

Ministering to the Homosexual

Amidst all the misinformation circulating in our society about homosexuality, there are certain known facts which are indisputable. We learn them by studying Holy Scripture (what we call special revelation) and by observing the world about us (what we call general revelation), and these known facts need to be carefully considered if the Christian community is to minister faithfully and effectively to those homosexuals with whom we are in some meaningful contact. In this presentation, I hope to do two things: First, I want to state and comment briefly on five of these known facts; and then, secondly, coming out of that, I will outline five basic principles of ministry which we might employ, especially in regard to homosexuals who show an interest in the gospel and express a desire to learn more.

Before any of that, however, I should make two things perfectly clear at the outset: (1) This presentation is not directed to any one kind of office-bearer, whether pastor, elder or deacon, but to all the office-bearers collectively, and to the entire congregation. We are, all of us, in this together - though, as with every ministry in the church, there is an expectation that consistory should lead and set an encouraging example for others. (2) I am not in any way claiming to be an expert in this. After several years of pastoral ministry, and of marriage and family counselling, I must acknowledge that I have dealt with relatively few homosexuals. That said, however, the austere approach which was too often practised by churches in the past (simply condemning homosexuality, and, by extension, homosexuals), along with the soft approach which is too often practised by churches today (either accepting homosexuality as an alternate and legitimate lifestyle, or simply ignoring it altogether), are both doing far more harm than good, and, clearly, a more biblical approach needs to be sought. The purpose of this presentation, therefore, is not so much to answer questions but to begin a discussion which will challenge us all to go back to the Bible and, at the same time, seek to speak the truth in love.

I. Let's begin with some of the known facts. Here are five of them that we dare not ignore.

1. Homosexuality presents a serious health hazard. About 15 years ago, a study in Vancouver (published in the Journal of the Canadian Medical Association and in the International Journal of Epidemiology) showed that the life expectancy of homosexual men is 8-20 years less than that of heterosexual men. Similar findings have been shown in other studies around the world. It is worth noting that the life expectancy of smokers is only 4 years less than that of non-smokers, yet, while millions of dollars have been spent in new legislation and ad campaigns to stamp out the public health hazard of smoking, nothing is spent in campaigning against the health hazard of

homosexual behaviour which is 2-5 times greater. Why should this known health hazard, which endangers the lives of so many people, be buried in obscurity? The fact that it is buried confirms what we have known for a long time, that homosexuality is a protected lifestyle in the now politically correct western world.

It might surprise most people to learn that AIDS counts for only about 2 years of the reported health risk. We may not know the whole reason for the remaining 6-18 years, and, without further study we may not find out, but the attitude of the homosexual community seems to account for a lot of it. In 2013, for instance, Vancouver Coastal Health and the BC Centre for Disease Control reported that levels of syphilis infections in homosexual and bisexual men were the highest they have been in more than 30 years in the Vancouver area. A recent newsletter from Real Women of Canada tells us that doctors are struggling to cope with a shortage of the main drug used to treat this potentially deadly infection, yet homosexuals persist in their promiscuous lifestyle, claiming that it is an integral part of who they are.

2. The Bible is consistently against homosexual behaviour and speaks of it in the Old Testament, in the Book of Leviticus, as an abomination, as something abhorrent to our holy God. In the New Testament we find the same thing. In the Letter to the Romans, for instance, homosexuality is called a vile passion, unnatural and shameful. In the First Letter to Timothy it is set forth as something contrary to sound doctrine; in other words, it flies in the face of what should be embraced. And in the First Letter to the Corinthians the warning is given not to be deceived - indicating how easily we may be deceived - for neither homosexuals (these are the aggressive partners), nor sodomites (better translated male prostitutes, these may be passive partners, those who engage in homosexual acts for money), will inherit the kingdom of God.

All this is important because it is too often said that biblical teaching is culturally conditioned, that what is true in one historical or cultural context is not necessarily true in a very different context. By quoting so many passages, though, which are many centuries removed from one another (and several cultures removed) yet all saying the same thing, it is clear that this teaching on homosexual behaviour is universally and unchangeably true. This is God's final word on the subject, and we have no right to alter it or think that the Lord may sometime change His mind. Moreover, the homosexual himself needs to be made aware of this teaching of God's holy Word if he is to receive any sure guidance and motivation on changing his behaviour. We are not doing him any favour by shielding him from this information, or by assuming that it is too harsh and offensive for him to hear.

