view of these issues.

There are broadly three reasons to seek change:

- Things have moved on and this teaching is no longer acceptable to modern society
- That is not what the bible says
- The bible is wrong

Each of these will be explored below.

Let us pray.....

We pray Come Holy Spirit. Grant us the openness to hear your voice. The wisdom to discern through your voice, your command and your heart. The humility to receive, to be challenged and to see things afresh as you lead us. In the name of your Son, our savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

2. AIMS AND STRUCTURE

This session lays out the case for change by looking at the arguments put forward for same-sex marriage in Scotland, the recent changes in the Methodist Church and then the theological debate looking at viewpoints for and against the teaching of the church in these areas.

3. STORY TIME 1: Andrew and Gerhard

Andrew and Gerhard are married. Watch the story of Andrew and Gerhard at <https://lhf.churchofengland.org/mod/videotime/view.php?id=577>

4. SAME SEX MARRIAGE: THINGS HAVE MOVED ON

Same sex marriage was introduced in England in 2013. The case for equal marriage was made in Scotland in 2013 and became law in 2014.

To embrace same sex marriage means to also embrace same sex sexual activity. It is therefore a good place to start by looking at the case for same-sex marriage.

The case for equal marriage in Scotland¹ was made under 6 headings:

1. It is fairer and more equal
2. It matters to LGBTQ+ people
3. It strengthens freedom of religion and belief
4. It has public support
5. It has political support
6. It's happening around the world

Which of these arguments do you find most compelling for change?

Which of these, if any, in your opinion, are reasons to change the teaching and practice in the Church of England?

If not, why not? If so, why so?

What else would need to be demonstrated for change in the Church of England to become compelling?

5. CHANGE IN THE CHURCH

The Same Sex Marriage legislation built in a triple lock which means that in law the Church of England cannot just change its practice. It would be illegal to do so. Other denominations such as the Quakers allowed same sex marriages early on. Most recently the Methodist Church has agreed to allow same sex marriages. We examine the reasons they gave for change below.

In *The Case for Change*² the following arguments were put forward to the Methodist Church:

- The Methodist Church is a diverse community

¹ <https://www.equality-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/EM-booklet-lores.pdf>

² <https://dignityandworth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/The-case-for-change-v4.pdf>

- Methodists believe that connection is an important embodiment of the biblical principle that there are many parts but one body (of Christ)
- A long held belief that God's grace is for everyone ("For all my Lord was crucified, for all, for all my Saviour died " Charles Wesley)
- Pride in a welcoming tradition, open doors to all who would come in
- LGBT+ people have historically experienced rejection, discrimination and abuse and it is important to acknowledge this history
- "When our rules, statements or practices say that LGBT+ relationships are not acceptable or are less valuable than those with people of different sex, we cause harm" (pg2)
- This also harms how the church is viewed
- Methodists are committed to the Bible as "divine revelation recorded in Holy Scripture is the supreme rule of faith and practice" (from the Deed of Union)
- All need to interpret scripture carefully and faithfully seeking its original meaning and how that applies today
- Culture has changed since biblical times and some of the words involved are difficult to translate or make sense of what they are referring to
- We all need to struggle with the passages, not take them lightly, and not be too ready to use the bible to condemn others
- Can we live together with different interpretations?
- "Some Methodists feel strongly called by God to hold same sex marriages in their churches and to do everything they can to recognise and support LGBT+ members" (pg5)
- "Others feel that their conscience and reading of scripture mean that it would be wrong for them to allow same sex marriages, even while they would want to welcome everyone because they are made in God's image and in need of a relationship with Jesus Christ" (p5)

In July 2021, after agreement of proposals by 29 of the 30 regional synods, the Methodist Conference agreed to rewrite their Standing Orders in the following way:

*The Methodist Church believes that marriage is given by God to be a particular channel of God's grace, and that it is in accord with God's purposes when a marriage is a life-long union in body, mind and spirit of two people who freely enter into it. Within the Methodist Church this is **understood in two ways:***

- *That marriage can only be between a man and a woman;*
- *That marriage can be between any two people*

*The Methodist Church **affirms both understandings** and makes provision in its Standing Orders for them. (pg 7)³*

The implications of this for the operation of the Methodist Church will be considered in the next session. Please note that each individual church needs to decide which understanding to adopt and that the **default teaching is the first one**. A church needs to **opt in to the second one** (this is required by the 2014 Act).

Which elements of the Case for Change resonate for you?

Which elements would you question or do you disagree with?

Is orthodox teaching necessarily harmful?

Do you believe that the Methodist Church can affirm both understandings with integrity?

