

– Chapter 2 –

Scripture and/or Science.

Throughout this document, all Scriptural quotes are from the NIV (2011 version) unless indicated otherwise. By way of background, the NIV that was published from 2011 onwards assimilated many, but not all, of the changes made when the TNIV was published in 2005. I understand that the TNIV, published in 2005, and produced by the same translation committee as the NIV, was essentially the third edition of the NIV, after the 1978 and 1984 editions.¹ However, as many Christians still use pre-2011 published NIV Bibles, I want to make sure that if your version of the NIV differs to that in this document, you understand why. At the time of writing (2015-2020) that is the current version.

I am not a trained theologian, so ultimately, **my** understanding of Scripture, obviously influenced by many writers across hundreds of years, along with my life experience, will determine **my** position, not cultural norms. My position is my position, it isn't necessarily yours. Although I have read extensively around the issue (as you can see from the sources I've used), I do not have all knowledge, so my experiences, my culture, my social interactions and my education will all impact on how I interpret Scripture. I will have read a different range of books to you, and possibly reacted to them in a different way to you. When I read a passage of Scripture, I measure it against all the other teachings contained within the library of books making up the Bible to help me understand its message; I read commentaries and other helpful insights from those more knowledgeable than me, and come to a conclusion. I do not have a monopoly on understanding Scripture, so I give it my best effort and rely on the Holy Spirit to prompt doubts or affirmation. There is clearly some subjectivity, but that is the same for everybody, even the heads of every Christian tradition cannot claim a 100% accuracy rate for correctly understanding what they read. So, yes, of course you can say I've got some things wrong, but fundamentally, I believe I'm walking the path God wants me to follow.

Peter Enns is a theologian who I will quote several times in my writings. He writes:

The Bible is an ancient book and we shouldn't be surprised to see it act like one. So seeing God portrayed as a violent, tribal warrior is not how God is but how he was understood to be by the ancient Israelites communing with God in their time and place.

The biblical writers were storytellers. Writing about the past was never simply about understanding the past for its own sake, but about shaping, molding, and creating the past to speak to the present. "Getting the past right" wasn't the driving issue. "Who are we now?" was.

¹ Christopher R Smith in The Books of the Bible from Biblica, Translating the Bible.

<https://goodquestionblog.com/2015/01/28/why-isnt-the-tniv-available-on-biblegateway/>

The Bible presents a variety of points of view about God and what it means to walk in his ways. This stands to reason, since the biblical writers lived at different times, in different places, and wrote for different reasons. In reading the Bible we are watching the spiritual journeys of people long ago.

Jesus, like other Jews of the first century, read his Bible creatively, seeking deeper meaning that transcended or simply bypassed the boundaries of the words of scripture. Where Jesus ran afoul of the official interpreters of the Bible of his day was not in his creative handling of the Bible, but in drawing attention to his own authority and status in doing so.

A crucified and resurrected messiah was a surprise ending to Israel's story. To spread the word of this messiah, the earliest Christian writers both respected Israel's story while also going beyond that story. They transformed it from a story of Israel centered on Torah to a story of humanity centered on Jesus.

This is the Bible we have, the Bible where God meets us.

Not a book kept at a safe distance from the human drama. Not a fragile Bible that has to be handled with care lest it crumble in our hands. Not a book that has to be defended 24/ 7 to make sure our faith doesn't dissolve.

In other words, not an artificially well-behaved Bible that gives false comfort, but the Holy Bible, the Word of God, with wrinkles, complexities, unexpected maneuvers, and downright strangeness.

This is the Bible God has given his people. This Bible is worth reading and paying attention to, because this is the Bible God uses, as he always has, to point its readers to a deeper trust in him.

We are free to walk away from this invitation, of course, but we are not free to make a Bible in our own image. What the Bible looks like is God's call, not ours.

