

Responses received Post Assembly 2013

1.	<p>As a congregation we have explored the issue in great depth, having done 'Making Moral Decisions' and also the BU material on same sex relationships. The membership would vote to bless/marry a committed couple.</p> <p>Theological maturity is needed by many, but for me this is an issue about how we as a denomination work and what our founders were persecuted and died for. I lament greatly that the Methodists and the URC have been more Baptist than ourselves on this issue. If the church and I feel we recognise the fullness of God's blessing on a same sex couple then we should be allowed without compromise from our own denomination to exercise our right to discern the mind of Christ.</p> <p>For Baptist Ministers I believe the rules should be changed to allow Ministers the right to support affirming congregations. Further safeguards for Ministers and churches that didn't want to support an affirming position would need to be written around this to allow freedom of conscience all round.</p>
2.	<p>This mornings session, grounded superbly and ably in scripture, calmly and reasonably enabled by president, head of ministries and faith and society, makes me proud to be a Baptist</p>
3.	<p>Dear BUGB,</p> <p>Thank you facilitating such a gracious conversation yesterday morning.</p> <p>I do not believe that homosexual relationships are inherently sinful. I would be supportive of faithful homosexual relationships every bit as much as I would be of faithful heterosexual relationships. I have come to understand human sexuality as a given rather than a matter of choice.</p> <p>As we seek to discern a missional approach to homosexuals it is extremely important that we are inclusive and welcoming. We need to demonstrate the unconditional love of Christ, that we should have for all people, regardless of sexuality, ethnicity or gender. We need to make it clear that we stand alongside homosexuals, following the example of Christ in working with those on the outskirts of society, not because they are deemed to be 'major sinners', but rather because they find themselves discriminated against by some parts of our society. The sad reality is that much of the discrimination they face comes from within our own churches. Just as we have been involved as a Union in exposing 'myths about poverty' we need a similar venture that will expose the myths we tell about homosexuality in our churches.</p> <p>Unfortunately it appears that many churches are willing to use language of inclusivity and welcome, but only as cover to conceal true motives. They talk of making homosexuals 'feel welcome,' and have an inherent hope that the homosexual person in question, thanks to exposure to the gospel and 'proper Christian living,' will be convicted of their sin and therefore stop being gay. This is a travesty, and makes a mockery of the concept of inclusiveness. This covert attempt to reform homosexuals is exactly the attitude that makes homosexuals aware that they are not welcome in our churches, and feel that they will never be accepted as they are.</p>

	<p>Conversation in churches is to be welcomed, and I give thanks that BUGB facilitates this. However, despite reassurances, as a minister in training seeking ministerial accreditation I find it difficult to openly express my opinion regarding homosexual relationships. This is especially the case concerning homosexual marriage and the blessing of civil partnerships. Whilst the Min Rec clause remains, forbidding involvement in such ceremonies and open encouragement of homosexual activity, this will always be the case. Where is the line that cannot be crossed? What is defined as encouragement of homosexual practice? I firmly believe that Min Rec rules need to be amended and this rule removed. It is fundamentally unbaptist, and implies a very negative approach to homosexuality. I am concerned that much of the homosexuality policy of the Union, and the conversation we have nationally, is dictated by a very vocal minority willing to use the threat of leaving the Union as a means of maintaining our current conservative policy.</p> <p>It is clear that I personally would advocate a truly inclusive missional approach to homosexuals, that would include affirming and blessing committed homosexual relationships. However, I do respect that many members of our Union, due to deep convictions, are currently unable to move forward in the same manner. We therefore need to find a way of holding an inclusive attitude as a Union whilst allowing local congregations to maintain their autonomy. I think that the best way in which we can do this is to make absolutely clear distinctions between marriage as a legal matter practised by the state, and the marriage that we bless and practice before God in our church congregations. This would entail stepping back as a Union from performing the legal element of the marriage ceremony, both for heterosexual and homosexual marriage. Then each local congregation would be free to bless whichever marriages it deems appropriate, we would no longer be agents of the state in performing marriage, and 'Christian marriage' (homo or hetero) would regain some of its distinctiveness.</p> <p>I'm praying the conversation as a whole in the Union goes well. Thanks for the opportunity to contribute.</p>
4.	<p>Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,</p> <p>I have just been sent the email address talkingtogether@mail.com by a colleague who attended the Assembly this past weekend.</p> <p>Having been a minister for the past 25 years, please may I offer a few comments?</p> <p>In recent months I have found the following articles most helpful:</p> <p>http://www.eauk.org/church/stories/homosexuality-and-hermeneutics.cfm</p> <p>http://www.eauk.org/church/stories/not-radical-enough.cfm</p> <p>http://www.eauk.org/church/stories/the-bible-and-homosexuality.cfm</p> <p>Ditto for the following book:</p> <p>http://www.amazon.co.uk/Embracing-Truth-Homosexuality-Word-God/dp/1871828740</p>

In Jesus we see truth and grace personified. With regard to the present day debate about homosexual practice, we must continue to strive to be truthful and gracious, as we must about every issue.

Whilst we must of course eschew homophobia, and seek to ensure that in our Churches we welcome and care pastorally for every person, we must at the same time hold on to God's revealed truth.

Unless we do so, we could easily end up worshipping a different god. The God whom Christians profess to worship is the God of the Bible. At no point does Scripture indicate that homosexual practice is anything other than contrary to God's will.

Of course sexual sin is not the only sin in the book. And homosexual practice is not the only sin. So we want surely to see this issue in perspective.

In the fellowship of the Church, we are each of us forgiven sinners. Church should be a place where we can find appropriate pastoral support, whatever the sins with which we personally struggle.

It is also significant that what Churches do and say regarding this issue matters hugely. We are now aware to some extent of what happens when a generation is brought up to believe that you can, as long as it is consensual, do whatever you want with whoever you want. Implicitly and explicitly the message given to us in many ways, and I am thinking particularly of young people, is that there are no boundaries any more. Given the moral vacuum, some will experiment in directions which previous generations would have considered beyond the pale. Then they suffer, tragically. They sometimes suffer physically, they always suffer emotionally, and above all they suffer spiritually.

In such a context the Church, as she considers the example she sets (for example what she says publicly, and what she permits and does not permit in terms of what ministers say and do, must remember the powerful, shocking words of our Lord Jesus:

Matthew 18:6

English Standard Version Anglicised (ESVUK)

⁶but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,^[a] it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

Footnotes:

a. Matthew 18:6 Greek *causes... to stumble*; also verses 8, 9

There is also an issue concerning freedom of speech, well documented on, e.g., the Christian Institute website: <http://www.christian.org.uk/>

It seems clear that, given the Government's legislation which is going through Parliament at the moment, it is vital that Christian denominations maintain the traditional view (and do not follow a revisionist trajectory): otherwise it may be a very short time before we regularly see ministers appearing in court for 'discriminating' by refusing to officiate at same-sex

	<p>marriages. We should not be under any illusion: there are those who would target us. Being part of a denomination which has not taken a clear stand on the definition of marriage being "one man and one woman" would not help any such minister who found himself or herself in the dock.</p> <p>With prayers and best wishes for your deliberations.</p>
5.	<p>Dear Members of Council,</p> <p>Greetings in Christ's name. I was not present at the BU Assembly but I value the opportunity to comment on the issue of Same-Sex relationships, particularly in the context of Ministerial Guidelines. I have made the point more than once in the "Baptist Times" that I feel these are in urgent need of revision on this point. The recent intervention by Steve Chalke, the decision of the URC to permit individual churches to register for Civil Partnerships, the changing understanding of human sexuality and the proposed Government legislation on Same-Sex Marriage contribute further to the need for debate. The discussion at Assembly has also shown clearly that there is a diversity of views on this issue within our denomination.</p> <p>It strikes me that the discussion at Council ought to centre around the historical, ecclesiological and practical issues concerned. To take these in turn, I feel that our Baptist Dissenting tradition stands for an open engagement with Scripture, a sense of open theological enquiry and a willingness to come to radical conclusions concerning issues of life and faith. Yet I think there has often been a tacit assumption within the denomination that the theological and hermeneutical issues involved have all been "done and dusted" and that no-one would possibly wish to endorse same-sex relationships. My contention is not only that there may be a small but significant number of Baptists who have moved away from this position, but also that they have felt it difficult to make their views known. It would be good if Council were able to publicly acknowledge this breadth of thought, even within our declared Evangelical principles.</p> <p>I have also long felt it anomalous that the 2006 "guidelines" adopted by Council do not permit accredited BU Ministers to publicly endorse same-sex relationships, under threat of disciplinary action. Although I recognise that Ministers are in a covenanted relationship both with each other and the denomination as a whole, I feel that this ruling is simply incorrect in a denomination which values the autonomy of the local congregation. I would further contend that the way in which these guidelines were "imposed" on Ministers – albeit after some discussion with the Ministers' Fellowship – violated our proper Baptist principles; certainly I knew nothing about them until they arrived on my doormat one day! My belief is that a Minister – always with the support of their Church meeting – who wishes to solemnise or bless same-sex unions should be able to do so without fear of recrimination. (The issue of Ministers who are in same-sex relationships themselves is not one which I am considering here, although it too will need debating at some point).</p> <p>The final point I would wish to highlight is that our present position is simply inconsistent. I think I am right in saying that there is nothing to prevent a local congregation from deciding to allow the blessing of same-sex relationships on its premises; nor, indeed, resolving to apply for registration as a venue for Civil Partnerships (although I presume that this would also require the consent of the appropriate Trust body). However, its Minister would be unable to participate in these ceremonies if he or she were duly accredited; strangely enough, a Lay Pastor or non-accredited Minister would <i>not</i> be bound by such strictures. Clearly this point will be thrown into focus even more if Same-Sex marriages become legal</p>

	<p>and churches wish to solemnise them; however the anomaly already exists and urgently needs addressing.</p> <p>It would be very easy for Council to “play safe” next week and merely endorse the current position on Ministers and Same-Sex blessings. Indeed, there will probably be those who press for this, believing that any perceived “relaxation” of the guidelines will cause a furore in the denomination. But may I push for the opposite to happen, and allow ministers to have liberty on this matter, as I believe that it is the only appropriate conclusion to reach. You may be interested to know that I touched on this issue in my sermon last Sunday and publicly voiced my support for Same-Sex Marriage on the grounds of giving couples a secure place in society rather than leaving them in some kind of moral limbo. This was entirely coincidental to the discussion in Assembly, as it came in the context of a series I am doing on the Ten Commandments and we had reached the Seventh! I was surprised how many folk in church agreed with what I had said.</p>
6.	<p>There are a few things I would like to contribute to the discussion. Probably nothing original but I hope it helps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I want to accept that I could be wrong about my understanding of the acceptability or otherwise of same-sex relationships. * I also want to acknowledge that such a shift in thinking is a big change in mindset and so I would want to ask those who differ in their views to respect the journey I am making and the conclusions I reach as much as I seek to do the same for them. * "Are same sex relationships acceptable to God?" is possibly the wrong question to be asking. The question I find myself asking increasingly is "What does God want from each of us?" The answer I conclude is that he wants to grow his life in us and make us more like Jesus. Therefore if someone tells me that this is their goal for life surely I am to respect that even if I find it difficult to accept the conclusions that they may come to. * If people with all the integrity they can muster are prepared to seek God for their lives I should be content to leave the results with him and allow him, by his spirit, to convict (others or myself). <p>I think I should conclude that had I been responding to the same discussion thirty years ago I would have reacted very differently. I don't feel that this implies an accommodation to worldly values but simply reflects a developing understanding.</p>
7.	<p>It would be great to have more personal testimony as heard at Assembly in Blackpool . – congratulations to our leaders for taking this bold step. Appointing a woman to lead our denomination is a really positive step forward and should be celebrated and made widely known in the media. The way in which the discussion over human sexuality was handled was excellent, encouraging full participation and a generous open spirit. It is to be hoped that all our churches are able to conduct future discussions in a similar way. It would be my hope that we might become a fellowship of churches in which the welcome to all, irrespective of gender, class, sexual orientation etc. was truly genuine, and that we would all recognise the differences in our beliefs without using them negatively.</p>
8.	<p>Dear friends,</p>

	<p>A couple of (hopefully) helpful contributions to the current debate.</p> <p>Firstly, I would draw your attention to a group to whom insufficient attention is paid in current discussions: Possibly because I am the pastor of a church where the majority of members are singles, I am conscious of the distress the modern obsession with homosexual relationships can cause to celibate, same-sex Christian friendships. 'It is not good for man to be alone', so single Christians should be encouraged to support one another. Christian ladies, particularly, have often shared homes in the past. Now, we have known a couple of such, coming to stay with us, who felt it necessary to assure us that they were not lesbians .. and they should not have needed to. If there is one good thing about the government's desire for 'gay marriage', it is that it can free up civil partnerships to give legal protection to such celibate, same sex friendships. I believe the BU should encourage us to bless civil partnerships, provided it is made clear that such relationships are entirely celibate.</p> <p>Secondly, there is a false comparison being drawn with changing Christian attitudes to some other issues. Slavery and women ministers are different situations from 'Gay' relationships. There is a clear anti-slavery theme even in the Old Testament (Exodus, Sabbatical year, Jubilee, etc) and not only does Paul envisage women prophesying in the assembly, but Jesus himself commissioned Mary Magdalene to 'Go, tell' and all NT scholars recognise the enhanced role he gave women. By contrast there is not a single positive portrayal of homo-sexual (as opposed to celibate same-sexual) relationships in all scripture. It may well be that (as some claim) the centurion in Mat. 8 / Luke 7 had a gay relationship with his 'boy', but the fact that Jesus does not question him before healing the slave does not mean he approved of such, it just demonstrates his grace. More significant to my thinking is Jesus quoting Genesis 1:27 in connection with marriage. Since it is not necessary to his argument, it can only be because he sees marriage as the union of one man with one woman. The government may redefine marriage, we cannot.</p>
9.	<p>I am very glad that we had this important discussion, and that it was done in a truly Baptist way. Other churches that are more hierarchical or conciliar are constrained to come to a corporate decision binding on all members. The Baptist Union, on the other hand, has exercised commendable leadership in bringing the matter up for discussion when many would prefer to ignore it, and at the same time has initiated a conversation in which we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit together rather than calling for a 'democratic' vote.</p> <p>My strong feeling is that this is a matter in which we must recognise the right of churches and individuals to speak and act according to their conscience, and the need for all of us to listen to one another and respect one another.</p> <p>I believe that, in accordance with this, the Ministerial Recognition rules should be amended. I was glad that it was made publicly clear that ministers should not feel inhibited in expressing their views, but the written rules at they stand contradict this, and as I understand it ministers in any case are currently not allowed to act on their views by, for instance, blessing civil partnerships, even if they have the support of their churches.</p>
10.	<p>I am old and old-fashioned and would love to cling to the clear black-and-white morality of my youth, especially in regard to Christian marriage, BUT I value the Five Core Values so helpfully spelled out by our Baptist Union, not least in church as <i>inclusive community</i>. I</p>

	<p>respect those early Baptists who, in pleading their own case to relate to God freely, not restricted by an established state church, recognized that they must claim similar freedom for those of other religions, not just for nonconforming Christians. Similarly, as I have over some thirty years pleaded for the full inclusion in our churches of people who have disabilities, and have gladly valued the new vigour brought to our London Baptist scene by many from immigrant communities, I cannot let instinctive prejudice make me exclude others just because of their sexual orientation. Inclusion is more Christlike.</p>
11.	<p>Following the discussion on the last day of the BU Assembly I have put together my thoughts on the issues of homosexuality in the attached document for your consideration. I pray that you all be given wisdom as you seek God's will together.</p> <p>Reflections on how, as individuals and as church, we approach the issues surrounding homosexuality in our country and culture</p> <p>In the following reflections I try to deal with the questions raised in the plenary session on the final day of the Baptist Assembly. In doing so, I have to recognise a variety of influences in my life.</p> <p>Firstly, I am a Christian, born again of the Spirit of God, who has been called, (and that calling recognised by 2 churches and the BU), to be a pastor, preacher and Bible teacher.</p> <p>Secondly, I am a member of a family in which my atheist brother is gay and last year celebrated a civil partnership with his partner of 18 years. I was asked to act as his 'best man' at that ceremony and was pleased to be able to do that. I love both my brother and his partner deeply and have welcomed the partner into my family. I have another friend from university days who came out as gay to me shortly after we graduated. He had come to Christ at University and considered that under the Lordship of Christ he should remain celibate unless and until God transformed his sexuality. Last June I was privileged to attend his marriage at his church.</p> <p>Thirdly, having experienced a variety of churchmanships over the years since becoming a Christian, I have been persuaded of a stance that would be described as evangelical and charismatic. I trained at London School of Theology in both undergraduate theology and a Masters degree in hermeneutics.</p> <p>Fourthly, I was born in 1974 and have been brought up in the UK through the 80's, 90's and in the new millennium with all the social changes and pressures that have been present during that time.</p> <p>In reflecting on the issues raised I will attempt to respond by way of questions and answers</p> <p>Who are we? (Humanity)</p> <p>In considering the issue of homosexuality I start by attempting to understand what it is to be human. On my reading of Scripture I have to conclude that all human beings are created in the image of God but that we have damaged that image. No one has truly been able to be the perfect image of God except for Jesus Christ who was and is fully God and fully human. Other than him we are all broken and limited in our understanding of God, ourselves and the world around us and we need God to reveal himself to us or we could understand nothing of Him. God has revealed himself in the world, in Scripture and supremely in Jesus Christ. Through Jesus we are offered the opportunity to be redeemed and transformed by the Holy Spirit through Christ that we might better reflect God's image.</p>

Who are we? (Church)

All those who have been redeemed and declared righteous by God become part of the body or family of Christ known as church and ought, where possible, to express that within a local congregation. These congregations should reflect God's image and be places of love, of healing and of transformation. These congregations should be missional in reaching out to others with the love of God that they might seek his transforming power in their lives too. These congregations are places in which we seek to know God through his revelation with Christ as our supreme authority as we seek to hear him together through the words of Scripture and reflect him through personal holiness.

For me these are foundational beliefs and I set them out without attempting to justify them from Scripture for the sake of space.

How then do we consider questions surrounding homosexuality?

Our first port of call is to the supreme authority of Jesus. Within Scripture Jesus never directly and explicitly addresses the subject of homosexuality. We are right to be cautious of all those who claim to have had a direct revelation from God as to what he thinks, especially where this tends to confirm what they already thought. So what can we learn from the Jesus of Scripture.

Firstly that Jesus was welcoming to all, with the possible exception of those who already thought they were righteous for whom he reserves his harshest criticism. Jesus welcomed those that were looked down on and despised by the rest of society whether that be Gentiles, women, the disabled or others. We don't know of any occasion when Jesus had contact with someone involved in homosexual activity, (while the account in Luke 7 is sometimes argued to show that the servant was the recipient of the masters sexual advances due to the use of the word *pais* in Luke 7:7, the word *doulos* is used in 7:2 and 10 which have no such connotation and in 7:7 the word can carry a range of meanings and are more naturally an indication of youth or general slavery/obedience. Indeed the same word is used of the relationship of Jesus to Father God in Matt 12:8 but without any sexual connotation). Jesus certainly reiterates the Genesis account of marriage as man and woman in Matthew 19 and parallels. He goes on to speak of those who are eunuchs, which might be a relation to homosexuals being born that way, made so by men or renouncing marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. This seems more a renouncing of marriage than expressly homosexual orientation such as is lived out in Roman Catholic priestly celibacy.

What of the rest of Scripture?

There is not a great deal on homosexual activity in Scripture. Every express mention does seem to reject homosexual activity as part of God's plan for human sexuality and set out heterosexuality as normative.

Old Testament

Genesis 1:24-28 & 2:18-24

The creation accounts at least assume that heterosexuality is the norm, with procreation as a necessary part of being fruitful and multiplying. There are those arguing that homosexuality is something hardwired into some people and that it is therefore wrong to discriminate by refusing them freedom to pursue their sexual preference. The evidence for a 'gay gene' is not there. There is some suggestion that there may be some genetic factors which might make some men more likely to be gay but that they do not determine sexuality and that psychosocial factors are of crucial importance in determining human sexuality. Even where

there is a genetic tendency towards something, it does not follow that it is God's will. For example there has been shown to be a genetic disposition towards violence or alcoholism and yet these are rightly still considered to be morally wrong.

