

## **Reflection on Shared Conversations**

I would have to start by saying that I had been dreading these shared conversations, mainly because I have good friends who hold to a different view to myself and also because I knew that there would be people there for whom this is a live issue. My own beliefs are that of an orthodox Reformed Evangelical Christian, who holds as a first order doctrine that practicing homosexual relationships are sexual sin, and unrepentant sexual sin is a salvation issue. Therefore I went into these shared conversations with a heavy heart.

### **A harrowing experience**

When we arrived and had finished all the formalities of greeting one another whilst holding all of our cards close to our chests, as soon as we had to begin to show our true colours and open up in the debate it quickly became apparent that there was a very strong liberal bias.

This bias was mainly due to the fact that out of nearly forty people in attendance, there were not even ten orthodox evangelicals there - so the orthodox evangelical side was outnumbered four to one.

With the numbers in attendance being stacked so strongly in favour of liberals and “progressive evangelicals” (who were liberal on this issue) as well as a number of the attendees being homosexuals themselves, including some in same sex relationships, it made it very awkward and difficult for the small number of orthodox evangelicals to properly open up in the debate.

I was also surprised that it seemed to be only the orthodox evangelicals who had Bibles with them, and who were using Scripture to give meaning to their experience. The counterarguments seemed to be made solely from emotions and experience, but without presenting a biblical foundation.

Despite my citing passages such as Matthew 19, Romans 1:26-28, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Jude 7 and asking ‘What are we to make of

such texts?', the response was sadly very much that of protest and denial, with remarks such as: *"Paul writes a load of rubbish so we don't listen to him..."* and *"We don't actually have to use the bible as a rule book"*. But for me the most distressing and shocking quote of the whole three days was, *"As Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, He probably didn't have a 'Y' chromosome, and so therefore He was most likely transgender anyway..."*. This drew a great cheer throughout the main meeting room, and my soul shuddered.

I have never heard so much brazen and dangerous heresy in one place. It was as if two thousand years of church history, and all the theology and doctrine that is held so dear by the faithful saints was being wantonly discarded for something fleshly and worldly.

When we went into the triplet for a conversation to share our story, I explained how I came to hold an orthodox position. However, instead of just listening, the two others started arguing with me and protesting against my position, and particularly when I said that I believed that it was a salvation issue.

On the whole I felt very emotionally manipulated and undermined for holding to the Church of England's official position on marriage and could feel the strong, unbearable pressure towards the church changing its official position on this issue.

Additionally, there was a strong liberal leaning towards bringing change to the doctrines of the Church of England. On the second day we had a discussion about "moving forwards", with many saying that the doctrines of the Church of England (that we all signed up to when got ordained) had to change in order to make it possible for clergy to bless same sex marriages. The three evangelicals in the room (myself being one of them) pointed out to the other eight or nine people in the room that to change the doctrine of the church would render our positions in the church untenable, as we would just not be able to minister as Christian leaders in the church in a climate of heretical false doctrines.

## Conclusion

A number of people on the shared conversations were saying things like; *“God changed my view on same sex marriage when such and such happened and God took me on a journey to show me that He actually blesses it.”* I found this really perplexing and confusing at the time, because I was asking; why would God approve something in practice when He says it is wrong so many times in His Holy Word?

There is so much more that I could say that would be spoken out of great heaviness, sadness and despair at how far the church that I love so much has fallen, but I will close by sharing how God spoke to me during the shared conversations.

After that confusing and distressing first night and going outside for an hour to pray and ask God what on earth was going on, in the morning of the second day of the shared conversations I sat down at the desk in my room and took my Bible and it just “fell open” at the following text:

*“The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.”* (1 Timothy 1:5–10 ESV)