

Should We Go to Our Gay Neighbors' Wedding?

"Sue, I love my sweet gay neighbors, and after the SCOTUS decision I figure we'll be invited to a wedding. Do we go?"

Christians take different positions on this question, just as Christians take different positions on the issue of homosexuality in general and same-sex marriage in particular. I believe that regardless of our feelings on this issue and about our friends and loved ones, we need to follow what the Word of God says.

Both Old and New Testaments clearly state that homosexual behavior is sin. Regardless of how we feel about those who engage in it, the Word of God is internally consistent on this issue: all sex outside of marriage, which is restricted to one man and one woman in a lifetime covenant, violates God's created intent for us. And that includes homosexual sex. Redefining marriage does not change the unnatural, sinful nature of same-gender sex (Romans 1).

A wedding is a communal event where society gathers together to witness the union of two people coming together to start a new family, a new building block of community. The point of a wedding is that the guests witness, support, bless and approve the marriage. Contrasted to lovers making promises to each other in a private intimacy, the communal witness and celebration of a wedding elevates and formalizes these vows as a covenant (a promise on steroids), and the new one-flesh union becomes a recognized part of the community.

So there is a huge difference between having dinner with gay neighbors, and attending their wedding. When people attend a wedding, it makes a statement. Attendance at a wedding means one is offering support, approval and blessing to the couple.

I suggest that since God has already spoken clearly about the nature of homosexuality, He would not contradict Himself to endorse and celebrate what He has declared to be sin (Leviticus 18:22). Neither should we.

Beyond that, the scriptures also direct us not to support other people's behaviors that God calls sin:

"Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them" (Eph. 5:11).

1 Timothy 5:22 instructs us not to "take part in the sins of others. . ."

How can one attend a gay wedding without participating in "deeds of darkness," without "taking part in the sins of others"?

To be consistent, Christians should examine why we attend any wedding. Since the Bible is equally unequivocal about believers marrying unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14), it would be wrong to attend that wedding as well. It would be saying, "I support, affirm, bless and celebrate this union." Just like going to a wedding of a Christian who dumps his wife without biblical grounds to marry a younger trophy wife. No!

Lots of people scoff at this position: "God is a God of love! Who are you to judge anyone's love?"

It's true, God IS a God of love, and He has described love for us:

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous;
love does not brag and is not arrogant,
does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,
does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;
bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things,

endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

If love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but God has declared that same-sex relationships are not right, then it is not loving to engage in unrighteousness. If same-sex relationships are outside God's created intent for human sexuality, then it is not loving to support and bless relationships that grieve God and will result in pain down the road for the people involved.

So, to answer my friend's question: "How can you attend a gay wedding without making a clear statement of support and endorsement, approval and blessing? And since you know what God says about the nature of their relationship as sin, what statement would you be making as His ambassador?" I encourage my friend to keep loving her wonderful neighbors, to continue to be their friends and to be salt and light to them.

But not to go to their wedding.

And if they ask why, to kindly and lovingly say, "I am a Christ-follower, and He has spoken about His intention for marriage. Just as He loves you more than you can imagine, I love you too, but I'm so sorry, I can't stand with you that day. But I'll look forward to visiting with you, as usual, on the other side of that day. And I will be praying for you."

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/should_we_go_to_our_gay_neighbors_wedding on Aug.25, 2015

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Can Homosexuals Change? – A Christian View of Homosexuality

Sue Bohlin looks at the real evidence showing people who have changed from homosexuality. From a Christian perspective, Sue presents some proven paths to recovery from homosexual thoughts and practice. When we let Christ begin to heal our underlying hurts and feelings of inadequacy, it is truly possible to experience a fundamental change.

Is It Possible for Homosexuals to Change?

Mike^{1} was marching in a Gay Pride parade when God got a hold of him. He had been high for four days and his “buzz” suddenly evaporated as he heard a voice in his head say, “You don’t have to live like this.” He knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was God offering him a way out. He put down his Gay Pride sign, left the parade, sat down in a nearby stairwell, and repented of his rebellion. He gave his heart to Jesus Christ and starting walking out of homosexuality that day. Today, several years later, he is married with a child, and living a very different kind of life. Not just on the outside; his heart was changed from the inside out.

Paul was on a self-destructive path of drug and alcohol abuse and homosexual activity. When he told his mother he was gay, she threw him out of the house, and the only place he could find belonging, safety, and identity was the gay community. As he spent more and more time “escaping” the pain in his life through sex and alcohol, he began to realize how bad his life was. He wanted to die but God had something else in mind.

Paul was invited to a Bible study where he met a man who had left the gay lifestyle and was living a changed life. For the first time he honestly called out and said, "God, please help me."

One of his friends became a Christian. He asked her about homosexuality and was angered by her initial response. She said, "I now believe it is a sin—but God wouldn't call it a sin if there weren't something better." Paul eventually realized that he was a sinner who needed God's love and grace, and in 1992 he trusted Christ as his Savior. Two months later, he was led to an organization that helps people deal with unwanted homosexuality through an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. He left his homosexual identity behind and embraced his true identity as a child of God, committed to holiness and purity. Paul is now director of that ministry and is helping others walk out of homosexuality. He's not perfect, he's still growing . . . just like me and every other Christian I know. But the "something better" God had in mind for him is an intimacy with Christ that is breathtaking.

