

Encounter Service – 5pm 21st April 2024



Deeper Theology: Bible Focus

Biblical interpretation & the blessing of same-sex couples

AllSaints 

Lots to cover...

1. Recap on *Deeper theology* Biblical Interpretation sessions:
 - a) Hermeneutics – the way we interpret the Bible
 - b) Sources of authority – our basis for moral reasoning
 - c) Self-awareness and Handling complex issues with humility
2. Seeking discernment regarding same sex relationships:
 1. Timeline of the sexuality debate in the Church of England
 2. Points of Agreement and Controversy
 3. Alternative Interpretations of Bible verses about same sex practice
 4. Biblical understandings of Marriage
3. Other arguments for and against the blessing of same sex unions
4. Different approaches to same sex marriages / blessings

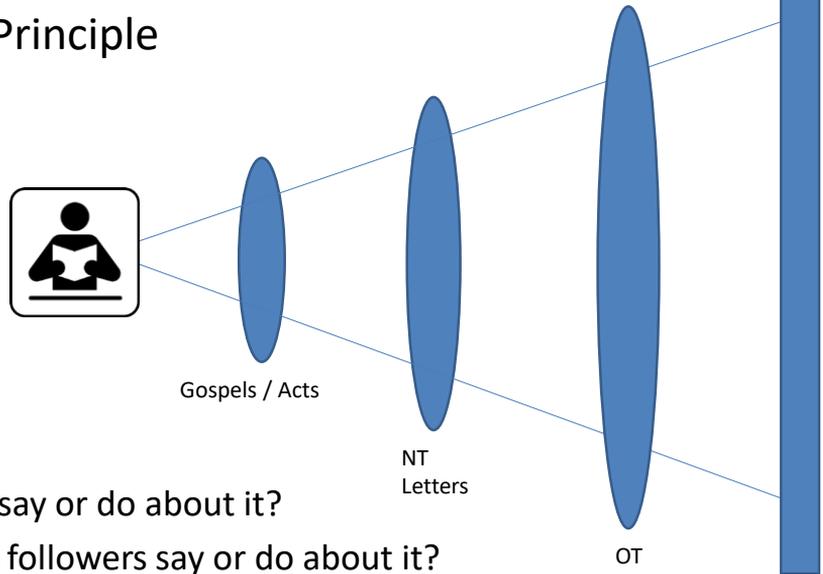
Hermeneutics – the way we interpret the Bible

- Biblical interpretation is every Christian's lifelong privilege and pursuit
- From the earliest days of the church there have been alternative approaches to interpreting the bible eg.:
 - *Symbolic/Allegorical* (Origen 185-253, Egypt)
 - *Plain Historical* (John Chrysostom 347-407, Turkey)
- Cassian and then Augustine developed a method of interpretation called '*The Quadriga*' finding 4 layers of meaning in the scriptures: literal, moral, allegorical and anagogical (eg. mystical/prophetic). This became the basic hermeneutical manual of the middle ages.
- At the reformation the Protestant emphasis rejected 'excessive' clerical allegorising in favour of '*sola scriptura*': A *plain reading* of scripture for all believers providing 'power, life, comfort and instruction'

Principles of Protestant interpretation

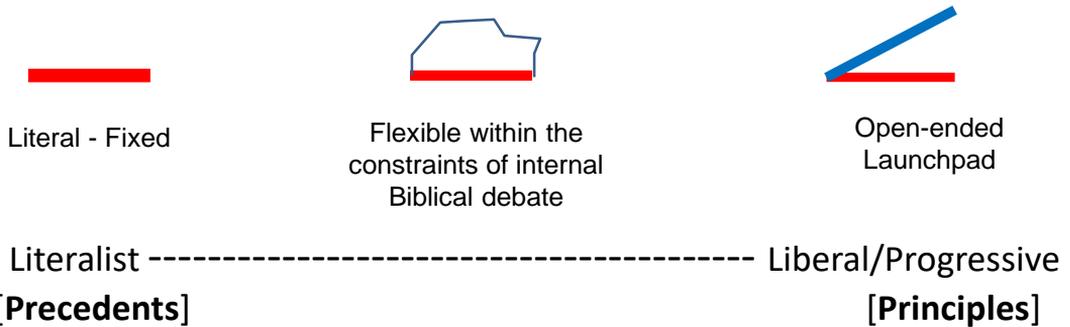
- *Sola Scriptura* – Scripture contains the whole will of God and can be understood by all believers with the help of the Holy Spirit
- *Progressive revelation* – Earlier parts of the Bible were written for and about earlier societies with very different cultural backgrounds and context. Christ superseded the ritual laws etc.
- *Authorial intent* - Looking for what the writer intended to say and the context.
- *Christocentric principle* - interpreting scripture through the lens and priority of Christ

