

# **“Is God Anti-Gay?”**

## **Selected Scriptures**

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on October 4, 2015

### **INTRODUCTION**

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Today we begin a new series entitled *Questioning Christianity*. In this series we are going to look at seven of the most common questions people have about Christianity. Today we want to begin with the question, **“Is God anti-gay?”**
  - The relationship of homosexuality to Christianity is a big topic in culture today. It is almost impossible to have a discussion about the Christian faith without someone raising questions about it.
    - This makes sense because, let’s be very clear, this is not simply a political or religious issue that is out there. This is a deeply personal issue. We are talking about people. Real people who often face rejection, bullying, and inner turmoil for identifying as gay.
- So I want to raise this subject, not because it is this church’s hobbyhorse or my hobbyhorse, but simply because it is one of the primary questions people have about Christianity.
  - Right off the top I need to say that in the time we have I will not be able to deal with all the questions you will think of on this subject. I am going to stick very close to the question but after the service we will have a Q/A where you can bring any questions you may have.
- So is God anti-gay? Is God against gay men and lesbian women? Rather than look at just one passage I want to unfold the Bible’s larger answer. I will do this in four parts.
  - In part 1 we will talk about the God who is radically inclusive. Part 2: the God who revolutionizes identity. Part 3: the God who gives liberating boundaries. And part 4: the God who loves sacrificially.

### **THE GOD WHO IS RADICALLY INCLUSIVE**

- Let’s begin then with part 1: **(SHOW SLIDE)** the God who is radically inclusive.
  - Let me get right to the heart of the issue. There is no question that the gay community has felt that God is anti-gay because religious people often act in ways that are anti-gay. Religious people can be very self-righteous and cruel.
    - We have all seen the supposed Christians who picket with signs that say God hates gay people.
- Since some religious people can act so cruel it is important for us to set our question within the larger story of the Bible.
  - There are two major parts of the Bible’s story that reveal the radical inclusivity of God toward the gay community.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** First, the Bible’s teaching about God’s creation of human beings reveals the radical inclusivity of God.

- Genesis 1 says that when God created human beings he created us differently than everything else. **(SHOW SLIDE)** Genesis 1:27 says, ***“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”***
  - For man and woman to be created in the image of God means that human beings reflect God. We are like God. No animal, fish, or star is said to be created in the image of God. Later in Genesis 9 God forbids murder on the grounds that people are made in his image. So to say all people are created in the image of God is not a comment on whether or not people are born gay or straight. It is to say that every human being reflects God himself. So to bully, humiliate, or use violence against a person because they are gay is an attack on God himself because that person is made in God’s image.
    - Whether you are a Christian or not this should be welcome news for the Bible teaches that **(SHOW SLIDE)** since all people are created in the image of God, all people (regardless of sexual orientation) must be treated with dignity, value, and respect.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Second, the Bible’s teaching about Jesus’ death on the cross reveals the radical inclusivity of God.
  - Nowhere is the radical inclusivity of God more on display than at the cross of Jesus. You see the ground is level at the foot of the cross. The cross declares on the one hand that **(SHOW SLIDE)** ***“there is no one righteous, no not one...for all have sinned.”***
    - But on the other hand the cross declares that Jesus came to die for our sins. He came to pay the penalty that we deserve to pay for our sins so that in the words of John 3:16 **(SHOW SLIDE)** ***“whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”***
      - Whoever. There is no more inclusive word than “whoever.” “Whoever” includes everyone whether lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, white, black, Chinese, Japanese, old, young, rich, or poor. ***“Whoever believes in [Jesus] will not perish but have eternal life.”***
  - We could put it this way: **(SHOW SLIDE)** Since all people are sinners and God gave His Son to rescue sinners, all people are welcome at foot of the cross.
- This radical inclusivity of God has massive implications, particularly for Christians. Christians, we have much to repent of in regard to our attitudes and behaviours toward the gay community.
  - How can we say we are saved by the sheer grace of God and then act as if we are morally superior to those in the gay community?
  - How can we worship our Saviour who treated all people with dignity and yet make jokes that demean gay people?

- Does not Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan show us that all Christians are duty bound to love and serve their neighbour, regardless if that neighbour shares our Christian beliefs or not?
  - Don't forget, Jesus had his harshest words for the self-righteous religious people of his day.
- Is God anti-gay? Does he hate gay people? Let us say it plainly. Let us say it explicitly. No.
  - All people are made in his image and all people are welcome at the foot of the cross.
    - This is the God who is radically inclusive.