Leviticus 18:22 & Leviticus 20:13

Some attempt to explain these away as saying that it would be wrong for a heterosexual to participate in homosexual acts or that they should be seen as cultural as many other Levitical commands are uncontroversially seen today. Yet there is nothing else in the whole of scripture to indicate a change in this stance and the other sexual laws in Leviticus 18 would all be maintained today. Indeed Leviticus 18 accepts that there are many others who will act in those ways but that God's people are to be distinct from them. In terms of Leviticus 20, the severity of punishment has been reduced in society, but Scripture at least indicates the severity with which God views such things, but otherwise only the possibility of sex during menstruation might perhaps be viewed differently by some today. I accept that some of the rules in Leviticus 19 are somewhat different in terms of long term observation, but this is usually because of some explicit or implied change in the rules elsewhere in scripture.

Genesis 19 and Judges 19:16-24

Generally when these incidents, especially the Genesis 19 one, are referred to it is not explicitly to condemn homosexuality but rather the trespass on hospitality. However Jude 7 does seem to indicate that they are considered as sexually immoral and pursuing unnatural lust, though whether this is due to the homosexual nature or the rape element can be debated, but it seems to include both.

The passage in Judges seems to be set in a period of severe moral decline and the homosexual nature of the act is seen as representative of that. Indeed the Judges passage, in sending out the concubine also seems to be a rejection of hospitality.

New Testament

Jesus, Paul and other NT writers standing in the tradition of Jewish rejection of homosexual activity built on their Old Testament understanding. The presumption should be that they follow that tradition unless they expressly depart from it. The onus of proof must be on those arguing for a change.

Romans 1:18-32

Some try to dismiss this as relating only to cultic Temple prostitution which is condemned as idolatrous, or that Paul reject homosexual activity because he in viewing it as homosexual activity carried out by heterosexual people and that had he known of sexual orientation then he would have viewed it differently. However Paul, with his extensive travels in the ancient world must surely have come across genuine loving same sex relationships given the attitude prevalent in the Roman Empire and throughout the ancient world. Instead, as Thiselton notes, "Paul sees homosexual intimacy as *one among many* symptoms of human fallenness, along with greed, materialism, self-assertion, and other qualities which fall short of the ideal, in contrast to today's obsessiveness with this particular phenomenon". Paul's condemnation of lesbianism (otherwise unmentioned in the Bible) alongside his discussion of male homosexuality suggests that the same sex nature of the relationship is what he is rejecting. The whole argument is placed within the context of creation and suggests that a departure from the heterosexual nature of sexual relationships cannot be approved of. Some speak here of homosexuality as the judgment of God. I suspect that it is better to see that in God's judgment he allowed them to go their own way (arguably the heart of most sin) rather than insisting that they follow his way. This is not to say that he approved of it but that he refused to intervene.

Paul's perspective elsewhere in Romans, that all have sinned, perhaps points us to some humility in our pastoral practice in recognition of our own brokenness in matters including sexually.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Seems to present an eschatological perspective and therefore of more eternal significance and rejects both the passive and penetrative part of male homosexual intercourse. The most natural way to interpret *malakoi* is of those taking the passive part in homosexual male penetrative sex and *arsenokoitai* as those taking the active part rather than looking to one to be some form of cultic prostitute (BDAG).

The fact that some of the Corinthians were living in homosexual relationships prior to conversion seems probable from verse 11, but suggests at least abstinence, if not transformation following conversion.

1 Timothy 1:8-11

This verse uses the same word, *arsenokoitais*, as 1 Corinthians and suggests that it is contrary to sound doctrine.

Are there counter arguments in the Scriptures?

1 Samuel 20:41 & 2 Samuel 1:26 – David and Jonathan

There are some who argue for their mutual love with kissing and being greater than the love of a woman suggests that there was a homo-erotic dimension to their relationship. However, in the light of the uniform rejection of homosexual activity in the Old Testament, I suggest that it would require something much clearer to establish that this was the nature of their relationship as it would otherwise seem to be unthinkable given the traditional Jewish view. Instead it is perhaps best to see that two men can have a very close and intimate bond of love and friendship without requiring a sexual aspect to the relationship. It seems, in the context of the establishment of the Israelite monarchy, more likely that the emphasis on the love between them was to show that David was not a usurper of the throne but rather God's chosen successor.

Similar arguments can be made for the relationship between Jesus and John (the disciple whom Jesus loved.)

Galatians 3:28

Some look to Paul's removal of the distinction of male and female as permitting homosexual acts as gender distinctions no longer matter, but the context of that passage is that both men and women are able to become sons of God through Jesus Christ and so, it is argued, that passage has little to say here, beyond the possibility of everyone coming to know God through Jesus Christ. This would presumably include homosexual people.

Is there any trajectory pointing to a cultural dimension to the consistent prohibition on homosexual activity?

Some try to parallel the issue with that of slavery or the role of women and yet, as Webb shows in his helpful book, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, there is a redemptive-movement hermeneutic in respect of both those issues that is totally lacking when it comes to issues of homosexual activity.

We do operate within a culture and yet we are called, for example in the Sermon on the Mount, to live counter-culturally. We are told there will be a temptation to preach what itching ears want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3) and there is always a temptation to please people rather than God (Gal 1:10) but our call is to be faithful to the revelation God has given us even though there may be times when it would be easier not to, such as in my relationship with my brother.

Just as Jesus didn't come to abolish the law but rather to fulfil it (Matt 5:17-20) so we shouldn't take it onto ourselves to do what he resisted. However, we are under grace and not under law so does that enable us to change our position. In that case I would still have to

revert to 1 Corinthians 6:12ff in which everything is permissible but not beneficial and state that the body is not meant for sexual immorality. It is hard to separate that from what Paul wrote a few verses earlier about homosexuality which is considered above.

In considering the Scriptures, although it would be easier to accept homosexual activity, I cannot see any Biblical warrant for doing so. The Bible seems to take a consistent approach and, unless we are to reject any certainty over anything in Scripture, I cannot take a different view. I have to accept that homosexual activity is wrong.

If homosexual activity is sinful, then where does it rank? In 1 Cor 6:9-10 it is neither a greater nor lesser sin than others mentioned there, but they all exclude the offender from the kingdom of God. Generally when speaking of the Kingdom of God the Bible seems to mean coming under the rule and reign of God rather than speaking of entry to heaven when we die. This list of offences keeping one out of the Kingdom suggests that we should give a similar emphasis to theft, greed, slander as we do to adultery and homosexual activity.

So what of our praxis?

In terms of the law of the UK, I do not see that we should object to those not accepting the Lordship of Christ, and therefore having no reason to accept the morality of his people from entering civil partnerships. Civil partnerships seem to give appropriate legal rights to those in same sex relationships and give legal effect to the wishes of inheritance and rights of next of kin that they would wish for.

Should it be termed marriage? This seems to be a redefinition of a word that doesn't need redefining. I have no problem with finding an alternative word (I don't see the problem with calling it a partnership). Expanding the term would seem to reduce the definition and meaning, in a culture in which marriage is already much reduced as can be seen in the divorce rate. I would have to oppose calling a civil partnership 'Marriage' though I accept that many will choose to use the terms marriage and wedding for these events colloquially. Should it be extended to religious bodies of other religions to perform them? Don't see that we can or should be able to determine this for other faiths. Should it be extended to the Christian church? I wouldn't like to see that happen as seems to run contrary to Scripture, but don't see that we can dictate to another denomination.

Should we conduct such partnerships (or bless such partnerships) as Baptists, should the law change to allow it? Council's declaration on it probably reflected the view of the majority at the time, but there is a question of whether it is a fit subject for Council to pronounce upon given the Baptist principle of freedom of the local church to interpret Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, having made a statement, to withdraw that statement would be seen by many within and beyond the Baptist church as giving support to those wanting to take those services, leaving those of us not willing to do them in a more awkward position, especially should the legally enshrined freedom of conscience be subsequently withdrawn or modified. I could not perform a gay marriage or partnership and would have to leave the Baptist Union should that be something that was required. I would also have to question my position should it be something that was encouraged.

If the Baptist denomination accepts the possibility of performing homosexual unions then the declaration made by myself and other candidates on RSC that they are not in homosexual relationship must also go or we will be left in an inconsistent position where something is

affirmed in the church that is not affirmed for the pastor. I accept that pastors should be held to a higher standard but that is of scrutiny rather than different definitions of sin.

Within the Baptist church there would seem to be a need for discussion and teaching on the whole area of sexual orientation as it is such a major social issue today, but doing that runs the risk of giving greater emphasis to this topic than Scripture does.

What of Pastoral care?

Homosexuality often seen as identity, but, as Christians, we believe that our identity is bound in Christ rather than in our sexual preference. I reject the premise that my sexuality determines my identity. We come to Christ to be transformed into his image (2 Cor 3:18) and to submit to him our whole lives, including our sexuality. There will be some who find their sexuality transformed in their relationship with Jesus Christ, this may well involve loving but non-sexual same sex relationships. There will be others who submit to celibacy under the Lordship of Christ and go on to find life as fulfilling as the celibate Jesus Christ and Apostle Paul did. There will be many who struggle to place this part of their lives under the Lordship of Christ and so we treat homosexual activity as we do other sinful activity as we seek to support everyone in submitting their sexuality to God. It may be an issue that affects church membership, just as it would for me for a cohabiting heterosexual couple. We recognise the support, care and love that must be given to people battling with this area of their lives just as for the rest of us struggling with our own brokenness and failure to live up to the calling we have received. Church must be a place of love and welcome in which everyone is offered friendship and support in their pursuit of holiness, including sexual purity of celibacy or heterosexual monogamous marriage. Perhaps a support system similar to that put forwards through Living Waters could be helpful in supporting those struggling with homosexual attraction.

What of Mission?

Everyone who does not know Jesus Christ, should be enabled to make a decision as to whether to follow him and place themselves under his Lordship, regardless of ethnicity, gender, class or sexual orientation. Within that we must acknowledge that the church has often leapt too readily to condemnation and (in some sexual matters) hypocrisy. We have too often preached the message of hate of the other rather than acknowledging the need of a saviour, which we all share. The barriers against the homosexual community have been built very high by the whole church.

As Rictor Norton states, "I would remind Christian gay apologists that a statement such as 'the church has a bad record regarding homosexuals' is a pathetic understatement. The church's record regarding homosexuals is an atrocity from beginning to end: it is not for us to seek forgiveness, but for the church to make atonement."

It is arguable that a change in the Baptist stance will not change this dramatically as we don't have the same profile that the Anglican or Roman Catholic churches have. There is a place for an apology over our previous treatment of the homosexual community, but that doesn't mean declaring homosexual activity as OK.

In mission we seek to enable everyone to find their identity in Christ rather than in any of the things they have previously looked to such that 'whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ'. For many within the homosexual community this means rejecting an identity based solely or predominantly upon their sexuality and allow for the possibility of transformation under the power of God or at least the grace to cope in our weakness. As

	<p>church this places a burden on us to become a welcoming community for those seeking to leave any old way behind.</p> <p>For the reasons stated above I would be unwilling to conduct any civil partnership or blessing of a civil partnership. I would be sorry to see the denomination bow to social pressure on this issue when the essence of our non-conformity is that we stand apart from that and seek to be counter-cultural under the leading of Christ. I personally do not think that Council should have been asked to speak on this issue, but having done so, I would be reluctant to see that position change as that would give out signals that were unhelpful to those of us taking a more conservative view.</p>
12.	<p>Thank you for welcoming feedback following the session on Monday morning at conference. Here are my reflections.</p> <p>I was disappointed with the quality of Bible study on Isaiah 42 that introduced our discussions on homosexuality and our pastoral and missional response. The passage that was read emphasised welcoming new nations to be God's people. One verse focused on was about the servant (Jesus, Israel and now his church) who will not hurt a bruised reed but the rest of the verse Is 42:3 says in faithfulness he will bring forth justice was not given any mention. Verse 4 was not commented upon 'In his law the islands will put their hope'. The implication of what was presented was that, in keeping with the selective reading of this passage, we ought to welcome in the bruised reed (homosexual) when surely some comment about what the law or justice might look like that the bruised reed will come and enjoy needed to be explored too.</p> <p>I would be disappointed with any change to current guidance in this area by council.</p> <p>I would value council helping ministers to reflect upon how we can pastorally and missionally uphold the teaching of the Bible that robustly rejects homosexual practice - not look for ways of accommodating our broken world's practices.</p>
13.	<p>Where is the balance in this debate? The traditional Conservative Evangelical approach to same sex relationships did not get a mention in the BT report. Either the BU has changed out of all recognition or this process is not truly representative of grass roots opinion in our churches. I have no doubts that BU will change its position on this matter but it will be the beginning of the end of the BU as we know it.</p>
14.	<p>I may come back with further reflections later, but at this stage may I just make three points.</p> <p>Firstly, congratulations to those concerned for providing the opportunity for discussion and contemplation on this huge issue. It touched a chord, and it is so important that we engage with these issues of sexuality. The whole thing was very sensitively introduced, with wisdom and openness, and I hope that it will be the start of an on-going process.</p> <p>Secondly, why was there no advance information about the discussion? It was not included in the Assembly Programme, and it was not referred to in the daily Update newsletters. There were a couple of verbal references over the weekend to “our discussion about sexuality on Monday”, but no real information, and no encouragement to get involved. In fact, we didn’t know which session it would be included within, or whether there was some special event at some special venue that wasn’t included in the programme!</p>

	<p>The first we knew that it was going to be discussed in the Bible Study session on Monday morning was when one of the Bible Study speakers made some comment about “What’s this got to do with sexuality?” And soon after that we realised that ‘this was it’. But why was there not better advance information? It was almost as though there was some secret agenda that people ‘in the know’ knew about, but the rest of us were left out of the loop. Whether it would have made much difference if there had been better information I don’t know, but I’m left feeling that we were unprepared for the discussion.</p> <p>Thirdly, it was a revelation to know that BUGB have training material on the subject of gay relationships and even that they come out to churches to provide training. I have been enquiring for several years as to whether there is good or useful material on the gay issue for churches, but had drawn a complete blank. Obviously I had not looked in the right place or asked the right people. But could I ask that the Faith and Society Team give more publicity to what they have available on this subject?</p>
15.	<p>Comments received from the ‘talking together’ conversation on sexuality at Assembly 2013</p> <p>Stories of pain, even suicide of people who have ‘come out’ and not been accepted. Hostility from both ‘the world’ and ‘the church’.</p> <p>Churches struggle to reconcile the desire to be completely accepting –against the Theological views (need to repent – change way of life).</p> <p>Knowing the person helps and changes how we respond. Question to ask ourselves – What is the best we can hope for for that person. Surprise expressed that gay people may feel unwelcome in the church.</p> <p>Gen 2 v 24 “So a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his <u>wife</u>, and the two will become one body”.</p> <p>Let us not compromise scripture and interpret to make us comfortable. God does not call us to water down His word.</p> <p>If we go down the route of affirming and celebrating homosexual relationships, what will this do to our relationships with the global Family of Baptists. Should we include Baptists from the majority (ie southern hemisphere Christians) in our conversation? Are there views valid or do we (perhaps arrogantly) assume they will be “left behind” us in their thinking – after all, we often believe their attitudes to women are not as advanced as ours.</p> <p>Our own church has done a series of studies on the subject of Same Sex marriage in the light of possible legislation. The church meeting then decided that at this point in our history we affirm the present ministerial code of discipline regulation and feel this ought to be the rule for minister and deacons, we feel that we cannot conduct same sex marriage or blessing services in our church at this time, but we would welcome persons of whatever orientation, as we feel Jesus would.</p> <p>We had a few concerns:</p>

	<p>1. That in the event of a revival of the present disciplinary rules – a minister/church might be compelled by case law to go against conscience on the ‘equality’ ground.</p> <p>2. That someone already in membership – who then declares their orientation and partnership – might take legal action against the church if it should uphold the position.</p> <p>Please let us not be forced into the world’s mode of political correctness on this issue. Lets <u>support Christian marriage</u> as God’s ideal and patterns for children to be brought up by a <u>mum and dad</u> God created Adam and Eve – not Adam and Steve Children <u>need</u> male and female role models Lets love every person who comes into our churches, but not compromise on biblical standards.</p> <p>Fundamental differences in group</p> <p>We don’t declare if we are heterosexual so why do we judge on homosexual.</p> <p>Is this a misinterpretation of scripture as we found the subject of women leaders to be?</p> <p>What does affirmation mean?</p> <p>Take legal aspect out of churches – just have a celebration</p> <p>Fear of discussing it in churches as fear of rejection.</p> <p>We would welcome gay people in church – no prob! We believe in belonging <u>before</u> believing.</p> <p>But how do we disciple them if they come to faith – what does the bible <u>really say</u> about gay lifestyle? – even faithful ones!</p> <p>How do teachers (Christian) teach about whether heterosexual marriage within the classroom?</p> <p>We need <u>specific</u> Biblical teaching about whether change is needed for gay people in the same way as we would seek to help people out of drug addiction, violence etc ..</p>
16.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As the conversation unfolded I heard some real stories of pain and struggle from people. A number of people were able to tell stories about members of their own family or people they had known since childhood or through church relationships who had ‘come out’. There was a genuine anguish in people’s stories as they tried to reconcile their theology and their experience of personal relationships. I suspect that had we had the same conversation 10 or 15 years ago then it would have been very different, but as the cosmic culture-shift of the last two decades regarding sexuality has unfolded very large numbers of people have come to know an openly gay person. Whereas 20 years ago people were making their comments about human sexuality in a vacuum of experience, people are now having to wrestle with the issues as they relate to real people whom they know and love.

- I had in some senses prejudged what might be said and by whom and was genuinely surprised that the most 'accepting' comments were being made by some of the older people who spoke. I had expected there to be a generational dynamic at work and was surprised to find that this was not necessarily the case. The very young people who spoke (those who were brought up in a more 'gay friendly' culture?) and those of an older generation (maybe with more life experience?) were those who were more accepting while those who were the most vociferously conservative were generally more middle aged.
- Something I heard several times was people saying, 'We would like to be more accepting but as I read Scripture I find it really hard to reconcile what I want and what the Bible says.' People seem to generally want to say that homosexual people should be accepted in exactly the same way that heterosexual people are but were honestly wrestling with their reading of the Bible. This encouraged me greatly! If it is a matter of better understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures and their cultural context then this is something we can set our mind to fixing through education and preaching.
- The above view was reinforced by the fact that those who had received some sort of theological education, particularly in recent years, seemed to be generally more accepting than those who had not. However, as with all these comments I have made the word 'generally' needs to be applied. The range of opinions was very wide! Again, in general, those who were more conservative were tending to start off what they were saying based purely on Scripture while those who were being most accepting were tending to base their comments on personal experience and relationships. This is a big generalisation but I heard several times people either saying 'The Bible says' or 'I had a friend/son/neighbour...'
- The question so children came up several times in two different contexts. The first was the question of what do we tell our own children in church? How are we to explain to them the presence of openly gay people in church? I personally struggle to understand what the issue was here exactly but the question, 'What do we tell our children?' came up in three different sub-groups. The second question relating to children was with regard to gay couples having children of their own (either biologically through surrogacy or adoption). Were two parents of the same gender best for the children and should Baptists have an opinion on this?
- Finally whilst I was encouraged by the tone of the debate and the willingness to share and listen, I was concerned at the use of language. The words 'they' and 'them' were almost exclusively used to describe gay and lesbian people. 'They' are still seen as a distinct and separate group whom the church is trying to integrate. 'They' are outsiders and different and we are trying to understand how to cope with them. I was disappointed that gay people are not seen as part of the 'us' and 'we' that we are trying to love better in the fellowship rather than an alien group from outside that we're trying to include.
- I was also slightly disappointed to note that the conversations about gay people were entirely in terms of how do we deal with people's sin rather than accepting of the lifestyle. People with openly gay lifestyles were seen as falling short of God's ideal for them and at no point did I hear anybody suggesting that a homosexual couple in a faithful, long-term relationship were living God's best for them. My personal feeling is that going forward viewing gay people as sinners whom we have to accept is a very different proposition to accepting gay people as full members of our communities. We are called to live alongside and love.
- Bisexual and transgender people were not mentioned at all in any of the groups I listened to – a matter of particular regret to me personally as we have a post-operative

