



A Personal Response:

‘God in love unites us’?

Perhaps not.

'God in love unites us'? Perhaps not.

The Current Position.

(1) The scriptural view of marriage:

1. Marriage is a calling and sacrament, not a matter of temporary convenience, but instead is intended for the life of both partners,
2. Marriage, once entered into and established, cannot be undone,
3. Marriage is between a man and a woman (as physically defined at birth)
4. Marriage is to the benefit of society as a whole in that it provides a good foundation for social stability built on relational boundaries, mutual trust and integrity.
5. Marriage is intended for the procreation of children (even if that involves occasional medical intervention)
6. Marriage is for mutual comfort. It is a self-contained unit where everything that is needed for its purpose can be found, (same sex couples must look beyond their union if they wish to have children and that simply works against the whole principle of fidelity in marriage)
7. Children are a gift of God entrusted into the protective care and stewardship of both parents and the Christian community.

8. The deliberate termination of life (e.g. abortion, euthanasia, etc.) is contrary to scripture.

9. Marriage, or anything described as 'marriage', between those of the same sex (as defined by birth, self-determination or by other choice or process) is contrary to scripture.

10. Sexually or physically intimate relationships between same sex couples (as defined above) is contrary to scripture.

11. Sexually or physically intimate relationships outside of marriage, regardless of gender, are contrary to Holy Scripture.

12. Surrogacy is not within the scriptural boundaries of biblically based marriage although adoption is.

(2) The scriptural view of same sex relationships:

There is no issue with platonic same sex relationships.

The issue is when they become sexually intimate, just like other relationships regardless of gender, outside of marriage.

Context of the report.

At the moment in the Methodist church, discussion documents are being

circulated in preparation for abandoning the traditionally accepted view of marriage for something 'more inclusive' of same sex relationships.

The church's biblical understanding (as being between a man and a woman (as defined physically at birth) intended for life and for the procreation of children) is now being challenged.

The main thrust of this discussion is found in a somewhat technical and overly complex document called 'God in love unites us', the report of the Marriage and Relationships Task Group for discussion and prayerful consideration.

What is eminently clear is this group is seeking a particular outcome and it puts forward an apparently well-argued case which talks about the higher Christian gifts of love, unity, fidelity and compassion which transcend gender boundaries.

Reasoning.

The argument being put forward to us in short goes something like this.

The bible is a social construct and was shaped by various historical and sociological events with a bit of theology thrown in.

It therefore needs to be reinterpreted because those historical and social constructs no longer apply because things have changed.

We are told that we, in our present time, have a deeper and far clearer understanding of our own sexuality and gender, and the concept of 'man' and 'woman' no longer apply as rigid definitions. Previously it was a conversation that couldn't happen until this time of true enlightenment and liberal thinking.

Even on the issue of gender there are issues. According to the bible, gender remains binary. HMGov and the LGBT community are challenging that and soon we will legally be able to self-define our own gender without the need for medical intervention.

Therefore, because there is no longer a clear sense of 'man' and 'woman' any more, we need to look at the concepts of marriage and other long term adult relationships again, and look at ways of making them far more 'inclusive'.

It requires us to be much more accepting of new forms of relationship because Christianity and God are all about 'love' – the rule is, if 'love' is involved then it must be ok because 'God is Love', and we have to set aside our own prejudices for the greater good. Therefore, by implication, those who do not accept this way of thinking are not really 'Christian' because they do not demonstrate 'love', 'tolerance' and 'inclusivity'.

The report uses many bible texts in support of its argument and position, but this is anomalous as it ignores some fairly essential texts on same sex relationships which involve physical intimacy, and also texts about marriage and the nature of 'male' and 'female'.

Whilst appearing to be logical and persuasive argument in support of the report's proposals, the argument is deeply flawed.

It is predominantly a socially driven response rather than a theocentric one.

The hidden agenda.

