

Is Human Sexuality a First Order Issue?

What is a first order issue?

A first order is an issue which is central to the Christian faith and on which there is no room for disagreement in the Church. Thus justification by faith is a first order issue because to deny that we are justified by faith (Romans 5:1) is to deny the basis of our salvation. Similarly, the doctrine of the Trinity is a first order issue because to deny the reality of the God in whose name we were baptised (Matthew 28:19) and whom we are called to believe in, love and obey.

Why is the discussion about human identity and sexuality a first order one?

- 1. To replace what scripture says about the givenness of male and female gender and sexuality is to construct our own anthropology in place of that given by scripture.**

According to the book of Genesis God created human beings as male and female (Genesis 1:26-28) and He created marriage to be an exclusive, life-long sexual relationship between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:18-25). To hold that relationships between two people of the same sex can constitute a marriage or that such a relationship is equivalent to marriage is to deny what Genesis (and also Jesus, Mark 10:6-7) teaches us about how God fashioned human identity and anthropology. Therefore, it calls into question belief in the first article of the Apostles Creed in which to affirm belief in 'God the Father Almighty maker of heaven and earth' is to declare that we believe what Genesis tells us about the cosmos and its ordering.

- 2. To affirm what scripture repeatedly says about same sex (and other) unacceptable practices is to challenge the plain reading of scripture and the idea that God's laws are given for our flourishing**

In the Ten Commandments God has given us his basic summary of what it means to live a holy life before him. The seventh commandment is 'you shall not commit adultery' (Exodus 20:12). In Leviticus 20:10-21 same-sex sexual activity, along with other forms of sexual activity outside marriage, is listed as a break of this commandment. The same is also true in 1 Timothy 1:10. It follows that, to engage in same-sex sexual activity is to breach the seventh commandment. In terms of the BCP catechism it is a failure of the requirement 'to keep my body in temperance, soberness and chastity.'

- 3. Christians are called to live a new and holy life which rejects all that is sin and endangers their spiritual health.**

In 1 Corinthians 6:11 St. Paul reminds the Corinthians that 'you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of

God.’ He reminds the Corinthians of this because, as a people who have been saved in this way, they should not be engaging in the sorts of activity listed in the previous two verses, activity which includes same-sex relationships (v9). As Paul asks in Romans 6:2 ‘How can we who have died to sin still live in it?’

4. People’s way of life can lead to exclusion from God’s kingdom.

There are a range of passages in the New Testament that make it clear that sexual sin in breach of the seventh commandment can preclude us from being part of the Kingdom of heaven (See Matthew 5:27-30, Galatians 5:18-21, Ephesians 5:5, Revelation 21:8, 22:15). In Corinthians 6:9-10 St. Paul declares that same-sex sexual activity comes into this category. It follows that to engage in such activity is to put one’s place in God’s kingdom in jeopardy and to encourage or tolerate such activity is to put other people in similar jeopardy.

For these four reasons the issue of same-sex sexual relationships is a first order issue and therefore not one on which the Church of England can simply learn to live with difference.

To read more about this topic, see Martin Davie’s paper [*Introduction to Adiaphora.*](#)