

Sex: Homosexuality
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John 3:16-17

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

The Case

What would you do if someone you have known for years in our congregation asks you out for a cup of coffee.

You think it's just a friendly chat as usual, but then they tell you that they are attracted to the same sex?

They tell you that this is something they have had for years but was afraid to tell anyone.

They have been told all their life that it is a sin and that gays go to hell.

They have tried to change but God has not answered their prayers.

They have tried to kill themselves before but couldn't go through with it.

F3C has been very kind and accepting of all kinds of people.

But is there a place for them?

They want to follow Jesus, but what does that mean for someone who is gay?

There are some specifics to this case.

We are not talking about an atheist or agnostic.

We are not talking about someone who is loud and proud and political or abrasive.

We may be talking about a Christian who indeed knows the gospel and has asked Christ into their lives.

We may be talking about a seeker who feels drawn to Christ but repulsed by church policies.

Is there a place for someone who is gay in the church?

In the majority of cases, gay folk either despair and harm themselves
or end up leaving the church, leaving their faith disillusioned.

What makes a person Gay?

Some think of it as genetic, some say it is a choice.

Even in the gay community this is not clear.

Is it psychological, physiological, intentional or accidental?

Why did God allow for some people to be gay?

The answer is "We don't know."

This debate has stacks of books but sometimes we just have to go with "I don't know."

What matters more, however, is "What do we do," and "How to we relate?"

The Attitude Spectrum

Understand that there are different attitudes within the gay community.

Understand also that there are different attitudes within the Christian community.

No one is exactly the same.

It does not help to make assumptions of anyone without getting to know them.

At the extremes, there is hatred, fear and acrimony.

These attitudes, if nurtured and persistent, are not compatible with being God's people.

We are invited to a place of understanding, compassion and truth.

The goal of the Christian life is not actually to make everyone comfortable or to sort everyone else out.

It is about loving God first and foremost and being in relationship with the Trinity.

It is also about loving others, but that loving is not saccharine and without principle.

Loving well has to do with being honest and truthful but also humble.

Not everyone is going to agree with us regarding our positions

and that's just going to be something we have to accept.

The question is whether or not we are able to be friends with others and to what extent.

A Caveat

We derive theology and practice from the authority of Scripture.

I recognize that there are different approaches to Scripture, some good and some bad.

Bad theology is marked by reading into the scriptures what you want it to say to support your own pre-conceived notions.

Good theology is marked by reading the Scriptures all and learning to grasp its meaning and intent within its own context.

This means allowing the Scriptures to challenge and change you, not the other way around.

It requires humility but it also requires the willingness to say, "I don't know or understand entirely."

Good theology knows exactly what can or cannot be said without equivocation.

Ultimately, the reason for Bible study and theology is to know the true heart of God and to follow his ways.

All this is to say that I have arrived at a certain point in my Biblical, theological and pastoral thinking.

If, however, anyone can present from Scripture a convincing argument for me to shift my thinking, I am open to it.

Until that time, I know I have to stand where I stand and humbly present where I and our church is at regarding the issues.

Scriptures

Leviticus 18:22

Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.

Leviticus 20:13

If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

Romans 1:18-31

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. ³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

1 Timothy 1:8-11

⁸ We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. ⁹ We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰ for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine ¹¹ that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

Biblical Context

I cannot but help sympathize with how a gay person must feel in reading these passages.

At no point does Scripture allow for homosexuality as a normative sexual expression.

There are only these passages regarding homosexuality in the Bible.

There is far more concern regarding aspects of justice and righteousness in regard to relationships with others.

Also, the Bible mostly indicate male homosexuality which may lend credence to the argument that these passages are really

primarily about power and oppression.

This, however, is a bit of a reach since the most direct interpretation is really not about power.

What are these passages really about?

They are not just about homosexuality specifically but include it in a context.

They appear in lists that indicate behaviours that are incompatible with God's people.

The Leviticus passages are about holiness - separateness from other practiced behaviours.

Such as incest and child sacrifice.

They also tend towards being about relationships within community with other people.

All of these are an expression of what it means to live as a follower of God and among his people.

They are, however, also about the power of God to reconcile, forgive and bless.

The Nature of Sin, Brokenness & Grace - A Recapitulation

We live within the pervasive effect of Sin since the fall.

Consequences:

Corruption of Relationship with God

Corruption of relationship with one Another

Corruption of relationship with Self

Corruption of Nature Itself

This final consequences is where we find all kinds of brokenness.

