

Introduction

Few topics have the potential to generate more emotion and misunderstanding in our culture than the Bible and homosexuality. As a Christ-follower and spiritual leader I am asked about this issue more than almost any other, by people who genuinely want to learn about Jesus and by people who just want to pick a fight. I have encountered bias and bigotry on both sides of the divide. Everyone seems quick to judge and slow to listen. More than ever, we need to heed the wise words of James, the brother of Jesus, who said,

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

-- **James 1:19-20**, NIV

We have covered this topic more than once at The Meeting House and messages are available online. For now, here is a printed overview of some of our thoughts on issues concerning Christian faith and the queer community.

Being A “Third Way” Church

For years, we at The Meeting House have enjoyed the beauty and challenge of being a “third way” church.

Typically, most churches fall into one of two categories on this topic — conservative or liberal. Conservative churches highlight those passages of Scripture that condemn homosexual behaviour. At their best, conservative churches remind us that Christ-followers should have a serious concern about what the Bible teaches on this and any ethical issue. At their worst, conservative churches can get side-tracked by

Note: The term “queer” is not one that I am a fan of and feels to me somewhat self-deprecating for this community to use. Having said that, it is the term that some members of the homosexual community have asked me to use when referring to them rather than just using terms like “gay”, “lesbian”, and “homosexual”. Their reasons are many and, whether or not I agree with them, I will respect their wishes and use the term advisedly, though not exclusively. Knowing that not all members of this community will necessarily agree, I will use a variety of terms. At this point in our dialogue history, it is the best I can do.

unbiblical and hurtful pursuits. They might invest their resources in ministries that try to change individual orientation or that fight against any perceived queer community agenda. They might organize rallies, sign petitions, and keep a sharp eye out for any activity within the queer community that they might perceive as anti-family. They may say they love all people equally, but the actions and emotions they bring to this topic seem to say different.

Liberal churches react against this apparent love-less approach by reminding us all of the inherent value and beauty of all people. At their best, liberal churches are places of healing and belonging for people with same-sex attraction. At their worst, liberal churches fail to wrestle with the biblical texts in a straightforward manner, often diminishing the value and inspiration of Scripture, and thereby failing to challenge all Christ-followers toward radical discipleship. Liberal churches tend to agree with, approve of, and support not only homosexual orientation, but also homosexual practice and marriage for Christ-followers, and, at their worst, they do so in spite of not because of biblical teaching on this topic.

[I am aware that my description of conservative and liberal churches could be greatly nuanced. There are a wide variety of expressions within the umbrella labels of “conservative” and “liberal”. But assessing the complexities of how conservative and liberal churches approach this topic is not a focus of this paper and I think the above description is accurate, though not complete.]

As a “third way” church, at The Meeting House we want to have the biblical rigor of conservatives and the welcoming embrace of liberals. We want to be honest and uncompromising in our call to all Christ-followers to follow Jesus as their Lord, their leader, their mentor and Master. We also know that people come to Christ in different ways and at different stages of spiritual understanding and ability, and we want to create a safe place for all spiritual seekers to come together in honest and loving community. In that sense, we consider The Meeting House a queer-friendly church. We do not preach that people must change their sexual orientation in order to follow Jesus. Instead, we invite all people to change their spiritual orientation, toward God and their fellow human beings.

When we do this, we will submit our humanness, in all its wonder and flaws, to God and his way of living as revealed in the teachings of Jesus. To be gay or straight or bi or trans is to be a wonderful image-bearer of God, yet to be so in imperfect, broken, and often hurting ways, just like everyone else. We seek to embrace and challenge all people in their sexual purity, but this is not a message for any one classification of human being.

The Truth About “Us” and “Them”

In short, the truth about “us” and “them” is that there is no “them”. There is only “us”. We are all beautiful and precious people, infinitely valued by God. We are also all sexually broken people to one degree or another, needing the healing of authentic community to live as Jesus calls us to live.

I may be heterosexual, but all that means is that I live every day with temptations toward inappropriate sexual expression – to have sex outside of marriage with women. Heterosexuality is not naturally monogamous. I am, to some extent, broken. My gay friends also live every day with the sexual temptation to express their sexuality in inappropriate ways. There is nothing more holy or noble about my temptation versus the temptations of my gay friends. Just because for them this temptation is directed toward others of their same gender does not diminish our common bond as humans and, for my Christian friends, as Christ-followers. Together we honour God by submitting our sexual temptations to the lordship of Jesus.

From a Christian perspective, our sexual orientation only helps define what our area of sexual temptation and perhaps dysfunction will be – but we are all tempted (and to some extent, dysfunctional) in one way or another. To be human is, among other things, to be in some wonderful and weird way, sexually dysfunctional. We are all sexually broken people, as well as sexually glorious people (**Romans 3:23-24; Psalm 51:5**).

