

Overlake Park Presbyterian Church

Homosexuality and the Church

October 18, 2015 Luncheon Discussion Materials

Goals for Luncheon:

- To listen to & understand one another
- To provide input for your leadership and brothers and sisters in Christ
- To remain focused on the ministry Jesus Christ calls us to

Historical Overview:

- Throughout the last 19 centuries the Christian Church has viewed homosexual behavior as contrary to God's intent, design and will for human sexual relationships.
- Beginning in the late 1960's a new understanding of homosexuality as a natural genetic disposition and a new attitude by people of that orientation began to challenge the church's stance.
- In 1977, our Denomination passed an Authoritative Interpretation of the Constitution declaring that "avowed practicing homosexuals could not be ordained into the offices of the church."
- In 1997, an amendment to the Book of Order was passed stating that "fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman and chastity in singleness" was a requirement for ordination to the offices of the church. This decision was challenged and overturned in 2010, allowing Presbyteries and individual Sessions to interpret these standards for themselves "to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life."
- Same sex marriage is now legal in all 50 states.
- The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) met June 14-21, 2014 in Detroit and made decisions regarding homosexuality and marriage.
 - First, GA approved an Authoritative Interpretation (a way of interpreting the constitution to mean something more specific than the existing language) to allow Pastors and Sessions the **independent decision** to perform and/or host same sex marriages in states that allow it. This action also guarantees that no pastor/session will be required to perform/approve same sex marriages if it goes against their individual or collective consciences or their understanding of Scripture. Each pastor and church gets to discern God's will for their congregations and context.
 - Second, GA asked for a vote of Presbyteries (which took a year) on whether to change the definition of marriage to read in part, "Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman." Because this would be a change in the Constitution, it requires a 51% approval by the Presbyteries. The final vote tally for Amendment 14-F is 121 in favor and 48 against, with two presbyteries taking no action on the issue. The Amendment was approved on March 17, when a majority of PC(USA) presbyteries voted in favor of the change and the Amendment went into effect on June 21, 2015.

This, coupled with the Constitutional change coming out of the last General Assembly in 2012 giving the churches the ability to call and ordain active homosexuals means that OPCC will need to make decisions on:

- 1) Our position on allowing/disallowing same sex marriages at OPPC
- 2) Our position on calling active homosexuals into ordained leadership (Elders, Deacons, Pastors) at OPPC in the future.
- 3) Our comfort in knowing our pastors (now and in the future) will perform same-sex marriages (if their conscience dictates)

Homosexuality and the Church Suggested “Reading List”

Below are resources regarding homosexuality and the church that I recommend for education, reflection, and prayer. These represent a broad spectrum of beliefs and theological perspectives from trusted voices.

The Scriptures

About Homosexuality in particular

- Genesis 19:1-29 (*Ezekiel 16:49-50 & Judges 19 often referenced with the Genesis passage*)
- Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13
- I Corinthians 6:9-11
- I Timothy 1:10
- Romans 1:18-32

Other related texts for discussion

- Genesis 2:18-25
- Leviticus 19:34
- Matthew 7:1-5
- Acts 10:9-29
- Romans 13:8-10
- Philippians 2:1-11
- 1 Peter 1:13-16

Suggested Talks/Sermons on the Subject

Dr. Dick Leon: “A Union of Odd People” sermon at SPC August 24, 2014

<http://www.spconline.org/media/audio/Sermons/2014/08/140824.mp3>

Dr. Dick Leon’s interpretation of Philippians 4:1-9 as part of the summer sermon series on Philippians, “The Good Life”.

Matthew Vines: “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezQjNJUSraY/>

A gay Christian, Vines gives a biblical view of homosexuality using the Bible as his basis for discussion. A helpful primer.

Suggested Books

Jack Rogers: “The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality”

Mark Achtemeier: “The Bible’s Yes to Same-Sex Marriage”

David P. Gushee: “Changing Our Mind”

Two Viewpoints:

The Traditional Viewpoint is that, according to the Bible, homosexual activity is not God's original intention or design. The Bible sees the practice of homosexuality as universally negative and sinful in all its physical expressions, consistently lifting up heterosexual marriage as normative and God's plan for sexual relationships.

Interestingly enough, while most Emerging scholars may argue whether the Scriptures discussed are applicable or not, they too would agree that the Scriptures are universally negative.

“So those are our six passages, the six verses in the Bible that refer in some way to same-sex behavior. And indeed, they're all negative.” –Matthew Vines, p.17.

