

*The LGBT issue confronts Christ's followers in new ways:*

1. The gay movement sees societal acceptance of all forms of sexuality between consenting adults as a civil rights issue. The sexual revolution has been codified into the laws of the state. Society has defined the moral crisis as a matter of personal autonomy and freedom rather than sinful deviancy or psychological disorder. The categories of "sin" and "sickness" no longer apply to homosexuality.
2. Sexual self-determination is increasingly viewed as fundamental to personal identity. In this new "sacred order" the person decides who they are whether by genetics, choice, or experience. The self is sovereign in these fluid and flexible decisions and demands from society tolerance, respect and approval as a moral imperative.
3. The gay movement has gained the support of many in the legal, political, corporate, scientific, educational and religious spheres of culture. This dramatic reversal of cultural consensus positions Christians who advocate biblical sexuality as either out of step with the times or as bigoted and immoral.
4. Christians who have grown into adulthood within this new cultural consensus face tremendous personal and societal pressure to accommodate these changing perspectives and to endorse sexual self-determination in all its forms. Tolerance for sexual diversity in our pluralistic age has become one of society's cardinal doctrines.
5. Depending on the authority of the Bible to define sexual ethics and to determine the moral order necessary for human flourishing has always been challenged by those who do not accept the Bible as the Word of God. But recently, self-professed evangelicals who claim to submit to biblical authority are asking, "Did God say. . .?" Their revisionist approach seeks to renegotiate the clear teaching of the Bible to defend sexual self-determination. Their argument often begins with the personal stories of self-identifying gays who inspire them to re-examine "the traditional" interpretation of a select list of biblical texts.
6. The radical reversal of the biblical sexual ethic in society and the church has ostracized and marginalized faithful and loving Christians who continue to take the Word of God seriously. No matter how welcoming and open Christ's followers may be to self-identifying gays, the perceived lack of moral approval and blessing is judged to be intolerant and immoral. Christ's followers are literally "foreigners and exiles" urged "to abstain from sinful desires" and to "live such good lives among the pagans, that even though they accuse [them] of doing wrong," their good deeds glorify God (1 Peter 2:11-12).

*Christ's followers are urged to respond in the following ways:*

1. We need the wisdom of God to "regard no one from a worldly point of view" and to embrace the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16). This is not an ideological war that requires a political response as much as a spiritual battle that requires a cruciform life. The gay issue is a symptom of a much larger phenomenon that is deeply rooted in the human condition and the fall. We have all exchanged the authority and glory of God for the authority and glory of the self. Everyone's sexuality has been impacted by the fall. We all need to confess, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). The gay issue may seem like a new phenomenon that poses a special threat to the Christian life, but it is not. We have failed to live into a biblical sexual ethic through our tacit approval of immature parenting, poor spiritual direction for the young, pre-marital sex, easy divorce, and selfish marriages. We have largely ignored the battle within when it comes to pornography and sexism, leaving us vulnerable to the battle without.
2. We should not be surprised if the world does not understand a biblical sexual ethic. We have naively thought that the goodness of God's moral order is somehow self-evident and that everyone should see it and appreciate it. We have been strangely silent on the sacramental cast of holy living. We have expected young Christians to mature automatically. We live by grace, not works, but grace is never an excuse for practical antinomianism – the false idea that Christians are under no obligation or responsibility to fulfill the law of Christ. We are not saved by works,

but saving faith is always accompanied by the work of righteousness. Costly grace provides the motivation for living the Jesus way, producing a counter-culture life-style rooted in Sermon on the Mount. We should expect the world to misjudge and condemn us because our understanding of God and the human person is radically different from the modern world-view.

3. We need to do everything in our power to welcome sinners like us into the fellowship of believers. We want everyone to hear Jesus' invitation, "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly" (Matthew 11:28-30, *The Message*). We want to experience the grace of God's "no" against every form of ungodliness and worldly passions and the power of God's grace-filled "yes" to redeem every aspect of our lives. We believe that real compassion and true conviction can and must go together. For the sake of our faithful brothers and sisters who resist same-sex attraction and for the sake of our young who need biblical guidance, it is absolutely necessary that we remain true to our biblical convictions.

4. We seek to teach and model a biblical sexual ethic within the counter-cultural community of the household of faith. We want to instruct the young in a theology of self-understanding, sexual purity, singleness, and marital fidelity. We want to support, encourage and befriend those brothers and sisters who are struggling with same-sex attraction. This will involve renegotiating the nearly exclusive and essential status the world subscribes to sexual identity. We are made in God's image, male and female, and we face an onslaught of self-damaging influences and temptations. Our sinful disposition is deeply rooted in our depravity and beyond redemption apart from the redeeming grace of God. Same-sex attraction is one such potentially disabling and destructive influence. This specific temptation may be rooted in various and complex factors, such as a person's genetic make-up, the way they were parented, early sexual experiences, mental and physical abuse, and conflicted relationships with the opposite sex.

5. We believe that there is a fundamental difference between male and female mutuality and same-sex sexuality. The Bible's redemptive trajectory moves away from patriarchy and gender stratification and moves toward gender differentiation, where men are men and women are women, gifted by the Spirit, engaged in ministry, and mutually submissive in Christ. The transcultural prohibition against homosexuality is sustained and strengthened throughout biblical revelation, even as old hierarchal patterns and gender roles are liberated under the influence of the gospel. The redemptive movement of the New Testament celebrates gender mutuality and prohibits same-sex sexuality. Christians must challenge society with faithful and charitable non-conformity when society departs from the will of God while at the same time embracing those initiatives and actions in culture that agree with the will of God. We live in a holy tension between hierarchical complementarians, who believe that they have rightly divided the Word of Truth, and advocates for same-sex sexuality, who believe that they are making the Christian faith relevant for modern culture. We distort the church's biblical response to sexual immorality when we discriminate against women.

6. We praise God for our brothers and sisters in Christ who courageously acknowledge their struggle with same sex attraction and who seek to remain chaste and faithful in their discipleship. In Christ they are worthy of our deep respect and friendship and they ought to be encouraged to use the full range of their God-given gifts in God's Kingdom work. Instead of drawing apart from our brothers and sisters in need we ought to draw even closer to them and in their company confess and repent of our many struggles with holy living and righteous impact.

7. We are not interested in a power struggle with the gay movement. Society was moving toward radical pluralism and tolerance of all forms of sexuality long before the Supreme Court sanctioned gay marriage. The world is the world and Christians should not expect to change it. God will change the world at the final judgment and in the creation of the new heaven and the new earth. Our responsibility is to live as salt and light in a decaying and hostile environment. We have a *living hope*, a *lasting inheritance*, and a *coming salvation*. We are encouraged to live into this new reality with confidence and joy. Undoubtedly this will require prophetic resilience and costly love.