

Is God homophobic?

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Date: 07 February 2016

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is on page 1149 of the Bibles. That's 1 Corinthians chapter 6 verses 1 to 11.

1 Corinthians chapter 6 verses 1 to 11. When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?

Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels?

How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life? So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame.

Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?

[1 : 12] To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?

But you yourselves wrong and defraud, even your own brothers. Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolers, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers who inherit the kingdom of God.

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.

I wonder if you read this newspaper headline before Christmas. You won't be able to see the print, but let me read it to you. Reverend Welcomes Murderers, Pimps, and Prostitutes to Services to Grow the Flock.

[2 : 27] Now the article, I won't tell you which newspaper it was in, but the article clearly felt this was beyond the pale, patronizingly describing the vicar as trendy, creative, wacky, and unorthodox.

If you are a vicar, by the way, you never want to be described as any of those things. But you see, it begs the question, I think, what kind of people could you expect, should you expect in church?

What sort of people are welcome in church? I've given this talk the title, Is God Homophobic? Which may seem slightly odd, perhaps, having listened to this reading from 1 Corinthians 6, which is mostly about lawsuits between Christians.

So I put the structure of the verses just on the outline on the back of the service sheet there, where you'll see we have in verses 1 to 8 the specific situation of Christians suing one another, it seems, taking lawsuits out against one another.

But then notice in verses 9 to 11, having focused on the specific situation in verses 9 onwards, he then broadens that out in verses 9 to 11 to look at a general principle.

[3 : 36] And so what I want to do this morning, having focused, I guess, most of this in our growth groups, probably more on the specific situation of verses 1 to 8, I want us to focus this morning now on the general principle.

So let me just read again verses 9 and 10. 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?

Now we've seen throughout our series in 1 Corinthians that the church in Corinth was a worldly church, arrogant, proud, chapter 5, verse 2, and you are arrogant, chapter 5, verse 6, your boasting is not good, proud of their knowledge, proud of their gifts, in danger of drifting away from their founding apostle, Paul.

One writer puts it like this, the Corinthians were simply trying to be Christians with a minimal amount of social and theological disturbance.

In other words, you see, they don't want to swim against the tide, against the cultural and social tide in Corinth. And so in a whole host of ways, they have uncritically accepted the cultural and social values of the society in which they live.

[5 : 08] And what is outside the church has found itself inside the church and become normal. And that is always going to be the danger for any church in any culture.

I take it that very few of us enjoy swimming against the cultural tide. It's why, sadly, many churches and many denominations have abandoned the teaching of the Bible on same-sex relationships, while others are accused of being homophobic.

So I put two headings there on the outline, which hopefully will help us this morning. First of all, the unrighteous won't inherit the kingdom of God.

Now that phrase, the kingdom of God, means the rule of Jesus. There is no place for the lifestyles that Paul mentions there in verses 9 and 10, if you are claiming to live under the rule of Jesus Christ.

There must be a genuine repentance, a genuine turning away from those things as part of a turning to Jesus.

[6 : 20] But notice, really, that Paul is not hung up on sex, nor is he hung up on homosexuality as single issues. Notice there's a whole list here of other lifestyle behaviors in verses 9 and 10.

Did you notice that as we read the verses just now? So yes, he mentions sexual immorality, which always refers in the Bible to any physical sexual arousal of an individual I'm not married to.

That could be face-to-face, it could be online. He mentions idolatry, which is when we give a created thing or another person the position in our lives that is rightly God's alone.

It could be a possession, it could be football, it could be career or any number of things. Adultery refers to those who engage in sexual immorality with another person when one of them is married.

But Paul also mentions theft. He talks about reviling, the intentional damage done to another person by what I say. He talks about swindling, financial wrongdoing, fraud.

[7 : 33] Indeed, it may well be that the lawsuits in verses 1 to 8, it may well be that financial irregularities, fraud or perhaps slander, were the very things which were causing those lawsuits.

Now my assumption is that every single one of us in this room this morning with a list like this will struggle in at least one of these areas.

So notice really that Paul is talking here about actions, behaviours and lifestyles. He is talking about the person who has homosexual practice, not homosexual attraction.

Notice these verses are not about those who fall into these sins and are repentant. Rather, he is talking about those whose lives are characterised by these things.

