

Same-Sex Partnerships

by Mark Mitchell

When we confront the issue of homosexuality, we must not forget that we are dealing with people; not just fact and theories, but real people.

I think of Steve. Steve sat in church Sunday after Sunday, nursing his secret shame. His confusion and guilt was overwhelming at times, and he desperately wanted to tell someone. But he didn't dare. Comments from the pulpit and attitudes reflected by some at church sent a clear message that it wasn't safe to discuss this with fellow believers. After Steve finally found the courage to confide in his pastor, he was shocked to find out that the pastor had told others of his problem. People he had known for years suddenly acted aloof. Fear gripped him when the pastor told him the elders wanted some time with him. His sense of alienation deepened when the elders informed him that he could no longer teach the fifth grade Sunday School class. It really didn't seem to matter to anyone that he wasn't acting out on his desires, and that he sincerely wanted to change.

But I also think of Lisa. She had finally found the acceptance and fellowship she longed for. She and a small group of other homosexual women were welcomed into the warm embrace of this grace-filled church and accepted for what they were. Their church's understanding of Scripture was different from what she had been raised to believe. She was invited into membership—no questions asked. She and her friends were encouraged to celebrate their same-sex identity, only in a responsible way. Her pastor even offered to officiate at the “union” ceremony of she and her partner. At times Lisa felt a pang of guilt, but she couldn't deny her feelings of relief at finally being accepted.

Unfortunately, these two very different experiences characterize what men and women with same-sex desires usually find in the church today. Either the church rejects them for what they feel in order to maintain God's righteous standard, or they're embraced and encouraged to celebrate their same-sex desires as a natural expression of how God made them.

Are these the only two options open to us? Is there a third response? Is it possible to embrace both unchanging truth and unlimited grace? In this position paper, I want to address first what the unchanging truth of Scripture says about homosexuality. Second, I want to deal with the more practical

questions of how we should respond in grace. Before I go on, I would like to acknowledge that I have relied heavily on John's Stott's excellent booklet entitled, “Same-Sex Partnerships: A Christian Perspective” (Revell, 1998).

Four Assumptions

Because of the explosive nature of this subject, I want to begin by stating a few assumptions. There are a number of truths about us that I take for granted as I speak.

1. **First, we're all human beings.** Whatever else we call ourselves, homosexual or heterosexual, we're first and foremost human. In one sense, there is no such thing as a “homosexual.” There are, of course, homosexual acts. But I want to distinguish between the acts and the man or woman who does them. Men and women are first and foremost human beings made in the image of God. Although we may disagree with homosexual practices, we cannot dehumanize those who practice them.
2. **Second, we're all sexual beings.** Our sexuality is basic to our humanness. Angels may be sexless; we're not. When God made humankind, he made us male and female. When we talk about our sexuality, we are talking about something basic to our personhood, which strikes at the center of our identity. With this affirmation we would have to agree that we all have a particular sexual inclination. For a moment, we don't have to answer the question of HOW we get that way. But we all have an inclination because we're all sexual beings.
3. **Third, we're all sinners.** We're frail and vulnerable. None of us are without sin, and we are all continually battling our own sinful nature. None of us have conquered it all. Every part of our humanity has been tainted by sin. In particular, we're all *sexual* sinners. Dr. Merville Vincent of Harvard Medical School is right when he says, “In God's view, I suspect we are all sexual deviants. I doubt if there is anyone who has not had a lustful thought that deviated from God's perfect ideal of sexuality.” Nobody except Jesus has been sexually sinless. We all stand under the judgment of God in this area, in desperate need of his grace. None of us can come to this study with a “holier-than-thou” attitude.

4. Finally, **we're all under the authority of God and his word.** What I have to say will be most relevant to those who want to understand and obey what God says about this subject in the Scripture. If we don't share that common ground, it will be much more difficult for you to accept what I say. I'm proceeding on the assumption that what Scripture says about this is more important than what psychologists, legislators, or even some ministers might say about this.

There are four primary biblical passages which deal with homosexual behavior. All of them refer to it negatively.

The Biblical Prohibitions

1. The story of Sodom: The first is the story of Sodom found in Genesis. The writer of Genesis says that *"the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord"* (13:13). God says the *"outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin exceedingly grave," so he determines to investigate it* (18:20–21). In the end, God overthrew those cities and all the people in them by an act of judgment (19:25). The question is, what was their sin?