Randy brings glory to God every day of his life by living out the abiding truth that change is possible.

Stories of Women

Carol grew up in a religious home with parents whose standards were too strict to allow her to please them. But she was smart, and a good student, and her teachers gave her the affirmation and encouragement her heart longed for. She developed very strong bonds with her teachers, some of which became profound emotional dependencies.

In graduate school, she was hit by the unexpected pain of loneliness and emptiness. Carol got into an intense relationship with a married woman, facing completely new temptations. She was totally unprepared to resist the strength of same-gender attraction, and quickly found herself

emotionally and physically involved in a relationship she couldn't believe was happening. Now she was not only emotionally needy, she was shackled by deep shame, woundedness, and guilt.

A friend told her about a ministry to those dealing with same-sex attraction, and it was like finding a door to another world. Through the support she found there, Carol was challenged to identify the lies of Satan which she had believed her whole life and replace them with the truth of Scripture. God is renewing her mind, meeting her deep heart-needs, and bringing her to a place of freedom and hope.

Diane's story is different. She spent eighteen years in a committed lesbian relationship with another woman she believed to be her soul-mate. They went through a commitment ceremony in a gay church, and raised a daughter together. She enjoyed a position of leadership as a bright and articulate spokesperson for a gay church.

Through all those years, Diane's mother was steadfast in three things. She loved Diane unconditionally. She never backed down about her belief that her daughter's lifestyle was sinful because God says it's wrong. And third, she prayed faithfully for her daughter.

Diane and her partner sought the Lord about everything except their sexuality. At one point, they were praying together for wisdom and truth about a situation that had nothing to do with their relationship. God answered their prayer in an unexpected way; He showed them the truth about the sinful nature of their relationship. It was a terribly painful and unwelcome discovery to learn that they had been deceived. Together, they decided out of obedience to God to separate and break off their relationship. It's still painful, even as Diane experiences God's healing touch in the deepest parts of her wounded soul. He's changing Diane and Carol from the inside out.

Three Claims for Change

Some people deal with same-sex attraction by pretending it's not there. Denial is unfortunately the time-honored "Christian" response. But this is not the way God wants us to deal with problems; Psalm 51:6 says, "Surely you desire truth in my inmost parts." Acknowledging one has a homosexual orientation is like seeing the red light on your car's dashboard; it means something is wrong somewhere. A homosexual orientation isn't the actual problem; it's the symptom of a deeper issue—legitimate, God-given needs for relationship and intimacy that have been channeled in unhealthy and sinful directions.

But it is not a simple matter, and it would be disrespectful to imply that there is an easy solution to the complex issue of homosexuality. Among those who claim that change is possible, there are three main schools of thought on how to get there.

The first is the deliverance ministries. They say that homosexuality is caused by a demon, and if we can just cast out the demon, the problem is gone. Sounds like an easy fix, but it ends up causing even more problems because homosexuality isn't caused by a demon. The person who was "delivered" may experience a temporary emotional high, but the same temptations and thought patterns that plagued him before are going to return because the root issue wasn't dealt with. Only now, he's burdened by the false guilt of thinking he did something wrong or that he's not good enough for God to "fix" him.

A second and more effective treatment for homosexuality is reparative therapy. There is a lot of wisdom to be found here because many therapists believe that homosexuality has its roots in hurtful relationship patterns, especially with family members, and many homosexual men and women report exactly that. But reparative therapy is often just behavior

modification, and it deals only with the flesh, that part of us independent of God. Reparative therapy can make people feel better, but it can't bring true inner healing.

The third, and I believe best, way to bring about real and lasting change is a redemptive approach. Ministries that disciple men and women in intimate relationship with Jesus Christ are able to lead them into inner healing because God transforms His people. It's excruciatingly difficult to leave homosexuality without support. Fortunately, even for people who do not live in an area where there is a ministry tailored for those dealing with unwanted homosexuality, there are online support forums that can be almost as powerful as face-to-face groups. I especially recommend Living Hope Ministries' online support groups at www.livehope.org. There are also some wonderful books available, particularly *Coming Out of Homosexuality* by Bob Davies, and *Someone I Love is Gay* by Anita Worthen and Bob Davies. Another excellent book is *You Don't Have to Be Gay* by Jeff Konrad for men and *Restoring Sexual Identity* by Anne Paulk for women. My all-time favorite author on this topic is [Joe Dallas](#); anything he writes is exceptionally good. But discipleship is hard work, and there is no simple and easy fix.

The Path to True Change

The most effective route to real, lasting change for those caught in same-gender attraction is a redemptive approach. This means discipleship, being taught and encouraged and held accountable to develop intimacy with Christ. Interestingly, it doesn't seem to matter what the particular stronghold is in a person's life—whether it be homosexuality, gluttony, drug dependency, compulsive gambling or shopping, alcoholism, sexual addiction, or any other stronghold—the most effective solution is the same: intimacy with Christ.

True discipleship is hard work. And God even gives us the energy for discipleship! But it takes tremendous self-

discipline to choose to operate in the Spirit instead of in our own flesh, to depend on God's strength instead of our own. The real battle is in the mind.

The steps to overcoming homosexuality also apply to overcoming any stronghold.