Let me restate those principles in the way they should really be understood:

1. That in order to be 'inclusive', the church must be willing to accept and embrace whatever morality society demands. Anything now goes so long as it involves 'love' (because 'God is love' and that makes everything ok).
2. That the inclusive church can no longer continue to promote biblically based standards of morality because these are discriminatory. Inclusivity means accepting those things that previously were unacceptable 'in a spirit of Christian love'.
3. That the Bible is no longer to be considered God's immutable and eternal Word but is something you can pick and choose from to justify your own personal lifestyle choices/opinions/views/theology/etc.
4. That the bible can be made to fit whatever you want, and if it doesn't fit it can be ignored on the basis that 'God/Jesus didn't specifically speak on this matter so it must be up to us to decide....'

5. That as inheritors of the Kingdom and, because we have grown in faith, understanding and stature, we can now abandon parts of our long established Christian heritage and traditional teaching. God has entrusted such decisions to us because we now know what He really meant to say. We now speak for God.

Is the bible really God's Word?

What it all comes down to is not whether the Methodist church should adopt in principle the idea of same sex 'marriages' but whether it acknowledges the authority and authenticity of the bible as God's Word.

Either it is or it isn't, and on that hangs the whole argument.

If it is God's Word then really this discussion shouldn't even be happening.

If it isn't God's Word then there is no need for discussion because we can do whatever we like.

Implications.

The sting in the tail is that those who disagree with the report's recommendations will inevitably be labelled homophobic and there will be an implicit threat to those who voice their different opinions that they will fall foul of hate, equality and anti-discrimination legislation (as well as not being 'very Christian').

There are no legal justifications for believing that this is the actual case* but there is strong social pressure to believe that this is the reality, (i.e. you must agree or you will fall foul of the law). It is little more than a form of coercion and blackmail.

The report's recommendations, if successful, will simply split the church. Any hopes of 'unity' (i.e. even just agreeing to disagree) between the opposing factions will evaporate very quickly as people will become even more emotionally involved in the discussion and more alienated.

People will inevitably leave the church whatever the outcome, whether the report's recommendations are accepted or rejected.

The Report acknowledges that if its recommendations are accepted it will cause division. It asks for a spirit of Christian love (i.e. just accept the recommendations and all will be well) to heal the inevitable wounds but the underlying theme is that whatever the outcome on this occasion, implicit within the report is the principle that if it doesn't get through this time, there is no question that more attempts will be made until success is achieved.

But that simply won't be the end of the matter. There will be more reports and more recommendations to come that will slowly but inexorably take us further and further away from a biblically based faith.

If one accepts the validity of same sex relationships then what about the validity of other forms of long term relationships?

Interestingly, polygamy has just been decriminalised in Utah so this may well become the next attack on the church's view on marriage. Why stop at just two partners in a marriage when you can have three or more? The more the merrier. It's all about 'love' so it must be ok.

It isn't just happening in the US either. Worryingly, there have been moves in the UK from the judiciary to have the age of consent reduced to as little as 5.

So where does it end, and at what point does the faith we hold becomes so eroded it becomes scripturally unrecognisable?

The Church as a model of the love of God.

The church is supposed not only to be God's voice to the world but a model of God's standards for the world. It is there to show the way. It is supposed to be exemplar in all it does and be a light to those in darkness.

Whilst the church is supposed to be

(1) a model of love and compassion, it has to be tempered with

(2) obedience to God's law, responsibility, faithfulness, self-discipline, trust, humility and a continual turning away from sin.

You cannot separate one from the other. Love comes with responsibilities.

Unfortunately people seem far happier to accept the warm and cuddly freedoms of (1) rather than the hard and challenging responsibilities of (2).

The truth is that 'love' is not about giving people what they 'want' but what they 'need'. 'Love' is as much about the 'No' as the 'Yes' and requires a trust in God's wisdom when it goes against the things society is asking or even our own beliefs.

Sometimes, a 'No' seems hard and uncaring but there is always a good reason and purpose to that 'No' even if we can't see it immediately.