A Message to the Christian Community

I would like to encourage Christians who invest too much time in making the queer community our opponents to ***learn the difference between acceptance and agreement***. When we confuse these two concepts we do not love as we should. Conservative Christians seem to find a hard time fully accepting someone unless that someone first changes, repents, and becomes like them. They cannot disagree and, at the same time, fully respect, honour, and accept the other person as the Bible calls us to (see **Titus 3:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 Peter 2:17, 1 Peter 3:15-16**). When we understand that acceptance and agreement are two different concepts, we will finally stop withholding acceptance as a form of disagreement and will learn to better love those outside our boundaries of agreement.

May I also suggest that we stop demanding Christian ethics from people who do not claim to be Christ-followers and Bible morality from people who don't claim to follow the Bible. Our secular governments are doing

their best, outside of a Christian worldview, to create loving, respectful, and stable societies. We should commend them for that and not expect that they will approach this topic from a biblical perspective as we would, wanting to preserve the full image of God in us as male and female in covenantal marriage (**Genesis 1:26-27**). Remember that Jesus taught this ethic to his disciples (**Matthew 5:1-2**).

Lastly, I would also call Christ-followers to declare their love through their actions. Conservative Christians have the well-earned reputation of putting a lot of energy into their messages of disapproval. They hold rallies, sign petitions, and write letters to the government to show their opposition to the gay “agenda” (whatever that may be). All of their active energy goes into the “we don’t approve” message. What about the “we love you” message? That aspect of Christian response to the queer community is usually given a token sound bite, often in the middle of longer sermons intended to make clear the “we disapprove” message.

I would like to suggest that we have it completely backwards. We should be pouring our active energies into the “we love you” message. We should be the first to look out for the human rights of any oppressed group, including gays and lesbians. We should find practical ways to serve the queer community, always showing them the utmost respect as image-bearers of God. If we are going to organize letter-writing campaigns, let them be letter-writing campaigns of love expressed to our queer community friends. If we do this rightly, we will be living the counter-cultural lifestyle that Jesus holds out for us. We will be that unique Kingdom society within our secular culture that shows the world how to bless those whom we do not agree with and who may not agree with us. And within that context of organized, active, energetically demonstrated love, we may then also make ourselves clear with the sound bite of disagreement. If we are loving as radically as we should, this will only make the love we offer all the more meaningful and transformative.

A Message to the Homosexual Community

If you are a member of the gay community, **the most important thing you need to hear me say is simply this: “I’m sorry”**. I’m sorry that the church has for so long made you feel inferior because of your orientation. I’m sorry that we have not demonstrated love, but judgment. I’m sorry that we have not slowed down enough to understand your struggles, and I’m sorry we have not represented Jesus to you as we are called to.

If you are willing to hear me say more, then I would also like to encourage you to consider the same lesson as the church needs to learn: the difference between *acceptance* and *agreement*. I would recommend that you stop expecting or even desiring all Christians to agree with you. It will never happen, and so, if that is to be the necessary basis for peace between our communities, that too will never happen. But then, who wants peace based on absolute agreement at all times? That is a fragile and false pseudo-peace that prevents us all from being completely honest while being intentionally loving.

Please know that it is possible for someone to believe that homosexual sexual expression is wrong, a sin, just as they believe that heterosexual sexual expression outside of marriage is sin, and that doesn't make them a bigot, a redneck, or homophobic in the least. Get to know us enough to realize that many of us do not have an anti-queer agenda and do not divide our thought world into gay and straight. I believe we can form mutually respectful friendships between our communities without demanding absolute agreement on all issues. And it is this mutually respectful diversity that will, in the end, provide us all with the most opportunity for growing, loving, and learning.

A Message to Homosexual Christians

As a Christ-follower, we are spiritual family – brothers and sisters together, regardless of sexual orientation. And as your brother in Christ, I want to encourage you to put aside the “I was born this way” argument in determining your ethics. That way of thinking does not apply to Christ-followers. **To be a Christian is to believe that Jesus is our Lord – not our past, our biology, or our desires.** Biological determinism is never the answer. Biology is not destiny. Life is about choice. I am not suggesting we can choose our sexual orientation, but I am saying we can all choose how we live.

As a heterosexual male, I could argue that I was born with sexual desires to have sex with more than one woman, and so I should have the right to live that way. But I do not go down that road because I am a Christ-follower. Not every desire I have should be indulged, whether I was born with them or not.

Jesus told the rich young ruler to give up everything he had. Why would God give him so much at birth, allowing him to be born into privilege, only to ask him to give it all away? I don't know. But he did. I suspect that Jesus knows what we are tempted to make an idol of, whether that is our possessions, our sexual orientation, or our religious affiliation. Regardless, we submit all things to the leadership of Christ.

Let me remind you that the Bible never condemns *orientation*. There isn't even a word for "homosexual" in the ancient languages. Only *chosen* behaviours and attitudes are discussed. As John Stott explains, "In every discussion about homosexuality we must be rigorous in differentiating between 'being' and 'doing' — that is, between a person's identity and activity, sexual preference and sexual practice, constitution and conduct." Look up **Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:8-11**. You'll notice that the practice, not the impulse, is sin. Also notice that homosexual sexual expression is not highlighted as being more sinful than a host of other things, like heterosexual sexual expression outside of marriage, greed, and gossip.

If you are a gay Christian, make Jesus, not your sexual rights, your focus and your Lord. As you do that, we will walk together as family, helping each other each step of the way.