First, the person has to stop the sinful behavior. It's best to ask for God's help. This is no different from the requirement for any drug or alcohol abuse treatment. You can't work on a problem when you're still totally controlled by it.

The second step is to work on learning what the Bible says about who you are in Christ. Just as people learning to identify counterfeit money examine real currency so they can spot the fakes, the struggler needs to fill their mind with God's Word so they can enter into their true identity as a beloved, valuable child of God.

The third step is working on the thought life, since this is where the battle is. It's important to identify Satan's lies playing as tapes in one's head, and stop the tape player! Then, deliberately replace the lies with the truth. Instead of "I'm never going to change," repeat the truthful promise that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). Instead of obsessing over the aching and longing for the unhealthy and sinful behavior or relationship, fill your mind with praise and worship and Scripture.

Next, face the fact that it feels lousy! When we stop trying to meet our needs in our own ways, we start experiencing the emotional pain that our strongholds had covered up. When it feels really really bad, we are at that very point where God can make the biggest difference. Ask, *What is my true need?* What is it my heart is truly longing for? Go to Jesus and let Him meet your deepest heart-needs. Let Him direct you to get your divinely-designed needs for relationship with other people met in godly ways.

This is where powerful healing happens.

Ex-Ex-gays

For the last several years, people who had left homosexuality have slowly but surely gained a hearing in telling their stories. Word is getting out: change is possible!

And there are also the voices of the frustrated and disillusioned souls who tried to leave homosexuality, who tried to change, and gave up. There's even a name for it: "Ex ex-gays." Their stories are full of tremendous pain, and some have even lost their faith over it. What happened?

Well, I think the same thing that happened to people who tried AA but couldn't stop drinking, or those who tried Weigh Down Workshop but couldn't lose weight. I have a friend who was in Weigh Down Workshop, and it didn't do a thing for her. The problem is, she never made the commitment to "die to self," to use an old spiritual term^[2]. She never got to the point of saying, "Jesus, I choose You over food. I choose a holy relationship with You over an unhealthy relationship with my appetite. And I will do whatever it takes to allow You to change my heart."

Many people who tried to change their homosexuality could win contests for praying and reading their Bibles. They really did try very very hard. But the prayers are often misdirected: "God, change me. Take away my desires. Let me start liking people of the opposite sex." Unfortunately, as well-intentioned as this prayer is, it's a lot like trying to get rid of dandelions in your back yard by mowing them. They keep coming back because you're not dealing with their roots. The basic cause of a homosexual orientation isn't genetics or choice; it's a wrong response to being hurt. It's about protecting oneself and trying to get legitimate needs met in ways God never intended. True change can only happen with the hard work of submitting to God, allowing Him to expose the

deep hurts and needs of one's heart, which means facing horrible pain, and inviting Him to bring healing to those wounded places. That's why intimacy with Christ is the answer. A wise friend observed that homosexuality is the fruit of sinful ways of dealing with pain—sinful because they cut us off from the One who can heal and meet our needs, sinful because they place us at the center of our universe and we don't belong there. Jesus does.

I hope you can see that real change is hard and it costs a great deal because it requires strong motivation, hard work, and perseverance. But hundreds of former homosexuals have found a large degree of change, attaining abstinence from homosexual behaviors, lessening of homosexual temptations, strengthening their sense of masculine or feminine identity, and correcting distorted styles of relating with members of the same and opposite gender. Some former homosexuals marry and some don't, but marriage is not the measuring stick; spiritual growth and obedience are.

The bottom line is, change is possible.

Notes

1. All names in this article are changed.
2. This term is not actually biblical, but the concept is. See Romans 6.

See Also:

- [Homosexual Myths](#) [Sue Bohlin]
- [Homosexuality: Questions and Answers](#) [Sue Bohlin]
 - [Homosexual Theology](#) [Kerby Anderson]
- [Same Sex Marriage: A Façade of Normalcy](#) [Sue Bohlin]
- [When Someone In Your Congregation Says "I'm Gay"](#) (Pastors' Brochure) [Sue Bohlin]
- [See also "Probe Answers Our E-Mail: Homosexuality"](#)

“Is Animal Homosexuality Proof that It’s Normal?”

A teenage girl in my church has just been confronted by discussions on homosexuality in her high school classroom. When she told the class that homosexuality was not “normal” behavior because it did not exist among animals, the teacher said that studies have “proven” that homosexuality is prevalent among animals, esp. elephants. While browsing on the web, I have found this to be a widely used “proof.” What would you answer? How can I help this girl?

First of all, I would encourage her to ask with humility and softness (i.e., no edge in her voice) where she can find the studies that “prove” the prevalence of homosexuality in animals. People toss off assertions all the time (such as, “science has proven homosexuality is genetic”) but when we ask where the articles are, they don’t have an answer. They’re just parroting what they’ve heard.

Same-sex behavior DOES exist in the animal kingdom, for a number of reasons. Usually, it’s either playful antics, or dominance behavior to assert hierarchy. For one male to mount, or attempt to mount, another male is a very powerful way to communicate his higher position in the “pecking order” of the community. But if you bring in a female in heat, suddenly the male-male behavior is abandoned in favor of the female. Sometimes males mount other males in a type of practice before the females come into heat.

