

I am grateful to the Commission for the chance to express my convictions about this matter. I hold a Ph D in Systematic Theology from the University of Durham (UK) and taught in the area of ethics and human sexuality at seminary level in the UK. I am now a priest of the Anglican Church of Canada, serving in parish ministry.

I oppose any change in the Marriage Canon which would lead persons of the same gender to be considered as married in the eyes of the Church. This position is rooted in my understanding of Holy Scripture. Nowhere in the Scriptures is homosexual practice commended or encouraged. Jesus altered, for his followers, some of the rules of the Jewish Law, (see Matthew chapter 5) but he did nothing to change its practice regarding same-gender sexual relationships.

I take the Bible to be the template for understanding God's will. As it offers no positive encouragement for broadening the understanding of marriage in the way proposed, I think it is misleading to the couple and to the wider congregation to say, by the action of conducting a wedding service in Church, that "God is blessing this". I decline, as a priest, to be put in such a dubious position. And even though I personally could be protected by a conscience clause from having to perform such weddings, I am distressed at the idea of my church, as part of its doctrine, not just tolerating but actively blessing states of life that cannot be supported from Scripture.

I support civil rights for gay people. I think that there is a distinction to be made between Christian marriage, which has a sacramental element, and civil marriage. As a priest it is not my business to tell same-sex couples that they should not seek civil marriage, though I would much prefer the term 'civil partnership'.

I have spent a long time thinking about why God's plan for human sexual relationships is for heterosexual marriage alone, and have come up with explanations which make sense to me. But I am not sure that Scripture explains the why, so I will not prolong this piece with what are only human theories. All we really have is that the Hebrew Scriptures were endorsed by Jesus when he said; 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'?⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."** Matt. 19:4-6, parallels Mark 10: 7, Eph. 5:31 NIV.

I think that as a church, we depart from these words at our peril.

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