

## Homosexuality in the Church

It was big news back in 2001 when the Episcopal Church elected an openly homosexual priest to the position of Bishop. It's still in the news once in a while ... it's like seeing The Exodus in reverse ... poor, precious people led in exactly the wrong direction. Only a god of one's own invention approves conduct contrary to truth.

At the same time we know that as God's children, we need to recognize that homosexuals are God's creation and need our love as much as anyone else. We all need the love He has given to us in Jesus Christ. But in the case of our relationship with homosexual individuals how exactly is that going to be practiced? That's a tough issue, and I can guarantee we are not going to exhaust the subject in the next few paragraphs.

To begin with, we should make sure when we say "love" we don't really mean approval. We must make a distinction here: love and approval. Living in a democracy, we are encouraged to be approving of one another, whatever that person happens to be doing. Some states have laws against sodomy, but the prevailing attitude these days is when it comes to sexual practices, do whatever you want in the privacy of your own bedroom just as long as no one is hurt. That suggests a question: Is there an absolute truth? Might there be a moral standard that applies, even if you are in the privacy of your home and no one is being hurt? Historically, Christians have said, "Yes there is."

Most folks in the United States and Canada historically have identified with the Christian religion. That is not to say these are Christian countries. By law they are not. We have been oriented that way and that means historically most of us have been conformed toward the Bible.

The Bible has some very clear statements on this and here is just one, an extremely difficult passage. 1 Corinthians 6: 9 and 10: ***"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders will inherit the Kingdom of God."*** The homosexual who might read this is offended by that. Also, loving family members who have a homosexual in the family circle, have to be torn apart by hearing a strong passage like that. But this is the conflict a Bible-believing Christian faces. How do I love a practicing homosexual and yet stay true to what God has told me about how to live life in His Word? This issue today is being framed in such a way that it is really asking us to choose between love and truth as if they were mutually exclusive.

One of the fascinating things about studying the Bible, and therefore studying about God, is that God cannot be divided. He is one whole, undivided God---meaning the truth of God and the love of God are in harmony with one another. We as Christians have to study those Scriptures and find a way through this thorny issue in which love and truth are harmonious and not compromised.

In this day and age the issue of homosexuality is significant for many people, and it tears at the hearts of people. We want to approach this subject understanding how volatile it can be. Quoting the Bible produces a number of results. In Bible-believing Christians, it has a strong impact. But in folks who are caught up in this lifestyle, it may produce a number of reactions. One is anger---anger at God, anger at Christians. It may produce a rejection of the Bible and the church. These days we are seeing something new rather than rejecting the church. People are changing the rules. In the name of inclusiveness and love we find some ministers performing marriage ceremonies for two homosexual people. There is another reaction that occurs in some people who practice the homosexual lifestyle, and that is guilt and hopelessness. They come to realize they are guilty. They have hurt themselves, hurt others and if they become ill and are facing death, despair rules their hearts.

Often homosexuals will say they were born that way, implying God created them that way and intends for them to be homosexuals. I don't know if that's true. I've heard it both ways. I do know the Bible tells us we are all born with original sin. Before we've even committed an actual sin, we are sinners from our conception. That tells me that even if we are born this way, it's not necessarily God-pleasing.

The question then remains: what can Bible-believing Christians do when confronted with this issue? The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, published in 1999 a plan for ministry to homosexuals and their families. It lists six goals.

The first goal is to confront the individual with his/her sinfulness and call him or her to repentance.

However, before that happens, some other things should happen. You want to build a relationship with this person, and be a genuine friend.

Secondly, before you go to someone about God, go to God about that person. Pray about this long before you ever raise the subject. Next it's important to assure the repentant sinner of forgiveness in Christ.

Goal #3, according to this helpful plan for ministry, is to help the individual rely on Christ's love and strength, and to abstain from homosexual behavior. The act of repentance really has three parts. One is confessing your sin, whatever that sin happens to be. Secondly, look wholly to the cross of Christ for forgiveness. But third, something we often forget. Because of gratitude to God for saving you, seek to live according to His Word. And in this case, that means abstaining from practicing homosexuality. In truth, we can fill in the blank here - whatever the offense, repentance applies for all. As heart shattering as this issue is, homosexuality is not an unforgivable sin. There is forgiveness with Him, says the psalmist; that He may be feared. Feared here means respect and reverence.

The fourth goal of ministry to the homosexual is to assure this person of the acceptance of the church, whatever the sin might happen to be. People certainly don't want to go into a church where they're going to be clobbered over the head for something they've done wrong. It may be wrong, and they need to hear it, but we all want to be accepted. The church needs to remember that Christ died for all.

The next goal is to help the individual bear his or her burden without fear of recrimination and rejection by his or her sisters and brothers in Christ. It's not enough simply to get that person to say "I've sinned and I trust now in Jesus for forgiveness." We have to walk with them all the way. St. Paul told the Galatian Christians, bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. The law of Christ is the law of love.

The sixth and final goal is to keep ministering. Keep serving homosexuals and their families. They should be on our prayer lists; they should be on our care lists all the time. Again, that's what Christ would have us do for Him.

That's the View from Here

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