Secondly, I have read of same-sex attachments in animals, but

the fact that they exist doesn't make it normal any more than the fact that cystic fibrosis or diabetes exists makes those diseases normal. From a Christian perspective, we live in a fallen world, and that fallenness extends to the entire creation on the planet. It would make sense that things would go wrong even among the animals. For instance, I understand that a hormonal imbalance can result in homosexual behavior in some animals. (Here are links to a couple of articles concerning that. Note the naturalistic bias underlying them: "What is, is normal and natural and therefore to be embraced."
<http://www.noglstp.org/bulletin/1997spring.html> and
<http://www.libchrist.com/other/homosexual/sheepandanimals.html>
)

Even from a godless evolutionary perspective, there is no benefit to homosexual behavior since those who engage in it do not reproduce, and from an evolutionary perspective, the only purpose in life is to make babies (the bottom line for the more scientific-sounding "survive and reproduce").

I recently discovered an excellent article on the "animal homosexuality myth" at the NARTH (National Association for the Research and Treatment of Homosexuality) website. This article points out that we can find occurrences of "homosexuality," cannibalism and infanticide in the animal kingdom, but the fact that these aberrant behaviors exist should not lead us to deduce that they are acceptable and normal HUMAN behaviors to engage in! www.narth.org/docs/animalmyth.html

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Published Oct. 2002, updated Aug. 2014

“Help Me Change From Gay to Straight”

Hello Sue,

I am from Australia and I read your add about how you can help me to change from being gay to being straight.

Can you help me please?

I'm not sure what you meant about “reading my add” since I don't have any advertisements of any kind, but I have written about homosexuality on Probe.org and www.livehope.org. My understanding about how true and lasting change can occur in people is all about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, who starts the process of setting things right when we put our trust and faith in Him and start the hard work of surrendering to Him. Daily. As a new way of life. Then change happens, all kind of change, because the fruit of the new life we receive from God is Christlikeness in us.

Some people who trust in Jesus discover that as they grow spiritually, receiving His great love and obeying the principles in His word the Bible, old wounds are healed, unmet needs are met through community with God's people, and they are led into new ways of seeing life, themselves, other people, and God Himself. They discover that they are changing, and they can finish growing up, which includes changing the way they think about people of the same sex and people of the opposite sex. They can develop attractions for the opposite sex. Or even just one person of the opposite sex.

There are no exercises for this kind of change. It is a result of a new orientation of submitting one's will to Jesus as boss

(or Lord) of one's life, following Him and trusting in Him. The change that comes is the same as learning to move beyond self-centeredness to compassion and a desire to love and serve others. Or learning to move beyond anger to forgiveness. Or learning to move beyond fear and anxiety to the peace of trusting that a loving God is in control. These changes are all reflections of emotional and spiritual maturity and God's work inside us to make us like His Son.

Some people who walk in intimacy with Jesus never develop attractions for the opposite sex. There are several reasons for this, but the important thing is that God's intention for our lives is far bigger and far more important than sexual attractions. Nonetheless, when God sets all things right, that includes rightly relating to both our own gender and the opposite sex—whether that process comes close to completion in this life or the next.

So, to answer your question, I would point you to Jesus. Not to religion—to Jesus Himself, which includes dynamic relationships with His people, those of us who truly know Him and are living in yieldedness and submission to Him. I would also invite you to investigate the free, confidential online support group for those dealing with unwanted homosexuality at Living Hope Ministries, www.livehope.org.

Thanks for writing.

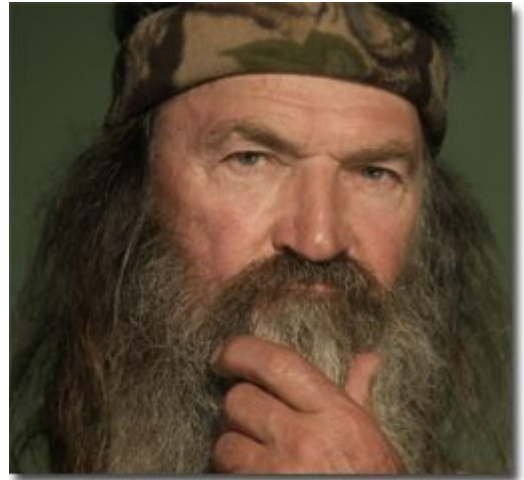
Sue Bohlin

Posted Feb. 2014

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Did (Duck Dynasty's) Phil Get it Wrong? Is Homosexuality Sin?

In one of the biggest social media flaps since social media was invented, Duck Dynasty's Phil Robertson openly said that homosexuality is sinful. Then the cyber world blew up in a clash of worldviews—the progressive, whatever-floats-your-boat perspective of A&E, the cable network that profits greatly from



the Robertsons' TV show, against the traditional biblical view of sin and sexuality. A lot of people think that Phil's old-fashioned morality is not only antiquated but unfair.

Is it? Is homosexuality a sin? If people are born gay, why would God condemn people for being the way He made them? What kind of God would do that?

Let me answer those questions in reverse order. First, how do we know that people are born gay? This idea is a newcomer on the scene of human history, arising only within the past hundred years—maybe only fifty. We “know” it because people keep saying so, and people say so because, looking into the rear view mirror of their lives, many of those who eventually identify as gay recall always feeling different, “other than.” According to the spirit of the age, that means they were always gay. Which means sexually and romantically attracted to people of the same sex.

