

Starting to Talk

Detailed Outline

Part 2 of 3

Introduction

We need to talk more about these issues because Scripture does.

III. Common Questions Regarding Homosexuality

A. Why do we focus on the sin of homosexuality so much, and treat it as more serious in comparison to other sins?

1 Corinthians 6 helps frame this discussion. There was all sorts of sexual immorality going on in Corinth, and Paul was speaking the gospel into their situation.

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Cor. 6:18–20)

Sexual immorality is not a worse sin, but it's a unique sin.

The other reason we need to deal with this is that our culture is making it a priority. There is a continued celebration of same-sex relationships in politics, in the media, and in our communities—embracing same-sex relationships as normative and good. Man says it is good, but God says otherwise. We need to stand up and speak truth about this matter. We need to be able to respond with the gospel.

B. Should Christians attend/support a gay marriage?

These are important questions now that gay marriage is a legal reality in America. But let me take a step back and recognize this: if you do get invited to the wedding of a gay couple, you're doing something right. That individual considers you a friend. You're developing a relationship, a connection with people in your community—and that's a good thing.

The man who works at the coffee shop I go to is in a same-sex relationship. I am thankful for the friendship I have with him. Do I agree with him? No. but I want to

engage with that friendship. How will people hear the gospel if all we do is step to the other side?

That being said, if my friend were to enter into a same-sex marriage and send me an invitation to the wedding, I myself would choose not to attend.

When Paul talks about marriage between believers and unbelievers in 2 Corinthians 6, he prohibits it—but he still considers it a marriage by definition. When we talk about same-sex marriage, we are talking about something outside of the God-given standard of what marriage is. Even when the government says it's okay, we have an authority that says otherwise.

Going to a wedding is not a spectator sport. One of the things I always say to the audience when I officiate weddings is, "You are not just sitting here watching this. You are here to help them keep this covenant. You are coming to this wedding not as a spectator, but as a participant." My attendance at a wedding is a willing cooperation with what's happening there. In good conscience I cannot support a same-sex marriage.

Yet, while I won't go to the wedding, I will still hang out with them afterwards. Some people think that's hypocritical. But I realize the couple has already made their decision, and if I can continue to have a relationship with them, I'm going to do everything I can.

I realize by not going to the wedding, I'm going to offend my friend. But by getting an invitation, I've done something right—and by remaining friends afterwards, I'm going to continue to encourage them to seek the truth of what marriage should be.

This is not as black and white as we'd like it to be. But to me, going to the wedding is a declaration of my support of it, and I don't think I can do that. But don't let your "no" be the end of it. Even when they're in a relationship that God does not sanction—listen, that's my relationship with every unbeliever! Every unbeliever is outside of God's standard. Does that mean I should step away from them? No! It means I should have lunch with them. It means I should share the gospel with them in whatever means I can.

Now, if you're a florist, a baker, a service provider, should you provide services to a homosexual couple who wants to use you for their wedding? Again, I don't think there's an easy answer. This is my personal opinion—I have yet to find the verse that says "Thou shalt not bake cakes for homosexuals"—but I don't think in good conscience I can support that wedding by providing services. You aren't just baking a cake. Say someone comes into a hardware store that you own, and they ask you to sell them a crowbar so they can break into someone's house. Should you sell him the crowbar? I don't think you should. When you are given knowledge about why they are trying to procure your services, you have a Christian responsibility—given the ethics and worldview you

have—to respond in like manner. Hopefully we can say no with love. Hopefully we can speak the truth in love. We can have conviction AND compassion.

C. How should Christians respond to a government that is moving to provide legal support to the LGBT community?

Our government is going to continue to support this, and it will continue to filter down into everyday life. States have already passed aggressive legislation regarding teaching children about sexual orientation in kindergarten. That legislation will become even more part of our culture as we continue down this road.

On one level, we should support legislation that honors God’s vision of marriage. On the other side, we should be against legislation that seems to criminalize same-sex relationships. For example, the government of Uganda is criminalizing same-sex relationships and imprisoning, torturing, and even executing those who identify as homosexuals. That is not something we should support. That is government overreach that we as Christians should stand against.

