

Clearing the Stereotype:
You Christians Are Antihomosexual
A Topical Study

Related Scriptures: Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Deuteronomy 14:3, 8; Romans 1:26-27;
1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 John 1:8

Today is unusual. I don't really have a sermon to preach. Just a story to tell. Within the story, we're still going to be studying the Bible, but in a different way. I usually have a big idea—the sermon in a nutshell. But not today. It didn't seem to fit. You'll have to come up with a big idea on your own.

My story begins in 1997. We had just started this church and we were meeting in the cafeteria of Mountain Sky Junior High School just down the street.

We were hoping to reach out to people who had given up on church. And our hopes were realized when Doug and Jane walked in on our very first Sunday. They had not darkened the door of a church in over twenty years. But there they were with us. Doug and Jane. In the church that smelled like a junior high cafeteria.

Doug was not too sure about church or Jesus, but he wasn't bashful. He filled out a Connection Card saying he wanted to talk with me. I remember the Monday, sitting in the church office, which was then in an upstairs bedroom of Virgil and May Johnson's house. I stared at the Card with Doug's name and number on it and said a little prayer before I called.

That started the relationship. Doug and Jane became regulars on Sunday. They lived in Moon Valley.

Doug invited me to go mountain biking on Shaw Butte. It was brutally beyond my level of fitness, but I was too competitive and too proud and too stubborn to back off. So afterwards, I lay there in the grass of Doug's front yard trying to recover, beet red, gasping, thinking I was going to puke, with Doug saying, "Sorry Bob, I would have slowed down, but you stayed right on my back tire. You should have said something."

When I caught my breath and the barf alert passed, we went inside and joined Jane for some iced tea. We chewed the fat about all kinds of things. They peppered me with questions about church and Jesus and the Bible. They said they found it refreshing that our church focuses on trying to learn and apply the Bible without a lot of other baggage mixed in.

And as far as I can tell, Doug and Jane became believers in Jesus and began to grow. And then came the bump in the road.

Some good friends invited Cathy and me to attend a banquet for an organization that lobbies for pro-family policies in the public arena. We went. And we were surprised to discover that Doug and Jane had been invited, too. They were seated at our table.

The main speaker for the evening was a well-known Christian man, a good man, as far as I can tell. At one point, the speaker began to talk about the dangers of the homosexual agenda. I don't remember his exact words. And I have no problem with somebody sharing his views regarding the existence of a homosexual agenda or the potential downside of it.

But I do remember how I felt about the way he did it. It's hard to describe, but I felt like a boundary was crossed. I talked last week about the Bible's call for Christians to be known in the public arena as being models of grace. It's about being respectful, generous, peaceable, gentle, and humble toward all, maligning no one. That night, I didn't feel like that was modeled. Instead, there was a certain contempt. A lack of grace and compassion. And it wasn't just coming from the speaker. It was in the air. It was palpable. The speaker seemed to convey by his words and his tone and his body language a disdain for homosexuals. And many in the mostly Christian audience applauded approvingly and repeatedly, almost like the roar of a crowd each time the hometown boxer lands a punch to his opponent's head.

It seems that many professing Christians do hold a special contempt for gays.

It would be easy to camp out on some extreme expressions of contempt. Like the ► recent picketers at Desert Mountain High School right here in the Valley. They held up signs against homosexuals. Signs that said, "Fags are going to hell," "God hates you," "Mourn for your sin," and "God hates Obama." I'm not quite sure how Obama got in there. This photo was taken by Ricky Amano, a member of our church family. He wasn't one of the picketers.

The picketers were from a Baptist church in Kansas, and they call these demonstrations "Love Crusades." And get this: You can check them out at www.godhatesfags.com. No kidding.

The ► suffering many homosexuals have had to endure at the hands of hateful Christians grieves me deeply. As a Christian, I'm ashamed of it, I want it to stop, and I want to apologize.

Such extreme expressions of contempt are conspicuous but probably not representative of most of you here. I don't know anyone in my circle of Christian friends who is this outrageous. The banquet we attended that night with Doug and Jane was certainly not like this at all.

Nevertheless, I still suspect that many Christians consider homosexuality to be worse than other sins. And there's some recent research that seems to confirm my suspicion. For example, the vast majority of Christians believe that homosexuality is not a legitimate lifestyle and they are against church-sanctioned weddings for same-sex unions. But strangely, the majority of born-again believers, some 61%, do not—do not—accept Jesus' plain teaching that divorce is a sin except in cases of adultery.¹ So born-again Christians are much more likely to disapprove of homosexuality than divorce.

Also, four out of five evangelicals say that homosexual relations between consenting adults ought to be illegal.² But I seriously doubt if four out of five think heterosexual sex outside of marriage between consenting adults ought to be illegal. But the Bible bans both, along with lust, greed, coveting, and

¹ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 94

² *Ibid.*

selfish pride. These are all sins according to the Bible. So it's perfectly reasonable for people to question why we camp out on some sins and not others.

