



LGBTQ Issues: A “Third Way” Approach

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Introduction

from Scott Hale, Lead Pastor

Few topics can generate more emotion and misunderstanding in our culture than the Bible and homosexuality. It is consistently one of the most common issues that I, as a pastor and a Christ-follower, am asked about 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 by folks who seem 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)

The following is an overview of how we approach such issues concerning Christian faith and the LGBTQ community. First a summary, followed by more detailed thoughts.

Summary of Beliefs Concerning LGBTQ Issues:

1. We believe that all people, regardless of sexual orientation or identity, are equally and infinitely **loved by God**.
2. We believe that most, if not all, people may struggle with some degree of **brokenness** in the area of human sexuality, whether gay or straight. As such we believe there should be no "us" and "them" between Christ-followers whose **orientation** is heterosexual and homosexual.
3. We believe that Christ-followers are called to express their sexuality within **marriage**, which the Bible understands as a sexual, covenantal relationship between a **man and a woman**. Accordingly, we cannot celebrate same-sex relationships as God's best for his children.
4. We believe that many people who follow Jesus, gay and straight, may be called to a life of **celibacy** for the sake of the Kingdom and we celebrate this chosen singleness as a gift offered to God.
5. We believe that all people who want to investigate the teachings of Jesus should be **welcome** at Generations Church. We invite all spiritual seekers - who are willing to walk in **grace and humility** with those they may **disagree** with - to journey with us as a part of our church community.

6. We believe that the most important issue is not our sexual orientation but our **spiritual orientation**. God calls us into a relationship in which we are fundamentally oriented *toward* him rather than away from him, humbly seeking to become more and more like Jesus in our thoughts and actions.
7. We believe that, although living according to God's design would be to everyone's advantage, Christian **ethics** should not be expected from or forced upon those who do not follow Jesus. Jesus' teaching is for Jesus' **disciples**.
8. We believe that the issue of whether sexual orientation is something people can be born with or may be caused by one's experiences (**nature vs. nurture**) is not a worthwhile fixation and should not determine the **ethics** we live out as Christ-followers. The call of the God's Kingdom to every human being is to leave behind the old life and become part of a **new humanity**.

Bottom Line...

9. Lastly, we believe that believing all of the above will make our community diverse, messy, and **beautiful**. We treasure **unity**, not the luxury of uniformity. We'd rather walk in the grace of loving fellowship than demand agreement on every detail. As our Lord tells us, they will know us by our love.

We invite you to join us.

Being a “Third Way” Church

At Generations Church we’ve embraced the beauty and challenge of being a “third way” church. Here’s what we mean by that:

Typically, most churches fall into one of two categories on this topic – *conservative* or *liberal*. Conservative churches highlight those scriptures that condemn homosexual behavior. At their best, conservative churches remind us that Christ-followers should pay serious attention to what the Bible teaches on this and any ethical issue. At their worst, conservative churches can get sidetracked by unfruitful and hurtful pursuits, becoming overly obsessed with fighting what they perceive as the “homosexual community agenda.” They may exalt homosexual behavior as a sin more condemnable than other “more acceptable” sins common among the church. They may say they “love the sinner,” but their actions and words often say different.

Liberal churches react against the fundamentalist approach by reminding us all of the inherent value 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 text in a manner that respects its value and inspiration, and thereby fail 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*, including marriage.

(I am aware there is a wider variety of expressions within the spectrum of “conservative” and “liberal,” but this oversimplification helps frame the conversation well enough for our purposes here.)

As a “**third way**” church, Generations Church wants to demonstrate both biblical precision and a welcoming embrace. We want to be honest and uncompromising in our call to all Christ-followers to follow Jesus as their Lord, mentor and savior. We also know that people come to Christ at different stages of spiritual understanding, 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 Generations Church a gay-friendly church, because we are a **human**-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.

The Bible reveals that we are all beautiful and precious people, infinitely valued by God. To be gay or straight is to be an image-bearer of God, yet to be so in imperfect, broken, and often painful ways, just like everyone else. We all need the healing of authentic community to live as Jesus calls us to live. And we seek to embrace and challenge **all** people toward a lifestyle of sexual purity.

Whether one is heterosexual or homosexual, we are prone toward temptations of inappropriate sexual expression – that is, to seek sexual contact with others outside of biblical marriage. There is nothing more holy about my temptations than the temptations of my gay friends. Nor does the same-sex inclination of a Christian friend of mine diminish our common bond as disciples.

Together we honor God by submitting our sexual temptations to the lordship of Jesus. (*Romans 3:23-24; Psalm 51:5*).

A Message to the Christian Community

I would urge all my brothers and sisters in Christ who may invest too much time in making the homosexual community our opponents to learn **the difference between acceptance and agreement.**

When we confuse these two concepts we do not love as we should. Some of us have a hard time fully accepting someone unless that someone first changes, repents, and becomes like them. We are unable to disagree and, at the same time, respect 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*).

