

Week 6

Respect, Honesty, Truth and Love for Those Facing Same-Sex Attraction

At Hope we often talk about **matter** and **manner** - this is where we're looking for unity, not uniformity of thought during these small group discussions. We should expect a range of thoughts on various topics, because our personality, experience, friends & family, upbringing, etc. all come into play as we shape our thoughts. Let's remember we all need Jesus and his grace is sufficient to cover each of us and our struggles, past or present.

How can we have a conversation that can honor God, the bible and each other?
Can we challenge ourselves to use this time to learn, listen and grow together?

? The Church has been criticized as an anti-gay institution. What examples come to mind that would validate such a criticism?

(What makes this study difficult is, properly understood, weeks 5 or 6 or 7 would immediately follow week 2 which speaks POSITIVELY of God's design and intent for sexual intimacy. To utilize this week as a stand alone could wrongly communicate only what God is against and perpetuate the church as being anti-gay. Does God speak to the realities of homosexual acts and behavior? Yes. But to then conclude that such people are beyond the reach of God's salvation and grace is not true.)

Leader's Note: Disagreements around controversial topics can take two forms:

(1) we disagree about the matter (e.g. the bible is permissive or not of homosexuality). Thankfully, the elders of HCC play a significant role in determining the biblical/theological boundedness on behalf of our church community. On this particular example, as has been preached and communicated, we believe God created covenantal marriage to be between one man and one woman.

(2) we disagree about the manner (e.g. one person stands opposed to gay marriage because of a personal conviction that this will not lead to human flourishing while another stands in support so that no homosexual couple is prevented from the benefits afforded to a heterosexual couple).

This latter category, small group leaders will be asked to help keep unity amidst potentially divergent and impassioned opinions.

This week we will explore the domino effects of worshipping the created versus the Creator.

An Exchange

Romans 1:16-32

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. ³² Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

? The principal concern of these verses is not the sin of homosexuality or any other of a litany of sexual sins. It is something far more serious and sinister. What is it?

Possible answers: It appears that the principal concern of the passage is the exchange that takes place where God is made lesser and someone or something is made greater (vv. 23 and 25).

? As a result of this far more serious and sinister sin, a series of consequences and implications, judgments, and sins follow. As best you can from the passage, can you track the domino effect of events that lead from one thing to the next?

Possible answers: One example in vv. 18-20. (1) God created the world. (2) Through which, he has shown his eternal power and divine nature. (3) Consequently, people are without excuse because God has made it plain to them. (4) Sadly, people suppress this truth. (5) This suppression of truth leads to godlessness and wickedness. (5) And, ultimately, God's wrath comes as a response. This shows that, ultimately, all

sins (including homosexual acts which is listed later) are categorized under the rejection of God as God, exchanging his lordship for lesser things.

So, we can see that once this primary rejection of God takes place then it is probably that any numbers of sins, including sexual, will enter in.

? Who does the text have in view in 1:18-1:32? (hint: see 2:1)

Possible answers: All of us. We all struggle with the exchange that can and does take place regarding sin. In this sense, homosexual acts can be compared to any other sin. All of it is grievous. All of it needs confession, repentance, and forgiveness.

Much to Consider

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

⁹ 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 ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ 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.

? Scripture will often list out a bunch of sins. And though homosexual acts are just one example within the list, it is often isolated and treated differently. Why do you believe it is viewed differently within the Church? Given your study of Romans 1, do you believe that distinguishing it from other sins is necessary? Why or why not?

Possible answers: For most (not all) people, sexual sin feels unique. This is often true of all sexual sin. If one confesses acting out due to greed or pride, it comes off very different than a person who acted upon temptations of adultery and homosexuality. They feel weightier. And, in one breath, we may acknowledge that sin is sin and all sin is wiped away on account of the cross. But, in reality, such sexual sin does get categorized differently. Perhaps this is why Paul speaks of it as he does in (1 Corinthians 6:18). Internally, we sense a certain uniqueness to sex—whether reserving it as a special gift within marriage or associating it with some of the most severe violations such as rape.

? In Week One's study, we saw that God is the authority from which Christians ascertain what is good, beautiful, life-giving, etc. One of the cultural mottos of our day is, "Do whatever makes you happy as long as it doesn't hurt anybody." How would you respond to someone who genuinely wants to understand why you wouldn't just let a person do whatever they want behind closed doors?
Possible answers: In one sense, there is a certain inability for Christians to prevent people from doing whatever makes them happy, no matter what that is. The question becomes, "How do you know that what you're highlighting (homosexual acts or otherwise) bring the deepest happiness?" And, additionally, "Who gets to say whether or not one's actions are harming another person?" Is God the authority? If not, then it's safe to expect that happiness and safety are in the eye of the beholder. But, for the Christian, it always comes back to what God esteems as good, beautiful, happy, safe, etc.

? Another cultural motto is, "Love is love." Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

Possible answers: Take time to digest this. Is love really love? No doubt, in one sense, we might say love is defined as an intense feeling of deep affection for another person. Well, in that sense, love could be love whether between two men, two women, two neighbors, two coworkers, etc. But, in another sense, is homosexual love the same as heterosexual love? Or to compare with another example, is polyamorous love the same as monogamous love? Or are those two types of love in disagreement at the very base of the love they're attempting to communicate—one definition of love being utterly dedicated to the love of ONLY one while the other definition entertains MANY suitors? Can those possibly both be conceived of as the same form of love—that polyamorous love is monogamous love is love? Or are they actually quite different? In the same vein does homo- and hetero- have the same meaning? If one spoke of a homogeneous population or a heterogeneous population, might you use those interchangeably and communicate the same meaning? Or are they decidedly different? They are quite different. One speaks of similarity and the other of difference. Homosexual love speaks of turning to another who is same. Heterosexual love speaks of turning to another who is different.

? Our culture no longer accepts tolerance for those who disagree with the practice of homosexuality. They demand acceptance and even celebration of it. In your mind, what does it look like, as far as it depends on you, to live at peace with such people (Rom. 12:18)?

Possible answers: So many possible answers. Our culture is less willing to entertain friendship or relationship with anyone who does not outright support LGBTQAI+ individuals to live as they see fit. Even if you were to relate to the other in peaceable ways (which the Church absolutely should), short of an abandonment of historic Christian beliefs about gender and sexuality, they may still not be open to a relationship with you. It is very tough. Yet we still must believe that God is at work. There are too many examples in the Church and in our local church to think otherwise.

Real Life Scenario

How can you engage in building relationships with coworkers, in light of your differences?

How can you care for others in your neighborhood, in light of your differences?

How can you care for others in your family, in light of your differences?

For Discussion and Accountability

? In all honesty, does this study and conversation make you feel uncomfortable? Why or why not? How does the good news of Jesus affect our words and actions as we wrestle in the discomfort?

? This particular issue may be your struggle. It may not be your struggle. Regardless, do you feel like you've classified it as a worse sin than other sins?

? What would it look like for you to show the love of Christ, even this week, to yourself (if this is your struggle) or to another?

Additional Resources

- *Gay Girl Good God* by Jackie Hill Perry
- *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* by Rosaria Butterfield
- *Is God Anti-Gay? (And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible, and Same-Sex Attraction)* by Sam Alberry