	<p>transsexual attending church on a weekly basis now and I would have liked to have heard other people's experiences of inclusion!</p>
17.	<p>This has been area that has challenged me over the last 2 years. I feel awkward and embarrassed that I could not invite a homosexual, lesbian or transgender to my church. These friends who struggle greatly with their sexuality and their faith face and experience a lot of rejection.... there are denomination who will not allow membership. i have read books and looked into a variety of debates. I respect and agree with Steve Chalks recent paper paper and I think the time has come when we debate this subject with openness and in a respectful manner remembering that no one is perfect and consider the agony and despair that many people go through regarding their sexuality. It is the heart that God is concerned about.</p>
18.	<p>At our last church meeting in September 2013, these were the views expressed by the church members: A secret ballot was held. The result was that all members present disagreed with the solemnisation of same-sex marriages in the church and 17 also disagreed with the blessing of civil partnerships in the church whilst 4 agreed with such blessings.</p>
19.	<p>Many thanks for the excellent opportunity for discussion and reflection on the difficult issue of same sex relationships at this week's Assembly.</p> <p>I share concerns expressed by all in my small group that I want to be open and welcoming to all, yet have a deep conviction that Biblical standards call for sexual intercourse to be exclusively reserved for a permanent, monogomous, married relationships between a man and a woman. I also oppose Government plans to introduce same-sex "marriage".</p> <p>My question concerns the BUGB guidelines for ministers which prohibit involvement in and promotion of blessings for same-sex relationships. At present, I feel that these give me a helpful safeguard, in that I can quote that "my church quidelines say" . If such quidelines were removed or changed, the onus for pastoral decisions would very much fall on me as an individual pastor.</p> <p>Are there any plans to relax or alter the current guidelines?</p>
20.	<p>Dear Members of BU Council</p> <p>I have struggled with same-sex attraction since my teenage years. Thankfully by the time I became aware of it, I already had a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, otherwise I honestly do not know how I would have coped. But what was I to do wish such strong feelings which I believed were in conflict with my faith? Enough people have written about the level of emotional anguish involved in this, so you do not need to hear it again from me.</p> <p>As I grew to adulthood, I shared my struggle with a small number of trusted Christian friends who supported me as best they could. I was of course aware that in society at large, gay relationships were fast becoming accepted and indeed promoted, and I was struck by the speed at which this happened. As much as this added to my pain, I still had the security of knowing that in the Christian community my struggle was honoured by those who knew about it. To know that I had the support of my Christian brothers and sisters helped me to stay strong. If life was going to be difficult, this at least made it possible. It would be easier to be a soldier for Christ if I knew I was part of an army. After all, are there not countless</p>

	<p>numbers of Christians who have proved his grace sufficient for them amidst life’s struggles in all their different forms? In my life as a Pastor I would meet many of them. If they could overcome, so could I. Though I would sometimes fail and fall, I would live by His grace.</p> <p>Imagine how it feels now, then, to see the debate on same-sex relationships raging around me – a debate which I cannot participate in openly for the sake of my loved ones and for the sake of the church pastor, but a debate which affects me profoundly nonetheless. If we as a Union are about to consider affirming the validity of same-sex relationships, the implication is that my lifelong struggle has been completely in vain.</p> <p>Now I know perfectly well that this debate is really about hermeneutics, and I hope and expect that you as Council will concentrate on that in your discussions. I have asked myself on many occasions what all the relevant Scriptures mean and whether they apply to long-term faithful partnerships. I cannot get away from the fact that whilst the Biblical trajectory leads us to free slaves and to affirm women at all levels of ministry, the same cannot be said for homosexual relationships, which if anything are more roundly condemned in the New Testament than the Old.</p> <p>But alongside the basic issue of hermeneutics, in your discussions I would like you to consider the implications for people in my position, of whom there are a considerable number, mostly hidden from view. Many of us are married with children, mostly we do not share our struggle beyond a small trusted group, but privately we are fighting what we take to be the good fight of faith. And I for one hope to be part of a church that continues to support me in that fight, whether they are aware of it or not.</p> <p>Yours in the grace of Christ</p> <p>A Fellow-Disciple who must remain anonymous</p>
21.	<p>The views below are my personal ones and not the view of the institution that employs me and not necessarily that of the church which I have the honour of serving as minister</p> <p><u>Regarding human sexuality</u></p> <p>The core question seems to be whether homosexual erotic/physical relations are sinful or not. We may well agree that we need to be more welcoming to people from all communities but as God’s people we need both to be pastorally caring but appropriately challenging. We must be careful not to condemn but nor can we bless that which is sinful. Presumably we’re not going down the road of “anything goes”.</p> <p>True Jesus did not say anything directly relevant about homosexuality and there are few passages in the Bible that speak about it (to my brief recollection six) but whereas in the case of women in leadership there are a number of examples of women in leadership roles in the Old and New Testaments and regarding slavery the letter to Philemon does encourage Philemon to free his slave Onesimus, I can find no similar passages which give a positive view of homosexual relationships but leave one thinking it may not have been appropriate then but may be now....? If homosexual physical relationships are sinful then we cannot bless them.</p> <p>There will be a place for church discipline in cases where people persistently do not live up to Christian standards. In my last church we withdrew church membership from someone who</p>

	<p>had been in an adulterous relationship for ten years (during which time he had fathered five children).</p> <p>I find it difficult to believe that same sex physical sex is that for which God made us. The human body seems to be designed in that way.</p> <p>If same sex physical relations are sinful then we should not bless or approve of them. If the view that they are sinful is only cultural then we still need to decide whether it is appropriate for our culture. Yes we must react with compassion and we should not regard this as the only sin which cannot be forgiven but if it is sin then it needs to be dealt with as such.</p> <p>The church has been half-hearted in its teaching on the place of sex as being within marriage and marriage only. If we had been more serious about promoting marriage we might have less of an issue about sex outside marriage whether that be same sex or different sex.</p> <p>While it is true that our stance on homosexuality does raise difficulties when trying to reach out to the gay community if we take a more liberal view allowing the blessing of same sex couples in civil partnerships or even conducting gay marriages then this, though it may help us in reaching out to the gay community will prove a great obstacle as we seek to reach out to other communities, especially the Muslim community.</p> <p>Chaplains who hold traditional views on human sexuality and against gay marriage live in fear. There are already anecdotal stories of chaplains being dismissed or made redundant from positions because of their stance on gay marriage. Once gay marriage is permitted in law, chaplains will be under pressure to perform gay marriages because they work within secular organisations and if the denomination decides to allow individual ministers the freedom to decide for themselves they will have no protection. Chaplains who have chapels (as many universities do) will be under particular pressure for those chapels to be used for gay marriages and for the chaplain to officiate.</p> <p>If we as a denomination permit gay marriage what message does that send to those homosexual Christians who have kept themselves celibate because they have believed this to be the teaching of the church? I think they will feel betrayed.</p> <p>I found the book “Walking with Gay Friends – a journey of informed compassion” by Alex Tylee (IVP 2007) very helpful.</p>
22.	<p>We understand from our delegates at the Baptist Assembly and also from BUGB literature, that you are keen to know from churches their view about the recent discussions and expected changes in legislation regarding same sex marriage. We have engaged with this issue in a variety of ways over the past months. Many of us have carefully read and reviewed the various views published on-line. We devoted an entire evening to discussion and then carefully debated the issue at the Church Meeting.</p> <p>By way of background, let me say that we are a growing vibrant multi-congregation church with a passion to reach our community for Christ and a good record in community involvement. One of our current congregations includes a number of openly gay or bi-sexual people. [Our church] joined BUGB around ten years ago and about the same time became more locally involved ecumenically. Since then church has appointed two BUGB accredited ministers and an BUGB accredited youth specialist. However, it would be fair to say that the</p>

church remains aligned to its former independent roots and the Evangelical Alliance statement of faith. This inevitably has raised concern amongst members as to why BUGB are even discussing the issues of same sex marriage rather than give the kind of clear statements they have seen from the EA and others including the Catholics.

During the past year or so, many of our church members have been keen supporters of the Coalition for Marriage campaign to prevent a change in the marriage legislation. Some of our folk have also pamphleted our community with their materials. A number of people wrote to or met with our MP and as a result of their concerns, he says, this changed his mind from voting in favour of the legislation, to abstaining. In our public worship, we have followed the EA request to pray against the legislation.

Whilst this probably sounds all quite negative, our approach is actually very much more positive and involves six key affirmations. These were discussed and agreed by our Church Meeting.

1 We are for the good news of Jesus.

Jesus welcomes all of us in our brokenness, and is able to transform us all into the whole human beings God intends us to be, whether we be men or women, rich or poor, educated or not, and whether we struggle with same-sex attractions or with heterosexual temptations. We emphasise leading people to Jesus because He offers us real possibility of change from the inside out. To walk with Him, we must let Him take the lead. To receive His forgiveness, we must be willing to acknowledge our wrongdoing. To receiving the grace of God in our lives is predicated upon our willingness to acknowledge our need of that grace. That response is the acknowledgement of our need of Him, our confession of our own failure and sin and our willingness to turn from those practices, habits and attitudes which dehumanise us or others such as greed, anger, prejudice, pride, self-centredness, and sexual misconduct outside of marriage.

2 We are for Christian marriage.

Irrespective of how the law is changed, we will continue to champion Christian marriage. One of the strongest threads in Scripture is directly about marriage, applied to a marriage relationship, or creates the theological base for the relationship of Christ and his church. Our definition of Christian marriage comes from centuries of tuning biblical references into liturgy which is acknowledged at each and every Christian wedding – and we will continue to emphasise this.

One of our church members, a former BUGB Area Superintendent, recommended to our Church Meeting that we deregister our building as a place authorised for marriages. This would avoid us being placed under any pressure to conduct same sex marriages in the future. There was much sympathy to the idea that the legalities of marriage could be completed at the local Registration Office, followed by a service of Christian marriage in our building.

We will continue to teach sensitively what we believe about Christian marriage and most importantly try to live it out in a self-authenticating and winsome way.

We will campaign to ensure we have the freedom in our society to teach the next generation an alternative to our society's new morality. We will especially support teachers and others in the public sector who will be especially under pressure to 'conform'.

3 We are for the historic biblical view on sexuality.

The Bible's teaching and the historic teaching of the church on the issue of human sexuality seem to be one of the clearest threads of Scripture. Sexual relationships are an expression of intimacy, love, union and mutual dependency across the genders that are given to us as a gift to be practiced within the context of a faithful and monogamous relationship between a man and a woman. The very act of sexual union between men and women is an articulation of the completeness of God, a picture of the perfect relationship within the Trinity that cannot be expressed in homosexual relationships.

Many of our church were impressed by Malcolm Duncan's point that "To place inclusion as the key value then to seek to lean into Scripture and redefine inclusion in the light of what our society understands it to be is a masterstroke of eisegesis, but it is not biblical exegesis. Steve Chalke's failure, I think, is to start with what our society describes as 'inclusion' and it read it back into Scripture, then to use Scripture and arguments of compassion and justice and inclusion."

4 We are for inclusion: Yet Christian discipleship is a narrow road and a small gate.

We need to speak and act from position of accepting others. We will not to single out a particular person's sexual brokenness as an issue above others, or act like there is no sexual brokenness at all in any of us. We are all in some way or another sexually broken and moving toward maturity in Christ and this means that we all submit our brokenness to the healing and reconciling work of Christ in the context of Christian community.

Christian inclusion looks like a narrow road and a small gate. It looks like picking up a cross, denying ourselves and following Jesus. It looks like obedience. It looks like a rejection of self and selfishness. It looks like keeping our bodies holy and pure. It looks like an acknowledgement of sin and dependency on God.

We believe there is a danger that the more we proclaim our Christian ethics in our post-Christian society, the more it will offend an unregenerate mind and add to their darkness; hence the frequently used tags of hypocritical, judgemental and homophobic. So rather than change our sexual ethic from our historic convictions, we do need to find ways of expressing it that opens doors for mission and God's Kingdom to break in. We cannot confront today's sexual ideology straight on. We must therefore find ways of describing Christian marriage which are positive and attractive.

5 We are for engagement with everyone in our community: Yet acceptance does not mean agreement.

We will seek to ensure that homophobia has no place in the family of God. We will welcome people of any sexual orientation into our church family. We will be delighted to show them hospitality, love, embrace, kindness and generosity to people irrespective of their sexual orientation.

We will accept all people to share with us in our life as a church – but we recognise that acceptance of people does not mean agreement with their views on this or other matters.

6 We are for maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace

We believe that there is a real danger that the response to the legalisation of same sex marriage will become another fracture between churches. Our own experience of the local Quakers strongly promoting their views has already challenged the sense of local unity. We will continue to work hard at understanding the views of others and resist the temptation to make this an issue of principle between us.

	<p>We hope that you will have found our reflections helpful in the wider debate which is taking place.</p>
23.	<p>To: The Baptist Union Council</p> <p>We have noted your intention to discuss same-sex issues at your Council meeting in November. Whilst understanding that we live and minister in a world which questions long-held traditional views, it is our firm belief that the Word of God is clear on this issue of sexual relationships. We continue to believe that the clear teaching of Scripture is that marriage is always between a man and a woman, and that all sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage is sin; the Bible describes such activity as ‘detestable’ to the Lord.</p> <p>In light of such Biblical principles, whilst we continue to welcome all, including same-sex couples, into our services, we will also continue to teach the error of such activity, as we teach the error of every sin. We will not baptise, nor welcome into membership, anyone who has not repented of such behaviour and ceased to be involved in it. We will not conduct, not host, any form of same-sex marriage ceremonies.</p> <p>Several years ago, we closed our BB Company because we discovered the organisation was allowing homosexual or adulterous officers to staff its companies. Their claim that they have no choice because they had to obey national legislation, we found inadequate alongside the Word of God.</p> <p>If BUGB changes its guidelines, or ‘fogs’ them in any way which appears to facilitate same-sex relationships, we will give serious consideration about our allegiance to the Baptist Union.</p> <p>We pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you in your deliberations, and that you may be led according to the Word of God, whatever the consequences.</p>
24.	<p>The membership have asked me to write to you to express our views on the subject of same-sex relationships. We have had discussions at deacons meetings and at our last two church meetings, arising partly from points raised at the Baptist Assembly and the EBA Assembly, and partly because of pastoral issues we have encountered here in recent years. You may find our conclusions useful in any discussions held subsequently at Association level or on the BU Council.</p> <p>We had a problem in that our church is affiliated both to the Evangelical Alliance and to Faithworks. We have discovered that some of the views held by Steve Chalke do not mirror those of the EA, so in order to clarify matters, we had a debate and voted on two proposals from the diaconate. One proposal was that as a congregation we should broadly support the 10 affirmations that the EA published last year. This was agreed by our church meeting yesterday, with one abstention. The same almost unanimous result came in our second proposition: that we recommend to the BU Council that they make no change to the existing requirement that accredited Baptist ministers should not conduct same-sex blessings or marriages.</p> <p>[Our minister] is on holiday, so did not participate in the vote, but he has made it quite clear that he supports these propositions. The church, I felt, did not come to these conclusions lightly – we all know people, including some former members, who have struggled in this area. At least one member has a Christian son who has come out as gay. We want to be pastorally sensitive, but also faithful to God’s standards as revealed in Scripture. Some people do not find the usual ‘proof texts’ as convincing as it is sometimes suggested, but we feel, collectively, that this is where we stand.</p>

	<p>If you want to know more about our discussions, do get in touch. We sometimes feel rather in the dark about thinking at regional and national levels. What is the attitude of the BU to Steve Chalke’s position for instance? I’ve known Steve for many years, and regard him as a personal friend, though I’ve never felt obliged to agree with all my friends. We are also concerned about the ecumenical dimension of this issue. [Our town] has a strong Churches Together group, but we are aware of different positions across the denominations. We don’t want disagreements to divide us – how can we maintain unity where strong passions are aroused?</p>
25.	<p>Thanks for enabling a safe discussion place on this subject at the assembly. As an evangelical I consider that scripture does not directly address the issue of committed, faithful same-sex relationships. This isn’t the place to try and back up this view but I think it would be a huge step forward for the BU to acknowledge that this is an issue where there is a diversity of opinion amongst bible believing Christians rather than implying that those who are faithful to scripture can only have one view. My views are very likely held by a minority at the moment but I sense that is changing rapidly.</p>
26.	<p>To the Baptist Union Council,</p> <p>In response to the subject of ‘How do we reach out to homosexuals in today’s society?’ which was discussed briefly on the last morning of the Baptist Assembly in Blackpool this past week:</p> <p>As the representatives from [a Baptist Church] to the BU Assembly 2013, we were left feeling very unclear of the limits to which the Baptist Union would encourage churches to go in the balance of love and truth in regard to same sex relationships.</p> <p>There were one or two thoughts that came to mind as a result of this session:</p> <p>Our challenge as Christians is to keep the church representative of an unchanging God, not representative of an ever-changing society.</p> <p>The issue is not about homosexuality or heterosexuality but about holy sexuality: the choice given by God in Scripture is faithful celibate singleness or faithful marriage between a man and a woman. Sexual “faithfulness” - insofar as it relates to the fruit of the Spirit - can only be used in these contexts.</p> <p>We need to continue to support and honour Godly celibate singles - homosexual and heterosexual - who courageously speak the truth of Scripture into this discussion or witness it with their lives. If singles were not so marginalised in churches, the appropriate levels of love, support and fellowship would be there to make living God’s standards more joyful.</p> <p>We should continue to emulate Jesus in accepting all who seek to enter the kingdom of God without recourse to affirming un-Godly choices in their lives.</p>
27.	<p>Thank you for leading the discussion on same sex relationships at the Baptist assembly. I believe most folk appreciated the conversation and in my mind the conversation was appropriate and sensitive.</p>

Whilst at Spurgeon's College in the mid 1980s I had to choose a number of projects and I wanted to consider things that were likely to become issues in the years to come. I studied 'women in leadership' and 'homosexuality'.

Please find an attachment in which I share some on my experiences as well as some of the questions people are asking. I don't find hostility in the churches, but I do find folk wrestling with issues, not only on same sex issues but also around what belonging means for those behaviour is at odds with their church's teaching.

Incidentally, I did smile when we sung a hymn after the same sex discussions with v3 reading:- 'We would be one in hatred of all wrong'.

Some reflections on same sex relationships debate

In response to the discussion at the 2013 Baptist Assembly I wanted to offer some thoughts on same sex relationships. In 1986 during my last year at Spurgeon's College I studied homosexuality and wrote a project for my final year studies. In addition I have led discussions around the subject and I have had significant dealings with people who are either in same sex relationships or who are struggling with their sexuality. The conversation has moved on considerably over 25 years.

1) 'J' struggling with feelings and practice

J was attending my last church when I started there in 1996. She had had lesbian relationships in the past and was struggling to come to terms with her feelings whilst recognising that she ought to remain celibate. J was put in touch with True Freedom Trust and she found a supportive group.

2) 'X' attending services

X was single and gay and after he had started attending services I called to see him. His house was in a mess and he was sleeping on the floor. We helped furnish his house (my mother-in-law had recently died and we had some excess furniture).

3) 'T' entered gay relationship on the death of his wife

'T' was a member of the church I pastored was married to someone considerably older than him. After she died he entered into an open gay relationship with someone he had met in another city. We endeavoured to work with him pastorally for around 9 months (issues of bereavement and rebound as well as homosexuality), but he was adamant that he had always been gay even though married. He did not want to resign his membership; he was arguing that the relationship was God-given and good.

We decided to have a debate within the church in order to decide our position. There was an implied position, but the church had never openly discussed same sex relationships. The debate happened over several special church meeting gatherings for church members and we asked 'T' to present his position whilst I presented the more traditional Church view. The church debated well with sensitivity and understanding, but overwhelmingly voted to adopt the traditional view. At this point 'T' resigned.

My name appeared in the 'Pink Times' and I had several people contact me and in a variety of ways telling me we were wrong. Some professed to be members of other Baptist churches.

4) 'M' entered gay relationship on the death of his wife

Although on the surface there are some similar issues to 'T' this situation is quite different and the church in question is different.

'M' had been married for many years and was well into his 70s when his wife died. He had only recently moved into town to be nearer his son, although there had always been strained relationships with this son. On the death of his wife 'M' became lonely and started to find support through the internet. He developed a friendship with another man who was gay and then declared that he had always had gay tendencies. Again the church cared for him pastorally for a number of months. M's partner (at this stage not a Christian) moved in for a while and they regularly attended church services. The partner moved away due to work and family and started to attend another church and came to faith. He came to the realisation that active gay relationships were wrong and the relationship ended. I'm not sure as I write if the friendship is continuing, but it certainly did continue when the relationship initially broke up.

In my experience there is little hostility within churches towards those in same sex relationships, but there is confusion and a questioning about how to support and how to create a place of belonging without agreeing with the behaviour and practice of gay people.

In addition there is a wider backdrop that issues around same sex relationships come within. In many parts of society there is no consensus around right and wrong – more if it's right for you it's right and if it's wrong for you it's wrong. Consequently what does it mean to 'repent and believe'? In my experience there has been a pulling back over talking about sin and many churches don't have corporate repentance and if they do it is often bland.

