



NG Study Guide: “A Christian Response to Same Sex Attraction” [Honoring God Series Pt. 5] [12.30.18]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Intro. The Bible reveals Jesus drinking wine, although He was never intoxicated. I’m not endorsing alcohol, nor am I seeking to minimize all the abuses related to alcohol consumption. Here’s where I’m going, you can likely imagine Jesus at the pizza parlor, on Sunday afternoon, watching the game with folks, and perhaps enjoying a beer, and talking about God at halftime. It may be a little more uncomfortable to imagine Jesus in a saloon doing the same thing. And it is likely more uncomfortable to imagine Jesus in a gay bar doing the same thing.

Although attitudes are shifting in the culture and in the church, there are still certain stigmas and shame associated with being same sex attracted; and Christians generally look at homosexuality as an issue, rather than as people. What we generally miss, in the illustration of Jesus in the bars, is what He sees – people, and all of their sin offends Him. Heterosexual and homosexual sin, greed, pride, coveting, idolatry, blasphemy, uncontrolled anger, lying, selfishness and apathy ... it is *all* an offense.

We want to create an environment where people who experience same sex attraction can talk without shame and without homophobic condemnation. We need to learn to engage and listen better.

We want to avoid using homosexual as a noun to refer to a person who is same sex attracted or LGBTQ (Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning). We want to avoid using a term like “gay-lifestyle” because these labels are meaningless just as there is no “straight lifestyle.” We need to recognize there are diverse subjects including same-sex attraction, same-sex orientation, and same-sex erotic behavior. So, in this teaching, I’ll likely generally use the terms “gay” or “same sex attracted.”

Our goal is always to determine what the Bible actually says and means about issues. We don’t want feelings to control our conclusions. And discovering sound doctrine, we must not neglect to be Christ-like or Christian in how we interact, respond, and engage gay (and straight) people. Our aim is to be like Jesus, full of grace and truth [Jn. 1:14] who displayed compassion without compromise [Jn. 8]. We are called to radically love people.

Thesis: the primary issue today is whether the Bible addresses and prohibits monogamous, consensual, gay marriage? Does the Bible affirm or not? Then, we can consider are people born gay? Can gay people change? Should they change? Is same-sex attraction sinful or just same-sex behavior? Is it unloving to require celibacy from same-sex oriented believers? And perhaps some other questions too.

I. Does the Bible address and prohibit monogamous, consensual, same sex marriage?

A. Arguments for the non-affirming position:

1. **The Bible talks a lot about marriage yet only affirms heterosexual marriages.** Eve’s femaleness seems to be necessary prerequisite for her marriage to Adam, which is a prototype for God-sanctioned marriage [Gen. 2:24-25].
2. **Jesus highlighted sexual difference in marriage, even when he didn’t need to [Mk. 10].** Similarly, Paul highlighted sexual difference as necessary if marriage is to reflect the character of God [Eph. 5, 1 Cor. 11].

3. Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 clearly state that men should not have sex with other men. The context of those verses and the repetition of similar statements in the New Testament suggest that these verses are still binding on believers.

4. Jewish writers unanimously condemned same sex relations throughout the Greek and Roman Era (ca. 500 B.C. – A.D. 400). Greeks and Romans engaged in various types of same-sex relations. Most displayed a power difference between dominant and dominated (e.g. master-slave, men and boys, male prostitutes), but there were also consensual relationships especially between woman. None of these same-sex relations were deemed acceptable.

5. The New Testament doesn't sanction same-sex relations. Since the NT grew out of Judaism, and shared sexual ethics, if Christians were to depart from Judaism's clear stance against same sex relations, we would expect it to be clearly stated in the NT.

6. Jesus likely stood with His Jewish contemporaries on their view of same-sex relations. While Jesus never mentioned same-sex relations, He displayed a strict sexual ethic in other matters. He likely didn't mention such views because no one in His Jewish audience contested them.

7. Romans 1 echoes the well-known ethic among Jewish and Greco-Roman writers, that same-sex relations were "against nature." Paul describes same-sex eroticism as contrary to God's design for male-female sexual relations. Since Paul used general language the prohibition can't be limited to a particular type of same-sex relationship.

8. The Greek terms used by Paul in 1 Cor. 6:9, and 1 Tim. 1:10 are not ambiguous in denouncing homosexual behavior. The term *malakos* ("effeminate") [1Cor. 6:9] is capable of different meaning. However, it commonly referred to men who significantly altered their gender, which often included playing the passive role in intercourse with other men. *Arsenokoites* ("men who sleep with males") [1Cor. 6:9, 1Tim. 1:10] is likely derived from Lev. 18:22,20:13, where same-sex relations are forbidden. Given the Hebrew parallel *mishkab zakur*, which is derived from these passages, it is most likely that the Greek term coined by Paul means "men who sleep with males." That meaning is confirmed by later Christian uses of the term.

B. Arguments for the affirming position:

1. The Bible passages about marriage were not contemplating homosexual relations. Although this is true, the passages about marriage seem to require male and female.