6.THE THEOLOGICAL DEBATE

So far, we have presented a traditional orthodox view to represent the current teaching of the Church of England by presenting the interpretation of one organization, the CEEC. The reality is that there is a spectrum of understanding on the detail even amongst orthodox evangelicals. To go into all the ins and out of these issues would take a year rather than the few weeks we have available!

The alternative understandings and interpretations that lead people to ask for change are similarly varied and diverse. Therefore, what follows is an attempt to capture the **essence** of the main interpretations and arguments for change.

For a more detailed view of each theological argument see Matthew Vine's talk in favour of same-sex marriage <https://youtu.be/ezQjNJUSraY> and Kevin DeYoung in support of the orthodox traditional view <https://youtu.be/iaSzBaYvvE> . Please note that each talk is approximately 1 hour.

7. A DIFFERENT INTERPRETATION: MARRIAGE AND SEX ARE GIFTS FROM GOD

We start with a **theological agreement!**

³ <https://www.premierchristianity.com/opinion/the-methodist-church-has-agreed-to-allow-same-sex-weddings-so-what-happens-now/5246.article>

³ Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

⁴ "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' [b]?"

⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Matthew 19:3-6)

TRADITIONAL TEACHING: is that marriage and sex are gifts from God ordained in creation. Jesus quoted Genesis when asked about divorce saying that in the beginning Adam and Eve were united to one another because that's how God made them to be. This is interpreted to be a creation ordinance for both marriage and sex.

REVISED TEACHING: is that marriage and sex are gifts from God that should be available to all people. Considering God's generosity and love for people means that it is inconceivable that he would withhold these good gifts from anyone based on who they are attracted to. "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen 2:18) therefore applies to all men, including those attracted to other men. Some would question whether marriage as we see it today can be gleaned either from the creation narrative or from the Bible since we see polygamy in the Old Testament and historically marriage has moved from a "joining of families" arrangement towards a personal commitment between adults.

How compelling an argument is this for change?

What other elements of orthodox teaching do you need to disagree with to use this as an argument for change?

8. A DIFFERENT INTERPRETATION: MARRIAGE IS BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN

..at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. (Matthew 19:4-6)

TRADITIONAL TEACHING: Jesus recalls the creation story by emphasizing that we are made "male and female" and that the two who become "one flesh" are man and woman. Men and woman are made to be complementary to one another as evidenced in the biology of sex. There are no positive statements that can be inferred from scripture as a same sex marriage. It needs to be inferred from absence. Also, since one of the purposes of marriage is sex and procreation, then the prohibition on same sex sexual relations (see bible verses below) leads to the conclusion that marriage could not

be between people of the same sex. All same sex relationships that are sexual are referred to negatively in scripture. Marriage is therefore ordained by God to be between a man and a woman.

REVISED TEACHING: the bible does not comment on same sex marriage in the same way that it does not comment on the internet, it did not exist. The concept of faithful monogamous same sex life long relationships did not exist as they do today so we need to interpret scripture differently in our own context. The idea of "one flesh" does not automatically mean sex but a much broader idea of kinship – having something in common. The creation narrative is illustrative rather than prescriptive⁴. Therefore, there is nothing in scripture to prohibit same sex marriage.

How compelling is this argument for change?

Do you need the bible to positively support same sex marriage or is inference from absence sufficient?

9. A DIFFERENT INTERPRETATION: THE RIGHTFUL PLACE FOR SEX IS BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN WITHIN MARRIAGE

TRADITIONAL TEACHING: adultery is a sin, prohibited by the seventh commandment. That means any sex outside marriage. A same sex marriage is not recognized by God therefore any same sex sexual relations are adulterous. There are several verses that are negative about same sex sexual relations and that suggest prohibition. Same sex sexual activity is against God's commands, is sinful, and should be avoided, otherwise those who engage in it create a separation from God. Like any sinful activity, same sex sexual acts are to be repented of and forgiveness sought from God. It is not a sin to be same sex attracted but same sex sexual activity is sinful.

REVISED TEACHING: some would argue that sex is a natural part of being human and that adultery should not be interpreted as any sex outside of marriage, including pre-marital sex. Arguing for same sex marriage would naturally also allow sex within that marriage. Most who seek change would argue that the bible verses that are seen as negative about same sex sexual activity are not about sex within a loving, faithful same-sex relationship. Some would argue that even though the bible verses are all negative about same sex sexual activity, the bible is wrong.

Visiting the key verses from LLF book (p284-294):

Genesis 19 (and Judges 19)

⁴ LLF book p 282

TRADITIONAL TEACHING: these are stories of men seeking to have sex with men. There were many sins of Sodom but this is the one that rekindles God's wrath and the angels bring the destruction of the city. Sodom then becomes a watch word for evil and sin, including the sin of same sex sexual activity.

