

## **If the Church has changed its mind about slavery and is finally acknowledging the ministry of women, isn't it right that same-sex relationships are now accepted?**

This argument depends on the idea that there is some kind of trajectory that leads from the abolition of slavery through the recognition of the need to grant equal rights and status to women to the acceptance of same-sex relations. If we ask what this trajectory looks like the answer is that it consists of an awareness that Christ has given a new status to the socially oppressed and excluded by granting them an equal place within the new community he has created through his death and resurrection.

During his earthly ministry Jesus gave an equal welcome to everyone, including those who were rejected or marginalised by contemporary Jewish society such as the 'tax collectors and sinners' (Matthew 9:1–13) and those who had leprosy (Luke 17:11–19). Following on from this the Church that came into existence after Pentecost was a community that learned not to regard anyone as unclean and therefore to be excluded (Acts 10:9–48) and that gave equal status to Jews and Gentiles, slaves and those who were free and men and women on the basis of a common relationship with Christ created through baptism (Galatians 3:28). The abolition of slavery and the granting of equal rights to women in society and the Church are the expression of this inclusive trajectory and the same would be true, so the argument goes, of giving equal acceptance to those in same-sex relationships.

There are two problems with this argument. Firstly, whilst it is possible to trace a changing trajectory through Scripture with regards to slaves and women, the same cannot be said regarding same-sex relationships. So, from Genesis to Revelation there is obvious 'movement' in the status of slaves and the institution of slavery. Whereas slaves in Abram's time were essentially 'chattels', by Paul's time he is able to write of his friend and colleague Onesimus (Philemon) now a fully fledged member of the Church and people of God. Similarly, the experience of women from first Bible times to the time of the New Testament Church changes significantly such that Paul commends, appreciates and releases the ministry of women in the churches for which he has a responsibility. However, there is no parallel trajectory or 'movement' in regard to the exercise of same-sex sexual relationships.

Secondly, the argument identified in the title fails to make a distinction between people and behaviour. All sorts of people were welcomed by Jesus and the Early Church, but they were welcomed on the understanding that they were willing to die to their old way of life and embrace a new pattern of behaviour based on radical obedience to God (Mark 8:34–38, Romans 6:1–14). This new way of life included a rejection of all forms of sexual sin (Matthew 5:27–30, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8). This would necessitate and include the rejection of sexual same-sex relationships as incompatible with Christian discipleship.

Those experiencing same-sex attraction would still be welcomed as people into the community and life of the Church – but their behaviour (as with all those welcomed into the Church) would need to be consonant with the radical obedience and ethical framework demanded by membership of the Kingdom.

RESOURCES:

[Steve Holmes, 'Serious thinking does not always lead to the same conclusion'](#)