3. While the Bible is steadfastly against homosexual behaviour, it is equally clear that homosexuals may be saved. In 1 Cor. 6, for example, in that very passage where we are warned not to be deceived, that homosexuals will not inherit the kingdom of God, we go on to read, v. 11, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” What a glorious revelation of God’s saving grace in Christ, and what a comfort to those who struggle with this sin to know what hope the gospel holds out to them! This is not a sin, therefore, like the sin against the Holy Spirit, which is unpardonable. How important it is for us (for all who seek to minister to the homosexual) to know this, and how vital and urgent it is for the homosexual himself to learn it as well. This is not to say that he may continue in his sin - no, he must repent of it, repent of all his sins, and trust in Christ alone - but this is the promise of God, Psalm 145:18, “The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.”

4. We may not know with certainty how someone becomes a homosexual, whether he is born with that propensity, or learns it later on, or even by a combination of nature and nurture together, but one thing is absolutely certain, namely, the Bible says that we are all born in sin, and that we need to fight against those sinful tendencies, whatever they may be and whenever they appear. For too long, people have tried to excuse their sinful ways by saying that they were born that way, or that they were raised that way, or that, in one way or another, it is someone else’s fault. This is all just that, an excuse, and a failure to confront one’s own moral responsibility. The Word of God is very clear, however, that there is only one effective way to deal with sin, any sin, and that is to repent of it, which is to fight it, to slay it, and to seek by the grace of God to put it right away.

The homosexual should be made aware that his best hope of mortifying this sin in his life is to become a Christian. He needs the Holy Spirit, in other words, he needs the Spirit of Christ who helps the Christian in all his weaknesses, so that he may fight and conquer this sin, not in his own wisdom and strength, but in the might and power of the Lord. Paul could testify (Phil. 4:13), “I can do all things (to be sure, I can do all that God requires of me) through Christ who strengthens me.”

5. While we may not yet understand, exactly, how someone becomes a homosexual, there is overwhelming evidence that there is a learning factor involved, and we know this from the growing number of cases in which sexual orientation has been changed. Dr. Robert Spitzer, who was a strong supporter of gay activism and played a pivotal role in 1973 in removing homosexuality from the psychiatric manual of mental disorders, now challenges the assumption he once held that homosexual orientation can never be changed. Why does he do so? It is because of the mounting

evidence that he had been wrong in his original assessment. Statistically, a small number of heterosexual men are becoming homosexuals; a more disturbing number of women are choosing to become lesbians; and, while I do not have the figures, an increasing number of books are being written by ex-homosexual Christians who have become heterosexuals. Clearly, changing sexual orientation is possible.

This should be encouraging information to those homosexuals who want to change their sexual orientation, though we should not insist that they do so in order to have a saving interest in Christ; it is not the sexual orientation which needs to be changed, so much, but the sinful behaviour, whether aggressive or passive homosexuality, which needs to be stopped.

II. Some basic principles of ministry to the homosexual. Again, here are five of them.

1. The Lord has called us in the great commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Notice, it is not merely a matter of going into all the world, but seeking in doing so to reach every individual person with the gospel, every individual person without exception of race, culture, or even sexual preference. What a massive task, one that calls for a major commitment to the work of missions, and, either we must go ourselves (in whatever capacity we can), or we must support those who go in our place. Clearly, our first responsibility is to those who are nearest, including family, friends, neighbours and our fellow workers. It may well be that certain doors are closed to us, and that even with our best efforts we have no means of opening them. It may be, too, that one such door is to the homosexual community. If, however, that door is not completely closed, if the Lord should grant us entrance into it, or place even just one homosexual or lesbian on our path, we must surely seize that opportunity.

The question is, 'Are willing to do that?' It is not a question, 'should we do it?', but 'are we willing?' We need to lay aside our own prejudice, if we find that to be a problem. We need to press ourselves to do what we know is right, and be prepared to step outside our own comfort zone. Jesus spoke against partiality and giving the best seats to our friends. If a known homosexual were to come to one of our meetings, or into our home, would not our failure to receive and welcome him be tantamount to our passing judgment against him, or even to shutting him out? The Lord Jesus Himself is the model we are to copy, the best example there is whose behaviour we are to imitate. In Luke 15 the Pharisees and scribes complained of Jesus, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." But is that not what we are all to do, and should we not be glad to do it, knowing that we were once of their number

(sinners in bondage) ourselves, and knowing, too, that the angels of heaven rejoiced when we were called out from the world and repented?