In people they are physical, genetic and psychological dispositions or disorders.

It strikes everyone whether they are of faith or not.

These are not necessarily willful sins but a consequential brokenness.

There is a difference between willful sin and the persistent effects of sin.

The two of them do have an interplay.

When we speak of the Kingdom of God, when we think of salvation,

It is both the consequential corruption that God is addressing.

In other words, God is transforming our wills to turn us from willful sin.

And he is healing our hearts to redeem us from persistent sin.

Moreover, God can take our brokenness and redeem and transform it for good.

Homosexuality is a part of this brokenness and there are three general ways people handle brokenness.

Reactions to Sin & Brokenness

Condemnation

Self-Loathing

Dogmatism/Legalism

These passages have been used at times to vilify, oppress and persecute gay people.

But you don't have to be Christian to be homophobic.

Actually, I don't even like the term homophobia because a phobia uncontrollable and inordinate fear.

Hatred, fear or even dislike of another person is an enculturated attitude that is nurtured and acquired.

Although having healthy families is a Biblical ideal that we have preached even here,

This can and has been used as an impetus to exclude and despise gay people.

One response on the Christian spectrum is a continued and staunch opposition to homosexuality.

Although a Biblical basis is cited, there is little real thought or conversation with the gay community.

This is a simplistic perspective; that it's a sin, it's abhorrent, "God hates fags," that gays can and should change, cannot be Christian.

Often times this position has been associated with

"Evangelical" or Charismatic Protestants & Traditional Catholic or Orthodox church positions.

What is sacrificed is understanding, compassion and friendship.

Denial

In reaction to such attitudes in society as well as the church, the gay community has often reacted in understandable ways.

There is acrimony between the church and the gay community born of understandable fear, misunderstanding and experience.

There is a political and adversarial dimension to gay politics against the church.

Some of this is the consequence of attitudes enculturated within the church and the church must confess its fault.

So at the other end of the spectrum there is complete openness to homosexuality.

This position is based on compassion, friendship and inclusiveness.

It opens the church up and supports gay marriage, gay clergy without discrimination in every aspect as a way of mission.

This has often been associated with mainline protestant communities.

What is sacrificed here is Biblical truth and theological thought for cultural bias.

But there are also who are raised in the church in faithful families who do develop same-sex attraction.

These people do not come from secular or even gay communities but from within the church.

The majority of these people end up leaving the church or worse, in their conflict and self-hatred do self-harm leading to suicide.

Reconciliation

The ministry of reconciliation is between fallen humanity and God as well as with one another.

There are 5 parts to real reconciliation that must occur in each believer, gay or straight, and is part of the gospel:

Confession

I have a problem

I need help, love & mercy

Repentance

I am going to follow Jesus the best I can

My best isn't going to be enough but I will neither condemn nor deny

Trust

I trust God's word.

I trust God's love.

I trust God's power.

Community

I will be honest and accountable among God's people.

I will bear witness to God's mercy.

I am loved.

Transformation

Takes time.

Can happen.

Not necessarily of circumstances (even sexual orientation)

But of attitudes - loving, safety, compassion, understanding.

So within the spectrum is a variety of positions.

What I do know, however, is that neither condemnation nor denial of sin is that way of Jesus.

He did not come into the world to condemn the world but to save it.

We strive for understanding and compassion as well as truthfulness.

In doing so we must ask and answer a lot of questions:

What does it mean to be under the authority of Scripture?

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus and be a part of the Kingdom?

What parts of our culture or background are we reading into the Christian life?

Have we been in dialogue or friendship with those who are of different positions?

Have we been good listeners?

Are we loving in the best ways of truth and grace?

Are we bringing peace and reconciliation as well as truth and reconciliation?

I don't have all the answers.

But we can try.

And our church must engage in these conversations.

If a gay person comes to our church, would they be welcomed?

Would they have the gospel?

Would they be both welcomed and challenged?

Isn't this what is supposed to happen with all of us?

Or what if someone among us is gay?

Will they feel welcomed among God's people as well as challenged in their discipleship to grow?

The church does not exist to make everyone feel good.

Nor does it exist to make everyone feel bad!

It is the call of the gospel to say that the Kingdom of Heaven is Here.

What are you going to do about it?

It will always be uncomfortable because the gospel is about changing your perspective to see the way God sees.

To act as Jesus acts.

By the help of the Holy Spirit.

Kyrie, Elieson.

Homosexuality Questions

Are homosexuals accepted by God?

