

What is the truth about homosexuality? How can we live the truth out with grace?

This morning I am taking on a kryptonite question that is very sensitive. So much so that we are providing an alternative experience for our children. I would avoid it if I could. This note is just one of the notes and personal conversations I have had. If it is not your world, it is the world of your children. Let me excerpt it:

But here is the topic for which I would appreciate some direction. It is an issue that I encounter every day of my life, and I can't ignore it, but I don't know how I "should" think about it, so I hope you will be tackling it this summer: that issue is "homosexuality".

In the past, it was fairly infrequent to encounter someone that would talk about being openly gay. It was pretty much a "don't ask, don't tell" type of issue. But now I feel like I am surrounded by friends and co-workers that are gay, or their parents are gay, or their kids are gay, or their ex-spouses are gay. Even more confusing are all the people that seem to "change teams". My manager at work always referred to her "wife" of 8 years; last year they "divorced", and now she is in a serious relationship with a man. Another co-worker lived with a man for 3 years, bore his child, and has had a string of lesbian relationships ever since. Her mother divorced her father and is now gay. A very close co-worker was married for 5 years right out of high school; he is now divorced from his wife, and has been in a relationship with a man for 5 years. A friend of mine from a campus ministry group in college married a man and they both continued in college ministry but she ended up getting divorced from him, when one day he announced he was actually gay. Do you get my drift? I've only mentioned about half of the examples I have.

Here is the deal; I have Christian friends that are alarmed and disgusted with anyone that is gay. I actually am currently very good friends with most of these people. They are excellent friends, workers, and parents. But I also get a little confused...with most people, I am interested in their lives, which includes their relationships. But I am sort of uncomfortable asking the same sorts of questions to my gay friends, like is it weird to ask "How did you meet?" "How did that problem between you two last week work out?" "What are you two doing this weekend?"

I have doubts; is it okay that I accept them just the way they are? I feel like some of my Christian friends would say no, that I need to point out what is "wrong" with their lifestyle. It's true that I find it hard to believe someone is born a certain way, when I see people going back and forth between gay and straight relationships.

Let's start by putting a frame around everything we'll be considering. John 1.14. John says God invaded our world in his Son. We knew it because he was utterly full of grace and truth. Grace and Truth. Do they really *fit* together?

Grace. Its first name is Amazing. Lavish. Didn't deserve it; didn't earn it. Extravagant. Open-armed, open-handed, open-walleted. It's the "*Let's have a party for my missing son who has been found*" sort of emotion. It's the voice at the end of "Hide and Seek" that says: *Ally, ally, ally `outs in free!* Jesus is all that.

And then there's Truth. Truth is the Final Answer. It is the bottom line. It is solution to the "X= ____." It is the GPS coordinates. Narrow, precise, unyielding and certain. To some it feels like the opposite of grace. Jesus is all that, too. John says, "This is what God looks like when he reaches into your world: Unvarnished truth with unvarnished love. (*So what?*)

Jesus leaves us here to *be* him. Small facsimiles standing at Starbucks counters or helping on 3rd grader's field trips. Little Jesus's. The Body of Christ. Also full of Grace and Truth. Not one or the other. But both. Not just loving everybody whatever they've smoked. Where ever they've slept. But also the truth side: Speaking without flinching. We don't get to choose. It's both. Every day. And it's hard!

Our question today is built around these two anchor bolts: Where can we find truth about homosexuality and how do we live it out with grace? Our work is cut out for us: Author Anne Rice wrote on her Facebook page:

"For those who care, and I understand if you don't: Today I quit being a Christian. I'm out. I remain committed to Christ as always but not to being "Christian" or to being part of Christianity. It's simply impossible for me to 'belong' to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group. For ten...years, I've tried. I've failed. I'm an outsider...In the name of Christ, I refuse to be anti-gay. I refuse to be anti-feminist. I refuse to be anti-artificial birth control. I refuse to be anti-Democrat. I refuse to be anti-secular humanist. I refuse to be anti-science..."

She's not rejecting Jesus. Like so many people, she loves Jesus. Because in the back of her mind is her gay son. She says, "Jesus never condemned homosexuality." Technically...she's right. But that is an argument from silence. That Jesus didn't address homosexuality can't be used as a defense of it. Jesus spoke to hot potato questions when they were pitched at him. In 1st century Israel, homosexuality was tightly corralled and restricted following Moses' instructions. It hadn't been that way for Moses in the Canaanite world. Or for Paul in the Greco-Roman world. Their worlds were drenched. Everywhere! That Jesus doesn't say anything simply signals that he goes along with what Moses taught. So all this sends us back to carefully see what Moses and Paul taught.