There is a question about 'where one draws the line'. We all recognise that people are on a journey and even after coming to faith people aren't perfect and their journey with God and towards God continues. If a gay person is welcomed into the church and comes to faith, do we baptise them if they stay in the gay relationship? Some may say 'yes' as we welcome and baptise those who aren't married but in a heterosexual relationship.

Do we say that those in inappropriate relationship can become members, but can't be appointed leaders? There is a line drawn at entering accredited ministry but how perfect does one need to be to belong to church or become a member or be a leader? Shouldn't there be a standard that is the same – minister and member?

Most people will say that our identity is found in Christ. However, gay people tend to have a higher emphasis on their sexuality in their identity than heterosexuals (I know this is a generalisation, but it is a questioning folk have).

We are all made in God's image, but we are all 'fallen' and that includes our sexuality. How is our sexuality fallen and how do you challenge folk to consider their 'fallenness'?

How do you challenge behaviour or disagree with someone's behaviour in an environment of belonging and care? Inclusivity has been elevated to being almost pre-eminent and 'not accepting my behaviour means not accepting me'. How do we separate behaviour and acceptance?

If we are to create a place of belonging for gay people, how do we also create a place of belonging for those who sincerely believe that homosexual behaviour is wrong and for gay people who believe that they must remain celibate to honour God?

Do we create a place of belonging for all and how? Where do 'child abusers' fit in – the world is harsh and critical and has no time for abusers (one area society see as being wrong).

Reflecting upon the plenary session on Monday there are a number of concerns I'd like to flag up, and I shall relay them to Stephen Keyworth also.

It was a major matter of concern that no one from the Black and Minority Ethnic part of our Baptist family was on the platform to make a contribution to the discussion. Similarly it was surprising to see that none of the 'listeners' reporting back on what was being discussed in the many and various small groups came from that significant and vibrant element of our denomination.

It is also a matter of concern that there appeared to be no acknowledgement that reflections on this topic need to take into account the perspectives which come from the global church, where the vast majority of world's Christians now reside. Timothy Tennent's recent study about *Theology in the context of World Christianity* notes that 'Majority World Christians are more likely to be morally and ethically conservative'. If we are seeking to discern the mind of Christ by listening to the voices of God's people, then it is important that we listen carefully to what our Christian sisters and brothers in the global South have to say on this matter.

It was interesting that two other people in the small group I was part of, independently volunteered the opinion that the presentation from the platform seemed to be commending one approach to the topic. The message appeared to be that changes in societal attitudes may mean that a re-interpretation of scriptural teaching now needs to take place so that more effective mission can be carried out. This could perhaps suggest an either / or approach which would not do justice to the complexities of the debate.

In relation to the encounters which take place between the Christian gospel and various cultures, one useful model developed by Andrew Walls, arising from his experience of the global church, talks about the gospel as both the prisoner and liberator of culture. The gospel becomes incarnate within various cultures but it also seeks to transform and redeem cultures. At times the presentation from the platform could seem to suggest that it was necessary to accept what contemporary Western culture is saying about same-sex relationships in an unquestioning way. Discerning which aspects of contemporary culture we can affirm and which aspects need to be challenged and redeemed is a more complex affair.

Some within the small group voiced concerns that a redefinition of 'marriage' to include faithful, committed same-sex marriage, could lead to a situation where other faith groups could, with some justification, also argue that other re-interpretations of what marriage is should also be accepted. This underlines the need for a theological understanding of the nature of marriage.

One way of expressing a commitment to justice for people who are gay is to support existing civil partnerships as arrangements which provide legal safeguards and protection. Such a commitment to provide such legal safeguards, however, need not automatically imply that same-sex marriage, as understood by the government, is directly equivalent to the church's historic understanding of marriage. It is possible to offer welcome to all whilst reserving the term 'marriage' for the union of man and a woman.

Within society generally someone who supports a more 'traditional' understanding of human sexuality is often regarded by the media as being bigoted and unthinking in their views. However, it is possible to adhere to a more traditional interpretation of human sexuality without falling into unhelpful homophobic attitudes.

	<p>The early church was 'born' into a world where there was sexual disorder of various kinds. However, it did not automatically baptize all current practices as being equally acceptable.</p> <p>Although the Government's legislation about same-sex marriage introduces some 'new' elements into the discussion, many of the key theological and pastoral issues are not significantly different from ones which I have been wrestling with throughout 35 years of Christian ministry. I appreciate that in the limited time available it is not possible to cover every aspect of these topics; but being aware of the wider debates, my concern is that the presentation from the platform presented only one main perspective on the topic. In future discussions, and in the November meeting of BU Council, a much more rounded treatment of these topics is called for.</p> <p>Within the Baptist family there has often been a degree of tension between freedom of conscience on the one hand, and faithfulness to the historic teaching of the church on the other. Having weighed up various arguments in this debate my hope is that our Baptist family will continue to remain faithful to the historic teaching of the church about marriage, and faithful also to the insights which come from the global church.</p> <p>I understand that others may in all conscience reach different conclusions, but my suspicion is that a more historic understanding of human sexuality is the considered opinion for many Baptist Christians around the country.</p> <p>I am hesitant to write such a letter, as I very rarely write letters of concern; but my concern for the future of the Union, which I love and am wholeheartedly committed to, leads me to write in this way.</p> <p>If there is anyone else you think I should be writing to at this stage I would be grateful if you could let me know who to contact.</p>
29.	<p>With reference to the debate on same sex marriages and the wider discussion on our churches response towards homosexuality, I think we are approaching this whole issue from totally the wrong perspective. I believe that Christians are being forced into responding to an argument that we should not even be engaging in. The debate is being driven along the lines of whether homosexual practice is a sin or not, and we are being fooled into responding. To generalise, we end up crashing into the "nature verses nurture" debate and people get very heated about the other persons point of view. There are no good outcomes here.</p> <p>We need to reclaim this debate. We need to redefine the terms of reference and, if we are ever going to present a unity of thought and action that reflects our deeply held trust and faith in God, then we need to set our response in our language and on our terms. First of all we must define what we believe marriage to be. The Bible directs us to believe that it is more than who you have a sexual relationship with and it is more than just two people committing to live together in mutual support. Is it right that two people of the same sex can be considered to be married, or are they a partnership?</p> <p>We also need to move away from the debate about whether or not homosexuality is a sin. This is a lose/lose argument. If we say it is a sin, we lose any compassion we want to show to the gay community. If we say it is not a sin, we lose our biblical integrity. It is perfectly OK to disengage from this argument as we are not called to judge who is worthy and who is not. Jesus reserves his harshest criticism for religious people who judge others, whether it is planks and specks, or making converts that are twice as evil as before. Is homosexuality a sin?</p>

The Scriptures tell us how to live life well. Broadly speaking the Old Testament's condemnation of homosexuality comes in teaching designed to establish Israel as a strong and fruitful nation. Paul's teaching on the subject is in the context of Christian living in contrast to the depraved Roman culture.

We are called to make disciples and this is what we should be doing. We should be presenting people with Jesus. I am never quite sure whether we put people in the way of Jesus, or Jesus in the way of people, but the point is that non believing people encounter Christ in a powerful and credible way.

We need to remember that we are a discerning people. Not discerning what is right and wrong, what is sin and what is not, but discerning the work of the Holy Spirit. I believe that by being discerning in our ministry we can engage with the homosexual community. We discern all of the time. When someone comes to faith we perceive a change in their life. We encourage our congregation to pursue a godly lifestyle and there comes a point at which individuals desire to be baptised. Whilst baptism is not a qualification of maturity it does present the Pastor and the candidate with the opportunity to explore lifestyle choices and address the integrity of the baptismal questions. Of course we do not demand sinless perfection, but surely we should see evidence of spiritual gifting and fruit. So all through the process we are looking for the active presence of the Holy Spirit. If it is not there ministers and leaders must have integrity and call a halt to the proceedings.

As discipleship continues there comes a point when maturing believers may be required or perhaps be expected to take on a responsibility within the life of the fellowship. Once again it is the activity of the Holy Spirit that is being recognised. We don't appoint people to serve as deacons or Sunday School Teachers because they want the job, but because we recognise that they are spiritually gifted to carry out the task. We don't recognise someone for ministry because "they could do the job as well as anyone else". Surely there must be evidence that God has equipped them. Peter at Cornelius' house saw the way the Holy Spirit moved among the gentiles and that determined his actions. Philip saw the Spirit at work in the Ethiopian eunuch's life and baptised him. Acts 6 sees seven men chosen for their spirituality to serve widows their food, surely a job that any servant could have done but it was given to only those spiritually qualified.

So, in the life of the church can sinful, broken and rebellious people serve? Yes, when their lives are fully submitted to Christ and this is evidenced by the work of the Holy Spirit in them. The strength of this approach is that it is not the church dictating what should be done, but a desire that comes from the individual concerned to follow Jesus and allow themselves to be changed by the journey.

I do not know how this would manifest itself with people in same sex relationships. I have never seen evidence of God blessing people living a lifestyle that contradicts the Bible. My experience in those circumstances has been that the Holy Spirit has identified and challenged people with any sin issues that hinder a fruitful relationship with God.

If we were to put this to the "Today Test" and imagine we were being confronted by John Humphries, are we evading the question? Yes we are! We replace the simplistic question that is designed to provoke discord with a Christian response that maintains the integrity of everyone involved in the discussion. At the same time we do not compromise our core beliefs. No one is excluded and no one is prejudged.

	<p>This is the approach that we have taken to people who have joined us and worship with us. We have people in our congregation from all kinds of background and in a variety of relationships, everyone is loved and accepted. Surely it is our job in churches to encourage people on their journey with Christ.</p> <p>We do not need to change our understanding of the Bible on this matter. We need to show the same patience and care indicated in the passage from Isaiah used at Assembly.</p>
30.	<p>I was pleased to have the opportunity of listening to others through Monday morning's discussion - attached please find my contribution on this subject,</p> <p>A Few Reflections Following the Discussion on Homosexuality at the Baptist Assembly 2013.</p> <p>1. My greatest concern about the discussion is that it began by considering the church's response to individuals in homosexual relationships – without considering God's attitude to the subject. I always like to look at such issues through two lenses – God's view and man's view – and it is my experience that if we begin with God's perspective, our response to the question as to an appropriate human response is transformed! Further, because God's view on key issues always starts from the positive, the most important question might be: What is God's expectation of sexual activity?</p> <p>2. My answer to this comes from passages in the pre-fall narrative of Genesis which describes the idyllic life as God intended for all mankind – with two well known texts in particular: Genesis 1.27: "God created man in his own image, In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" and again Genesis 2.24-25: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."</p> <p>3. This understanding that God created humanity in two forms – male and female – and that the only valid conduct of sexual intercourse is within marriage between a husband and wife – has been almost universally accepted by the church for centuries – and nothing in Scripture indicates to me that any other form of sexual intercourse is acceptable to God.</p> <p>4. So, to my mind, the debate about the church's response to homosexual activity must begin with the statement that this is not what God intended – and as such is <u>sin</u> alongside all other forms of sexual intercourse outside of marriage. This suggests that our response to pre-marital sex, to polygamy, to adultery, to homosexual activity, to paedophilia and to bestiality must be on a par.</p> <p>5. Now, our response to all sin is wonderfully summarised in the words of 1 John 1.9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" This is well expressed by Jesus Christ himself in his encounter with the woman caught in adultery where he concludes with the words "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8.11).</p>

6. And so, for example, my teaching of those who have come to faith but whose sexual lives are below God's standard is that they should confess this and endeavour to put it right. If a couple are living together outside marriage, I encourage them to make arrangements for marriage as a sign of their commitment to both God and to one another. If someone is living with a non-Christian partner, I encourage them to remain faithful along the lines of 1 Corinthians 7. If someone confesses a more casual approach to sexual activity, I encourage them to abstain.

7. With regard to divorcees, I encourage them to confess their part in the break-up of their past relationship, to receive God's forgiveness and cleansing and to live celibate lives for a period – but I then accept that as God has cleansed them from their sin, they are free to pursue a new relationship within God's plans – indeed this is a path that I myself have trodden – and my wife and I have recently celebrated our 26th wedding anniversary!

8. My dilemma with regard to homosexual relationships, even stable ones, is that as a Pastor I am being asked to accept that such relationships are equivalent to heterosexual marriage and thus acceptable to God – but I have no right to make such a statement which goes against Scripture!

9. So, how would I, as a pastor, respond to a Christian who is in a homosexual relationship? I would welcome them whilst expecting them, as with any other sinner, to confess their sinful acts, to receive God's cleansing and to live without future sin – albeit possibly continuing in the same home as their current partner so that longstanding relationships were not severed.

10. Now, I recognise that in today's society, this sounds almost like a sentence of death! But I consider the "rights" agenda, which suggests that everybody has the right to such sexual expression as they choose, as unbiblical in its origins! Paul, for example, in 1 Corinthians 7, points to celibacy as a well accepted lifestyle choice for believers – and there is a long history of monks, nuns, nurses, missionaries, etc. foregoing sexual activity in favour of a more wholehearted devotion to their calling. I would argue that a strong message from the church, identifying celibacy and marriage as the only two valid options, is needed more now than ever.

11. At this point, I also need to move from concern for the individual to concern for society. From my reading of Scripture, every reference to sexual activity outside of God's norms appears in the context of a wider breakdown of society. The events of Sodom and Gomorrah are one obvious example – but the consequences of David's adultery with Bathsheba are another. Looking beyond Scripture, although I am no historian, the fall of great empires such as Rome is always associated with debauchery and sexual licence – and I do see a clear link between the United Kingdom's departure from Christian ethics and the rising openness of homosexuality. I fear for the future of our nation unless we return to the Lord in every aspect of our individual and corporate lives.

12. This also raises the issue of the source of homosexuality. I have to be very careful here with language – because I do not want to suggest that homosexual tendencies are a direct result of personal sin. However, I do think that as a community departs from God's ways, then the people of that community will develop traits that are contrary to God's intentions. I sense that this nation's very openness to alternative sexual expressions is resulting in a greater number of people declaring that they are homosexual. I have, for example, heard of several instances where homosexual activity has developed following the

	<p>breakup of a heterosexual relationship rather than from puberty. I question whether homosexuality is necessarily an inborn trait and would suggest that at least some times it is a learned behaviour! But, even where homosexuality is inborn, I see this as one of the ways in which we, today, are created in the image of God, but often flawed.</p> <p>13. I suggest that it is important that God created us, male and female, in His image – I see many parallels between the unity of the Trinity and the unity of male and female in marriage. I recognise that the Bible speaks of the church as the bride of Christ – an image which I fear we are in danger of tarnishing. The perfect nature of God, and His perfect plan for humanity, are in my mind well worth the church upholding!</p> <p>14. Turning further afield, although all my life experience has been in the United Kingdom (apart from holidays), I want to recognise the international element of this debate. The worldwide Anglican Communion is struggling with the issue partly because many churches in Africa have recognised the truth and strength of the Scriptural teaching on this issue. I fear that unless the current conversation results in a clear positive statement about God’s intention for sexual expression, we will be doing no favours for the church in less established regions of the world.</p> <p>15. In conclusion, I was struck, at the Baptist Assembly, by the words, (my paraphrase) “Stand firm! We must get rid of the grot from our lives by hanging out with Jesus!” Let us not be afraid to speak the truth, even if this is unpalatable to the unbelieving community!</p> <p>16. My hope is that any material flowing from Baptist House after this discussion will fully explore this wide ranging issue – and not just focus on human response.</p>
31.	<p>I am a Baptist Minister, and was worried about what I initially heard about the discussion of same sex relationships – urban myth or not, the idea that ministers could not advocate same sex relationships seemed perverse. While I agree with the attitude taken by the church here at [] – that the proper place for sexual relationships is within the covenanted relationship of marriage between one man and one woman – it is an issue we need to discuss openly, and probably come to a position where we agree to disagree within the family of Christ. I am disturbed that our focus has been so much on homosexuality, rather than looking at the whole issue of sexuality.</p> <p>I wish you God’s blessing at the November Council, and I pray that our discussions will be open and accepting – without any no-go areas.</p>
32.	<p>I feel that a basic mistake is made when the only texts we refer to in the discussion are the ones that specifically mention homosexuality. I am not saying that these passages should be ignored but I do believe that they should be read and understood in the light of our understanding of God revealed most clearly and completely in Christ. Other highly relevant texts are, therefore, those that affirm that God is love, and that those who live in love, live in God. I could say much more but heopefull this is enough to make the point.</p>
33.	<p>Dear Delegates,</p> <p>I was delighted to hear you had discussed this very important issue. An an open Gay Christian man who was employed within the Baptist Denomination many years back and who now having come through divorce and heartache my journey within the denomination can only be described as harrowing. I recently left the denomination after 38 years due to exclusion and</p>

	<p>misunderstanding from well meaning but misguided leaders within the church. Despite my treatment my story is a good one my family survived and my children have grown up to be balanced and well adjusted. My spiritual journey continues as I prepare to journey into Anglican lay ministry. God will always have centre stage in my life and my partner of twelve years understands this. My choice of celibacy is not because I believe being Gay is a sin but because my calling is a priestly one and has come about through my communion with God. If I could shout from the rooftops I would shout.....this is my church also! So yes I am glad we are being recognised but how sad that there has still been no Gay Christian representative to share their story at the assembly we are not invisible and we can speak for ourselves. So there you have part of my story perhaps one day I can tell it in person to my fellow brethren in the church that has been a significant part of my life.</p>
<p>34.</p>	<p>Hi,</p> <p>We need practice help quickly.</p> <p>I am a Parish Nurse and as part of my job run a busy Parent/career baby/toddler group.</p> <p>A very nice same sex couple come with their little boy. When inviting people to the Mother's Day service I did not personally invite them [there were posters up] because of not being sure of the churches response. Suppose they come ! may be get involved and want the little boy dedicated – will the church promise to help them bring this child up in a Christian home.</p> <p>This problem will not go away. I would love to be able to invite them personally and be able to say that the church has people with a variety of views towards same sex relationship but that the leadership of the Baptist Church is welcoming and wanting to learn from them. This little family need our prayers as life is not going to be easy for this little boy.</p> <p>If we do accept them in a positive way then some people may leave the church and other same sex couples come because we are welcoming.</p> <p>So I hope this talking is not going to take too long.</p>
<p>35.</p>	<p>Firstly, may I commend you for the sensitive and constructive way the issue of same-sex relationships was opened up at the recent Assembly.</p> <p>I particularly appreciated the fact that this was approached from a pastoral viewpoint rather than the rather sterile discussion of a few “key texts” which is the way this topic is often dealt with.</p> <p>I am in what may be a fairly unique position of being both a Baptist minister, and also a Member of the Royal College of Physicians, and therefore having to deal with this subject from several differing perspectives. I have developed a keen interest in the whole question of Biblical teaching on sexuality, and several years ago took a 3 month sabbatical to explore some of the literature on the subject. It is certainly not an easy issue and it may well be that there may be several different viewpoints which needs to be respected, and held in tension.</p> <p>My experience of attending several sessions on this issue, including one at last year's Pastors' Consultation for the LBA is that there is often far more heat than light generated in these sessions!!</p>

	<p>I wish you well in your ongoing exploration of this subject, and would like to be kept up to date with any conclusions etc. Also , if I can contribute to the process of moving this issue forward, I would be delighted to contribute to the debate.</p>
36.	<p>The bible our manual that guides us being children of the most high God our creator, through Jesus Christ the saviour of the world has advised in his word ; Matt:19/3-12, Mark10/2-12, Prov 18/22, Rom 1 /26-28 Gen 19/5, 13,15.</p> <p>These verse teach us who should marry who. Therefore pastors should be careful who they join together as man and wife.This is my advice as a child of God not by my own righteousness but by the righteousness of Jesus Christ through his precious blood that he shed on the cross of Calvary for you and me.</p> <p>Amen.</p>
37.	<p>Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus,</p> <p>You have no need of me to reiterate the various passages of scripture which refer to the above matter.</p> <p>The scriptures make clear that sexual intimacy and sexual activity is only approved by God between one man and one woman joined in marriage. All else is wrong, it is sinful. All of us have in some way fallen short.</p> <p>We, as Christians, are to seek to reach out to all people irrespective of their sexual behaviour which may fall outside of the afore stated sphere. We are all forgiven sinners and we should reach out to all sinners with the message of the gospel of forgiveness which requires faith and commands true repentance.</p> <p>If however a person claims to have come to faith in Christ and is unwilling to forsake any sinful lifestyle then we should receive them as we would any and every sinner but should not receive them into membership but instead seek to show them graciously of the necessity of a change of lifestyle. So if a persons sexual activity falls short of that which God approves they must resolve either to be celibate unless or until they enter into marriage as defined by scripture (man to woman) if they are to follow Jesus. We must support them in every way both to deal with the issues in their life that may have brought them to live a particular lifestyle, and to overcome the sexual temptations they face.</p> <p>However in our compassion we must not countenance sin.</p> <p>I am duty bound as I seek to be a faithful minister of the word of God to completely reject the idea that sexual activity or intimacy outside of biblical marriage is compatible with the teaching of the scriptures,. Moreover, contrary to the statement of 'Affirm', the scriptures expressly forbid sexual relationships of any kind between people of the same sex. I cannot countenance therefore the idea that sexual activity or intimacy between persons of the same sex can ever be right.</p>

