**Some Views of Biblical Authority**

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**View One**

God loves us enough to have given us a manual for living. By the grace of God, the Bible is truthful, without error, and clear. Everything we need to know for our salvation, and to live holy lives pleasing to God, is right there on the page. We simply need to read it, and obey it – and that includes all that it says about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. Most of what people mean when they talk about ‘interpreting’ the Bible is one attempt or another to avoid listening to its plain teaching

**View Two**

The Bible tells us what we need to know in order to understand God’s loving purposes for us. It is given to us by our Creator, who knows all about what is good for us, and who wants to communicate that to us. We can trust such a God to have spoken to us clearly and coherently – the answers the Bible provides to our questions, including our questions about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage, and are indeed clear and coherent. However, we need to read everything that the Bible says about marriage and sexual relationships, we need to pay attention to each text’s historical context, and we need to read them in the context of the Bible’s widder message, in order to find a trustworthy framework or blueprint for our thought and practice.

**View Three**

We need to take care in putting the pieces of biblical teaching together; there is significant danger of taking any part on its own. God has given us the Bible as a whole, expecting us to learn from the interaction of all its parts. Sometimes one text qualifies another or shows that another was giving guidance only for a specific context, or helps us see that another was revealing only part of the truth. God invites us into the labour of reading all the relevant texts together. It is only when we do so – and especially when we read all of the Bible in the light of Christ’s work and teaching – that we will find the answers that we are looking for.

**View Four**

Absolutely, we need to take care as we put the different parts of the Bible together, but the task is not simply resolving difficulties, or finding ways to smooth at the Bible’s rough edges. There are deep and persuasive tensions in the Bible, and they are there for good reason. It is an inherently complex conversation between multiple voices. We need to acknowledge those tensions, explore them, go on learning from them, and dwell with them, as we think through our questions about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. In fact, God invites us into this kind of dwelling with the text. The Bible is too complex, too mobile, and too lively to be called a blueprint or a framework.

**View Five**

God has given us the Bible as a whole, expecting us to learn from and dwell with the interaction of its part. When we rea all the relevant biblical texts together, we do discover that some of them, taken by themselves, are misleading. Listening to the Bible as a whole means learning to discern what is more central to it, and what is less central; God expects us to make that discernment too. We find that some of what we read in the Bible about identity, sexuality, relationships ad marriage just doesn’t line up with the most central things the Bible says about love. So I think the Bible itself teaches us not to take those passages as instructions for our lives now, and to find some creative ways of reading them.

**View Six**

The Bible is given to us for the one purpose of teaching us about God’s love for the world, especially its fulfilment in Jesus. The Bible is a collection of human words brought together by God to witness to that love, and ultimately to Christ. Everything in it is given to us for that one purpose. I do trust that God has provided us with witnesses whose testimony is sufficient to teach us this love. But I also think that the testimony is provided by fallible human voices, all of which needs testing against the central message. I believe that the Bible calls us to work out our own answers to our questions about identity, sexuality, relationship and marriage, in the light of this central message. The answers we give to specific questions will sometimes be quite different from the answers that the biblical authors gave, because we no longer agree with some of the other assumptions they brought to the process – we will therefore have to say ‘no’ to some of their answers.

**View Seven**

The Bible is a collection of fallible human voices, but I’m wary of what you say about God bringing these texts together, and giving them to us for some eternal purpose. It is a book produced by people who were caught up in movements of God’s Spirit in history, but their words only so uneven and partial justice to what they glimpsed. We can find important truths in Scripture, sometimes powerful and beautifully expressed, but they are mixed in with all kinds of other material, some of it horrific.