

A Biblical and Pastoral response to Homosexuality

EFAC Seminar – Rev Paul Hunt

Two Issues

How to respond to homosexual people in our community who aren't Christian.

How to respond to people within the church who express that they are gay or think they are gay.

People who aren't Christian

How to respond to homosexual people in our community who aren't Christian. Our neighbours, work colleagues, family members.

We Have an Image Problem

I hear that the church is very unfriendly to gays, and Christians are not good at relating to homosexual men and women. In a recent survey of 1,000 Australians by Olive Tree Media (olivetreemedia.com.au) 30% of respondents said that the church's practice towards and doctrine on homosexuality **completely** blocks them from considering Christianity. Another 15% said it blocked them significantly.

Of course there may be good Scriptural reasons why the Christian view causes offence. But I do think we need to recognise our hypocrisy here - we need to be careful that we haven't elevated homosexual sin to a different category that hinders homosexuals' access to loving Christian fellowship that will point them to Christ.

If a couple come to church and are living together but not married I suspect we would accept them more readily than a gay couple. Do we treat greedy people the same way as we do gays? Greed is

included with homosexuality in 1 Cor 6 in the list of sins that will exclude you from the Kingdom of God.

Our desire to have gay and lesbian people hear the Gospel of Jesus means we may need to do more in our heads and hearts first to open a door for them to hear the Gospel.

In 1 Cor 5 Paul writes

9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.

11 But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

12 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? 13 God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked person from among you."

It is quite clear that a distinction is drawn in how we respond to the immoral ethical life of the person who claims to be Christian and that of the non-believer. While all behaviour, sexual or otherwise, that is outside God's plan for us is destructive in some way, *our response* differs according to the person's attitude and relationship with God.

To separate yourself from a non-believer who acts outside the Christian ethical framework would mean withdrawing from the

world, and apart from being impractical would mean losing the opportunity to share the gospel with them.

We do not judge them, God is the one who does that, not us, indeed we are to judge those within the household of faith.

This does not mean we are unaware or naïve about the destructive and dangerous lifestyle they may be engaged in, sexual or otherwise, nor the fact that without repentance these things can keep them out of the kingdom of God but we do not stand in judgement upon them – that is God’s prerogative.

While I lament much of the increasing acceptance of behaviour as normal that once would have been considered reprehensible in our society, I don’t expect a non-believer, who does not accept Christ nor the authority of the Scripture, who does not have the Holy Spirit, to understand that God in his mercy and grace, sets limits to our behaviour and lifestyle for our good.

Titus says that the grace of God and his salvation ... teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age

So my response to the guy next door who is gay or the woman who I work with who is lesbian, should be to respond like I do in any other context. Be friendly, be relational, be Christian and godly in my behaviour. Live a lifestyle that reflects the Gospel and gives it good “press”, where we in other facets of our lives as well as the sexual ones, say “no” to ungodly passions and “yes” to self controlled lives.

Now if you have a close relationship with a friend or a relative who is homosexual, this is particularly challenging. The reality is that a Christian point of view and opinion on human sexual behaviour, and so a view on theirs, is likely to bring conflict, a clash of values deeply held. Don’t underestimate that the biblical view is confronting, challenging and hurtful for them.

It would be wise to have thought through a Christian response, rather than avoid the issue altogether. I would try to be prepared to give an answer to give them if they ask you – “why is the church against gays?” or “why are you Christians so hung up on sex?”, while still trying to point them to Christ, as the centre of our faith, rather than *just* discuss sexual ethics where your frameworks are universes apart.

If your children are gay or express such thoughts, they may well do so with an expectation of rejection. They may be offended by your views, they may be angry, they may write **you** off, but if you respond, and continue to respond, with grace and love it is less likely that they will carry that sense of offense or prejudice with them long. That may mean, under God’s grace, that they will start to interact with the issues of the Gospel that underlie God’s desire for us live self controlled lives his way.

I have met homosexuals (mostly gay men but a few lesbians) who I quite like, and if we were to work together would get along with quite well. In terms of relating to them I have no problem any more than anyone else who isn’t a believer.