Christocentric Principle



1. What did Jesus say or do about it?
2. What did Jesus' followers say or do about it?
3. What did Jesus' forbears say or do about it?

The Biblical interpretation continuum?



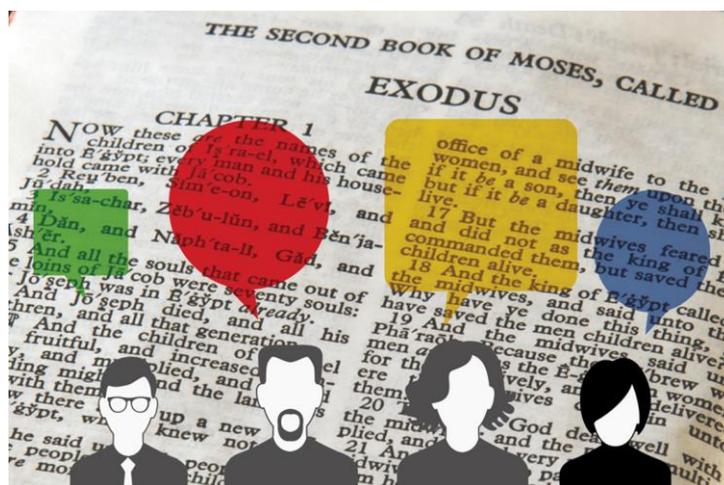
Different interpretations of the Bible lead to different ethics

Ethic = a system of accepted beliefs that control behavior

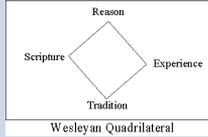
A practical approach

1. In faith, choose the bible as the final authority for matters of salvation, faith, and moral guidance.
2. Pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit
3. Avoid interpreting verses in isolation, draw on the widest possible survey of scripture, including reputable scholarship
4. Learn as much as you can about the **context** of a passage – Who, What, Where, When & Why? What was the *Authorial Intent*?
5. If the meaning of a text appears self-evident, don't try to squeeze another meaning into it – (*eisegesis*)
6. Suggest an interpretation with a *trembling heart* (re. Isaiah 66v2)

