

Baptists exploring human sexuality

Bessels Green Baptist Church

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Key themes

- How do we read Scripture and interpret it (hermeneutics)
- How do we live together in unity and fellowship when we disagree? (ecumenics)
- What are the pastoral and missional implications? (missiology)

Mapping the Landscape

Thinking about human sexuality, and same-sex relationships in particular.

The witness of Scripture

The task of hermeneutics

The shaping of our thought theologically

Mapping the Landscape

The contribution of psychology

The contribution of science

The cultural context in which this landscape is experienced.

Mapping the Landscape

Pastoral implications.

moral questions

pastoral results

relationship questions

what kind of relationships?

loneliness and isolation

Mapping the landscape

- A Baptist way of doing theology, of thinking ethically, or 'doing Church.'
- Keeping in step with the times or with the Spirit?
- Freedom of conscience in interpreting Scripture and discerning the mind of Christ

Mapping the landscape

‘That the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures,, and that each Church has liberty under the guidance of the Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.’

Mapping the landscape

- Not hierarchical, as the Catholic Church
- Liberty in each local Church
- Churches existing in relationship to one another in the BUGB should listen to one another, but not to obey some supra-ecclesial body, but rather to willingly accept together what is discerned to be the mind of Christ.
- Therefore we should be good at listening!

Mapping the Cultural Landscape

- Homosexual acts decriminalised 1967 (England and Wales); 1981 (Scotland); 1982 (NI); Military (2000); Civil Partnerships (2005); and Same-sex Marriage 2014.
- Equality legislation criminalises discrimination on the grounds of sexuality, with religious conviction opt-outs.

Civil Partnerships

- From 2005 same-sex partners can opt for a non-religious contract that confers pension, next-of-kin and other legal rights.
- It does not presuppose a sexual relationship
- It is unavailable to heterosexual partners, for whom marriage remains the only recognised contract (although the law also recognises the actuality of co-habiting partners.)

Civil Partnerships

- While often contracted with the paraphernalia of a wedding, it is legally not marriage.
- With the introduction of same-sex marriage, it is likely to ‘wither on the vine.’

Same-sex Marriage

- The legislation was passed in 2013
- First weddings in March 2014
- Confers similar rights to heterosexual marriage, with some exceptions:
 - There are no grounds for divorce on the basis of adultery (since this is defined as an act of penetrative vaginal sexual intercourse)
 - There are no obligations/possibility to consummate the marriage.

Same-sex Marriage

- There are legislative safeguards for those who wish to refuse to celebrate such marriage on religious grounds
- Church of England
- ‘Others’ (that’s us) who must re-register their buildings for same-sex marriage.
- Some questions about European Court of Human Rights’ decisions, if UK law challenged.

Freedom of Conscience

2 Marriage according to religious rites: no compulsion to solemnize etc

- (1) A person may not be compelled to—
 - (a) undertake an opt-in activity, or
 - (b) refrain from undertaking an opt-out activity.
- (2) A person may not be compelled—
 - (a) to conduct a relevant marriage,
 - (b) to be present at, carry out, or otherwise participate in, a relevant marriage, or
 - (c) to consent to a relevant marriage being conducted, where the reason for the person not doing that thing is that the relevant marriage concerns a same sex couple.

Mapping the Cultural Landscape

- Steve Chalke, 2013
 - Article in Christianity, January 2013; and Oasis website.
 - Responses from Steve Clifford, Steve Holmes, Paul Goodliff & Stephen Keyworth, Malcolm Duncan and David Kerrigan.
- Extending the blessing of the church on grounds of mission and pastoral justice

Mapping the Cultural Landscape

- Baptist Assembly 2013
 - Small groups
 - Plenary summary
 - Sense that we want to be places that welcome the everyone

Mapping the Cultural Landscape

- BUGB Council and BSG have affirmed four aspects of this in a statement:
 - Our ecclesiology gives liberty to the local church
 - The foundation of marriage is a life-long union between a man and a woman.
 - Where Church Meeting decides, and a minister's conscience allows, an accredited minister may preside at a same-sex partnership without fear of sanction
 - There is no change in minister's own sexual conduct (only sex that is approved is between a man and a woman within marriage.)

BUGB Statement 1

As a union of churches in covenant together we will respect the differences on this issue which both enrich us and potentially could divide as we seek to live in fellowship under the direction of our Declaration of Principle 'That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His Laws.'

BUGB Statement 2

Upholding the liberty of a local church to determine its own mind on this matter, in accordance with our Declaration of Principle, we also recognise the freedom of a minister to respond to the wishes of their church, where their conscience permits, without breach of disciplinary guidelines.