It seems that the report has been overly indifferent to (2) in its pursuit of (1). It certainly has not demonstrated a true and full understanding of what 'love' is and isn't in God's eyes.

Real love isn't always inclusive.

It is exclusive in nature too. That is the basis of marriage. It is the basis of our faith too.

So if the report's recommendations are accepted then what does it really say to the world about the faith the church proposes and preaches?

It will certainly be seen that the church has little or no integrity or loyalty or understanding of God's authority when it comes to the execution of a scripturally based belief and faith.

If the church blows with the wind rather than standing firm then what certainty does it offer? Apparently, very little when it denies its scriptural basis.

And if that is true, why would anyone in their right mind want to belong to such a fickle and unstable organisation?

Outcomes.

This will not be one of the desired outcomes the report authors will be looking for but it is inevitable.

Neither will be the division it causes in the church itself. The reports talks about maintaining unity within the church but its recommendations will generate a lot of dissent and hurt and there is no real pastoral plan in place to deal with this, just the vague hope it will all somehow blow over and everything will be alright.

Well, it won't.

The proposed recommendations will never be enough as far as the LGBT community and other groups are concerned, and the reality is that they will just keep on asking for more and more. They are not interested in a faith that does not completely support or justify their ideals and goals.

It's not even as if there will be a big take up for the new inclusive same sex services. Mostly, they just want to change the status quo and be justified by it.

Any underlying optimism that opening the church doors to the LGBT community will fill the church is both naïve and unrealistic.

It simply won't.

The church has long been seen as 'the establishment enemy' by the LGBT community and that will remain the case for the foreseeable future, 'inclusive' services or not.

Any increases in membership as a result of accepting the report's conclusions and proposals will be heavily outweighed by the subsequent losses of existing and long standing members.

The Reality.

Whilst some people may accept the principles of the report, the actual practice may be a real shock when it comes to implementation.

Witnessing the first same sex kiss at the altar will be a profound and disturbing shock for many people.

For some of the more traditional souls amongst the assembled company, it will be as if they were witnessing the desecration of the altar, a point from which there is no return. That should be a massive pastoral concern in the report but it isn't.

Many heterosexual couples may feel that the acceptance of same sex couples into any form of recognised 'marriage' is a betrayal of the marriage vows they made, that they have been lessened in some way or diminished. That is simply not acceptable.

With the best will in the world, there are consequences that cannot be predicted and there is no going back from this position once put into motion.

The report has made some attempt to reconcile this but it has failed, not that it could ever hope to succeed given all the unpredictability of possible outcomes.

The long term affect hasn't really been considered either. This is a legacy for our children and all subsequent generations and it may not be appreciated. What happens when the social moral pendulum swings back to a more orthodox morality? It will as that is evidenced by centuries of recorded social history, but yet again we have failed to let it teach and inform us.

That is a great burden to leave our children, one they may not thank us for.

Same sex couples.

What of the same sex couples who seek to get 'married' in church and intend to celebrate their long term relationship in sexual terms?

Don't they have any rights or say in all of this?

I don't want to seem unsympathetic but the bible is quite clear on this matter. It's a 'No.'**

If you can't accept the bible as God's Word then why on earth would you want to get married in a church that has built its faith upon its precepts?

If you do accept it as God's Word then why are you going against it?

Or are same sex couples looking for some kind of religious justification?

We are all given free will as a gift of God and it can be abused or used. That is our decision and choice. We all have to accept the consequences of our choices and actions.

However, we cannot as Christians pick and choose from the Bible and just have what works for us. We can argue about it all day long but it doesn't change anything. It's the whole package. So when the Bible states that same sex relationships that involve sexual intimacy are off limits, discussion is not needed.

The bible also says that sexual intimacy outside of marriage is off limits too, and that applies whatever sexual preferencing consenting couples have, heterosexual or not.

Just how clear does it need to be?