Remember that two angels came to visit the city of Sodom, and Lot welcomed them into his home. But then the men of Sodom surrounded the house and said, *"Where are the two men who came to you tonight? Bring them out so that we may have relations with them"* (19:5). That word "have relations" is literally "know" and it has different meanings in Hebrew, not all of which are sexual. Sometimes it can just mean "to get acquainted with." Because of that, same-sex advocates say that the sin of Sodom had nothing to do with homosexuality. These men just wanted to "get acquainted" with the two angels before they let them stay in their city. So the sin of Sodom, they say, was not homosexuality but rather being inhospitable. But that doesn't fit with the rest of the story. Later, Lot responds by saying he has two daughters who've not "had relations with a man," and he offers them to the men of Sodom instead of the angels. This was an evil thing to do; he's not sending his daughters out there to have tea! It's obvious what he's talking about. He's saying that they have never had sex with a man. The New Testament confirms that the sin of Sodom was the sin of homosexuality. Jude says that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah *"indulged in gross immorality and perversion"* (verse 7). You can see why the Christian view has always been that they were guilty of homosexual practices.

2. The Leviticus texts: The second texts are found in the book of Leviticus. They're part of what we call the "holiness code."

God's people are challenged to follow his holy laws and not copy the practices of other nations. These practices included things like child sacrifice, idolatry, injustice, and sexual perversions. Two verses deal with the practice of homosexuality:

"You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination." (Leviticus 18:22)

"If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them." (Leviticus 20:13)

It's interesting that those who call themselves homosexual Christians claim that these passages are dealing with only the religious prostitution that took place among the Canaanite fertility cults. They say that since those religious practices have long since ceased, they have no relevance to same-sex partnerships today. But, as John Stott says, "The burden of proof is with them... The plain, natural interpretation of these two verses is that they prohibit homosexual intercourse of every kind."

3. Paul's portrayal of decadent pagan society: This is consistent with what we see in the New Testament. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 1:26–27,

"For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error."

Paul is describing idolatrous pagans in the Greco-Roman world of his day. He says they had a knowledge of God through God's creation and their own conscience, but they suppressed the truth and practiced unrighteousness. In judgment, God gave them over to depraved minds and decadent practices, including "unnatural" sex.

This appears to be a very straightforward condemnation of same-sex relationships. But some argue that Paul knew nothing of those who have "natural" same-sex inclinations, or those who form committed same-sex partnerships; he was just talking about irresponsible perverts. The fact that they abandoned the "natural" for the "unnatural" even indicates that although they were heterosexually inclined, they abandoned that for homosexual practices. Surely if Paul were more enlightened on this subject, he would want those who are inclined to homosexuality to act on their "natural" impulses. I'm going to

deal with that argument later, but for now I want you to see two other New Testament texts.

4. Paul's lists of sinners: In both 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 and 1 Timothy 1:8–11 there are two lists of sins, both of which include homosexuality. The first list uses two different words to describe two different things. Without being too graphic, the first word literally meant “soft to the touch” and was used to describe males who played the passive role in homosexual sex. The second word literally means “male in a bed” and described the one who took the active role. Same-sex advocates today say this referred exclusively to the ancient practice of selling younger boys to older men. But most biblical scholars would agree with Peter Coleman when he says, “Taken together, St. Paul's writings repudiate homosexual behavior as a vice of the Gentiles in Romans, as a bar to the Kingdom in Corinthians, and as an offense to be repudiated by the moral law in 1 Timothy.”

So there are four main texts that repudiate homosexual behavior. You might think that in a book as big as the Bible, there would be more. Some might even accuse me of proof-texting—taking verses out of their original context to prove a point. Others would add that none of these passages really repudiate a loving, lifelong commitment between two people who've always felt inclined towards same-sex relationships. So for just a few minutes, it might be helpful to move beyond these negative texts and look at the positive teaching of Genesis about human sexuality and marriage. When we go back to the creation of humanity, God's original blueprint, what do we see?

