

SEXUALITY, TRUTH and GRACE

INTRODUCTION

One reason for addressing the topic of sexuality at the Lausanne conference is that there are 155 million people around the world who are involved in homosexuality. The church is not adequately reaching these people with the gospel.

Many in the church say they are not equipped to reach these people. They have questions. Should homosexuals be invited to church? Should the church start some sort of formal outreach? What should churches do when homosexuals come to Christ? Are there effective ways to follow-up on new believers from a homosexual background? How should churches respond to Christians who say they struggle with homosexuality?

We in the church have also given some wrong information and guidance to those who come to faith in Christ. We've told people that they must change before they can come to Christ – mixing up repentance with transformation. We've mistranslated Scripture to say that if you struggle with sexual issues after you come to Christ then there is something wrong with you.

Some people in the church want nothing to do with them. And some consider them to be the enemy rather than the lost. Being treated as the enemy has created barriers between lost people and God's kingdom. It has also made people inside and outside the church fearful about being honest about their very real struggles with sexuality. Given the church's response, it could be said they are the largest deliberately unreached people group in the world.

The essays on this topic issue a call to the church; a call for a change in the church's approach to homosexuals and homosexuality. This is a call to reach them with God's truth and grace. What has been done in the past fell short of the gospel and did not demonstrate God's truth and grace. There should be no deliberately unreached people group.

To assist the church in understanding this call, the sessions and the essays on sexuality have the following objectives:

1. Understand the extent and scope of sexual issues facing the church. Particularly that people outside and within the church struggle with their sexuality and that sexual issues have significant impact on the church
2. Understand that 155 million people are involved in homosexuality around the world; forming an unreached people group.
3. Understand how contemporary world views about sexuality create significant challenges in church life and in evangelization. Contemporary world views pressure societies and churches to adopt a different view of truth, humanity and morality than traditional Christianity. This issue is polarizing the church. In addition, the church's actions on this issue have become a barrier to reaching others for many unreached people reject Christianity because they believe that Christians are intolerant, hateful people who have anti-gay prejudices.

4. Equip Christians and churches to uphold the Biblical view of sexuality but respond with compassion and grace to those affected by homosexuality by demystifying homosexuality. To do this, the sessions will provide a better understanding about roots of same-sex attractions, God's plan for change and transformation, and God's plan for living with sexual integrity. And the sessions will encourage churches to affirm that men & women involved in homosexuality are not the enemy of the church but they are the lost who need to be reached with the gospel. Many are strugglers seeking acceptance, help, healing and reconciliation with God. The sessions will also consider how Christians and churches can reach people involved in homosexuality.
5. Understand God's plan for healing and change, and how it occurs.

ESSAY INTRODUCTION

With these objectives in mind, four essays have been written that addresses sexuality, truth and grace. The essays cover the following topics:

1. What is homosexuality
2. The extent of sexual issues facing the church
3. God's work to redeem and transform people involved in homosexuality
4. Equipping the church to respond with God's truth and grace

WHAT IS HOMOSEXUALITY?

This question is a good place to start because there is contradictory information from different sources, there is confusion across the church, and the church is responding in many different ways. Answering what appears to be a simple question is not easy. There is no precise, all-inclusive definition of homosexuality. It is probably much easier to say what homosexuality is not. It is not a genetic defect, a hormonal imbalance, a mental illness, or a result of demonic possession.

To answer the question, let us consider four areas; attractions, behaviour, identity and lifestyle.

Attractions

Sometimes the term homosexuality is used to refer to same-sex attractions. Sometimes same-sex attractions are called a homosexual orientation.

Why do people experience same-sex attraction? This is an area where there is much confusion.

Sometimes same-sex attractions are temporary, occurring only for a short while. Other times they may be on going. It is important to understand that some people who experience same-sex attractions do not want them. And there are many people who have same-sex attractions but do not describe themselves as homosexual.

Some claim that homosexual orientation is biologically determined through genetics or hormones in the same way that race or eye color is fixed. Often this claim is used to advance the argument that because

homosexuality is caused rather than chosen then it cannot be immoral; instead it is normal and good. It is also used to advance the argument that children & teenagers who are experiencing confusion or trouble in their sexual development should be told that their troubles mean they are homosexuals and that they should embrace homosexuality as they mature.

While genetic influences and predispositions may contribute to any unwanted behaviour, it is important that we aren't misled. The origins of homosexuality are still not clearly understood by scientists and the topic is the subject of debate. Media reports have claimed much more than the scientific community has accepted. Actually science has begun to show that comparing same-sex attraction to race or eye colour, both of which are completely determined by our genes, is a bad comparison. Sexuality is a complicated aspect of our nature. Science is also starting to study the variability of sexual attractions and that change in sexual attractions actually occurs frequently in many people.

We can also say that people do not choose to experience same-sex attractions. No one wakes up one day when they are 15 or 20 or 50 years old and says, "I have been heterosexual all my life. Today I choose to be homosexual." In fact, the experience of most people is that they felt different from their earliest memories. Further they did not want these feelings and they resisted them for years.

