

Let's be clear: On marriage

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Preacher: Simon Dowdy

[0 : 0 0] The first reading today is from Genesis chapter 2 and starting at verse 18. So in the Bibles on your chairs, that should be on page 3.

Genesis chapter 2 and we're going to be reading verses 18 to 25. Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone.

I will make him a helper fit for him. Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.

And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field.

But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man.

[1 : 0 9] And while he slept, took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then the man said, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She should be called woman because she was taken out of man.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. The second reading today comes from 1 Corinthians chapter 6, starting at verse 9, and that is on page 1149 of the Church Bible.

1 Corinthians chapter 6, starting at verse 9, 1 Corinthians chapter 6, starting at verse 10, 1 Corinthians chapter 7, 1 Corinthians chapter 7, 3-8.

[3 : 3 7] commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body? Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?

You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. Amelia, thanks very much for reading for us.

Morning, everyone. Lovely to have you with us. Please, will you turn back to our first reading, which we had. We'll be coming back to 1 Corinthians, but turn back to that first reading we had from Genesis chapter 2.

And then let me pray for us. Let's pray together. Psalm 19.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

[4 : 4 7] The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this wonderful privilege we have this morning of gathering together to hear your voice as we look at the Bible.

We pray you would indeed revive our souls, make us wise, rejoice our hearts, and enlighten our eyes. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Could we possibly turn the PA system down a bit? I'm just conscious of this constant feedback. So I can't quite see who's got the... Benji, brilliant.

Oh, Warren, great. Okay, thank you very much. If you can't hear me, stick a hand up and I will try and speak more loudly. Now, look, you'll know if you were here last week that this today is the second of three talks on how we should respond to the Church of England's general synopses votes in February to bless same-sex relationships, including the blessing of same-sex marriage.

Last week, we saw that we can be clear on the Bible, confident that the Bible is indeed the Word of God, God speaking to us, with the clear implication that we mustn't allow the drift of our culture to trump what God says.

[6 : 11] If you've missed last week's talk, if you weren't here, then I'd love you to listen to it online, just so you then get the context for what we're thinking about this morning, which is marriage, what it is, and therefore how we should think, not so much, well, as well as marriage, but also how we should think about same-sex relationships.

Let me just say, we're not going to see this morning everything the Bible says about marriage. There's a much fuller four-part sermon series on the website, I think, from a couple of years ago, so if you want the kind of fuller version, then do listen to that.

But as we start, let me say that I'm very conscious that for some of us, this series of talks, including the one next week, is a series which is hard to hear. But I hope at least we are agreed that we do want to hear the truth, however difficult it is for us to hear that truth.

I mean, you know, just think, if your car needs an MOT, you know, do you take your car to the garage which is actually going to tell you what's wrong with it, or do you take your car to the garage where they promise they'll always pass every car, regardless of its state of health?

Or just think of when you go and see a doctor. Do you want your doctor to tell you the truth and what is wrong with you, or actually do you want a doctor to tell you that, you know, you're in the best shape ever and there's nothing wrong with you whatsoever?

[7 : 49] Or for some of you applying to universities or thinking about universities, do you want to apply to a university that prides itself on not causing any offence and only teaching what you want to hear?

Or will you apply to a university which will actually challenge you by teaching you the truth? You see, God loves us too much not to speak the truth to us.

Which means, of course, we can approach his word this morning with real confidence, even as our culture is thoroughly confused. And if you have sight of the outline, it's obviously going to come up on the screen as we go through, but we're going to look at two key things this morning.

Firstly, what God says about marriage, Genesis 2. Secondly, what God says about homosexuality. So let's start with what God says about marriage. Genesis chapter 2.

The whole chapter really is a chapter that gives us God's template for life in his good world. So back to chapter 2, verse 4. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created in the day that Lord God made the heaven, the earth and the heavens.

[9 : 09] And the rest of the chapter outlines God's good pattern, his template, including marriage. And we see the first wedding in verses 23, 24 and 25.

Now, of course, every wedding is a cause, isn't it, for great celebration. Every wedding is like that. But the first wedding particularly so because it's the blueprint for every other wedding, every other marriage that then follows.

It really is a marriage made in heaven. Adam, the man, then bursts into song. Verse 23, as he sings, this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. And then look on to verse 24. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh.

Now, that is a hugely significant verse in the Bible because this is the template verse. This is God's original blueprint, so to speak, for marriage, his blueprint design.

[10 : 16] And although you and I don't live in the Garden of Eden, far from it. We live in a world that has turned its back on God. Nonetheless, the original blueprint design hasn't changed.

And Jesus himself makes that point clear. So before we go any further in Genesis, just turn, will you, to Matthew chapter 19, which we looked at last week on page, I think it's on page 993.