2. We need to remember, believer, that we are, each and every one of us, the chief of sinners. What that means, in the most practical terms, is that we are no better than anyone else. Sin is sin, after all, and the wages of sin (all sin) is death. So, whatever our own besetting sins may be, we are no better than that unbeliever to whom we are seeking to give the gospel. Knowing this to be so, and accepting it as fact, is an important (if humbling) starting place in our evangelizing anybody, including the homosexual. For years, heterosexuals have used a variety of pejorative terms to insult homosexuals, but, clearly, this has to stop if we wish to win them to Christ. In the same way, the homosexual lobby is now using the term homophobe to insult us, and this, too, has to stop if they are ever to give us and the gospel we preach any serious attention. This speaks to attitude, and we may be sure that, whatever one's attitude (whether condescending or welcoming), it is discerned quickly and easily by all who hear him. Let the change begin with us, if it has not already happened, speaking of homosexuals with respect and addressing them as those who, like us, are made in the image of God and called to live for His glory. When we start to think that way, and to pray for their souls, then will we start to talk that way as well, and also mean it.

3. How, then, shall we treat the homosexual who seeks our counsel and help, even if it is just to ask us a few questions for his own information? That is a good question. How would you want to be treated if your besetting sins were known? Here we fall back on the golden rule - doing unto others what we would have them do unto us - which should always be considered in evangelizing anyone. After all, as we have just considered, we do not want to offend this fellow needlessly; the offence of the cross is quite enough in itself without adding any personal offence of our own.

So, how shall we treat him? Surely, the answer to that question is to treat him with love and respect, with patience and understanding. This does not mean backing away from the vital issues. We need to love him enough to tell him - and be aware of this, that we may be the only ones who do tell him - that, if he continues on his present course of self-destruction, he will not enter the kingdom of God. The Scriptures are clear on that. Neither he nor we should be deceived. He must put away his sin. He must flee to the Lord Jesus Christ and seek refuge in Him. He needs to know what we ourselves have learned, that Christ is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him, and that the one who comes to Him He will by no means cast out.

4. The homosexual who expresses a conviction of sin and wants to commit his life to Christ is clearly in need of caring discipleship, and probably even more than

many other people, because of the confusion and conflicting opinions about homosexuality which are so rampant in our day. He will be told by influential voices of the homosexual community, and possibly by some of his friends, that he can be a Christian and still continue his homosexual lifestyle. It would be most helpful, therefore, if he could connect with a support group of ex-homosexual Christians who are prepared to be there for one another and for him. A regular Bible study consisting of heterosexuals solely might be of more limited help for him, but only if they are prepared to empathize, spend extra time with him, and direct him to the kind of literature that he really needs to read. (I have provided what I am persuaded is a most helpful bibliography at the end of this paper. Please look at it carefully. My recommendation is for churches to purchase some or all of these books for their library, and so make them available for anyone who is interested in reading them.)

Perhaps a word of caution is in order here. We all have to do battle with sin in our life, and particularly with besetting sins, as they are called, those nasty transgressions which steal our affections, and, though we know they are wrong, we have trouble giving them up because we would still like secretly to pursue them. While we are not justified in giving in to them - ever - nor should we rationalize such behaviour, at the same time we must not be too quick to condemn other people for their failures, because we do not know what battle they have waged or what resistance they have offered in seeking to conquer that particular sin in their life. It was a rule of the Puritans always to be much harder on themselves in their pursuit of holiness than on others, and that, surely, is a good rule of thumb for us all.

5. The homosexual who wishes for any reason to change his sexual orientation - and who wishes, possibly as a means of doing so, or maybe even as a means of convincing himself that he has done so, to get married to someone of the opposite sex - should be upfront and honest with that woman about his sexual history before proposing to her. This is something that they should talk over together, and they should not commit to marriage unless they are both agreed under the fully disclosed circumstances to do so. I have known a few men who have not done this, and the results have been disastrous for both husband and wife.

I have for many years insisted in all premarital counselling that both men and women share with their prospective spouse before marriage whatever secrets they may have, anything that might cause them any possible embarrassment or shame later on were it to be discovered. If they have not done that, and the secret is somehow later revealed, the relationship will then be severely strained, both because of the secret itself and now because of the sense of betrayal in not being told about it.

Homosexual orientation and behaviour, if there has ever been any, is clearly a very important part of one's life and sexual history. It should not be overlooked or discounted as trivial. I am not suggesting that this information be divulged to a prospective employer, or to any of the powers that be if one is running for political office, any more than he should have to reveal that he was once quick tempered, or a gossip, or had a penchant for chocolate. But marriage is different, and it demands a higher level of transparency, especially with regard to sexual history. One may well seek pastoral advice in order to achieve this most effectively, but the general rule, "the sooner the better," is best.

In conclusion, ministering to the homosexual was not something that we thought much about even thirty years ago, but today, with the world changing more rapidly than we have seen it ever before, we have to prepare ourselves and our churches for it. Let us pray that, in the coming generation, the church will have as much (or even more) influence on the world as clearly, in the last generation, the world has had on the church!

Respectfully submitted,

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