

You Christians are anti-gay

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[0 : 00] Now the text that we read, this is 1 Peter chapter 3, says, Do not fear what they fear, but in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience.

So this is about the questions that come up, perhaps in conversation, perhaps somebody asks you a question or in effect asks you a question, and Peter's writing to all the Christians there, and he said, We all ought to be able to give an answer.

And I summarized it to say that to save other people, God is pleased to use people like us for his glorious work. So that's an encouragement that we don't have to be, don't have a PhD, we don't have to have been to Bible college.

If we're Christians, we ought to be able to say something, and God is prepared to use those things that we say. Now the question that we said we'd look at this evening is this one.

[1 : 24] So somebody says, Your God is anti-gay, or you Christians are anti-gay.

So that's, in some shape or form, a question that might be asked, or a comment that might be made. And what I'm going to look at this evening is, what would we say?

I don't think it's a right criticism. I don't think it is true that God is anti-gay, or that Christians are anti-gay. But how do we answer it?

Now, how might this be said? Now it might be said, aggressively, you can see I wasn't sure how many G's to put in aggressively. It might be said aggressively, you know, You Christians, you're anti-gay.

It might be said by people who are explicitly pro-gay. That's one of the things that they push.

[2 : 29] So they might be pro-gay. They might be part of the LGBT lobby. That's all those sort of lumping all together. It is lumped together under that heading.

And, for example, some of the members of the Green Party, I think, would see themselves as taking that sort of position.

That they would say they are committed to, quite strongly committed to, what we might perceive as a gay agenda.

And you remember when all the fuss about Christina Summers blew up, there were some people in the Green Party who, in their blogs and in their writing, were very forceful against Christina and against Christians.

My implication. And interestingly, at some point, I did a sermon about issues of homosexuality. And I think I did it quite carefully.

[3 : 36] And yet, if you look in the Regency magazine, if you look in the back copies of the Regency magazine, somebody trawled through our website and found that sermon. It's the only sermon I've ever preached on homosexuality.

And it was very critical of the treatment that I gave. And said that it was cherry-picking texts and dealing with them in an unbalanced way.

I think the person who wrote that had their own agenda. But anyway, so there we are. Now, not only from people who are aggressively pro-gay, but you might find something similar being said by what I put down as fair-minded non-Christians.

So they might say, I've got a problem with you Christians because you seem to be anti-gay. Let's put it that way. It's a little bit more polite, a little bit more muted. But I can think of somebody who said, I want to go to church, I'd like to go to church, but my girlfriend has a real problem with the way that Christians come across regarding gay issues.

Okay? Now, I can go a little bit further and say we might even meet that sort of statement from fair-minded people who are Christians.

[4 : 55] So within the large umbrella which contains Christian, there might be people who say something like that.

You know, the church has got it wrong traditionally and we should apologize. And I've put including with a question mark evangelicals.

Evangelical means a particular strand within Christianity, a particular section of Christianity which lays emphasis on the Bible.

And even within people who say that they believe the Bible, there will be some who say, you know, the church has got it wrong. And I've put one other group of people from whom one might hear this, which would be family members.

And for the last 30 or 40 years within the church or within the church family, some connection or another, time to time people have come and said to me, this is something that's arisen within my family, you know, son, nephew, uncle, auntie, whatever.

[6 : 12] So, actually many of us might come across a question like this. Okay. Now then, answers.

You may remember if you were here previously, I said there are two sorts of answer. And type A is the one liner.

So, if you can think of a one line short reply, that is often the thing that we need. We don't always have time for a long conversation.

We just need a quick answer. And we saw that Jesus was really, really good at this. He got into situations where people came at him, they weren't particularly interested in really knowing what he said, they just came at him with a question.

And Jesus was brilliant, brilliant at coming back with one line or just a sentence or a couple of sentences, bang. And he was able to reply to the question in a fair way, but it just hit the nail on the head quickly.

[7 : 24] Now there's that sort of answer, and there's type B, a longer, careful, nuanced answer. Don't always get the opportunity to give that, a longer answer, a careful answer.

The word nuanced, I'm taking to mean, where you might, something is so complicated, you might have to say, there is this to take into account, there is that to take into account, there is also something else to take into account, but the situation might be different if, or something like that. So there are shades of, I say maybe shades of grey in some situations, that it's quite difficult to explain unless you sit down and take time to do so.

And what I've been aiming to do in these Sunday evenings is give answer type A. That's really what I want to look at this evening, a quick answer.

Now having said that, let's look briefly at what might be relevant to a type B answer, a longer answer.