Choices.

When it comes right down to it, we either trust God or we don't.

When God says 'No' it is for a reason and going against that is putting ourselves above God.

If we go against God, it doesn't stop God loving us in just the same way but it will have consequences. It may separate us from His presence if we do not come to our senses, not just in this world but maybe in the world to come.

That is not God's fault. It will be our choice and the blame lies fairly and squarely with us. We have free will and we decided against the better advice.

It is our choice.

Similarly, there is an argument that states we cannot choose who we fall 'in love', and this is sometimes used in defence of same sex relationships and unfaithfulness in marriage.

It is a complete myth. It is not a reason but an excuse.

Like a lot of things in life, we have choices. That includes who we fall 'in love' with. We need to grow up and accept responsibility for our choices and start acting like adults. Our lives should not be ruled by our emotions.

We need to face up to that fact. Being 'in love' is mostly about a transitory but overwhelming hormonal need for sexual gratification.

It also has little to do with real love and is essentially an act of great selfishness.

Love, trust and obedience.

What the world understands as 'love' is but a shadow of the love God intended for us. It isn't based just on romance or sexual desire but on something much more substantial, something that is tough and durable, disciplined, faithful, trusting, resilient, and based on compassion, forgiveness and completeness.

The main thing is that Christian marriage as scripturally interpreted is self-contained and there is no possible reason to go looking beyond its boundaries because it is whole and completely fulfilling in itself.

Similarly, if we say we love God, then we have no need to look beyond His Word. If we do, like a married partner straying beyond their marriage, we have been unfaithful to God.

On the subject of same sex relationships involving physical or sexual intimacy, it's a definite 'no'.

So is any relationship involving physical or sexual intimacy outside of marriage – that too is a definite 'no'.

Regarding that latter point, maybe if the church hadn't been so silent in its teaching that would have gone a large way to avoiding some of the 42,000,000 abortions (yes, forty two million confirmed abortions) worldwide last year.

There are consequences to 'going with the flow' when something really needs to be said. We are guilty as charged on this particular issue and it should weigh heavily on the church's conscience.

That alone might prompt us to consider the real possibility that God really does know best and that there is real purpose to His Word, rather than Him just trying to stop us having 'a bit of fun' on the side.

We can trust God and what He says. Not only that but we should learn to trust God and do what He asks, especially if we claim to love Him.

Consequences.

There are always consequences to our actions whether good or bad, but especially when we turn our back on God and go it alone, and these consequences are often far greater than expected and end up affecting lots of other people.

In terms of the report recommendations, especially regarding same sex marriage, I sincerely hope they are rejected by the Methodist church members.

If accepted, then there will be no turning back. Not everything that is done can be undone.

Whilst the report has some worthy points to make, (as any good politician knows, it has to have some elements of truth to be convincing), I believe it is ill conceived in principle, misleading, politically rather than theologically motivated, largely one sided and will have both lasting and damaging consequences if adopted.

My concern is not just for the Methodist church, but the whole church.

What the Methodist church decides matters.

What happens in one church affects all the others for good or for ill. Thus, a move towards ignoring or even denying the authority and integrity of the bible as God's Word is a serious wound.

The report and its recommendations may have good intentions but the road to hell as I remember is paved with the very same.

+lan

Executive Bishop, OSJ (UK)



Appendix, notes and supporting material:

* On the right to hold religious views that are different to other people:

The Human Rights Act: your rights under article 9

The right to hold beliefs

Article 9 protects your right under law to hold both religious and non-religious beliefs. This is an absolute right which means it can't be interfered with by the state, groups or individuals. Article 9 includes the right to freely choose or change your religion or beliefs.

The right to manifest your beliefs

Article 9 also protects your right to manifest (live out) your beliefs - for example, your right to wear religious clothing, the right to speak about your beliefs or take part in religious worship.

