**Tone in Addressing Homosexuality**

Part 3 of 5: Homosexuality in the Context of Christian Sexual Ethics
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**Darrell Bock:** I think the tone of this discussion is really important, and it's one of the things that really is something that I think we have to reflect on as a community, because I think that the tone with which we balance the offer of the gospel and hope that Jesus brings is able to reshape who we are and how we respond, in relationship to a person's sense of "this is who I am and there's just no hope." How to communicate that in a context in which oftentimes this topic generates a lot of heat and a lot of conflict and a lot of anger, high blood pressure? You can describe it in a variety of ways. How do we, as a church community, overcome that tendency? The tendency to react in a way in which because you're standing up for right, and you deeply believe in it, and you have this passion of wanting to communicate that – how do we help the church with its tone in this topic?

**Stan Jones:** Why don't you start, Michael?

**Michael Brown:** Surely. I think it's important to recognize that we will be misunderstood as Jesus was; that when we stand for righteousness, as Jesus said in the Beatitudes, in Matthew 5, beginning in verse 10, that we will be reviled and even persecuted. So we accept that. We understand that. If the world called him Beelzebub, what's it going to call us? So we're not expecting everyone to like us.

But I think it's so important, as we do with any other issue, that we start with a confession of our own sin. I spoke at a rally recently and the only word I said about homosexuality was this: that no-fault, heterosexual divorce in the church has done more to destroy marriage than all gay activists combined. We must point a finger at ourselves and recognize our own failures in a public way.

So even though there's some of the gay community that hates and reviles me and looks like at me as – articles have been written on me as that I'm an anti-gay monster. I understand there's going to be that perception. But I have, on a number of occasions in Charlotte and elsewhere publicly apologized to the gay and lesbian community for the hypocritical example of the heterosexual church, for all of our scandals, for the guilt that's on our hand in terms of promoting immorality, tolerating immorality, destroying the family unit. Confessed that first and then, secondly, confessed our sins.
against the homosexual community in painting them as the worst of all sinners and every one of them some promiscuous deviant who's out to capture little children and things like that, and the worst enemy in fighting things in political terms rather than in compassionate terms. So I've offered that apology publicly.

And then we've got to build relationships. When I had that long flight with the fellow going to Rome, at the end of the flight I said, "If you met someone like me that held to all the views I hold to, would you consider that person a homophobe?" He goes, "Oh, absolutely." I said, "Do you consider me a homophobe?" He goes, "No. I heard your heart. It's so wonderful to hear a conservative with a heart."

Sometimes, especially when we're in a public setting – before the secular media or some Christian radio show – we think we gotta talk about those homosexuals and those sodomites, and we gotta show how radical and righteous we are. And, of course, it does no good. It doesn't further our message by taking on some type of tone.

So at the risk of someone thinking that I'm soft on this issue, I'm going to speak with compassion, and I'm constantly going to try to speak in such a way that if a gay person was listening, they'd say, "He understands me. He understands my battle. He sees the world through my eyes even though he differs with me." And it's going to require patience and, ultimately, we must get in their shoes.

I have read books written about struggles that gay men and women have had, or how they left the church or turned away from God because of preaching about homosexuality, and put the book down and got on my knees and wept in the presence of God and said, "I hurt for these people so much. I hate to be perceived as an enemy. Help me to do what's right, but to do it in a way that glorifies you and helps them." And there's that tension we always have to carry as we stand for what's right and demonstrate mercy and compassion at the same time.

Stan Jones: I would just add that Michael has, I think, depicted it extraordinarily well. And the church is in a very difficult position because, as different from sort of other situations, in this situation you have the added element of activism that wants to push the church into a certain mold. There was actually a book written almost 30 years ago, After the Ball by Kirk and Madsen, that outlined a strategy for changing the attitudes of America. It was written by two gay activists. And one of the things they really
emphasized was that the gay community should always portray itself as victims and portray conservatives as the victimizers.