[8 : 40] So I put a few sort of bullet points here. They're bullet points without the bullet. So let me say answer, in terms of answer B, here's one thing.

the Bible, if you read the Bible, you will find, I think you will agree with me, that it does not have chapter after chapter and book after book constantly harping on about same sex sex.

Those of you who have read the Bible, I know some of you have read the Bible lots of times, would you agree with me, that that is not a constant theme in the Bible? Would you agree? Yeah. So people might have, if people haven't read the Bible, might have the impression that that's all that Christians believe or all that the Bible's on about, and the answer to that, or one part of the answer to that, is it really is not a major theme in the Bible.

The Bible is not always going on about homosexuality. I'll tell you what it is constantly on about. The Bible is constantly pro-marriage.

That is a big theme in the Bible, and as you will have noticed from our songs, that one of the fundamental things in the Bible, that's to say the relationship between Christ and the church, is regularly portrayed as a marriage relationship.

[10 : 14] And I think that's very significant because God is saying, if you want to understand what Christianity is about, here is one very good way to understand it. It is like marriage, like a man and a woman, two unlike creatures.

Don't want to over emphasize the unlikeness, things, but I would ask you to reflect on your own experience, and do not think that actually men and women are somewhat unlike.

So two unlike entities, Jesus and his church are unlike, and yet they're joined together. And it's a remarkable thing, if you've ever tried to work through a relationship between husband and wife, it takes quite a bit of doing actually, because there's a wonderful complementarity, the two fit together, and yet the two are unlike, and sometimes you have to work that through. It's a bit of a miracle in itself. And the Bible says, take that idea, and then please understand that's how it is with Jesus Christ and the church.

Christ and his church, two unlike things, yet here's the miracle that by God's grace they're joined together. And the qualities of marriage, things like faithfulness, things like exclusivity, things like permanence, things like intimacy, all those things of human marriage, that's how to think of Christ and the church.

[12:07] And that runs its way right the way through the Bible, and you think, well hold on, Jesus isn't in the Old Testament, which that's correct, but the relationship between God, between Yahweh, the God of the Bible, the God of the Old Testament, and his people, is often described like a marriage.

In fact, the Old Covenant is likened to a marriage, the Old Covenant being that part of the Bible, all of that. And departure from God, departure from faith, is likened to cheating in a marriage, going off with another woman.

Okay, so the Bible is not constantly anti-same sex sex, but it is very strongly pro-marriage. And the Bible assumes regularly that the Bible is pro-sexual activity, but it is always understood that sexual activity is only within marriage.

So if you like, that's the positive constant theme. So if you like, you could say that one thing the Bible is against is anti-secret sex, in the sense that it's between two people who have never made a public commitment.

It's against promiscuous sex, because sex is meant to be exclusive and permanent. And it's against uncovenanted sex. A covenant is when you make a commitment and a promise.

[13:51] So if you want to say, let me just, at the risk of repeating myself, it isn't constantly going on about homosexuality, but by implication and actually explicitly, it is against sex outside marriage, whether it is, you know, whatever sex it is.

So that's bullet point number one. Does that make sense? Yes. Yes. Yes. Now let's look at two texts in Leviticus.

These come up from time to time, and I'm only going to deal with them very quickly. I'm not giving a proper answer B.

But these would be referred to, Leviticus 18.22, and I'm not cherry picking these, I'm simply saying that there are relatively few references in the Old Testament, explicit references to homosexuality, and these are they.

So Leviticus 18.22 says, do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman, that is detestable.

[15:19] And it's in a context of quite a lot of things. If you look in Leviticus 18, you'll see that the translators in the New International Version have put a heading Unlawful Sexual Relations.

The book of Leviticus is about order. It's about the things that are right in order, compared with the things that are wrong in order. The book of Leviticus is saying that the universe is an ordered universe, particularly the universe of relationships and of humanity has order to it.

And what Leviticus is against is a contravening of that order. And it flags that up in various ways.

And some of the ways in the New Testament are unnecessary to flag up again.

And they fall away. And so you will probably be told that in Leviticus we're forbidden to eat shellfish. Well, we're forbidden to eat all sorts of food that would be ceremonially unclean.

And people would say, OK, so that means the whole of the book of Leviticus is obsolete. And I say, I don't think that is a correct way of handling the material in Leviticus.

[16:42] Anyway, Leviticus 18.22, this is something that is out of the natural order. It's forbidden, and a strong word is used, it's detestable.

And I just, there's the reference, and I'm not going to take that any further. In Leviticus 20, verse 13, it says, 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. That's the verse, I'm not reading all the other verses surrounding it, but you're very welcome to do so.