	<p>I am Pastor of a church that belongs to the Baptist Union. If the BUGB does not make a clear biblical stand on this issue I shall be duty bound to distance myself from that organisation.</p>
38.	<p>I was privileged and blessed to be at the BU Assembly last week end in Blackpool with the worship, teaching, sharing, testimony and information made available to us all. It was our first assembly and I would certainly choose to go again. I was moved by the stories shared by various people from home and abroad and greatly encouraged to see so many churches joining the BUGB - God is doing wonderful things in this land too!</p> <p>I would have to say that I was most moved by the personal family situation shared with us and admire the courage and faith required to do so in front of such a broad audience. I was moved by this account then I looked round at the people near me and could see they too were moved and with the opportunity afforded to us, I discovered that others in our 'group' were experiencing similar struggles. This touched me even more and I, like so many others, feel we need to do something about it and soon.</p> <p>I suddenly realised (I'm clearly a little slow), that this is not just about individuals who struggle to find acceptance as a 'person', it's also about their families who are hurting because they are torn between what is perceived to be 'right' and 'wrong' about a person they love. This means that the way we, as Christians, are dealing with the situation is causing harm to the people in our churches who don't feel they can share their family situation; it means that we, purposefully or by lack of positive action, are turning people away from the church where we go freely to hear God's Word and discover the love, hope, forgiveness and acceptance it teaches. We know it is not God's plan to turn people away - we as individuals make the choice to turn away from God but He is faithful to us and I acknowledge I am no more perfect than the next woman.</p> <p>The whole issue of same sex marriage and whether there is a place for it in our churches or the people involved, is horribly a divisive work of the devil (please understand I am not saying anyone involved in it is), and it is my belief that if we do not act now, Christian churches around the country will be divided beyond recognition. Not to mention the fact that this is (understandably), using up a great deal of discussion, thought, prayer and mission time; we are being distracted from the main work of the Church.</p> <p>This leaves us with the main question: "How do we act?" At the Assembly, we were rightly asked to pray about it but if I might be so bold, I wonder if guidance on the focus of the prayer and maybe setting a dedicated BU day/time perhaps even fast, to bring this issue to the only One who can really offer true wisdom. We need to come together seeking forgiveness for our lack of understanding and perhaps the way 'we' have treated other people; we need to ask God to grant us the wisdom and understanding in this situation which appears alien to anything we may have come up against before; we need to act in faith on what God reveals to us.</p> <p>I am confused by this matter and I know that many, many others are too and some I fear are making judgements based on dogma and not Biblical teaching. I am reminded of the situation Esther was faced with and how she asked that the people fast and pray for God's help. A whole nation of believers praying for the same situation and God responded faithfully.</p> <p>I hope this request is not misunderstood and found to be offensive. I can assure you that is never my intention but I may have said something that I don't realise could be offensive and I also know that you are all working so incredibly hard and I am grateful for all the guidance</p>

	and support you give to so many.
39.	<p>As promised I attach my testimony which I am happy to be shared in any way that may be fruitful in increasing understanding of LGBT issues in the BU and beyond.</p> <p>A natural faith</p> <p>As a small child I imbibed from my mother a warm enveloping sense of God’s love. Jesus was my loving, caring shepherd, and he rescued me like David had rescued the lamb from the lion and the bear - one of my favourite Bible stories. I was weak but he was strong and would take care of everything.</p> <p>Throughout my schooldays I prayed in my head about everything, and I noticed that it really made a difference, especially on a particular occasion when I forgot to ask God to help me with my weekly spelling test! My Dad wanted to hear me pray out loud at bedtime but I stubbornly refused, it felt like a kind of test and I didn’t think I’d say the ‘right thing’. He was a devout but anxious man who made me feel rather insecure. All my family belonged to the exclusive Brethren who believed in strict separation from ‘the world’, forbidding any social contact with people outside our group.</p> <p>In my mid-teens I started to worry about how I could be sure I was ‘saved’. I asked my Dad about it and he gave me a booklet (‘Safety, Certainty & Enjoyment’ by an old Brethren evangelist, George Cutting). I suddenly realised that I’d always trusted Jesus - it had never crossed my mind to do any different; believing to me was as natural as breathing. At that moment it seemed as if a bright light shown all around me on my bed - I was thrilled that it was all so simple.</p> <p>But almost at once I was overwhelmed with guilt because I loved boys and men - I had first started noticing them when I was 8 years old. Every time I saw a guy I liked I tried to ask God to forgive me on the spot, but it was impossible to keep up. So I prayed a catch-all prayer of repentance every night, but nothing alleviated my sense of guilt and shame, and I became depressed; my confidence went down the pan and my schoolwork (A levels) suffered. A dark grey cloud hung over me for 2 years.</p> <p>Double living</p> <p>Eventually it crossed my mind that if I knew I was saved when that light had shone down on me, then I must still be saved – regardless of what I did: and that got me off the hook. I still liked guys but that part of me was put into a sealed compartment and the feelings treated as if they did not exist. Homosexuality simply did not exist in my world – I’d barely heard of it; what I wanted was for God to give me a loving wife and family.</p> <p>God answered my prayer and I met XXXX. I felt sure I was in love, but much later I came to realise that XXXX didn’t actually feel quite the same about me and so things soon went off the boil between us. I felt rebuffed but assumed this was just how it was with relationships. I did find affection and intimacy with a guy I had met through XXXX. From any objective standpoint this was a sexual relationship but to me that could not possibly be the case – I was <i>not</i> a homosexual, but that didn’t alter the truth that I caused XXXX the deepest possible pain when she eventually found out. Despite everything we married when I was nearly 22 and XXXX was 19. XXXX had tried to tell her mother before the wedding that she was unhappy but to have broken an engagement in our strict Brethren world was nearly as unthinkable as divorce.</p> <p>God gave us two wonderful children, but after the birth of our second child XXXX suffered a severe bout of post-natal depression. Critical to her recovery was our move from Brethren to a Baptist church. Here Ruth made a life-changing discovery of God’s love and with professional support began to feel better in every way. For me, however, this was an unrecognised tipping point in our relationship. When dogged by depression XXXX had had</p>

only a limited interest in sex and I had been able to manage that, but now she was well her legitimate expectations of me increased and the underlying tension this created would be a fault-line in our marriage for the next 20 years.

In the meantime I felt God was calling me to go into Christian ministry and after 4 years training to be a Baptist minister we moved to take up a part-time pastorate, this allowed me to also write a doctoral thesis on the Brethren movement. In our fifth year at the church I suffered a complete breakdown – mental and physical. This resulted primarily from the stress of an on-going situation whereby a couple of members, whose son had become engaged to my daughter, were attempting by covert means to undermine the leadership of the church and bring my pastorate to an end. I was unable to recover to any significant degree and was eventually diagnosed with ME/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome – and have not been able to work since. There were undoubtedly other factors that also contributed to my demise, not least the lasting effects of a socially isolated upbringing and my long-repressed sexuality with the underlying tension that created in our marriage.

Danger! God (still) at work

My work for God as a minister was finished – but God hadn't finished with me! Having effectively aged 40 years over a few weeks to learn to be happy with how things were was a huge challenge. I never doubted that God's will is perfect but often I could believe it only through gritted teeth. In 2010 I had another serious breakdown, 8 years after the first, brought on when the issues in our marriage were accentuated by the needs of XXXX mother who had come to live in part of the house. I had the frightening experience of becoming virtually paralysed and temporarily losing my speech. I spent 2 weeks in hospital.

In hospital I experienced God's love in a deeper way than ever before and this has proved genuinely life-changing. At my weakest moment I found myself being cared for by a young man who aroused feelings that frankly terrified me because I knew was too weak to be fully in control and suppress such emotions as I would normally do. I knew instinctively that God had put his finger right on the most sensitive place in my being – and I cried to him to rescue me from myself!

What God used that guy to show me, and it bowled me over in wonder, was that he understood my most secret and inmost needs. Being cared for by him was like being cared for by Jesus himself. This realisation that God both understood me and loved me unconditionally began a process that led me to find the courage to acknowledge to myself the true nature of my sexuality. Nonetheless it took 2 years of heart-searching and prayer, not to mention theological exploration, to bring me to the place where I felt happy to be gay. The fear of being gay had haunted me for decades – it was too awful to think about. Years ago I started to blame my father for this scourge that afflicted me, and I felt a deep bitterness and anger towards him – I was just glad he was no longer alive. But all this has fallen away as a wonderful awareness of God's love has enabled to simply accept the truth about myself. It's not anybody's fault that I'm gay, and it's not an affliction, it's just how I am - and God loves me!

In the winter of 2010 XXXX fell on an icy pavement and suffered concussion for several weeks, during that time she came, totally independently, to an acceptance of the position between us and discovered a peace about our relationship that had always eluded her before. In a strange way this prepared the way for me to eventually share honestly with her about my sexuality without fear of personal rejection, which I did in Oct 2012. XXXX was able initially to respond very constructively and for a few months we genuinely sought to express our commitment to God and to each other in the context of a mixed orientation marriage. However, this concept proved in reality to be too difficult to work with. I felt unable, with

	<p>integrity, to undertake never to leave, and XXXX was, totally understandably, unable to live with the uncertainty this created, so we separated.</p> <p>The last year has been traumatic almost beyond words, but slowly I am regaining health and strength, rejoicing in God's loving presence and provision in more ways than I could ever recount. I have reason to think that the future may include a loving and committed same-sex relationship, but I am more than content to leave it all in the hands of the wonderful Lord who, in the words of Jacob, 'has been my shepherd all my life to this day' (Gen 48.15).</p>
40.	<p>Dear Sir</p> <p>We, the members of [a] Baptist Church, have undertaken a review of our beliefs regarding the question of same-sex "marriage". In doing so, we have considered the changing beliefs of the society around us and recent changes in legislation. We have taken into account the views that Steve Chalke and others have expressed on this subject, and we have re-examined the scriptures.</p> <p>We continue to believe that the clear teaching of scripture is that marriage is always between a man and a woman and that all sexual acts outside heterosexual marriage are sin. We also believe that every one of us is a sinner.</p> <p>In the light of these clear principles, we will continue to welcome same-sex couples into our meetings, while continuing to preach that homosexual acts are an offence to God, as are the sins of us all. We would look for clear signs of repentance before baptising anybody who has confessed homosexual or other sin. We will not welcome anybody in a homosexual relationship into church membership. We will not host same-sex "marriage" ceremonies.</p> <p>If the BUGB changed its guidelines, or issued any statement, in a way that appeared to endorse same-sex "marriage", we would give serious consideration to leaving the Baptist Union.</p> <p>We hope this communication makes our beliefs and position clear, and pray God's blessing upon you as you seek His way forward.</p>
41.	<p>Obviously, the change in government law regarding gay marriage creates a new context. Please correct/conform my understand that the combination of this new legal situation with the BU declaration of Principle that 'each church has authority under the Holy Spirit to interpret ...' etc, that it is possible that different churches may end up operating different responses to the new legal situation. Our desire is not to avail ourselves of these new legal rights, but to ensure that whatever decision we (or other Baptist churches and ministers) take will not make us vulnerable to legal challenge. Are there papers published the Faith & Society dept. relating to this? Has BU Council made any changes to its policies since those made in the late 80s and early 90s regarding ministry? Is there anything else on this issue that you would want local churches to be discussing? Thanks.</p>
42.	<p>Dear Sir</p> <p>According to this article on the website:</p> <p>http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/369399/Monday_Morning_Plenary.aspx</p>

	<p>the issues surrounding same-sex marriage were due to be discussed again at November's Baptist Union Council.</p> <p>Can you advise me when you will be publishing the results from this discussion and whether any decisions have been made about how we might move forward with this matter.</p> <p>My wife and I are members of a Baptist Church and have been supporters of LGBT issues for some time, we recently attended two meetings in London and we would definitely agree with the notion that ministers and churches who support same sex marriage should be allowed to perform these ceremonies if they wish to do so.</p> <p>I have been watching the website for news from November but nothing has been forthcoming yet, hence the reason for my e-mail.</p>
43.	<p>The key words that came out were that we must be kind and gracious, irrespective of the viewpoint we hold.</p> <p>The other really interesting thing was the discussion over "ministry regulations". Few seemed concerned about being "sanctioned" (but that may reflect the particular people I was talking to) but were concerned as to whether they would be supported if they refused to do a blessing/marriage. This concerns me a little, because I would argue that we could be accused of discrimination if our central regulations prevented a minister acting locally. Personally, I have encouraged that ministers stay with the stand that as a gathered church, we reserve the right to marry anyone at our discretion, and that we are free to use that discretion at all times. If we choose to say no to a same sex couple, it is because we do not feel able to affirm them as "those whom God has brought together" a conclusion that we might also make in the case of a heterosexual couple. I would stress this particularly in the context of "we cannot affirm that God has brought you together" (i.e. we don't know you well enough) rather than "we affirm that God has not brought you together" - Sorry that's probably too wordy, but it worries me that ministers are looking to regulations to cover them for what should be a matter of local discernment - if we collude with this, I fear "another fine mess" Stanley.</p> <p>The other comment I would make, which has been affirmed by the many emails that I received last week (from all sides) was the importance of the context in which this is done. Discussing this in a room together, in a spirit of worship and fellowship, seems far more appropriate than surveys and emails. I think this is an area where Associations have to step up to the plate. It would be great if my stats (which I suspect will be slightly skewed towards the liberal end) could be strengthened by other Associations adding to them.</p>
44.	<p>We appreciate many benefits from belonging to a union of churches. We are particularly encouraged that the first Baptist principle states that all human authority is subject to the word of God. This has given a good evangelical foundation to the Union churches and colleges and has enabled the churches to remain in touch with God. Equally the fifth point: A particular concern for mission, has encouraged us to remain in touch with the communities where we are located.</p> <p>We also acknowledge that the inter-dependence of churches, together with support networks through the regional teams enables each church to take responsibility before God for its direction and progress.</p>

However, over the last few months, we have begun to develop some concerns which we would like, in the first instance, to make known to the Regional Ministers.

1. Accountability. Although this is not one of the stated principles, it is strongly implied both in the subordination to the word of God and the inter-dependence of the churches. This should mean that nothing is spoken in the name of the Union which undermines the gospel or the scriptures and, indeed, nothing should be spoken in the name of the Union without the agreement of the members. Anyone wishing to express their views should do so in their own name or the name of a body which has agreed. (For example [our church] has just joined Baptists4Israel following our last church meeting when a unanimous decision was passed. Prior to this my article about Israel on the BMS website was in my name only).

Recent examples where there appears to be a lack of accountability include:

- A message from the BU (and others) congratulating the Muslims on the celebration of Eid in which it is called a day of good news and celebration (<http://www.ethicsdaily.com/british-christian-leaders-send-greetings-to-muslims-cms-21005>). Whilst we would wish to have good relationships and dialogue, the message seems to go beyond this almost to universalism.

3. Compromise. It has always been clear that no pastor on the accredited list would be allowed to conduct a gay celebration. Since this accords with the principle of human authority being subject to scripture, this should have posed no problems. Those who do not agree would not wish to be in the BU but would prefer a denomination that took a less evangelical perspective.

However we understand that the BU Council are now intending to reconsider this. If they give permission for accredited pastors to conduct gay weddings or bless them there will be widespread consequences. The law states that Anglicans may not conduct these services but other denominations may decide. If the Council give permission then we could be held under an obligation.

Recently three appeal judges have decreed that anyone has freedom to practice their religion but does not have freedom to use their religion as an excuse for discriminating against gay people when a service would be provided for heterosexuals. ([Http://ukhumanrightsblog.com/2012/02/19/analysis-court-of-appeal-upholds-hotel-gay-discrimination-ruling-marina-wheeler/](http://ukhumanrightsblog.com/2012/02/19/analysis-court-of-appeal-upholds-hotel-gay-discrimination-ruling-marina-wheeler/)).

In closing, could I emphasise again that none of these concerns are designed to criticise anyone. Indeed it is difficult to know who they are concerned with because of the apparent inaccessibility and anonymity of the people involved.

Responses received Post Assembly 2014

1.	<p>I'm concerned that the definition of "Christian marriage" as the union between a man and a woman implies the existence of an alternative union called "non-Christian marriage". Baptist ministers are expected to observe the standard of Christian marriage, while non-Christian marriage is good enough for everyone else. In that case, non-Christian marriage isn't just for non-Christians, it's for all Baptist church members who are not ministers, because we have a category of marriage that is potentially capable of accommodating homosexuals.</p> <p>This statement does not enhance the status of marriage among Baptist ministers. Instead it's going to make ordinary church members feel that their marriages have been devalued, and I think it will drive a wedge between ministers and their congregations.</p> <p>I believe the Church of England has done much better with their Canon B30, which just defines marriage and makes no attempt to differentiate between Christian marriage and other types of marriage.</p> <p>I am a member of [a Baptist Church]. It's affiliated to BUGB. I am giving my own views, not the views of the church. The minister says he would never conduct a same-sex marriage in church but I don't know what the rest of the church thinks, they haven't discussed it much.</p>
2.	<p>I welcome the statement that affirms Christian marriage as between a man and a woman. Very positive and very clear. I wholeheartedly support and affirm the Declaration of Principle! As you might expect.</p> <p>However, I believe the credibility of both is severely weakened if we allow churches that we are in union with to practice blessing of same sex marriages without discipline. For me it is quite fundamentally a question of whether we would consider homosexuality a sin or not? If churches decide it is not a sin – then I find that incredible. Even more that if churches affirm that it is a sin and yet still wish to go ahead and bless something that is considered sinful that is a complete anathema and simply cannot be.</p> <p>I affirm the general statement sometimes made of "love the sinner and hate the sin". I have some friends who are openly gay and they know my views and we disagree but that does not stop us from being friends or me or others reaching out in Christian love to them. One of them in particular regularly talks to me as I appear to be his only friend who will listen! They are most welcome to attend our worship services and will be made welcome by all. So would those of no faith or a different faith to ours, or those caught in some sin such as heterosexual fornication or adultery etc. To not challenge churches who wish to bless and thereby affirm same sex marriages, even if they are very few in number in practice, I hope does not become an "Achan's sin" problem for the Union, where all suffered because of the sin of one person. Even at best in my opinion it weakens our credibility. I recognise the need to get our hands and feet dirty as we minister in a fallen world, to not do so would be to ignore the earthly ministry of Christ himself. When Jesus had to deal with the woman caught in the act of adultery the often quoted "Let those without sin cast the first stone" was used by our Lord. Equally he also said to the woman, "Go and do not sin anymore". So the fundamental question remains, is homosexuality a sin or not? I believe that scripture quite clearly makes it out to be a sin. I do not wish to go into various proof texts at this point to support the argument.</p>

