

TheForum – Straight answers to straight questions Are Christians anti-gay?

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[0 : 00] I've split this session into three parts and you can make notes on your sheet, on your handout and we'll take a break for a discussion after each part. The first one is more looking at the way our culture thinks about homosexuality, so assumptions and misconceptions about homosexuality and then we'll have a discussion as you'll see over to the inside page. Then the second part we'll look at what the Bible says about homosexuality and some more discussion there and then finally on the back page responding to people over the question of homosexuality so trying to be more practical about how as Christians we talk to people about the gay issues.

So let me do the first part and then we'll break for some discussion. Please feel free to ask me questions if you like in the breaks and stuff. I really hope I say these things right because you do have a real sense and I noticed this already in all the tables that it's almost like walking on an ice lake. There's an element of not wanting to put your foot in the air wrong place and say the wrong sides of the thing and I think that's a good and right way to be because we don't want to be balls in china shops on this issue. A good example of this actually surfaced recently. There's a chap in my family who is gay and who was very interested in Christianity for one period, particularly when he was a younger guy and he came along and was doing confirmation classes and got confirmed with a whole bunch of other guys and he was really part of things in a youth group very much like this. And then when he came out and said I'm gay, at that point all the guys that he did this confirmation with completely shunned him, completely didn't just stop talking to him, completely rejected him. And he's now very aware of me actually because I'm a Christian minister. He's just very aware of everything to do with Christianity and to do with church.

And so it's easy for the church to either appear or actively be quite antagonistic and unhelpful to gay people just because I think they're not thinking right, they're not thinking biblically, they're not thinking holistically about this issue, particularly when it comes to other issues.

So I think it's a really important issue and as I do these things I'm aware that there will be people here who have got very good friends who themselves are gay or bisexual or you perhaps yourselves are struggling with some homosexual thoughts or bisexual thinking and you know I want to be very sensitive to all of you guys because you know I've got friends and no other Christians who likewise are going through these issues. So this is real life, this isn't just sort of abstract conversation, this is real stuff. So apologies if it came over in any way that's ungracious or unkind. Let me just try to think a bit about the cultural, the way our culture thinks about homosexuality and I've kind of put four things on there, these are just four things, there's lots of other things that could be said. Let me just take you through these and we'll see where we go. The first thing is that people, the first assumption is that people are born gay so they can't help it which is the nature versus nurture debate. You know some people learn things i.e. nurture as they grow and some people are just born that way and there's a kind of genetic family predisposition and the assumption that our culture broadly has is that homosexuality is something you have from birth. It's interesting there's been a lot of scientific studies done on this and no conclusive proof has come to the fore at all. They put a lot of money into this actually. That doesn't mean anything but as yet that's very much unproven so that's an unproven assumption. Of course the problem with sexuality is that sexuality develops you know from very young age and you know you're not really aware of sexuality until puberty or maybe 10 or 11 or 12, that kind of age. And so you're not aware of sexual thoughts really from ages 0 to say 10. So it might feel like for gay people they've always been gay but no one was any kind of sexual before the age of 10 so it might well have been something that developed but really would feel so innate to my personality that it's something that really feels like it came from

birth. Whether that's the case or not it's just unproven, we don't know.

[4 : 17] So this idea that you're born with it so you can't help it, it's not your fault, it's just innate to you, that's not a proven thing. And I'm always toyed about whether this is a helpful thing to say or not but there are examples and I've met a person like this who would call themselves ex-gay, who would have been gay at one stage and have changed their thinking and changed their orientation. Now that's a very sensitive topic and it's a very difficult and hard thing but it does happen, it does exist.