I am unable to biblically defend the idea that homosexuality is in some special category of bad, but I'm afraid many of us have put it there. I confess, I feel a bias lurking in my own heart. If, as parents, we could somehow choose a few sins our children and grandchildren would be certain to avoid, I suspect homosexuality would be a popular choice. If we had to choose, I suspect the vast majority of us would rather our loved ones struggle with problems that are heterosexual rather than homosexual.

I really admire the candor of my brother, Ricky, the one who took photos of the God-hates-fags picketers. With the photos, he sent me an email ► saying,

Maybe these photos scare me because if I'm honest, I know that within me some level of these feelings exists and is in direct contrast to the Spirit which lives in me. ► Your sermons have been very helpful for me to continually seek to see the world through God's gracious and loving eyes, and to represent Him truthfully. ► Thank you again for continually teaching my family the truth of who God really is, directly from His Word, and not a misrepresentation based on human fears, pride, or philosophies.

Well, ► back to Doug and Jane at the banquet. The banquet ended. We all went home.

Doug and Jane were not in church the next Sunday. And a few days after that, I got a call from Doug. He said, "Bob, Jane and I really need to meet with you and Cathy. Would you please come to dinner with us? And bring your Bible. We have some questions."

We arrived at the restaurant and Doug and Jane were waiting. We sat down and engaged in a few pleasantries. And then Doug got right down to it. He looked me in the eye and said, "We were offended by the gay-bashing at the banquet the other night. We were about ready to walk away from the banquet and walk away from our church. We were this close," he said, bringing his forefinger near his thumb.

"But," he said, "we noticed something at the banquet that kept us from walking away. We watched you and Cathy. And we noticed that you did not applaud at the homosexual punch lines. You didn't seem to join the gay-bashing. And so, we want you to show us what the Bible has to say about homosexuality."

And then he paused, fighting back tears that welled in his eyes. And he said, "This is important, Bob, because my sister is a lesbian. And I love my sister."

In that moment, I felt like I was in one of those Southwest Airlines commercials: "Want to get away?"

My recollection of what happened after that is not perfect. I'm going to recount it as best I can. I'm pretty sure I didn't sound as good as I suggest. And in reality, Cathy contributed a good deal more than I let on. In fact, all four of us contributed to a conversation that was messy and winding and punctuated with food and bathroom breaks. But this is the gist of it, dressed up in tidy Sunday form.

I took a deep breath and said, “Doug and Jane, we are so sorry you were offended at the banquet. We can certainly see how you would be. We didn’t applaud because we didn’t approve of the way homosexuals were being trashed. It was ugly and, as Christians, we’re not proud of it. We’re sorry.”

“Before we look at the Bible, I want to say some things. I’ve never met your sister, but I think I know something about her. I know that God loves her every bit as much as He loves me. I know that I am called to love her no matter who she is or what she’s done. I know that Jesus died for her just like He died for me. I know that your sister and I are in the very same boat morally speaking. I’m no better. She’s no worse. We’re all desperately in need of the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.”

“Having said that, I believe that homosexuality is immoral. And I can’t escape it or dress it up. It’s a sin. It’s my best understanding of what the Bible says. And I take the Bible to be my highest authority for what to believe and how to live. Let me show you.”

And then I turned to the New Testament. A pretty common thing to do is to start the case against homosexuality from the Old Testament. Maybe it’s because of some strong Old Testament language that seems to press the point. For example, I’ve seen ► Leviticus 20:13 used a lot. It says,

^{NAU} Leviticus 20:13 If *there is* a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act . . .

There’s the strong language: ► “detestable.” “Detestable” seems like such a boom-shack-a-lack-a, really-big-sin, picket-sign kind of word.

Only one problem. The Old Testament Law also describes a lot of other things as “detestable.” Like eating pork.³ So the Old Testament is not the best place to go to address homosexuality. Because the Bible itself tells us that a chunk of the Old Testament called the Mosaic Law—the part that calls homosexuality detestable—has been ► done away. It doesn’t apply to us directly today.

So I went to the New Testament. Specifically, I turned to ► 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and I read it.

^{NAU} 1 Corinthians 6:9 . . . Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

Then I said, “Let’s set aside for the moment what it means to ► ‘inherit the kingdom of God.’ For some good reasons I won’t get into now, this isn’t talking about whether or not people are going to heaven. If it is, we’re all in big trouble.”

