

## “Homosexuality”

By: Doug Warren

### **As the rhetoric over the battle for gay rights heats up, many have asked me, “What is the Christian response to the debate about gay rights?”**

One of the questions I am asked most frequently has to do with the raging debate concerning homosexuality. So often in this and similar arguments, people talk past one another. It is not just an issue of miscommunication; there is a reason for the cross talk.

All of us tend to gravitate towards people, movements, or causes that pronounce someone else’s failure as far more egregious than our own. We tend to read articles that support our own views while ignoring or dismissing those with a view different from our own. In either case we too infrequently pause to consider the rationale of the opposing viewpoint and reflect on whether there might be truth that we need to apply to our own lives. Let’s take a moment to do just that. My intention is to challenge your thinking whichever side you may be on.

#### **Who defines sexuality?**

In the debate about sexuality, what are the real issues? Who or what decides what is acceptable or not? Do we look to Playboy, the Kamasutra or the Bible? If God is the one who designed sex, as the Bible claims, then it would stand to reason that He is the one who can tell us how it is to be used. His directions about sexuality are not given as a killjoy, but as the Giver directing the recipient how to enjoy this beautiful gift. He is not simply more experienced than we are, but He is the One who has created our bodies, minds, and souls to crave the intimacy and pleasure of sexuality. He is the One who not only wired us with these desires, but has also set parameters on when and how they are to be directed.

He says that our sexuality is not just about us, but is intended to give us insight into the intimacy He has created us to have with Him. With this in view perversion is not about societal norms or any other standard but God’s own. Any sexuality that does not honor God as the giver of this gift is perverted. That means the most faithful, monogamous married man and woman may be horribly misguided in their sexuality if they are doing it in a self-centered way that ignores their Creator.

The gospel does not single out homosexuality as the most heinous sin, but shows us that fornication, adultery, incest, homosexuality, bestiality, and *any* sexuality outside of God’s design is wrong because it robs us of the window onto Christ that sex is intended to provide. Those who are most loudly denouncing homosexuality would do well to celebrate the gift sex is within its biblical context of husband and wife together following Christ.

### **Who defines dignity?**

The other major issue raised in the current debate is also an area close to the heart of Jesus. How do we deal with discrimination? For those who would say that this really isn't an issue, talk to those who have been deeply wounded by jeers, violence, and worse because of their real or imagined homosexual practices. While Jesus does not hesitate to call sin what it is, He is also clear that He has no part in belittling or degrading those engaging in sinful behavior.

We are to treat people with dignity and respect despite what we think of their behavior, because they are made in the image of God. The gospel response to individuals with heterosexual behavior that we find morally objectionable is not to call them "sluts" or to look down our noses at them. That is not the way of Christ, but the way of the legalist whose own sense of self-righteousness Jesus found deplorable.

At the same time, to deal with others in compassion is not the same thing as confirmation. While the plea for non-discrimination is a just one, often what is being asked for goes much further. Followers of Christ must not condone what He forbids.

### **The Issue**

In the current battle the two sides both have elements of the truth as well as distortions of what God tells us in His Word. The Bible says *both* that every person is created in the image of God and therefore is to be treated with dignity *and* that homosexuality is wrong. What is underneath both sides of the argument is our need for validation. The issue is that none of us likes to have our sin pointed out. It doesn't matter if that sin is bigotry or homosexuality. Our sense of rightness is defined both positively and negatively. Being a moral, authentic, good person is the flip side of not being a bad, immoral, hypocritical person.

Apart from the good news of God's acceptance of us through His Son Jesus Christ, the only way we have to define ourselves in these ways has to do with comparing ourselves to others. This is precisely the trap that leads conservatives to denounce liberals as perverts (or their sponsors) and liberals to denounce conservatives as homophobes. Both sides feel justified that at least they are not as bad as the other and that keeps us all from having to deal with our own deficiencies.

### **Gospel Power**

We need an alternative. The power of the gospel is able to change *both* homosexuality and bigotry. Neither side wants to admit their sin; in fact they may not even be able to see it. But the power of the gospel transforms us. It allows us to see anew the extent of our depravity towards others and changes us in ways that were previously impossible.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power to transform our lives. It can redeem our sexuality. It can redeem our heart's attitudes towards people different than ourselves. Jesus is not only a model for proper behavior; He is the Savior who can transform our actions as He transforms our very being. He makes hateful people loving. He satisfies our deepest longings in a way that no one else and nothing else can.

On any given Sunday we may have in our congregation couples who are practicing their heterosexuality by living together without being married, people who are unfaithful to their marriage vows, and individuals struggling with homosexuality or sexual identity. We welcome them all in the name of Jesus. We do not immediately take them aside and press them to give up their sinful ways. Yet it is our God-given responsibility to gently confront one another with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is something that neither the self-righteous condemnation of others nor the mutual-legitimization crowds can offer.

The good news that we have in Christ is not just that God accepts us as we are, but that He loves us enough not to leave us there. He has paid for our failures and transforms us more and more into His image. That means in all of our relationships—sexual and nonsexual.

This summer my prayer for you and all our neighbors is that we may see Christ transform all of our relationships by the power of the gospel. Let us find our intimacy in Jesus and in Him know the freedom to conform our sexuality to His commands. Let us discover the dignity inherent in all those created in God's image so that we can know freedom from hate and bigotry. His truth will set us free if we repent and believe.

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