Sexuality and Marriage in the Bible

Genesis 1 and 2 provide two complimentary accounts of creation. The first chapter is general and affirms the equality of the sexes, since both are made in the image of God. Genesis 2 is more specific, affirming the complimentary differences between the sexes, which is the basis for heterosexual marriage. In the second chapter of Genesis, three fundamental truths emerge.

1. First, **the human need for companionship.** In verse 18, after creating Adam, God says, “*It's not good that man should be alone.*” God has created us as social beings, with the capacity to love and be loved. That's part of being made in his image. So God continues and says, “*I will make him a helper suitable for him.*” As we'll see, this “helper” who is different but “suitable for him” is also to become his sexual partner and they are to become “one flesh.”
2. Second, Genesis 2 reveals **the divine provision to meet this**

human need. Having affirmed Adam's need for a partner, the search begins. God parades before Adam the animals and Adam proceeds to name them. Yet verse 20 says, “*But for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.*” Since there was no one suitable for Adam, God had to perform a special act of creation. Adam was placed into a deep sleep and out of his rib God fashioned a woman. This was divine surgery under divine anesthetic! As Matthew Henry wrote, “Not made out of his head to top him, not made out of his feet to be trampled on by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.” Once the woman was created, Adam awoke from his deep sleep and God presented the woman to him, like a bride's father gives his daughter away. Adam was overwhelmed. He broke into the first love song ever written: “*This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man*” (2:23). To put it bluntly, Adam was turned on!

3. This leads to the third thing Genesis 2 reveals, and that is **the resulting institution of marriage.** After the love song in verse 23 comes the phrase “For this reason...” in verse 24. “*For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*” Notice the constituent's parts of a marriage are one man and one woman. Notice that their union is to be publicly acknowledged as they leave their father and mother; it's to be permanently sealed as they “cleave” to one another in a loving commitment. And it's to be physically consummated in a “one flesh” union.
4. **Jesus endorsed this definition of marriage in the New Testament.** When he was questioned about marriage, he quoted Genesis 1:27 which said that God “*created them male and female.*” And then he quoted Genesis 2:24, which affirmed the leaving and cleaving and resulting one-flesh union we just talked about. Finally, he added his own comment, “*So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let no man separate*” (Matthew 19:4–6). So, in short, Jesus affirmed that heterosexual gender is a divine creation, heterosexual marriage is a divine institution, and heterosexual fidelity is the divine intention. Scripture endorses no other kind of marriage or sex. By the way, we should not single out homosexual relationships for special condemnation. The fact is that every kind of sexual relationship and activity which deviates from this is wrong in his eyes. This includes adultery, cohabitation, casual encounters, pornography and teenage experimentation.

Now, of course, homosexual advocates disagree with this teaching for a variety of reasons. And I believe, to be fair, we have to address those reasons. Let me deal with five of these.

Contemporary Arguments Considered

1. “But they lived in a different culture.” The first reason we’ve already touched upon—it’s the argument about Scripture and culture. The idea here is that the biblical authors lived in a very different culture than ours and were addressing questions relevant to their culture and not to ours. Not only that, Paul knew little about our culture. He didn’t know about modern psychology or the concept of a person having an innate homosexual inclination.

If the only teaching we had were the negative prohibitions, it might be difficult to answer this argument. But the positive teaching in Genesis about the creation of man and woman and the divine institution of marriage is designed to be universally applicable. The creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 take place before culture even developed. The reason for the prohibitions is that the practice of homosexuality is against the created order. Gays accuse evangelicals of being overly literal in using the Bible, but here we’ve looked beneath the surface of the commands to the clear teaching on biblical sexuality and marriage from Genesis, which was endorsed by Christ himself.

2. “God made me this way.” The second argument that is used deals with creation and nature. People say, “I’m gay because God made me that way. Like a fish was made to swim, so I was made for same-sex relationships. How could God make me a certain way and then deny me the right to express it? That would be unnatural!”

Let me respond. First, we should be very compassionate with those who’ve felt a same-sex inclination for as long as they can remember. Whether we’re willing to concede that they were born that way or not, often times that’s all they know. That’s a tremendous burden to live with and we who have never been through that should not act like it’s all their fault, because oftentimes it’s not.