They are ongoing. It's part of their lifestyle. They are unrepentant. In other words, you and I must never imply that homosexuality is the sin of our age.

[8 : 43] Because theft, greed, pornography, drunkenness, reviling and defrauding, many of which of course are completely trivialised in our culture, are equally sinful.

Nonetheless, homosexual practice is wrong. It is in this list. Notice really the Bible is completely consistent on this.

In the Old Testament, I put a couple of verses from Leviticus on the outline. Leviticus verse 18, chapter 18 verse 22. You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.

Leviticus 20 verse 13. If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. Indeed, the very words that Paul uses here in 1 Corinthians 6 are the same words which Leviticus uses, suggesting that he is referring back in his thinking, in his mind's eye, to those original Leviticus prohibitions.

What's more, the Lord Jesus himself, when asked about marriage, he reaffirmed the original blueprint of marriage and for marriage, which we see in Genesis chapter 2.

[9 : 56] So in Matthew chapter 19, Jesus says, Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female? And said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

That is the blueprint for marriage. We see it in Genesis at the beginning of the Bible. We see it reaffirmed by the Lord Jesus. It is a lifelong partnership between two people of the opposite sex.

Now to say this is not to be homophobic. A phobia, I hope we're clear on this, is a fear. Arachnophobia is the fear of spiders.

Phobias are often irrational. So it's a clever label, isn't it, to use. But as Christians, we need to insist we are not homophobic.

We don't fear homosexuality. We don't fear the gay community. But we need equally to say, if we are to submit to the authority of God in his word, we need equally to say that homosexual practice is wrong.

[11 : 11] To say that is not to be a bigot. You may remember back in November, the BBC radio presenter, who in the context of a discussion on these very verses, in 1 Corinthians 6, verses 9 to 11, accused a Christian lawyer of being a bigot because she said the Bible is the word of God.

So let's consider, shall we, three objections. And I've put them there on the outline, on the handout. First of all, times have changed. Surely we can't really, in the 21st century, surely we can't take what the Bible says seriously about these things.

Just look how much society has changed. But here's the question, I think. What sort of book is the Bible? Is it simply a human book, with human wisdom and human observations, recording different people's experiences of God over time?

Or actually, is it the word of God himself, as Jesus indeed said it was? Besides, Paul's teaching would have gone against the tide in 1st century Roman culture, just as much as it does in ours.

Homosexual practice was widely accepted in the Roman world. When Paul wrote this very letter of 1 Corinthians, Nero was the Roman emperor. He had married a male eunuch with the name of Sporus, with a full wedding ceremony, and then a public procession, which took them back to the imperial palace, where Sporus lived as the emperor's wife.

[12 : 49] Now imagine just how hopelessly out of date the teaching of Paul here must have seemed, when such sexual sin was paraded so publicly by the most important man in the world at the time.

But you say, what about faithful committees, gay relationships, gay marriage even? Surely that is okay. But just think back a moment to what we saw last week in 1 Corinthians chapter 5.

Do you remember? A man who was in a sexually immoral relationship with his stepmother. Again, it's something which is expressly forbidden in the Old Testament, in Leviticus.

But there seemed to be no question, did there, in Paul's mind, about whether the couple loved each other. Paul doesn't ask about their level of commitment, their level of faithfulness, because all those things are beside the point.

The fact is, it is wrong, and should not be happening. Third objection, perhaps. Why do we have to make such a big deal out of all of this?

[13 : 57] Well, precisely because our culture and society is making a big deal out of it. And because, verse 10, have a look at it again, such will not inherit the kingdom of God, just as those whose lives are characterized by drunkenness or greed will not inherit the kingdom of God.

You see, I think it's very easy to get the impression that the church is like some stuffy West End gentleman's club, which is being dragged kicking and screaming into the 21st century.

And the club members all along are saying to each other, we don't want these kinds of people here. So, you know, first the dress code is relaxed, so you don't have to wear a suit and tie. And then the rules for talking in the drawing room are relaxed, so actually you're allowed to talk to each other over the top of the page of the Daily Telegraph.

Then the rules are relaxed even further, such that women are actually allowed in if they are accompanied by a club member who is a man. And then finally women are allowed in full rights as full members.

