

Reflections on Homosexuality

Discernment of Elders of Grace Church

Because of the shift in our culture's beliefs and attitudes toward homosexuality the elders entered a discernment process in the fall of 2013 to seek God's direction around two questions.

What does it look like for Grace Church to honor our understanding of a Biblical perspective toward homosexuality while being a loving and redemptive community for those who identify as homosexuals?

How do we fulfill to our vision to be a people and place of compassion for the sake of Christ toward those within the LGBTQ community?

While cultural attitudes and norms toward marriage and sexuality may shift, we are firmly committed to stand upon the Scriptures as they speak to marriage and sexuality.

Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in a sacred covenant commitment. It is God's unique design and gift to provide the framework for intimate companionship, the relationship for sexual enjoyment and expression according to Biblical standards, the means for procreation and the picture of the union between Christ and His church.

The Bible speaks often about sexuality and the importance of sexual integrity. While outside the scope of this paper, homosexuality would best be discussed within the broader Biblical instruction on sexuality. It is important that we be equally committed to all areas of sexual integrity.

The Bible is clear and consistent in its teaching that homosexual behavior is sin and not an appropriate lifestyle for the follower of Christ.

As Christians we are called to live according to the truths of the Scripture and also called to love people as Jesus would.

While not intended as a public document, after months of discussion and prayer the following statements will guide our posture toward homosexuality.

- The Gospel calls us to see and treat all people with dignity and respect – as people created in the image of God for whom Christ died (Genesis 1:27; John 3:16-17)
- The Gospel calls us to be people of grace and kindness. Since God's kindness leads us to repentance, we treat others with nothing less (Romans 2:4; II Peter 3:9)

Reflections on Homosexuality

Discernment of Elders of Grace Church

- The Gospel calls us to see and treat people for who they might become ‘in Christ’ not who they are ‘in sin’ (II Corinthians 5:16-17)

- We must guard against a posture of self-righteousness as a Christian community. Our history with premarital sex, adultery, divorce, and pornography reflect that we’re not in a place to judge others based upon our moral goodness. As Paul said so well, Jesus Christ came to save sinners *of whom I am the worst*. Our posture is to be one of grace and humility as we interact with people who think differently about homosexuality.

“Being right is actually a very hard burden to be able to carry gracefully and humbly ... one of the hardest things in the world is to be right and not hurt other people with it.”

John Ortberg, Soul Keeping

- Integrity requires us to speak God’s Word in love. We dishonor God and people when we ignore or disregard God’s standards for marriage and sexual conduct.

- As we desire with all people, we will love those who are homosexual and graciously serve them in their journey toward Christ. The hateful, fearful harassment of homosexual people will not be tolerated.

- We will be a community defined by love not fear (I John 4:18). The posture of the Christian community toward those who are homosexual is too often rooted in fear.

- We recognize a difference between same sex attraction (SSA) and homosexual behavior. SSA is not sinful by itself. Homosexual behavior is.

Reflections on Homosexuality

Discernment of Elders of Grace Church

- We accept that someone may be a Christian who identifies as gay or homosexual in that they live with SSA throughout their life. Same sex attraction is complex and should not be reduced to a simple choice of lifestyle. Our standing and security with Christ are not the products of our sexuality but God's grace.
- Holiness and wholeness for *some* Christian's with SSA may be best reflected in a life of celibacy as a reflection of their love for Christ. Holiness and wholeness should not be defined only in terms of becoming a heterosexual or entering into a heterosexual marriage.
- It is our desire that Christians with SSA find a safe community among us so they can live honestly in their pursuit of Christ without fear of stigma or rejection.
- We welcome practicing homosexual men and women into the life of our community. We hope they discover acceptance as people created in the image of God, a relationship with Christ, and the freedom Christ brings through redemption, community and spiritual growth.
- Christians acknowledging SSA but not living in a homosexual relationship will be welcomed into membership and all levels of service and leadership.
- In order to honor God's design for marriage we do not believe it appropriate that people living in homosexual relationships become members nor serve in places of leadership within Grace church.