That being said, the Traditional viewpoint would say that homosexual sin is no better/worse than any other sin. It is on par with greed, divorce, premarital sex, racism, infidelity, jealousy, and a myriad of other things we are all guilty of. The Traditional viewpoint would admit that Jesus himself doesn't speak about homosexuality. Yet while some would read into that as meaning Jesus didn't care, the Traditional viewpoint would argue that more than likely it was so universally thought of as negative that he didn't even think of speaking on the topic. The discussion itself just wasn't a part of the landscape.

The Traditional viewpoint points out that homosexual practice goes against complementary biology and thus against God's created order. It also has no chance of being procreative and thus living out God's command in the Garden to “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). The fact that homosexual practice is not procreative is not, de facto, an argument against its acceptance but, rather, suggests that there is something basic to sexuality that is best expressed by heterosexuality that is explicit in its procreative aspect. Regarding sex, the Traditional viewpoint argues that in scripture, men and women were created for one another, “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Thus the complementarity of male and female is given a theological grounding in God's creative activity.

The Traditional viewpoint would argue that although being homosexual does not keep one from being a Christian, the only faithful expression of sexuality for the homosexual person is celibacy (as expected of a heterosexual person). Any physical homosexual expression outside those boundaries is considered sin.

The Traditional viewpoint would argue that sexuality is not the basis for defining a person's identity or for finding meaning and fulfillment in life. Our identity is found instead as children of God.

An Emerging Viewpoint

But proponents of homosexual covenanted partnerships would ask the question: Does the Bible really talk about this at all? Why would they say that?

Because while it is true that the Biblical norm was heterosexual relationships, an Emerging viewpoint would argue that what we are talking about today is a completely new concept—a committed, monogamous, same-gendered relationship between two people who are naturally (some would say, created to be) attracted to one another. An Emerging viewpoint would say this is a brand new idea, and because of that we need to look at the Bible with fresh eyes.

An Emerging viewpoint would agree that while the Bible is universally negative regarding homosexuality, it only talks about homosexuality as going against one's natural state. It was always anti-“who you were made to be.” It was always an act of rebellion instead of considering whether or not it was actually one's natural state of being.

An Emerging viewpoint would say that the Bible doesn't discuss the whole picture because the ancient view of homosexuality was really limited to two people having sex (against their nature) and nothing more. It did not take into account the idea of a same-gendered orientation or the other levels of what a covenant relationship looks like; intimacy, care, love and oneness that can happen in a homosexual relationship (as in a heterosexual one).

Because of that, those with an Emerging viewpoint may ask, “What if by holding closely to this law (condemning homosexual relationships) it actually makes one break other laws of God and withhold his good gifts?” What if for some, to live into God's desire that “man would not be alone” it could only be lived out same-gendered? Wouldn't going against that and marrying the opposite sex (for example) be a fraud? Does one have to choose between a life of being alone with no hope of any alternative and a life in a relationship that is less than its full intention as well?

“This is a major problem. By holding to the traditional interpretation, we are now contradicting the Bible's own teachings: the Bible teaches that it is not good for the man to be forced to be alone, and yet now, we are teaching that it is.” –Matthew Vines.

In other words, an Emerging viewpoint would say, “We know that the Bible is universally against homosexual practice, and we would be universally against that kind of homosexual practice too (one that is simply lust-driven, one that is promiscuous, one that forces itself on another). But a same-gendered, monogamous, covenanted relationship between two people that lives out the meaning and intention of marriage is not really discussed in the Bible at all, except on the meta-narrative level of not being alone, of bearing good fruit, and of living a holy life in service to Jesus Christ. That is the kind of Godly, Biblical relationships we are for.”

An Emerging viewpoint would say that some homosexual Christians may be called to be celibate, as celibacy is a gift from God. But if they have not been given that gift, an Emerging viewpoint would be that homosexual Christians should be free to enter into monogamous, covenant relationships that let them live out their life in a God-honoring relationship.

Do we agree on this issue?

Faithful people who love Jesus Christ, seek to follow Jesus Christ and are committed to God's Word differ on this issue. And, we know that those who sit in the pews each Sunday disagree on a variety of issues. This, in fact, is what the Kingdom of God is about – **wholeheartedly seeking to follow Christ together without demanding agreement on our interpretation of scripture.** As I reflect upon the history of Christianity, I am thankful for the many who have gone before us setting the example for healthy and vibrant theological debate while remaining committed to the mission of Jesus Christ together.

That we have PEACE and LOVE in our DNA means we will walk through discussion of this issue with the health and integrity. Together, we will create a plan for conversation, prayer, listening, and decision-making. And, together we will not allow this issue to distract from our central focus: To love Jesus Christ and seek his plans for OPPC's future ministry and mission.