

## What Should Be The Church's Response To Homosexuality?

By Ross S. Olson MD

This is a topic that is uncomfortable but crucially important for the church and for individual Christians. We need to know how we should respond to the issue of homosexuality and how we should respond to individuals who may be struggling with same sex attractions. But it is difficult to even discuss the topic rationally because of the shift that has taken place in the way people think in western society. Are there absolute standards of right and wrong? If so, where do they come from? Do the rights and wants of the individual trump any other consideration? Is tolerance the highest virtue? Is disapproval of a person's behavior equivalent to hatred? What is the purpose of marriage, indeed, what is the purpose of sexuality? If an emotion or motivation comes from within me does that mean that it is good? Can civil rights principles be applied to behaviors? Are new ideas automatically better than old ideas?

Let me try to give a Biblical perspective. In I Corinthians 6: 9 – 11, the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit writes to the church at Corinth: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 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."

Today, on the one hand we have people like Rev. Fred Phelps of Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas who says, "God hates gays." On the other we have many mainline denominations who affirm homosexual behavior. In 1994, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in America determined that church membership would not be determined on "marital status, sex, or sexual orientation" and also discouraged the use of conversion therapy to "change" homosexuals into heterosexuals. Some homosexuals even say things like "God made me this way." Metropolitan Community Churches were started by those who wanted to be Christians without repenting of homosexual behavior. They claim that the Biblical prohibitions against homosexuality did not have anything to do with homosexual orientation and "loving relationships" as we understand them today.

What did Paul say at the beginning of his letter to the Corinthian church that included former homosexuals? Was Corinth a second class church? The church had its problems, but read I Corinthians 1:1-9: "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ— their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in Him you have been enriched in every way— in all your speaking and in all your knowledge—because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."

So we see that people can come out of all sorts of sinful behavior and be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is completely contrary to the world's view that homosexual behavior is not only innate and fixed, but irresistible and intrinsically good. So what are we to do? In Ephesians 4:14-15, Paul writes about the reason for the spiritual gifts, given to individuals, for the benefit of the church. "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

Speaking the truth in love means first of all that we need to speak the truth. Sometimes people think it is unloving to speak the truth – like the fact that some people will die in their sins and be eternally separated from God. But unless we communicate it, they may never know that they need to repent and trust in the blood of Jesus to receive forgiveness and the free gift of salvation. But some think that speaking the truth can be like dropping a bomb and leaving. That is not love. God does NOT hate gays. God hates homosexual behavior as He hates all sexual immorality and indeed all sin. God created sexuality for the good of humanity and as a symbol of His love for His people. Anything that distorts this cosmic object lesson is the work of the master deceiver who is the enemy of all that is good.

But God loves gays, just as He loves adulterers and thieves and the greedy and drunkards and slanderers and swindlers. In fact God loves all sinners. It breaks His heart to see the crown of His creation spoiled by sin. It was because of this that Jesus died on the cross.

There are several aspects to this issue that we need to consider. One is the false idea that science and modern thought have made parts of the Bible obsolete. To be sure, we need to use our God-given reason to understand what the Bible really means. But we must not think that reason or science stands in authority over the Scripture. This is true, for example, in the question of evolution and an old earth. Many genuine, warm-hearted believers accept what they consider to be strong scientific evidence for evolution and think that God must have done it that way. (I used to think that.) Others accept an earth that is millions of years old and try to reconcile that with Genesis. Now in recent decades, however, powerful scientific evidence shows that evolution could not have happened and also that the earth is indeed young, completely compatible with a Biblical history of approximately 6000 years.

And there is also strong scientific evidence that homosexuality is not normal but represents a distortion of what God intended. There is also strong evidence that living the gay lifestyle produces all sorts of problems, including infectious diseases, illnesses caused by stress, psychological problems, chemical dependency, violence and shortened lifespan. And the violence is not “gay bashers” but rather gay on gay, especially homosexual men because of the many broken relationships and the difficulty men have in dealing with stress. Because males can become sexually aroused more quickly than females and are not as strongly attached emotionally, male homosexuals tend to be very promiscuous. Even so called “committed relationships” are generally “open” with each partner free to cruise. This produces either a calloused attitude or a permanent broken heart.

And there is also a powerful scientific case that homosexuality is not innate but rather a result of multiple factors, many of them potentially preventable. Many homosexual adults claim that they knew that they were different from a very young age. And it is true that homosexuals do not choose their attractions (although we all choose our behavior.) It is claimed by many gay researchers that homosexuality is genetic or at least congenital. But the search for a “gay gene” has been unsuccessful. Identical twin studies show that if one male twin becomes homosexual, the other is homosexual about 38% of the time. If it were purely genetic, or due to prenatal factors, it ought to be 100%. Twins also share a similar environment growing up of course, as well as a similar personality. And those things seem to have the greatest influence.