	<p>I agree that this needs very careful handling and is no time for knee jerk reactions. If “my church” got to hear that this was being debated then many would not want to talk much as for them the situation is clear. I am not sure how to handle it with them. Perhaps the best thing is to highlight that the debate is ongoing, and we hold to the clear statement that Christian marriage is between a man and a woman. Even that statement on its own could attract some criticism for not being fundamental enough! If something that is to me scripturally clearly a sin cannot lead to discipline, whatever form that may take, then that is a dereliction of our Christian duty to one another. To permit, condone otherwise tolerate sin, whatever that sin may be, not just homosexuality is a sin in itself.</p>
3.	<p>As a BU Minister who was at the Assembly I have to confess that I am still confused over exactly what the BU council is saying. I think we need further clarification over whether the statement gives freedom to BU churches to conduct SSM if they so choose.</p> <p>I will talk to my regional ministers about this too so that I can be properly informed when I bring this to a church meeting for discussion. And then I will be able to speak on behalf of our local church. Of course, in order to respond we need to know exactly what the council is saying and this is not absolutely clear.</p> <p>However, my initial thought on reading the follow up statement today is this - given the sensitivities of this issue, and the opportunities it presents for misinterpretation, it is regrettable that BU council chose to report this to the Assembly in such a misleading way. Since this is such a controversial matter why was not there some discussion and further clarification at the assembly? I think it is rather churlish to complain that Premier has distorted the statement when it was put to the assembly in this way.</p> <p>I fully appreciate that this is a divisive issue and the council has a very tough job in handling it - I do not envy you! However, all the more reason to bend over backwards in handling it in a transparent manner.</p>
4.	<p>I was very disappointed to hear that the Baptist Union of Great Britain is failing to adhere to that which is clearly contained in God's word.</p> <p>It seems to me that by leaving it down t the individual ministers conscience a to whether or not they wish to carry out a same-sex marriage or not is in fact not taking a stand but rather sitting on the fence and hoping to go along with "the world"</p> <p>I understand you wish to "celebrate our diversity" and don't wish to be divided on this issue however Paul warns on this very issue</p> <p>"keep watch over yourselves and the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the the church of God which he bought with his own blood.. savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw disciples after them" Acts 20 v 27 - 30</p> <p>Surely we are not to maintain our unity and celebrate our diversity whilst allowing these wolves to savage us and distort the truth.</p> <p>Does this stance mean that the Church now accepts homosexual relationships as acceptable in God's eyes? If not, should we not be exhorting those who live without God to live a life</p>

	<p>that is pleasing to Him or are we so complacent to let them fall into God's judgement because we ourselves will be fine?</p> <p>Over the past decades the is nation and slipped further and further into moral decay and the Church - that which should be God's arms and legs on earth - seem to be content to do nothing.</p> <p>The church is called to be in the world but not of the world, how long will it be until the Church is completely undistinguishable from the world around it? How can we fulfil our role as "Christ's ambassadors" when we're not even preaching Christ?</p> <p>Over the years the Church has failed to take a stand on many issues such as Sunday trading, the over sexualisation of the western culture and now on the very definition of marriage.</p> <p>This has led to breakdowns in family, materialism and a society that is not prepared to do anything without first asking the question "what's in it for me?"</p> <p>This non-stance seems to me to be another way in which the Western Church is so afraid of facing any sort of persecution that it'll do anything to avoid it. whereas there are Christian brothers and sisters risking their very lives in countries such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and China (to name but a few) by just professing Christ as Lord. How can we stand up for them and join them in their struggle when we do everything in our power to avoid having struggles of our own.</p> <p>"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness" Romans 1 vs 18</p> <p>My sincere prayer is that the eyes of all who profess Jesus as Lord and Saviour will be opened to live a "life worthy of our calling" Ephesians 4 v 1</p>
5.	<p>I welcome the discussion and am enjoying reading lots of the conversation to seek a full understanding of the issues.</p> <p>I just wondered if clarification of the following was possible.</p> <p>Throughout the BU statements so far it is clearly noted and emphasised that we are affirming that Christian marriage is between a man and a woman.</p> <p>Assuming a church decided to conduct a marriage ceremony for a homosexual couple and the baptist minister presided, is that marriage then termed 'not a Christian marriage' and will the order if service used need to reflect this accordingly in its wording?</p> <p>I'm just confused as to whether we are creating 2 types of marriage and that a homosexual Christian couple getting married in a church, would not be entering into a Christian Marriage.</p> <p>I suspect the conversation has not reached that far and that's fine, it's just one that the statement raised for me.</p>
6.	<p>After listening to the arguments and after careful thought and prayer I am writing to formally register my opposition to the BUGB changing it's position on same sex blessings and marriages in Baptist churches. I am particularly concerned that the process of consultation</p>

	<p>seems to have engaged those who are advocates of change and has not engaged the conservative majority. As a consequence I fear that the conservative voice is being seriously underrepresented in this process.</p> <p>My preference is that the BUGB take a clear position on this issue. Not only showing it's support for the traditional understanding of marriage but clearly stating it's opposition to BUGB churches hosting and it's ministers officiating in same sex ceremonies.</p>
7.	<p><i>A response to the 2014 Baptist Assembly Update on the Baptist Union's conversations and response to sexuality and relationships.</i></p> <p>It is disappointing that the current leadership of the Baptist Union is hesitating about their position on a same sex marriage when the Bible is clear on the sinfulness of same-sex sexual relationships. The Union cannot hide behind the local autonomy of churches and the preservation of unity. At this time of uncertainty, the Baptist Union should stand in defence of biblical truth. It should bring reassurance to church members that are daily bombarded by secular, ungodly and deceptive messages.</p> <p>The problem</p> <p>It seems that the world, politics and liberal theology are leading the agenda, and not Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. Should not the opposite be true? Are we not called to be salt and light in this world? This is not the same kind of debate as the conversation about divorce, remarriage, women in leadership, slavery, spiritual gifts, as many suggest. Here we are faced with a radical redefinition of marriage, and the normalisation of homosexuality.</p> <p>Should we compromise?</p> <p>The Baptist Union has a moral responsibility to care for and protect its churches. It should call churches and ministers that are drifting away from biblical doctrine to reform. A shallow response amounts to unofficial support for same-sex marriage. If the Baptist Union conducts the debate in such neutral, polite, broad and liberal way that it allows anyone that wants to call themselves a Baptist Church then many members will hold views that contradict Scripture. I am not talking about being exclusivists but being faithful to God.</p> <p>We can't compromise on biblical truth for the sake of unity. There is nothing to celebrate together if false doctrine is held by some churches in the Union. The Baptist Union should not put unity ahead of doctrinal faithfulness.</p> <p>Discipleship</p> <p>We are called to be disciples, and following Christ is not a "choose-your-own-beliefs" adventure. Jesus is Lord and He defines the terms of our discipleship. Same sex sexual relationships are described in the Scriptures as immorality. It is impossible to be a follower of Christ while endorsing or participating in a same sex marriage.</p> <p>The New Testament teaches that the church is to be a community of support, nurture, service and also discipline. "Admonishing one another" is an important component of Christian love, contrary to the view of current postmodern culture. The Scriptures gives us the basis for correcting each other, and when practiced in a spirit of grace, it has life-transforming power.</p> <p>Disciplinary procedures exist in order to save and preserve the organisation. If these are deliberately ignored, then shame and chaos will prevail. Discipline is encouraged in the Bible for the sake of restoration. Why is there such fear to discipline when necessary?</p>

Our love and tolerance for people that have same sex attraction shouldn't ignore the sin of homosexuality nor try to make it acceptable. We open our doors for all to hear the gospel and receive regeneration and transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The role of the Baptist Union

The Baptist Union doesn't have power over local church decisions however the Union should enforce the current scriptural basis on those churches that have committed themselves to keep the rules of association. Changing the regulations to accommodate churches that disagree about essentials of the Christian faith would be irresponsible.

It is hypocritical for us to say: '...the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures' when God's truth is thwarted and the leadership remain hesitant and complacent.

It is contradictory and hollow to affirm that the "traditionally accepted Biblical understanding of Christian marriage as a union between a man and a woman" as the continuing foundation of belief in our Baptist Churches, when churches and ministers who think the opposite still participate without facing warning, rebuke or discipline.

What are we afraid of? That we might upset the world and the media? That we might contradict respectable Baptist theologians, or upset prominent Baptist ministers? That we might upset relatives and church members or lose some churches in the Union?

Conclusion

A shy declaration will weaken our faithfulness to Christ. The Union cannot turn a blind eye when there is a violation of the authority of Scripture and its teachings on marriage and sexuality. There must be a call to prayer, repentance, and a return to more faithful and godly roots. If the Baptist Union becomes a melting pot of churches that have drifted away from God's word and orthodox doctrine, then it is not worth belonging to.

If current national and regional Baptist leadership cannot act accordingly to the Scriptures and God's view on same sex marriage then, they are not worth of their position, and should question their call.

If the Baptist Union in their findings on sexuality and relationship want to "evolve" and be permissive on the issue of sexuality for their own reasons let them be clear. They should not, however say, "God has said" and tell us that they are doing it to advance the gospel and the unity of the church. Is it time to leave the Union?

8. I would like to express my thoughts on the recent statement of where we are on the discussions related to same sex marriage.

This is clearly an emotive and potentially divisive issue and it was with a degree of shock that I heard the words at the recent assembly. Shocked that having taken part in the conversations at the regional assembly and a meeting of ministers, last year, that the first response to all of this had been a statement at the assembly of where we are at. I would have hoped to have heard something of this for discussion before a public statement.

So that I am clear, I do not agree with same sex, Christian marriage, since having spent considerable time reading around this, I find no biblical way to accept this, even if pastorally I might like to. While the state may choose as it wants, the church has not to simply follow popular culture in my opinion, which I think is a danger with this. Obviously I would prefer a simple statement affirming the traditional Christian view of marriage. But I also accept that some will be disappointed with the outcome and that may well include myself.

My main concern is the confusion that the statement suggests.

	<p>Trying to affirm traditional marriage, between a man and a women, not allowing ministers to have same sex marriage partners, while allowing conscience to dictate if churches or ministers should conduct same sex marriages, seems to suggest (at least to me) that the statement seeks to:-</p> <p>Appease those who support same sex marriage by allowing churches and ministers to choose what they do on that issue. Say that we don't really accept same sex marriage by trying to affirm marriage as between a man and a woman – so ministers cannot be in such a relationship. Relax ministerial rules on performing same sex marriages but not on ministers being in such a relationship.</p> <p>I realise that this is not as yet a policy or an agreement as far as the Union is concerned and yet the direction is towards allowing a confusion to exist, as far as I can see. The steering group having relaxed ministerial restrictions, suggests to me that we are heading down the road of appeasing rather than defining.</p> <p>Allowing the local church to decide how it interprets scripture is the Baptist way, within certain constraints. However to allow churches and ministers to decide if they should perform same sex marriages or not and then not allowing churches and ministers to then decide about same sex relationships for their ministers, contradicts this Baptist way, surely? Either the local church is able to interpret this issue or it is not in my opinion. Either same sex marriage is acceptable to a church and its minister(s) or it is not.</p> <p>I hope that there will be further discussion in the regions as to what this statement suggests for churches and ministers as it seems to me very confusing.</p>
9.	<p>I read with interest your on-line info regarding your discussion on The Marriage Act.</p> <p>Your article states the following.</p> <p><i>We have recognised that some of our ministerial rules have been open to being interpreted as forbidding full and open discussion. In light of this BU Council did make some amendments to those rules in March. They recognise the freedom of a minister to respond to the wishes of their church, where their conscience permits. This is in the context of the Church Meeting: Baptists have a longstanding belief in the theological significance of the Church Meeting as a place where Christian believers, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, discern together the mind of Christ.</i></p> <p>As a Baptist Minister in Scotland may I offer a comment and ask two awkward questions?</p> <p>As the Church of Scotland capitulates to the spirit of the age on matters of interpretation, favouring 'culture' rather than Christ as a hermeneutic in the human sexuality debate. I recognise a similar and foreboding vocabulary being used in your article.</p> <p>From a distance the March Council decision has the feel of a departure in the BUGB from what is a conviction of what is becoming and appropriate for our ministers to be associated with in these matters. If the BUGB is saying that you have made room for accredited ministers to be 'free' to conduct same-sex unions when and where the local church is sympathetic to this then I fear for the repercussions of such a position. It seems very unwise</p>

	<p>and a noticeable departure from were our Baptist predecessors were on this matter (2 years ago).</p> <p>If your council has created a space for this to happen when the Pastor and Congregation so wish it to be, then equally I suspect you may have created a difficulty for fellowship and unity under the Rule of Christ principle.</p> <p>The mention of the outcome of your decisions in March as freeing Ministers to respond to the wishes of the church, whilst acting within their consciences, seems strained. Also, and dare I say a bit contradictory, as it relates to the process which leads us to discern the mind of Christ.</p> <p>Here are my two awkward questions.</p> <p>Does Christ now divide Pastors and Congregations in the joint process of discerning His will on matters?</p> <p>And is this an attempt to keep Steve Chalke on your list of accredited ministers?</p> <p>I am aware that I know nothing of the detail of your council debate and decision. However I note this as a departure in what seems a concerning direction for the BUGB.</p> <p>I commend to you the EBF Resolution on Marriage and Sexuality from the Rome council in 2011.</p>
10.	<p>My wife and I recently attended the meeting of Affirm in Manchester, where we discussed the implications for same sex marriage within the Baptist Church in the UK. We are supporters of same sex marriage and full equality and inclusivity within the church. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the question “What are the missional and pastoral implications of the Baptist conversation on sexuality in the context of equal marriage and other developments”. It was led by Jeremy Marks of “Post-Courage” and Rev.Ian Stears-Handscornb.</p> <p>It was an interesting day and threw up a few questions, which I am now addressing to you in the hope of some more detailed answers.</p> <p>I have read the assembly address, but there are still a lot of points that need to be addressed as I’m sure you would agree.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It now seems clear that any Baptist Union church can, if it wishes to do so, register for same sex marriage and that any minister can carry out same sex marriages without being in breach of disciplinary guidelines, however... • The Baptist Union website states ‘We affirm the traditionally accepted Biblical understanding of Christian marriage, as a union between a man and a woman, as the continuing foundation of belief in our Baptist Churches.’ • In light of the above statement, any Baptist minister who married a same sex partner themselves would be in breach of current disciplinary guidelines and guilty of ‘unbecoming conduct’ according to the latest ‘ministerial recognition’ document. However a Baptist minister can be in a civil partnership without being in breach of any policy and retain their ministerial accreditation. <p>The above positions appear contradictory. The BU are content that the church can offer same sex marriage, yet a homosexual minister cannot be in such a marriage. Can you explain the reasoning behind this position please?</p>

	<p>Additionally, I understand that some Baptist Union churches in the UK have already registered for same sex marriage. Could you possibly provide a list of such churches, particularly any in the South Wales area.</p>
11.	<p>I as an individual am delighted that the union is holding to the one man one woman principle of holy scripture. If my own local church took another route Because of my convictions would not be able to continue in the church I attend. I am also delighted that the Evangelical alliance has remained faithful in this.</p>
12.	<p>What will be the Union's response if a local church in membership decides to re-register their building to conduct same sex marriages?</p>
13.	<p>I've just read the article regarding same sex marriage on the baptist website and am wondering if there is any guidance on membership? I can't find any answers as to whether its acceptable to be in membership and serving the church whilst being gay. Its not something I wish to take to the eldership at this point as the idea of possibly being cast out of my church family isn't a nice one. Any help, advice or signposting would be so so helpful. Thank you!</p>
14.	<p>Please forgive me but I'm really confused so can you help me, as I don't understand how the BUGB could amend its guidelines on marriage for Gay people from within the faith and wider community but still prohibit that same right for Gay clergy people. Please can you tell me the reason for this difference of practice?</p> <p>I also find it odd that the BU would give the OK for a Civil Ceremony to Gay clergy people in same-sex relationships, but yet deny them the right to marry. Is this because they believe that same- sex sexual intimacy is sinful because it is seen as 'unnatural'? Or because the purpose of sexual intimacy is to 'procreate'?</p> <p>I'm desperately trying to make sense of it all and the reasoning behind the amendment for some at the exclusion of all. As this seems like double standards and sends a mixed message.</p> <p>I like to keep in touch with clergy friend's in Canada who serve within Churches affiliated to the Canadian Baptist of Western Canada, for the CBWC are watching to see what changes are happening here as this matter is an issue to be addressed there also.</p> <p>Unlike the BUGB the CBWC have made no amendment to the traditional stance which states that " any sexual behaviour outside of monogamous heterosexual behaviour is sin." So one can only hope that the example set by the BUGB will help them get back in touch with Baptist Polity in regard to the Church Meeting as the place for discerning God's will for that particular faith community in matters relating to faith and practice. Especially on issues such as these which have the potential to be divisive.</p> <p>I have attached a story I received from a young woman in Canada this week (with her permission) who like her partner was in Baptist Ministry for 9 years serving as Pastors called by God. She was affirmed by both the people of God at local level and the Ministerial Board of the CBWC, trained at Carey Baptist College, and called by Congregations to ministerial and service. I believe this highlights both the human cost, along with the need for the Baptist family as a whole to re-think their view and policy relating to practice in this matter. For it is</p>

	<p>excluding so many gifted people from fulfilling God’s call upon their life to serve within a Baptist context.</p> <p>The Congregation I was called to serve as pastor 9 years ago decided at the last church meeting to offer the service of marriage to Straight and Gay couples because they believe it would be an injustice and discriminatory <u>not</u> to do so.</p> <p>A decision that wasn’t taken lightly but after some time of prayerful reflection upon scripture , listening to the voices of our Gay brothers , sisters and parents as well as modern psychological insight. As a result it was decided that a person’s sexual orientation is a gift from God as is love for another , and the desire to express that love publically within the Covenant commitment of marriage.</p>
15.	<p>I have never been as proud to be Baptist as I was on 13 May 2014 when the Baptist Union allowed each church to be self-governing on matters of human sexuality.</p> <p>I believe in God the creator who made each one of us just as we are - perfect in God's image. An image which includes both male and female. A God of all nations. A God of all sexualities.</p> <p>Furthermore I am proud to belong to a local Baptist church which welcomes all people to come and be part of the body of Christ. A body where each person must serve in a unique way in response to the call God has placed on their lives: for some that call includes being married, for some it includes having children (biological or adopted), for all it is to love our neighbour as ourselves and serve those who society shuns.</p> <p>Thank you Baptist Union for allowing [a Baptist] Church and all its members and friends to be fully ourselves as we worship God and serve our community.</p> <p>P.S. Let's continue to prayerfully consider point four of the expression about our ministers being required to be single or in a heterosexual marriage. If a church can call a Baptist minister who is divorced then it should be up to the church to call a Baptist minister who is gay.</p>
16.	<p>I know that as a Christian I have to reflect Christ to the world and His ways are gentle and kind. My concern as a mother is that too much attention is being given to the topic outside the church and to the youths, its now looking like its more cool to be gay than it is to be straight. The church should be mindful of how we approach the issue as we do not want to confuse the next generation further.</p> <p>I tell my children what the societal values are and where it conflicts with our family values, culture and religion. We respect people's choices but we don't have to alter ours to suit just to be seen to be more accepting.</p> <p>There is love and there is the TRUTH. Let the church speak the truth wrapped in love.</p>
17.	<p>Having read your statement on the issue of Same-Sex marriage and attended meetings that Paul Goodlift and Stephen Keyworth have conducted regarding 'The Marriage Act and Ministerial Accreditation Rules', my understanding of your future proposals has left me very distributed that as a union, you have moved from Biblical as well as Baptist principles on this issue; and if followed through you will shipwreck the faith of many Christians and lead to the total demise of the BU as a credible Christian witness in GB today.</p>

	<p>I have written down my thoughts and analysis of this whole issue in the attached booklet, and would value your thoughts as to whether my understanding of this issue is totally misplaced as a result of my own failure to understand what your long term plans are as an Union concerning HGP and SSM.</p>
18.	<p>Having read your article about the above act, I have a question:</p> <p>What is the Baptist Union's definition of a man or a woman: Is it genetic, or physical organs or self-declaration/socially defined?</p>
19.	<p>Pleased to read that the Baptist Union is upholding the Biblical Principle that Marriage is the union of one man and one woman.</p>
20.	<p>After the statement last year's AGM our church members have asked for further clarification of the statement.</p> <p>I attended the LBA consultation last September which raised even more questions than it answered. [Our church] is very concerned about the statement - mostly because of how unclear it is.</p> <p>I presume that this will be addressed in some way at this year's AGM?</p> <p>One of the issues that concerned me most of all from the LBA consultation day we had was that most people are unaware of the implications of the public statement made at last year's BUGB AGM. The two key areas being:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That 'continuing foundation' is deliberately flexible and means that the position could change in the future. 2. That currently it is possible for Accredited Ministers to be in a SS civil partnership. <p>I think the BUGB council needs to respond in some way at the AGM - even if just by way of clarification. As I speak to Baptists around the country I pick up on a frustration over the process. Many Baptist Pastors I have spoken to were amazed to hear the two points above. They had no idea that the statement could be interpreted in that way. It feels (and I stress that it is only a subjective feeling) as if the consultation has just been a smoke screen but actually decisions have already been made; as if clarity and direction are actively being avoided. That may well be a completely unfair description of what is going on but the only way to deal with that perception is by making the process transparent - is the statement on the BUGB website the final position on this matter? If 'yes' then what, exactly, does it mean in practice? (and are all churches aware of that? See my two points above). If 'no' then what is the process of its review?</p> <p>We appreciate that this is a difficult and complex pastoral matter but we have been waiting for a year now. What can I report back to my next church meeting?</p>
21.	<p>I have read with interest the comments regarding Same Sex Marriage from the recent BU AGM minutes and I am left a little confused as to what the BU position is on the way forward.</p> <p>Christian/Biblical marriage is between one man and one woman, Jesus affirms the Genesis position in Matthew 19. Whilst I appreciate that under the BU Declaration of Principle it says</p>