So that would indicate to me there is something that's not innate in it, something that's difficult because I'm sure some people are different than others. So just to say on that it's not proven that it's something of nature. The second and I think this is a more important underlying assumption is the moral basis for not just homosexuality but all sexuality and actually broader morality in our culture is the kind of idea, as long as I'm not hurting anyone, we talked about this a bit when we looked at the new atheism stuff but there's that Jamiro Christ song is the one that stands out in my mind that's called, If I Like It I Do It. In other words, you know, I'm not hurting anyone, I want to do it, I like to do it, then what's the problem with me doing it? And I actually think that's a relatively good basis for morality because over-religious people like to restrict all sorts of things you like doing for no particular reason. However, the danger of If I Like It I Do It is that it justifies all sorts of things that we also think are wrong. Where do we draw the line between I like it, I do it? As long as it's not hurting anyone. Of course, sexuality does hurt, which is kind of starting to step into the next point about this recreation for union. But when two people are having sex, it's not just a kind of a bit of fun. It's not like playing chess. Let me step into the next one because these two points are related. This wrong view of sex, recreation versus union. Lots of people have this idea that sex is just a recreational activity, it's just a bit of fun. Chess is a recreational activity. So if I played chess with someone, a young lady one night, we played chess together. The next morning when we woke up, you know, she might have beaten me, I might have a bit of a chip on my shoulder about the fact that she's quite good at chess. But principally, all we've done is had a game of chess with each other. Whereas if I meet a young lady and we sleep together, have sex together, the next morning, far more intimacy has happened. Something primeval, something important, something root in myself has happened between me and that person. And it's not just a recreational activity.

Let me put this in a slightly crude and slightly ridiculous way. If I saw a young lady walking home from the train station late at night on her own, and I jumped on her and put my finger in her ear like that, she'd be a bit weirded out. But to think, well, why did that guy jump on me and put his finger in my ear? But if I raped her, something fundamentally serious, more serious has happened. So it's not just a bodily touching thing. It's not just a recreational activity. Sexual intercourse is something that affects the whole of you as a person, and not just your body, your soul, your spirit, everything about you. It massively affects you when you have sex. And rape is a really, really clear example of that. So the biblical concept of sex is not for recreation or for fun, but for union. It's meant to be two people gluing together. And in my experience, certainly when I was at school, those people I knew who had sex almost always fell deeply in love with the person they lost their virginity to. And that's even if they were complete idiots that they only met once.

Because what's happened is you've glued yourself to that person. You've bonded in an intimate way. You've been naked with a person in a way that you're not like that with anyone else, ever.

[8 : 28] It's the most intimate thing you can do. And so it is, you're supposed to be falling in love with the person you have sex with. That's the aim of sex. It's to unite. It's to glue to become one. That's the Spice Girl Soul. Two become one. And that's the point of sex. Which is why it's really sad that people who have been very promiscuous often find it hard to have relationships with people or long-term relationships with someone because they've had sex with so many people. The old camp illustration I've heard many years ago is imagine two pieces of paper. Imagine I glued them and glued them together.

That's what sex does. But to unglue would be, well I haven't glued these together, but if I'd had, they'd rip, they'd tear, they'd be damaged. And the more times you do that, the more damage there is.

So having sex with someone is meant to unite you to someone rather than just a bit of fun. So that's a really important root understanding of sexuality that's a biblical way, which I think is not the view of people in our culture. The fourth thing I've just put down there is that it's not fair that heterosexuals can have sex, but that gays can't. And I think this is a good, fair point.

