

Good to be Gay?
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Readings: 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; John 8:2-11

Hook

Tom, not his real name, worked with me for several years. He was extremely popular in the office, but nobody knew he was living with another man in a homosexual relationship. One day, he told me about his life. His Catholic adoptive parents taught him that homosexuality was the second worst sin after Devil worship. So when the truth dawned on him, aged 15, that he was attracted to other boys not girls, the self-loathing this brought on led him to two very serious attempts at suicide. But he survived, thanks to the Samaritans, and eventually met his partner, with whom he felt accepted and loved. At least at one level. But deep down he knew he was going against God. So we talked and explored the Bible's teaching, which I hadn't done before, and which convinced him he was living outside God's will, so he would never be happy and fulfilled. Eventually, and it is impossible to overplay the enormity of the decision for him, Tom broke with his partner and committed himself to celibacy. One thing he said has never left me. 'Tony, as a single Christian I know that you have to face the struggle of living a celibate life the same as me, but you have the possibility of marriage in the future. I know that can never be possible for me.'

Two overriding principles

The issue of homosexuality has become a political hot potato! So why on earth should I choose to preach on it? The answer is twofold. Firstly, because we are all only too aware of the upsets and splits within the worldwide Anglican church. For that reason I've tried in my last two sermons to outline what has been happening over the past 5 or so years. I contended that the underlying reason for the split is whether the Bible is the Word of God or not. Homosexuality is simply the pitch on which the new thinkers have chosen to battle – but make no mistake, it's about the Bible. In the second sermon I explained which parts of the Old Testament law still apply and which don't, and why. Both sermons and the handouts are available on our website as usual, or you can ask me for copies.

So my first reason is the current Anglican situation. The second is because I'm convinced that the Gay lobby is hurting people – physically, emotionally and spiritually, by deceiving them. Today, you must either say that homosexuality is a normal lifestyle or you're called a homophobic bigot - as I have been. But I don't think I fit into either of those extremes, and more to the point, nor does God in the Bible. I believe that there is a third view, between the two extremes, but one which gets very little publicity - the Gospel view. And it's illustrated by Jesus' treatment of the woman caught in adultery, which was read to us. Notice two things often overlooked in this story. Firstly, Jesus didn't question the Old Testament Law that said adultery deserved the death sentence. He never questioned the Word of God. No, His concern was the hypocrisy of the men who He knew were equally sinful, though perhaps in different ways. Secondly, though Jesus told her that he did not condemn her - that's the popular bit - he then said to her "Go now and leave your life of sin." - that's the unpopular bit. He offered her forgiveness, but on the understanding that she left her life of sin; the Bible word is 'repent'. So there we see into the very heart of God, showing us how he sees our sin. Sin is rebellion against His rightful authority and it damages his world and people. It's so serious, Jesus had to die on the cross to deal with it. Which is why he tells the woman – and you, and me – to leave our lives of sin, whatever that may entail for us. But he longs to win us back all the same. If that is God's heart, both on the seriousness of sin and his longing to offer us forgiveness and a fresh start... Then our hearts should beat as one with His heart. And our lives reflect his life. We should worry about our own sin, not other people's, because of what our forgiveness cost Jesus. Right, hold on to those two things for a few minutes. God's views of my sin and my forgiveness.... And the pain of Tom's situation as a celibate homosexual. I want us to look firstly at what the Bible does and doesn't say about homosexuality. Then at what the pro-Gay Christian lobby says to counter it. And finally, a few important pastoral applications for us.

What does God's Word say?

So what does God's Word say about homosexuality?

Well, it's certainly not a major topic in the Bible.

There are 2 references in the Old Testament and 4 in the New.

But all teach the same - that sex between people of the same gender is always wrong in God's eyes.

Because it's always outside marriage, the only place for sex.

The Bible specifically includes both the passive and active partners, and both male and female homosexual acts.

If you want to look them up afterwards, I've included details in these notes at the back.

Beware that the NIV in the pews has not done a very helpful job of translation of two of the New Testament passages.

But - and if you hear nothing else today hear these two things -

The Bible nowhere talks about or condemns homosexuality as an inclination or nature – it only condemns the sexual act.

Nowhere does God condemn a person for being attracted to people of the same sex.

Indeed, the idea of the homosexual person or inclination wasn't spoken of until the c19th – only the homosexual act.

And secondly, as our epistle reading made clear, though it's as serious as all sin is, it's no more serious than other sins.

The Bible lists with gay sex things such as extramarital affairs, theft, greed, drunkenness, slander and swindling.

Remember Jesus said, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her".

The Bible nowhere condemns homosexual tendency or nature; and nowhere says gay sex is worse than other sins.

But Gay sex is always sinful.

I. Christians who disagree - LGCM stance on Bible

'OK Tone, that's your view and we respect that, but what of those Christians who differ with you? Like the Archbishop of Canterbury, or Jeffrey John or the previous bishop of Oxford?'

Well, it's true that a minority of Christians hold different views.

But let me make a few short points.

Firstly, until the last 30 years or so, Christians have been united in teaching that sex outside marriage is always sinful.