Sources of authority – our basis for moral reasoning

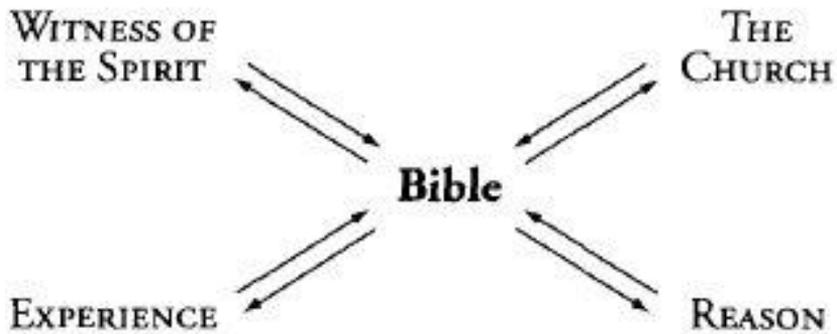


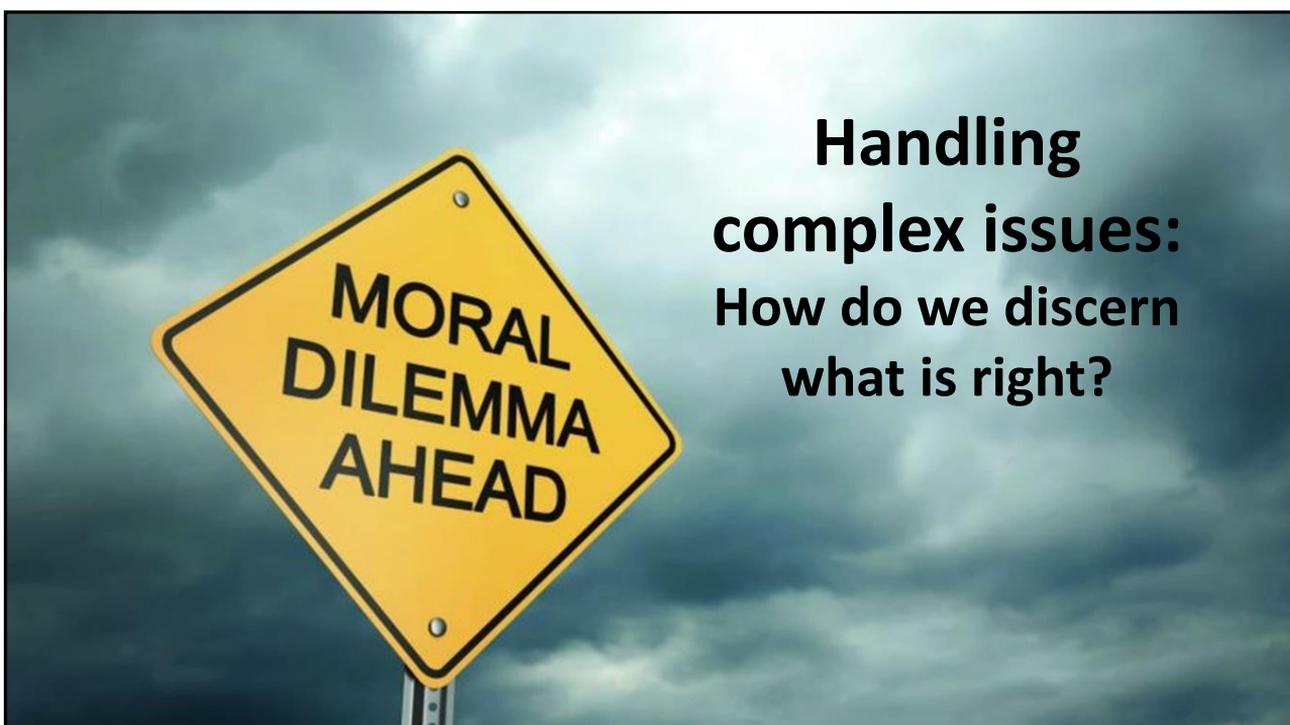
Sources of Authority

Catholic	Anglican	Methodist	Liberal Anglican
Ignatius	Richard Hooker	John Wesley	John Macquarrie
	3 Legged Stool	Wesleyan Quadrilateral	
			
Scripture Tradition Magisterium	Scripture Tradition Reason	Scripture Tradition Reason Experience	Scripture Tradition Reason Experience Revelation Cultural Context

<< Heteronomy ----- Autonomy >>

Keeping the Scriptures central





**Handling
complex issues:
How do we discern
what is right?**

Self-awareness is key to humble discernment

When discussing complex issues keep in mind:

1. Your view of the Bible (**Hermeneutic**) may be different from others
2. Your sources of **Authority** may be different from others
3. Your **Past experience** may be different from others:
Pain; pride; prejudice and insecurities can affect your ability to reason prayerfully and objectively.

Advice on handling complex matters: Philippians 1v9-10

⁹ And this is my prayer: that your **love** may abound more and more in **knowledge** and depth of **insight** [judgment], ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best [be discerning over controversial matters] and may be pure and blameless [sincere and without offense] for the day of Christ.

Discernment comes from:

1. **Love (*agape*)**, informed by:

- **knowledge** *epignōsis*
- **insight** *aisthēsis*

Timeline of the sexuality debate in the CofE

- The 1967 Sexual Offences Act decriminalised same-sex acts. Supported by Anglican bishops including Archbishop Michael Ramsey.
- In 1991 CofE Bishops published 'Issues in human sexuality' which upheld traditional teaching on marriage and sex whilst offering greater understanding to same-sex couples.
- In 2003 following the appointment of Gene Robinson as Bishop, schism occurred in the Anglican province of America and the Anglican Church in North America was created.
- 2004 Civil partnerships were legalised in the UK, supported by Bishops in the Lords
- In 2013 The Pilling Report recommended clergy should be allowed to offer public services to "mark" same-sex relationships. This sparked 'shared conversations'
- 2014 Same-sex marriage is legalised in the UK, but remains illegal for Church of England.
- In 2020 *Living in Love and Faith (LLF)* was published with resources for discussion.
- Nov 2023 General Synod voted to allow clergy to bless same-sex marriages (by 1 vote).
- Dec 2023 The House of Bishops commended *Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF)* for blessing same-sex couples during public worship. Stand-alone services may follow...

Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2021 Census Analysis:

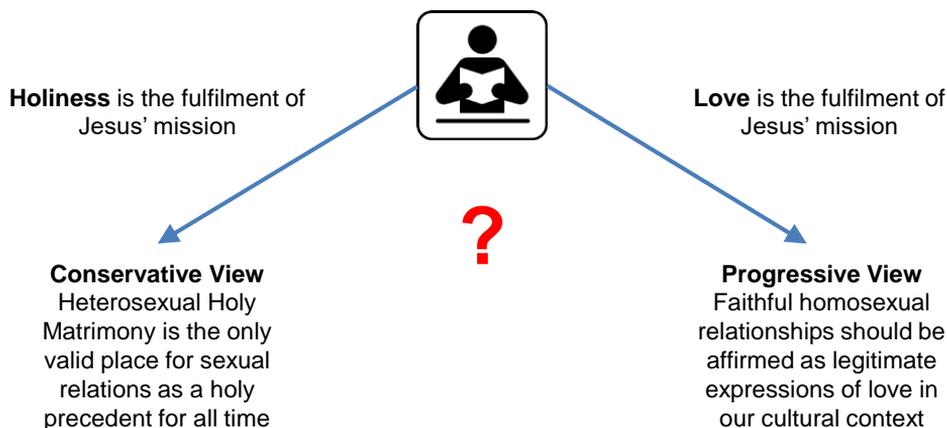
- According to the UK 2021 Census of the 16+ UK population:
 - 3.2% of the overall population identify as LGBTQ+
 - 1.5% Gay or Lesbian
 - 1.3% Bisexual
 - 0.4% Other
- The highest percentage identifying as LGB+ were age 16-24yrs
 - 6.9% identify as LGBTQ+
 - 2.11% Gay or Lesbian
 - 4.0% Bisexual
 - 0.79% Other

Agreement and Controversy

Christians who love the Bible reach different conclusions about sexual ethics depending on their approach to biblical interpretation & sources of authority.

- Points of agreement:
 - Homosexual *orientation* is not sinful.
 - The following are incompatible with Christian discipleship:
 - Adultery, promiscuity, prostitution, polyamory, incest, bestiality, paedophilia.
 - Violent, abusive or coercive sexual behaviour.
- Point of controversy:
 - Is a consensual monogamous homosexual relationship a legitimate biblical expression of love and faithfulness in the context of family life in our culture today?

Alternative Biblical Interpretations



What does the Bible say about Homosexual practice?

There are 12 explicit references to homosexual behaviour in the Bible, 9 in the Old Testament and 3 New Testament. Of the Old Testament references, 7 refer to sexual abuse or cultic prostitution:

Passage	Description	Context
Genesis 19v5-6	The men of Sodom	Sexual Violence
Deut 23:17-18	Law against shrine prostitution	Cultic prostitution
Judges 19v22	The men of Gibeah	Sexual Violence
1 Kings 14:23-24	Male shrine prostitution condemned	Cultic prostitution
1 Kings 15:12-15	Male shrine prostitutes expelled	Cultic prostitution
1 Kings 22:46	Male shrine prostitutes expelled	Cultic prostitution
2 Kings 23:6-8	Male shrine prostitutes removed	Cultic Prostitution