Also, we should be careful with oversimplified explanations for why a person feels these things. Science hasn’t come up with a definitive explanation for what causes a homosexual inclination. It may be a combination of things, including childhood family dynamics, or confusing sexual experiences, including abuse, that bring both pleasure and shame. Unfortunately, our own stereotypes are part of the problem. There are boys who are drawn to things our culture labels as “feminine” and there are girls who are interested in things our culture labels as “masculine.” That doesn’t make them gay, but when our cultural stereotypes make them feel that way, you can understand their confusion.

I would also say that just because we feel certain inclinations doesn’t mean we have the right to fulfill them. And sometimes when we do fulfill them, that just makes the inclination stronger. Because I may have a propensity towards losing my temper, does that make it okay to do so? Even Jesus experienced sexual desire, but he never fulfilled it. He called all of us to take up our cross and follow him.

Finally, we should let our creator God define what is natural and unnatural. What is “natural” is what conforms to the biblical doctrine of creation, not what conforms to our own feelings. Something might feel natural to us, but according to God’s creative order, it is in fact unnatural.

3. “We really love each other and that’s all that matters.” The third argument concerns the quality of relationships. The idea here is that love is the greatest commandment, and this is the criterion that should be used to judge a relationship. If a same-sex relationship is characterized by love, commitment, and tenderness, and self-sacrifice, how can that be wrong?

One of the problems with this argument is that this is a rare thing in the homosexual community, especially among men. The truth is that gay relationships are characterized more by promiscuity than by fidelity. It’s also difficult to maintain that same-sex partnerships are an expression of love in light of the danger and damage that often results. Besides AIDS, there is a greatly increased danger of infectious hepatitis, viral infections, and liver and rectal cancer. But most of all, the biblical Christian cannot accept the premise that loving another person is the only absolute moral law. Jesus told us that the first and greatest commandment is to love THE LORD with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. And Jesus also said, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”* (John 14:15) So a loving relationship is not in itself enough criterion to authenticate it. If it were, then adultery is okay as long as you love the person. I’ve heard many married men and women tell me that their adultery is okay because they have fallen in love. But does that make it okay? The quality of love is not the only yardstick to measure what is good or right.

4. “This is all about justice and human rights.” The fourth argument deals with the issue of justice and human rights. The idea here is that discrimination is wrong, whether it be on account of race, gender, social class, or even sexual preference. God is a God of justice. Just as slaves and women have been afforded equal rights, so should homosexuals. I’m going to deal with this more later, but for now I would agree that oppression and discrimination is wrong, towards homosexuals or anyone else. Scripture says to *“Honor all men.”* But discrimination and injustice is different than a society’s refusal to

recognize same-sex marriage, or an individual's refusal to accept the same as morally right. We can and should be tolerant of different lifestyles, but still disagree with them.

5. "God accepts us all." Finally, there is the argument about acceptance and the Gospel. Doesn't the grace of God mean that he accepts us just as we are? Why not accept homosexuals just as they are? Well, God does accept us as we are, and we don't have to make ourselves good to earn his acceptance. But his acceptance means he freely forgives those who repent of their sin and believe the gospel, not that he condones our continuing in sin. And we accept each other as fellow sinners endeavoring to follow Christ, not as fellow sinners resolved to persist in our sinning. Jesus accepted the woman caught in adultery, but he also commanded her to *"Go and sin no more."*

The pressure today on the church to change its historic stance on homosexuality is unrelenting. But I hope we can see that we can change our position only by changing our fundamental stance on biblical authority and changing our core view of human beings made in the image of God. In every generation, the church has been faced with new challenges to cave in to the culture and abandon God's truth. The current challenge of same-sex partnerships is the newest form of an old set of challenges—to diminish the authority of God's word, and to understand people on their own terms rather than by God's view of them.

What I have not talked about yet is how God's grace might be applied to those who are struggling with this issue. And what should the relationship be between the church and those who live with homosexual inclinations? To answer these questions, I want to use as an outline Paul's triad of faith, hope and love in 1 Corinthians 13:13, *"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."*

The Call to Faith

Let's start with faith. Faith is our human response to God and his word. Faith is believing what God says and acting upon it, even when it doesn't make sense to us. Hebrews 11 is the "Hall of Fame" of faith. There we read about the likes of Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses and Rahab. In every case, they heard the word of God, believed it as the word of God, and acted upon it.