	<p>that Christ, as revealed in the scriptures, is our sole and absolute authority in matters of faith and practice and that the local church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to interpret and administer his laws. This surely does not give any church or minister the prerogative to change God's word or alter the meaning of it.</p> <p>You state we have freedom to seek the mind of Christ as Spirit led communities. This being so, the Spirit and mind of Christ is not going to be against his word in scripture and then leading either the Union or individual churches to viewing same sex marriage as biblical. Sexual relationships between either two men or two women is sin according to the Bible. No amount of conversation or seeking the mind of Christ is going to change that. God's word does not justify sin nor does it justify same sex marriage. I do not believe the Holy Spirit of God is going to lead his church into sinful ways which are contrary to his word. Our unity is in Christ and in and around the word of God - the pure gospel, not in letting some interpret scripture to meet the demands of the modern world.</p> <p>I encourage the BU to take a strong biblical lead on this matter and speak with a clear voice. If I have read the recent minutes of the AGM wrongly I apologise, but it does seem that space is being given for further conversation opening the door to the possibility of allowing some churches to interpret the bible in a non biblical way.</p>
22.	<p>The issue arose about the statement on same sex marriages and I was asked to pass on a couple of comments to you...</p> <p>a) there was some surprise at the abrupt way the issue was introduced to the Assembly where many people may not have been aware of the context, or known the story so far. Comment was made that this was perceived as a significant moment in the process.</p> <p>b) there was a concern that the announcement was made without all churches being told, and would it not have been better that everyone receive the information at the same time.</p> <p>c) more specifically one noted that on her MR1 she had stated she agreed with the Baptist Union view on homosexuality, and did the Assembly statement release her from that commitment, or what was she to make of the agreement, as it is now possible for some ministers to view same-sex marriage as something they can countenance, or only bits of it as it is still not possible for a minister to be in a same-sex marriage. It was pointed out that the statement had affirmed a traditional view of marriage and the BUGB stance on same-sex relationships had not changed, rather that the competence of local churches to make decisions had been underlined but (as I suspect that you will find elsewhere) the nuancing does not always travel well.</p>
23.	<p>As the Leadership Team at XXXX Baptist Church, we are writing to you at the request of our Church Members' Meeting. In July we discussed the new guidelines with regards to homosexual marriage within the Union. We believe that it is important for the BU to hear from the local churches with regards to issues like this, so we wanted to let you know our church's views.</p> <p>We appreciate that you have not rushed into this decision, but have taken time to listen to the denomination. Also you have encouraged prayerfulness and faithfulness to Scripture in your communications to the churches, and for this we are thankful. Furthermore, in this new ruling you have highlighted the importance of local church autonomy and we respect your desire to hold this doctrine tightly.</p>

Nevertheless, our church is most concerned that the Baptist Union has changed its stance on the issue of same sex marriages by changing its ruling from Baptist pastors not being allowed to conduct same sex marriages to allowing the local church to decide whether it will or will not conduct them. We feel that by making this change you are embarking on an undesirable trajectory. We would not want to see the BU take any further steps down this path and if it were to do so we may have to consider whether we can continue to affirm the Union's stance which seems to us to be moving away from one based on Scripture.

Thank you for taking the time to hear our concerns.

24. Sir, I write this letter to you out of genuine and deep concern on a matter of crucial significance affecting our faith in Christ Jesus Our Lord, the author of our salvation.

I hope that my writing to you finds and meets you in good spirit.

I was until the 3rd week of May, an active worshipper at the local Baptist Church [].

In May of the current year, I heard the news on Premier Christian Radio, announcing, that the Baptist Union of Great Britain has consented to a policy on same sex marriages for the very first time. It was also announced, that the Baptist Union grants the local Baptist churches discretion to conduct such marriages.

It has taken some time to digest this news in view of clear biblical teachings on such issues. I have taken time out to prayerfully seek our Lord in consideration of this matter, hence my letter to you.

I do sincerely hope and pray, that the rest of the contents of this letter, as you read, would not be met with fury or the gnashing of teeth, as often is the outcome when one is confronted with the gospel truth.

I have tried to be objective in my writing and have referred in fairness and with an open mind, to the Baptist Union web page. There I note the following points:

- 1 Baptist Churches will not be forced to conduct same sex ceremonies
- 2 The process involves registering their building to opt-in
- 3 Registration currently held for a building is not sufficient
- 4 If they do not opt-in, they will not be allowed in law
- 5 Churches can only do so if their appropriate religious authority gives them written permission

Firstly, on a close examination of points 1-4 above, it is clear that there is no compulsion or forced measure imposed by the government on any church to join the same sex marriage scheme. Seeing that this is the case, what then is the justification for the Baptist Union compromising on the word of God by consenting to same sex couple marriages? See **ROMANS, Chapter 1, 1-32 (on homosexuality and so forth), "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" 32.** Death, in this case, meaning, eternal condemnation. See ROMANS, chp 12, 1-2 (we are called not to conform to this world, but to be **"transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may prove what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of God"**).

We, as members of the one body in Christ Jesus our Lord are not called to compromise, change or transform the living word of God with the effect of conforming and transforming the gospel of our Lord to fit into worldly standards. Rather, we are called to preach and teach the gospel of our Lord Jesus without compromise or change in text or content, in order that those who are of the world are transformed and renewed by it, for that good, acceptable and the perfect will of God to be established in their lives as well.

We are not called to conform to homosexual practices, (ie acts) but to transform such, by preaching the word of God boldly as written and given, to bring about change. It is true, that the God we serve is a God of love and He loves us all, including, homosexuals. However, as loving as He is, Our Lord does not approve of sin, not the act of homosexuality. By saying yes to homosexual marriages, you are condoning sin, and in effect, going against the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I note also the following comments from the Baptist Union web page: **“A Statement was shared, put together by the Baptist Steering Group, which tried to express an overview of where Baptists are in relation to the Marriage (same sex couples) Act 2013” Spirit filled and helpful consideration was given to this and there was a good measure of consensus”**

I question this – “Spirit filled and helpful consideration” for the following reasons. Any Spirit filled consideration flowing from the body of Christ, truly filled with the Spirit of God, armed with an in-depth knowledge of scriptural teachings and principles from the bible, would not have resulted in a “good measure of consensus” to the point of a compromise. In fact any spirit filled and helpful consideration on such an issue ought to have led to a negative consensus. That is, a negative outcome without compromise. The consensus reached by the Baptist Union on same sex marriages calls into question its leadership. From the view point of an outsider looking in, the effect of such a consensus gives a negative impression of leadership overall, as such, one is left to question, whether in fact, a vast majority of leaders amongst the Baptist Churches across board in the UK are practicing homosexuals, for such a consensus to be reached and agreed. This is indeed very worrying.

The position here is likened to those whom Apostle Paul spoke of in Galatians chp 3, 1-2 when he said thus: **“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?”**. I wonder what spirit possessed and filled those who brought about so unhelpful a compromising consensus on same sex marriage in the Baptist Union, surely, it could not have been the Holy Spirit, bearing in mind the word of God on such matters.

I am so glad that I have written this letter to you, to remind you of the living and uncompromising word of God thus: **“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh”**. (Genesis chp 2 v24). The word of God does not by any means say, that a man shall leave his mother and his father, and cleave to his husband and they shall be one flesh. Neither does it say, that a woman shall leave the house of her mother and father and cleave to her wife and they shall become one flesh. It does not.

By introducing and practicing same sex marriages in Baptist churches, you have belittled the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and have made our God out to be a liar, for which He is not. It makes no difference whatsoever, whether this is down to discretion amongst the authorities/pastors in each local Baptist church or that permission is required. The truth is, no consensus or compromise ought to have been reached or made in the first instance.

Furthermore, the effect of point [5] above means, that if the appropriate religious authority of any given local Baptist Church gives permission, then the marriage would take place, regardless of what the word of God says concerning this type of relationship. More so, it is not at all clear from point [5] above, whether such decisions would involve official members of the local Baptist church or whether such members have any input and to what extent.

In any event, this is a case of hypocrisy in the highest order. The form of which, Christ our Lord, spoke boldly against, when He likened such to the conduct and character of the Pharisee and the Sadducees. See: Matthew chapter verse 6-9: Of course, God is love, and we as members of the body of Christ are called to love. The greatest commandment of all. However, we are not called to love by sinning, or to encourage sin, whether directly or indirectly, other wise, we make the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to be of no effect and by so doing, make a mockery of our God. See Matthew Chapter 15, 6-9 ***"So, for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: "This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men"***

I must say, that the so called (Baptist Steering Group), have not by any means, steered your path towards the course and path of righteousness by virtue of the consensus reached.

If the Baptist Union does not have a careful rethink of the policy agreed, what you have said yes to as a collective lot, would eventually bring about the downfall and destruction of the entire Baptist Union all together. Knowing the God and Lord that we all serve, a God of love and equally one of justice, to whom we are all accountable.

Responses Received Post Assembly 2015

1.	<p>Why were we not told that the second AGM session was going to be about this? If we had been, my wife or I would have attended it.</p> <p>What is irritating me is that it is not clear who is deciding policy. There may be open discussion, but who officially authorises what is issued to us? I would have thought it should be Council, if not the Assembly, rather than some vague 'Steering group'.</p>
2.	<p>Dear BUGB,</p> <p>We are writing as the ministry team of XXXX Baptist Church, to offer our reflections and feedback to the ongoing conversation around the Union's response to the changing legislation regarding Same Sex Marriage.</p> <p>As you may know, XXXX history and location have shaped it over many decades to be a church which has taken an inclusive stance on the subject of human sexuality, and specifically, an affirming position regarding same sex partnerships.</p> <p>We were greatly encouraged that at the 2014 Assembly, it was made clear that ministers would no longer face discipline if they acted in accordance with both their conscience and the expressed will of their church meeting, in participating or officiating at a same sex marriage, or the blessing of a civil partnership. This is something that we regard as an entirely correct Baptist response, and one which is in accord with our shared ecclesiology.</p> <p>XXXX took the decision by overwhelming majority at an extended church meeting in November, chaired by one of our regional ministers, to register for the solemnisation of Same Sex Marriage. This has not been without pastoral fallout for the congregation, and to our great sadness some have felt that they must leave our church and worship elsewhere. We have been particularly troubled by the fact that the division has largely occurred along ethnic lines, and this has given us much cause for thought about the nature of inclusivity in a multicultural congregation such as ours. On the other hand, we have seen a number of recent baptisms, including one person (who is not gay) who said that the decision of the church on this issue was a deciding factor in her desire to commit herself to Jesus through our local fellowship.</p> <p>It is our hope that the registration will shortly be finalised (the registrar has been somewhat slow, and the process has been a learning curve for them as well), and we anticipate holding our first same sex wedding in the not too distant future.</p> <p>You may also be interested to know that two people from XXXX are leading an intentional incarnational community with the express purpose of breaking down walls, assumptions, and prejudices; both within the LGBT and church communities. They meet weekly in Soho, just round the corner from the church, and are known as The Soho Gathering. They will be writing to you separately to outline more of their mission, vision, and ministry.</p> <p>We are aware of the diversity of voices that exist within the Union on this topic, and of the strength of feeling of some who would take a less inclusive view. Our intent is not to harm the Union, which we love, and rather simply to be faithful witnesses to Christ in our context, and faithful interpreters of our shared scriptures. If there is any way that we can helpfully engage the Union further in this, we would be pleased to do so.</p>

3.	<p>Hi,</p> <p>This may or may not be of any interest to you at this stage but i humbly submit my Masters Dissertation (attached) titled</p> <p><i>Unity in Diversity: What baptistic convictions might enable the Baptist Union of Great Britain to maintain unity in the light of divided views on human sexuality?</i></p> <p>for you to read or discard as you see fit. I suspect much of it will tell you what you already know but my desire in selecting this topic was that our Union remain united and properly focused.</p>
4.	<p>Thanks for feeding back on this issue at the Assembly in Peterborough. I'm sure that you must be fed up with discussing it and therefore I thank you for being willing to take on this role. As you encouraged from the front I reported back to our church members at our last Members' Meeting and the following questions / comments come from that meeting:</p> <p>1. <u>Traditional Christian Marriage</u> - it was good to hear the traditional position on marriage affirmed at the assembly. However, we cannot see how that has clarified the position of the BU. Does this mean that the council has now changed it's mind from the statement made in 2014? At the LBA consultation was that this statement only explained where the BU currently is and said nothing about the future; it was only a foundation on which may be built alternative definitions of marriage.) Does the council now distance itself from those remarks? And therefore is the council going to amend the statement on the BUGB website? (By removing 'continuing foundation'?)</p> <p>2. <u>The Declaration of Principle</u> - likewise we are not sure how what was said at the assembly clarifies the position of the BU. We all understand that our church government means that the BU cannot prohibit individual churches conducting SSM if they so choose. The question most Baptists are asking is whether the BU will continue to accept such churches as members of the BU? The answer to that question may be difficult to arrive at but it is fairly straightforward - either yes or no. The statement in 2014 was only possible by amending the Ministerial guidelines in March 2014 to remove the reference to Minister's promoting homosexuality. In other words, as it previously stood, the BUGB had grounds to remove the Accreditation of any minister that conducted a SSM but now it does not. The statement has been put forward as if it summarises where Baptists are now but actually it reflects a change in position. Therefore we would appreciate further clarification on this issue - why does the council feel that it cannot remove the membership of a church that conducts SSM? (simply referring to the declaration of principle is not enough.)</p> <p>3. <u>The complex pastoral issues</u> - we welcomed xxxx comments about the need to engage with this issue pastorally and missionally. We completely agree that, at a local church level, we are talking about people for whom Christ died and need to think through a Christ like response to people personally. We are not sure what difference that makes to the official position of the BU though.</p> <p>4. <u>Scripture</u> - it has been repeatedly asserted that both sides of this debate argue their position from scripture. This genuinely confuses us since this is precisely the reason we feel strongly about this issue. Where are the passages in scripture that speak in favour of homosexuality? We think this is what sets this issue apart from many others that Baptists</p>

	<p>have wrestled with in the past. As far as we are aware there are not dissonant voices in scripture on this issue and so we would welcome these 'pro-gay' passages being pointed out to us.</p> <p>Many thanks for listening.</p> <p>We are seeking a direct response to the first two points. We realise that this may well take some time (and could be via a public statement of some kind) but we are expecting an answer.</p>
5.	<p>I have been talking to a church about their struggles to get registered for same sex marriage. We here at [Baptist Church] registered last July (2014). We had little difficulty apart from a bit of toing and froing over wording and making sure the forms were filled in correctly. I am more than happy to have conversations with any other church going through the process.</p>
6.	<p>Dear BUGB,</p> <p>As representatives of Soho Gathering, we would like to write to you in the light of the continuing conversation that the Baptist Union is having in regards to human sexuality – particularly recently concerning Same Sex Marriage.</p> <p>We are a fellowship-based group, partnered with XXX Baptist Church</p> <p>The Soho Gathering came from a desire to see the Church and the LGBT community reconnect – acknowledging that neither side can claim victimhood in this ongoing divide; to do so only aggravates tensions and shuts down conversations.</p> <p>We meet every Thursday in the Yard Bar in London's Soho, to share wine and a meal together, to discuss life, the universe and everything and to offer fellowship to those who seek it. Through this we have welcomed many people from a variety of denominations (even occasionally brothers and sisters from Jewish and Muslim backgrounds as well). We have also built relationships with the staff at The Yard, something we see as fundamentally important as we seek to establish ourselves credibly in the area; as well as being overheard by other bar-goers and asked about the nature of our group.</p> <p>One memorable occasion was during our Maundy Thursday meal where we invited members of BCBC to join the Soho Gathering. We were overjoyed when over 20 members from BCBC came, participated and fully left their comfort zones in the sharing of Communion in a gay bar on a busy Thursday night at the start of the Easter bank holiday weekend. We broke bread and shared wine over the blaring music and in amongst the darkened club lights, looked on by dozens of members of the gay community as they tried reconcile what they saw, with what they understood to be the nature of the Church.</p> <p>One of the more frequent conversations we find ourselves drawn into is the debate around Same Sex Marriage (SSM). We often sit amongst a variety of theological opinion from a rich tapestry of denominational background but ultimately the consensus remains the same: marriage is the union between two loving individuals, before community and with God.</p> <p>We have decided to write to you today, not only to share of the work that we are doing, but also to thank you for your continued efforts in ensuring the conversation carries on. XXXX,</p>

	<p>having trained to be a Baptist Minister at Spurgeon’s but who is in a same-sex relationship and so unable to approach ordination, was especially encouraged when the shift of the rules around Ministers conducting SSM were announced during the 2014 Assembly. These steps, although difficult and not without pain for all involved, are vital in the ongoing pastoring of not only our Churches but the nation and even the world. We believe this decision is one that reflects fairly and genuinely the Baptist Church ecclesia that we both are called to be a part of and love.</p> <p>We would be delighted to participate in any further conversations and offer insight, reflection and thought from their own journeys as the Baptist Union continues on this journey of conversation.</p>
7.	<p>I trust you are well. Thank you so much for all you do and the ministry you exercise within the Baptist Union. Please be assured of our very best wishes and prayers for you. I am writing to you officially on behalf of the eldership and trustees of XXXX Baptist Church in your capacities within the Baptist Union of Great Britain so please feel free to share this correspondence with those that need to be involved in the ongoing discussion that may arise. Please note that I have copied in several others that are directly related to this conversation either because of their influence and relationship with XXXX and me or because of their involvement with our pastors’ training and formation.</p> <p>I wrote to you after a well-known Baptist minister published an article a little while ago in which he expressed his support of same sex blessings and called for the church to re-consider its position. In that correspondence I asked whether the Union had followed through on its commitment, at that stage, to discipline a pastor who took the steps that the pastor who wrote the article had taken. I also asked for a response to my concern that the Baptist Union of Great Britain would begin to change its position on the issue. Your response was very helpful and gave me an assurance that conversations were taking place with the minister concerned and that the Union was committed to the historic position and understanding of marriage. That gave XXXX Baptist Church and me the assurances we were seeking but discussion, correspondence and decisions of recent months seems to indicate a clear change in approach which has neither been debated nor approved by the wider Baptist family.</p> <p>We are deeply concerned with the stance that the Baptist Union of Great Britain has taken in relation to the issue of the blessing of same sex couples and / or equal marriage. Whilst we want to celebrate the important principle of each church in the Baptist Union of Great Britain being governed by the principles that lie at the heart of Baptist ecclesiology we understand the simple reality that the principle of local congregational decision making / autonomy lies <i>under</i> the important principle of the teaching and the authority of the scriptures. Whilst we do not want to impose our view on any other local congregation we find ourselves unable to be aligned with a position that suggests that the overarching teaching of the Old Testament and the New Testament is anything but clearly prohibitive on the issues of the blessing of same sex couples or indeed equal marriage. In the Baptist Union of Great Britain Assembly earlier this year, the following was noted:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"We affirm the traditionally accepted Biblical understanding of Christian marriage, as a union between a man and a woman, as the continuing foundation of belief in our Baptist Churches." (full statement here: http://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220650/A_Baptist_response.aspx)</p>

That sentence is sandwiched in between two others. On the one hand, each church is free to make its own mind up on this issue and ministers are free to do as their church asks without any consequence or discipline, and on the other hand, ministers themselves must adhere to traditional sexual conduct and relationships. How is it possible for that the BUGB can articulate a definitive and clear position on what the Bible says in this area but at the same time not require its ministers to act accordingly? At best this leads to inconsistency and at worst it leads to suggesting that two positions which are polar opposites are both right. How can the BUGB position and the BUGB policy be incompatible with one another? Does the mind of Christ as revealed to the pastor of a church differ from the mind of Christ as revealed to the local congregation or the Baptist family on this issue?

