

We have been working through some pretty tough, but good questions as part of our Got Questions? Message Series Questions that many of us have probably wanted to ask for a long time, and haven't for some reason. The next two weeks we have what probably are our toughest two questions.

I think these are tougher because these are not just theoretical or personal growth questions...we are talking about issues connected to people we love and care for. Issues that some of us probably wrestle with. Issues that for centuries have been labeled as sinful and separating us from God. This week we are looking at homosexuality and next week we are looking at divorce.

The person who submitted this question simply asked: Does God hate gay people?

The short answer to this question is a resounding No!!!

John 3:16, "God so love the world He gave his only son...."

Romans 5:8

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Nothing stands in the way of God's love for us. Just as your children's (mis)behavior has nothing to do with your love for them...so God loves us. You love them no matter what. You may not like what they do. You may want them to stop because you know what they are doing is harmful. But you still love them.

God's love is not dependent on our actions.

But we are in a challenging time. Historically, the church has held that homosexual activity is sinful.

For years, many believed that homosexuals were making a willful choice in their actions. While some homosexual activity can still be characterized as choice driven, research has demonstrated that, however it takes place, human sexual attraction develops within the first 2 years of our life. And that our sexuality is more of a spectrum than a defined category.

Recently the Supreme Court ruled that states cannot keep same-sex couples from marriage using the Constitution. It did not redefine marriage. It simply said that according to the founding document of the United States...they cannot withhold marriage those who are LGBT...they did not say Marriage is defined as anything...only that it is unconstitutional to deny the union under the Constitution.

The arguments for and against are rather complex and nuanced. Even if you are comfortable in your belief, you need to do more reading and more thinking. If you are like most people, you think you have evaluated everything, but I can guarantee you

haven't read enough. This question is challenging beliefs and standards in every part of our society and impacting people around the world.

I have found that I have to read and re-read both sides on a regular basis because not everyone who says homosexuality is a sin is a bigoted legalistic jerk, and not everyone who believes there is room for homosexuality is someone bent on destroying the Bible, the Christian faith, and all moral foundations.

I want to encourage you to read and read widely:

Renowned Christian ethicist David Gushee issued a statement supporting homosexuality.

Ken Wilson's book, *A Letter to My Congregation* and Matthew Vines' book, *God and the Gay Christian* offer an intelligent and loving look at the view to accept homosexuality.

William Loader, who personally supports homosexuality, has written a ton on sexuality in the Bible and upholds the belief that the Bible cannot support the homosexual lifestyle.

Tim Keller has responded in a gracious and well thought out response to both Wilson's and Vines' books in an online article supporting the traditional Christian view.

Also, read N.T Wright and Rich Nathan's articles for some insightful and compassionate dealing with this sensitive topic.

Today, we can only do so much so you must keep reading and praying and being open...

Biblical Passages

The first thing I want to do this morning is give a brief overview of some of the common Scriptures and also consider alternative viewpoints that might help us reflect more deeply on this topic.

Sodom and Gomorrah

While this passage is often used, it has nothing at all to say about homosexuality. Many read the story of the angels visiting Lot and say, "See, homosexuality! They want to rape those men!" They forget that a few verses earlier, God condemned the cities because they failed to have even one righteous person in it!

One of the reason we can quickly discount this is that, if this passage were about homosexuality, the it would still be inappropriate to use in a well reasoned defense because what is happening is gang rape; not, as we see in today's society, consenting adults in a relationship.

Leviticus

Leviticus is definitely one of the more popular passages:

Leviticus 18:22

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

The discussion goes several different ways when dealing with this passage. Most of them focus on the idea that we do not live according to Leviticus law as Christians. We eat bacon, shell fish, and we don't offer sacrifices.

Because this is more than just the simple argument that people on both sides try to make it...we need to understand there are three forms of laws in Leviticus: Civic (political/social), Ceremonial (how to perform certain religious ceremonies), and moral. And what happens is that people fail to take into account proper interpretative methods when working with these passages.

Yes, as Christians we no longer live under Levitical Law in the sense that neither Civic nor Ceremonial Law applies to us. But we are still responsible to live according to the moral law expressed in Leviticus. The teaching of both Jesus, Peter, and Paul in the New Testament make this clear as you work with these passages.

Which is why later in Leviticus 20:13, where it says,

“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.

A person, using the 3 distinct sections of Levitical Law, can agree with the first part, that prohibits homosexuality (a moral law), and reject the part about stoning a homosexual because it is a civil/social/political law.

Now, what happens in some of the discussion is whether this is actually moral law, and whether or not they are simply talking about homosexuality in connection with the cultic worship practices of those around them...

Jesus

Over the past few months, one of the most popular Facebook, drop-the-mic-and-wak-away approaches has been, “What does Jesus says about homosexuality? Nothing! There you go!” Like that solves the issue. This simply reduces the discussion to absurdity on the part of the one saying that!

The problem here is you simply cannot speak from the absence of something. They are right, Jesus never explicitly says homosexuality is wrong. But you cannot make a case for or against homosexuality on the sole basis that “He never said anything about it.” Otherwise, genocide, abortion, and beating your wife would be ok because Jesus never says anything about those things. There are simply too many things that Jesus said nothing about for this to be a valid point in the discussion.

Jesus, throughout his teaching, affirmed the positive aspects of sexuality. He upholds standard Jewish moral law, and repeatedly taught from the Old Testament perspective concerning marriage between the man and woman. Making it slightly easier, using proper interpretive methods, to believe Jesus affirmed traditional marriage views or at least spoke as though they were the expectation.