Faith starts with hearing and accepting God's word. We've seen that God's word says the only alternative to heterosexual marriage is singleness and sexual abstinence. If you're not married, that's a very difficult calling to have. You have to battle your own desires. You have the constant temptation of

the enemy. And you have the secular world which tells you, "Sex is essential to your fulfillment. To expect people with homosexual desires to abstain is to condemn them to a life of frustration, neurosis and despair. It's cruel to ask you to deny yourself what is for you a natural and normal mode of sexual expression."

But God's word says something different. It tells us that while our sexuality is part of who we are as human beings, we don't need to be active sexually in order to be fulfilled. Take Jesus Christ. Despite what some people tell us today, Jesus was single and he never had sex. But Jesus was perfect in his humanity; he was a whole person, he knew great joy. He teaches us that it's possible to be single, chaste, and fully human.

You say, "Well, he was Christ. He was different." But that's not what Scripture says either. Scripture says he was *"tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin."* (Hebrews 4:15) Tempted in every way? Was Jesus tempted to lie? To steal? To murder? To commit adultery? Might Jesus have even been tempted in a homosexual way? I shudder to say that. But at the very heart of the gospel message is the fact that Jesus was our human representative on the cross. How could he represent sinners whose sins he had never faced or never conquered?

Scripture calls Jesus in Hebrews 12:2, *"the author and perfecter of faith."* He's the one we're to follow. He's our model. At the very center of being a follower of Christ is the call to take up our own cross and follow him. If you're a person with same sex desires, that means that as an act of faith you have to lay your sexuality at the foot of the cross. If you're a single, heterosexual person you have to do the same. Those of us who are married know that we too must take up our cross. Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. We may think that our cross is heavier than someone else's, but, in our own walk of faith, we all have a cross to bear. One of the problems we have in our society is that we Christians, who want to protect the sanctity of marriage, have not always been the best examples of that. Divorce is just as prevalent in the church as it is in the culture, as is premarital sex. Perhaps if we kept our own house in order, the culture would be more prone to listen to God's word.

Though we're not perfect, faith believes that God is able and willing to give us the grace we need to be obedient to his call on our lives. Hebrews says that since Christ himself has suffered temptation, he is able to help those who are tempted (Hebrews 2:17–18). So we're not left to ourselves to fight this

battle. Not only does he forgive us and cleanse us, he gives us new life and his Spirit strengthens us.

Paul had a thorn in the flesh. We don't know what it was for sure. What if that thorn in the flesh was a same sex inclination? He asked for God to take it away. Three times he asked and each time God said the same thing, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* (2 Corinthians 12:9) In our brokenness and weakness, we do have God's power. To deny this is to portray us as helpless victims of the world and of our own sinful natures. But we're not victims, we're victors! We have new life in Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 there is a list of sins which Paul says characterizes those who will **not** inherit the kingdom of God. Among them are those who practice homosexuality. But then in verse 11 he says something we often miss: *"Such were some of you..."* There were people in that church who had come out of this lifestyle. Notice the past tense. That's what they **were**, not what they **are**. Something changed them. Paul says, *"You were washed...you were sanctified...you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."*

The Call to Hope

This leads me to the second thing—hope. What kind of hope for change is there for a homosexual person? Is there a cure? Is there healing? Can they change?

There are two prevalent distortions in the church about the possibility and process of real change and healing for those inclined towards same-sex relationships. The first is the conservative Christian myth that a quick, sincere repentance and prayer for healing will instantly change that person. Although that's always possible, the problem is that's rarely what really happens. The more prevalent myth is the opposite, that there is **no** hope at all for healing and change. The person with same-sex inclination will just have to fight these crippling desires his entire life.

Here is where we need the balance of Scripture. Scripture teaches that sanctification and change is a lifelong process. There is a balance in Scripture between a theology of victory and a theology of suffering. Like any other sin, you may never completely rid yourself of same-sex desires until you see Christ and are transformed into his image. But this hope makes our present suffering bearable. Alex Davidson writes,

"One of the most wretched things about this condition is that when you look ahead, the same impossible road seems to continue indefinitely. You're driven to rebellion when you think of there being no

point in it and of despair when you think of there being no limit to it. That's why I find comfort... to remind myself of God's promise that one day it will be finished."