Not unforgivable, as long as I repent, but sinful.

The Christian pro-Gay lobby is new and it's maverick.

The bishops of the Anglican communion continue to overwhelmingly reject their new ideas.

Secondly, the UK has two main Gay Christian organisations.

The Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement ('LGCM') which exists to promote Gay sex as acceptable before God.

It may have only just over a thousand members, but it really knows how to handle the Media.

The other group is True Freedom Trust which exists to help Christians with Gay leanings to lead a fulfilled, celibate life.

They have more members, but the Media never mentions them.

Every TV and Radio soap has had pro-gay story lines!

As do the house makeover programmes!

We are being brainwashed to change how we think and to see the Gay life-style as completely normal.

Thirdly, those who reject the traditional Christian view claim it's just a different interpretation of Scripture - it is not.

The Bible's teaching on Gay sex is absolutely clear.

It's about whether you will accept what the Bible says as being authoritative or not.

Read the notes on the Bible's teaching and ask yourself this:

If you were writing the Bible, and you wanted to say that Gay sex was always unacceptable in God's sight, could you have made the Bible any clearer than it already is?

Fourthly, if I set out to justify my behaviour or views, I will prove it from the Bible - just think of how the Dutch Reformed Church used the Bible to justify apartheid.

Or how African slave-traders justified slavery.

Let me give you two examples of this from the LGCM website.

I quote: "The Centurion's Servant is one story in which a gay relationship may be mentioned. This is because the word used in Greek in the account given by Luke can mean 'boy-friend'. We know that centurions and their personal servants often had sexual relations and it is stated that the centurion was very fond of the servant. If this story does mention a gay relationship, then it confirms that Jesus was less interested in what people did rather than in their faith and love."

Imagine for a moment that you are a new or poorly taught Christian who is struggling with Gay temptation.

Wouldn't you grab hold of that nonsense and believe it?

I checked in the three most respected Greek lexicons, which most of us don't have on our shelves, and none of them even hint at the word 'boyfriend'.

It's just the everyday word for a young boy.

It has nothing to do with Gay sex, let alone with Jesus approving of soldiers having sex with their young male servants!

Here's another quote about our reading from 1 Corinthians 6:

"No-one is sure what the words used in these passages refer to. They could refer to some types of homosexual behaviour, but it is not certain."

If you read that on their website, you would probably think that if no-one knows what it means, you'd better ignore it.

But the scholars do know what the words mean!

All three lexicons agree that the words mean the active and the passive partners in Gay sex.

Do you see what I mean about proving anything from the Bible if you're determined to justify your actions & views?

Pastoral issues - 1

So now a few important pastoral comments - because it is very much a pastoral, as well as a theological, issue.

Firstly, the Bible says that Christians have no right to judge non-Christians and tell them how to lead their lives.

Jesus said 'Do not judge or you too will be judged.' Matthew 7:1

Or think of the woman caught in adultery.

On the other hand, the Bible says as Christians we should speak sensitively with our fellow believers when they are going astray, as a sign of our love and concern for them.

First checking that we haven't got a bigger mote in our eye!

But love will do that, talk, however risky it might be.

Loving your neighbour can be fairly straightforward if they need a trip to the shops, help with the washing or ironing.

Helping the person who is lying injured from a mugging like the Good Samaritan isn't rocket science.

But what if you see a fellow Christian starting to take drugs; drink way too much; beat his wife; get hooked on porn.

How do you love that Christian neighbour?

What if they are rebelling against God's Word in some clear and overt way.

And the Bible says, as it does in our second reading, that they "will not inherit the kingdom of God"?

Is it really loving to do nothing and let them go down what Jesus called the broad road to destruction?

I sincerely hope, that if I ever turn my back on God and his ways, one of my closest Christian friends will tell me.

Frankly, I would be disappointed if they didn't.

So my first pastoral point is that Christians are to some extent responsible for each other, but not to tell the world how to live!

Pastoral issues - 2

Second pastoral comment.

To the Christian with homosexual tendencies, you or I should say this, direct from our second Bible reading.

"Flee sexual immorality".

Make the decision not to do it and take steps to avoid situations where you know you'll be tempted.

But we should also say the same to the Christian with heterosexual tendencies: "Flee sexual immorality".

And in either case, if you're being sexually tempted, find a wise Christian you can trust, whom you talk and pray with, knowing they won't condemn you, but will treat the matter seriously.

Pastoral issues - 3

Thirdly, to the Christian who hates homosexuals.

The time to throw stones is when you are totally without sin.

Until that day arrives, have a heart; preferably God's heart!

Pastoral issues - 4

Finally, a pastoral comment to all of us.

We all struggle with our sinful natures.

You may not find any kind of sexual temptation a problem, but other Christians in our church most certainly will.

On the other hand, you may struggle with jealousy, greed, anger, lack of forgiveness, gossiping - which for others struggling with sex may be non-issues.

Do not judge another's struggles and weaknesses, lest you be judged about yours!

As Christians, our job is to love and care for and support one another - no matter what.

It's called grace - unconditional love - which is what we have been shown by God.

Prayer (do business)