## THE GOD WHO REVOLUTIONIZES IDENTITY

- Let's move to the second point now. We now turn to talk about **(SHOW SLIDE)** the God who revolutionizes identity. Here I will get you to turn to John 10.
  - ***“OK,”*** someone says, ***“we have heard the Bible criticize the self-righteous religious person. We see that God is not anti-gay in that he says gay people should be treated with respect. We like that. But if you are now going to say that God opposes homosexual behaviour then God is anti-gay because he would then be telling a gay person to go against the very core of who they are. Telling someone to deny their true identity would most certainly be anti-gay.”***
    - In this second point I want to show us that God cares more about the core identity of people, whether gay or straight, than we can possibly imagine.
      - So let's talk about this issue of identity.
- There is no question that most gay people do not choose to experience same sex attraction, like a person chooses to take up a hobby like skiing. Most gay people tell us that they have always felt attraction to the same sex.
  - Based on this, our culture says, ***“your same sex attraction tells you who you really are as a person. Your identity is as a gay or homosexual person. To deny or go against the core of your identity will dehumanize you. If you want to be fully human you need to act on your desires by pursuing same sex relationships.”***
    - This is why Lady Gaga includes the gay community in singing, ***“I'm on the right track baby, I was born this way.”*** This is why Macklemore's Grammy nominated song *Same Love* says, ***“And I can't change/Even if I tried/Even if I wanted to.”***
      - **(SHOW SLIDE)** In short, the accepted message of our culture is that same sex attraction equals a gay identity that should be acted on in order to experience fullness of life.
- Christianity wholeheartedly agrees with the human desire to experience fullness of life. But Christianity says this cultural message does not go nearly far enough in empowering people, whether they are gay or straight, to experience fullness of life. In fact, our cultural message diminishes human dignity. How so?

- Quite simply, it reduces a person's core identity to their sexual urges. Our sexuality is certainly a part of who we are but we are so much more than our sexual urges.
  - **(SHOW SLIDE)** Reducing people's identity to their sexual urges, whether heterosexual or homosexual, diminishes the greatness of who they are as human beings.
- ***"OK,"*** someone says, ***"but this is about more than sexual urges. It is also about relationship and love."*** Yes, but since when does being fully human mean you *have* to be in a romantic relationship? If this were the case we would need to say that all single people, whether gay or straight, are not fully human unless they are in a romantic relationship.
  - As good as romantic relationships may be, **(SHOW SLIDE)** reducing people's identity to the need for a romantic relationship also diminishes the greatness of who they are as human beings.
    - In summary, we are more than our sexual urges being expressed in romantic relationships.
- This is where God wants to revolutionize how we build our identity. **(SHOW SLIDE)** God wants to give all of us, whether gay or straight, an identity that encompasses all of our humanness thereby leading to fullness of life.
  - The Bible says our problem is that we have too low a view of what it means to be human. The Bible says we are not merely a random collection of atoms with urges and appetites. No. We are the special creation of God himself. You and I were made to know and be in a relationship with our Creator.
    - **(SHOW SLIDE)** The Bible says the human soul is so great that God alone can sustain the weight of it. This means that trying to build our identity on anything but God is like trying to build a skyscraper on sinking sand. Sand cannot uphold such greatness and the skyscraper will crumble. In the same way, **(SHOW SLIDE)** if we try to build our identity on anything but God the greatness of our humanity will crumble.
- We know this is true in other areas of life. If we try to build our identity and self-worth on being physically attractive, we will crumble because we will never be attractive enough and age will steal it all from us.
  - If we try to build our identity and self-worth on being successful we will either become prideful and look down on those who do not achieve like we do or we will always feel like a failure for not achieving.
    - In the same way if we try to place the full weight of our identity on another person within a romantic relationship we will crush them because no person can bear the weight of all we need and want.
- Into all of this Jesus comes with an astounding promise. In John 10:10 Jesus said, **(SHOW SLIDE)** ***"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."***
  - Jesus is saying, ***"I want all people, gay or straight, to experience the fullness of what it means to be human. Build your identity on me for I alone can sustain the weight of all that you are."***

