

LETTER TO A PASTOR HOMOSEXUALITY: CHOICE OR CHANCE, SIN OR SICKNESS?

The following has been adapted from an actual letter written to a pastor who had expressed his views on homosexuality in a written church newsletter. This pastor sees homosexuality as being a matter of "arrested development," beginning in early infancy or before. Other aspects of his viewpoint should become apparent in the body of this response.

Dear Pastor:

I have read your article in the most recent edition of your church newsletter, as well as the previous issue in which you stated that you desired responses.

I share your concern for homosexuals, and agree that Christians ought to minister to them in love and compassion. I agree that compassion cannot be limited to the innocent. If it were, then it would not exist, because all are guilty before God (Romans 3:9-18).

I do not wish to add another personal opinion to the many already being expressed, but rather to search the Word of God to see what He has to say about the matter. In order to respond to your article, I have spent time prayerfully searching out Scripture, and have also taken the time to read two books which explore, quite extensively, a biblical view of this issue.

Homosexuality is an important matter, not merely because of current "gay rights" activism, but because of what God has to say about it. This is not an area where Scripture is either silent or ambiguous, but rather an area where God has spoken clearly. As in other areas of how we should live, God has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3, 4).

With all due respect, I must disagree with much of what you say regarding homosexuality. However, in making comments, I want very much to offer **more** hope to such persons, **more** love, and **more** compassion. God has serious words to the homosexual, but He also offers a glorious hope that cannot be matched by any other perspective.

First of all, both Old and New Testaments define homosexuality as sin: Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Genesis 19:4-8; Romans 1:24, 26, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. This is serious,

because sin leads to death, but it also generates hope, because God has provided a solution to sin in Christ. No distinction is ever made between orientation and action. In noting this lack of distinction, we must remember that we are not looking at the words of a mere man, who lacked the knowledge of modern science, but rather at words breathed out by God, our Creator (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Having created us, God could have distinguished between a non-sinful orientation and sinful actions, but He did not.

The orientation is as sinful as the action itself. Jesus taught this in Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28. Although His examples are concerning murder and adultery, the context shows Him to be teaching a general principle about sins of the **heart**. Homosexual *lust* (within the heart) is therefore as sinful as homosexual *action*.

I do want to note that there is no reason to regard homosexual sin as being any worse than other sin, sexual or otherwise. Sin is sin, and all are sinners. Therefore, attitudes of self-righteousness, hatred, fear, and condemnation are never justified. Rather, we are called to evangelize and *restore* in a spirit of love, gentleness, and humility (Galatians 6:1, 2).

The fact that a desire is present from an early age, or "innate," or "natural," does not mean that it is not sinful. Scripture speaks repeatedly of evil desires, or lusts. For example:

Temptation arises from your own evil desires, and a deadly progression is set in motion, from desire to temptation to sin and finally to death (James 1:14, 15).

The power of God, through Jesus Christ, offers the hope of escape from the corruption of the world which is caused by evil desires (2 Peter 1:3, 4).

God commands the Christian to "put off" the "old self" which is being corrupted by its "deceitful desires," and to "put on" the "new self," which is to be like Him in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22-24).

A similar teaching appears in Colossians 3:5, where God commands His child to "put to death" the evil desires that belong to the old nature. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the passions and desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:24).

Those who do not know Christ as Savior have their minds set on the desires of the flesh and are unable to submit to God's law, **but** those who do know Christ are controlled by His Spirit and what the Spirit desires (Romans 8:5-9).

Sin is present from the time of conception (Psalm 51:5; see also Romans 5:12-21). It therefore makes sense that man's "natural" desires, even at an early age, tend toward sin. Man is not born innately good, innocent, and pure, contrary to much popular belief. *However*, this does not give rise to despair, because of the hope of the gospel.

You mention the possibility of two same-sex homosexual persons living together yet restraining from sexual intimacy. There are serious problems with this type of arrangement, which is hardly different from a heterosexual live-in couple:

God commands the Christian to **flee** temptation (2 Timothy 2:22, 1 Corinthians 6:18). This type of living arrangement is an open invitation to sin which places the individuals involved in a constant place of temptation, thereby disobeying God's command.

God is deeply concerned that our lives are lived so as to be a testimony to others, avoiding even the appearance of evil (Matthew 5:16, 2 Corinthians 8:20). This type of living arrangement fails to give proper testimony to the world that God's children are set apart, not conformed to worldly standards of behavior (Ephesians 5:3, Romans 12:2).