But, there is also hope for change—here on earth. I have a book called Portraits of Freedom, which includes the testimonies of 14 followers of Christ who've come out of homosexuality. Many of them are happily and heterosexually married. For all of them, it didn't happen overnight. It was a process, but there was progress. Barbara Swallow, who struggled with same-sex desires most of her life writes,

"I want to encourage you, to let you know that Jesus truly heals...homosexuality. There is more available to you than just abstinence, more than struggling with temptation for the rest of your life. Jesus can set you free from every aspect of your unhealthy thought patterns and from all the junk that goes with them. Don't be afraid to let Jesus into the painful areas of your life. Allow him to walk through them with you....if you trust Jesus, he can heal the hurt and you will never have to live with that pain again. Just imagine the freedom. When you push through the past with Jesus Christ, he can heal you forever. I assure you that he is able to do this. He did it for me."

One of the keys to change is the development of deep, loving, lasting, honest friendships, both with members of the same sex and the opposite sex. Where do you think that can best happen? The best place for that to happen is the church.

The Call to Love

This brings us to the third and final thing, the greatest thing, Paul says, is love. You see, we live between the present grace we grasp by faith and the future glory we anticipate in hope. In between these two realities lies love.

When I speak of love I don't mean a love that denies the truth of the gospel or the standards of Scripture. There is a misunderstanding today about love and more specifically about tolerance. It used to be that tolerance meant the ability to agree to disagree; that you could disagree with someone about what is right and wrong but you still respected them and loved them as human beings made in the image of God. But now tolerance has come to mean there is **no** right and wrong. You don't agree to disagree, you just agree that everybody can do what they want and believe what they want and somehow we're all right. That's not tolerance; that's foolishness!

Having said that, let's be honest, the church hasn't always felt like a safe place for the person who struggles with same-sex desires. A good case can be made for the fact the homosexual is the modern equivalent of the leper. In Jesus' day, lepers were social and spiritual outcasts. Historically, the church has responded to homosexuals like the Pharisees responded to lepers—with a mixture of irrational fear, hostility, and even revulsion.

When we do that, we overlook a few important things. We overlook the fact that most homosexual people are not solely responsible for their condition (though they are for their conduct). Would we treat a person who was rendered blind as a child the same way? We also overlook the fact that we ourselves share not only a common humanity but also a common disease called sin. In God's mind, sin is sin. We all deserve his wrath, and anything we get above that is pure grace. In his mercy and grace, Jesus welcomed the most despised sinners of his day, and the Pharisees cringed. I would ask who are we most like? Are we more like Jesus or are we more like the Pharisees?

So there needs to be a double repentance. Some Christians must repent of their homosexual behavior, while others must repent of their heterosexual self-righteousness and hatred. We should stop the queer jokes and insults. We should deal with our own emotional reactions. And we should determine to make the church a place where a person struggling to be obedient in the midst of homosexual desires can be embraced and prayed for. Are you willing to pray with, eat with, hug and comfort a man or woman who has homosexual feelings?

John Stott's writing has helped me immensely think through this subject. He writes,

“At the heart of the homosexual condition is a deep loneliness, the natural human hunger for mutual love, a search for identity, and a longing for completeness. If homosexual people cannot find these

things in the local church family, we have no business to go on using that expression.”

It's time for the loving actions of Christians to be so obvious that the one thing the homosexual community cannot deny is that we love them and we care for them. For some, that will not be enough; they also want us to agree with them. We can't do that. But may they never be able to say we didn't extend a hand to help. Jesus would be there for them. For some reason, these were the kinds of people that were drawn to Jesus. Why aren't they drawn to us?

Conclusion

Many of us have seen the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. We've grimaced as we've watched him endure the gruesome suffering of the cross. But in the cross we see more than just physical torture. We see faith, hope and love come together.

We see Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, willing to say to the Father, *“Take this cup from me, but not my will, but rather your will be done”* (Luke 22:42).

We see Jesus, who hoped against hope; *“...for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame...”* (Hebrews 12:2).

And we see the purest expression of love ever given. People are asking, Who killed him? The Jews? The Romans? I think we know the answer. We all did it. My sin and your sin nailed him to that cross. But it was love that drove him to surrender to such brutality. John, the apostle of love, said this,

“God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love one another”

1 John 4:9–11