



STUDY GUIDE

Series Questions

1. Is Christianity Irrational?
2. Is Christianity Against Gender Equality?
3. Is the Bible Pro-Slavery? Does Christianity Encourage Racism?
4. **Is Christianity Homophobic?**
5. Is Christianity Against Other Faiths?
6. Is Christianity Violent?
7. Can You Believe in the Bible and Science?
8. Why Does God Allow So Much Suffering?

Session Introduction

In the past weeks, you have received a lot of material to study, and many of you have felt squeezed for time. This week's study is set up so that the first sections are primary material, and if you have time at the end, you can conclude with the supplementary material.

Take time as you begin to pray for God's guidance in this conversation and study with each other.

Session Four: Is Christianity Homophobic?

Primary Material:

Part A: Opening

- 1) What new ideas did you find instructive in Pastor Richard's sermon? What do you want to study more and think about more?
- 2) Do you have any friends/family members/work colleagues who are part of the LGBTQ community? How might this affect your thinking on this topic?

Part B: Jesus and Sex

While it is true that Jesus himself does not talk directly about homosexuality, he does talk directly and strongly about sex and marriage. His words are formative as we enter this conversation in our study.

Read Matthew 5:27 - 30

- 3) Do you think a first-time reader of these words would be shocked by what Jesus says?
- 4) How would you put what Jesus says into your own words?

Here are some different observations that Christian teachers have made on this passage:

- "Ultimately, every Christian is called to sexual restraint... Saying yes to Jesus means saying no to sexual freedom." (Rebecca McLaughlin)
- "A holy sexual desire is good. Misdirected sexual desire is absolutely destructive." (Tim Mackie)
- "I cannot keep a bird from flying over my head. But I can certainly keep it from nesting in my hair." (Martin Luther)

- 5) Which one of these quotes helps you to think more deeply about holy living?

Please note that Jesus gave this teaching to those who were already his disciples (Matthew 5:1-2).

6) As you think of this teaching that Jesus has given, do you think that we in the church are tempted to place the same expectations of moral obedience on those who are not yet disciples?

7) What is the problem with doing this?

Read Matthew 19:3 - 6

Here in these verses, Jesus is asked a question about divorce, but he first responds by talking about God's design for marriage.

In verse 4, he reminds his listeners that at the beginning, the Creator made them male and female.

8) Where does Jesus draw this idea from? See Genesis 1:27. God gave the gift of marriage - a sacred commitment of one man and one woman - in verse 5.

9) What are the three steps that are outlined in verse 5?

10) Where did Jesus get this idea from? See Genesis 2:24 - 25.

Here Jesus is reaffirming marriage by pointing his listeners back to the story of creation.

(Note that in Matthew 19:7 - 9, Jesus talks about divorce, a topic that we have reflected on in a past sermon, but we will not linger on these verses in this study.)

Read Matthew 19:10 - 12

Here Jesus talks only about one alternative to the gift of marriage - the gift of singleness, as he uses the word "eunuch" in these verses. (First century eunuchs were typically males who had been castrated in childhood. They performed specific roles, from singing to guarding high status women.)

But Jesus is talking much more broadly than just about this. He is talking about singleness that is a lived experience for many reasons. Consider how Eugene Peterson translates these verses in the Message:

“Marriage isn’t for everyone. Some, from birth seemingly, never give marriage a thought. Others never get asked—or accepted. And some decide not to get married for kingdom reasons.”

- 11) How can we celebrate the gift of singleness in the church?

- 12) How do we lovingly respond to those who long to be married, and yet remain single because the opportunity has not yet come?

- 13) How do we lovingly respond to those who are same-sex attracted in the church and long for more than a life of singleness?

Here is what Rebecca McLaughlin writes: “In a biblical framework, therefore, friendship is not the consolation prize for those who fail to gain romantic love. Like marriage and like parenthood, it is another way in which God manifests an aspect of his love for us. Christians are one body (Romans 12:5), brothers and sisters (Matthew 12:50), knit together in love (Colossians 2:2), comrades in arms (Philippians 2:25).