Are people born gay? Do people choose to be gay? Neither of these two simplistic statements are true. They are not the only options we must choose between. The causes of same-sex attractions are more complex than these two simplistic options. More than one hundred years of research and science generally support a developmental theory; that is homosexual orientation is developed as a response to a complex combination of psychological (such as early childhood influences such as parent-child relationships and childhood sexual abuse), environmental (such as peer group influences, same-sex experimentation and early sexual debut) and biological factors, together with human choice (adult experiences such as wilful or purposeful experimentation and subculture dis-inhibition). The seemingly automatic process by which the nonsexual attraction to the same gender during childhood transforms into a sexual desire for the opposite gender during puberty is not automatic at all. It is the culmination of an entire childhood of experience and development.

Some psychologists have expressed the link between childhood experiences and same-sex attractions in the following way.

Homosexuality is a deficit in the child's ability to relate to parents of the same sex that is carried over to adult members of the same sex in general. Put another way, the problem with an adult homosexual is not that they want same-sex love. It is that their childhood needs for same-sex love from their same-sex parent have never been met and they are trying to meet them now with relationships to other adults of the same-sex that includes sexual activity as a mistaken method to receive love.

What does Scripture say about our sexual attractions? It says that our sexuality, including our attractions, was created by God as part of His image in us. And God pronounced them good. God's plan for our attractions was that they would help us understand that it is not good for us to be alone. Our attraction to one person of the opposite sex would help draw us into marriage where we will become one flesh with our spouse. God created the attraction, love and sexual intimacy between a husband and wife to be a good thing that serves several purposes.

However, sin has damaged our attractions just as it has damaged every other aspect of God's creation. The result is that every person will experience damaged attractions that tempt us to use our sexuality in ways that God did not intend. Some attractions will lead to the temptation for sex before marriage. Some attractions will lead to temptations for sex outside of marriage. Some will experience attractions to people of the same gender. And some will experience attractions to children or other things. God does not condemn us for experiencing a specific attraction or temptation. God says we are condemned because of our sin nature. God does not say that experiencing same-sex attractions is a sin. Nor does God say that we can choose our temptations. He does say that following temptations into actions (whether actions in our imagination or actions in physical reality) are sinful actions.

Developing a better understanding about same-sex attractions is helpful to the church. It helps the church understand that Christians and non-Christians can experience same-sex attractions. It helps the church understand and respond to people who experience unwanted same-sex attractions; people who do not want to engage in sinful behaviour or adopt a homosexual identity.

It helps the church and individual Christians address the distinction between temptation and sin. Same-sex attractions may pose temptations to lustful thinking and behaviour just like opposite-sex attractions. The experience of same-sex or opposite-sex temptations is not sinful. Rather they are evidence that sin has damaged each person's sexuality, causing them to be tempted to engage their sexuality in ways that God did not intend. In both cases, people are not forced to follow temptation; temptations may be resisted and overcome in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It provides guidance to church regarding what kinds of ministry can be helpful to people who experience same-sex attractions.

The resource material on "The Roots of Homosexuality" provides a fuller discussion about this.

Behaviour

Sometimes the term homosexuality is used to refer to sexual activity; men having sex with other men or women having sex with other women.

But even this definition of homosexual behaviour is not precise. There are people who have brief, experimental homosexual involvements, but do not describe themselves as homosexuals. And there are people who engage in same-sex sexual activities who do not describe themselves as homosexuals.

When considering homosexual behaviour, it should be noted that there is absolutely no affirmation of homosexual behaviour found anywhere in Scripture. Rather, the consistent instruction in the Bible is chastity for those outside a monogamous heterosexual marriage and fidelity for those inside such a marriage. There is also abundant evidence that homosexual behaviour, along with illicit heterosexual behaviour, is immoral and comes under the judgment of God.

The church needs to confidently affirm the truth from Scripture. But if the church declares that homosexuality is a sin and says no more, then the church has not affirmed the truth from Scripture. It has left out important truths from Scripture, creating barriers that prevent people from hearing the gospel and being reclaimed for God's kingdom. Jesus clearly said that God is not happy when people, especially religious leaders create barriers that prevent people from entering God's kingdom.

The important truths from Scripture about homosexuality include that we all have sexuality that is broken and damaged by sin. And we all will experience temptations to use sexuality in ways that God did not intend. Another truth is that God's response to people who face these struggles is a response of mercy, forgiveness and true grace that leads to redemption and new life in Christ. The result of which is that the church is to be a place that includes people who once were involved in homosexuality but are no longer. Instead, they are people who have been justified. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 clearly acknowledges the presence of former homosexuals in the church. It includes them with other ex-sinners who have been forgiven, justified because of Christ and given a new identity in Christ. It is certain that the Apostle Paul knew there were former homosexuals in his local church and he celebrated their freedom in Christ Jesus. This Scripture communicates the tremendous hope and goodness of God.