- Our culture says same sex attraction equals identity. God says same sex attraction may be part of our experience but it does not have to define who we are.
  - Therefore, God calls us to build our identity, not on our sexual urges, but on Jesus Christ who made us, who knows us, who came to rescue us, and who will lead us into the fullness of what it means to be human.
- Wesley Hill wrote an amazing book entitled, *Washed and Waiting*. He states that he has always felt same sex attraction but chooses not to act on this attraction. He does this because he believes his identity is built on Jesus Christ and not on one single part of who he is as a human being. Listen to what he writes:
  - **(SHOW SLIDE)** *“Being gay isn’t the most important thing about my or any other gay person’s identity. I am a Christian before I am anything else. My homosexuality is a part of my makeup, a facet of my personality. One day, I believe, whether in this life or in the resurrection, it will fade away. But my identity as a Christian—someone incorporated into Christ’s body by his Spirit—will remain... Imitating Jesus; conforming my thoughts, beliefs, desires, and hopes to his; sharing his life; embracing his gospel’s no to homosexual practice—I become more fully alive, not less. According to the Christian story, true Christlike holiness is the same thing as true humanness. To renounce homosexual behavior is to say yes to full, rich, abundant life.”*<sup>1</sup>
- Sam Allberry, who has the same experience as Wesley Hill but is also a pastor, writes, **(SHOW SLIDE)** *“the kind of sexual attractions I experience are not fundamental to my identity. They are part of what I feel but are not who I am in a fundamental sense. I am far more than my sexuality.”*<sup>2</sup>
  - I recognize that this contrasts sharply with those gay people who say their attractions *are* their identity. But why should these other voices with the same experience be silenced?
    - Wesley Hill isn’t denying his attraction to the same sex. Rather, he and so many others are choosing not to form their identity around their attractions but around Jesus.
- Jesus said, **(SHOW SLIDE)** *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”*
  - There is no question that Jesus asks for a lot. He calls everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, to deny our very selves – to surrender every part of who we are to him and to daily build our identity on him.
    - But the reason we should do this, Jesus says, is because in him is all the fullness of life we are looking for.
- So I conclude this second point by saying that God cannot be anti-gay when his stated purpose in sending Jesus to this planet is that we might have life and have it to the full.
  - In order that we might find fullness of life God seeks to revolutionize our identity around the one person who can sustain the weight of our humanness – Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*, Kindle Edition, Location 146, 869.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? And other questions about homosexuality, the Bible and same sex attraction*, 8-9.

## THE GOD WHO GIVES LIBERATING BOUNDARIES

- Well, we have looked at the God who is radically inclusive and the God who revolutionizes identity. Let's turn in the third place to talk about **(SHOW SLIDE)** the God who gives liberating boundaries. Turn now to Leviticus 18.
  - At this point the question is: can people build their identity on Jesus and still live a homosexual lifestyle? In other words, what are God's rules about sexuality?
    - Someone says, *"Aha, I knew it. Now we will see the Bible verses that speak against homosexuality. Now we will see that God is indeed anti-gay."* Well, let's find out.
- In our day we do not like the idea of rules, especially in the area of sexuality. True freedom, we say, means being free to do whatever we like. True freedom means no boundaries. That sounds so good but we all know it simply isn't true. True freedom is always found within strict boundaries.
  - Musicians are most free, not when they strike any note they happen to hit, but when they stay within the strict rules of music like playing in key.
    - When driving you are most free, not by ignoring the centre line, but when you submit to the strict rule of driving on the right side of the road.
- The Bible says that God's rules are not arbitrary laws to ruin our fun. They are rather the good instructions of our Creator for how life works best. **(SHOW SLIDE)** God's rules on all things (including sexuality) are his good instructions to protect and enhance human flourishing.
  - You might say they are the Manufacturer's instructions for the human species. When your car manufacturer says not to put water in your gas tank the manufacturer is not trying to ruin your freedom. The manufacturer is trying to protect and enhance your freedom.
    - So what are God's good rules on human sexuality?
- This may come as a surprise to you but the Bible says **(SHOW SLIDE)** sex is a good gift of God to humanity. God is not a prude who says, *"OK, if you really have to do it then go ahead but I don't like it."* No, we read in Genesis 2 that when God created Adam and Eve He gave sex as a gift to express and cement their unity with each other.
  - Since sex so powerfully bonds two people together God created marriage as the boundary for sexuality. **(SHOW SLIDE)** Genesis 2 says, *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."* Jesus himself reinforced this in his teachings on marriage and divorce.
    - **(SHOW SLIDE)** So the Bible teaches that sex is God's good gift to be enjoyed between a man and woman within marriage.
- When it comes to homosexuality you may again be surprised to learn that the Bible is not fixated on it. But as Sam Allberry writes, *"when it does [speak]...the Bible has important and clear things to say about homosexuality."*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 23.