Part C: “God Demonstrates His Love for Us”

Read Romans 5:8

Let’s face it that we can get trapped in wrong thinking by imagining that we are not supposed to love people who live contrary to what God says. There are times when Christians have a bad track record in loving people.

- 14) Did Christ start loving us when we had it all together?
Did Christ start loving us when we started attending church?
Did Christ start loving us when we started believing?
When did Christ initiate his love for us?

15) How can MCBC grow in being a welcoming place and a loving community to those who are transgender or experience same-sex attraction?

16) Can we be welcoming to our gay and lesbian friends, while not affirming their behavior? How?

Supplementary Material

Part D: The Apostle Paul - "the Chief of Sinners"

Read 1 Timothy 1:8 - 15

Note: As Pastor Richard mentioned, this is one of six passages that directly addresses homosexuality, and he guided us in thinking on this passage.

17) What do you notice about the list of various sins in verses 9 - 10?

18) In the most recent translation of the NIV, in verse 10, the Greek word "arsenokoitai" is translated as "those practicing homosexuality". Do you make a distinction between sexual orientation and sexual behavior? Discuss.

19) Who does Paul identify as the greatest sinner? Does this surprise you?

20) What do you learn from Paul's attitude about himself?

Part E: Learning from Rachel's Story

Rachel Gilson writes as someone who experiences same-sex attraction. Consider these excerpts from an article in the magazine Christianity Today:

"Unlike me, most of my Christian friends who experience same-sex attraction grew up in the church. One of the most unifying themes I hear from them is the ragged fear that tore at their hearts. They were terrified that someone would discover their attractions. They spent years praying for God to take the feelings away and decades policing their mannerisms in order to stay hidden.

In the end, we all need the same exact thing that my friends needed years ago and the same thing that I need now: space to speak about what we really feel. The purpose of transparency is not to glory in our struggle but to find support in our quest for costly obedience. I have to know that my desire for women doesn't put me beyond the reach of the Holy Spirit and that right in the midst of it, he can bless me. That's true for each of us. Only when we're honest about our sexual struggles can we hear this message: The Lord wants more for us. He wants our allegiance. He wants our holiness.

The same is true for every believer. Obedience was never meant as a bargaining chip to force God into blessing us—it was always meant to be the bountiful and delicious fruit of a life in relationship with our Creator and Savior. He has joy in store for us, which we can only fully find when we pursue the obedience of faith with transparency, honesty, and hope. No matter our temptations, no matter our patterns of desire, we press on to make this joy our own, because Christ Jesus has made us his own."

Her story helps us to consider many things.

21) How can we support and love those who might share with you that they experience a same-sex attraction?

22) When have you experienced in your life as Rachel describes it, a "quest for costly obedience"?

WEEK 4 RESOURCES

Video resource - Right Now Media

***"Homosexuality and the Christian Faith" - Rosaria Butterfield**

In this 47-minute session from the 2014 The Gospel Coalition Women's Conference, author Rosaria Butterfield shares her inspiring story of conversion. A former lesbian, she describes how the Bible changed her from the inside out.

<https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Training/Post/Preview/151911>**

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Recommended Readings

Readings are not required to participate in the study but offer more information on the topic.

***Via, Dan O. and Robert A. Gagnon. *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views.* Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 2003.**

A dialogue between the two positions.

Grenz, Stanley. *Welcoming But Not Affirming.* Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988.

A defense of the traditional "welcoming but not affirming" position.

Gushee, David P. *Changing Our Mind: Definitive 3rd Edition of the Landmark Call for Inclusion of LGBTQ Christians with Response to Critics.* Canton Michigan: Read the Spirit Books, 2017.

A presentation of the "welcoming and affirming" position.

Kaltenbach, Caleb. *Messy Grace: How a Pastor with Gay Parents Learned to Love Others Without Sacrificing Conviction.* New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2015.

A gracious and powerful testimony.

Yarhouse, Mark A. *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture.* Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2015.

A helpful primer on transgender issues.

***highly recommended resource**