Peter Enns. "The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It" (p. 231-2). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

At the end of 2018 I came across another wonderfully helpful website set up by Rev'd Dr Jonathan Tallon, who describes himself as a New Testament lecturer and early Church researcher. There is a brilliant set of videos, that are very helpful and worth watching: <http://www.bibleandhomosexuality.org/>

As part of the process of learning, I must listen to the LGBTQ+ community and their experiences, and measure whether what they say against what I understand Scripture to be saying. At the same time, I must try to understand how God's

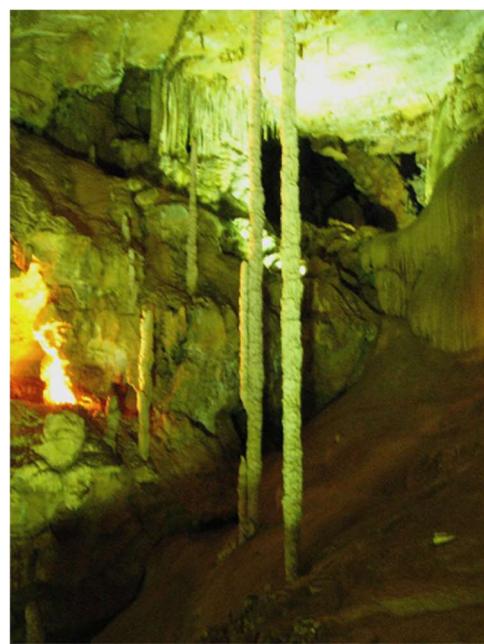
grace applies to the situation I'm looking at. That may sound impossible to many, but I believe it isn't.

Regarding Scripture, the church has a long and sad history of clinging to the exact words of translated scripture, although another reality was staring it in the face:

- For many years, the church insisted the world was flat and we persecuted, tortured, and killed those who said it was 'round'.
- Then we insisted for many years more that the Earth was the centre of the universe, and everything circled around us, continuing to persecute anyone who disagreed with us. Galileo was found "vehemently suspect of heresy" by the Inquisition and spent his last nine years under house arrest, because he saw the Sun as the centre of the Universe instead of the Earth. During his trial, he was threatened with torture if he did not tell the 'truth'. We might chuckle that people thought that the Earth was the centre of everything, but people died because the church adhered absolutely to what it believed Scripture said. The church saw change as a threat to God that they had to resist at all costs.

Let me also include a caveat: Galileo lived at the same time as Kepler. They both held similar views about the Solar System, though not always. Kepler ran into no charges of heresy for his views, whereas Galileo got into a lot of trouble. One writer (Dr Allan Chapman: "Comets, Cosmology and the Big Bang: From Halley to Hubble") suggests that one of the reasons Galileo had so many problems was the way he treated people, whereas Kepler kept his head down, and was more circumspect in how he presented his findings. Nevertheless, however objectionable he may have been, there is no reason for the Church to make accusations of heresy, and threats of torture.

- Many Christians still insist the world was made in seven literal days, and these folks will still make life difficult for those who hold a looser view to the age of the Earth, thinking they have compromised their faith. No Christian doubts God *could* have made the Earth in 7 literal days, but why would He have made it so that it looks so much older – 4-4.5 billion years instead of the proposed 6-10k years. Look at any cave system with stalagmites and stalactites. I was lucky to visit the Gruta Rei do Mato caves (see picture) not far from Belo Horizonte, in Brazil where some of the columns were 20m tall. Columns are what is formed when stalagmites and stalactites meet. We know they grow at around 10cm every thousand years, so if you do the maths, you'll realise they started to form around a million years



ago (10cm per 1k years for stalagmites and 10cm per 1k years for stalactites, so a closing growth of 20cm per 1k years). This is assuming the columns finished growing yesterday, and not thousands of years ago. The limestone rock from which the columns grew would have been formed 'a long time' before that!