But think about a newborn baby. Is he or she sexually and romantically attracted to people of the same sex? No, of

course not. That is an emotional development issue that will arise years down the road. Consider a toddler: how does one find the gay kids in a church or daycare nursery? You don't. But even in toddlers, some temperament and personality differences have surfaced, the kinds of differences that can lead to a child feeling "other than."

Little boys who are emotionally sensitive, artistic and creative, can be uncomfortable around the rough-and-tumble boys who are far more physically aggressive, sporty and relationally insensitive. It doesn't mean they're gay, it means their design, their God-chosen kind of masculinity, is different. They're probably going to feel "other than," and later on someone will label that as gay. It's not.

Little girls who have athletic gifts and abilities, who don't care for pink or dresses or nail polish and are often natural leaders, can be uncomfortable around the girly-girls who are interested in very different things. It doesn't mean they're lesbian, it means their design, their God-chosen kind of femininity, is different. They're probably going to feel "other than," and later on someone will label that as lesbian. It's not.

People are not born gay, which is a constellation of beliefs and feelings about oneself and others that is the result of many interactions with many people over many years. Just like people are not born prejudiced. Or entitled. Or English speaking, for that matter. But all those things can become so entwined with a sense of self that it feels like that's who one is.

Recently, my husband was talking with a new friend who struggles with same-sex attraction. His friend said it was hard growing up in a slender "case" (body type) and so sensitive, and that's why he was gay. My husband pointed out that he, too, had the same body type and was emotionally sensitive, that that was their design. Ray talked to him about

the [gender spectrum](#) for different kinds of masculinity as God's creation, and his friend absolutely lit up with gratitude. He had never heard that the way God had made him didn't mean he was gay, it meant he was gifted, and he had never heard an "everstraight" like my husband acknowledge that boys and men can live on that end of the spectrum and not identify as gay. There is another way of explaining the feeling of "other than" that honors both the person and the God who made them in a way that has often not been appreciated or affirmed.

But let's turn to the first question: is homosexuality a sin?

It's important to define your terms. What do you mean by homosexuality? Our culture has clouded the biblical perspective of the issue. Do you mean being same-sex attracted? Or do you mean "stepping over the line," actually engaging in same-sex romantic and sexual relationships? What Phil Robertson did, which is part of the firestorm, is to shine a light on what the Bible says: all sex outside of marriage is sin, both opposite-sex and same-sex relationships. Our sex-saturated culture finds that offensive and unacceptable. Sex is seen as a right and a basic need of life, when it is neither.

But the Bible never condemns same-sex attractions, which constitute temptation and not sin. People generally discover, not choose, that they are drawn to the same sex, and [there are very good reasons for this](#). As with all temptations, God says to stand against them and not give into them. It is foolishness to define oneself by our temptations and weaknesses! (Much better to define ourselves the way God sees us, as His beloved child who desperately needs Him.)

So define homosexuality. If you mean simply feeling "other than" and different, complicated by being drawn to members of the same sex, then homosexual attractions are temptation, not sin. If you mean acting on those attractions to engage in

emotionally dependent and/or sexual relationships, then according to the Bible's standards, yes that is sin. Note how God addressed Cain's struggle with feelings and temptations: "Sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must master it." (Genesis 4:7) So it really comes down to feelings vs. behavior. The feelings are not necessarily sinful (although sin begins in the mind, where attractions can cross over the line into the sin of lust, regardless of the object of those attractions), but behavior always is. We need to keep homosexuality in the context that God does: pre-marital sex, adultery, same-gender sex, incest, and sex with animals: anything outside the marriage bed (defined as one man and one woman, Gen. 2:24) is sin.

Many people have a faulty concept of a distant, scowling god sitting on his throne looking for people having a good time so he can be mad at them, looking for an excuse to hurl thunderbolts at them for daring to enjoy themselves. The God of the Bible is not Zeus. Jesus corrected many aspects of our misunderstandings of His Father. He is a loving God who put guardrails on the treacherous mountain road of human sexuality. He doesn't condemn people who run off the safety of the road by crashing through the guardrails He put in place; He knows that the natural consequences of running off the cliff are their own discipline. God says, "Don't have sex outside of marriage" because He loves us and knows that sex outside of marriage brings pain to the soul (as well as dishonoring everyone involved, including Him).

God doesn't make anyone gay, but He is full of compassion for those who find themselves with same-sex attractions. He warns us against all kinds of sexual sin because He knows how destructive it is when we violate His intention and design for our bodies and souls. He wants so much better for us.

This blog post originally appeared at

Exodus is Shutting Down, But Jesus Isn't

July 17, 2013

Recently, Exodus International announced that it was shutting down. For decades, Exodus was the oldest and largest Christian ministry dealing with faith and homosexuality. But in the past few years, it had become a lightning rod for controversy, and the name had accumulated a lot of baggage. They hoped that by shutting down the ministry, the church would step up and do its job of loving and leading people well. They realized that many churches and pastors are still under-educated about those who deal with same-sex attractions, and some are unsafe. But by having a separate ministry to send people to, they haven't needed to change, and it was easy for the unbiblical "us/them" dichotomy to flourish.