REVISED TEACHING: the primary prohibition here is about mob violence, rape and the shame of disrupted hospitality. Some have argued that the reference to "other flesh" means sex with angels (however the men did not know that the visitors were angels).

Which do you find most compelling?

Does this view support or deny the legitimacy in God's eyes of same sex sexual activity?

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

TRADITIONAL TEACHING: the holiness code of Leviticus, about how to remain holy for God, clearly states that men to lie with men is "an abomination", potentially leading to a death sentence for both. This therefore is a clear prohibition on same sex activity. It is not about unwanted sex or rape because in that case the punishment would only be for the transgressor.

REVISED TEACHING: the prohibition is against a specific activity, not all same-sex sexual activity. Some argue that it is coercion or rape that is in mind. Others argue that the primary purpose of the code was to protect the family particularly from excessive power of the head of the household. Other suggest that the word for "male" could refer to a young boy and so the practice of pederasty, sex by men with young men or boys, common in Roman times, is the intended target. Other "abominations" in the Old Testament are the customs of the other nations surrounding Israel that were adopted by the Israelites. It is argued therefore that it is adopting these customs that is the intended prohibition.

Which do you find most compelling?

Does this view support or deny the legitimacy in God's eyes of same sex sexual activity?

Romans 1:26-27

TRADITIONAL TEACHING: Paul presents same sex sexual relations of both men and women as both sinful and unnatural. This is an absolute prohibition amongst a range of other non-sexual sins that are clearly also against God's commands. The context is to build a case against judgement of others due to hypocrisy. Paul has clearly prohibited consenting same sex sexual activity as sinful.

REVISED TEACHING: some have argued that Paul presents a choice made to divert from “natural intercourse”. Orientation towards same sex attraction is not a choice and therefore not what Paul discusses here. Natural intercourse for someone same sex attracted is with someone of the same sex and to have an other-sex sexual partner would be “unnatural” to them. Others have argued that instead this refers to specific sins of pederasty or sex as ritual in pagan idol worship.

Which do you find most compelling?

Does this view support or deny the legitimacy in God’s eyes of same sex sexual activity?

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:8-11

TRADITIONAL VIEW: Paul is writing a “vice list” to the errant Corinthian church to encourage them to holiness. Same sex sexual activity is included in two terms meaning “male prostitute” and “men who have sex with men”. The Greek word is made up of two that refer to the active and passive roles in same sex sexual activity and are therefore all encompassing. There is no sense of coercion in these activities since other words were available to describe these circumstances.

REVISED VIEW: the practices Paul has in mind are abusive and do not relate to faithful, committed, life-long same sex relationships we envisage today. Putting the same word as in 1 Corinthians 6 next to “slave traders” in this vice list may suggest in Timothy that what is in view is sex trafficking.

Overall, having looked at several verses, which is the most compelling biblical case:

Marriage – the traditional view or the revised view? Why?

Sex – the traditional view or the revised view? Why?

10. A DIFFERENT INTERPRETATION: THOSE WHO ARE NOT MARRIED SHOULD EXERCISE ABSTINENCE

TRADITIONAL VIEW: some people experience sexual attraction solely to people of the same sex. Same sex sexual activity is against God’s command and should be avoided. Those people are therefore called to celibacy. Others who are single should not have sex. The rightful place for sex is between a man and a woman within marriage.

REVISED VIEW: Same sex sexual activity for loving, faithful, life-long relationships is not explicitly prohibited by scripture. Marriage can be inferred as available to same sex couples as well as male-female couples. Therefore, same sex couples should be able to

marry and have sex. Some also take the view that sex outside marriage is not prohibited either and so non-promiscuous sex between consenting adults is permitted.

11. SAME SEX ATTRACTION

TRADITIONAL VIEW: it is not a sin to be attracted to people of the same sex. The sin is same-sex sexual activity.

REVISED VIEW: same sex attraction is a natural make up of how some people are made in God's image. It is therefore not a sin to be attracted to a member of the same sex.

We close with agreement too!

12. STORY TIME: Julie and Alice

Julie and Alice have been together for many years. Watch the video at <https://lhf.churchofengland.org/mod/videotime/view.php?id=582>

13. TIME FOR REFLECTION

Together we sit in silence and ask God to guide us through what we have explored so far. Asking him which bits of the case for change make sense. How far should the church go, if at all, in changing liturgy and practice. If you are unconvinced by change how can this be communicated and put into practice gracefully and well.

Next time we will consider what the implications might be if the Church of England were to make changes to teaching and practice in these areas. **Please read the notes for the next session before we meet so that we can concentrate our time on discussion.**