It can seem really hard for Christians particularly. So Christian homosexual, we would say to them, please would you abstain, but if you're heterosexual, go ahead and get married, you're fine. And it just, it seems unfair. It seems, it seems wrong. It seems like unequal. Well, let me just say a couple of things on that. Firstly, of course, it's also the same for single people or divorced people or widowed people or perhaps disabled people who will never get married. It's easy to look at the people that are married and think, oh, everyone's like that. But of course, in any group of people, there's whole bunches of people that aren't like that. And that's definitely the case at Grace Church. You often, you often notice the people that you envy rather than all the people. So there are whole bunches of people that can't have sex. In fact, all the married people can't have sex with anyone else other than their partner. So everyone is restricted in some way sexually. So it's not just them, it's not just the gay people that are going to find this hard. This is, this is something that bunches and bunches of people find hard. And secondly, and I don't know how to put this, the danger in our culture is that, and homosexuality is just a kind of an outpouring of this, is that sex has become such an important thing that it's almost as if, if you're not having sex, you're not a full person. You're not, you're only a part person. You guys might find this when you're at school. I don't know if you find it at school. But those who are having sex are the people that are, you know, they'll be showing off about it. Because, you know, I'm having sex and you're not. And there's something belittling about being a virgin. There's something embarrassing about saying you're a virgin. There's, you often hear people on TV, don't you, sort of saying, well, I haven't had sex for two months now, or something. As if that's like some sort of fast. Or as if that's some sort of massive crutch that they've, they've having to be struggling along, not having sex. There are bunches and bunches of people in the world who live their entire lives never having sexual intercourse. And they are, guess what, absolutely fine. It's really okay not to have sex. And we'll see this as we come to the third point. The real problem with the homosexual side of things is that homosexuality becomes your primary identity.

[12:10] And so your sexuality becomes your, the primary thing you need to be doing in life. And that's really not the case. You're just a person that happens to have same-sex attraction. But you can with, you can abstain from sex just as someone who's single, who's heterosexual, has heterosexual attraction and isn't sleeping with someone else. Or someone who's divorced or widowed or disabled or, or buried, but doesn't, has same-sex attraction to all sorts of other people of the opposite sex, but, but refrains from sex with them. So it, it might seem unfair, but it's not the end of the world. It's, it's okay not to be having sex. It's not the most important thing in life. Now, those are just a few, as I was brainstorming and thinking, underlying assumptions and misconceptions about sexuality and homosexuality. I've put a few questions for you to chat through there to, to go on with that. Maybe you can think of some more. I'd be interested to hear. Why don't we just take a few moments and chat through some of those questions and think through some of these things. For the next bit, I just wanted to quickly look at some of the biblical texts. There aren't loads of them actually, so it shouldn't take all that long. And I've put them there on your sheet. Let me read the, the few that are in the Old Testament, really. The important ones are in Leviticus.

These are from the Old Testament law, the law of Moses. It's always bad kind of pulling out single verses because you don't sort of see them in their context. But let me read the verses and explain the context. So this is Leviticus 18. You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It's an abomination. He's talking to males there. And Leviticus 20, two chapters later, if a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them are committing an abomination. That word gets repeated. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood is upon them. Now they're very strong, unequivocal verses. And the context in them is actually a whole range of other forms of sexuality that the Bible would say is wrong. Most of them are incestual ones, sleeping with your sister, sleeping with your mother, sleeping with your auntie, that sort of thing. There also includes bestiality in there and adultery. And all of those forms of sexual immorality, as the Bible would put them, are death penalties in the Old Testament, all of them. Now there are a whole bunches of things in the Old Testament that are death penalties. So I don't want to get into what punishment should be done and all that sort of thing. But death penalties do express a seriousness. There's lots of different laws in the Old Testament and some of them have different punishments to others and some therefore more serious than others. And sexual immorality is a serious one. So that's important.

So it's plain, isn't it, that in the Old Testament, homosexuality, as with many other forms of sexual immorality, are wrong, are immoral, are sin. Now one of the common arguments or the difficulties

with looking at the Old Testament law as it is, is, yeah, but why do you ignore some bits of the Old Testament law and use other bits? So the classic way of putting it is, it says you're not allowed to eat shellfish in the Old Testament law, but you eat shellfish. Why do you choose some and not others? How do you pick some and not others? And that is a question which is a talk in its own right. But let me say a couple of things. Firstly, as we'll look at the New Testament, the New Testament also applies that, this idea of sexual immorality being wrong. So we'll see that in a moment. So it's not just a kind of, we don't need to rely on these few verses in the Old Testament. There's stuff in the New Testament as well.