I simply make the point here that it's not talking about rape. It might, you might be, you might, or it might be said, ah, what's being criticised here is not that you've got two like sex people having sex. It says the point is it is being forced on one of them unwillingly. That's the problem. Now I'm going to say having sex forced on anyone unwillingly is wrong. That's not what's being pointed out here because if you see it says both of them have done what is detestable.

[18:03] Both of them are put to death. Their blood will be on their own heads. So in Leviticus what is being criticised here is not something that was done unwillingly to a victim.

It says both of them were willing in this and it does in fact carry the death penalty. So I'm just going to pass over that and say that what have I put on there?

There's a strong word used for what is wrong here abomination or detestable and if we were to look at it more closely I think we could make a very strong case that it's not wrong accidentally or it's not wrong in some way which is going to be obsolete when Jesus comes.

I think it's more profound than that. He's looking at the order between the sexes and saying that marriage between unlike woman and man is the norm and this does not fit in with that norm.

There are two other classic texts which I will refer to briefly. One is in the book of Romans so we've gone thousands of years ahead. As you know the Bible spans hundreds and thousands of years so we've gone from the Old Testament into the New Testament.

[19:35] This is Romans chapter one and the letter to the Romans is written by the Apostle Paul. He's setting out I think we could say the basic things that he believes and preaches the way he sees things what he says to people.

In Romans 1 verse 24 or actually we start in verse 21 he talks about humanity in its the human condition for although they knew God they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened although they claimed to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles and there's a sin mentioned there anybody like to say what the sin is or sins idolatry yep and before idolatry because the idolatry God hands people over to what what comes before the idolatry yeah ignoring God yeah failing to glorify God and failing to thank him now in fact those are the profound sins and there's a sort of avalanche of things that follows on from that but that's where the avalanche starts they knew God they were irreverent to God they didn't glorify him and they didn't thank him now that's the in the way Romans talks those are the foundational sins irreverence and ingratitude and God says if you're going to treat me like that if you're going to push me away then I will I will I will give you I will let you see what that how that works out I will hand you over to do the things that you think are best and see what a mess it makes and this is how it goes on verse 24 therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the dishonoring of their bodies with one another he's saying that sexual muddle and confusion and ignobility things that are not noble comes as God hands humanity over he says if you don't want me then I'll stand back from you see what sort of a mess you get into they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the creator who is forever praised because of this

God gave them over to shameful lusts even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones 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 wandering is probably a better translation their error so Paul does mention homosexuality here he is not saying this is the great sin all sin this is the problem with your society homosexuality what he says the problem with your society is ingratitude and irreverence and if you want to see what where this is flagged up in your society see what muddle and mess happens to sexual behaviour the fundamental sin is refusal and irreverence and ingratitude and what he is saying about homosexuality is iconic it sort of particularly shows if people don't want

God who is other they want created things which are or less the same as themselves God says ok well let's see how that works out in sexual life instead of this capacity and the nobility of two unlike creatures joining together man and woman you'll see that same link up together and one other text which is in 1 Corinthians 6 9 to 11 where Paul is talking to Christians so we're still in the New Testament still with the same writer Paul he's now talking to his church members 1 Corinthians 6 verses 9 to 11 and he's well this is what he says do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God do not be deceived so he's saying you can't be a

[25 : 05] Christian if you carry on like this neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God and that is what some of you were but you were washed you were sanctified you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God well I won't go through all of that because there's some long words there which need explanation but he is saying he's got a list of things and he says you can't carry on being that and doing that if you're a Christian and he doesn't just single out homosexuality he does mention it he includes I presume all sorts of sexual immorality so heterosexual promiscuity or sex outside marriage and he includes idolaters he includes adulterers he says thieves and greedy people and drunkards slanderers and swindlers so again he's not singling out he's not just being anti-gay but he does say you can't continue that way and in particular he seems to say your identity changes and with homosexuality it would appear that people feel very strongly this is who they are and that's what people says that's what some of you were that's what some of you were but in

Christ there is deeply and powerfully a new identity and again I'm not trying to give a full answer to this I'm just giving some bullet points let's give another bullet point here there's a difference I think we should understand between inclination and temptation and actual sin of mind or body so if you are a heterosexual you are you might be tempted sexually towards the opposite sex so you might be inclined to admire like members of the opposite sex and there's nothing wrong with that inclination you might it might go further you might be tempted to behave improperly towards the opposite sex temptation is different from sin temptation might lead to sin but being tempted isn't sin from temptation there may be actual sin be it of the mind or be it of the body and I simply point that out because that is true for heterosexual people as homosexual people so there has been in the