But 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. 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; 1 Corinthians 5:12*). Remember that Jesus taught his Kingdom ethic to his disciples (*Matthew 5*). There are many behaviors we consider unbiblical but do not demand to be made *illegal* (e.g., lying, adultery, fornication, gossip). Rather than trying to get nonChristians to act more Christian, our energy may be better spent just trying to get *Christians* to behave more like Christ.

Lastly, I would also call Christ-followers to declare their love through their actions. Many Christians have a 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”. All of their active energy goes into the “we don’t approve” message.

What about the “we love you” message?

Rather than hiding a token “we love the sinner” soundbite in the middle of a tirade against all that we disapprove of, what if we have it *completely backwards*?

What if we poured most of our energy into living out the message of the God who is **Love**? What if the church were the first to look out for the human rights of anyone facing oppression and injustice, including gays and lesbians. What if we sought practical ways to serve the homosexual community, showing them the utmost respect as fellow image-bearers of God? What if we modeled Jesus’ passion – his rebuke of religious hypocrites and his grace toward those who were shunned?

If we do this rightly, we will be living the counter-cultural lifestyle that Jesus models 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**. 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, let me first say this: **I'm sorry.** I'm sorry that some Christians have made you feel inferior because of your orientation. I'm sorry we have demonstrated judgment instead of love. And I'm sorry we have not represented Jesus to you as we are called to.

I would also encourage you to consider the same lesson as the church needs to learn: **the difference between acceptance and agreement.** If the precondition for peace between our communities is for all Christians to agree with you, then sadly it will never happen. But let's be honest: peace based on "absolute agreement at all times" is a fragile foundation for relationship, isn't it? Pseudo-peace that prevents us all from being honest also prevents us from experiencing true respect and love.

I have seen beautiful proof that it is possible for someone to believe that the Bible teaches that homosexual expression (sexual relations) is a sin, just as they believe that heterosexual sex outside of marriage is sin, and that doesn't make them a *bigot*, a *redneck*, or *homophobic*. I believe we can form mutually respectful friendships between our communities without demanding absolute agreement on all issues. And this mutually respectful diversity will, in the end, provide us all with the most opportunity for growing, loving, and learning.

A Message to Homosexual Christians

As Christ-followers, you and I are spiritual family, no matter our sexual orientation. And as your brother in Christ, I urge you to put aside the “born this way” argument in determining your ethics. To be a Christian is to believe that **Jesus is our Lord** – not our past, our biology, or our desires. Biology is not destiny. Life is about choice, not biological determinism. I am not suggesting we can choose our sexual orientation, but **we can all choose how we live.**

Let me also make clear that **the Bible never condemns orientation.** There isn’t even a word for “homosexual” in the ancient languages. Only chosen behaviors and attitudes are discussed. That’s why we differentiate between ‘being’ and ‘doing,’ between a person’s sexual *preference* and their sexual *practice*. 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 called “sin.” Nor is homosexual behavior highlighted as being *more* sinful than other sins.

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

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 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 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 divisive.

At Generations Church we believe that marriage is established by God, and assumed and affirmed by Jesus to be a heterosexual union.

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 a wife reflecting God's union with us in his teaching as well (*e.g., Matthew 19*). He is also straightforward in his teaching that there are people who for 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. Jesus considers this to be a high calling, only fully pursued by a dedicated Christ-follower.

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*).

Nevertheless, we do not believe dictating government policy is the primary mission of disciples. As Christ-followers, we pour our energies into organizing **our voice to offer a message of love and life to our world via the Gospel**. Our high calling is not to bring about political reform, but 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 Than We Do?

You now know where Generations Church stands. But how do we relate **to Christians who hold a different position?**

A growing number of Bible-believing Christians believe that “in our less-than-ideal world, God now blesses same-sex marriage as a holy alternate for homosexual Christians.” Although we do not hold this position, we welcome spiritual fellowship with any Christian who wants to study Scripture with us in order to follow Jesus.

Although the opportunity for **membership** is extended to those who affirm our statement of beliefs, **fellowship** is extended to all who wish to make Generations their home and Jesus their Lord.

We at Generations strive to be a community where **no one walks alone** and where all of us are **helping each other become more like Jesus**. We invite you to come journey with us.

Grace and peace,

Scott & Melissa Hale, Lead Pastors

*Much appreciation to The Meeting House of Toronto, Canada, for the inspiration and wording of some passages in this document.

Some Relevant Bible Texts

- Matthew 5-7 (The Sermon on the Mount)
- Matthew 19 (Marriage in the Garden & Singleness for the Kingdom)
- 1 Corinthians 7 (The Gifts of Marriage & Singleness)
- Romans 3:23-24 (Our Shared Status as Broken People)
- Titus 3:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 Peter 3:15-16 (Our Attitude of Grace, Gentleness, & Respect)
- Philippians 3:13-14 (Freedom from the Pains of Our Past)
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17 (Becoming Our True Selves)
- 1 John 4:7-21 (The Priority of Love)