

WHAT ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?

We are concluding our series today on Love and Marriage. We have looked at the biblical basis for marriage and last week looked at what happens when marriage is broken through divorce. In today's world, you cannot talk about marriage without also addressing the issue of gay marriage. On July 20, 2005 Canada became the fourth country in the world to legalize same sex marriage. This past June the United States Supreme Court ruled that bans on same sex marriage were unconstitutional.

As we enter into this discussion, I want to speak the truth but I want to speak it with love. I have heard it said that when people of my generation hear the word homosexuality they think of an issue, when a young adult today hears the word homosexuality they think of a person. We are not only dealing with an issue today, we are dealing with the lives of people.

I want to try to answer three questions today that often come up when addressing this issue;

1. Is Homosexuality a Sin?

As a Christian, I believe that God through His word has the final say in all issues of life. We do not say that something is right or wrong based on our own thoughts or feelings about a particular issue. We judge an issue based upon what God says about it. In terms of homosexuality, we cannot interpret the bible through the lens of our sexuality, but we must interpret our sexuality through the lens of the bible. So what does the bible say?

Leviticus 18:22 'Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.

In the KJV homosexuality is called an abomination. In the Hebrew this is a very strong word and means something that is offensive to God.

Leviticus 20:13 If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

In the Old Testament. Homosexuality was a capital crime and was punishable by death. It was placed in the same category as incest, idolatry and adultery.

Some people have argued "So what if the Old Testament forbids homosexuality. It is full of strange laws and ideas. It also forbids the eating of pork and shellfish." There is a big difference between the ceremonial or dietary laws in the Old Testament and this law. Homosexuality was a capital crime – something deserving the death penalty. To say that homosexuality and eating shellfish is the same is like arguing that it is OK to commit murder because it is just like speeding. Both are illegal, and speeding is no big deal, so murder should not really be a big deal either? Speeding and murder are both crimes but they are different. The way you know that they are not the same is in the fact that the penalty for committing them are not the same. They are different.

More importantly, this passage speaks about things that are universally wrong as opposed to things that were ceremonially wrong only for Israel. There were some laws that only had to do with Israel and the other nations were not expected to keep those laws. God never judged the Philistines because they did not follow the Jewish holidays or ate shellfish. God did judge the nations based upon the universal laws that he is giving here in Leviticus 20. He sums up the chapter by saying;

Leviticus 20:22-23 'Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. 23 You must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them.

Like the other sins listed here like adultery and incest, homosexuality is declared something that is universally wrong everywhere, not just ceremonially wrong for Israel. We also see this in Genesis;

Genesis 18:20-21 Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous 21 that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

The prevailing sin in Sodom and Gomorrah was homosexuality. Some argue that Sodom and Gomorrah cannot be considered as a scriptural basis for the sin of homosexuality because these homosexual relationships were not between two loving, homosexual partners. Rather, they claim that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah had to do with the fact that sex was forced on those who did not willingly participate. In other words, homosexuality was not the sin, rape was. However, the book of Jude is clear;

Jude 1:7 In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

This says that God judged Sodom and Gomorrah for it's "immorality and perversion." The Greek words for perversion literally mean "going after *strange or different flesh*." It was not the rape but the homosexuality that was offensive. This has been the understanding through history. The word SODOMY has always meant homosexuality, not rape.

Perhaps the clearest verses in the Bible about homosexuality come from Rom 1:

Rom 1:21 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 mortal man 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 of 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 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 indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

This scripture is very clear. I have heard people try to argue this verse before saying that the word natural and unnatural are the issue. What is natural for a heterosexual is unnatural for a homosexual and vice versa. However, it is clear that it is not saying natural for the person but natural biologically.

Homosexuality is contrary to nature. There is a reason why extension cords have a 'male' end and 'female' end – they are designed to fit together. If you went to the hardware store and bought one that was different, it would not work. Biologically, sex is designed to be male and female.

The primary passage I want us to look at today is out of 1 Corinthians;

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 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.

Notice what he says in verse 11 – “And that is what some of you WERE”.

All of us were born into a broken world, but brokenness is not what God designed or desires for us. It is not God’s will for our lives. Everyone is born with a fallen sin nature. We are all born broken, and brokenness shows itself in many different ways. God does not make people gay. One expression of brokenness is same sex attraction, but there are many other ways that sin misshapes us.

Paul lists here some of the ways brokenness was expressed in the lives of those in the church in Corinth. However, he then says that is what they WERE, not what they ARE. There had been a change. There had been transformation. In other words, it is not the brokenness you were born with that defines you. It is God’s will for you and the person you are becoming in Christ that defines you.