But I'm conscious the Bible version is slightly different in terms of pages. Page 993, certainly in this one, Matthew chapter 19. As I said, it's the passage we looked at last week.

In verse 3, the Lord Jesus is asked a question about divorce. The Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?

And in answer to that question, the Lord Jesus goes back to Genesis chapter 2, to the original marriage template. Verse 4, he answered, It shows, you see, the way in which the Lord Jesus regarded Genesis 2 as authoritative in the ethical debates of his day.

[12 : 01] Notice how he endorses marriage as being from creation, from the very beginning, between a man and a woman. I think the striking thing is that here in Matthew chapter 19, you know, we're 2,000 years beyond Genesis.

And yet Jesus doesn't say, well, you know, Genesis 2, it's a long time ago, it's out of date, we need to kind of redefine it for the modern age, or anything like that. And of course, if this is how Jesus, who is God on earth, regards Genesis 2 as the template for marriage, then it should come of no surprise to us at all that actually the rest of the New Testament does the same, as we should also regard it as the blueprint for marriage.

In the same way, I guess, that in the United States, they have a constitution. The constitution came into the law in 1779, and appeals can be made to it, despite the fact that the US constitution is 250 years old, almost.

And so you'll remember when Donald Trump challenged the outcome of the last US election in 2019, it was the constitution which everyone was turning to, to see what you do, because it's the blueprint for how the country functions.

Well, similarly, Genesis chapter 2, verse 24, does the same thing for marriage. So let's turn back to that verse, Genesis 2, 24. It gives us four elements of marriage.

[13 : 44] I put all four of them on the outline, although really we're just going to focus on the fourth. Genesis 2, 24. Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and to hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Marriage is one public. It is two permanent. It is three physical. In other words, it's the only safe place for sexual intimacy.

And it is four heterosexual. A man shall leave his father and his mother and to hold fast to his wife. Marriage is between a man and a woman, not between a man and a man, or a woman and a woman.

Marriage can only ever be between two people who are of the opposite sex, because this is the way in which God created it.

Now, the reason for that is back in verse 18. Then the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone. Then I'll make him a helper fit for him.

[14 : 57] Here, if you like, is God's person specification of what a helper for Adam should look like. Notice that little phrase.

It must be a helper fit for the man. Or a more literal translation, someone who is like opposite. That's what that phrase of fit for means.

Someone who is like opposite. It means, of course, that none of the animals are suitable, because they are not like. They are not like the man.

They're not made in God's image in the way in which he is. And another man isn't suitable, because while another man would be made in God's image, nonetheless, he wouldn't be opposite.

Marriage is heterosexual. And therefore, God's good design as our loving creator is for sexual intimacy to be only within a lifelong marriage between one man and one woman.

[16 : 02] It means that same-sex unions, because they don't have this inbuilt sense of being like opposites, this complementarity, are not part of God's good creation blueprint.

And in God's sight, they can never be marriage. That's why, of course, the rest of the Bible sees homosexual activity as sinful, just as it sees heterosexual sexual intimacy that's outside of marriage as sinful as well.

Now, to say that is not to be homophobic. Phobia, of course, is a fear. Arachnophobia is the fear of spiders and so on. Phobias so often are irrational, so it's a kind of clever use of language.

As Christians, we need to, and I hope we do, graciously insist that we are not homophobic. We don't fear homosexuality. We don't fear the gay community. Quite the opposite.

We're called to love people. We're called to love all people. But we equally need to insist that homosexual practice is wrong and that same-sex marriage is not marriage.

[17 : 23] So that's our first thing for this morning, what God says about marriage. Let's turn on to that second reading which we had from 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and what God says, therefore, about homosexuality.

1 Corinthians chapter 6, page, again, in my version, it's page 1149. I wanted to notice two things here.

They're both up on the screen. Firstly, that homosexuality is no different from other sins or perhaps it should read is in many ways no different.

I think there might be some ways. I think you could probably say it is different, but for our purposes this morning, it is no different from other sins. Now, you may know that first century Corinth was a city in many respects, like London is today, known for its sexual permissiveness.

Throughout the letter, we see the church struggling to be distinctive. The church in Corinth is very much a church which is struggling to swim against the cultural tide, just as the church does in the UK today.

[18 : 38] In chapters 5 to 6, it's in relation to sexual immorality. Have a look at verses 9 and 10. Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Now, that phrase, the kingdom of God, simply means the rule of Jesus. There is no place for the lifestyles of verses 9 and 10 if you are living under the rule of King Jesus.

There must be a repentance, a genuine turning away from these things as part of turning to Jesus and putting our trust in him.

But notice, will you, that the Apostle Paul doesn't kind of get hung up on either sex or on homosexuality.

[19 : 45] There's a whole list of other lifestyle behaviours as well. Hence the heading, homosexuality is no different from other sins. And yet, it is still a sin.