I'm choosing the word *taught* carefully. You can have *references* to behaviors, like in Sodom and Gomorrah, but they don't come with clear teaching or guidance. So there isn't as much as you'd think. There are really two. One is Deut. 23.17. It is a command to the priests to not be like other religions around them where sex was involved with worship. Don't participate in it and don't tithe off the profits made from the male or female sex trade. So while this is interesting, it really doesn't help us figure out the truth. The clearest in the OT is Lev. 18.(v. 22)-20.(v.13). Two different verses within 3 chapters. In no uncertain

terms, a man having sexual relations with another man is absolutely prohibited. The consequences were capital. But keep in mind that these were part of larger lists of commands. They were lumped together with infidelities, incest, abuse, and seductions. No better, no worse. Guard your behaviors. Don't do it.

Notice, though, these commands were given specifically to the Jews. God's covenant people. They weren't directed to all people, everywhere. The Jews had been set apart. They belonged to God in a unique way. He entrusts his blueprint upon their lives. From Sabbath to the sanctity of sex to worship. *"If you live by my blueprint, not only will you be blessed, but you be a blessing to the nations of the earth."* That blueprint involves harnessing the nuclear power of our sexuality. Moses is establishing boundaries. Speed through the boundaries and you will unleash daisy-chains of explosions that will bring heartache and dishonor upon yourselves and your children's children. Regardless of what we might feel about it, that's what it says.

Phil, but the five books of the Bible are filled with rules. Rules about kinds of threads of cloth that can be combined, and tattoos, or not cooking a lamb in its mother's milk. When the NT comes along, it seems to suspend almost all of the commands. In light of what we know and society has changed, isn't it time to retire the same-sex prohibitions?

I could almost go there except for how all of those commands are broken down into two groups: First, there were the ceremonial commands. Those are moral equivalent of spitting on sidewalks. The consequences are not ever very great. For example, the dietary laws Jesus set aside are ceremonial.

The other group are the moral commands. These are the ones that had staying power. Each of the moral commands is an extension of the Ten Commandments. The big ones. Commandment #7 was against adultery. The breaking of the marriage bond. And all those commands in Lev. 18 and 20 are sexual unions that corrupt and dishonor the design of God. They break down the life of the community. They wear through the trust and responsibility.

So let me summarize. This was a command for the people of faith to embrace for *their* lives. They were to live out this blueprint for God's reputation, for wholeness in their life together, and ultimately, for the blessing of all the peoples on earth. This was a spiritual obligation *they* accepted. They didn't project on everybody else. That's how Jesus would have understood it and saw no reason to modify it.

When we move into the New Testament, we have a similar situation. There are several passages that refer to same-sex relationships. For example in 1 Cor. 6.9-10 Paul writes:

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God. Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders...will inherit the kingdom of God."

That's very, very serious. They won't inherit the kingdom of God. But in v. 10 he enlarges the list and says, "Neither will thieves, the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers

nor swindlers.” I think there’s enough elasticity in that to fit around all of us. None of us will inherit the kingdom of God. And he says it: “Such were some of you!” We’re all there. We’re all broken. And then he adds, “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the Lord Jesus.”

What he’s saying is that all of us are in need of grace. Examine any of our motives and our hidden behaviors and we’re sunk. Until Jesus found us. We all need to find a place to kneel at the cross of Jesus. Follow Paul’s theme into the next few verses: “*You are a new creature in Christ, while your behaviors may not exclude you from heaven, they are not wise. Flee sexual behaviors outside the bond of marriage between a man and woman. And if you’re unmarried or a widow, if at all possible, stay unmarried like me.*”

So again, let’s summarize. Wherever you’ve been, whatever you’ve done. There’s hope at the cross of Christ for those deep inclinations that lead into brokenness. It is possible to be a follower of Christ yet still be caught up in justifications that feel 2nd nature and right. But spiritually are not wise. They actually compromise Christ. We are to honor God with our bodies. And that may mean for some, and actually for all of us at different times in our lives, it is best for us to practice singleness and celibacy.

