

This is about people – not an issue. Gay and Lesbian

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Two weeks ago, the sports equipment and apparel company Nike cancelled their sponsorship contract with boxer Manny Pacquiao. They were right to sever ties with Pacquiao after he made demeaning homophobic statements. Forbes magazine lists Manny Pacquiao among the highest paid in sports. One title fight last year was a \$125 million payday. Thankfully there is public conscience about shaming and degrading other people when Pacquiao compared homosexual people to animals.

The church's attitude has not been stellar toward all people who are all in the image of God. It would be hard to think of a group of people who are currently more ostracized and stigmatized than people who identify or known as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex or Questioning. We are to love people as God loves people. The one thing that we all have in common is that we are loved by God. In response to God's love we are to love like God loves and live like Christ lived.

Wrong information, and prejudice fuels dehumanizing rhetoric and actions that builds walls between us. It is easier to enlist people in a campaign against an enemy than rally all people to godly living. We consider ourselves as modern, current people but we are not as aware as we would like to think regarding sexual orientation. The early church may have been more aware of sex differences than we acknowledge.

We can only start the conversation this morning regarding people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or Intersex. Notice I said it is a conversation about people rather than dealing with an issue. We cannot depersonalize the conversation to call it an issue. That dehumanizes people. We are talking about people who are loved by God, and people that we love. Whether we aware or not we probably all know one or more people who experience same sex attraction. Out of fear of rejection and humiliation they may not make their thoughts and feelings known.

This morning we are going to begin the conversation regarding Lesbian and Gay. I think the recommendation of Preston Sprinkle of using Lesbian and Gay is better than using homosexual which is used as a noun, an adjective or as negative slang or slur. We need to be aware of how our words attribute motive to all gay people when we say "the gay lifestyle" or "the gay agenda." Not all gay people are having sex. People who are gay are not sub-human monsters. Don't assume all gay people are predators trying to pervert society and victimize vulnerable people. Before we get to specific scriptures we need some definitions and depending on your source these definitions are in flux.

Sex is a biological term that describes chromosomes of XY, XX or a combination of chromosomes, hormones, internal genitalia and internal genitalia that becomes external at puberty. Assigned sex is the sex identified at birth, when a midwife, nurse or doctor looks at a baby and says you have a _____. Sexuality is one's erotic, romantic orientation or practices. Same sex orientation is a persistent desire, attraction or feeling for the same sex. Same sex behaviour is acting on one's desires. Bisexual is sexually attracted by both men and women. Transgender is a person who does not fit male, female cultural norms. Queer refers to those people whose sexuality falls outside the heterosexual mainstream.

Gender is how a particular culture invests sex difference with meaning, clothes, roles, gestures, and responsibilities. That definition is fluid as some intersex people talk about feelings that are different than what they have been told they should have or things they should do as a little boy or girl.

The term intersex may be new to you. Intersex are people whose bodies display physical characteristics of both male and female. Physical characteristics of female or male sex characteristics may become more evident at puberty. More recently intersex is being replaced with the term- variations of sex development. Variations of sexual development is not something new or isolated. In the Dominican Republic and areas of Papua New Guinea there is higher incidence of people born with ambiguous sex characteristics. Obviously we cannot cover all the background information this morning.

Ancient Christians and Jews knew that the categories of male and female were not enough. In the Old Testament there is direction, concerning eunuchs. In Matthew 19:12 Jesus talks about eunuchs who were eunuchs from birth, those made eunuchs by others, or those who made themselves eunuchs. A simple binary sex model of male and female was not the understanding in Jesus' day. In the creation story, Adam and Eve are examples of monogamy and procreation but not every human being is the exact male and female replica. There are wide differences in humanity, people with, hormonal differences, people born with a mental illness, physical difference, there are men and women who are infertile, males who have less body hair than other males. We cannot deny minor or major physical differences.

Gay people refer to themselves as gay. Gay can apply to both men and women. Lesbian refers to women. The first hand accounts of Christians who experience same sex attraction tell us that people did not wake up one morning deciding to be gay. As one person has said he woke up every morning trying to pray the gay away. Washed and Waiting is Wesley Hill's personal account of a Christian who experiences same sex attraction. As a kid Wesley knew that he was different. As a teen he wanted to fit in but was never drawn to the opposite sex. His decision has been to live a celibate life. The debate will go on regarding the cause. Is it nature or nurture? Are we born that way or do our life experiences shape us a certain way? Studies also continue on the structure and function of the brain; its responses to hormones, environment, and stress.