As a church family, XXXX Baptist Church discussed a policy position on the issue of homosexuality in our Church Meeting in March 2013 and then approved it in our June Church Meeting a few months later. I attach copies of our policy and the resolution for your information. You will note that the resolution referred to the stance of the Baptist Union at the time. You will also note that those who are serving ministers here have signed a personal declaration of conscience to help us should the need arise to defend our position before a court of law. The policy outlined remains the united position of the Church family, the staff, the Church Council, the elders and the trustees. The change in the position of the BUGB presents us with deep challenges. We have a number of concerns with the apparently shifting position of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, but I would like to articulate the five key ones:

1. The position now being taken is a significant and material change from the one that has been previously articulated. We do not believe that this change has been debated and discussed properly and we do not believe that it represents the views of the vast majority of Baptist Churches in the Baptist Union of Great Britain or indeed further afield. It would be most helpful for us to understand the process by which this change has been facilitated and who has contributed to its formation, presentation and adoption. We are concerned that the very principle of local church autonomy that is being used to defend the position does not seem to have been followed in the formation of the position itself.
2. Baptist Principles sit under, not above, the authority of the Bible and we are concerned that this position is being reversed in the approach being taken. Whilst there are voices calling for a re-interpretation of the scriptures teaching on the issue of human sexuality we cannot find a change in the language of the teaching of scripture on sexual ethics concerning those experiencing same sex attraction. Much of the debate about these issues that has been enabled within the Baptist Union has been led by those whose views are evident in the position now being adopted but has not engaged with the robust and equally passionate views of those who would consider themselves theologically and socially conservative on this issue.
3. The position being articulated by the Baptist Union of Great Britain lands firmly on the fence and in doing so it fails to provide a clear lead to hundreds of local churches. By taking the position outlined you appear to be telling local churches they can believe what they like and act as they like on this issue provided they all agree. That seems to put the principle of democracy in the local church above the principle of adherence to the clear traditions and teaching of the church (and particularly the non-conformist traditions). The result is a self-affirming circle of decision making which is separated from the principle of being shaped by the tradition and teaching of the scriptures and the traditions of the church herself. What has been said seems to be going to great trouble to make it clear that the possibility of same sex blessings and equal marriage will only be

approved and practised by a small number of churches and a small number of ministers. We would suggest that the reality is that the whole Baptist Union of Great Britain seems to be shifting its position on a core moral and social conviction to accommodate a few. We would suggest that those churches and ministers that feel they should endorse the position of blessing same sex couples or carrying out equal marriages should be graciously released to find a family of churches that believe that such a position to be biblically defensible rather than asking the whole of the Baptist Union to change its position on this issue. You may argue that you are not asking churches to endorse same sex blessings and equal marriage because you are seeking to let each church decide its position on this issue but our response would be that by asking us to affirm the choice of those who would seek to endorse same sex blessings etc. you are asking us to adopt a position that accepts such a position as biblically possible. We find ourselves unable to do that.

4. The shift of language indicates a new trajectory and we believe that the result of that shift will be an increasingly permissive approach to the issues of human sexuality in general, to same sex relationships in particular and specifically will result in a weakening of the concept and centrality of marriage between a man and a woman. Such an approach will weaken the witness of local churches, create confusion in the minds of those whom we are seeking to disciple and result in a weakened understanding of the importance of principles of holiness, faithfulness and obedience.
5. We are not sure where this leaves those who would seek accreditation and ministerial formation with the Baptist Union of Great Britain. What will be taught at Baptist Colleges on the issue? Will the position of those seeking to endorse same sex blessings and equal marriage be presented as the preferred view, another valid view or something else? What will happen to those candidates who hold to a conservative theological position? Will they be encouraged to change their position? Will a conservative view be discouraged or marked down? What are the implications for ministerial formation and pastoral training? We fully accept the need for robust theological dialogue, listening and teaching and appreciate that various colleges will adopt different approaches to this issue but will those students we support in their ministry formation at such colleges be treated differently because their view is more theologically conservative and traditional? Indeed, will they be welcomed in such colleges as an important voice and contribution to the discussion?

On a personal level, I understand the pastoral challenges of same sex attraction more than you may think. I also face the deep challenge of close family members who experience same-sex attraction. I respect and accept that there are many followers of Jesus who have a view of same sex blessing and equal marriage which is very different from mine. None of that, however, leads me to a position where I can endorse the approach that the Baptist Union of Great Britain seems to be setting out. It seems evident to me that the position accommodates a few and excludes the vast majority. Our anxiety is that the shift is to retain a handful of high profile leaders rather than a reflection of the view of the vast majority of those in Baptist churches. In the name of autonomy it demands a fundamental shift in theology, epistemology and pastoral ethics and principles which is a Rubicon that XXXX is unable to cross. Churches have treated people who experience same sex attraction very badly. XXXX recognises that and wants to be part of a compassionate and kind solution. We walk with a number of people who experience same sex attraction and are delighted to have these brothers and sisters as part of our church family but we cannot move from what we understand to be the clear teaching of the bible on this issue.

	<p>It is with deep respect but also a great heaviness of heart that I have to say that I believe that the position taken is unsupported biblically, untenable pastorally, illogical theologically and unsustainable in terms of mission. We are extremely worried that this shifting position seems to be happening quietly and without any sense of leadership in the Baptist Union of Great Britain or any discussion and proper debate across the Union's churches. The shift may represent the views of a few, but it certainly cannot be endorsed by us and is not done in our name as part of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. It would be my intention to post my letter to you as a public blog post / open letter in the next few days or week in order to enable a wider discussion of the challenges presented by the apparently changing position. Such a material change as you are making cannot, in our view, be made without the full and open discussion of the churches.</p> <p>Our church family is deeply concerned about what is happening, as is our church leadership. We find ourselves unable to endorse the position taken and wanted to share our reflections with you and invite you to respond to us.</p>
8.	<p>Firstly I want to say that I think it is right that as a union we are debating the issue of homosexual marriage at this time. To this end, I want to thank you and the Steering Group for the time and effort that you have put into the debate, including in preparation for the meeting of LBA ministers on 23rd July, and the meeting organised by BMF last year. I have particularly appreciated the clarification of the legal position as it currently stands.</p> <p>However, I am very concerned about the BUGB statement, and the LBA ministers' meeting did nothing to alleviate my concerns (it seems from the poll at the end that this is true for the majority of those present). I cannot see how this can be merely a matter for personal conscience, since it goes to the heart of the gospel of salvation we preach and seek to live out, through which we are called to holiness. Furthermore, although we are a voluntary union of autonomous churches, nevertheless what one church or minister does has a significant bearing on how the outside world views all the other churches and ministers within the union, since outsiders do not understand (nor can they be expected to understand) our systems of church government. For these reasons, we do not need a statement that includes a bit of what everyone thinks on this issue (the essence of how I heard you describe the current statement). Rather we need an unequivocal statement that reflects, with mature consideration, Jesus' heart on this matter as revealed in Scripture. Any organisation has beliefs, and those wishing to be a part of that organisation must do so on the basis of their willingness to accept agreed beliefs. Even the early Baptists were not entirely free to follow any beliefs they chose, but rather were free to discern the mind of Christ on how to operate <i>within</i> agreed doctrines and truths. The same should be true of BUGB.</p> <p>Throughout this process, Baptist Ministers have been calling for a theological discussion on this issue, but this has been consistently sidelined in the debates that have been held. I understand that a few hours in a meeting are insufficient space to do justice to the theological debate (as is an email conversation). But we should not be issuing statements or changing ministerial rules based on case studies, and not on good theology.</p> <p>Our current statement effectively asserts that this is an issue about which Jesus is not particularly concerned. But sexual conduct is consistently presented in the Bible as one of a mere handful of key measures of the holiness of God's people. The risen Jesus himself shows it is of great importance to him in three of his letters to the churches in Revelation (Ephesus,</p>

Pergamum and Thyatira). Furthermore, 1 Thes 4:3-8 makes Christ's mind concerning sexual conduct abundantly clear – it is a matter of holiness: “It is *God's will* that you should be *sanctified*: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to *control* your own body in a way that is *holy* and *honourable*, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will *punish* all those who commit such *sins*, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a *holy* life. Therefore, *anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.*” (emphasis mine).

In the light of this, as a union we must have the courage to answer the question: “is homosexual practice (within ‘marriage’) sinful or holy?” It cannot be both. It is insufficient to say “we read the same Bible and interpret it differently;” not all interpretations of the Bible are legitimate. Throughout the history of the Judaeo-Christian faith until the late 20th century, all homosexual practice has been regarded as sinful (in stark contrast to women in leadership, for instance). Therefore the burden of proof must lie with those who argue that all the previous generations have wrongly interpreted Scripture in this regard. Yet, at best, their arguments are based on conjecture and cultural particularities, and require that passages are not read with their most obvious reading.

The most obvious reading of Scripture is that Gen 1 – 2 clearly articulate not only what is normal, but what is God's *design* for the context in which all sexual intercourse should take place: namely marriage between one man and one woman for life (marriage is implied by the necessarily public nature of a man “leaving” father and mother, and being “united to his wife”). Whenever there is deviation from this design, there are consequent problems. Thus, in Matt 19:1-12, Jesus reinforced the link between the creation of *male* and *female* and the exclusivity of marriage for life – any variation from this was rooted in hard-heartedness, with the notable exception of celibacy. If Jesus had wanted to “extend the foundation for marriage” to include lifelong homosexual union, he would have done so, just as he challenged the interpretation of Old Testament law in a number of other ways (contrary to popular assertion, lifelong, loving, homosexual relationships were known in Jesus time). The plain reading of the text is that Jesus, a Jew, read Gen 1 – 2 as formative, and interpreted it through the lens of Lev 18 and 20 – as would Paul have done.

This is consistent theology. Reinterpreting what the Bible says about homosexual practice alone, whilst maintaining our interpretation about everything else the Bible says about sex (exclusive, monogamous, within marriage, equal, only with humans, not incestuous, etc.) is theologically inconsistent. I understand that the revisionist teaching comes from a desire to include (which our culture today wrongly equates with love). I also understand the need for pastoral sensitivity. But there is a difference between pastoral sensitivity and publically stating that something God declares to be sinful is actually holy and worth celebrating (which marrying homosexuals or blessing their marriage would declare). What does that say, pastorally, to those who have battled for years to maintain celibacy because they are homosexual by orientation? It says their battle for holiness has been a waste of energy.

Christian discipleship is a call to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Christ. For different people, self-denial will be painful in different areas. But that doesn't mean we should say “oh that's too difficult for you, don't worry about denying yourself in that area.” Otherwise, what do we mean by repentance? And what does salvation mean if it does not include sanctification?

	<p>I could say much more, but this letter is already far too long. I do not consider this in any way a sufficient presentation of the theological arguments. But I hope that it has been sufficient to at least delay a change to ministerial rules that would be difficult to reverse, until such time as the Union has had the informed, mature, detailed theological debate that we need on this issue.</p>
9.	<p>I am concerned that in this matter we do not use the principle of the liberty of each church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer Christ's laws, as a cloak by which any and every interpretation of Scripture is regarded as valid or coherent. There is good and bad exegesis. There is good and bad application. I would hope that our concern as ministers of the Word is that we strive for the best in our interpretation of it. It is enough to say that other Christians read the same scriptures differently (which I believe I heard you say) with the implication that such readings have equal coherence or validity. This issue is too important to be considered a matter of <i>adiaphora</i>.</p> <p>My doctoral training required that I respond to the best arguments fairly and rigorously and that I present a coherent and economical thesis which has explanatory power for the facts and texts at hand. I am currently researching for a paper that I shall be giving at the Faith & Thought Symposium on Homosexuality taking place at Bloomsbury in October. My brief is to cover the biblical aspects of the topic.</p> <p>I was approached to do this paper because I spoke in open session in response to an interview that XXXX gave at his church last year. I lost count of the number of <i>non sequiturs</i> in XXXX arguments and told him so. Whatever the concerns are for integrity in pastoral approaches to gays and lesbians (and I minister to such in my own congregation), this must also be accompanied by integrity in our use of the Bible. Jeffrey John's little book <i>Permanent, Faithful, Stable</i> is woeful in his treatment of biblical material, all the more so given that he has a D.Phil. in New Testament. (I shall probably offer in due course to read a paper on the use and misuse of the Bible in current discussions of homosexuality at the postgraduate research seminar at Spurgeon's College).</p> <p>I have respect for the integrity of a New Testament scholar like William Loader, who has concluded a five volume monograph series on attitudes to sex and sexuality in all the extant Jewish writings of the Hellenistic era. The last volume is entitled <i>The New Testament on Sexuality</i> (Eerdmans 2012). On Paul and Romans 1 he concludes that Paul does indeed rule out of court all homosexual conduct (in line with every other Jew known to us from that era) on the basis of his reading of Genesis 1 & 2. Loader writes: 'My concern in seeking to elucidate as clearly as possible what Paul was saying comes not from a belief in Paul's abiding authority nor a desire to depict his views as resembling or matching my own. My hermeneutical perspective is to bring to his writing the respect it warrants as one of the earliest documents of the Christian movement, a respect I believe is due, at the very least, to all human beings' (p.321). There is misinformation and misrepresentation on all sides of this vexed issue but I hope that we can find a way to expose specious and tendentious reasoning in a denomination that has traditionally respected the authority of the Apostle Paul (among others).</p> <p>Or take the example of the American Catholic New Testament scholar, Luke Timothy Johnson, whose <i>New Testament Theology</i> is widely used as a text book. He writes: 'I have little patience with efforts to make Scripture say something other than what it says, through appeals to linguistic or cultural subtleties. The exegetical situation is straightforward: we know what the text says. [...] I think it important to state clearly that we do, in fact, reject the</p>

	<p>straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good.’ (Quoted in Ian Paul, <i>Same-sex Unions</i>, Grove Biblical Booklet 71 (2014) on p.29.) At least we know where we stand with Luke Timothy Johnson whom I believe has grasped the nettle in this debate.</p> <p>In my opinion, it is not enough to leave the matter at the level of placing differing interpretations of Scripture side by side as if that were the end of it. This, it seems to me, is where most denominational reports and theological commissions end up. Arguments need to be tested for their rigour and a process that neglects that task lacks integrity. We cannot afford to avoid such an exercise if the BUGB is to retain credibility.</p> <p>The second matter of concern to me is your comment about the choice of the phrase ‘continuing foundation of belief’ in the statement affirming the traditionally accepted biblical understanding of Christian marriage. I understood you to say that such a foundation is capable of extension. I want to explore the implications of that. I am currently re-reading James Brownson’s <i>Bible, Gender, Sexuality</i> (Eerdmans 2013) in which he argues that Jesus’ use of Genesis 1 & 2 in his definition of marriage describes only what is <i>normal</i> and does not prescribe what is <i>normative</i>. I am looking to be persuaded of this view such that I can stand up in front of my congregation with a clear conscience and declare that this is indeed the case. But I need cogent and compelling reasons to adopt this change of view and as yet I have not been persuaded.</p> <p>My concern would also be, if I were to adopt such a position, what sexual relationships if any are excluded if marriage between one woman and one man is merely ‘normal’. If I feel free to vary the ‘man’/‘woman’ element of Jesus’ formulation in the case of same-sex marriage, then why am I not also free to vary the numeric values in the same formulation? Love, faithfulness and permanence are properties that belong to <i>groups</i> as well as pairs. What of polyandry, or polygyny, or polyamory? What should I say to proponents of such arrangements who would complain that it is not just or fair that their sexual arrangements aren’t recognised in law as same-sex unions now are? If Scripture is not normative with regard to marriage then presumably we have to admit that there is no abiding Christian sexual ethic because all (including biblical) sexual ethics are merely culturally conditioned.</p> <p>I could continue but two sides of A4 is enough. The internal contradictions of the BU statement were clearly expressed at the meeting and I add my voice to those views.</p>
10.	<p>Dear Council members,</p> <p>As you consider the current BUGB guidelines with regard to equal marriage within the churches of our Union and amongst our congregations and ministers, I would like to thank you for taking time to consider my own submission to you.</p> <p>It would seem unnecessary for me to rehearse, yet again, the biblical and theological arguments for and against same-sex marriage. These arguments will have been made many times before and in many other submissions to you, and I know that they are all sincerely held. For my own part I would prefer to offer to you, if I may, a few thoughts of a more personal nature.</p> <p>Firstly, I would suggest that there is a real ethical inconsistency in the guidelines as they currently stand. Specifically, I refer to my freedom (given the consent of the church meeting) to register the church building for same sex marriage services, and my freedom to preside</p>

over such services, but the threat of disciplinary action against me if I should myself choose, in law and in good faith, to marry another man. I well understated the reasoning behind these guidelines, but they are ethically flawed and it cannot be right for a minister's covenantal relationship to the wider Union to be used to prevent him or her from entering into a marriage which the local church may believe, under God, to be good and holy.

Secondly, I would like to suggest that there is a real naïveté in the Union seeking to prevent a minister from marrying but allowing him or her to enter into a Civil Partnership. This naïveté lies in the assumption that people in civil partnerships are likely to be celibate but that marriage is predicated on sexual activity. The law, of course, suggests otherwise (for under the new legislation, non-consummation is no grounds for divorce). But the better way forward for us is to recognise that sexual activity between a loving and devoted same-sex couple is an act of love as it is between heterosexual people.

Thirdly, I would like to suggest that the Union has, I think, handled this whole difficult issue with real care and wisdom over recent years; and for that I thank you whole-heartedly. But there is an elephant in the room. I was saddened by the outcome of the recent meeting of Anglican primates in Canterbury and by what I perceive as a very selective form of righteous anger. Those who affirm equal marriage are removed from the communion while those who call for the imprisonment of gay people are allowed to remain. While we are surely right to do all we can to foster cultural sensitivity within our Union, we need also to beware of tyranny of any kind, and not to forfeit human dignity in the name of the unity of the church nor out of fear of some of her members leaving the party.

Last of all, I would like to ask you to put, if you will, a human face to the mostly anonymous people who are most directly affected by the guidelines that we entrust to you to formulate. People on the sexual margins of our society will continue to pair off in the most remarkable combinations, as they have always done; and they will do it for love. And for those who choose to remain in the church, they will be glad that that can now celebrate their marriage within the church building and with the blessing of their pastors. But we must also give that same right and dignity to our pastors. To me and to others like me.

For too long the church has condemned us with a blanket condemnation. She has defined us not by our ability to love but by our genital activity. She has even lobbied parliament for the right to discriminate against us. But now the church has the opportunity to give to a marginalised minority the rights and understanding that she has long claimed for herself in an increasingly secular world. And she has much to learn from such people! Of love affairs sanctioned, until recently, neither by prayer book nor law court but simply by conviction. Of the beauty and strength of a stripped down religion that exposes the real cost of sharing home and life together. And from those of us on the margins who see our sexuality not as a choice but as a given, the church may even, by God's grace, gain many gifts of creativity and honesty.

I want to ask you, if I may, to continue on the journey that we have begun, and even to take a step further. I mean to embrace loving committed same-sex marriages and to allow ministers to enter into them too. By denying us this freedom, and by enforcing the separation of two vocations, we will, as a Union, break hearts and tear lives and love affairs in two. But by affirming such a right and liberty, we will embrace the truth that will make us free even it is does not make us comfortable.

11. THE ELEPHANT IN THE CHURCH

	<p>The story is told of three blind people who encounter an elephant for the first time. One encounters the tail and declares that it is a rope. The second bumps into a leg and exclaims that it is a tree. The third grasping at its trunk fears it is a large snake.</p> <p>What has this to do with the issue of LGBT people and the church?</p> <p>Prior to 1967 gay men risked imprisonment if their orientation was known. No distinction was made between, for example, child sexual abuse and loving relationships. Everyone brought up in the 50s and 60s started from the assumption that everything "queer" or "perverted" was evil. But society has changed and made that discernment.</p> <p>In every age the church must respond to changes in society, but the problem is that this "elephant" in the church is invisible. This was brought home to me twenty years ago when, as a preliminary to "coming out" to those I trusted, I first prayed in church for Lesbian and gay Christians. Expecting condemnation, I actually got support, but also surprisingly an elderly, well-respected member of the church "came out" to me.</p> <p>Unlike black people, Lesbian and gay Christians are invisible. In their churches they often feel vulnerable and under attack, so are reluctant to reveal themselves. So the "unsighted" faithful Christians often act like the blind people and the elephant. One sees a "gay conspiracy" to undermine their beliefs, another sees "liberals" going against "the clear teaching of scripture", a third sees tradition being swept aside.</p> <p>That's why we need a genuine conversation where those fears are heard and respected, at the same time allowing the safe space where the invisible can become visible. Then by prayer, genuine Bible study and openness to the Spirit the conversation may be transformed for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.</p>
12.	<p>As I mentioned the <i>Affirm</i> (Baptist Network) committee asked me to let you know that <u>we are in touch with</u> approximately 20 Baptist churches that are fully affirming and happy for us to refer LGBT Christians to them on that basis. Several other churches we contacted are clearly "on a journey".</p>