The other defining NT passage is Romans 1.24-32. The problem with this passage is that after all of the words have been parsed and the context put under a microscope, it still says what it says. All people really are in need of a savior. They all have taken life routes that are heading over cliffs. The righteousness of God could let them go. Wherever people are living, whatever their religion or lack thereof, they have been given a certain amount of light, spiritual insight that they can respond to. But generally they haven’t. He lets them climb onto their conveyor belt of choice. He lets them do what comes naturally. One example, he says, is that he lets human desires get confused and malfunction to the point where eventually men pursue other men and women for women. But that’s just one piece of his evidence. They also gorge themselves with envy, murder, competition, deceit, and hard feelings. Their conveyor belt keeps spinning them forward into gossiping, slandering, deep down hating God, hating any authority, arrogant and always looking how to put the spotlight on themselves.

I hear that conveyor belt churn! Their minds work overtime on how to get the leg up or leg over. They ignore their responsibility to honor their parents and obey them. Always getting smarter, they keep running out of wisdom. They can’t seem to stay true to their marriage vows. They’ve lost any sense of what it means to really love. They have no mercy for the widow, the orphans, or outsiders in their town. As Paul writes, he knows only too well that every person in the room has been riding on that conveyor belt. God could just let them go. Thank God, he’s God! Paul goes on to tell the story of Grace.

Let’s put everything in its context. This isn’t a monograph on the morality of homosexuality. An exposé. He doesn’t do that. It’s one more piece of the evidence of God letting people do what comes naturally. Homosexuality isn’t unnatural. Actually he implies

it eventually becomes natural in a broken, self-absorbed world. Children and adults maladapt in order to find love. Grace is what's unnatural!

Clear back when we started this series, I taught that we need to always come back to ask how original audience understood what was written? Because we are always reading someone else's mail. To answer that, there is every indication that people living closest to their writing understood it as I've explained it. There wasn't an ambiguity. All the religions of the book--Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are unique in the world of religions for taking a view of same sex relationships. And Church fathers concurred. They understood that there were some people who just seemed constituted to be homosexual. But most had drifted into same-sex attractions because of life and problems. While the early church generally shows great kindness with encouragement for their own and toleration for those outside, they were settled in their conclusions.

I've been dealing with biblical truth. In the time we have left, let me segue over into scientific truth. First, no such thing as the "gay gene" has been found--nor do most sophisticated scientific researchers feel that it will ever be found.

"Time and time again, scientists have claimed that particular genes or chromosomal regions are associated with behavioral traits, only to withdraw their findings when they were not replicated. 'Unfortunately,' says Yale's [Dr. Joel] Gelernter, 'it's hard to come up with many findings linking specific genes to complex human behaviors that have been replicated.' All were announced with great fanfare; all were greeted unskeptically in the popular press; all are now in disrepute." (Science, 1994).

Tall kids with good coordination aren't automatically basketball players. The conditions are right for them to merge into that. So, too, with homosexuality, homosexuality isn't inherited. Several conditions line up. That leads into my second point under scientific truth. It appears that homosexuality is rooted in cluster of five issues:

1. *Prenatal effects—hormonal mix while we were forming*
2. *Postnatal effects—From viruses to trauma*
3. *External interactions—family, education, community of acceptance*
4. *Reinforcing effect of repeating behaviors*
5. *Draw of Love—Sheryl Swoopes-- "Do I think I was born this way? No," she*

tells ESPN the Magazine. "And that's probably confusing to some, because I know a lot of people believe that you are."

There is a curious pattern developing. Gay activists are beginning to give up a pursuit of a "gay" gene. (Perhaps, the reason is that if you can find a clear cause, then it stands to reason that you can find a cure).

Third, the flow of thought within the GLT community is away from "cause" and toward "gender fluidity". Sheryl Swoopes is now engaged to a man and is planning on getting married to him. We are seeing a move away from heterosexuality vs. homosexuality and toward "homosexualities." We're hearing something that sounds like: *Neither Nature or Nurture determines me. People are free agents who follow powerful*

inclinations. We fall in love with who we fall in love with. And all of them just as legitimate as any other.

Lisa Diamond is a researcher at Univ. of Utah. She has followed 100 women who identified themselves to some degree as lesbians 13 years ago. Her research is startling. She checks back with them every two years. What she has found is that each time she checks in between 20-30 % of them are always re-defining themselves. Dr. Diamond also has discovered that teenagers who have same sex attractions are forcefully refusing to take on labels. They want self-determination. They want gender fluidity. All of this leads to the last truth.

Fourth, with almost no one realizing it, the Bible is increasingly spot on in its ability to speak. We are living again in the first century moral world. This is a perfect transition for next week. How will we speak with the grace and truth of Jesus?