

Marriage and Homosexuality

Introduction

Gresham Bible Church maintains the following stance regarding marriage: True marriage, as it is identified and pictured biblically, is a covenant union between one man and one woman. Any kind of relationship that deviates from this essential union is not marriage. There are many relational, ethical, and theological implications of this clear teaching in Scripture, but one particular implication is that relationships of two members of the same sex are not and cannot be true marriages. Moreover, our position is that homosexual practice, according to Scripture, is sinful and, like all other sin, it is a perversion of what God intends and is therefore subject to God's righteous judgment. At the same time we also believe that in Christ there is atonement for and victory over sin, including sins that pervert true, biblical marriage. We at GBC seek to love those with same-sex attraction, which is not inherently sinful, as well as those involved in homosexual sin, striving to treat them with compassion as we point them to the gospel for help with their struggles against sin.

Biblical Marriage

The Bible begins and ends with marriage. It was not good for the first man, Adam, to be alone, so God created the first woman, Eve (Gen 2:18–22). Adam and Eve were unified physically and the God-ordained institution of marriage was thus initiated (vv 23–24). By definition and from its inception, marriage is a union between one man and one woman. The end of the Bible again pictures marriage as a heterosexual union. The book of Revelation presents an eschatological image of the marriage supper of Jesus, the Lamb of God, and His bride (Rev 19:6–9; 21:2, 9). Several other passages in between contribute to the biblical view of marriage as heterosexual (e.g. Isa 54:5–6; Hos 2:16–20).

In addition to these images of marriage, three main areas of biblical evidence support the position that true marriage consists of one woman and one man, and therefore, that homosexual unions deviate from biblical marriage. First, because marriage, by definition, consists of a man and a woman, it is a complementary relationship that reflects the complementarity of God's own triune existence. God exists in a unified diversity of persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This mystery is reflected, albeit in a finite way, in marriage. God created men and women with distinct gender roles and traits (Gen 2:18, 20), and these distinctions were reaffirmed after the fall (Gen 3:16–19). When a man and woman come together in marriage, the two distinct genders are joined in a way that reflects the unity and diversity within the Trinity. Same-sex unions necessarily contradict the complementarity at the core of biblical marriage, and consequently fail to reflect the Trinity in this way.

The second area of biblical evidence in support of a heterosexual definition of marriage has to do with procreation. In Gen 1:28 God blesses Adam and Eve and tells them to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." The original intention of the first man and woman, made in the image of God (Gen 1:27), was that they come together in sexual union and produce offspring.

The potential to reproduce is present in every sexual union between a man and a woman (including infertile heterosexual couples), and this procreative element of heterosexual unions is essential to the biblical institution of marriage. In contrast, unions involving either two men or two women lack reproductive potential and are therefore incapable of fulfilling the blessing and mandate to be fruitful and multiply, which is at the core of what it means to be married biblically.

Thirdly, the biblical model of marriage is one that highlights monogamy, fidelity, and durability. In the Bible it is very clear that God is opposed to adultery and all other forms of sex that violate the faithful union of one man and one woman (Exod 20:14; Deut 22:22; 1 Cor 6:18; Heb 13:4; etc.). Marriage is also viewed as a covenant, intended to last a lifetime (Mal 2:14–16; Matt 5:32; 19:3–6, 9; etc.). While some same-sex couples may be in long-term, committed relationships, homosexual behavior is often bereft of these qualities. Lifestyles characterized by unfaithful, short-term relationships with multiple partners, whether heterosexual or homosexual, fundamentally oppose the covenant quality of biblical marriage.

In addition to these groups of scriptural evidence supporting the heterosexual definition of marriage, there are also several passages that address homosexuality directly.

- Genesis 18:17–19:29—The Sodom and Gomorrah story (cf. Judg 19:22–24; 2 Pet 2:6–10; Jude 7).
- Leviticus 18:22; 20:13—Sexual laws about holiness.
- Romans 1:26–28—Homosexuality as representative of universal sinfulness.
- 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; 1 Tim 1:8–11—Lists of sin contrary to the gospel and the kingdom of God.

These texts clearly identify homosexual practice as sin. In order to keep this paper brief, and because our main purpose is to identify our stance on marriage, the arguments related to these passages will not be addressed in detail here. Please refer to the resources listed below for more information and extensive interaction with the exegetical issues involved.

Sin and Homosexuality

Though GBC views homosexual behavior as sin, we do not view same-sex attraction as sin. In some ways same-sex attraction, or what is sometimes referred to as homosexual orientation, can be regarded as parallel to the single man or woman's attraction to the opposite sex. In both cases the attraction can and often does lead to sin when it results in sexual activity or lustful thinking. Nevertheless, the attraction itself is not sinful. That is not to say same-sex and opposite-sex attraction are the same in every way. One major difference is that sexual attraction to the opposite sex can be fulfilled within the context of marriage, and it is rightly and beautifully fulfilled in that context. To the contrary, since biblical marriage does not include homosexual unions, same-sex attraction can never be fulfilled in marriage.

The sin of homosexual practice, like all other sin, has been dealt with at the Cross of Christ. The Bible teaches that we have all sinned (Ps 14:1–3; Rom 3:23), disqualifying ourselves from

relationship with a holy God. We at GBC do not single out certain sins as more disqualifying than others. It is only by His grace, demonstrated climactically in Jesus' atoning death and victorious resurrection, that any of us are able to be justified before God and have reconciled relationship with Him. As with other kinds of sin, though Jesus' death atoned for homosexual sin, some may experience ongoing temptation. God, in Jesus, empathizes with the experience of being tempted (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15), and promises grace to triumph over temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Conclusion

We have addressed the topic of marriage as it relates to homosexuality because we feel compelled to given the cultural trends of our day and the degree to which the biblical view of marriage has come under attack in recent years. Even some leaders in churches are joining the chorus calling for normalizing same-sex "marriage," and reinterpreting Scripture to ease the consciences of those choosing this path. Our concern is not primarily political, and our motivation is not to incite arguments. Rather, we are simply affirming what the Bible says about marriage and homosexuality and subjecting our views to the authority of God's word. The Bible, followed by the church throughout history, teaches that marriage is a union of one man and one woman, and sexual activity outside of that union is contrary to God's will and design and thus sinful.

Having clearly identified our position on this issue, we at GBC seek to display Christlike compassion and care for individuals struggling with same-sex attraction, as for those struggling with other kinds of temptation. Likewise we desire for those engaged in homosexual behavior or lifestyle to come to repentance and experience the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God that the gospel affords. Although our position on these issues is likely to be considered intolerant and perhaps even hateful, the clarity of Scripture's teaching on marriage and homosexual sin does not mitigate the love of Jesus, and neither does it diminish our love for those involved in homosexual sin.

Additional Resources

- Allberry, Sam. *Is God Anti-Gay? And other questions about Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-Sex Attraction*. The Good Book Company, 2013.
- Gagnon, Robert. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2001.
- Hill, Wesley. *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Köstenberger, Andreas. *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2005. Pp 201–226 are especially relevant.
- Yarhouse, Mark. *Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends*. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2010.