Having said this, I am also keenly aware that there is one significant difference between gay and straight Christians' expression of obedience to Christ which has to do with the biblical relationship of marriage, which we will talk about in the next section.

For now it is worth saying that many of our homosexual brothers and sisters have laid down their desires, their "rights", to sexual intimacy in response to Christ's call to die to ourselves and follow the way of the cross. We believe that God honors the ongoing internal battle that these brave Christ-followers struggle with, and he certainly offers them grace to help them deal with their temptation.

What about Same-Sex Marriage?

We are well aware that biblically literate Christians have differing opinions on this sensitive issue and we respect other viewpoints while at the same time wanting to be clear about our own. We are sharing our views through this document in the interest of honest disclosure and dialogue, not out of the desire to be preachy or divisive.

At The Meeting House we believe that marriage is established by God, and assumed and affirmed by Jesus to be a heterosexual union. This is not arbitrary but holds deep significance. The first time God's image is said to be reflected in humankind it is male and female together in committed union that is being described (**Genesis 1 and 2**). To be male and to be female is to uniquely reflect one aspect of who God is. **And it is when both genders are brought together and united in loving covenant that God's image is most powerfully seen. This is a unique biblical relationship called "marriage"**. The covenant of marriage and the sexual intimacy of marriage are both used as images of our intimacy

with God. He is the Groom — we are the Bride. He enters us — we receive him. He leaves his seed in us and the result is new life — new birth.

We see Jesus supporting this understanding of marriage as a union between a husband and a wife reflecting God's union with us in his teaching as well (e.g., **Matthew 19**). He is rather straightforward in his teaching that there are people who for various different reasons are not called to marriage. He says that some people will be born “eunuchs” – in other words, some people are not given the necessary biology for marriage. This is a fact of life that applies to a variety of people for more reasons than sexual orientation. He also adds that some people will be made this way by outside influences. Most importantly for a Christ-follower, Jesus also says that some people will choose to be “eunuchs” for the sake of the Kingdom. This is a high calling according to Jesus, and will only be fully understood and pursued by a dedicated Christ-follower.

[Remember, we're not suggesting that we expect Christian ethics to be embraced by non-Christians.]

Jesus also seems to be clear in his teaching that marriage is what God, not the State, defines it to be. So even when two people get married officially by the State, if their marriage does not follow God's righteous guidelines, God does not recognize it as a marriage (e.g., **Matthew 5:31-32** and **Matthew 19:9**). This should not surprise us since it is true in many matters of sin. There are many things that the state says are legal that God still says are immoral (e.g. adultery). When there is divergence of opinion or definition between God and government, as Christians we follow God's understanding on the matter.

In light of this, we do not believe that the Christian agenda should be to get our government to act more Christian. We think we have enough to keep us busy if we focus on getting Christians to act more Christian. We know we may disagree with our government's understanding of marriage. And at the same time, we must hold true to what we believe, while the government does the same.

If our secular society does not embrace a Christian world-view (as they do not) then we can only pray for them as they make the best decisions they can according to their own worldview. As Canadians, we are given a voice in current political debate and we are certainly free to participate in that process. But as Christians, we pour our energies into organizing our voice to offer a message of love and life to our world via the Gospel. This is not a message about political reform, but about life change, one life at a time. And when the Church organizes itself around the Gospel, we give the nations of this world a glimpse of a better Kingdom.

What About Christians Who Believe Differently?

You now know where The Meeting House stands. But how do we relate to Christians who hold a different position?

A growing number of (Bible-believing) Christians believe that, although same-sex marriage is not God's original ideal, in our less-than-ideal world, God would and does bless same-sex marriage as a holy alternate for homosexual Christians. Although we do not hold this position, we welcome and enjoy rich fellowship with any Christian who wants to study Scripture in order to follow Jesus.

As Anabaptist Christians, we have learned to love, live with and learn from "Just War" Christians, even though we strongly disagree with their ethical interpretation of Scripture. Surely, then, we can do the same with Christians who interpret the Bible differently regarding same-sex marriage.

Conclusion

I hope these thoughts have helped bring some clarity, whether or not we find ourselves in agreement. If you would like to investigate this topic further, you can listen to different sermons online on the series archives tab of teaching page on our website — themeetinghouse.com/teaching. Look for these teaching topics:

- Hot Potatoes 1 (Jun 1999) -- #10 Is Being Gay A Sin?
- Hot Potatoes 2 (Nov 2002) -- #5 Is Gay Marriage A Step in the Right Direction?
- Not Ashamed – Part 2 (Jun 2005) – on the second half of the first chapter of Romans
- Licence to Sin (Feb 2011)
- Modern Family (Oct 2013)

In the meantime, it is our prayer that as Christians we would learn to better model the compassion of Jesus without pretending to agree where we do not. It is also our prayer that those who are not Christ-followers would be motivated to more deeply investigate the loving and life-changing teachings of this radical Rabbi from Nazareth. To whatever extent you are open to this investigation, we are happy to help.

Peace to you,

Bruxy Cavey
Teaching Pastor