

2014 Christian Life Conference

Homosexuality and the Christian

by Sandy Willson

I. What God says about love

- We embrace each other with acceptance, affection, and community.
- We confess our sins of the past and our present moralistic biases.
- We edify each other.
- We hold each other accountable.

II. What God says about homosexuality

A. Question: *How do we know what God says?*

There are two common mistakes:

1. The Bible is not the final answer.
2. There's nothing more to learn – from the Bible or from science.

Answer: All of the Bible accurately interpreted and faithfully applied to my situation by the power of the Holy Spirit in community with the church.

The relevant biblical texts:

Genesis 1:26-28

Leviticus 20:13

Genesis 2:18, 21-25

Romans 1:24-28

Genesis 19:1-11

I Corinthians 6:9-11

Judges 19:22-30

I Timothy 1:8-11

Leviticus 18:22

2 Peter 2:6-10

(see pp.4- 6)

B. Question: *Are we supposed to believe that the instructions for Christians 2000 years ago still apply today?*

Two common mistakes:

1. Not taking culture seriously (as with slavery or polygamy issues in the past).
2. Not taking the biblical text seriously (see Matthew 5:17-20; John 17:17; II Tim 3:16; and many other texts)

Answer: Interpret the Bible in its historical, literary, and theological contexts and faithfully apply its eternal truths to our particular context.

Some challenges we face and answer:

- *“The Bible was addressing other forms of sexual perversion in a pre-Freudian age before we were even aware of the distinctions between ‘inversion’ and ‘perversion’.”*
 - ◆ Romans 1 could not be clearer: the Bible is addressing homosexuality as we know it today.
- *“The church has learned through the years that we were wrong about slavery and about women’s roles and we are now learning that it is wrong to withhold all civil rights from homosexuals, as well.”*
 - ◆ The Church was indeed wrong about slavery and about the abridgement of women’s rights, and the Bible clearly says so (Philemon, Luke 8:1-3, Romans 16, Galatians 3:26-29).

On the other hand, the Bible nowhere commends homosexual behavior and in several places strongly forbids it. Furthermore, “rights” come from the Creator (who reveals our rights in the Bible).

- *“The gospel by its very nature includes everyone.”*
 - ◆ The gospel does invite all people everywhere to receive the forgiveness of Christ *and* to live under the Lordship of Christ.
- C. **Question:** *Doesn't the scientific evidence suggest that homosexuality should be tolerated as simply one expression of God's creativity?*

Genetic factors – It seems very likely that genetics sometimes play a part in the development of sexual orientation.

Psycho-social factors - The most common factor seems to be a disruption of the connection to the parent of the same gender, creating a hunger for affirmation from a person of the same gender. At the deepest level, then, homosexuals are not looking for sex, but for love. We are made for loving relationships, and if we don't get them legitimately, we naturally seek them illegitimately. Please note the sad irony here: at the very point where the homosexual has his greatest need, namely, loving, affirming same-sex relationships, the church tends to recoil and withhold same-sex affirmation!

Answer: The genetic and psycho-social discoveries elicit deeper sympathy from all of us for the struggles of our homosexual friends, and these studies cause us to pray for and minister to them with greater zeal and intelligence. At the same time, we must say that neither genetic predispositions nor environmental influences excuse us from moral responsibility; for example: the cases of anger, alcoholism, parenting.

Conclusions from biblical studies:

- 1) God created us in His image and made us sexual beings.
- 2) God ordained the family, based on a lifetime marriage between one man and one woman, and designed sexual relations only for heterosexual marriage.
- 3) We are all sexual sinners in need of constant forgiveness and healing.
- 4) We are called both to love each other regardless of which particular sins we are most likely to commit and also gently to lead each other to health and wholeness as defined in the Bible.
- 5) We can change. It is true that those who have strong homosexual orientations, even after committing their lives to Christ, will normally continue to struggle with homosexual lusts and temptations; but they will struggle with ever-increasing success, as they appropriate the unfailing love of Christ to their lives.

III. How to apply what God says

A. To those who have homosexual tendencies:

Two common mistakes:

1. “in the closet” (guilt and shame)
2. “out of the closet” (unrepentant bravado)

Response: A robust affirmation of my human dignity as one created in the image of God, with an honest assessment of my brokenness and sin; that is, to think rightly of myself.

Four action steps:

- 1) Accept this church's apology for our insensitivity and our self-righteousness toward you. We are truly sorry; we would humbly repent and ask for your help in the future.
- 2) Realize we all struggle with sexual sin.
- 3) Commit yourself to God and to His plan for your health and happiness: (the gospel is the only way to restore human dignity with honest assessment of our sins)
 - a. Confess your sin and brokenness, without excuse.
 - b. Trust in Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness, significance, love, and eternal life.
 - c. Seek help to live a Christ-like life.
 - d. Build deep, meaningful relationships with other believers.
 - e. Join a Bible-believing local church where you can worship God and learn of Christ in a mutually encouraging and morally healthy environment.
- 4) Engage in ministry to others.

We live in a hurting world that demands that you get the focus off of yourself and onto the needs of the poor, the lost, and the lonely.

B. To those who have loved ones who engage in homosexual practices:

Two common mistakes:

1. Separation (from embarrassment, anger, hurt)
2. Accommodation (from sympathy, weariness, resignation)

Response: The truth in love.

