

LEADERS' DIALOGUE ON HOMOSEXUALITY

The Bridge Network of Churches October, 2013

WHY THIS ARTICLE?

The cultural pressure being placed on every facet of our society to capitulate to the homosexual agenda can be debilitating to Christians and churches if they have not taken the time to think through this issue with biblical compassion and accuracy.

This article will assist pastors in leading the discussion with their congregants.

Eighteen senior pastors, along with the ministerial staff of the Bridge Network of Churches, met on October 10, 2013, to discuss beliefs and needed actions relating to the issue of homosexuality and how it is affecting families of Christians and our churches. These are the thoughts and recommendations which came out of that meeting; our hope is to provide pastors and congregations with the information they need to be proactive rather than reactive in this key issue facing our generation.

WHAT DOES GOD THINK ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?

It is clear what our culture thinks about homosexuality; it is considered an acceptable lifestyle. Reflecting on biblical theology forces the conclusion that God does not consider the acts or behaviors associated with the homosexual lifestyle to be acceptable; He opposes such behavior. (Matthew 19:1-12; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 6:9-11; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Timothy 1:8-11) While there is no apparent developed concept of sexual *orientation* in the Scriptures, these passages are clear that God has determined guidelines for sexual *behavior* which apply to those who are experimenting with their sexual identity.

We recognize some individuals who are connected to our congregations have not embraced homosexuality to the exclusion of Scriptural mandates, but are searching for truth to match their sexual orientation. While sexual orientation may be subjective, biblical sexual ethics as understood by the church throughout history have been consistently interpreted to be non-inclusive of homosexuality.





WHAT CAUSES HOMOSEXUALITY?

We agree that both the culture and the church are confused about the causes of homosexuality. Environment, relationships or genetics may contribute to sexual orientation, but the foundation of all human brokenness, including homosexuality, is the fallen nature of man, corrupted by sin. Our sinful nature instigates sins of every type; predispositions toward specific types of sin can make resistance to temptation more difficult.

The psychiatric community, in conjunction with the scientific community, currently believes there may be a homosexual 'gene' which predisposes one toward this sexual behavior; their error is compounded in their support for the idea that there may be a 'lying' gene and an 'anger' gene. If every sin can be blamed on some genetic disorder that is irresistible, we cannot be held responsible for our sinful choices, thus contradicting clear biblical revelation.

CAN SOMEONE CHANGE SEXUAL ORIENTATION?

While the culture around us says a homosexual cannot change, several examples were shared among us of individuals who have chosen to leave the homosexual lifestyle. The church can be equally at fault by saying the opposite, "You must change." We recognize the reality that some individuals may never change from their attraction to those of the same sex, but that fact does not negate the sinfulness of the behavior. Celibacy, though a difficult choice, would be a recommendation for these individuals with "enduring situations."

We understand sanctification is both an event and a process. The path to holiness is a journey, not a single step, and it takes time to gain victory over one's predispositions. The difficulty of the journey, however, does not negate its necessity.



Grief Resources:
<http://followme.org/answers/grief/the-stages-of-grief-and-grieving>

WHEN A FAMILY MEMBER ANNOUNCES A GAY IDENTITY

Pastors should help parents walk through the process of grief when a child announces a gay sexual identity. Some parents will feel as though they have lost a child. The loss of their dream of a wedding or grandchildren will feel like a death to them. Processing the emotions of grief will affect the rest of the route they take.

If they look for someone to blame (part of the grieving process), and remain there, it can affect their child and their child's eternity. If they choose the path of judgmentalism, resulting in rejection and isolation from their child, they could permanently damage their relationship with that child.

It is our recommendation that a path of love and acceptance (but not affirmation of lifestyle choice) be pursued with the homosexual family member. The hard work of restoring the relationship will need to be done. Demanding change, emotional withdrawal, shaming and other tools of manipulation will only hinder God's ability to work in that person's life. It is recommended that a support group for family members be enlisted to share the emotions involved in the relationship.

The embarrassment which accompanies the revelation of a homosexual child can be crippling; it is recommended that pastors speak encouragingly and supportively of those who are struggling with the presence of gay family members. Because a church can become a very bigoted place, the pastor must set the example for the members in how to come alongside and help those who are hurting.

HOMOSEXUALITY AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

We recommend teaching and dialoguing openly about this subject based on Matthew 22 and the Great Commandment. Some of the conversations which need to happen in the congregations will be difficult, but they are also necessary to prepare the church to respond intelligently, compassionately and biblically to homosexual individuals who want to become members of the church. Consistency in allowing church

membership should be applied among all illicit sexual behaviors; this is a better defense than directing it at one group.

It is imperative that churches be seen as people who are like Christ in that they are full of grace and truth. While the world sees the church as a rejecting body, we should redefine ourselves as a people of discernment in deciding who covenants with us in membership.

The key truth in any moral situation is the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the surrender of one's life to Who He is. If what we offer (abundant life in Christ) is better than what they are leaving, our stance will make sense to them.

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO GAYS WHO WANT TO BE MARRIED IN THE CHURCH?

We cannot recognize gay marriage as ordained or accepted by God. Because the culture has determined to force homosexual marriage onto a gullible and spiritually irresponsible people, the churches must take a stand to honor God's original design for marriage. It is recommended that language be added to a church's bylaws to clarify the congregation's position on what constitutes biblical marriage.

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For more information on bylaws language regarding homosexuality:
<http://factn.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Church-by-law-recommendations-memo.pdf>

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