

CONVERSATIONS

Social Awareness, Living Truth

Series 2, Paper 2

HUMAN SEXUALITY: UNDERSTANDING HOMOSEXUALITY

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Evangelical Christians have traditionally viewed homosexual behaviour as one of a number of sexual sins. Increasingly, there is pressure to abandon this theological position and affirm homosexual behaviour and same sex relationships as part of God's design. This pressure upon the church is driven by trends in society and among government policy makers to see sexual orientation as a protected minority class and to view same-sex marriage as a fundamental issue of equal rights. The question facing Christ followers and the church is over the moral legitimacy of same-sex marriage. Does the Bible necessarily prohibit two men or two women from having a consensual, loving, Christ-honouring, monogamous union? And is this an issue that really matters for Evangelicals or is it one about which we can just agree to disagree?



WHY THE QUESTION MATTERS

These questions matter for Christians because of what their answers say about the core identity of a human being. For many in the LGB community, living out their LGB identity is an essential expression of who they are. Yet for Christian believers, our identity is fundamentally anchored in being created in God's image and being designed for relationship with Him. It is through the gospel our identity is completed in Christ, not through sex, marriage or other identifiers.

Christian marriage is meant to be a witness of the covenant relationship between God and his people. The mystery of this relationship is based in the fact that God and his people are fundamentally different. Just as marriage was designed by God to be a testimony of God's loving relationship with his people, so this is expressed in how the husband and wife are different from each other and how they express this commitment differently within the marriage relationship.

The Bible does not seem to give support to a latitude of justified opinions on this important question. Though some Christians believe they can interpret Scripture consistently with an affirming view of same-sex marriage, one must ask if such interpretations are plausible to the average reader or if they merely explain away what Scripture intuitively teaches.

The biblical perspective on homosexual behavior is consistent

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH?

The biblical perspective on homosexual behavior is consistent in seeing it as an expression of sexual intimacy that is outside of God's design for marriage. There are eight Biblical texts that refer to homosexual behavior. The Sodom texts (Genesis 19:1-9; Judges 19:22-23; and Jude 7) refer to the incident in Genesis 19 in which the men of the city rise up and demand Lot to surrender his guests to them that they might "know them", a euphemism for having sexual relations. Jude 7 condemns Sodom specifically for the pursuit of "unnatural desire", suggesting that engaging in unnatural relations was part of the sin of the Sodomites.

Leviticus includes two texts (18:22; 20:13) that condemn homosexual relations in a list of inappropriate types of sexual relations. While we might dismiss these texts as part of a purity code not applicable to us today, the parallels in language in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 suggest that the Apostle Paul has these texts in view as he calls the New Testament church to purity. In 1 Corinthians 6:9 Paul calls the Corinthians to a new level of holiness in their personal behaviour and conduct with one another. He calls them out of four categories of sexual sin along with six other types of sin. These include "fornicators", "adulterers", "the effeminate" and literally "male-bedders". While the term "male-bedders" is rare, its meaning is understandable from its root words, and also because the same two root words are conjoined in the Greek Old Testament of



HOW ARE WE TO RESPOND?

Any response we give to those who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual should carefully balance truth and love. As we express genuine agape love for another person, without judgment, we earn the opportunity to speak truth into their life. Whenever someone has the courage to share about their same-sex struggle, they are taking a big risk. To get to the next step of their journey, they need an advocate who can listen to them and walk with them. Same-sex attraction is not sin and needs to be differentiated from homosexual behaviour. It is the Holy Spirit's role to convict all of us of sin regardless of the nature of the sin. Acceptance of someone as a person is not approval of their behaviour.

We need to create welcoming communities. Our faith in Jesus was never meant to be a solitary journey, but one meant to be lived in the context of the Body of Christ. Those that struggle with same-sex attraction need supportive communities and discipling environments where they can establish healthy friendships and relationships.

All people are in need of an identity rooted in Christ. Eunuchs in Philip's day would have been more stigmatized by faithful Jewish believers than the same-sex attracted, trans-gender or gender-fluid individuals would be by us today. Yet in Acts 8, the Holy Spirit moved Philip to go and seek him out. Similarly, our responsibility is not to solve the struggle of same-sex attraction, but to lead people to follow Jesus!

Leviticus 20:13. The term "effeminate" literally means "soft-ones" and is generally associated with the passive partner in homosexual relationships. Paul doesn't consider homosexual behaviour worse than any other sexual sin, but acknowledges this is part of what they were, but now they have been washed, sanctified and justified. Regardless of past behaviour, God's redemptive grace is available to all!

In Romans 1:26-27 Paul uses homosexual behaviour to illustrate his point that humankind has abandoned its relationship with God in pursuit of worshiping the creation. Just as humankind has corrupted its designed relationship with God, so God has allowed humankind to corrupt the design of one of its most basic relationships with each other—that of sexual relations within marriage. Even women have "exchanged" natural relations for those that are "contrary to nature" demonstrating that the issue was not merely excessive male lustiness. The implication of this text is that men with men and women with women is simply contrary to God's design, whether it is within a "marriage" or not. Paul is not singling out homosexual practice as the "sin of sins", but he is using it to illustrate the disordering nature of sin that affects all of us when we reject God.

Our responsibility is not to solve the struggle of same-sex attraction, but to lead people to follow Jesus

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR DIGGING DEEPER

Gagnon, Robert A. J. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009). Among the most thorough treatments in examining and analyzing the relevant biblical passages.

Sprinkle, Preston. *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015)

Yarhouse, Mark. *Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2010)

Yuan, Christopher & Angela Yuan. *Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son's Journey to God. A Broken Mother's Search for Hope* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2011)

<https://www.wheaton.edu/academics/school-of-psychology-counseling-and-family-therapy/sexual-and-gender-identity-institute/resources/>

<https://www.centerforfaith.com/resources>

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