“I ► think we can agree, though, that this is a list of some things that aren’t good in God’s eyes. We have ► fornication, which includes any kind of sex outside of marriage. We have ► idolatry, which includes making anything in life more important than God. We have ► adultery. We have being ► effeminate, which is a very awkward attempt to translate a Greek word that has no good English counterpart. It doesn’t describe a guy who looks feminine; rather, it describes being the passive one in a

³ Deuteronomy 14:3, 8.

same-sex relationship.⁴ We also have ► homosexuality in general. We have ► thievery, which would include cheating on your income tax or pilfering supplies from the office. We have ► coveting, which includes me wanting to keep up with the Joneses. We have ► drunkenness. We have ► reviling, which includes the use of abusive language. And we have ► swindling, which includes acting out of greed.”

“There ► are ten sins on this list. Now, you look at my life, and I’m afraid I stand guilty on at least six or seven of them. And while it’s certainly not my intention, I fully expect to mess things up some more in the future. I’m a sinner. I’m an immoral person. I desperately need the love and forgiveness of my Savior Jesus Christ.”

“And ► so, Doug, when you say your sister is a lesbian, I say she’s one of us. We’re all sinners. I think no less of her.”

At that point, our conversation took a very common turn. Doug said, “Well, I think my sister was born that way. It’s who she is. She didn’t choose to be a lesbian. So how can it be a sin?”

“That’s a good question,” I said. “I struggle with it, too. But, here’s my thinking.”

“I’m not an expert, but based on some reading I’ve done, I think you could be right in saying your sister didn’t choose to be a lesbian. As far as I can tell, people don’t generally wake up one day and decide to go homosexual. In fact, I suspect there is some truth to the idea that some people are born that way, if that means there is some genetic or physiological predisposition to same-sex attraction. The exact origin of same-sex attraction is well beyond my understanding—I suspect there’s often a complicated blend of physical, social, and emotional factors. Nobody seems to have figured it all out yet.”

“But, for the sake of argument, let’s just say that homosexuals are indeed born that way—born with homosexual desires. Having homosexual desires is not wrong, any more than it’s wrong to have heterosexual desires. But we are responsible for how we behave in response to those desires. Being born with a certain desire does not automatically give me the right to fulfill it.”

“I was born with heterosexual desire. But as a Christian, the biblical boundaries within which I may fulfill it are very narrow. I only have the God-granted privilege of marriage. But not every person will enjoy that privilege. Some will not marry, and are thus called to a life of celibacy—a life that the Apostle Paul commends.”⁵

“The biblical, moral options for those born with homosexual desires are similarly limited. Some have tried to change and seem to have succeeded and are now in heterosexual marriages. Others may not want to change or may not be able to. For them, the only biblical, moral option I see is celibacy. In our culture, celibacy is not popular, but the Bible presents it as a perfectly viable, even laudable option.”

At that point, Doug said something like, “Well my sister is not a Christian. Should we be imposing our morality on her?”

⁴ W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. “μαλακός,” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 7:25-35.

“Good point,” I said. “I don’t like the idea of imposing my morality on people. I’m not calling for your sister to repent. What she chooses to do is pretty much her business. I certainly don’t expect everybody to take the Bible the same way I do, and I want to respect the ones who don’t.”

“But here’s where I’m torn. If we were to operate on the assumption that everybody has the right to fulfill the desires with which they were born, it would take us to some bad places. For example, I could say that I was born with a desire for women so strong that just one wife can’t fulfill it; I need to be in a loving, sexual relationship with ten or twelve. I could say that I was born with a desire that cannot be satisfied by adults; I need to be in a loving, sexual relationship with children. And then I could round up some people who feel the same way I do and we could say our civil rights have been violated unless the government blesses the fulfillment of our desires and charges with a hate crime anybody who disagrees.”

“Now, I certainly don’t condone hateful things that have been done to gays and lesbians. Neither do I condone the ungracious approach taken by some of my brothers and sisters at the banquet. But I get some of their concerns, and I share some of them.”

“I’m not in favor of validating or legalizing the fulfillment of whatever desire people happen to be born with. Lines must be drawn somewhere, and I choose biblical ones. Not because I’m homophobic. Not because I hate gays. Not because I think I’m better than anybody else. But because I’m just doing the best I can to live in biblical grace and truth.”

Doug and Jane were back in church the following Sunday. They seemed okay with our explanation of things. I’m not sure they agreed on every point, but our relationship continued as before. And they continued to grow in our church until they moved to Albuquerque. Among the last things Doug said to me was, “Bob, can you find us a church in Albuquerque like Moon Valley?”

I’ve lost track of Doug and Jane. But I’ll never forget them. Neither will I forget Doug’s sister. I’ve never met her, but when I think about the kind of church I want Moon Valley to be, I think of her. I’d like her to walk in and feel honored and respected and loved and welcome. Because she’s one of us. Human beings who desperately need the love and forgiveness and grace of our Savior, Jesus Christ.