We believe God could create a large tree, instantly. If we immediately cut it down, the rings would give the impression it had been grown years before, but what would be the point? A God who lies and is deceitful, or putting the best gloss on it, one that is misleading? That's dodgy theology! That would fly in the face of the doctrine that God cannot lie. Not only that, but at this moment, the furthest known galaxy to have been spotted from the Earth is so far away that its light took 13.1 billion years to reach Earth – which means the light was emitted just 700 million years after the Big Bang – assuming that was the beginning. Christians generally assume the Earth was created in the same general timeframe as the rest of the universe, so if the universe is very old, and the Earth very young, we have an issue. Using the tree analogy, if God spontaneously created the Earth ten thousand years ago, why make it appear much older. What is the point? Why not just let it play out naturally? Why not make it look like a new creation – it would make it easier to believe in a God of Creation? My point is that Creation is not a simplistic story and may include some elements of evolution in its history!

- I came across an article asking "If evolution is true, then why didn't God simply tell us that? Given that Christ is the Creator who is the Truth, and since as God he cannot lie (Numbers 23:19) and His word is truth (John 17:17), why would this same Christ take millions of years to evolve the world, then tell us he created it all in six days? (Exodus 20:11)"

[<https://www.premierchristianity.com/Blog/10-questions-to-ask-Christians-who-believe-in-evolution>] To me it's a daft question. One example: On a simple level why didn't God make it clear that the Sun was the centre of the Solar System – that would have saved a lot of people from persecution! Why didn't God make it clear the Earth is a sphere, and maybe that there were other planets? Couldn't Jesus have explained that the Earth was minute compared to the Sun, and that the Moon was small compared to the Earth? They simply thought of the Sun and Moon as greater and lesser lights (Genesis 1) – not size but brightness. The church could have then been at the forefront of scientific understanding. There is nothing written about stars – other than that they are around and seem to have been placed in patterns/constellations (Job 9:9; 38:31; and a few others). I would also add that the scientific reasoning and widespread travel needed to advance the theory of Evolution wouldn't be available for another 1800 years, so there wouldn't have been much point in Jesus sitting His disciples down for a quiet chat round a fire and explaining the idea of evolution. They simply wouldn't have had a clue what He was talking about. How could He demonstrate it to them? It simply wasn't important for them at that time.

- Another issue is that the church has traditionally stood behind the idea that life was only created on Earth. (If there were life on other planets, would Jesus have to go to those planets and die there too? If there are many planets with life on them, does Jesus just spend His time dropping in on those planets to die there as well?!) In late September 2015 NASA scientists got really excited because they found evidence that water still flows on the Martian surface. Today there are many articles about the existence of water on Mars: <https://www.nature.com/search?q=water+on+mars>. Most scientists say that where liquid water is found, so is life - but whether that is true in this case, is still to be determined. So, we can say that it is well within the bounds of possibility to expect scientists to confirm microbes existed at some point on Mars, and if not Mars, perhaps one or two of the moons orbiting other planets, so what impact will that have on Theology. It certainly wouldn't threaten the fact that Earth, and indeed mankind, is a special creation of God, but our theology is bound to have to be modified again soon if we insist that life can only exist on Earth. Maybe an argument can be made that life transferred from Earth to Mars soon after it began on Earth – or vice versa, perhaps through a collision with a huge meteorite. Alternatively, perhaps life simply developed – how would that alter our theology?

When I was young the Creation/Evolution debate was hot – especially in America – less so here in the UK, though it was still a major issue and I was part of it! Creationists would argue a “young Earth” theology, and shout down anyone considering evolution. Any scientists with a faith, arguing scientifically in the public eye, for a “young Earth” are now regarded as a little strange. Adherents still exist, but they are becoming rarer. The debate seems to have moved on to “Theistic Evolution” as against and sometimes alongside “old Earth Creationism.” Theology must move on as we learn more about science. Science and Scripture are not enemies, but instead should, and must, work hand in hand. It is very wrong if Christians dismiss science. Science can correctly ask whether we have read the text right, such as when we thought the sun went around the Earth. We like to embrace it when it proves something we like and treat it with suspicion and disbelief if it is something that threatens something we like to believe. Instead, we should check the science has been conducted properly, and then review our theology in case we have made a mistake with what we believe. If the church had done that with Galileo, many people would have been spared – isn’t that a Gospel principle?

