

## Same-Sex Marriage? - Week 67

In Britain this weekend the media will be filled with pictures of joyful homosexual couples emerging from their marriage ceremonies, as "same-sex marriages" become legal for the first time in parts of the United Kingdom. By this law Parliament wants to show that the State recognises and affirms expressions of love and long-term commitment within society, irrespective of gender. The Bill was pushed through Parliament with no prior manifesto commitment, with limited debating time, in the teeth of wide-ranging opposition and only with cross-party support. The "media juggernaut" has been loud in its support, pollsters tell us most people are in favour, and those opposed to this extraordinary law have been mocked and sidelined.

The sleight of hand, the arrogance, and the sheer folly of this new law are breathtaking. Its "unintended consequences" will be widespread and irreversible, as we are seeing already with the amendment of the wording of laws of *the past 700 years*. While the Church of England has been exempted by Parliament from having to conduct "same-sex weddings", such an exemption is likely to be challenged soon in the European courts.

For these "marriages" pose real questions for the Christian Church across the denominations, and not just in Britain. On the one hand, no local church seeks to be a "a party-pooper", looking glum about these "marriages" while many others are dancing for joy. On the other hand, homosexual practice is always firmly condemned in Scripture. It simply is not possible for anyone who seeks to take the Bible seriously to join in the celebrations with unreserved applause.

Somehow the Church has to find a way of "squaring the circle" - being pastorally sensitive to the individuals involved, while being clear as to what God tells us about these matters in His holy Word, and hence what we should all be doing about the current situation.

Now we cannot hope to get all the answers to this tricky situation neatly tied up in a short article such as this, but we can at least highlight the main scriptural issues.

To begin with, let us dismiss the claim being bandied about that love and commitment are "all you need" for any relationship to be worthy of the status of marriage. If that is so, then where do we stop? Marriage to a parent, a sibling, a child or even an animal would all become acceptable. No, there is far more to marriage than mere love and commitment, vital though these are.

Let us go on to recognise that homosexual *inclination* - feelings of attraction to the same sex - is one symptom, among hundreds of other symptoms, of our fallen, sinful state in God's sight, arising from "the Fall" of Genesis 3. All such symptoms of fallen humanity are in the same category as far as God is concerned, requiring from us the same response - repentance and confession, a turning-aside, and a genuine effort of self-restraint - all with the help of the Lord and of each other. So far therefore, feelings of homosexual attraction do not

specifically stand out as being any more or less sinful than all the other forms of fallenness afflicting humanity - including misdirected heterosexual attraction.

The same cannot be said concerning homosexual *practice* however, whether or not the homosexual relationship is one of long-term commitment. The physical expression of homosexual feelings is always described in Scripture as being against nature, unnatural, and as such is described as being an "abomination" in God's sight. Heterosexual fornication and adultery are also sinful, but are at least in line with God's original created order, in the way that homosexual activity never can be.

All this brings us to the unavoidable biblical truth that the sole place for any full physical expression of sexual feelings is to be found only within a faithful, exclusive, lifelong, heterosexual marriage.

Scripturally, that is "just the way things are", whatever anyone's views on the matter may happen to be. This truth has never been popular, but since when has the Church's task been to speak only what fallen, sinful humanity wants to hear? For the well-being of all, God rejects all sexual practice outside heterosexual marriage. For the well-being of all, God welcomes all who seek Him through Christ, with repentance, faith and a desire to get things right under Him.

So Christians are set a tricky task in this matter, which is likely to lead to criticism, of our being too harsh or too soft, whatever we say or do.

We are called, of course, to show God's love to our fellow-sinners. No "holier-than-thou" attitudes towards homosexual people are justifiable, bearing in mind we are all in equal need of God's merciful forgiveness in Christ Jesus.

Equally we are obliged to uphold biblical truth, with courtesy and humility. All members of fallen humanity are required to resist a whole range of wrongful temptations in their own lives, and for some people, some of those wrongful temptations concern homosexual practice. There is no reason why homosexual sinfulness should be regarded any less seriously than heterosexual sinfulness or any other form of sinfulness we face.

At stake in this matter is the authority of the Holy Bible, and the source, nature and definition of marriage itself. Unfortunately this new law flies wilfully in the face of both the Bible and marriage. The joyful couple emerging from their same-sex wedding may indeed be married in the eyes of the State, but, like it or not, are not, and never can be or will be, married in the eyes of Almighty God.

The whole thing is very sad, and very wrong. "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy" (from Habakkuk 3.2, KJV).