But secondly, broadly speaking, in the Old Testament, there's a holiness code and then there's a cleanliness code, clean and unclean. And the cleanliness code, some things make you clean and some things make you unclean, are to teach you about the fact that our hearts are clean or unclean. But those things in and of themselves were never clean or unclean.

That's what Jesus taught. So particularly the foods, for example, there is no, if you eat a shellfish, it doesn't actually affect you at all because it's something that goes out of you. And cleanliness and uncleanness, that was always a picture of our hearts being clean or unclean. Whereas sexuality is not just an external, it's something from the heart. It's fundamentally about you, as I was saying earlier, it's about union. So sexuality doesn't fit with the clean, unclean things like leprosy or menstruation or eating shellfish because those are just external things that actually aren't really about the heart. Those were always pointing, there were shadows of the real reality that Jesus talked about, which is you should have clean hearts and not unclean hearts. But things like sexuality, which have this stricter punishment, are very much about us as a person. And that's why the New Testament applies those as things that continue on. Let me show you some of the New Testament texts. An important one is 1 Corinthians 6. This is Paul writing to the church in Corinth, which is a culture very much like our own, where sexuality was a very common and an important part of society. Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? He's talking to Christians, particularly here. 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. 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.

[18:00] Let me just make a few comments on these verses because they're important verses. Firstly, he is saying that these sins, and there are a number of them, are serious. So they're serious for Christians as well as unbelievers here. Because any people who live these lifestyles of sexual immorality or idolatry or homosexuality or theft or adultery or swindling or reviling will not inherit the kingdom of God. And he's saying this strongly to Christians. In fact, he says in verse 11, and such were some of you. The implication is that's not the way Christians are now. So these things are serious things. Secondly, notice he says, do not be deceived. These things, if you practice these things in your life, you will not inherit the kingdom of God. In other words, there'll be many people who say deceptively, oh, don't worry about it. It's fine. God loves you. Okay? He's so keen to see this to these people in Corinth because there'll be people amongst them who will say, don't worry about it.

You go ahead and be an idolater. It's really fine. Swindling, do you know what? God loves swindlers. Don't worry about it. Notice also, though, homosexuality just happens to be one of the things on this list. Homosexuality is not the worst or most serious or the number one thing. If we, as Christians, want to be hot on homosexuality, we also need to be hot on greed. And greed is a lot more prevalent and a lot more hidden a sin, I think, and probably a much bigger problem than homosexuality in the church. So let's not make that the number one most important, serious, most awful sin in the universe. It is not. It's just one of many.

And you could look at Romans 1. I'll let you look that up in your own time. One of the things that is often said about these verses is what Paul's referring to here in homosexuality is homosexual prostitution. So it was common in those days they had temple prostitutes and homosexual temple prostitutes. And what he's referring to here is prostitution, which is a different thing to a kind of lifelong committed homosexual relationship.

But it doesn't say that here. And there's no evidence for that here. He's talking about sexual immorality. If you go back to the Levitical thing we were looking at, Leviticus 18 and 20, which is the sort of background to these sorts of thinking, adultery is wrong there. Bestiality, which is sleeping

with animals, is wrong there.

[20 : 52] Or incest sleeping with other people in your family is wrong there. And those are all common as well in Corinth. But he does pick out homosexuality and adultery and sexual immorality there. So all of these things are wrong.

It's not just prostitution. It's any forms of these things are wrong. Now, I don't know how that does feel heavy. But seeing as heavy and not being in the kingdom of God is really heavy. It's really important. It's really serious. But verse 11, he says to the Christians, some of you were like that. Some of you were greedy. Some of you were swindlers. Some of you were homosexual practices. Some of you were sexually immoral. Some of us here are those things or were those things. But when you became a Christian, you were washed. You were sanctified. That means you were set apart. You were made holy such that you don't do those things anymore because you've changed. You're a new person in Christ. And that's really, really important because the danger of the homosexuality thing, as I discussed earlier with my relative, is that Christians think, well, I'm not guilty of that. So I'll reject that person or look down on that person.

