

What God Says About Same-Sex Marriage: Questions Answered (Part 1)

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I. Introduction

There are many questions that Christians are now struggling with regarding Same-Sex Marriage. As we ponder the answers to these tough questions, we should make sure that we don't forget that we're dealing with fellow human beings whom God loves and wants to save. Thus, every answer we give should be tempered with love and mercy towards the sinner for whom Jesus died.

II. As You Deal with These Tough Questions, Love and Mercy Should be Your Guiding Principle

Can a Christian attend a same-sex wedding? Some say "no" others "yes"; both sides have a point. Those who say "yes" see a difference between being an active participant in a wedding (e.g., caterer, baker, groomsman, bridesmaid, etc.) and simply attending. In their minds, attending is not actively supporting the sin of same-sex marriage.

Approach your decision with love and compassion, before we address why it's wrong to attend a same-sex wedding, we need to understand what our decision will mean to us and them. We have to realize that this is one of the most important days of their lives and they're inviting us because they love us and want us to celebrate with them their love and commitment for each other. Thus, saying "no" will inevitably hurt them and possibly end our relationship. Why is it important to consider this? Because we need to be aware of the hurt it's going to cause them and if at all possible, so that we can do something to repair the relationship later.

There may not be a clear passage that addresses this question, the issue is not that we can't be around sinners. We need to be around them for Jesus to save them. Jesus loved sinners and they loved Him; He was always around them, Mark 2:15. And the only way to avoid sinners is to leave planet earth, 1 Corinthians 5:10. Now some see 1 Corinthians 5:9-12 as clear instruction that we shouldn't attend same-sex weddings. However, the passage instructs us not to keep company with fellow Christians who are living in sexual sin and it specifically states that it's not addressing non-Christians. Thus, based on this passage we can refuse to attend the same-sex wedding of Christians or refuse to perform or host same-sex weddings in our church, but it says nothing about the same-sex wedding of non-Christians. Likewise, Ephesians 5:11, which tells us not to have anything to do with the unfruitful works of darkness, concerns fellow Christians (5:1-7).

Why it's wrong to attend same-sex weddings, there are two basic issues: what is marriage? and what does attending a wedding signify? Marriage was created by God and it's not up for redefinition by man. It is always to be between a man and a woman, Matthew 19:4-6. Same-sex marriage is a clear violation of this covenant, making it sin. To agree with same-sex marriage or celebrate it is to agree with and celebrate sin. Thus, the second problem: everyone present at a wedding is there to celebrate that union and to celebrate it is to approve of it. And therein lies the problem, to attend is to sanction sin just as it would be if you attended any other sinful wedding, e.g., attending the wedding of your best friend who committed adultery and is now marrying the adulterer.

Say "no" with compassion, how you express your decision not to attend matters. You should be loving and gracious. Your goal is to show them that despite your differences, your relationship with them matters to you deeply, you're not going to break ties with them, you understand how much this day means to them but you also cannot in good conscience attend and celebrate with them.

Is God angry with me because I disagree with what He says about homosexuality? There are many Christians who in good conscience do not want to discriminate against homosexuals. The information they have tells them that they are born that way. Since that's the case, how can we deny them the right to marry? How can we blame them for something that is not their fault? All this leads them to think that God is now angry with them because they are clearly contradicting God's Word which states that homosexuality is sin and marriage is to be between a man and woman. So is God angry with such people? No!

Think for a moment about how God responded to Adam and Eve's sin. They committed arguably the worst sin in human history because their sin led to death and destruction for the rest of us. And yet, in spite of that how did God react? God responded with love. He ran to their aid and restored their identities as king and queen of earth. He also promised to one day send His only Son to permanently undo the death and destruction they had ushered into His creation, Genesis 3. Why did He react this way? Because He knows very well that there's an enemy who deceives us. Therefore, God is merciful and patient with us. If our confusion/error is due to Satan's deception (as Adam and Eve's in the Garden) and not outright rebellion and we have a repentant heart which is open to His correction, then God will guide us to the truth which will set us free from our error.