The better question is, "Does God love people who are gay?"

The answer is an emphatic yes.

Another question, however is, "Do we wish to follow God?"

This is a question for all people, gay or straight.

The question then is "How do we follow God?"

That is usually where the bone of contention lies and where we all need to seek both truth and grace.

We need to learn to listen to the Holy Spirit and the heart of God.

Rather than to impose our own desires on God.

What exactly is wrong with homosexuality? Please explain in a way I can explain to non-Christians.

Understand that if you speak to a non-Christian, the term "wrong" is of no relevance.

In fact, "wrong" may not be the appropriate word either in a Christian context.

We use the terms sin or brokenness.

The question we must approach in engaging the world is whether or not they understand the terms of sin and brokenness.

Even if they don't we then communicate that perspective humbly and clearly.

They must accept that we live as disciples and followers of Jesus.

This includes Jesus' values which he derived from the Old Testament and taught to his direct apostles.

We also need to communicate that believers are taught not to hate or demonize or condemn.

That sin requires reconciliation and brokenness requires healing.

You can express your own position of both seeking to understand and be compassionate even as you seek to follow the teachings of Christ.

You have your own tensions with this but are willing to befriend and listen.

How do I deal with homosexuality being taught at school to my children?

I speak to my children this way.

Being gay is not God's ideal for a person according to his word.

This is not a popular position in the secular world, but it is the clearest understanding we have as believers from the Bible.

But we are to treat every gay person with the respect, care and love we are to give all people.

This is not the most popular position in the church, but this is also the clearest understanding from the Scriptures we have!

The onus is for us to teach our children and for them to know not everything taught at school is right.

We follow God, but not everyone does.

They need to know where they stand or they will fall for anything.

Homosexuality is not a contagious disease!

Do not vilify gay people.

How do I teach my children to react and respond or deal with friends who are in families where their parents are homosexual?

Be their friends.

Understand that we as believers live as followers of Christ and the word of God.

We do not share the same values as some of most of the gay community and we must accept that.

They must also accept us for our convictions and trust our friendship despite our differences.

Model this attitude for your children.

If you are afraid and antagonistic, they will be too.

If you are caring yet truthful, so will they be.

What is the Christian view of homosexuality?

There is no one perspective.

It runs the gamut from embracing homosexuality and encouraging it to demonizing and condemning it.

Our church follows a different course from both.

Practical Realities

In my readings I have learned that among gay Christians there is a difference.

A lot of time this is referred to the A&B argument.

One side reads the Scriptures and concludes that the act of homosexuality is sinful.

They therefore commit to a life of celibacy.

The other side concludes that the passages of Scripture are not currently relevant as a prohibition towards behaviour.

They therefore allow for same-sex covenantal relationships or marriage.

Also our church will not seek to oppose the general rights afforded to the gay community by the government.

They are not to be denied their rights to services.

Understand that governments are not Christian institutions anymore.

We live as many early churches did, not in the shadows, but alongside and within a secular world.

We are just not of it.

Where currently does the discipleship direction of our church lie in regards to A&B?

Although we understand and appreciate monogamous relationships among gay people,

Our understanding of Scripture currently leads us to invite gay believers to consider celibacy.

This however must also mean that we are willing to be in close friendships with gay believers in order to cultivate deep and meaningful relationships.

We must wrestle with the fact that we are asking someone to deny any possibility to physical

sexual fulfillment.

Even as we ask straight people to be celibate before marriage, at least they have the possibility of marriage.

We are asking much of our brothers or sisters and we must walk with them.

Does our church welcome gay people?

I would like to say yes, but that isn't just up to me.

It is up to you. To us as a people.

We are only as a church as you personally are.

Will you truly pass the peace with someone you know is gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans-sexual?

You may already have. But would you do so willingly?

Will our church and clergy perform gay marriages?

No. Although we are sympathetic towards the plight of committed relationships even in the gay community

We are not prepared to consecrate gay unions due to our understanding of Scripture.

Do we believe that a person's orientation may change through therapy or the work of the Holy Spirit?

Yes. We believe in the power of God to change people.

But we do not necessarily believe that this is a universal reality.

MAY change, not WILL change.

Some people want to change and some people can change.

Some cannot.

Some will not experience this change and it is not to be forced beyond what the individual situation can bear.

Prayer for the GLBT Community & Ourselves

For believers and non-believers.

For the humility of the church and confession of the sin of persecution.

For grace, wisdom, compassion, understanding and openness.

For truth and the Kingdom to come.