There will continue to be people who say that it is just a sinful act of the will. Christian therapies to change sexual orientation have been mainly unsuccessful. Exodus International, which was the largest umbrella group, disbanded a number of years ago stating that they saw very few people change their sexual orientation.

Christian viewpoints are on a continuum. **Affirming** and **non-Affirming**.

Those who **affirm** that people should act on those same sex desires, give a number of reasons. Here are some of those reasons.

People are born gay therefore it is okay to act on those desires. However, this line of reasoning does not hold for people who say they were just born with a violent temper and there is nothing that they can do. We say to them; learn to control your temper. The Christian life is submitting our will to God's will not fulfilling every natural desire that arises within us.

There is the argument that we need to be current with our culture. In response I would say that the culture has rightly said to the church don't enforce your beliefs on us but now the culture wants to enforce their beliefs on us. However, we live in a pluralistic society where not everyone believes the same thing. Pluralism means we can have an honest robust exchange of ideas and opinions. The culture cannot enforce outside morals on the church.

Those on the affirmative for gay sex say; It would be unloving to tell a gay person not to act on their impulse. Their argument says that God loves us and wants us to be happy and fulfilled. This view is influenced by our highly sexualized culture rather than God. God has a different model of what it means to be fully human. Sexual gratification is not the pinnacle of being human. If sexual gratification was the ultimate expression of being human then people who are born physically unable to have sex, disinterested in sex or become unable to have sex cannot be fulfilled as a human. All Christian heterosexual couples have to live without sexual "fulfillment," in some sense. Normally, marriage involves periods of sexual abstinence, and sometimes, through circumstances beyond the couple's control, it may even involve lifelong sexual abstinence or ongoing sexual dissatisfaction. We live for a higher calling of pleasing God and a higher definition of being human.

Another argument is that if they go into a monogamous gay relationship and really love one another God will forgive. There is no scriptural precedence for this proposal. The apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans takes on this type of argument when he says God forbid that you keep on sinning so that God can keep showing grace. May it never be.

People on the affirming side will also say there is no clear prohibition in Scripture. That requires dismissing Old Testament laws in Leviticus 18:22, 20:13 that a man shall not lay with man.

Regarding the New Testament, people who affirm same sex sexual relationships site that Jesus never gave any direction prohibitions against same sex relations. Jesus would not have addressed homosexuality in his Jewish culture because there was already a strong prohibition

in Jewish culture. Arguing that Jesus did not give any prohibitions against homosexual sex is an argument from silence, which is not a good argument.

The apostle Paul writing to the Romans 1:24-27 speaks about the sexual relations between women as unnatural and sexual relations between men as indecent acts. Paul is not just saying that it is against Jewish cultural norms. He is grounding his statement in the larger argument that man has abandoned God. The Roman world was highly sexualized. Homosexuality was part of Roman sexual experimentation. Roman men had sex with their wives for procreation, recreational sex with other women and prostitutes, female slaves, and sex with young boys. Sex outside of marriage was not a moral issue for Romans. What Paul wrote to the Romans was a radical change. Sexual redemption, and purity are part of the ongoing life of a Christian.

On the **non-affirming** side are those who recognize that people are born with same sex attraction. There are many differences in physical, mental and emotional conditions. Adam and Eve are not just a pattern into which all other humans must squeeze themselves, but as the beginning of the story of God's redemption, a story that will bring many more kinds of humans into the conversation— there is a story in Genesis about different races, languages, tribes, and nations. And yes God's creation includes differently sexed and gendered human beings.

Previously I mentioned the Old Testament laws in Leviticus 18:22, 20:13 a man shall not lay with man. Some would discount these laws because since the cross we are not under the law but under grace. Jesus upheld the highest ideal for human relations that God prescribed in the Old Testament. When asked about divorce in Matthew 19:9 Jesus held up the ideal of life long heterosexual marriage. Jesus followed the trajectory of the Old Testament law and raised the bar on lust. "Whoever looks at a woman lustfully is guilty of adultery." Matthew 5:28 An argument from silence to prove that Jesus would approve of gay sex is a weak argument.