- Then we have the role of women in church life – can they be leaders or are they simply there to do the sewing and make cups of tea?! Whilst this battle has largely been resolved in favour of full contribution, there are still parts of the church that exclude women from having a full role in church life – such as the signatories to the Nashville Statement. My point is that views and interpretations of scripture can change over time. Not just that, but it is healthy, providing the Bible remains central to the new position.

- And what about slavery – thoroughly endorsed by Scripture, but universally regarded by contemporary Christians, and most modern societies and cultures, as repugnant. How many people have died because of slavery? Again, we'll come back to this in a moment.

The issue of how we interpret Scripture is tackled by Peter Enns. At the start of his book, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* he writes:

On the one hand, I am very eager to affirm that many evangelical instincts are correct and should be maintained, for example, the conviction that the Bible is ultimately from God and that it is God's gift to the church. Any theories concerning Scripture that do not arise from these fundamental instincts are unacceptable.

On the other hand, how the evangelical church fleshes out its doctrine of Scripture will always have somewhat of a provisional quality to it. This is not to say that each generation must disregard the past and start afresh, formulating ever-new doctrines, bowing to all the latest fads. But it is to say that at such time when new evidence comes to light, or old evidence is seen in a new light, we must be willing to engage that evidence and adjust our doctrine accordingly. ...

[T]he scientific evidence showed us that the worldview of the biblical authors affected what they thought and wrote, and so the worldviews of the biblical authors must be taken into consideration in matters of biblical interpretation and formulating a doctrine of Scripture.

Enns, Peter. Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament (p. 1-2). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Later in that same book he makes the helpful observation that: "Biblical interpretation is a path we walk rather than a fortress we defend." And that should be our attitude, curious, open and measuring everything against Scripture.

For these reasons making an argument about sexuality based solely on Scripture seems unwise at best, especially if science has already gone a long way towards questioning and repudiating the traditional so-called church understanding, so I will examine in a certain amount of detail what we are facing, then I'll look at Scripture and try to make some sense of it, seeing whether what Scripture is describing is what we are looking at, and then reach a conclusion, which then must inform my thinking and actions. Before some folk jump up and down about the beginning of this paragraph, let me make the point that Scripture is authoritative about Theological issues as well as the areas of social justice, morality and ethics. However, it can't be authoritative in areas like mathematics and science, where things are either true or false, though certainly there are times it can and must contribute to the debate.

So, what is the place of Scripture in this piece? I would say it is central and we will be taking a detailed look at it, but Scripture in certain circumstances has nothing to

say. When talking about the specific orientations and what is happening at the cellular level in the body, you can't get anything useful from Scripture. Neither can Scripture give direct examples of what life is like for an LGBTQ+ oriented person. Even the [non-]issue of whether being gay is a choice, or an orientation, is not addressed in Scripture. None of the key passages deal with this – not even Romans 1. As a result, I have used:

- the Bible to explore moral, ethical and spiritual issues and provide guidance,
- the testimony of the LGBTQ+ community to understand their experiences (and feelings of rejection),
- scientists to understand the biology and psychology,
- historians to see how far back these issues go,
- and finally, media reports and commentaries because often they will explain things clearly, where maybe a scientific paper isn't very readable to those like me, whose education is not at the same level!

However, Scripture is very useful when we look at the ethics and morality of any situation, and indeed this essay is only as long as it is because the Bible is so important to me, so this is not a capitulation to the ethics of our contemporary society. It seems the problem we face is because many see homosexuality as a moral issue, so we try and use the Bible. We don't recognise that it is not a moral issue, but a scientific issue, where the Bible isn't authoritative.

In case you misunderstand me, I am not saying that Scripture isn't authoritative – it can be, but don't forget that if we look only at Scripture, we would probably think slavery is perfectly normal and acceptable and possibly blessed and authorised by God. I'll just give a couple of references here, but you'll find many, once you start looking.

Proverbs 12:9 says: -

Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than pretend to be somebody and have no food.