BUGB Statement 3

We affirm the traditionally accepted Biblical understanding of Christian marriage, as a union between a man and a woman, as the continuing foundation of belief and practice in our Baptist Churches.

BUGB Statement 4

A Baptist minister is required to live and work within the guidelines adopted by the Baptist Union of Great Britain regarding sexuality and the ministry that include ‘a sexual relationship outside of Christian marriage (as defined between a man and a woman) is deemed conduct unbecoming for a minister’.

Pastoral Cases: Questions

What do we feel about this scenario?

What is going on here?

What are the pastoral implications of this story?

Listening to the voice of Scripture

Hermeneutical questions

Which texts?

- What does Scripture say in the round, as well as those texts that have most frequently been applied to this debate?
- Why do we use Scripture in certain ways?

Group work.

Hermeneutics

- Marks on a page =
- Words
- Those words refer to meanings that have a life in thought and grammar within a specific culture (in this case 3-2000 years old, Oriental, rural....)
- Which are translated into an English cognate which may, less or more, be equivalent to the meaning attributed to the original Hebrew or Greek concept or meaning.

For instance,.....

김치

Kimchi

Fermented cabbage in garlic, chilli and ginger....
Yum!

- What about 당신에게 행복한 생일

Scripture

- Genesis 1 and 2
- Genesis 19
- Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13
- The Gospels
- 1 Corinthians 6:9
- 1 Timothy 1:9-10
- Romans 1:26-27

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

- Part of the Levitical 'Holiness Code'
- Concerned for the purity and distinctiveness of the Israelites, distinguishing them from the Canaanites who they supplanted.
- Forbids 'men sleeping with men'
- Is this because of the need to preserve every possibility of procreation?
- Is this because in Canaanite religion this was identified with fertility cults?
- Does this have anything to say about 'committed, loving, monogamous same-sex relationships'?

1 Corinthians 6:9

1 Timothy 1:9-10

- Paul uses a word, *αρσενοκοιτα*, *arsenokoita* that literally translated means ‘sleeper with men’, a word coined by Paul, most probably, to transliterate the Hebrew of Leviticus. But we do not know for sure what Paul had in mind when he coined that word.

1 Corinthians 6:9

1 Timothy 1:9-10

- Does Paul mean homosexual acts? Most likely, yes. But which ones, and between whom?
 - Masters and slaves?
 - Greek pederasty?
 - Roman soldiers and conquered foes?
 - Loving, committed, faithful partnerships?

Romans 1:26-27

- What is Paul's argument? Not that homosexuality is the cause of the departure from God's way, but rather, the result of replacing the Creator with his creatures.
- This is a sign of 'going against nature' [*para fusin*, την φυσικην χρησην εις την παρα φυσιν]

Romans 1:26-27

- But we might ask, what is ‘going against nature’, if you are a strongly orientated same-sex attractive?
- Is this ‘the natural order’ or ‘your natural instinct?’
- If your nature is to be attracted to your own gender (a notion the ancient world did not recognise, and which did not distinguish orientation and practice) what is your ‘nature?’

Romans 1:26-27

- The concept also applied in Greek thought to any excess of passion, and frowned upon those who surrendered control of their reason to passion..... Be they homosexual or heterosexual. 'Going against nature' could mean being governed by base instincts rather than by reason, and its link to the logos.

Scripture: conclusions

- Far from being easy to ‘read the plain meaning of Scripture’, it is actually difficult to be **sure** what Scripture has in mind when it prohibits ‘sleeping with men’, although it most likely means homosexual sex,
- While we can be on safer ground when we recognise Scripture’s endorsement of loving, faithful covenantal relationships, between husband and wife, parents and children, friends and brothers and sisters in Christ.

Theology and Science

The truth of science

A spectrum of sexualities

DNA and genes

Nature / nurture

Hormonal influences

Homosexuality and the brain

Fraternal birth order

Theology and Science

Theology

The basic question is what is God like?.... And then, 'so what?'

