

## The Gospel and Same-Sex Attraction

### 1. Introduction: Why is this topic so hangat?

#### Our changing attitudes

In the West (with the UK as one example)

*Revulsion → Concession → Normalisation → Celebration (and punishment of those who dissent)*

In Malaysia?

#### Our changing conceptions

The “look-in” approach to life (expressive individualism)

*That term suggests not only a desire to pursue one’s own path but also a yearning for fulfillment through the definition and articulation of one’s own identity. It is a drive both to be more like whatever you already are and also to live in society by fully asserting who you are.*

- Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic*

*Define yourself → by figuring out your deepest desires → put your “true self” on display*

*From activity to identity*

*A Malaysian example:*

Justice For Sisters co-founder S Thilaga said the response is clearly discriminatory, irresponsible, and harmful.

“I think likening LGBT people, performers, and content to the promotion of hedonistic culture, profanity, and free sex is a dangerous stereotype and falsehood.

“His and other politicians’ statements over the last few weeks show a deep lack of understanding of LGBT people.

“We stress that sexual orientation, gender, and sex are identities like race, disabilities, etc. They are not lifestyles, choices, etc as what these deeply misinformed ministers and elected representatives say,” she told *Malaysiakini*.

The influence of the internet

Result: everything is personal; don't be on the wrong side of history

### **Our changing church interpretations?**

The unified witness of the historic church:

#### ***To Donatus, Cyprian (ca. 250)***

If . . . you could gaze into secret places—if you could open the closed doors of sleeping chambers, and recall their dark recesses to the perception of sight—you would behold things done by immodest persons which no chaste eye could look upon; you would see what even to see is a crime; . . . *Men with frenzied lust rushing upon men.* (9)

#### **Basil's Canonical Epistle (375)**

*They who have committed sodomy with men or brutes, murderers, wizards, adulterers, and idolaters, have been thought worthy of the same punishment; therefore observe the same method with these which you do with others. We ought not to make any doubt of receiving those who have repented thirty years for the uncleanness which they committed through ignorance; for their ignorance pleads their pardon, and their willingness in confessing it; therefore command them to be forthwith received, especially if they have tears to prevail on your tenderness and have [since their lapse] led such a life as to deserve your compassion.* (Canon 7)

#### **Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2.1.94.3**

By human nature we may mean that which is proper to man, and this sense all sins, as being against reason, are also against nature...and in this sense, certain special sins are said to be against nature; thus contrary to sexual intercourse, which is natural to all animals, is unisexual lust, which has received the special name of the unnatural crime.

#### **Martin Luther (cited in *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, Ewald Martin Plass)**

It departs from the natural passion and desire, planted into nature by God, according to which the male has a passionate desire for the female. [Homosexual behaviour] craves what is entirely contrary to nature...After a man has once turned aside from the fear of God, the devil puts up such great pressure upon his nature that he extinguishes the fire of natural desire and stirs up another, which is contrary to nature.

The unprecedented recent change:

We are witnessing a profound transformation in attitudes toward people who are LGBT throughout many American denominations. In the 1950's very few people knew any "out" LGBT people. Today, most Americans do. They are friends and co-workers; parents, children, and siblings; neighbors, elected officials, and fellow church members. For many people, as ignorance has been replaced with real-world knowledge of people who are LGBT, myths and preconceptions have vanished. *This remarkable transformation has given us the opportunity*

*to read the biblical texts anew, through the lens of Jesus' redemptive life and ministry, free from some of the mistaken assumptions that had previously obscured our understanding of God's revelation for our lives. Like growing numbers of Christians across the United States and around the world, I believe that support for LGBT equality is consistent with and indeed mandated by my faith.*

- Jack Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality* (emphasis mine)

Hence, why some people say

Yuk (the default "older generation" response)

Yay (the default "younger generation" response)

## **2. Where we need to start – with Jesus and the gospel**

"The question before us, and the question that really matters, is simply, what do you think about Christ? And what are you going to do with Christ? Every question we might ever have can be boiled down to the subject of Jesus Christ."

– A.W Tozer, *The Crucified Life*

**We start not by "looking in", but by "looking up" who Jesus is...**

*\*If we are Christian, we acknowledge Jesus as Lord*

'To my mind, God's prohibition of same-sex relationships made no sense. My heart fully embraced the "love is love" narrative – the logical move from "God is love" to "People fall in love" seemed to validate all consensual romantic adult relationships. Weren't they all potential expressions of this higher reality? This seemed elegant and obvious. I wasn't craving murder or theft, but love, intimacy, and companionship! I didn't understand, but would I trust him? Would I take as truth my word or God's?'