The Apostle Paul

The Apostle Paul said the most about homosexual behavior.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

“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 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

And then in 1 Timothy 1:8-11

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. 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, 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 that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

The discussion around the words Paul uses and we translate as “homosexual” in these verses is intense and varied. Some take them at face value, use the English translation and state, “Homosexuality is sinful!”

Others see Paul’s use of the words as not meaning a modern understanding of consenting, monogamous adults.

Others attempt to understand the context, and see that it includes homosexual behavior, but also outlawing Temple Prostitution, and the common practice among the Romans of pederasty...which was using young men for sexual purposes.

In addition to the wrestling with the Biblical passages that explicitly address homosexuality...there are a few others that we need to include when discussing this issue.

At the heart of all of this is an

Identity Issue

So many problems in our life are a direct result of where we find our identity. We can be defined by our race, our sexuality, our nationality, our political affiliation, our church affiliation, our past, our accomplishments, whether or not we have a spouse or children, or any number of other things.

But for those of us who seek after God, our identity can only be found in Him. I am not my career, I am not my political affiliation, I am not defined by the fact that I am a Christian. If we are followers of God, our identity is first and foremost found in our being the beloved child who is worth running toward and welcoming home. Everything that doesn't flow from that simply gets in the way.

That is how Adam and Eve were first tempted away. The snake said, "God is afraid you will be like him! Don't you want to be like God?" He was tempting them to find their identity in their own eyes...and it has been downhill from that point on.

And if that isn't bad enough that we are tempted to find out identity in things that are not God, we spend the rest of our time resisting the identity that people wants to place on us!

Eve had been placed in the Garden with Adam to assist in the work, not as subordinate, not as we weaker sex. The original Hebrew says she was there as one who stand face to face with the man. But almost immediately after eating the forbidden fruit, Adam turns to his wife, and says, "You are called Eve because you will be the mother of nations."

In the ancient world, naming someone was an act of control and power. It was putting a role; defining their identity for them...apart from them...without input from them.

So apart from the direct statements in Scripture and Issues of Identity, probably the most problematic is the discussion about...

God made me this way

On a personal level, this statement bothers me more than any other when spoken by a Christian. It tells me they absolutely do not understand their own faith. Why? Because God did not make ANY of us this way!

Genesis 3 and The Fall plunged both humanity and nature itself into the darkness of sin. Not a single one of us is the way God wants us to be. So if we are this way by nature that doesn't mean it is the way God wants us to be. So whichever way you support, you cannot and should not us this as a foundational statement.

Paul says it this way, Romans 8:19-21

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

So Lady Gaga can sing *Born This Way* all she wants, but as Christians, we must realize that while we may be born this way...we are not born the way God wants...not a single one of us.

Really, the heart of this has more to do with how you and I act toward others than anything else.

It gets tougher because you and I know and love people who have been hurt because they are gay. I have seen the turmoil that “hiding” it can cause. I had one adult friend of mine come out to me. He told me, “I almost didn’t. I am not ashamed, and I’m very open everywhere else.” I was heartbroken that this man could not tell me his story without fear of rejection.

I have watched as several of my students struggle with their identity, their place in the world, people’s reactions to them...I was angry and still struggle to put into words the emotions I feel when I hear the suicide rates are higher among LGBT teenagers than other groups because of bullying and rejection and treatment by their parents and churches. And we can have discussions about personal responsibility and all that...but it hurts me to hear that.

So no matter where you end up on this issue...because I don’t do your thinking for you and I certainly can’t tell you how to believe...you have to make those decisions after reading the best material and praying desperately for insight from God. No matter where you end up here is how I believe God calls us to live:

Lead with Love

There are people who believe the Bible says homosexuality is sinful...but they are simply bigots. They stand against those in the LGBT community first...and then gladly accept a Biblical interpretation that proclaims them homosexuals.

If you come down on the side that homosexuality is sinful, and you honestly start with the Bible rather than your own personal distaste for a lifestyle...you will be moved with compassion and not a driving sense of proclaiming how wrong someone is.

When Jesus looked out over the crowds the Bible tells us He was moved with compassion. Compassion. The word in Greek means “in the gut”. Have you ever been so moved with concern that your stomach hurt? That’s what happened when Jesus looked at the crowd.

Our primary responsibility as representatives of God is to love the people around us. No matter the lifestyle, the past hurts, whether we think what they are doing is a sin or not...what needs to lead the way in our response to people is our unconditional love for them. One of our motto’s around here is, “Come as you are, you will be loved!” People don’t need to clean up before they get here. People are accepted where they are at. We love people and we demonstrate it by actually loving them!

Some will say that love includes telling them right and wrong. Yes, it does...but only after two things happen: First, you have built sufficient relational capital that they know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you love them no matter what their response is going

to be. And, Second, that you do so with the humility of someone who realizes they don't understand God fully.

Second,

Point people to Jesus

A few weeks ago, my friend Matt Price spoke to us about the Samaritan woman at the well. After meeting and talking with Jesus, she was overcome with the reality of who this man was. Her life was changed that day.

And with that realization she went back to her town and invited people to come meet Jesus. She didn't say, "Here are the reasons you should believe him!" She couldn't say, "Based on my credibility, you should come meet him." She had no credibility...that is why she was coming for water during the hottest part of the day.

This woman simply said, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"

Come meet this man for yourself!

Our task is not to lead people to the place of confession. It is not to confront people about things in their life we believe are sinful. Our primary responsibility is to live according to the principles of God in our own lives and lead people to Jesus.

The Apostle Paul says it 1 Corinthians 11:1,
"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

You are not the point. This church is not the point. Being a Christian is not the point...
Jesus is the point!!!