This made the news because on the one hand, there is a lot of contempt and hatred for Exodus by gay activists who insist there's nothing wrong with homosexuality, and many considered it a victory. On the other hand, Exodus was the go-to place for people seeking help with this issue, and as the umbrella organization for scores of local ministries, they were able to refer people to places where they could find support. As a longtime board member for [Living Hope Ministries](#), the Exodus referral ministry for Dallas/Ft. Worth, I know how valuable the Exodus referrals have been.

How did this happen?

Over the past several years, Exodus got off track when some people promoted “gay to straight” change efforts, including the controversial reparative therapy technique. Both of these are nothing but “flesh management,” using natural, human-only tools and methods. They lost their focus on the founding values, which until recently was still found on their “About Us” page:

*While we have never met anyone who “chose” to feel same-sex attracted, people do have to eventually make a decision to either act on those feelings or not to act on them. **Since 1976, Exodus has served as an organization helping men and women surrender their sexual struggles to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.** We do not believe that same-sex attractions are sinful in and of themselves but rather one type of struggle and temptation among the millions that impact each and every human being.*

We do believe that any sexual expression outside of a monogamous marriage between one man and one woman falls outside of God’s creative intent for human sexual expression and is sinful. Homosexuality is no greater or less a sin than any other and is not the determining factor for a relationship with Jesus Christ. (emphasis mine)

What I see here is a statement pointing to God’s standards, God’s intent for human sexuality. It conforms to the limits of what the Bible actually says, which is a prohibition against acting on one’s sinful desires regardless of what those desires are. It acknowledges that all of us are messed-up sinners who can’t stop being sinners and can’t stop our temptations, but we do have control over what we choose to do with our feelings and temptations.

Ricky Chelette, the Executive Director of Living Hope, says, “I have been to every Exodus Conference for the past 15 years and every Leader’s Conference except this past year, and have

always felt that we were centering on Christ, upholding God's truth, and encouraging people not so much to be "straight" but to be rightly and intimately related to Christ, which then transforms our lives, actions, hearts and thinking. Living Hope will continue to do what we have always done: 'Proclaim God's Truth to those who are seeking sexual and relational wholeness through a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.' Nothing has changed for us."

Since Living Hope is one of the largest, if not THE largest ministry of its kind in the world, I am encouraged that Kingdom values are still unshaken despite what's going on at Exodus headquarters.

I've had a lot of emails and messages asking "What does all this mean?" Well, I can tell you what it *doesn't* mean:

- It doesn't mean that Jesus is not enough for sexual struggles.
- It doesn't mean that He has left His throne and is no longer in control.
- It doesn't mean that there isn't any help for those dealing with this issue, either for themselves or a loved one.
- It doesn't mean that it's pointless to fight against unwanted same-sex attraction (or any other temptation). By developing intimacy with Christ so that we are continually transformed into His image from one glory into another (2 Cor. 3:18), He changes and decreases the power of those temptations.
- It doesn't mean change isn't possible. Exodus coined the phrase "change is possible" and then backed off the hope of change. But people's personal filters about what kind of change led to unrealistic expectations about what they could expect.

Of course change is possible—it's an intrinsic part of being alive! Whether one is a believer or not, we change over time. The Christ-follower should expect change because we are transformed into what we worship. As we focus on Jesus, we become more like Him. That means greater holiness, more self-control, rightly relating to our own gender and to the opposite sex. As John the Baptist indicated, He increases and we decrease. That is change. Our attractions are also our temptations, and as my pastor says, "Jesus never promises to take away our temptations. He hasn't taken away mine either."

I recently said to my friend, a former lesbian activist, "You know, it's entirely possible your attractions to women won't change and you will walk with an emotional limp the rest of your life. . . just as I will continue to walk with a physical limp the rest of *my* earthly life. But both of us can glorify God in our limping by honoring Him with our choices, as we look to Him to restore us to a perfect future that includes running and jumping and leaping and loving perfectly, on the other side."

I know that may sound weird, "glorifying God in our limping," but I think He receives more glory through limping people who are dependent on Him, than healthy people who breeze through life independent of Him.

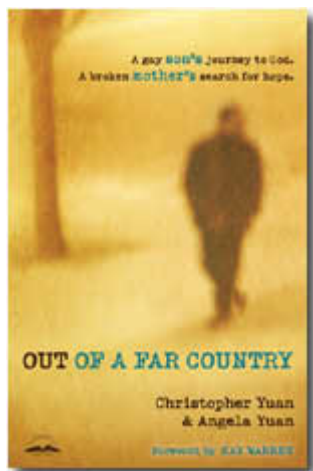
Even though Exodus International is shutting down, Jesus Christ is still very much loving and changing those who turn to Him in trust and obedience. And I am grateful to be a part of it.

This blog post originally appeared at
[blogs.bible.org/tapestry/exodus-is-shutting-down-but-jesus-
isnt](https://blogs.bible.org/tapestry/exodus-is-shutting-down-but-jesus-isnt)

The Power of a Mother's Prayers

Oct. 23, 2012

Jesus' most famous parable in Luke 15 tells the story of a rebellious young man usually dubbed "the Prodigal Son" who demanded his share of his father's inheritance while his dad was still alive, shameful enough, but then went off into "the far country" to squander it on riotous living. A modern-day prodigal and his mother have written their story, telling parallel stories from each one's perspective. The son's "far country" included drug dealing, living it up as a party animal, and gay promiscuity leading to a diagnosis of AIDS. But God brought both mother and son out of the far country to Himself.