How do you handle the tension between your Christian faith and society at large which has now sanctioned something your faith calls sin? First, if you're just now sensing tension between your faith and society's morals, how have you handled the tension regarding abortion, pornography, the exploitation of women as sex objects, the abuse of the poor, promiscuity, etc? In other words, this is nothing new; society has been sanctioning sin since Cain killed Abel and we're either tossed to and fro by the moral winds of society or we live by our faith. Second, how did Jesus handle the tension? Jesus didn't sway with every sinful wind of society. He condemned society's sin whenever He came across it and the unrepentant sinners behind it, e.g., Mark 7:9-13. But Jesus also showed love and mercy to individual sinners. He didn't "Hate the sin and love the sinner." He "Hated the sin *because* He loved the sinner." Thus, it's crucial *how* you show your condemnation of someone's sin. Jesus didn't condemn without first showing love to those who needed salvation, e.g., the woman caught in adultery, John 8—seek to bless instead of curse.

How should the church treat a homosexual couple who walks into their assembly? The way Jesus treated every sinner who had ears to hear what He had to say about their life. But first, do you know this couple? If you do, then there shouldn't be a problem. Why? Because through you, they should know many things already: that Christ loves them and wants them to have an awesome life, that there are things in their lives that need to change as there are in everyone who comes to Jesus, that He is patient and loving with them as they discover what needs to change, that He doesn't expect their lives to change overnight, and various other things related to church.

Now, if you know them and invited them and they don't know all these things about Jesus, you should ask yourself why you haven't shown them. And if you brought them to hear the gospel from the pastor or someone else, you really need to search your soul and ask why you haven't introduced them to Christ yourself. It's not that we can't bring unbelievers to church, but we shouldn't look at the church as the first step in evangelism. Jesus didn't use the church to evangelize. He gave the Gospel to sinners Himself right where they lived...and not just with words!

We should always move toward people; we should seek to bless and not curse them. We sometimes take the position of accusation instead of blessing. Jesus broke the power of accusation by delivering the guilty. Here's something amazing: Jesus is the advocate for the sinner (1 John 2:1), and Satan is the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). And yet in the name of Jesus we become accusers!

Second, so how should we treat a gay couple who walks into our church? The way we would a prideful person, a liar, or anyone else struggling with any other sin. That is, we should love them enough to point them to Christ's salvation, which means that: 1) we invite them into our fellowship instead of keeping them outside in Satan's darkness, 2) we're patient with them as the Lord frees them from their struggle with sin—as we would be and are with anyone else who has a long-standing battle with sin. This means that we don't expect them to change overnight, instead we realize that it may take a long time for the Lord to free them, and 3) we reach out with true fellowship/relationship and help them overcome their specific sin with daily, weekly, or monthly guidance whichever is needed. In other words, we treat sinners the way Jesus did.

How should we treat homosexuals in life, at work, in our family, on social media? Similar to the answer above, with love and grace, recognizing that sinners are not going to change overnight. They will continue to sin, especially now that society has sanctioned their sin. But this shouldn't stop us from befriending them or socializing with them. Jesus was always around sinners; they enjoyed His company and He enjoyed theirs, Mark 2:15. You should also have a frank discussion with them about where you both stand on homosexuality and why and what you expect of the relationship. Your goal is to let them know that even though you disagree with them, you still love and respect them and you still want a relationship with them. We should not avoid tough conversations; we should love them enough to have them. And we should also be patient and tolerant. For example, if a gay couple holds hands in front of us, it shouldn't drive us to separate from them (do you think Jesus separated from the sinners who sinned in front of Him?). But what if they make out in front of me? The problem with a make out session is not simply that it's done by a gay couple. This shouldn't be done by any couple; it's an issue of basic propriety. We are children of light. Light is not supposed to be afraid of darkness; it's supposed to overtake darkness, Ephesians 5:8-14 (1 John 4:4). So don't be afraid that their sin is going to taint you. They need your light so that Christ can free them from their sin.