2. Romans 1 is focused on excessive lust. The general language used cannot be limited to certain behaviors considered excessive.

3. At the time of Christ, most homosexual erotic behavior was exploitive. Thus, only exploitive acts were being condemned (e.g. men with boys, masters and slaves, male prostitutes). Nevertheless, the language of Lev. 18:22, 20:13, and Rom. 1 is all-inclusive, and consensual non-exploitive homosexual relations were also condemned.

Conclusion: I believe the Bible does address and prohibit monogamous, consensual, gay marriage, and conclude the non-affirming evidence is the better Biblical interpretation.

C. Additional considerations:

1. Avoid the "Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve" argument. It is offensive, and unintelligent.

2. Avoid the "gay pride is why Sodom fried" argument. The judgment of Sodom had nothing to do with same-sex unions which is the focus of discussion. No one is claiming that gang rape at Sodom either heterosexual or homosexual is okay.

3. Homosexual sins are never mentioned in isolation. There is always a context of other sins: greed, slander, gossip ... Thus, recognize your own sin is just as offensive to God as homosexual sin.

4. A Christian response is always characterized by love. Jesus always demonstrates love to people considered sinners by the religious elite (e.g. Matthew, Zacchaeus, Centurions, the woman caught in adultery), before addressing their sin.

II. Some additional questions to consider:

1. Are people born gay? Can gay people change? Should they change?

The scientific evidence is unclear, and seems to indicate that nature and nurture are both at play. Nevertheless, the ethical issue remains about acting on desires. The concept of Reparative Therapy involved ministries where youth with same sex attraction were compelled by parents to go for treatment to become straight and were often traumatic, highly ineffective, and cruel. On the other hand, some professional counselors are reporting a successful clinical practice dealing with this focus. Essentially, someone must want to receive treatment, and the effectiveness is questionable.

2. Is same-sex attraction sinful or just same-sex behavior?

The Bible prohibits homosexual behavior, and not same-sex attraction. Behavior is always a choice.

3. Can you be a gay Christian?

Again, labels need to be considered. If someone has same-sex attraction, and has yielded to Christ, and sought to repent of same-sex behavior, then it appears they can be a follower of Jesus. And it is probably wise to let our primary identity be a Christian or follower of Christ, rather than a straight Christian, Dodger-fan Christian, or gay Christian.

4. Is it unloving to require celibacy from same-sex oriented believers?

Matthew Vines, an advocate for affirming, asserts that it is unfair and unloving to force celibacy upon gay Christians seeking a monogamous committed gay marriage. The argument is an appeal to a sense of fairness or feelings, rather than the Bible per se. Celibacy is not a curse, and marriage is not Utopia. Marriage is not the cure for loneliness nor the answer to contentment. Jesus is the answer to fulfillment. Agape love is not the same as sex. Singleness and celibacy should be honored by the Church, both gay and straight, and recognized as a freedom in Christ (1Cor. 7). We are not "called" to marriage or singleness, but called to salvation and holiness.

5. How do we address those in the church who claim to follow Christ, but affirm homosexual practice?

First, we love them. We want to affirm them as people. We want to be compassionate and get to know them and their story, and we don't want to compromise truth. It appears that the Bible condemns homosexual erotic behavior, and those who continue to practice without repentance are not likely saved. Similarly, those who struggle without conviction and repentance with greed, coveting, unbridled anger, pride, lying, heterosexual sin, and neglect of the poor and neighbors are similarly not likely saved.

As to the 1Cor. 5 issue of sending people out of the church, we should approach this issue carefully. Unless we are prepared to remove all the people engaged in unrepentant sin described above then we should be hesitant to limit to only homosexual sin. On the other hand, when people are flaunting their lifestyle of sin, and promoting that it is biblically acceptable, we need to in love confront whatever issue that might be. Allowing continued flaunting of sin to the distraction and detriment of the Body should not be condoned in the name of tolerance. On the other hand, there are many people who earnestly want to know the truth, and conform to the truth, but are not yet ready or able to make the very difficult life decisions (count the cost), and we want them to know God's love, word, and work of salvation and sanctification. Ideally, compassion without compromise.

6. Practical ways Christians address the issue of homosexuality both directly and lovingly?

Jesus engaged people and demonstrated love long before addressing their sin. In this case, it seems Christ-like to spend hours getting to know someone and their story before sharing with them your doctrinal beliefs about homosexual erotic behavior and why you don't affirm.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. What are some ways that Christians may view homosexual sin differently than heterosexual sin?

Q2. Why might Christians of different generations view same sex attraction issues differently?

Q3. How can Christians affirm same sex attracted individuals as people, and show compassion without compromise?

Q4. How would you like to apply this lesson to your life?

“Digging Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. Preston Sprinkle’s book “People to Be Loved” is an excellent, well-researched, and thoughtful read, and was a primary reference for this teaching.

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don’t force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn’t enough time to answer them all.
- 3. The “Digging Deeper” section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the “Digging Deeper” section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don’t hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.