- Let me summarize it like this: **(SHOW SLIDE)** The Bible doesn't condemn homosexual *orientation/inclination*, only sexual *lust* or *activity* outside of a marriage relationship between a husband and wife.
- For instance, in Leviticus 18 God gives his people rules on who and what they cannot have sex with. Leviticus 18 is like a Jerry Springer episode. God commands his people not to have sex with animals, with your mother, your father, your sister, your brother, your son-in-law, your daughter-in-law, your aunt, your uncle, or your neighbour's wife.
  - This long list shows that because we are sinners, our sexual desires are misdirected in many different ways. So the question is not, "*is our sexuality misdirected?*" but rather "*in what ways is our sexually misdirected?*"
    - It is misdirected in so many ways from men objectifying women to spouses cheating on each other.
- Now it is within this list of ways that our sexuality is misdirected that we find a reference to homosexual behaviour. Leviticus 18:22 says, **(SHOW SLIDE)** "*You shall not lie with a male as with a woman.*"
  - Notice that homosexuality is listed as one sexual act among many that is outside God's good intention for humanity.
- The rest of the Bible follows the same track. Romans chapter 1, for instance, describes a long list of behaviours that demonstrate how people have turned away from God including envy, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, and pride.
  - Within this discussion Paul, the author, writes, **(SHOW SLIDE)** "*women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men.*"
- But someone says, "*if God is clearly against people acting on same sex attraction then he must be against gay people.*" We think this way because our culture forces people into only one of two viewpoints. Our culture says we either celebrate homosexuality (and are therefore viewed as loving gay people) or we disagree with homosexuality (and are therefore viewed as being against gay people, homophobic, bigoted, and anti-gay).
  - But why can't there be a third way? Why can't people disagree and still love each other? To disagree is not to hate. Many people disagree with Christianity but it does not necessarily mean they hate Christians or are anti-Christian.
    - In many areas of life it is very possible to say, "*I believe you are wrong but I love you.*"
- God gives boundaries for our sexuality, not because he is anti-gay, but because as our Creator who loves us God knows how we work best.

## THE GOD WHO LOVES SACRIFICIALLY

- But still someone will say, "*I cannot accept this. It still feels like God is against gay people.*" Let me bring out the Bible's ultimate proof that God is not against gay people.

- In the final place let us talk about **(SHOW SLIDE)** the God who loves sacrificially. Turn with me now to Rom 5.
- The supreme proof that God is not against gay people is found in the fact that God willingly sent Jesus to die and Jesus voluntarily sacrificed his life that our sins might be forgiven and we might be restored back to God.
  - In our culture we have countless stories of one person sacrificing their life for another. These are the stories that move us.
- In literature we see this in Charles Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*. Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton both love the same woman named Lucie Manette. But Lucie chooses to marry Charles and Sydney is left alone. But later Charles is thrown into prison where he awaits execution by guillotine. Sydney visits him in prison, drugs him, and has him carried out. Sydney then secretly takes Charles' place at the guillotine. He sacrifices his life so that his opponent Charles can live happily ever after.
  - In our movies this theme comes up again and again. In *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* Aslan allows himself to be killed by the White Witch so that Edmund can go free. In *The Matrix* Neo gives his life so the human race can be freed from the machines. In *Frozen* princess Anna sacrificially gives her life for her sister.
    - These stories move us because it is the supreme example of love when a person gives up their life for another, especially if that person is their adversary. No one can be accused of hatred when they sacrifice themselves for another.
- The apostle Paul summarizes the message of Christianity in his letter to the Romans. He writes, **(SHOW SLIDE)** ***"For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."***
  - How can we think God is anti-gay when, out of love, God gave us Jesus and Jesus willingly died for the sins of people whether gay or straight? The cross proves that if we think God is anti-gay we have believed a lie. Someone has blown dust in our eyes. Someone has used smoke and mirrors to deceive us.
    - ***"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."***

## CONCLUSION

- So is God anti-gay? Is he against gay people? No.
  - Today this radically inclusive and loving God stands with his arms wide open to receive any who will come to him. Will you turn your life over to Jesus? Will you ask him to forgive your sins? Will you receive Jesus Christ and build your identity on him?
    - ***"Whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."***