Because I am privileged to walk with a number of people out of their own personal "far countries" of homosexuality, *Out of a Far Country* was a compelling read for me. But because I am also a mother, Angela Yuan's testimony of trusting Christ and then entrusting her beloved son into His hands again and again as a faithful prayer warrior, was deeply encouraging as well.

I was reminded of several lessons on prayer through this book.

First, *it's better to pray big than to try to micro-manage the outcome*. Angela continued to relinquish her own desires for her son to the Lord's better plan, which was for Christopher to walk in his true identity as a beloved child of a loving

heavenly Father. When her son was angry and rebellious, she kept her eyes focused on the Lord instead of Christopher. She writes, "I started fasting and praying, asking God for wisdom and discernment. I had no idea what it would look like, but I had a clear sense that Leon and I needed to step aside and get out of the way so that God could work in Christopher's life."

When Christopher was three months away from graduating from dental school, he learned he was expelled because of his foolish, illegal and sinful choices. His parents went to meet with the dean. Both the dean and the son expected the senior Yuans to put pressure on the school, but instead, Angela said, "Actually, it's not important that Christopher becomes a dentist. What's important is that Christopher becomes a Christ follower. Leon and I have flown down to Louisville to tell you"—I looked over at Leon—"that we will support whatever decision you make. I only pray that my son will turn to God."

And he did. It didn't happen until he was incarcerated for his drug dealing, but God answered the far more important prayer.

Second, *let go of your time line*. We are such impatient people! We start praying and we want God to answer in the next day. Or week. Or month. But while He is at work behind the scenes, unscrambling the mess we tend to make of our lives, we don't think He is listening or answering. Angela prayed for years for God to bring Christopher out of the far country, and when He did, it was glorious. Christopher went from prison, where he met the Lord Jesus, to Moody Bible Institute, and then graduate school at Wheaton College, and now has a worldwide ministry telling his/their story and bringing great glory to God in the process.



Third, *prayer is essential for the spiritual battles against the forces of darkness*. Christopher's choices to engage in ongoing sexual sin, drug use and wild living went hand-in-hand with a spirit of rebellion and a strong delusion. Both of these involve demons, because his sinful choices opened up doorways to demonic influence. The Yuans' book provides plenty of examples of the spiritual blindness that resulted. But Angela's faithful time in the Word of God and intercessory prayer tore down the strongholds that held her son captive to his fleshly desires and his spiritual bondage. She turned a shower stall into her prayer closet, where she spent literally hours every day immersing herself in the Bible and prayer.



Fourth, *remain thankful*. When Christopher called his parents to tell them that he had been arrested and was in jail, Angela recognized this as the answer to her frequent prayer: *Lord, do whatever it takes to bring this prodigal son out of that far country to you*. For the first time in years, she knew that where her son was, and that he was safe. She grabbed a length of adding machine tape and wrote down that blessing. And then, as God unfolded His glorious plan for drawing Christopher to Himself and then redeeming the pain of his rebellion, she kept adding to the blessing list over the years. When I heard her tell her story at an [Exodus International](#) conference several years ago, she held up her rolled-up blessings list and let it drop: it's about six feet long! Christopher tells me it's almost full on the second side as well. Choosing to focus on the ways in which God continues to bless us in the midst of suffering, developing an attitude of gratitude, keeps us from losing heart in a hard situation.

Fifth, *persistent prayer changes the one praying*. Desperation for her son drove Angela Yuan to an incredible intimacy with her Savior. Her daily time in His word and her gift of

intercessory prayer drew her heart ever closer to Him. *Out of the Far Country* isn't just a story of a mother's and son's spiritual journey, it is an inspiration to "always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1).



This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/the_power_of_a_mothers_prayers

“How Do You Answer a Person Who Says You Can't Take the Bible Literally Because It Promotes Killing Homosexuals?”

How would you answer a person who says, “You can't take the Bible literally because it promotes killing homosexuals” (Lev 20:13)?

There are a number of things that one might say to this, but I will mention just a few. In addition, I will not only speak to the issue of interpretation, but will also address some of the issues which give rise to a statement like this. Of course, we must also remember that there is oftentimes a lot of anger behind a statement like this. Hence, it is important to remember that while we always want to speak the truth, we want to be careful to do it in love. This is the most important thing to bear in mind in responding to someone making such a claim. We want to be kind, gentle, and patient in our response. But concerning the response itself, here are a few things that occur to me as I think about this issue.

First, this particular law was only given to ancient Israel under the terms of the Old Covenant. But God is not relating to anyone under the terms of this covenant today. Rather, God is now relating to all men under the terms of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8). Hence, this is not a law which should be implemented today. In addition, I think it is also important to point out that this passage does not PROMOTE killing homosexuals. This is simply false—and it is important to say so. This particular law requires that those who engage in homosexual activity be put to death. Even under the Old Covenant, a person with homosexual inclinations or attractions, who refused to act on them, would NOT be put to death. What is at issue here is homosexual *activity*—not homosexual attraction. Hence, even interpreted literally, this law does NOT promote killing homosexuals. Rather, it stipulates that those who engage in homosexual *activity* are to be put to death. But again, it is important to remember that God is no longer relating to mankind under the terms of this covenant.