So notice, will you, Paul mentions sexual immorality, which in the Bible always refers to sexual intimacy outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.

Paul mentions idolatry, which is where we give a created thing or another person the position in our lives that God alone should have. It might be career, it might be possessions, it might be a relationship.

He talks about adultery, which refers to those who engage in sexual immorality with another person when one of them is married. Homosexuality, but notice there, Paul is talking about those who practice homosexuality.

He's not talking about those who are same-sex attracted but don't practice it, it's those who practice it. Finally, in verse 10, he talks about this whole, a number of things, people's lives characterized by theft, greed, drunkenness, reviling, in other words, slander and swindling.

[20 : 58] Now, my assumption is this morning with gatherings such as us here today that actually all of us are going to struggle in one area or another with a list like this.

Notice, will you, they are all actions, they are all behaviors, they are all lifestyles. As I said, Paul is talking about homosexual practice, not same-sex attraction.

These verses are not about those who fall into sin and are then repentant. They are those, it's said about those whose lives are characterized by these things.

It's part of their lifestyle. They are unrepentant. In other words, we mustn't think that homosexuality is the only sin that Christians are bothered about because theft and drunkenness and slander and defrauding others, many, of course, which are trivialized in our culture, are equally sinful.

Nonetheless, homosexuality is on this list. It is wrong. A practicing gay lifestyle is not an option for someone who is following Jesus.

[22 : 20] It's why, of course, it's so serious that the House of Bishops have chosen to mislead Christians in the Church of England into thinking that such relationships can be blessed.

They can't. Did you notice the application of verse 9? Do not be deceived. I'm conscious that many of us have gay friends.

I'm conscious that some of us have gay family members. And it is out of love that we say to them that this is what God says in the Bible. Don't be deceived.

In contrast, it is unloving. Indeed, it is a wicked thing. When church leaders give their blessing to same-sex relationships, thereby shutting those people out of God's kingdom.

That must be a wicked thing to do that. So, homosexuality is no different from other sins. But then I also want us to notice that same-sex attracted Christians are no different from other Christians.

[23 : 31] Verse 11. And such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

There was an article in one of the tabloid newspapers a couple of years ago. You may remember it. It's such a striking headline. The headline ran like this. Reverend welcomes murderers, pimps, and prostitutes to services to grow the flock.

Well, a headline clearly designed to grab our attention and it certainly worked with me. But what does Paul make of that? Well, he says to the church in Corinth, that is what some of you were.

Your lives are no longer characterized by those lifestyles. I wonder if you noticed the three words in verse 11 and they are glorious words which describes everyone, everyone who has put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

did you spot them? Washed. Through the death of Jesus our sin washed away such that we are clean in God's sight. Sanctified through the death of Jesus we're made holy in God's sight.

[24 : 44] We're set apart to serve him as his special treasured people. Justified through the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

Again, we are put right with God. We are made perfect in God's sight. both now in this life but also on the final judgment day as well.

Isn't that glorious? Isn't that wonderful? Three words and yet conveying so much. It follows therefore that if you're same-sex attracted and if you turn to the Lord Jesus in repentance and faith you are no less loved by God than any other Christian.

let me say my assumption has always been that there are same-sex attracted people here at Grace Church either single or married.

If you have repented if you have put your trust in Jesus you are in no way a sort of second-class Christian and you could say exactly the same thing about the alcoholic the thief the adulterer any of the other things here in Paul's list for those who have repented and put their trust in Jesus.

[26 : 04] you see what is the gospel if you like for the person who is same-sex attracted but it's exactly the same as it is for anyone else it is a gospel of both repentance and of faith repentance turning from your old way of life turning from your old lifestyle and faith putting your trust in the Lord Jesus who died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins following him as Lord now tragically the decision of the Church of England's General Synod to bless same-sex relationships tragically it actually amounts to a different gospel because it is a gospel without repentance can we see belief and repentance go together last week I was reading a blog by a same-sex attracted

Christian I was so taken with what she was saying that I thought I'd share some of her blog with you the title of the article was seven things I wish my pastor knew about my homosexuality and one of them was this she said this I wish you knew that it honors neither God nor me to apologize for God's plan or design she said I appreciate empathy for the pain that my misdirected longings may cause but God is not arbitrarily withholding something good from me he is showing me what leads to life and human flourishing and is keeping me from that which will harm me love me and tell me the truth isn't that such a powerful thing to hear from someone who is same sex attracted she went on to say that she wants to be treated like every other follower of Jesus she said this I wish you knew that I should be credited with the same moral agency and responsibility as everyone else in the