You know, as if the church needs to get with a program and drag itself reluctantly into the 21st century. That is the narrative, isn't it, I think, which we are constantly being fed in the media, and sadly by many in the church as well.

[15 : 16] So I want us to notice here there is far more at stake than club etiquette. The Bible does allow for disagreements on certain issues, what the Apostle Paul calls disputable matters.

So, for example, whether or not we would baptize babies. Some think babies of Christian believers should be baptized, others don't. But not on issues of first importance, where actually what is at stake is the gospel.

Hence, the application you see, what is the application of these verses? It is verse 9, do not be deceived. This is not homophobia.

It is quite the opposite. Many of us have gay friends. It is out of a deep love for them that we will say to them, look, this is what the Bible teaches.

This is what God says. Don't be deceived. That is a loving thing to say. In contrast, and I hope we're convinced of this, it is unloving.

[16 : 26] Indeed, it is a wicked thing when church leaders give their blessing to same-sex relationships, thereby shutting people out of God's kingdom.

You and I live in a society obsessed by sex, wanting to redraw the lines and redefine traditional interpretations of sex, marriage, and increasingly, gender.

That, I think, is why the perception in the media is that the church is always going on about sex. But you see, because the issues raised are gospel issues, we must speak up for the sake of the eternal salvation of others.

Don't be deceived, says Paul. How might you and I be deceived? Well, we could be deceived by our own sin. Have a look again at this list of things in verses 9 and 10.

If any of these sins characterize our lives, if we are unrepentant, then we need to be clear ourselves that we will not inherit the kingdom of God.

[17 : 36] The door of heaven will be closed. How many, I wonder, in this room here this morning, over the next 10 years, will make a complete mess of their Christian lives, indeed wreck their Christian lives, perhaps over issues of sex or money or greed or alcohol.

I guess many of us will be able to look back over the last 10 years and think of friends, sadly, who have done that. Or we may be deceived by the false teaching in churches that says times have changed, that loving homosexual relationships surely are fine.

Or we may be deceived by the cultural pressure to embrace and improve and approve of homosexual lifestyles. The unrighteous won't inherit the kingdom of God.

you and I, you see, have a choice. Will we submit to what God says in his word or will we simply go with what the culture has to say?

But secondly, the washed will inherit the kingdom of God. Verse 11. And such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God.

[19 : 02] Now let's go back to this article, Reverend Welcomes Murderers, Pimps and Prostitutes to the services to grow the church. Now what does Paul make of that? Well he says to the church in Corinth, that's what some of you were, but you are no longer.

Yes, your lives were once characterized by those lifestyles, but your lives are no longer characterized by those lifestyles. Did you notice the three words which describe everyone who has put their trust in the Lord Jesus?

Three benefits, wonderfully, that flow from his death in verse 11. First, Paul says you were washed. Through the death of Jesus Christ, our sin can be washed away such that we are clean in God's sight.

Secondly, he says you were sanctified. Through the death of Jesus Christ, we can be made holy in God's sight, set apart to serve him. Thirdly, he says you were justified.

Through the death of Jesus Christ, we are put right with God. We are made perfect in his sight both now, but also on the judgment day as well.

[20 : 08] Which means, you see, our past sins, whoever we are, need not determine our future destiny. There was a very sad interview with the actor Chris Langham recently, how he'd been abused as a child by a family friend, how he'd faced a police prosecution, and how he'd been given a 10-month prison sentence.

And he was describing how this completely not only wrecked his career, but also how it wrecked his life as well. And the interview finished, I don't have any respect, I don't have a reputation to save, I am unforgivable.

Well, it may well be that you're sitting here this morning and you think, but that is me. I am unforgivable. God would never have me.

Perhaps because you imagine the Christian message has sought your life out, and only once you've done so, God will accept you. And you know what your life is like, you know what your heart is like on the inside.

But wonderfully, you see, our past sins need not determine our future destiny. Heaven will be full of sinners, but sinners who have been washed, sanctified, and justified.

[21 : 28] How? Well, verse 11, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, through his death on the cross. We're not yet perfect, but if we have put our trust in him, then we have been declared perfect already in God's sight.