The testimonies of homosexuals who have come out of the homosexual lifestyle and are living holy Christian lives are very instructive. Joe Hallett was raised by a father who was very cold and rejecting, and young Joe felt he could never be acceptable. Joe hungered for a warm affectionate relationship with a father figure and fantasized about different men being his father. It was not sexual but was a legitimate emotional need that could have been fulfilled. But it made him vulnerable to sexual abuse. In looking for affection and approval, there were individuals willing to interpret that as an invitation to sex. He was sexually abused, initially by older boys in the neighborhood. This produced a mixture of shame and pleasure and simultaneously a hope that in this way he was being accepted and loved. Yet the experience never filled the need in his heart.

For Joe, although he gave his life to Jesus Christ as a college student, he continued to struggle and lived a homosexual lifestyle. It was through the friendship of a Christian woman that he finally submitted his sexuality to the Lord and committed himself to live a holy life. By that time, in the mid 1980s, on his discharge physical from the Army, he discovered that he already had full blown AIDS. At that time, the expected lifespan was 2 years. It was not easy to live moment by moment for the Lord and there were slips, at least in thought, but he worked at Outpost Ministries and led many to the Lord before he died over 10 years later.

So father-hunger is a major risk factor for male homosexuality, often having its effect by increasing the boy's vulnerability to sexual abuse. In a study by Dr. Paul Cameron of Family Research institute, two-thirds of the boys whose first sexual experience was homosexual, whether defined as consensual, seduced or forced, engaged in homosexual behavior as adults; 95% of those whose first experience was heterosexual were heterosexual in their adult behavior. (See [www.familyresearchinst.org](http://www.familyresearchinst.org) ) And in many studies, including some by gay researchers, at least 25% of adult male homosexuals admit that as adults, they have had sex with boys under the age of 16. This is such an undeniable fact that gay advocates justify it this way: "The boy was actually gay and soliciting sex. The adult was doing him a favor." With the epidemic of fatherless homes in America and adult homosexuals willing to victimize children who are simply looking for affection, the stage is set for an increase in this sort of entry to homosexual behavior, which can rapidly become a strong habit, essentially an addiction.

This brings up another basic point that is misunderstood or misstated by our culture. Touch is confused with sex. When a toddler climbs up on your lap for a hug, this represents a need for affectionate touch which is pure, legitimate and important. Children who are not held or hugged feel unloved. Babies who are fed but not held may even die. Yet when there is a question of sexual abuse, the child protection workers usually ask the child, "Did he touch you?" They mean, of course, "Did he touch you in an inappropriate way?" But in order to avoid problems, in some situations touch is actually discouraged or even prohibited. I know a psychologist who was told by her clinic that she must not touch the clients. She recalled a 13 year old depressed girl who desperately needed a hug but because the clinic was afraid of lawsuits alleging sexual abuse, she was not allowed to do so. Even parents sometimes are uncomfortable hugging their children, especially when they get to be adolescents and actually need affirming touch even more.

But this does not explain all male homosexuality. What of the men who say they always "felt different"? Research by Dr. Jeffrey Satinover suggests that there is indeed an "at risk" personality for homosexuality. This is similar to saying that there is an "at risk" personality for becoming a basketball player. In that latter case, a basketball player would tend to be tall and well coordinated and usually physically aggressive. A boy with those characteristics is not forced to become a basketball player but he might find success in it if he tries and may be encouraged to try it by parents, coaches and friends.

Similarly, it seems that boys who are artistic, musical, sensitive, socially shy and introspective are more at risk of becoming homosexual. Why is that? Partly it is related to what our society considers to be appropriate male interests. If as a boy, you think that to be a man you have to play football, smoke cigars and shoot brown-eyed animals, you may consider yourself to be different. And if society says, "we know what you are, you are gay," then you may identify yourself in that way and even be encouraged to declare it openly or act on it in what becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Think of the phrase, "He is all boy." It is often said of a typical boy with typical interests. But what about the atypical boy who overhears it? He thinks, "Well, then I must NOT be all boy."

In order to understand homosexual attraction, we need to understand heterosexual attraction. How does it happen? By knowing how male and female were created, we who look to the Bible for ultimate

explanations realize that because woman was taken out of man, woman is the one who completes man and man is the one who completes woman.

A toddler learns, "I am a boy" or "I am a girl." By school age, children generally play with children of their own gender. Girls think that boys are "weird" and boys think that girls are "yucky." Then with puberty there is first of all curiosity and then fascination with the different, the mysterious, the unknown, the opposite gender. And indeed, because male and female are complementary both physically and psychologically, the differences can seem mysterious. That fascination can then settle on a particular individual and become a strong attraction which God intended to motivate young people to find a partner with whom they will spend their life, entering a marriage covenant and remaining faithful in a sexual relationship which helps to bond them together. They then can raise children in a safe and nurturing environment. We all know that this design can go awry in a fallen world. There can be sex without commitment, unfaithfulness and broken promises. Therefore boundaries and safeguards are set by all human societies that have stood the test of time.

The attraction is for the mysterious, the different, the one who will complete me. If a boy feels insufficiently male, he will be attracted to the maleness that seems different from himself and somewhat mysterious. He is attracted to an ideal that he feels will complete him.