And there's a sense in which there's a drive to push us into that mold. And, sadly, as Michael has intimated, all too frequently we don't just fall in, we jump in. We engage in this outrageous rhetoric and really it is – it can at times be rhetoric that is truly hateful. And I think there needs to be training and thoughtfulness in our engagement with our issues in such a way that we discipline ourselves that we're going to follow Christ, not follow the mold that others want to push us into, so we're going to have the self-control, we're going to have the discipline to stick to what Christ would have us say, to stick to the kind of perspectives that he would bring to the situation.

And he would bring love and unrelenting pursuit. Our God is a God of patience. Our God is a God of faithfulness. But our God is also a God of purity, and so we are people who have been given the gift of being given a message. We've been given a message in the person of Jesus Christ. We've been given a message in his Word. And his Word guides us towards holiness, and so we don't have any option other than to love and to tell the truth. And so, in doing so, we need to resist the activism that would push us off center.

You know, I work at Wheaton College and we've been the target a number of times of gay activist groups. And they oftentimes are very explicitly following a pattern of intentional provocation. And understanding that and not letting yourself be provoked, but rather responding with grace and love and truth, is a discipline and it really does pay off.

Darrell Bock: Well, I think this is a significant conversation and we're slowly running out of time, which is unfortunate. But I appreciate your willingness to engage on this. Let me ask one final question, kind of open ended, and that is if there's one thing you would say to people who wrestle with this area – and I'm going to put different kinds of people in front of you – people in the church, what do you say to people in the church about this issue? And then what would you say to a homosexual person who is thinking about and is open to what goes on in the church? What do you say to each of those audiences about this kind of topic and engaging on it?

Stan Jones: For me, Darrell, to the person in the church I would say approach the homosexual person through the grid of a full confrontation with your own brokenness. Realize that you are a person on a journey,
you're a person who has been called to die to self and to turn to Christ for redemption, and see in them the mirror of your own experience. Always approach them realizing that we are fellow human beings. They are not the "other." They are not the "activist." They are another human being.

And to the person who is open, who's in the gay community, I think the major thing is to not start with the moral commands. That's almost a way guaranteed to push them away. But rather try your best to introduce them to Christ, the living God, the Son of the living God. And bring them into a loving relationship with him. The moral issues will come. Christ would call them to holiness, but the call to holiness only really grabs a hold of us when we see the need, the deep need in our lives. And so it is the living encounter with Christ that is going to be transforming.

Darrell Bock: So in talking about having them come to Christ, you're talking about emphasizing those things that Christ offers people that surround the entirety of life and not just this particular area.

Stan Jones: That's right. That's right. And so you don't avoid sexuality, but sexuality's not the only area.

Darrell Bock: Okay. Michael, what would you say?

Michael Brown: Yeah, so to answer in reverse order and to give us kind of a chiastic structure to the answer there – of course the issue of homosexuality may come up as I'm dealing with someone in the world, but I'm not going to start there. It seemed that many that I've met that say that they're even gay and Christian, it's more of a social Christianity. There's not really authority of Scripture involved, so it's nominal.

Whoever the person is, I would make the entire focus coming into right relationship with God, the general guilt that's in their life, that we've sinned against God. I would really pray for the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and I would point everything, exactly as Stan said, to Jesus and following him. Obviously, the question of sexuality comes up, and while I would tell them there's the hope of change, I have to tell them, "You give everything to the Lord. We'll sort that out after, but right now you're going to have to give everything to Jesus and say, "You're going to be the Lord of my life.'"

Forgiveness is free. Salvation is a free gift. But it's one that requires embracing Jesus as Lord. But we make the mistake of
starting on the sexual issue, and sometimes it's hard to avoid. But we need to do our best to push away from that. When I talked to these two gentlemen last night, I said, "My goal in our interaction, my ultimate goal, is to introduce you to Jesus in such a way that everything in your life will change."

To someone within the church, not only would I put the emphasis on holiness and offer them hope for the future in God, I would try to give them a larger context, because every kind of sexual expression goes these days, and now reality TV has shows on polyamory, multiple-love relationships, and now there are lawsuits and polygamous reality TV stars that say, "Why can't this be legal in our state?" Everything kind of goes. The boundaries have been removed.