Exodus 21: 2 says:

² *"If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything. [read onto verse 11]*

Leviticus 25: 42-46 says:

⁴² *Because the Israelites are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt, they must not be sold as slaves. ⁴³ Do not rule over them ruthlessly, but fear your God.*

⁴⁴ ***"Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves. ⁴⁵ You may also buy some of the temporary residents living among you and members of their clans born in your country, and they will become your property. ⁴⁶ You can bequeath them to your children as inherited property and can make them slaves for***

life, but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly.” [My emphases]

I hope you pick up the significance of those words I've put in bold. If you take the view that God dictated every word of the Bible you've got some difficult explaining to do! It seems that God assumes that slaves are part of society. He doesn't say: "***If*** you have slaves", but simply "Your slaves...". The expression used is a given – you ***will*** have slaves, and these are the ways you should treat them. Going on, in Leviticus, God says I can:

- take slaves from people who are not His children.
- I can buy some of the temporary foreigners living among us.
- I can bequeath them to my children (after all they are simply property, not people).
- I can make them slaves for life.
- There is also an implication that you can be ruthless with a slave, because an exception is added, when God says, "***but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly.”*** (Do it to a slave but not to a fellow Israelite!)

However, the earlier Exodus reference says you could take a slave from your own community, but release him after 7 years – that's a bit contradictory, isn't it?

That is why it was so hard to abolish slavery, because so many people said the Bible encourages/commends slavery and you can't argue against the verses you have just read.

Today, we all accept how wrong slavery is, that people have rights; that all are equal; that we have an obligation to respect others, giving them the dignity, they deserve. But obviously, in taking this line against slavery means that we set ourselves against the parts of the Bible that promote slavery, but most of us are happy to do that. Can you see the interesting problem we face?

I have always regarded myself as a Christian fundamentalist, although the current connotations of that word aren't helpful. Perhaps, I am slightly happier to be identified as a "red-letter" Christian (someone who focusses on the words of Jesus), although I'm uncomfortable that may seem to be identifying me as elitist, which I don't accept. Others may regard my openness to ideas outside the conservative tradition makes me more of a Liberal. I disagree, because when the term 'Liberal' is used in Christian circles it is as if you no longer regard the Bible as having anything to say and you can pick and choose which bits can be ignored and dismissed. For me, the Bible is even more important now, than before the change to my thinking.

Whatever I am, I fully accept (present tense) the Bible as being inspired by God and is His gift and guide for my life. However, there are a good number of issues where some conservatives will disagree with me, but my views are based on trying to marry what the Bible says, with what we have incontrovertibly proven in science, such as the examples used in the bullet-points a page or two back. Obviously, I would have to be stupid to insist on a 'Flat-Earth' these days and we must listen to

what science tells us, though we still need to critique new ideas. I like to think I have a Bible in one hand, and a 'test-tube' in the other – to adapt a phrase Billy Graham previously used. I have no problem allying science and the Bible – they are not in conflict.

Until around mid-2012, I adopted a soft line, non-affirming evangelical position towards LGBTQ+ folks. By "soft line" I mean I paid lip service but wasn't completely comfortable with the position. It came from my upbringing with family / friends / church / school. I was wrong. I never challenged my views because it looked black and white from the way I had been taught to view Scripture, and I didn't see any need to really look at the issue, because I didn't know any gay Christians. Another thing I used to struggle with was the idea that gay folks could be "Christians". How is that even possible? Now, having made LGBTQ+ friends, listened to and read a fair bit written by the LGBTQ+ community, as well as regularly worshipping with them, I must say that I know that many folks in all categories can be, and are, wholly spirit-filled and committed Christians, just as in the rest of church society.