There is a big difference between who you were born and who you are becoming. Just because my brokenness tempts me to lie, that does not make me a liar. My brokenness causes me to desire this, but that is not who Christ created me to be. Just because I lust does not mean I am an adulterer. My brokenness may push me towards it, but that is not what Christ has called me to be. Just because you struggle with same sex attraction does not mean that you are gay. You are not defined by the challenges you face but by the choices you make. God does not make people gay any more than he makes them liars or idolaters. These are just expressions of brokenness.

Should a person who struggles with lying just give up and say “I’m just a liar. That is just how God created me. Since God made me this way it is OK for me to lie.” If a person struggles with pornography should they just say “I am just a lustful person. That is how God created me so I just need to accept it and realize that this is no problem if I do this.” Of course not.

Someone may argue this seems unfair. Why should people who struggle with same sex attraction be told they should never have sex? However, this is not asking of them of anything more than is expected of heterosexuals. There are lots of unmarried people today who struggle with temptation as well. Just because you struggle with something does not mean that you should give in to it.

Jesus calls the shots in our lives. Making Jesus lord of your life means that He gets final say. If Jesus is not Lord of all He is not Lord at all. We are called to take up our cross and follow him. The problem is that culturally we have come to God saying “This is who I am. This is how I feel. God is here to please me.” The bible says “this is who God is, this is how God feels and we are here to please Him.” Completely different approach.

Is Homosexuality a sin? Yes. All sex outside of marriage is sin, whether it is gay or straight.

2. What about gay marriage?

God defines marriage as the covenant relationship between one man and one woman for life. Genesis shows us that God created men and women different for a reason. That means that God’s definition of marriage is not always the same as ours. Last week we read;

Mat 19:3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" 4 Haven't you read, he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' ? 6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." 7 Why then, they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" 8 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. 9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

What Jesus is saying here in verse 19 is that, a couple can be legally married but in the eyes of God they are still committing adultery. In other words, their marriage may be LEGAL, but it not LEGITIMATE. Likewise today, we have common law marriage. It is a contract in the eyes of the court but not in the eyes of God. If you are a couple living together and enjoying the legal benefits of common law marriage, I would recommend that you GET MARRIED. Gay marriage would also fit into this category. Just because the courts call someone married does not mean that they are.

3. Can you be gay and still be a Christian?

The only thing that is required to be saved is that you accept the grace and forgiveness that God offers through Jesus and seek to make Him lord of your life. That is what saves you. However, being a Christian is more than just being saved. A Christian is a person who is seeking to live their life under the lordship of Christ and involved and growing in a local church. Living for Jesus requires a stricter code of conduct.

Anyone is welcomed to come and worship at this church, so long as they are not disruptive. That acceptance does not mean agreement. It simply means that no matter what you have done or where you are from, you are welcomed to worship here. If you feel that you have been unfairly judged or been made to feel unwelcomed, I am sorry. However, to be a member of a church, you have to be willing to submit to a higher code of conduct. To be a leader in a church requires an even stricter code of conduct. The greater your involvement, the greater the expectations. E.g. police checks.

Say you are used to wearing shorts and flip-flops to church. However, you start serving on the worship team. One Sunday someone comes up to you and says that they think what you are wearing is inappropriate. No one ever said anything to you about them until you started serving on the worship team. The reality is that as soon as you go up onto that stage, or take on any other position of leadership then you are judged more harshly. That is just the reality of involvement and leadership.

Don't misunderstand me. Wearing flip flops is not a sin. However, say that you are serving on the worship team and you are having an affair? As a pastor I remember having to remove someone from the worship team because they were going out and getting drunk and messing around on Saturday night and thinking that made no difference with what happened on Sunday morning.

Can you be saved and be a practicing homosexual? Yes. Can you be a practicing homosexual and live a healthy vibrant Christian life? Can you be a practicing heterosexual who is involved in adultery and live a healthy vibrant Christian life? At some point your behaviour will become a limiting factor in your growth. You cannot say "Jesus is Lord" and then do what your Lord tells you not to. If you believe what the bible says about homosexuality and then choose to be involved that lifestyle, at some point that lifestyle will limit what God has intended for you to be.

Again, we are talking about practicing gays. It is not a sin to struggle with same sex attraction, any more than it is a sin to struggle with opposite sex attraction. It is not a sin to be tempted. If you are walking down the street and you see an attractive person, it is not a sin to be attracted to them. It becomes sin when you begin to dwell on that thought and begin to lust after them in your mind. It is only when you give in to temptation that it becomes sin. Many Christians struggle with same sex attraction but are able to live for God and serve as leaders in the church. Same sex attraction no more disqualifies you for service than opposite sex attraction. The question is how you handle it.