Actually, that’s not quite true. I have to work at not reacting for I find the idea of male homosexual activity repugnant. That’s being

honest. Many homosexuals I've met are really nice people – and I mean that. But I do find the idea of homosexual sex more disordered than heterosexual sex, and I think that's biblical. But I suspect that some of us still have to work against the inclination to want to avoid talking with people we know are homosexual.

Jesus seemed to be able to relate to people who society didn't like much in his day –prostitutes and tax collectors amongst others – and wasn't afraid of being tainted by their lifestyle yet still sought to bring the gospel to them. Their sexual lifestyle is not something that we have to approve of to relate to them helpfully.

But nor is their lifestyle something we have to agree with and if we want to have real debates in our society we should be able to hold this moral viewpoint without ridicule – increasingly difficult where sexual expression is seen as a human right.

But to summarise - homosexuals are no further away or closer to God than other people who are not yet Christian, and so if we view them as God views them - people who need to know of the love of Christ - that is good!

We must be gracious to anyone who is outside of the body of Christ. How can they know of his Gospel unless Christians can get over their struggles with this issue? In the list of sins in 1 Cor 6 Paul writes "what some of you were" – this sinful history, that we all share, gives us humility in our relationships with those who have not yet experienced the transforming power of the HS.

Needless to say there is no place for gay bashing or ridicule, which is categorically different to saying we believe that the lifestyle

sexually active gays and lesbians lead is neither helpful nor honouring to God.

Within the church however it is a different matter.

In the Church

Different approaches to different types of persons.

The Struggler

The person who recognises that indulging in sex outside marriage is not how God wants them to live, struggles with the issue of same sex attraction and wants to talk about it. They may have had homosexual encounters in the past, either as a Christian or before they were Christian. They may be married or single. But they are genuinely seeking to be obedient to God in this area of their life and have expressed their struggles and where they have fallen, are repentant.

We must help them, like anyone else caught in sin.

Walk alongside them – these issues can take a long time to resolve. Assist them by listening to them, their fears, guilt and pain. Assist them by praying with them and reading God's word with them.

Help them know of forgiveness if they have fallen into sin. Help them resolve with faith the issues of hurt or guilt or pain they feel.

Be aware of your own sinfulness – lust=adultery Jesus says. Are you any different?

Be aware of your own temptations and be wise.
Do not be naïve – the sexual feelings that drive such behaviour are strong and may stay with them for the majority of their lives.

Who could you refer them to? A Christian counsellor? Other friends who can keep confidences?

Many leave the church thinking they would never get a sensitive hearing if they were struggling with this issue. That is an indictment on us.

The Defiant

There are others in the church who think that God accepts their sexual immoral lifestyle and live unrepentant lives. Who do not believe that God has much to say about their sexuality and that no-one has the right to limit their activities. That the church needs to move on from critiquing sexual lifestyle – heterosexual or other. I have heard such views expressed in our Anglican church forums. If these people are leaders their false teaching needs to be refuted.

Paul uses his strongest words for such people - ¹¹ But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

¹² What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? ¹³ God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked person from among you."

The goal is be their repentance and restoration to the family of God so that their eternal future is not jeopardized. But *if they refuse to*

repent then their behaviour and teaching of it to others either directly or by example, needs to be stopped, because of the damage it does to God's honour and the bad example of what it mean to live as a disciple of Christ.

This is not to be done lightly but it means they should not be allowed back into the church until they express repentance. Needless to say this loving, godly discipline is not practiced in many of our churches.

So there are many challenges – no surprise. But in all this may we genuinely seek to hold up Christ to those who do not know him with love and compassion and encourage us all into deeper godliness in life and faith.

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Some Helpful Scripture Passages on this issue

1 Cor 5

⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— ¹⁰ not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.

¹¹ But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

¹² What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? ¹³ God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked person from among you.”

1 Cor 6:9-11

⁹ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Titus 2:11-3:8

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly

passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

¹⁵ These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

Titus 3

¹ Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.

³ At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸ This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.