Indeed, there are many well-known Christians who are part of the LGBTQ+ community, for example: a good number of significant politicians, including former Shadow Leader of the House of Commons, Chris Bryant, Liberal Democrats Simon Hughes, and Tim Farron. In every walk of life there are high-profile gay and lesbian Christians. Within the specifically Christian community Vicky Beeching, the Theologian, Writer, Broadcaster and Keynote Speaker announced she was lesbian in 2014, and I will quote her a number of times through this document, because she has been so much in the public eye of the Christian community. As she came out during the period I was researching this material, she kept coming to my attention. There are 6-8 current clergy serving in the Church of England who are transgender, and many others who are part of other areas of the LGBTQ+ spectrum.

Maybe we find ourselves in a moment similar to the Apostle Peter, asking how Gentiles can possibly be Christian, and then finding God's Spirit has been poured out on them as well (Acts 10 & 11). It would be arrogant to assume I know who God has called and who He hasn't. However, we can get a clue by whether the fruit of the Spirit is evident in the person's life. Until 2012, I also mistakenly thought there was little to no information out there to challenge my views, so felt quite safe and didn't need to make any effort. Looking back, I had inadvertently created a sort of bubble that I lived in. I didn't see the pain. I just thought there was a handful of folks and they were largely irrelevant to me. Then I discovered how much pain I/we as Christians were causing. My eyes were opened. Now I find there is so much information out there, I simply couldn't and haven't, read it all. The volume of information is incredible and from my perspective, quite surprising, though it shouldn't be. To give you a flavour, you can start by looking at: http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibl.htm. I like this site because it is generally dispassionate, and the issues are expressed without the heat and underlying rancour frequently found on certain sites. It is not a Christian site, but one dealing with anything coming under the religious/spiritual label. Some of what

they write I dislike, but it's good to read stuff that challenges your thinking, because you must work out why you disagree. So far, I haven't found a site that is as complete, detailed, and as fair in its representation of the issues. I have provided a list of other sites at the end, of each major section. Some I am in sympathy with, and others not, so just because I have included a link, doesn't mean I'm endorsing the site – some, I may differ with profoundly, if not in content, then attitude.

Christians across the land have different attitudes towards the LBGT+ community. I know that although most churches are non-affirming if you poke them with a stick, but within them there will be members with a variety of convictions towards the LGBTQ+ community. Some will be fully affirming, some hard-line non-affirming, some have never given it a thought, and some with a very uneasy anti-LGBTQ+ theology, because they may not have spent much time working it through from Scripture, but simply have a gut-feeling that to be anti-Gay is wrong. So, I would encourage anyone and everyone to make a proper attempt to dig deeply in the Scriptures and understand why you believe as you do – whatever your stance. Indeed, you need to be digging into Scripture to explore all sorts of issues: racism and white supremacy, immigration, homelessness, modern slavery, justice for the poor, etc.

Also read as much as you can from the viewpoint that is opposite to your own. Don't just read one article, as that is pretty lame, but look at information on at least half a dozen different websites, or 2-3 books. Websites tend to be more accessible, but books can cover issues to a greater depth. I also hope that all will be tolerant and respectful and can accept that everyone is entitled to their own thoughts, providing they do so as Servants of God under the Lordship of Christ.

This document is a personal attempt to clarify my own thinking on the specific issue of gender and sexuality. Because I personally faced issues relating to Trans and homosexuality, and both cause the church a lot of difficulty, I've had to work through my own Theology and come to a conclusion.

I think the main issue is that the church has traditionally denied the possibility of Transgender issues and Homosexuality in the 'light' of an inflexible binary gender system. The adherence to this system has *directly* caused the death of thousands in Europe alone, and *indirectly*, many more. There will be people who die today while I write this because of their sexuality, so, to my mind, the church has a lot of blood on its hands.

I write a lot about Transgender issues and Homosexuality and less extensively about Bisexuality. Why is that? In essence, probably because there is less resource material. In addition, my perception is that people with bi-sexuality are rarer, although I'm not sure of the extent. There is a certain amount of circumstantial evidence that bi-sexuality is easier to hide, and so I suspect there may be a lot more than we think. However, I think the principles discussed throughout this document can be easily applied to Bisexuals. I want to make a couple of points,

however. Based on everything I have read about the sexuality spectrum, as well as personal conversation, Bisexuals themselves are on a spectrum.