Christian community if unmarried heterosexuals are called to celibacy and are presumed in Christ to have the power to live out his commands then so should I be to treat me according to a different standard is to lower my dignity before God I too am called to be holy she finished by saying this may I make two requests love me but remember you cannot be more merciful than God it isn't mercy to affirm same sex acts as good don't compromise truth help me to live in harmony with it I'm asking you to help me to take up my cross and to follow Jesus homosexuality is no different in many respects from other sins and same sex attracted

Christians are no different from other Christians let me finish by considering three objections I think we so often hear to this teaching from the Bible firstly times have changed surely in the 21st century we can't really can we take the teaching of the Bible seriously I mean just look how much society has changed surely it's simply a matter of justice and equality but just think back to last Sunday what kind of book is the Bible is it simply a human book containing human wisdom and observations about the way to live or is it as we saw Jesus say last week is it the unchanging word of God because God doesn't change therefore his word doesn't change therefore his template for marriage and what isn't marriage doesn't change either besides

I think we so easily forget this the teaching here of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians would have gone against the tide of first century Roman culture just as much if not more so than it goes against our tide the tide of our culture in 21st century Britain today homosexuality you may know was widely practiced in the Roman world probably more so than it is in our culture when Paul wrote this letter Nero was the Roman emperor he had married a male eunuch called Sporus with a full wedding ceremony followed by a public procession where he took Sporus into his palace and lived with him as his wife just imagine how out of date Paul's teaching must have been with sexual sin paraded in the Roman world like that by the most powerful man of the day second objection and again

[31 : 22] I think we often hear this what about faithful committed gay relationships isn't that kind of faithful committed relationship something to be celebrated surely that's okay but just look back to the previous chapter and how chapter 5 starts in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 1 it is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans for a man has his father's wife here is a man in a sexually immoral relationship with his stepmother now notice will you there seems to be no question here about whether or not the couple love each other Paul doesn't ask about the level of their commitments or whether they have been in a faithful long term relationship because of course that is beside the point the fact is the nature of the relationship is wrong it is still sin third objection why on earth should we make such a big deal out of all this well in part of course you so often hear why is the church making such a big deal out of it but actually it is our culture which is making such a big deal out of it and the church is always called to be distinctive we are always called as followers of

Jesus Christ to be distinctive in whatever culture we live in in whatever time and age that is part of our calling to be distinctive but of course supremely on this issue we make such a big deal out of it because of 1 Corinthians chapter 6 verse 10 such will not inherit the kingdom of God just as those whose lives are characterized by drunkenness or greed will not inherit the kingdom of God in other words those who persist in unrepentant lifestyle will face the judgment and remember of course the Lord Jesus himself who spoke about hell more than anyone else in the Bible it is a loving thing to do to warn people of the reality of judgment that is a great kindness to do that I don't know about you but I think it's very easy to get the impression that the church is like some kind of stuffy gentleman's club in the west end which needs to be brought into the 21st century and that's so often isn't it the way in which the media coverage works on this all along the club members are saying we don't want to have these people in our club and yet the rules gradually get changed over time so firstly the dress code is relaxed to bring the club into the 21st century so you don't always have to wear a suit and tie and then you're actually allowed to have a conversation with someone in the reading room so rather than just sitting there behind the pages of your daily telegraph you're actually allowed to have a conversation with someone and then women are allowed in but only if accompanied by a member of the club and then finally women are allowed in equally on their own terms have you heard that kind of thing so easy

I think that's the way in which the media portrays this the whole time and yet actually I hope we can see there is far more at stake simply than club etiquette verse 10 such will not inherit the kingdom of God yes the bible allows for disagreement on certain issues what the apostle Paul calls disputable matters and there are other issues on which Christians disagree such as whether or not women should lead churches for example or whether or not women should be bishops but they are not salvation issues they do not imperil people's eternity which means that those who say and I'm sure we've all heard people say something like well you know the church of England has learnt to get along over the issue of women bishops and therefore this is no different that everyone should just learn to get along together they are missing the point that this is an issue where people's eternity is at stake and it's because as those who know

Jesus it's because we've experienced the love of Jesus ourselves it's because we love others that we are concerned for their eternity and that is why we will need next Sunday's talk as well as today's talk because next Sunday we're going to be thinking together about how as a church we need to be clear on our response so do please come back for that but in the meantime let's pray together and such were some of you heavenly father we praise you very much for the glorious good news of the lord Jesus washed sanctified and justified and we pray that you would help us to keep on rejoicing in what it is to know him and yet heavenly father we pray to in our current climate please would you help us as a church to be faithful to the gospel ourselves to be faithful to the bible's teaching and please would you help us to hold out this glorious good news to our society to our world to those who are same sex attracted attracted and we pray father for those in our church family who are same sex attracted please would you help them to keep on trusting in the lord Jesus and to rejoice in him and we ask it in his name amen in to