Three action steps:

1. You must establish a loving framework for the relationship.
 - a. Unconditional love – “I love you no matter what.”
 - b. Focus on need for Christ.
 - c. Discover openness to receive help.
 - d. Evaluate your own family – how open to influence.
 - e. Communicate reasonable boundaries, for example:
 - no non-biblical cohabitation in your house
 - no surprise or “forced” visits by illicit partners
2. You must communicate respectfully.
 - a. Ask: how they feel, what they think, decisions they've made
 - b. Ask for permission to share your thoughts and perspectives
 - c. Listen to response with sympathy and understanding.
3. You must seek spiritual health for yourself.
 - a. Communicate with closest friends for prayer, consolation, and counsel.
 - b. Embrace for yourself the gospel of freedom from guilt and shame,
 - c. Confront honestly any issues in your life in need of repentance and faith,
 - d. Grow in your understanding and usefulness:
 1. Read helpful books
 2. Get pastoral counsel
 3. Help others:
 - other families in distress
 - AIDS relief
 - Advocacy for love and justice toward homosexual people

C. To those concerned about the Church

Two common mistakes:

1. Moralistic condemnation (“keep the rules at all costs”)
2. Amoralistic toleration (“keep the relationship at all costs”)

The best response: Holy fellowship

Four action steps:

1. Take seriously the Bible’s call to holiness of life, for the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.
 1. Begin with yourself. Matthew 7:1-5.
 - What are my sins in need of repentance?
 - Am I sympathetic to those ensnared by homosexual behavior? (Male homosexuals compared to males in general population: 5x have STDs; 3x abuse alcohol; 10x abuse drugs; 13x have major depressive disorder; 6x attempt suicide. They call this “gay!”)
 2. Take seriously the Bible’s call to holy community in doctrine and practice, which are mutually inclusive. (see I Timothy 4:16.)
 3. Begin with your own church, and care for the whole Church.
 - We all share in responsibility for our small groups, CCs, local churches, and denominations – we must not be guilty of “winking at” or “sweeping under the rug.”
 - When problems arise move slowly, deliberately, and, as far as possible, under authority.
 - We are to promote mercy and justice in the Church. The evangelical Church must admit to despising and excluding homosexuals in the past. If the question is, “Do we ordain homosexuals?” the answer, in one sense, is resoundingly “yes.” We ordain homosexuals, fornicators, adulterers, swindlers, slanderers, and greedy people (I Cor 6:9-11); but, on the other hand, we only ordain them when they have repented. Some churches are now blessing sin we prefer, as the Bible teaches, to bless repentance.

Suggested Reading on Homosexuality

Homosexuality and the Bible, Robert A. J. Gagnon

Homosexuality and the Christian, Mark Yarhouse

Is God Anti-Gay? Questions Christians Ask, Sam Allberry

Out of Egypt and Into the Promised Land, Jeannette Howard

Restoring Sexual Identity, Anne Paulk

Straight & Narrow?, Thomas Schmidt

Same-Sex Partnerships?, John R. W. Stott

The Bible, Christianity, and Homosexuality, Justin R. Cannon

The Same Sex Controversy, James R. White and Jeffrey D. Niell

Washed and Waiting, Wesley Hill

For parents and family:

Beginnings: Hope and Healing for Families and Friends, Robert Taylor

Gay Children, Straight Parents: A Plan for Family Healing, Richard Cohen

Someone I Love Is Gay, Bob Davies

The relevant biblical texts:

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."
Genesis 1:26-28

¹⁸ The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. ²³ The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." ²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. ²⁵ The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.
Genesis 2:18, 21-25

The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. ² "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning."

"No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square." ³ But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. ⁴ Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. ⁵ They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."

⁶ Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him ⁷ and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. ⁸ Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof."

⁹ "Get out of our way," they replied. And they said, "This fellow came here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door. ¹⁰ But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. ¹¹ Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.
Genesis 19:1-11

While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him." ²³ The owner of the house went outside and said to them, "No, my friends, don't be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don't do this disgraceful thing. ²⁴ Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But to this man, don't do such a disgraceful thing." ²⁵ But the men would not listen to him. So the man took his concubine and sent her outside to them, and they raped her and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go. ²⁶ At daybreak the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, fell down at the door and lay there until daylight. ²⁷ When her master got up in the morning and opened the door of the house and stepped out to continue on his way, there lay his concubine, fallen in the doorway of the house, with her hands on the threshold. ²⁸ He said to her, "Get up; let's go." But there was no answer. Then the man put her on his donkey and set out for home. ²⁹ When he reached home,

he took a knife and cut up his concubine, limb by limb, into twelve parts and sent them into all the areas of Israel. ³⁰ Everyone who saw it said, "Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites came up out of Egypt. Think about it! Consider it! Tell us what to do!" Judges 19:22-30

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

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. Leviticus 20:13

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. ²⁸ Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. Romans 1:24-28

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. I Corinthians 6:9-11

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. ⁹ We also know that 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 adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers-and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine ¹¹ that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me. I Timothy 1:8-11

If he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷ and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men ⁸ (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)- ⁹ if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. ¹⁰ This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; 2 Peter 2:6-10