Bisexual spectrum. There will be Bisexuals who have:

Gay	A much greater bias to same sex, and much less to the opposite sex.	A stronger bias towards same sex, but slightly less to the opposite sex	A bias towards both genders equally.	A stronger bias towards the opposite sex, but slightly less to the same sex	A much greater bias to opposite sex, and much less to the same sex.	Straight
100%	85% / 15%	66% / 34%	50% / 50%	34% / 66%	15% / 85%	100%

Figure 1 - Don't get hung up on percentages or proportions. This is a simple table to illustrate a point, with no science data used.

If that table is correct, and logically it must be, if the work of Kinsey and many others stands up, there will be those who largely identify as straight but have a bit of a draw to those of the same sex. Likewise, there will be those who identify as gay, but who have a slight draw to the opposite sex. Then obviously there will be those who know they are equally attracted to both men and women. I suspect that if you can keep your head down as pass as straight without too much problem, you'll do so. Why put a target on your back if you don't have to?! And if you are mainly gay, you may feel it adds an unnecessary complication!

Generally, most folk who identify as bisexual would still tend to have one partner at a time, and be monogamous for the duration of the relationship, before moving on to the next partner, who may be of either gender. Over the years, there have been a number of stories about gay men who have 'successfully' undergone conversion therapy, so they are now apparently attracted to women. Many within the Community, because of their own personal experience, suspect the people in these apparent success stories were never truly homosexual, but bisexual. That is speculative at best, though. I will cover this in much more detail later but mention it here as it may be pertinent.

At the time of writing, there is a popular TV series called S.W.A.T. based in Los Angeles, and one of the permanent characters (Officer Christina 'Chris' Alonso) gets involved in a complicated relationship with a soon-to-be-married couple – at their invitation, if not insistence. The wife is clearly bi-sexual, her husband straight and 'Chris' is lesbian. The relationship was an ongoing sub-plot running through the background of the series, and (Spoiler Alert!) eventually Chris has leaves the relationship, just before the wedding, because she feels nothing for the husband, although she loves the wife. I mention this to illustrate how complicated and fraught with problems, multiple relationships can get.

Our traditional understanding of Scripture teaches that God made woman for the man, and man for the woman, and, in the New Testament, that relationship was to be monogamous. It was to be a way of procreation, commitment, and relationship.

Our Western/European society currently sees ideal relationships as being monogamous, from largely Christian roots. Marriage, which again we'll look at in some detail later, although being a Christian institution (in the West), is largely influenced by the culture a person finds themselves. Some societies recognise polygamy, but many cultures recognise the best model is in pairs, because unless infanticide is practiced, genders at births tend to be fairly close to 50% male and 50% female, with very slightly more males than females (105 boys:100 girls).

So, for someone who is bi-sexual and in a relationship with one person, I believe God's call on that person would be to remain faithful to that person, regardless of what other urges they feel. Our current culture and understanding of Scripture, sees God's call to "straight" folk, to have one partner, and if we get urges to be drawn to someone else, we need to bring those urges under the Lordship of Christ. Hence, at present, I believe God calls Bi-sexual folk to a single partner, whether they appear outwardly "straight" or "gay." From where I now stand, I have no problem with someone who is bisexual dating someone who is female, and then if that relationship breaks down before they enter a covenantal relationship, dating someone who is male. Once they have made a commitment to a person, whatever their gender, they honour God by sticking with that person for good. If the spouse dies, and they find someone else, maybe of the opposite gender to their former spouse, again a monogamous commitment is required.

The main area of difficulty is that I find no Scriptural backing for concurrent multi-sex relationships. That situation presents a whole pile of problems: for example, we would probably argue that in a marriage, both partners are equal, and have equal rights to each other's bodies, and many wedding vows follow something akin to: "for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish..." If there were a third person in the relationship, the concept of equality of rights becomes more difficult to recognise in practice from the outset. Inevitably one person will become more dominant at the expense of one or both remaining partners, which is not the Biblical model, which I happily concede, is frequently a problem in common "straight" relationships as well, but would be even more complex where the relationship is greater than two.