The God of power and judgment

The God of relationship

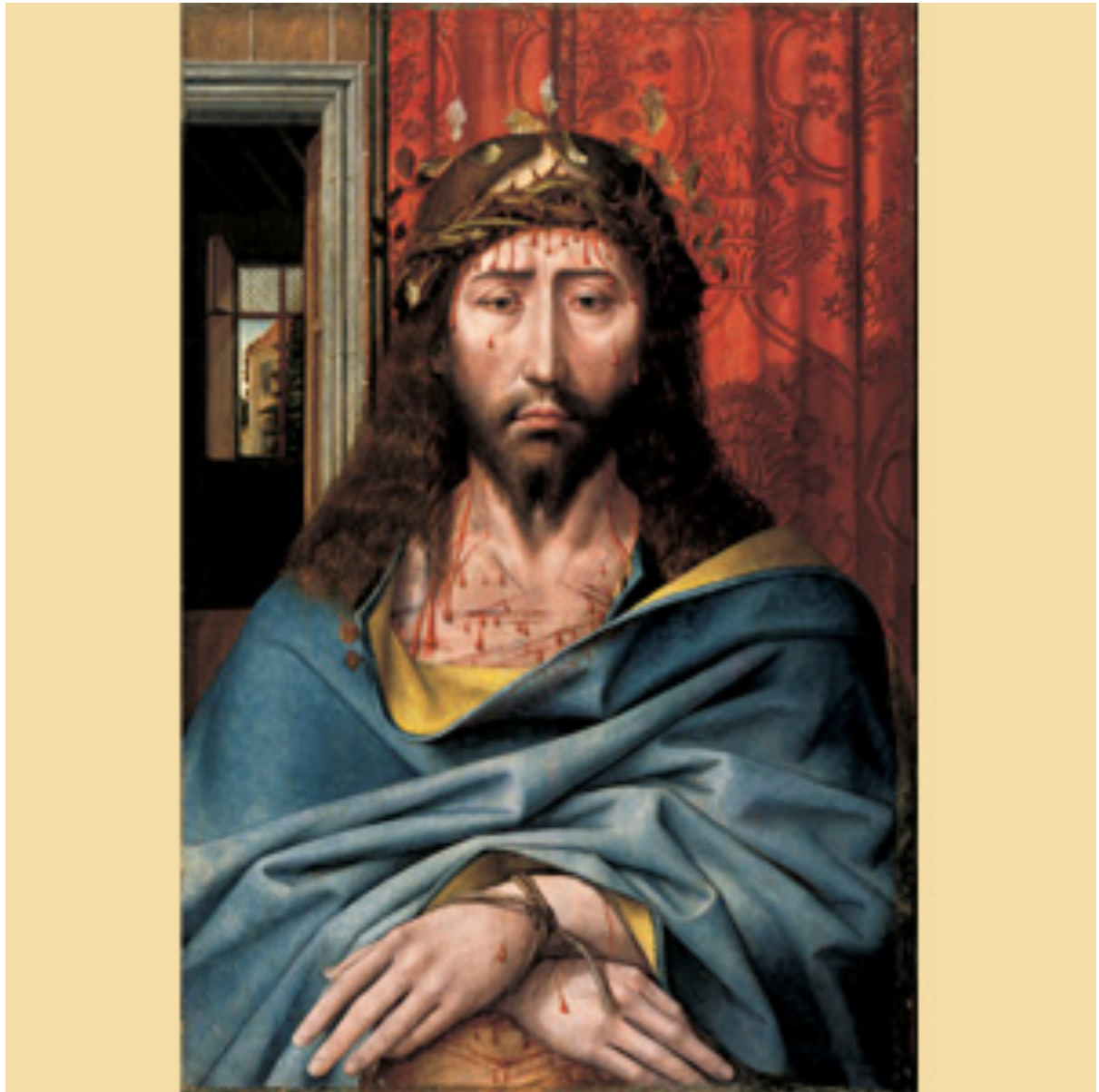
















Theology

- God is beyond gender
- God is acknowledged as God-in-relationship
- Humankind is made in the image of God
 - Augustine of Hippo: maleness and femaleness is primary and ultimate
 - Gregory of Nyssa and Irenaeus: humanity is primarily defined in Christ

Theology

- The primary invitation to humanity is to participate in the life of the Triune God by faithful intimacy
 - Occurs first in the Church
 - Secondarily in the intimacy of marriage (Eph 5:32f)
 - Also in any expression of friendship (John 15:19)

Theology

- The tradition from Augustine, through Aquinas to Wesley and beyond says that what militates against covenant love is sin
- Is sexual intimacy ordered primarily for procreation (as Catholic Church has consistently taught) or primarily as an expression of faithful human intimacy (*'marriage is ordained for the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other'*. BCP)

Where next?

- Are we called to stand firm on the unchanging message of Scripture? Well, yes, but what is that? Some say this is clear, others that it is not.
- Could this be the day in which the Spirit is calling us to recognise that in some cases, same-sex relationships might be included within those affirmed by God, or is that an accommodation to the world?

Where next?

- Since all human sexual relationships are intrinsically disordered by sin, should we be singling out these ones (when monogamous, non-abusive, and loving) for disapproval alone?
- Might we find a place to be able to affirm such partnerships, on the basis that every heterosexual partnership is also 'disordered by selfish desires', and none are perfect in purity?