Often we fail to understand that there is a huge difference between gender and sex. Sex is what you are, gender is how you act. Sex (male or female) is biologically determined at conception. Every cell in your body is either XX or XY and nothing you do can change that. If you are born male then there is nothing on earth that can ever make you female. You can cut things off your body or add things to your body or wear different clothes or take hormones but your sex does not change.

Gender is how you act, and it is not black and white. All of us have within us gender characteristics which are both masculine and feminine and that is normal. Just because you have feminine traits does not mean you are a woman. Never confuse sex and gender.

So what should our response as the church be to the acceptance of homosexuality in our nation today?

First, God calls us to love others. If you struggle with same sex attraction then we join with you in recognizing that we are all broken. Every person here has blown it. We all wrestle with something. What you wrestle with may not be what I wrestle with, but we all struggle. I believe this church is a good place to wrestle with our brokenness and seek to be the men and women that God wants us to be.

Second, we need to continue to seek to be agents of change in the world. When the US ruling for same sex marriage happened, I saw many Christians posting articles that said that we as Christians should not judge others. One article said “We are not called to be the morality police of our culture”. We should not expect people who are not Christians to act as if they were. I understand that.

Does that mean we must accept our culture as it is? Does that mean we should not speak into this issue? Of course not. Christians have always been called to be agents of change in the world. We are called to be salt and light. Salt acts as a preservative. We are called to stand against injustice and sin wherever it may be. Christians are called to stand against the cultural sins of every generation.

I have heard people saying that discrimination by sexual orientation today is the same as discrimination by colour 100 years ago. The same way that people eventually accepted interracial marriage years ago, people will eventually get with the times and accept gay marriage.

I think that homosexuality is like racism, but not in the way you think. I would compare the current public opinion of homosexuality today with the acceptance and public opinion of slavery years go. It was through Christians like William Wilberforce and John Newton using the bible that the slave trade was ended. Years ago slavery was accepted as a normal part of life. It was not simply a personal sin, it was a national sin. It was not only recognized by the majority and widely supported. It was legalized in the courts. It was not until Christians who understood that all people are created equal in the eyes of God stood up and fought for justice that slavery was ended. It was a terrible cultural sin that has had lasting consequences to this day. We are still paying today for the sins of our ancestors.

As a Christian I stand against abortion, because I believe that it is wrong. Even though it is an accepted part of our culture, I believe that it is wrong and that one day we as a nation will pay a great price for the murder of so many innocent children.

As a Christian I also stand against gay marriage and homosexuality because it is wrong, and because just like every other universal sin God has named, it will have huge consequences. Homosexuality has become not simply an individual choice, it has become a national sin. It is no longer simply tolerated. It has been legalized and celebrated. Because of that I fear God's judgement upon this nation.

Remember what God said in Lev 20:

Leviticus 20:22 Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out.

God speaks in the Bible about blessings and curses. There are blessings for any nation that recognizes God's laws and seeks to live according to them. No nation can do that perfectly, and we all understand that. There is no such thing as a Christian nation. However, the closer we get to God's ideal, the healthier and better the nation becomes. Canada was founded on Christian beliefs and principles and has been blessed because of that. I have lived before in nations that were not founded on the same Christian ideals and principles. There is a huge difference.

I hear people saying that unless the church starts loving gay people and stops judging them the church will never reach them. After all, Jesus hung out with sinners. Shouldn't we do the same? Yes, Jesus did hang out with sinners, but he did not practice affirmational inclusion but transformational inclusion. There is a big difference between these things. Jesus meets us where we are but then tells us to go and sin no more. Yes, we need to show love and acceptance to the gay community, but that does not mean that we must also accept and affirm the lifestyle.

I have tried to speak the truth in love today. There will be those who will say I was too tolerant, and others who say I was too legalistic. I have tried to outline a biblical understanding of the issue. In saying that homosexuality is a sin I am not being homophobic or intolerant. I am only underlining what the Bible says.

As a follower of Jesus Christ, I have made Him Lord of my life. That means He calls the shots. As Christians, the goal for all of us is holiness. All of us have blown it. All of us struggle with our fallen human nature. We have all made mistakes. The goal for us as a community of faith is healing and wholeness. It is to be the people God desires us to be.

If you are here today and you struggle with same sex attraction, may I suggest to you that the goal of your life is holiness, not heterosexuality. The solution is not to simply try to change your desires, it is drawing close to God. The more you seek God and His righteousness in your life, the more healing and wholeness you will experience. God may choose to change your desires, but the focus is holiness.

1 Cor 6:11 ... 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.

I hope that is the goal for all of us, no matter where we have come from or what we have done. Whatever our brokenness, we want to be justified, washed and sanctified through our Lord Jesus Christ through the Spirit of God. We want to be transformed into the people God created us to be.