*The description of homosexual sin in Romans 1:18-32 is extremely serious. It shows homosexuality to be sort of a bottom rung on the ladder of sin. Idolatry is described in this passage, wherein man has exchanged the worship of God for the worship of created things, blurring the distinction between Creator and creation. Then, exchanging natural relations with the opposite sex for homosexual lust, the distinction between male and female, established at creation, is also blurred. Some very fundamental distinctions, designed and ordained by God, are violated here. The words of this entire passage are strong: **Not only** is homosexual activity described as deserving death, but the final verse issues a warning **also** to those who approve of those who engage in such practices.*

*One of the most serious passages is found in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, in which God lists homosexuals as being among those who will **not** inherit the kingdom of God. Thus, this issue is of*

eternal significance. However, the passage concludes on a note of hope: "...and such **were** some of you..."

Ministering to the homosexual is of crucial importance, because his eternal destiny is at stake, and his only answer is in the cross of Christ.

A distinction needs to be made between the unbeliever and the believer at this point. The unbeliever clearly needs the gospel. Without it, he is unable to overcome his sin (Romans 8:7, 8). The believer is to be restored by other Christians in a spirit of love and gentleness, and the person who seeks to counsel him must always consider his own tendency toward sin (Matthew 7:1-5; Galatians 6:1, 2). The person who is truly born again will not continue indefinitely in a sinful lifestyle (homosexual or otherwise) without evidencing the desire to change and follow Jesus Christ. Of course, Christians continue to wrestle with sin throughout their lives--what I'm saying is that the true believer will progressively demonstrate godly qualities, and will have a desire to obey God. If a professing Christian continues in homosexuality without evidence of repentance and change, something is wrong. He may not be a true believer. (This doesn't mean we are saved by our own works, only that saving faith will always bear fruit. If it doesn't, then it isn't genuine [James 2:14-26]). This is the most serious issue of all: **eternal salvation**. It is therefore of the utmost important to lovingly confront the homosexual, whether or not he is a professing Christian, with God's truth about his sin.

Sin is always enslaving. You are either a slave to sin, which leads to death, or to righteousness, which leads to life (Romans 6:16). Thus, homosexual sin may **seem** to be beyond the individual's choice. **However**, Jesus Christ not only sets us free from the eternal consequences of sin. He also provides the power to live a new life, one that is pleasing to God (Romans 6:1-4, 6, 11-14, 15-18, 19-23; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 2:18, 4:14-16; John 8:31-36). The hope for the homosexual provided by Jesus Christ is tremendous. He is offered forgiveness, cleansing, entrance into God's kingdom, and the power to live a new life--including a fully satisfying heterosexual relationship, as God designed at creation. Surely that surpasses being doomed to a same-sex, non-sexual relationship with no expectation of being able to change and enjoy a complete family life.

Ministry to the homosexual requires love, patience, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, and such--the fruit of God's Spirit. Much more is needed than mere "unconditional acceptance,"

which may appear kind but fails to address the person's real need. it is costly in terms of taking the time to disciple the person, open God's Word with him, counsel him, and provide him the kind of godly accountability that will facilitate lasting changes. God's people have a clear calling to offer such counsel and assistance. They cannot nod approval to sin in the name of unconditional love (1 Corinthians 5, Leviticus 19:17, Ezekiel 3:16-21, Matthew 18:15-20, Galatians 6:1-5). It takes much, much **more** commitment to offer this kind of intensive ministry, rather than mere acceptance and friendship. The sin cannot be accepted and tolerated, but the purpose in confronting sin is to restore the person and lead him to Christ. This is real love and compassion.

AIDS. Physical illness is certainly not always the result of sin. Its causes are varied. With AIDS, however, the cause is **often** (although not always) the result of sexual sin. However, this may be God's way of confronting the person with his sin and giving him the opportunity to receive eternal life, even though he loses his physical life. In a sense, it may be an act of compassion designed to bring salvation of the person's soul. The Christian must respond with compassion to the infected person, offering him the hope of the gospel.

TO SUMMARIZE: If you were a physician, and a patient had terminal cancer, would you send him home with a couple of aspirins and withhold the truth about his condition? Or would you perform the surgery needed to save his life? I'm speaking metaphorically, because homosexuality is sin, not sickness. However, the point is that homosexuality must be confronted truthfully as sin, in order to point the individual to the only solution, which is the cross of Jesus Christ. **Real** love, **real** compassion, will gently, humbly point the person to Him and thus to hope. Christians must faithfully represent Christ, who spoke truthfully in confronting sin, yet didn't hesitate to gently restore the outcasts of His day, laying His life down for their sins.

Thank you for taking the time to read these comments. I hope you will consider them very carefully as you minister in an environment plagued by confusion and conflict over the issue of homosexuality.

*From a **very concerned** fellow Christian*

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