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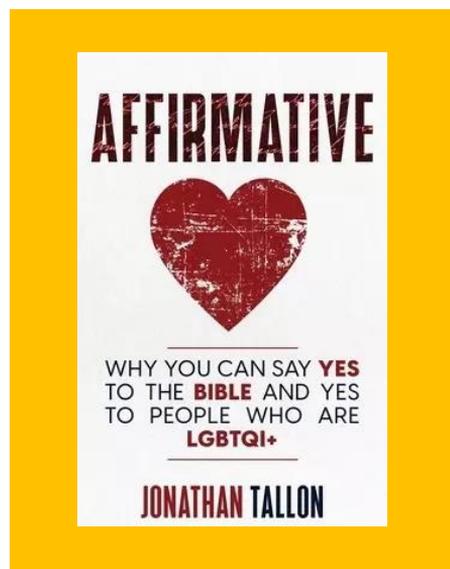
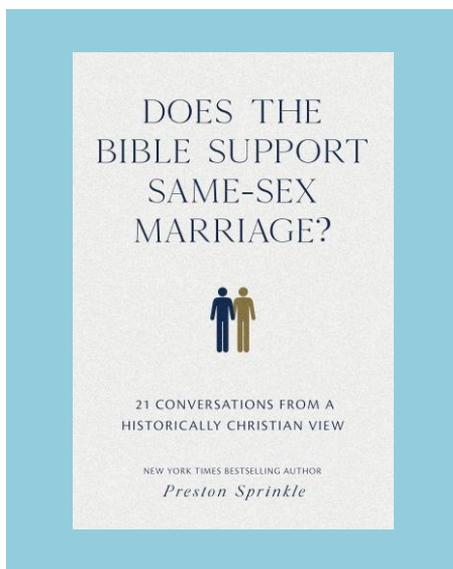
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What does the Bible say about Homosexual practice?

The remaining 5 references are relevant when discussing consensual homosexual practice:

Passage	Description
Leviticus 18:22	Torah law commandments about unlawful sexual relations
Leviticus 20:13	Torah law punishment for homosexual practice
Romans 1: 24-27	Paul cites homosexual practice as evidence of rebellion
1 Corinthians 6:9-10	Paul warns that homosexual practitioners will not inherit the Kingdom of God
1 Timothy 1:8-10	Paul warns that homosexual practice is contrary to sound teaching

Helpful comparative reading



Leviticus

- Leviticus 18:22 “Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.
- Leviticus 20:13 “If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable.

Conservative View

Although the ritual and ceremonial laws of Leviticus were set aside through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, the moral laws, including laws about sexual relations remain.

Progressive View

Jesus replaced the Holiness Code of Leviticus with a distilled principle: *Love your neighbour as yourself* (Lev 19v18) which is to be applied afresh to each cultural context.

Romans 1

²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Romans 1

Conservative View

Paul is describing God's righteous judgment on fallen humanity. Listed along with many other 'things that ought not to be done' in Chapter 1, homosexual practice is cited as evidently 'against nature', a symptomatic result of the fall and humanity's rebellion against God and the divine order of creation.

Progressive View

Paul is describing the debauched Gentile pagan cultic practice of Cybele worship (The 'Great mother' fertility Goddess of Rome) which involved ritual homosexual acts and frenzied self-emasculation of the male *Galli* goddess disciples. (As described by the Roman historian Lucian in the C2nd AD) Paul was using this as a rhetorical trap to get his Jewish Roman audience to instantly pass judgment on such brazen idolatry.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

- ⁹Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor *malakos*, nor *arsenokoitēs*... will inherit the kingdom of God.

Conservative View

Paul warns that both active and passive homosexual partners will not inherit the kingdom of God. *Arsenokoitēs* was coined by Paul as a way of referring back to the Septuagint Greek version of Leviticus 20v13

Progressive View

Malakos literally means 'soft'. It could mean male prostitutes, or promiscuous males. *Arsenokoitēs* was invented by Paul meaning 'male-bedder' probably referring to Pederasty.

1 Timothy 1:9-10

- ⁹...the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰for the sexually immoral, for *arsenokoitēs*, for slave kidnappers and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine

Conservative View

Arsenokoitēs was coined by Paul referring back to the Septuagint Greek version of Leviticus 20v13 eg. unlawful homosexual practice.

Progressive View

Arsenokoitēs was invented by Paul meaning 'male-bedder' probably referring to Pederasty, note - he refers next to *andrapodistēs* slave kidnappers, eg. trafficking young men for sex

Further points to note

- In 1946 The RSV used the word 'homosexuals' as a translation of *Arsenokoitēs*. This is a mistranslation because it vilified homosexual orientation as well as practice.
- Similarly, the word *Sodomites* was a word commonly used for homosexual men referring back to the violent and abusive men of Sodom in Genesis - a gross misrepresentation which the church took too long to correct.

What did Jesus say?