I would help that person to see, look, a lot of what's happening now goes back to the sexual revolution of the '60s; this is part of a larger degeneration in our society. And I would show them, when you open the door here, look at what's happening. I would want them to understand that this sexual promiscuity – of which celebration of homosexuality is part of that even among committed homosexual couples – the fact is it's part of a larger social moral issue.

I want them to see that the same struggles they're having are ultimately going to impact little kids in school, like at the nursery school here in Charlotte where teachers are not allowed to call the kids "boys" and "girls" because that would be making a gender distinction. And I would try to point them back to there's something special about what God intended for male and female, and you are not what your desires are; you are who you are in Jesus.

And if you could take your mind off sexuality for a little while and just focus on being a child of God and who you are in Jesus, and really developing intimacy with him, it will help you grow as a disciple. A lot of things will dramatically change. And then, of course, we gotta be willing to cry with them and walk things through with them. And if the whole goal is, "Don't think about elephants for the next hour, and I'll give you a $1,000.00," that's all you're going to think about, is elephants. If someone's whole emphasis is, "I can't think a homosexual thought. I have to think heterosexual thoughts," you're guaranteed to fail. So just forget about that right now. If a thought comes, let it go in one ear, out the other. That's not who you are. You are not who you desire sexually. You are not who you desire romantically. You're a child
of God called to be holy, and we're going to help you grow in that. And it's amazing to see the changes and disciplines that come as we put first things first.

**Darrell Bock:**

So as our sense of identity shifts from our desires, and what runs through our mind in relationship to desires, and moves towards our relationship to God and how he can not only come into our lives—you know, this is actually where the gospel speaks to this area. The gospel is not just about having sins forgiven. The gospel is about an enablement that God gives, that comes through the spirit and the life that he gives to us when we come to him. And that opens up new vistas and new possibilities for who we are as people, capabilities that we didn't have before we come to God and focus on him.

And so I think it's nice to come to the end of the this and to think about how the gospel actually can speak into this situation, that in our identity that we find in Christ and in the capability that he gives to us through the Spirit that comes from the Christ when we come to him, we have the possibility of living differently than we did before. It may not remove everything that we've struggled with before, because we struggle and grow to the end, as we've talked about. But it does mean that there's the possibility of being different than who we were, and in that transformation there's the possibility of hope of a different way of life. Is that what we're saying?

**Stan Jones:**

I think that's well said, Darrell, and I think that there is hope for transformation, there's hope for redemption, there's hope of being made whole, and that is the business that God is about.

**Darrell Bock:**

Michael?

**Michael Brown:**

Yes, absolutely. Darrell, you're the Greek scholar here, but most Christians just think of grace as unmerited favor, which is wonderful and extraordinary. But it doesn't end there. It's God's ongoing gracious help. It's God's empowerment. I got saved as a heroin-shooting, LSD-using, rock-drumming, 16-year-old lost kid, full of pride, hatred, anger. And to the core of my being, Jesus changed who I was and said, "Deny yourself. Take up the cross." But when you see Jesus, it's not morbid. It's not terrible. It's not like a monk, you know, flagellating himself or something like that. It's glorious. It's wonderful. If we can really present Jesus and connect people to the living vine, there's no better life.
Darrell Bock: Yeah. I think that power that we're talking about here to transform and to change, it changes all of us in a wide variety of areas and that's why we're discussing homosexuality in the context of sexuality and humanness as a whole, because I do think the real danger here is that in focusing just on homosexuality, we lose a context for humanness and humanity and the way God made us, and we end up – it's your elephant example – you know, I end up being focused on the elephant and trying to forget about the elephant, and I can't forget about the elephant.

When, in fact, what we're asking is what does it mean to be human? What does it mean to be a creature of God? What does it mean to be in fellowship with God? And then how does God engage us in that life in such a way that we become the people he designed us to be rather than reflecting the brokenness that we tend to come into life with?

Well, I want to thank you all for the time and for the discussion. I'm sure we may try and do this again, but I really do thank you for your coming to The Table and talking with us about what is a very important set of issues, and that is the whole area of sexuality, homosexuality in the Christian church. Thank you all very, very much.

Stan Jones: Thank you for having us.

Michael Brown: Thank you.