But I could save most of those guys. Hang on. But some of you were sexually immoral. Some of you were idolaters. Some of you were greedy. And if you still are, be careful because you will not inherit the kingdom of God if you continue that way. So all of us were those forms of sin. And all of us have been changed. I like the way Paul puts it in 1 Timothy chapter 1 there.

I've put it on your sheet. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. This is very important. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst. Notice two things in there. Why did Christ come into the world? It wasn't actually to judge people. It was to save sinners.

[22 : 53] But secondly, this is the apostle Paul. He says, of whom I am the worst. You see, his message, his ministry is reaching sinners because he himself was a sinner. And he offers grace to sinners because he himself is a sinner who is offered grace. So actually, not only does the Bible say homosexuality as other forms of sexuality is a sin, the Bible also says all of us were sinners.

I'll put it more strongly than that. All of us have been, and maybe even are, sexual sinners. Every one of us. And yet Jesus came into the world to save sexual sinners like us.

So it's important we don't see the Bible, although it does condemn homosexuality, it condemns sexual immorality as well. And the Bible doesn't just sort of, I think some people think that all the Bible is is a list of rules, and particularly rules against gay people. And it really isn't. It's a message of hope, of salvation for all people who are sinners, whether you're gay or straight sexual sinners. So I think that's my very brief summary of what the Bible says about homosexuality. I've put a couple of questions on the bottom there underneath. Feel free to discuss anything that I've said or any other things you think the Bible might be saying. But I've put a couple of questions. Why don't we spend a few moments discussing those?

I'd like to just do this last point, which is how we respond to people over the question of homosexuality. Let me take it in two parts. First of all, to people who are gay and Christian themselves. And then secondly, to the person that we were imagining at the beginning who's asking us the question, do all Christians hate gays? Let me first of all say about people who are gay Christians. We touched on this idea of the gay identity. And I think the gay identity is the big thing in our culture. It's very interesting. If you have someone who's gay and who's a writer, they'll describe themselves as a gay writer. Or if you have someone who's gay and he's an actor, they'll be described as a gay actor. As if gay is the sort of primary identity marker of who that person is. Now, I'm not surprised because it's not been that many years since homosexuality was illegal and ostracised. And we were discussing actually on our table how the gay community has arisen out of a small persecuted minority who feel a lot of identity and bond with each other. And the gay community is a strong community. It's very much an identity thing. But I would want to say to a gay Christian that actually their primary identity is not their gayness, but their Christness.

[25 : 38] Actually, those of us who were in church this morning, we had a good example of that. When you become a Christian, it's as if the old you's died and the new you is alive in Christ. So who you are now is Christian in Christ? So actually your first identity is in Christ, is Jesus. So actually the idea of gay Christian is a mistake. It's I'm Christian. I just happen to have, I'm attracted to people of the same sex. It's just as an extra thing. So when I'm talking to people who are gay and Christian, I'm wanting them to not think of their gayness as their most important personal identity, but their Christianness is their most important thing. Let me just say a second thing, is that anyone who is

gay and who is a Christian needs such extraordinary support and encouragement from us that I would want to say I think they probably need more support and encouragement than almost any other subgroup within our church that there is today. I'd almost want to go over the top in my support for a gay Christian than almost any other Christian that's struggling with almost anything. I'm overstating that for a good reason. I do know some people who are gay and who are Christians and every one of them that I know, there's not many, are not open with their homosexuality. People in their own churches don't know that they're gay. And maybe that's the case with some people here or some people at our church. And that makes me really, really sad because it means that they're frightened to be in the church. They're frightened to admit they're gay. It's very striking, isn't it? When Jesus came into the world to save sinners, he sought out the outcasts.