Acts 5:40–41 helps me think through this:

They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

So here’s what I think is going to happen more and more in our culture. The government is going to continue to push this. Tolerance no longer means agreeing to disagree. It now means “This is how it is, and if you disagree, you’re a bigot.” We need to continue to preach the gospel and its effect on sexuality. It’s going to get harder. But is that really bad? We live in a unique situation in North America where we’ve been given a lot of freedom without much persecution. If that were to change, would we be willing to have the same attitude as the believers in Acts 5? Their response was not “How dare the government do this to us?” They rejoiced!

In the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus told the disciples they would be persecuted. I think when the persecution finally happened, they rejoiced because it gave even greater soil for the gospel. I believe this is going to be more of an issue for us. We may have to deal with persecution in our jobs, our communities, our families. Rejoice—because it gives you an opportunity to preach the gospel even more clearly. Christians in persecuted countries aren’t praying for the persecution to stop; they’re praying to be faithful in the persecution.

It's going to get harder, but that's okay. Light shines brighter in the darkness. So let's look at it as an opportunity rather than a threat.

D. How do we show compassion, but still communicate the holy standards of God in relation to sexuality?

We have to have a very clear standard of what marriage and sexuality is: a covenant between one man and one woman for life. Sex is to be enjoyed within that covenant. Anything outside of that—adultery or homosexuality or fornication—is against God's holy standard.

At the same time, we have to develop conviction. People say, "Jesus was more compassionate. He didn't speak against homosexuality." I realized that in all four gospels, Jesus never makes any mention of homosexuality. But there are two problems with that: one, it's an argument from silence. Just because he said nothing about it doesn't mean he supports it. In Matthew 5, Jesus mentions sexual immorality, using the word *pornea*, from which we get "pornography." It encompasses fornication, adultery, and same-sex relationships that are talked about in the Levitical code. So though he didn't talk specifically about homosexuality, he did say a lot in support of what marriage is. And yet he is an example of compassion: to the adulterous woman he said, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." He gives her encouragement while still holding her to a standard: "Go and sin no more."

We are called to have ethics in the area of sexual morality. In 1 Peter 2, we are told, "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

But later in the next chapter, Peter writes, "... but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you

Are people asking you your convictions, or are you just telling them your convictions? Your life should reflect the glory of God so that people come to you and ask, "Why?" They have to see it, not just hear it. They DO need to hear the gospel—it's not enough to just see it—but we should demonstrate it by our lives.

E. Are people born gay?

This is a big debate. There's been a lot of study on this: twin studies, DNA, finger length, hormonal changes. A lot of research is trying to find a link between biology and behavior. Most people I've worked with who struggle with same-sex attraction say that

from the earliest moments of their lives, this is how they've always felt. They felt these urges early on in life.

To date, while there's a lot of research, there's no biological causation linking biology to behavior. There are only theories and speculations. If tomorrow's front-page news announced definitive biological causation—"the gay gene"—I would still say we have to hold to God's standard. Here's why: biology is not authority. God's Word is. My genes are not my destiny. There are things I do that could be traced to biological rationales, but that doesn't mean the behavior is okay—especially when God's Word says "no."

F. What is the connection between pornography and homosexuality?

[Answered in discussion groups]

G. Can an individual be both gay and Christian?

Many recent books are trying to say, "Yes, you can be a committed follower of Jesus Christ AND be involved in a same-sex, monogamous relationship." A lot of Christians are trying to advocate for this now.

My answer is yes and no. If what you mean by those terms is, "Can a person who loves and follows Jesus struggle with same-sex attraction and in that sense be gay?" Yes. Can you be a Christian and have heterosexual temptations, greed, other temptations of the flesh—yet still be a follower of Jesus? Yes. The difference comes in when you decide what to do with those temptations.

1 Corinthians 6:9–10 says, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

When someone goes from saying, "This is the struggle I have" to, "This is who I am, and I embrace this identity and behavior—and I love Jesus," I would argue that's like saying "I love stealing. I am a stealer. And I love Jesus."

You may struggle, but you can still seek sanctification and holiness.

H. How do we help Christians who are struggling with same-sex attractions?

[Answered in discussion groups]