The resource material on "What the Bible Says About Homosexuality" provides a fuller discussion of this.

Identity

With some people, homosexual attractions or behaviour can lead to adoption of a homosexual identity. When the term homosexuality is used in this sense, it means that a person defines themselves as a homosexual. They base their identity or sense of self upon homosexuality. This can occur even if they perhaps have never engaged in homosexual behaviour.

Adopting an identity based on homosexuality is a destructive thing to do for it is a false identity. Everyone is tempted to develop a false identity that is separate from God. All false identities lead to destruction. God plan of redemption includes giving us a new and true identity in Christ. We are exhorted in Scripture to put on our new identity (1 Cor 5:17).

For many homosexuals who accept Jesus and the new life that He offers, their true change isn't so much behaviour focused, attractions focused or demon focused. Instead their true change is heart focused. It is a change of identity from the inside out. And that identity change will result in behaviour change.

Often well-meaning Christians want to focus on behaviour and assume that once a person stops homosexual behaviour, that everything is OK. This is a large mistake. The journey out of homosexuality ends, not starts, with behaviour. And even after homosexual behaviour has ceased, there is much work to do in the process of assuming a new identity in Christ.

Walking away from an ingrained, long-held old identity and into a new and sometimes hard-to-understand identity can be much more challenging than simply stopping unwanted behaviour.

This search for identity in Christ alone is not unique to people leaving homosexuality. All people are on a quest for true identity. However, for many people, the source of their false identity is not clearly evident. With homosexuality, the false identity is clear.

The false identity of a homosexual often becomes integral to who they think they are. This may be the result of the strength of their struggle. People often start with a strong internal battle against the same-sex attractions that they experience. But the world bombards them with the lie that these attractions mean they are homosexual and their homosexuality is unchangeable. This creates great stress in their lives. When their internal resistance fails and they finally decide to embrace the identity the world encourages them to

embrace, there is a great sense of relief. For the first time in their life, they may feel comfortable with who they are. And from this comes the unfortunate decision to reinforce this new sense of identity.

Because of the connection between their feelings and their identity, gay-identified people do not distinguish between who they are and what they do. Thus, the much overused Christian phrase “love the sinner, hate the sin” does not make sense to homosexuals. All they hear is the word “hate,” because they do not distinguish between who they are and what they do.

Leaving homosexuality means laying a gay identity at the altar of Christ and accepting the new identity He has for them. For many, this is an incredibly difficult struggle for it seems to mean abandoning the one thing that finally gave them a sense of who they are.

Lifestyle

Other times homosexuality is more of a social and political statement, in which a homosexual person embraces a lifestyle that is supportive of homosexuality.

Embracing a lifestyle involves surrounding themselves with a supportive gay subculture. They may surround themselves with gay friends; work at a gay establishment, frequent gay bars or nightclubs, etc. With this gay lifestyle intact, the person feels less alone. They have a sense of belonging.

When asking a homosexual to come to Christ, in most cases you are asking them to give up their sense of identity and leave a vast support system behind. They face being treated as traitors to the very people who loved and accepted and embraced them. And they are trading that for a completely foreign and unknown support system that they may or may not find in the Christian community.

Understanding the challenge of giving up a hard-fought identity and vast support system should help the church to know that much encouragement, fellowship and support needs to be provided by the church. Will the person’s new identity take root and flourish in the community of believers or will they feel abandoned by their old friends in the gay community and rejected and misunderstood by the new brothers and sisters in Christ?

ADDITIONAL ESSAYS

There are three more essays that follow this one. They are provided as separate documents.

Essay #2 - [Homosexuality and the Church](#). This essay discusses why the church must speak and minister into the lives of people affected by homosexuality.

Essay #3 - [God’s Work To Redeem And Transform People Involved In Homosexuality](#). This essay discusses how God redeems and transforms people involved in homosexuality.

Essay #4 - [Equipping The Church To Respond With Truth And Grace](#). This essay discusses how the church can respond with God’s truth and grace.

CONCLUSION

God is calling the church to respond with His truth and grace to the men and women affected by homosexuality. Too many of us in the church reduce them to activists fighting against tradition and Biblical morality. Too many of us have hardened our hearts towards them to the point where we fail to see them as

lost people whom God wants to reclaim for His kingdom. Our calling is to reach these 155 million men and women around the world with the love of Christ (John 13:34).

Gay men and women are not excluded or exempt from His love, grace, salvation and healing. God's passion should be our passion; that none should perish but that all would have everlasting life.

God has given this responsibility to all of us. We believe and have every confidence in the church's ability, through Christ, to win homosexual men and women to Christ. We are all in this work together, through Christ, fulfilling the Great Commission. God has given us all that we need in order to reach people with the good news of God's kingdom and heal those who need healing. May God equip us all to respond with God's truth and grace so that men and women involved in homosexuality will see and know that God loves them and wants to reclaim them for His kingdom.

Exodus Global Alliance

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