And the outcasts sought him. And I wonder if the body of Christ, the church, is the same. Do we seek those who feel apart from us? And do those who feel apart from us seek us? And I don't think that's the case. So it's really, really important that anyone who is, and if this is something you struggle with, or this is something you know someone's struggle with, please don't feel that we at Grace Church would reject you or feel repugnant to you in any way. Much, much the opposite. We massively want to encourage you and help you in your faith. You see, it's so important. Actually, the truth is, Christians who, given 1 Corinthians 6 that we just read, know that they have a homosexual orientation or a bisexual orientation and want to be Christians and remain, what's the word I'm looking for, not having sex, celibate, thank you very much, are some of the greatest heroes in our modern church. They're absolute heroes. We really want to support them. And I've put down there on your sheet the True Freedom Trust, who is an excellent evangelical organisation of homosexual people trying to live celibate lives. And they've got lots of good articles and talks on there. They're a really good organisation and a really kind and gracious organisation. So I do commend them to you. Come and speak to us. Please do that. I don't want you to in any way feel hated or neglected or chastised or in any way pushed out to the margins. But let me just finish with how I speak to a friend who's an unbeliever, because I think this is a common question that a guest asked.

Do look it up later. Colossians 4.4 says, whenever we speak to unbelievers, we want to speak with grace seasoned with salt. That's always the way we want to speak. So it's really important that we're gracious. As I said earlier, my relative was not only rejected, but people spoke to him in a pretty horrible way. That's really, really ungodly. And we are to be gracious. So wherever we say, we're not trying to get into a ding dong fight and show that we're right, but to be gracious, because that's honouring to the Lord Jesus more than anything. It's so important. It's not what we say, although what we say matters, but how we say it is so important. And I say that particularly to the younger guys, because I'm speaking as a guy who used to be a younger guy. We're often good at saying what's true and not what's gracious. And it's really important as well when we're speaking to unbelievers that what I want to say to them is that gay people are massively welcome in our church. In fact, everyone is welcome in our church, especially sinners. The most important people we want in our church are sinners of all kinds, of all shapes and sizes, okay, including me.

[30 : 34] And we really, really welcome all sexual sinners in our church, including me. Now, that's what Paul was saying in that verse in 1 Timothy. It's not a them and us situation with gay people at all. We need to be saying to all people, we're all sinners and we're all sexual sinners and so am I. So it's not a them and us situation. But thirdly, and it's very easy to neglect this. God does have a high standard for sexuality, a much higher standard than our culture does. So that's the way I would put it. For God, sex matters. In our culture, sex doesn't matter.

Because anyone can have sex almost with anyone at any stage. But for God, sex matters because it's about unity. So depending on whatever your situation is, the way I would describe it, when I was a single person, I used to say, say, for example, God wants single people like me not to be having sex.

And I now say, and God wants married people like me not to be an adulterer. So God has restrictions on all of us. And that's good because he has a high, sex matters. And that includes me. And that includes all of us in our own situation. In other words, what my view of sexuality or God's view of sexuality, I'm trying to live out. And we're all trying to live out. So we're not being hypocrites in here. But do we hate gay people? Absolutely not. I mean, fundamentally not. That is a pot common perception. We absolutely don't hate gay people. No, no, no, no, no. Gay people are so, so welcome. And I hope there are gay people in our church. I haven't been around long enough to

know. But we do think that sexual immorality is wrong. And we all want to live in a way which pleases God sexually. Now, that's the way I put it to people. I don't know how you'd do it. Why don't you just spend some time? If you do need to go, please feel free to shoot off because we have gone over time. But why not discuss in your groups anything that I've said? Or how would you put it? How would you go about explaining to an unbeliever or even to a gay Christian what you think about do Christians hate gays? Why don't we spend a few moments doing that?