

243 *The sanctity of marriage*

My children have sometimes felt a little odd – their parents are still together! And having got in touch again with my sister these past five years, I have learnt more about my own upbringing, and have seen the terrible damage that can be caused by careless and even abusive relationships.

The sanctity of marriage has been chipped away at since ‘the sexual revolution’ of the sixties and, as Christians, we have rightly tried to stand against it, because the teaching of Scripture is very clear. The place of marriage in the Bible runs right through from Genesis to Revelation, in the whole of God’s plan, both literally and figuratively, culminating in the wedding of the Lamb, with the church as his beautiful bride.

And yesterday we had the Church of England’s pronouncement on gay marriage, which has provoked strong reactions – in both directions – which could split the church.

However, when we feel strongly about something, it’s all too easy to slip into woolly thinking. We need to distinguish carefully between important biblical principles and secondary issues that could be matters of individual conscience. I feel very strongly, too, so please check me out.

I hope you won’t think it trite if I summarise the issues from my recent articles in the form of a table concerning sexual relations.

	male–female	same-sex
with children	×	×
non-consensual	×	×
casual/unfaithful	×	×
within a faithful relationship	✓	

Does anyone have *any* doubts about *any* of my seven symbols? The plain teaching of Scripture – the X’s are sexual immorality, and the tick is essential fundamental Christian teaching.

One dear friend, who is struggling with what I’ve been writing, has said, *‘I have searched and searched [the Scriptures] and can find nothing that suggests that same-sex relationships/marriage are OK. A continuing theme is that God created male and female; the Bible is full of examples of the differences between men and women, something current thinking is desperately trying to negate. Jesus brought a whole new dimension to this in the way He related to women.’*

I agree totally with all of that, but does it help with my empty box 8?

Now an example from Tom Wright’s excellent *Revelation for Everyone*: When 2:12–17 mentions the evils of ‘eating food offered to idols and sexual immorality’, Tom uses it to refer to ‘faithful man-plus-woman marriage’.ⁱ Maybe gay marriage was in the forefront of Tom’s mind at the time he wrote, but it *certainly* wasn’t in John’s mind.

Faithful gay relations (box 8) are not referred to specifically in Scripture, so is it good biblical interpretation to just say it's 'sexual immorality'? For me it's a matter of conscience.^{1 Cor 10}

Now, think of Adam and Brian, Clare and Diane^[231] – not real people, but they stand for real people around us in our churches, today. They need our love and support.

Paul Bev. 28.1.23

ⁱ From his studies of verse 14, 'eat idol-food and indulge in sexual immorality', Tom says, '*Sexual morality isn't, as is often portrayed, a matter of a few ancient rules clung to by some rather conservative persons when the rest of society has moved on. It is, rather, a matter of the call of the creator God to faithful man-plus-woman marriage, reflecting the complementarity of heaven and earth themselves. ... The reason sexual immorality is so often coupled with idolatry, as here, is because such behaviour points to different gods – the gods of blood and soil, of race and power. It's a toxic mixture, and the Christian has no business getting involved with it, as Paul himself warned in 1 Corinthians 10.*'

I'm guessing that his discussions about gay marriage are what prompted his rhetoric about '*a few ancient rules clung to by some rather conservative persons when the rest of society has moved on*'?

Interestingly, his quote from Paul (1 Cor 10) says that, **despite** John's comments in Revelation, eating idol-food is **not** wrong *per se*; it's a matter of conscience, a matter of our having a caring attitude towards people with whom we disagree – **exactly what I'm asking for re box 8!**