Christian publishing world a number of prominent Christian ministers who have said I think with great courage but with integrity and consistency that for them and it has been this way since their teenage years or even younger their inclination is that they admire and are attracted to people of the same sex that's an inclination temptation they may or may not want that it might lead to temptation it might lead to actual sin but the Christian ministers I'm referring to say please understand this is not something I've ever made into an actual sin and I'm not intending to but you're tempted with some things and this is the thing that I'm tempted with so I'm just asking that we should understand that situation and I think

I'll stop doing my bullet points there because it's so that's the thing that I'm not going to talk about because that was answer B so let's talk about answer A the one liners so you don't have time to go through all that with a one liner so somebody says so I went down to the open market some years ago now said who I was come round to visit you and the gentleman said I'm a homosexual you're against me aren't you so what do I say I'll tell you what I did say I said we're all sinners shake a hand nice to see you I'll come back another time now you had a good one liner didn't you didn't you yes tell us what you said and why under what circumstances you said it that that word gave me and one day he came up to me and said your god doesn't like us and I said my God died he gave his son and at the time I thought well, so that's got to be that wouldn't be something that would naturally come out it's a fact

Jesus died I think I put that down but I couldn't get it into one line God sent his son to die for you I think we can say that there's a sort of theological nuance that we might like to put to it if we had time but I put God sent his son to die for straight people and gay people, for murderers and selfish people for bankers and terrorists and you can, counsellors and MPs and drug users and you just the list is whatever humanity contains those are the two one-liners that I could think of I'll tell you why I think they're important and then see what you think I think the idea of sin we should not let people think that God singles out gay people and says you're sinners and everybody else isn't because the whole point of being a Christian is to say

[32 : 41] I'm a sinner I'm not a Christian because I'm good I'm a Christian because I know I'm a sinner and I need Jesus Christ to die for my sins and if there's any way we can put that across that needs to be put across and that's the second answer is about God's attitude to sinners God is not saying well I like you but I don't like you and I feel rather at home with you but I don't feel at home with you God is saying you're all as bad as one another you're all all of you from you know the king and queen if you want to take a Victorian hierarchy to whatever all sinners and Christ died for all sorts of people and God's attitude is not that some of you are rather nice but you're all sinners and

I am moving out to everyone in love because Christ died for all sorts of people and just trying to just repeating myself aren't I but that the cross is there for everyone and nobody should think that they're so bad that the cross isn't for them and nobody should think that they're rather good so that the cross isn't for them you see my point on that okay I'm going to stop there so we usually have a few minutes if anybody wants to ask a question or has any observations to make I don't intend to draw this out till everybody collapses in sleep so any thoughts and questions so the question is what we might say to the comments some people are born with an inclination and attraction towards the same sex anybody got any answers to that yeah well yeah we're all tempted to some wrongdoing so if people are born with a heterosexual inclination it doesn't mean that they're therefore excused as it were to have sex with anybody they want to that would be sin too yes yes he did yes that's right thank you yeah

I mean there was a thought that there was such thing as a gay gene wasn't there but I don't think anybody realistically ever has ever found such a thing I wouldn't want to contradict somebody who said I've always felt this way we had a Christian chap come speak whenever it was October was it who said that he'd felt that way from a child I just don't think that saying this is the way I feel can ever say therefore I can act according or I'm excused in acting according to the way I feel because that's not right is it we can feel such and such a way doesn't mean that we have to act that way no okay I don't think the Bible is particularly clear or definite on that

I wouldn't be I wouldn't find it strange that people might be born with a particular weakness for a particular sort of sin so some people are born because they're very capable with the weakness or the inclination for power and they find it within their capacities to control other people and to get their own way but to be born with that capacity and inclination I still think is not an excuse for that you just do whatever you're inclined to do I think we're all born with different sorts of temptation aren't we I mean our makeup inclines us to different temptations I mean selfishness for example we're all born selfish aren't we anybody here not born selfish

I wish I could think of a quick answer to that but for the sake of the recording somebody put up their hand and said they weren't born selfish I think we're all born selfish but that is not an excuse for acting selfishly is it no no sorts of ways that's part of the pickle that we're in that's why we need such a mighty saviour and can I just say one other thing I think it's so important that we treat everybody as people people are made in the image of God therefore they are valuable in themselves whatever sin they may or may not be involved in and I think it's also important that we stand up for the rights of people to be treated as people there is no excuse for anybody to be victimised insulted belittled for whatever it is and we should stand up that that shouldn't be the case so it's very important that we treat people as people and people for whom who are made in the image of God and potentially for whom

[38 : 44] Christ died I'll stop there shall we stop there