And end of verse 11, by the Spirit of our God, the Holy Spirit, who now lives in us if we put our trust in Jesus, and who is gradually transforming us and making us more like him. I always think one of the most dispiriting jobs in the world must be handing out flyers to people at tube stations at 8 o'clock on a Monday morning, when actually that is the last place people want to be.

Most people, of course, just completely ignore you or look down. They won't give you any eye contact. Even those who take a flyer, what do they do? They just kind of put it in their, they put it in their pockets, and they just carry on walking in exactly the same direction that they were before.

Now, please don't make the mistake, you see, of thinking that Christianity is like that. It is not a free ticket to heaven that I just shove in my pockets until I need it, and carry on living the life I was leading in exactly the same way before.

Because when we have put our trust in Jesus Christ, we have a new identity and a new life to lead. I wonder if you saw the very moving YouTube video last week of 15-year-old Trevor Harris, Trevor Sullivan, rather, who woke up from a heart transplant in the States.

[22 : 57] And it's wonderful to watch if you've seen it. There were just tears of joy streaming down his face. And yeah, as for the first time in months, he was able to speak unaided.

He was able to breathe unaided. In other words, he had a new life to live. Tears of joy at the new life ahead of him. Just as those who have put their trust in Jesus have a new life to live, enabled by the Spirit.

Which means the genuine Christian will demonstrate the work of the Spirit in their lives. You see, if you have to summarize what the New Testament teaches about Christian living, it is this, be who you are.

not in the sense of if you are born gay, relax, it's the way you are. But in the sense of be who you are now in Christ.

Be the real you that Jesus has now made you. God doesn't say, relax, you were born that way. He says, in Christ, you were reborn another way. Live out this new life that you've been given.

[24 : 11] It's why many Christians who experience same-sex attraction don't label themselves as gay because so often, of course, the whole gay lifestyle is implied by that.

They experience same-sex attraction but they are seeking to live out their new identity in Christ enabled by God's Spirit to do so. What shapes their identity first and foremost is they belong to Jesus.

Washed, sanctified, justified. But they will not give physical expression to those desires. So you see, what is the gospel for the gay person?

Well, it's exactly the same as it is for anyone else. All of us are sinful. We've all naturally turned our backs on God. that manifests itself in every area of our lives including our sexuality.

All of us are sexual sinners. But wonderfully, the Christian gospel is a message of forgiveness. Of Jesus who died on a cross such that we might turn back to God and be forgiven, washed, sanctified, and justified.

[25 : 26] You see, it's wonderfully inclusive, a free offer to anyone who will repent and turn from their sin and put their trust in the Lord Jesus.

This book is on the bookstore, Is God Anti-Gay? Written by Sam Albury. Let me read a paragraph from his book.

It is this message I first heard at my friend's church. The message I've tried to live in the light of in the years since. Through it all, as someone who lives with homosexuality, I've found biblical Christianity to be a wonderful source of comfort and joy.

God's word to me on this issue at times feels confusing and difficult, but it nevertheless it is deeply and profoundly good.

The gospel of Jesus is wonderful news for someone who experiences same-sex attraction. Now, I think it begs a question for us as a church.

[26 : 33] Do we have room for gay people at Grace Church Dulwich? Do we have room to love them, to understand them, to help them to understand the gospel, and to respond like anyone else in repentance and faith?

And then to be real church family to them as they seek to turn their back on their gay lifestyle and to seek out their newfound life in Christ as those who nonetheless still experience same-sex attraction.

You could say the same, couldn't you, for the thief, for the alcoholic, for the adulterer, for anyone else, I guess. I think there are significant implications here for the kind of friendships we have and the sort of church family we are.

We all naturally gravitate, don't we, to those who are like us. Our kind of age, our kind of stage in life is what we all do. But it would be a terrible thing, wouldn't it, if as a church we gave the impression that Grace Church is only for happy, fulfilled, respectable people of a particular type.

I put some more resources on the outline there at the bottom of the server sheet. Living Out is an excellent website. you can look at where various church ministers who experience same-sex attraction have put a website together, lots of questions are answered there, various testimonies.

[28 : 03] Sam Albury's book I've mentioned and Ed Shaw's book The Plausibility Problem which is our book of the term. Such an important book as we ask the question what kind of church are we as we seek to serve those with same-sex attraction.

Thank you.