If God's Word is true concerning homosexuality and thus homosexuals are individuals who are trapped in a very serious sin, how can the church help them find their way back to God and the life He truly intended for them? There are several things you can do: 1) treat them as a person in need of rescue instead of a leper who's on their way to hell, 2) befriend them and offer true fellowship, 3) introduce them to Christ, the One who will save them, 4) walk alongside them as Jesus frees them from their sin, which means deep conversations about how they got there and how to get out of it, conversations where you show them how God made them before they were born, Psalm 139:13-14, who God truly is (their Loving Father who wants the best for them), and what their life is supposed to look like—a life of meaning and purpose that God designed for them before they were born, Psalm 139:16. That is, you need to love them and help them connect to God, trusting that He will speak to them because He wants to free them. It's not that we need strategies as much as we need supernatural intervention: a gay couple doesn't need to hear our exegesis as much as they need to hear the voice of God. God's voice is the only thing that will convict their hearts and convince them to worship Him, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 14:24-25.

What if a gay couple invites you and your spouse to dinner or a party? You should attend their party/dinner. The scribes and Pharisees stayed away from sinners; they saw them as unclean dregs who would get them dirty. But Jesus ate and partied with sinners precisely because they needed a doctor to heal them, Mark 2:15-17. You go to the party because you see your homosexual friends as—and that's what they should be is friends—you see them as people in need of the Lord's salvation. And in order for the Lord to save them, you have to love them enough to build a relationship with them so you can introduce them to the Lord of salvation despite their sin, just like you would/should with any person struggling with sin.

If a gay married couple asks you for relationship advice, how should you respond? The question implies that they know you and your Christian faith and perhaps that they respect your opinion. If that's the case, two things: 1) I would gently explain that because men and women are different, the biblical passages on marriage do not simply give the same advice to each person in the relationship. They define a role for the man and a role for the woman, because that's what marriage is. The Bible has no advice on how to maintain a gay marriage for the same reason that it has no advice on how to have meaningless one-night stands. That's just not God's plan for mankind. And since they're not living God's plan, 2) I would invite them to a deeper conversation about who Christ is and what their lives would be like if they had a relationship with Him. That is, I would seek to have them begin a relationship with Christ so that He could transform their lives and not only free them from homosexuality, but show them why they were born, their true purpose in life, Psalm 139:13-16.

What do you say to family and friends who think that homosexuality is wrong, but they think that everyone, including Christians, should just accept homosexuality because it isn't hurting anyone? I would start with their premise that it's wrong and go to the Scriptures that clearly show it's a sin. And if it is a sin, then it clearly is hurting someone: the sinner himself/herself and those who are close to them. How so? They are not able to live the life God intended for them, so their sin is robbing them and their family/friends of this individual's godly contribution to their lives and society at large. Thus, not only does it hurt the individual—it's behavior that leads to death and death is not just physical, Romans 1:26-32—it hurts the people around them. Additionally, it's hurting society because when a nation as a whole puts a stamp of approval on sin, then that nation will suffer God's wrath, Romans 1:18. It's one thing for God to punish an individual's sin; it's quite another when God punishes a nation for their sin. The sinners of that nation will suffer, but so will many innocent people. Finally, the idea that "X is okay because in my judgment it's not hurting anyone" is simply not true. Eve tried that exact philosophy in the Garden of Eden—how did that work out for the rest of us?

Sex is not the main attraction for homosexual couples. What they want is someone to love and spend the rest of their lives with. So if sex is not the main issue, what's wrong with same-sex marriage? Marriage is not just about sex. It's a oneness that includes emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects and these aspects are all supposed to be fulfilled by the opposite sex. So when a man/woman wants all these things from the same sex, it's sinful and wrong. This is us telling God (as He describes in Romans 1), "We want to live life without You and make our own rules. And if we want the oneness of marriage with the same sex, that's our right." But if we decide to live life without God, then we better be prepared for the consequences. It's His universe not ours; He makes the rules not us. And contrary to popular opinion, God's rules are not designed to confine us. They're designed to liberate us; they make it possible for us to be our best selves. Additionally, it doesn't matter what the main attraction is. If the act is a sin, the reason why you committed the sin is irrelevant. For example, robbing a bank is still sin even though for me it's not about the money, in fact I give the money away to charity. I love robbing banks because of the thrill I get when I get away with it.

III. Conclusion

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."