

The question for me in this debate is this: When it comes to sexual behaviour, do we as Anglicans follow the teaching of the Bible or the practices of the culture? I want to suggest that when it came to human sexuality, Jesus held to the traditional teaching handed down in the Old Testament and confirmed in the New Testament. This teaching encouraged sexual expression between one man and one woman within the boundary of marriage.

In Mark 10:6-9 Jesus points to the intended order of creation, with a man and a woman being united as one flesh in marriage. A reading of the gospels shows us that when it came to matters of scriptural interpretation and cultural and religious practices, Jesus did not hesitate to challenge the accepted beliefs and practices of the day. His treatment of the downtrodden and outsiders are examples of his divine mercy and love. He extended God's forgiveness to those thought to be outside the kingdom, and in the process he offended many.

Why then did he not seize the chance to include same-sex couples in God's plan for human sexuality? He was more than willing to overturn the religious practices of the day in many other areas, why not this one? When he was raised from the dead, Jesus appeared first to one who was not even considered a reliable witness, yet she was chosen to witness the new creation. Surely we don't believe he lacked the courage to extend the boundaries of marriage to include gays and lesbians?

If we believe that Jesus is God and in him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3), we have to believe that had he supported same-sex marriage, or any sexual relations outside of heterosexual marriage, he would have taught his disciples accordingly. Yet this is not mentioned anywhere in the gospels, and is one thing at least that the Pharisees did not accuse him of. Mark 10:6-9 shows that he had opportunities to widen our understanding of marriage, yet we don't see him doing that. Why not?

I believe the answer is clear: He upheld the order of Creation, not the order of the culture. If we are to keep to the teaching of the Bible on this matter, we should stand courageously with Jesus and offer his love and forgiveness to all people.

But as we do this, we need to keep in mind that a truly pastoral response involves the offer of forgiveness and new life in Christ. A pastoral response should not encourage or support an expression of sexuality that our Lord himself did not encourage or bless.

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