- Rachel Gilson, *Born again this way*

"Being a Christian means I believe what I believe about sexuality because I believe what I believe about Jesus. I follow him, which means I follow what he teaches about this part of life."

- Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)

**Then we consider what Jesus says (about sexuality as a whole)...**

a) Jesus exposes the brokenness of our human condition, including "sexual immorality"

<sup>20</sup> He went on: 'What comes out of a person is what defiles them. <sup>21</sup> For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup> adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evils come from inside and defile a person.'

- Mark 7:20-23

#### b) Jesus affirms God's blueprint for sexuality

<sup>3</sup> Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?'

<sup>4</sup> 'Haven't you read,' he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female,"<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>5</sup> and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh"<sup>[b]</sup>? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.'

- Matthew 19:3-6, quoting Genesis 1:27 and 2:24

<sup>31</sup> 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.'<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>32</sup> This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.

- Ephesians 5:31-32

### ...and what Jesus wants to do in us

#### c) Jesus wants to protect our sexuality

<sup>27</sup> 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery."<sup>28</sup> But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

- Matthew 5:27-28

#### d) Jesus wants to redeem our sexuality

<sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men <sup>10</sup> nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> 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.*

- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

"In Jesus Christ I found my answer: Yes. I could trust God because in Christ he has proven himself trustworthy...This was my anchor when seas got stormy. I was free to obey before I understood

because of *who Jesus is*, and who he had shown himself to be *for me*. Anything he said to me was for my good, even if I couldn't make out how. I could build my life on his goodness and love.”  
- Gilson, *Born again this way*

### **3. We then read across the Bible, recognising its consistent teaching on homosexuality**

6 key passages:

OT – Genesis 19:1-29; Leviticus 18 and 20

NT – Romans 1:16-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:8-11.

2 examples:

#### **a) Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13**

Revisionist arguments:

- i. Christ's coming means Leviticus/the OT law is obsolete  
Eg. Hey, “you still eat prawns right? So double-standard one, you're violating Leviticus too!”
- ii. Leviticus has something very specific in view, eg. “The verses here are really about cult prostitution/aggressive homosexual rape/abusive pederasty, so they don't apply to faithful, loving homosexual relationships”

Don't panic! When you remember the fundamentals of Bible reading (Context/Content/Biblical Theology)....

#### **b) Romans 1:18-32**

Revisionist arguments:

- i. This is talking only about abusive sex or pederasty (same argument as Leviticus)
- ii. This is talking only about those who practise homosexuality against their very own (heterosexual) nature/orientation, or those with excessive lust.

Again, think through Context and Content...

#### **4. Responding pastorally: some common questions**

...from those who are struggling:

- What if I'm experiencing same-sex attraction?
- Did God make me gay? Seems as if I was born this way.
- Surely God doesn't want me to be miserable!
- Is it ok if the same-sex relationship is faithful?

...from those encountering same-sex attracted people:

- What should I do if a friend "comes out"?
- How can the church be better at supporting same-sex attracted Christians?
- Should I ever attend a gay wedding?

- What about Christians who are arguing for same-sex relationships?

### **Further reading/study**

- Is God Anti-Gay? (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) by Sam Allberry. *Probably still the best primer around.*
- What does the Bible really say about homosexuality? by Kevin DeYoung. *Very helpful on the individual Bible passages.*
- Washed and Waiting by Wesley Hill
- Born Again this Way by Rachel Gilson. Hill and Gilson are both same-sex attracted Christians who write personally and movingly of their struggles.
- Does the Bible support same-sex marriage? by Preston Sprinkle. *Q&A format dealing with all the common questions.*
- The Plausibility Problem by Ed Shaw. *Shaw honestly shows where churches go wrong in supporting same-sex attracted people, and proposes some better paths.*
- A Better Story by Glynn Harrison. *Not a book purely on homosexuality; it helpfully charts the origins of the sexual revolution, and challenges Christians to tell a 'better story' of sexuality than the world's.*
- Mere Sexuality by Todd Wilson. Fantastic and underrated book helping us rediscover the Bible's teaching on sexuality as a whole, with reflections on same-sex relationships along the way.
- Marriage, Scripture and the church by Darrin Snyder Belousek. If you want a thick academic tome that critically engages with alternative viewpoints to the historic Christian view, here it is. Not for the faint-hearted.