This is why growing up, a boy will identify with his father, brag about his father, imitate his father and want to be with his father. His father then instructs and models manly behavior, affirms the boy's interests and abilities as manly, and helps the boy to become competent and confident in manhood. Where these developmental tasks are not accomplished prior to adolescence, they are in danger of becoming entangled with sexuality. And when sexual behavior begins, strong habits are established. A psychologist once noted that the male sex drive can become attached to almost anything – animal, mineral or vegetable. Pornography can start the cycle and is a danger, especially to young adolescents.

To the person who says, "But I have these desires that come out of my own heart," I say that all honest adults admit that they have had desires that they know would be terribly wrong if acted out. We thus have to agree that all of us need to control ourselves at least some of the time. Then further, we will have to admit that it might possibly be true that some whose desires are all inappropriate will need to control themselves all of the time.

Another principle that needs to be understood is that to love a person does not mean to affirm and celebrate all that he desires and does. Some people who have perhaps a little knowledge of the Bible say things like, "Isn't Christianity about love?" or "Hate is not a family value." Think about it, if you have a friend who drinks too much and you really care about him, you would not affirm him in his drinking, saying, "That's the way you are. Live it to the fullest!" No, rather if you had the standing and the opportunity, you would confront him, in love, and try to get him to understand that his behavior is destructive to himself and others. Would he be angry at you? Of course! Does that mean that you did wrong? No!

What about lesbians, female homosexuals? The origin of same-sex attractions has some similarities. Girls with interests that are not considered typical are at risk, especially if they are made to feel that this is not appropriate for a woman, also if there has not been a good relationship with her mother or a mother substitute. But childhood sexual abuse by men is present in the history of at least 50% and in some studies up to 90% of women who later identify themselves as lesbian. In essence, they are angry at men and feel they cannot trust men. Because women tend to depend on each other for emotional support, if they come to believe that a friendship is actually a sexual attraction, they may engage in behaviors which lead to ongoing habit patterns. Women tend to develop stronger emotional relationships in general so lesbian partnerships are more stable. But the consequences of a breakup are very intense. Although infectious diseases are not associated with lesbian behavior, many psychological problems are.

How big is this issue? It is being used by the academic establishment, the media and the law to attack Christians. In Canada, pastors can be sued and even jailed for teaching Biblical doctrine regarding homosexuality. How many homosexuals are there? The myth coming from Kinsey's biased data is that 10% of the population is homosexual but this has been thoroughly discredited. The truth is more like 2% and people do indeed change. So an incredible amount of influence is being wielded by a very small minority.

What should we do as individuals and as a church? On a societal level, we do need to act to preserve the freedom of speech the founders of our country intended to guarantee. Political correctness has taken over our universities and media. The notion been uncritically accepted that if someone is offended by something I say, I did wrong, regardless of the truth of my statement. (And some irrationally contend that there IS no truth. Yet they claim that as an absolute truth!) And many court decisions have reinforced the notion that religious understanding or motivation has no place in the political arena. Yet if that were true, the abolition movement would have been declared improper because the motivation to free the slaves came from the realization that they, too, were created in the image of God. Therefore, even though our primary motivation as Christians is to preach the gospel and make disciples, when our freedom to do so is threatened, if there is something we can do, we should do it.

Because individuals whom God loves are being enslaved by deceptive ideas and destructive behaviors, we need to reach out to them, sharing the love and acceptance that God has demonstrated towards us. Children and young people need warm caring healthy relationships and we can all reach out to those with whom we have influence, especially if their home life has been disrupted. We need to affirm the atypical child as one created by God with gifts and interests that can be used for the Kingdom of Christ.

Adults struggling with same sex attractions actually need healthy non-sexual friendships with those of the same gender. This becomes threatening at times if we know of the struggles. Of course, there may be many that we befriend whose struggles we do not know about. Friendships need to be pure and honorable and in some cases safeguarded against temptations to become anything else. But the point is that God left us in the world for the express purpose of reaching out to others. But the specifics of how to do this in any given situation require more wisdom than is humanly possible, therefore, it throws us into dependence on our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for sensitivity and direction to do what is needed to accomplish His will in the lives of people He died to save.

Because this is a key area of spiritual warfare, all our efforts must begin and end with prayer. Pray that the lies of Satan will be exposed, that the schemes of his pawns will be confounded and that individuals will be freed from the bondage that drags them down. Pray that men and women, boys and girls will find in a relationship with Jesus Christ the ultimate fulfillment that we all are designed to need. Pray that in God the Father they will discover the perfect parent. Pray that they will recognize, because of their weakness, the importance of walking close to the Lord Jesus Christ moment by moment. Pray that they will receive from the Holy Spirit both the motivation and the power to live holy lives in a world that is increasingly departing from the path of truth and life.

#### Resources

[www.outpostministries.org](http://www.outpostministries.org)

[www.narth.org](http://www.narth.org)

[www.familyresearchinst.org](http://www.familyresearchinst.org)

[www.rossolson.org](http://www.rossolson.org)