Second, the law reveals the awful truth about human sinfulness and the holiness of God. God takes sin very seriously and his holiness and moral perfection require that He deal with it as it deserves. Under the terms of the Old Covenant, homosexual

behavior was not unique in meriting the sentence of death. Adultery (Lev. 20:10), blasphemy (Lev. 24:16), murder (Exod. 21:12), striking one's father or mother (Exod. 21:15), kidnapping (Exod. 21:16), cursing one's father or mother (Exod. 21:17), and other acts as well, all merited the death sentence under the Old Covenant. Even Sabbath violations received the death sentence (Exod. 31:14). Hence, homosexual activity was not unique in meriting the death sentence under the terms of the Old Covenant.

Third, God disapproves of ALL sexual sin—not just homosexual activity. God disapproves of adultery, fornication, rape, incest, bestiality, as well as homosexual sin. Again, homosexual sin is not unique in being prohibited by God. All sexual sin is prohibited. The Bible allows for sexual activity only within the confines of one man/one woman heterosexual marriage. Any kind of sexual activity outside of this is sin—whether that sexual activity be homosexual, heterosexual, sex with animals, etc.

Fourth, the moral law is based upon the morally pure and morally perfect character of God. If the Bible really is the word of God, then homosexual behavior (along with all other sexual sin) is sin. All such activity, then, would constitute a violation of God's moral law.

Finally, I think we can agree that we should not ALWAYS interpret the Bible "literally." The Bible, after all, does contain a wealth of figurative and metaphorical language, and it would be inappropriate to interpret such metaphorical expressions literally. The problem in this case, however, is that the verse in question is not making use of such figurative or metaphorical language. Indeed, the writer is quite explicit in spelling things out for us. It would strike me as dishonest to suggest that this passage should be interpreted non-literally or metaphorically. What would it be a metaphor of? What would be the literal truth behind (or underneath) the metaphor? In addition, why should anyone think

that God does not disapprove of sexual sin? What sort of argument or evidence is there for believing that God's attitude toward sexual activity is essentially the same as that of a modern secular American? Why should we think that sin (all sin) is not a deadly serious issue to an utterly holy God? It seems to me that the statement you mentioned simply makes some unwarranted assumptions about God's attitude toward human sin.

Of course, the good news is that God has provided atonement for sin through the substitutionary death of His Son, and His resurrection for our justification. Anyone who is willing to turn from their sin, and trust Christ for salvation, can and will be forgiven and saved. No one needs to die for their sins (since Christ has already done so). But everyone who rejects Him and His sacrifice will have to pay for their sin themselves. Hence, we want to communicate, I think, that God takes sin very seriously. But He has also provided for our forgiveness through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross.

Hopefully some of this will be helpful to you as you continue to wrestle with an appropriate response to claims of this sort.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

Posted May 28, 2012

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When to Break a Promise

Oct. 11, 2011

An important part of integrity is keeping one's word. But are there times when breaking a promise is the *right* thing to do? I think so. And I think God is honored when we do.

We need to make a distinction between giving our word on a legitimate matter—such as wedding vows, signing a legal contract, or even promising to bake six dozen cookies for the PTA bake sale—and making promises that are foolish or sinful in the first place.

I know a number of women struggling to disengage from emotionally dependent relationships with other women. Emotional dependency is putting all your emotional and relational eggs in another's basket, so to speak—needing another's attention, affection and approval as desperately as a baby needs her mama. Making huge promises is part of the manipulative glue that holds these relationships together: "I will always be here for you." "I will always take your calls and return your texts." "I've never loved another like I love you and I always will." "I will never hurt you."

When women come to the point of recognizing these relationships are not God's intention for either of them, they often struggle with their promises as if they were inviolate and carved in stone. Yet the bigger issue—which they need help to see because brokenness keeps us bound up in blindness—is that keeping some promises means sinning against God. In that case, obedience to God is the better choice, even if it means breaking a promise that never should have been made in the first place.

In that case, the right thing to do is repent of making the promise, confess it as sin, and turn in obedient trust to God, depending on Him for help in the painful process.

Recently, a friend who is getting help extricating herself from a sinful relationship told one of her helpers, “But when my friend comes over to help me get out of bed in the morning because I’m depressed, I would be an awful person if she drove all the way over here and I didn’t answer the door and let her in.” The helper wisely responded, “You’re concerned about being an awful person for not answering the door, but you’re in a relationship with a married woman! What about the adultery? Which one is the sin?”

Sometimes, we make promises we shouldn’t make because we didn’t check first with God. Many years ago, our church choir director arranged a day-long seminar with a very wise man. One thing he said stopped me in my tracks: “Why are you here? The need is not the call; the *call* is the call. If God did not call you to this ministry, then you’re not available for what He wants you to be doing.” I realized I had never asked the Lord if He wanted me to sing in the choir, and when I asked, He said no. Embarrassed, I tendered my resignation so that I’d be available for the “something else” that He actually wanted me to do—which, it turns out, was teaching women’s Bible study. Both the women in the study and the other singers in the choir can testify that I am a far better teacher than singer!

Are there promises you should break so you can say “yes” to God instead?

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/when_to_break_a_promise