People who are non affirming of gay sex still affirm that we love all people. Loving people does not mean affirming behaviour. Love accepts a person as a human being in the image of God without accepting all a person does. This is Jesus in Matthew 5:44-45 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous. God generously continues to love all. We continue to love people even while they may not be living in accord with God.

We don't treat people as objects without feelings and human rights. The apostle Paul's teachings are often misunderstood. In 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 Paul wrote... regarding what I wrote to you in my earlier letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. But I wasn't talking about the sexually immoral people in the outside world by any means—or the greedy, or the swindlers, or people who worship false gods—otherwise, you would have to leave the world entirely! But now I'm writing to you not to associate with anyone who calls themselves "brother" or "sister" who is sexually immoral, greedy, someone who worships false gods, an abusive person, a drunk, or a swindler. Don't even eat with anyone like this. 1 Corinthians 5:9-11.

Paul is saying don't associate with people who say they are Christians but flaunt God's laws. Notice that Paul includes all kinds of sin. The reason Paul gives for such a radical move of breaking fellowship with a person is so that people do not remain deceived that everything is okay between them and God when they are actually out of fellowship with God. Paul in another letter to the Corinthians tells the church to welcome a particular person back into fellowship after that man had changed his lifestyle. Love confronts and forgives.

The question is asked; so what if people came into Heritage Green who were living in a gay sexual relationship. People in a gay sexual relationship would be welcome and shown the love of God. Our message would not change and we would not target them. We all need to receive the transformative grace of God. I would expect that the Holy Spirit would speak the same way the Spirit speaks to all of us. We preach God's word for the sake of the well being of people. We are responsible for spiritual care and well being of people whom God draws to Heritage Green.

So what is the way forward as non affirming of gay sex? Research shows that some of us only experience same sex attraction. People who emerge adolescence with same sex desires are shaken, have anxiety, depression, guilt, they pray for healing but have no answer. They live with the darkness of feeling less than human cut off from people, being alone to deal with the inner turmoil. Feeling that even God whom they want to love hates them.

What is the standing before God for Christians who experience same sex attraction? The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:11, Don't you know that people who are unjust won't inherit God's kingdom? Don't be deceived. Those who are sexually immoral, those who worship false gods, adulterers, both participants in same-sex intercourse, thieves, the greedy, drunks, abusive people, and swindlers won't inherit God's kingdom. That is what some of you used to be! But you were washed clean, you were made holy to God, and you were made right with God in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Notice the tense "that is what some of you used to be." No matter what our lives before Christ we are washed, clean, made, holy made right with God. God loves and we love all people who struggle with persistent, unwanted desires. Notice the list of other activities that people would still struggle with such as immorality, adultery, greed, drunkenness, abusive behaviour. Just as we love Christians who are dealing with other afflictions such as chemical dependencies, eating disorders, mental and emotional illnesses, we love people who are dealing with same sex attraction. The dynamics of human sinfulness and divine mercy and grace are the same for all of us, regardless of the particular temptations or weaknesses we face.

There are options for gay Christians. Mixed orientation marriage, is one spouse has strong heterosexual desires, other spouse has same sex desires. People do create strong bonds in mixed orientation marriages and have children.

In celibacy you exhibit the image of God without being married. Denying gay people, a same sex spouse is not denying them a fulfilled life. True love and intimacy is not just through having sex. Marriage is not the solution to all of our relational longings. Gay or straight marriage will not fix all of life's problems. Sex and romance are not the same as love. Our basic script in the church has been about marriage, getting married, and giving the impression that singleness is just a temporary stage which we pass through. Singleness is not an interim stage in life.

Those with the gift of singleness are not just asexual individuals with no interest in family life. We all have the need for friendship and closeness. As a church we welcome all people who want to be part of the community. We affirm that we will be with you and support you on this journey through life. People who experience same sex attraction have the same desires for friendship, giving and sharing their lives with people.

Jesus is the single saviour. We live out our calling as Christians not as single or married. Our first call is to be like Christ. All of us yearn to shake off or be free of some aspects of our life before we knew Christ but we live by faith daily trusting Christ, relying on the Spirit while looking forward to the next life when we are totally free.

This is the start of the conversation that needs to continue.