- Jesus never specifically mentioned or taught about homosexuality or same-sex relations according to the Gospels.
- However, Jesus did affirm God's original intentions for heterosexual marriage in the second creation account in Genesis 2 during a discourse about marriage and divorce in Matthew 19:

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."

Marriage: Leaving, cleaving and becoming 'one flesh'

Conservative View

Marriage is the gift of God in creation. Jesus explicitly affirms the creation ordinance of permanence, unity and sex-difference when talking about marriage in Matthew 19. Paul describes marriage as a *holy* mystery which reflects Christ's relationship with the church: Permanent, united, different. Flesh means *flesh* in every other reference in Genesis so this is clearly referring to sexual union between male and female.

Progressive View

David Runcorn: 'in the Bible 'one flesh' does not mean sexual love. The Hebrew word (*basar*) means 'relatives'. 'One flesh' actually means 'one kinship group' (cf Gen 29.14 & I Sam 5.1). One flesh emphasises the central place of marriage in the re-shaping and renewing of primary kinship groups. 'The focus is not on sexual union but on the formation of the essential and foundational building blocks of human community'.

Other arguments: 1) Pastoral

Conservative View

The church should reject homophobia and discrimination but offer a better story of new life and core identity in Christ. The pastorally loving thing to do is to strengthen families by promoting traditional marriage as the original holy foundation of family life in which children are nurtured.

Progressive View

Traditional Christian teaching has contributed to homophobia and discrimination. Research over the last 20 years has reported increased risk of suicide where individuals feel conflicted between their religious and sexual-gender identities.

Other arguments: 2) Missional

Conservative View

Denominations that have embraced same-sex marriage in recent years have declined. Those opposed to SSM have tended to grow.

'Churches "trimming faith to fit in with culture" have tended to shrink'. Louise Perry -Telegraph 23rd Dec 2023

Churches need to respectfully lead on morality, not simply follow culture.

Progressive View

The Pilling Report (2013) stated 'the Church of England's current teaching and practice is "deeply off-putting to those outside the Church and therefore a serious impediment to mission". Conservative churches will increasingly be at odds with society e.g. UK.gov states: '*We strongly encourage schools to include the teaching of different family models and same-sex relationships.*'

Other arguments: 3) Moral trajectory

Conservative View

Unlike slavery or women's ministry there is no 'internal debate' within the bible about the prohibition of same-sex practice. From start to finish, sexual union between male and female within marriage is both normative and prescriptive.

Progressive View

The church has debated many controversial ethical issues over the years such as slavery, women's ministry, mortgages, etc. but the trajectory of Jesus' ministry in the Bible is towards human flourishing, liberation, inclusion and justice. The blessing of same-sex unions is following the same trajectory.

Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF)

- These are prayers and guidance commended by the CofE house of Bishops for the blessing of same-sex couples during public worship services.
- The official teaching of the CofE remains that ‘Holy Matrimony is a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman.’
- However CofE churches may ‘Opt in’ to offer *Prayers of Love and Faith* as a pastoral accommodation for the blessing of same-sex couples where the incumbent and PCC agree it.

PLF represent “a departure from the doctrine to which the Church of England has always held fast”
‘The Alliance’ (HTB churches)

“For the first time the goodness and holiness of committed same-sex relationships will be formally recognised in the liturgies of the Church of England.”

Different approaches to same sex marriages / blessings

Catholic	Church of England	Methodist
<i>The Sacrament of Marriage</i> is the ‘exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children’	<i>Holy Matrimony</i> is a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman, blessed by God in creation and pointing to the love between Christ and the Church. A way of life which makes Christ holy. It is within marriage that sexual intimacy finds its proper place.	<i>Marriage</i> defined as ‘a lifelong union in body, mind and spirit of two people who freely enter it’
Since Pope Francis issued <i>Fiducia Supplicans</i> in Dec 2023, Priests may offer private spontaneous pastoral prayers of blessing for ‘couples in irregular situations or couples of the same-sex’ not for legitimation but rather for their spiritual enrichment.	Clergy may offer ‘Prayers of Love and faith’ for the blessing of same-sex couples during Public Worship if the PCC and Incumbent ‘Opt-in’.	Methodist ministers may conduct same-sex weddings following local agreement and registration of the Methodist Chapel.

Where is your swing-o-meter?