There is a slightly grey area, and that is the area of polygamy. Over the span of time within which the Bible was written, the ethical and moral attitude towards Polygamy changed. In the Old Testament, nobody seems to have batted an eyelid, because it was part and parcel of the culture they were living in. By the time of the New Testament, the implication seems to be that most marriages were monogamous, but polygamous marriage still occurred as evidenced by the religious leader's question in Matthew 22: 23-28 – which we will address shortly. So, polygamy was very much a part of Jewish life, even into and beyond Jesus' day, though it had different labels, and gradually diminished, but it wouldn't stop entirely for another 1400 years after Jesus. On the one hand, you had a good number of men with more than one wife, and then you'd have others who took concubines, which we'll also look at in a moment. Finally, under Jewish law, when a man died leaving no children, the "brother must marry the widow and raise up

offspring for him" so that her former husband's name would not die out. This is called Levirate Marriage and appears in the passage above: Matthew 22: 23-32 (also Mark 12:18-23 and Luke 20: 27-33). It is also very much part of the story of Ruth (ch 1: 11-13), including Boaz's dilemma in Ruth 4. Anyway, we'll take a closer look at polygamy in a page or so under the heading of: **Sexual relationships in the Bible.**

In our understanding and terms, we would say the concubine and redeemed widows became additional wives because the point of the relationship in each case was for sex, although really, they were more like property than wives, so at the time they weren't seen as wives – because they were property, they just didn't count. Just to clarify, wives were women whose fathers gave them to a potential husband with a dowry. In other words, he paid the husband to take her away. If a man paid a father for his daughter, she was a concubine. Slaves were just property, so if their owner married, they were also part of the package.

Theologically I find it difficult to justify one person having two concurrent partners of differing genders, because there is nothing to support it in Scripture. It seems to me that that type of relationship is likely to end in trouble, from the point of view that eventually there will be friction as one of the parties gets more attention than the other, or maybe one or more partners will be treated as submissive.

Additionally, if we look at the makeup of that threesome: it'll either be two males and one female, or two females and one male, which both strike me as being a problem if they are all equal parties to each other. Almost certainly one of them will be dominant, and so the complexity of the relationships can't really be described adequately here. It's really complicated because you have the concept of a man with two wives or a wife with two husbands, or a wife with a husband and wife, or ...! The sexual orientation of each member of the 'threesome' becomes difficult to get to grips with, in terms of marital equality. How do you bring an active faith into that type of dynamic? Given how pervasive marriage breakdowns are between two people, how much more likely is it in this context, when you have more relationship dynamics going on? In a relationship of two people, you have two relationships: my perception of my relationship with my spouse and my spouse's perception of her relationship with me. I might think everything is hunky dory, and my spouse is thinking things aren't so good because.... In a three-way relationship, you have six relationships to consider (each party has a relationship with two other spouse's). At present, justifying a gay or lesbian relationship seems a walk in the park by comparison! (This is why extra-marital relationships will end in tears.)

Another added difficulty is what happens when a relationship goes through tension. Let's say A is having difficulty with B, and C is not involved. How long will it be before C starts to side with one or the other, and from there it's a short step to increase of tension, exclusion of one of the parties. After all, it happens frequently in traditional marriage relationships. And then you need to add in children. Consider the pains and unhappiness that breakups bring to the family.

Accepting this is a rare situation, my reaction is that there is nothing in Scripture that gives a green light to concurrent bi-sexuality, and I therefore, at this time with my current understanding, have to say I cannot accept this type as a valid form of sexual expression.

However, it's not really possible to write down a response that covers every eventuality, and it may need to be looked at on a case-by-case basis, in much the same way that leaders of churches decide whether they can in good conscience marry folk who have previously married and divorced.

Fortunately, the law of the land says I can only have one spouse, and this ties-in quite nicely with my current understanding of New Testament teaching. And normally, for most people, one spouse is quite enough, thank you!