The right to manifest your beliefs is 'qualified' - in certain situations it can be legally over ridden, for example, to protect the rights of others or in matters of keeping public order, but these situations are exceptionally rare.

The Equality Act: religion or belief discrimination

The Equality Act 2010 says you must not be discriminated against because:

- you are (or are not) of a particular religion
- you hold particular (or do not hold particular) religious views/beliefs
- you hold (or do not hold) a particular philosophical belief
- someone thinks you are of a particular religion or hold a particular belief (this is known as discrimination by perception)
- you are connected to someone who has a religion or belief (this is known as discrimination by association)

In the Equality Act religion or belief can mean any religion as long as it has a clear structure and belief system.

The Equality Act also covers non-belief or a lack of religion or belief.

- the Equality Act also protects those with no religion if they are discriminated against because of their beliefs.

Hate Crime:

A hate crime is when someone commits a crime against you because of your disability, gender identity, race, sexual orientation, religion, or any other perceived difference.

It doesn't always include physical violence. Someone using offensive language towards you or harassing you because of who you are, or who they think you are, is also a crime. The same goes for someone posting abusive or offensive messages about you online.

A hate crime is defined as 'Any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a person's race or perceived race; religion or perceived religion; sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation; disability or perceived disability and any crime motivated by hostility or prejudice against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender.'

A hate incident is any incident which the victim, or anyone else, thinks is based on someone's prejudice towards them because of their race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or because they are transgender (or even 'straight').

Hate crime can fall into one of three main types: physical assault, verbal abuse and incitement to hatred.

Physical assault

Physical assault of any kind is an offence. This law covers physical assault motivated by prejudice.

Verbal abuse

Victims of verbal abuse are often unclear whether an offence has been committed or believe there is little they can do. However, there are laws in place to protect you from verbal abuse.

Incitement to hatred

The offence of incitement to hatred occurs when someone acts in a way that is threatening and intended to stir up hatred. That could be in words, pictures, videos, music, and includes information posted on websites.

Hate content may include:

- messages calling for violence against a specific person or group
- web pages that show pictures, videos or descriptions of violence against anyone due to their perceived differences
- chat forums where people ask other people to commit hate crimes against a specific person or group

Summary:

You have the legally protected right to hold whatever beliefs or opinions you wish and the right to express them. This is protected under Article 9 of the Human Rights Act.

You may not be discriminated against because you hold those beliefs or opinions under the Equality Act.

However, these laws do not give you or anyone else the right to behave or speak abusively, unreasonably, inappropriately or irresponsibly or to deliberately cause harm or offense.

**** Scriptural Examples:**

Leviticus 18:22:

"Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable."

Jude 7

"Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire."

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. "

Romans 1:26-27:

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

Supporting Extract: URC, Rob Wood, May 2017

The Bible defines marriage in [Genesis 2:24](#) as a union between one man and one woman. Jesus Christ upholds this definition of marriage in [Matthew 19:5](#), as does the Apostle Paul in [Ephesians 5:31](#). Any and all sexual activity which takes place outside of this context is treated as sinful, what Jesus calls 'sexual immorality' in [Mark 7:21](#).

Further to this, same-sex practice is specifically highlighted as sinful a number of times in Scripture. In God's Law, for example, condemnations of same-sex practice are given in [Leviticus 18:22](#) and [20:13](#). Further references are made in the New Testament. For example, in [Romans 1:24-32](#), amid echoes to the Genesis creation account, both male and female same-sex practice are treated as sinful. Further references to the sinfulness of same-sex practice can be seen in [1 Corinthians 6:9](#) and [1 Timothy 1:10](#).

The Scriptures are, therefore, consistent in their prohibition of same-sex sexual activity, across different periods of salvation history and within different cultural settings. Although the Scriptures are clear on sexual ethics, they also tell us that the prospect of forgiveness and eternal life is held out for anyone who turns from sin and puts their faith in Christ ([Mark 1:15](#)), no matter how they may have fallen short of his good design for sex and marriage.