

# Sexuality

Fall 2019

## What is the Issue?

Sexuality is perhaps the greatest religious flashpoint in the modern Western world. Social views regarding sexual morals have changed dramatically within the last sixty years. Sex outside of marriage is now considered normal, divorce rates have increased significantly, and pornography and other sexually charged media are widespread. Homosexuality is widely seen as a social rights issue in modern society. These trends have placed culture on a collision course with the Church.

Prior to engaging the immediate topic, we must first evaluate an even more significant question: *Who holds authority?*

Modern secular voices teach that authority is relative, either entirely individualized or based on the social constructs of our society. These views *place humanity in the position of authority*, whether as individuals or as a collective. As such, they are antithetical to the Christian faith, which teaches that *God is the final authority* and His authority is seen in the person of Jesus as revealed in Scripture.

Sexuality is a secondary topic, but with major implications. In other words, how we understand the question of authority will directly affect our view of sexuality. If we resolve the issue of authority, then the topic of sexuality becomes clear. By choosing to place culture (or personal emotions) in the place of authority, the entire Christian faith is undercut.

## Standing on the authority of Scripture and Christian History

In contrast to modern secular culture, we uphold the authority of God as our moral standard, as expressed in the Person of Jesus and revealed in the Scriptures. God created us, and He alone knows how humanity can best thrive. His standards provide boundaries to protect us, enable us to live a rich life, and reveal God to humanity. We believe God calls us to live according to His ways, in our treatment of others, and in our personal lives—including our sexuality.

The Antioch Movement stands in agreement with the clear teaching of Scripture, which we hold as the final authority, as well as the nearly unanimous teaching of the Church since the New Testament era<sup>1</sup> and the majority of Christians around the world today in affirming the following:

God ordained marriage is a life-long covenant between one man and one woman. Sexual activity is gift to be enjoyed solely within the context of marriage<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition* by S. D. Fortson III and R. G. Grams for a scholarly review of the subject

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 19:4-6, Mark 7:21-22, Acts 15:20, Romans 1:22-27, I Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, 1 Timothy 1:8-11

Sexual activity outside of marriage, homosexual activity, pornography, and other forms of sexually explicit media fall outside of the boundaries God placed on sexual behavior.

### **Modern Application**

Regarding the topic of homosexuality, Antioch has consistently upheld a stance of Clarity and Compassion: *Clarity* that the practice of homosexuality is sinful, and *Compassion* toward those who sin sexually, experience sexual confusion or deal with unwanted sexual desires.

Unfortunately, many people with a homosexual orientation have been treated horrifically by both the church and society at large. We believe any form of hatred, bullying, or abuse is sinful and call on Christians to show love and compassion toward each person, including active homosexuals and those questioning their gender identity.

At the same time, we provide clarity regarding a Christian view of human sexuality. We believe humankind flourishes when we live under the authority of God as revealed in Scripture and suffers when we reject His boundaries. We believe the Church is “the pillar and support of truth” and has a God-given obligation to uphold the teaching of Scripture, even in the face of societal pressure or cultural disagreements.

1. A common argument for those supporting homosexual behavior is that some people are “born this way,” and thus have no control over their sexuality. The extent to which this is true is disputable, but either way, it fits within the Christian teaching that *all* humankind is born with a sinful nature<sup>3</sup>. We believe all men and women have a sinful orientation. This is manifested differently in different people. This does not validate sin, but instead reveals the need for a Savior.

Furthermore, we believe a Christ-follower’s most fundamental identity is found in their adoption as a son or daughter of God, not in their sexuality<sup>4</sup>.

2. Temptation is not sin and is common to all humanity<sup>5</sup>. Jesus Himself was tempted by sin<sup>6</sup>. Temptation, including homosexual attraction, is not sin and should never be a place of condemnation. Due to the social stigma surrounding homosexuality, many Christians have hidden their tendency toward same sex attraction. We believe the church should be a safe place to share our temptation and support one another in our desire to live in freedom from all kinds of sinful behavior.
3. Jesus provides grace to overcome temptation<sup>7</sup>. Though we’re all tempted to sin, Scripture teaches us that God empowers us to overcome<sup>8</sup>. This does not mean that everyone with

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 3:23, 5:12

<sup>4</sup> Romans 8:12-17

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:13

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 4:15-16

<sup>7</sup> Romans 6:1-14, Titus 2:11-12

<sup>8</sup> Galatians 5:19-25

homosexual attraction is guaranteed to develop heterosexual feelings (though many will), nor is this the goal of faith, but it does mean we can all live in freedom from sin.

Freedom from sin is found first and foremost in the grace of God and is supported by Christian community<sup>9</sup>. We joyfully support believers in their journey to freedom and growth in Christ-like character.

4. Homosexual behavior is not a “worse” sin than others, but it is still sin. We recognize some manifestations of sin have received strong condemnation in Christian culture, such as homosexuality, while others have been rationalized or overlooked, such as greed or slander. We grieve over any place of hypocrisy in the church. We believe Jesus calls *all* believers to the life of a disciple<sup>10</sup>. This life involves sacrifice and surrender for *everyone*, including, but certainly not limited to, our sexuality.

*“Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.”* Matthew 10:38-39

*“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.’”* Matthew 16:24-25

5. The church should be a welcoming place for everyone, while also clearly teaching the Scripture<sup>11</sup>. We wholeheartedly believe the best way to love people is to introduce them to Jesus and then encourage them to live as a disciple.

As a result, we worry about attempts to normalize any lifestyle of sin<sup>12</sup>, including sexual activity outside of a marriage between one man and one woman. We also recognize everyone is on a messy journey of spiritual growth. We welcome *anyone* into our churches and pray they feel genuinely loved and accepted. We also call *everyone* to a life of surrender to Jesus and freedom from sin.

6. We believe God created men and women as His image-bearers on earth and, as such, both men and women are of equal worth and dignity<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, we believe gender is an integral part of our humanity and is determined by our biological sex at conception.

We recognize some people struggle to embrace their gender. We strive to show them love and compassion as they discover their God-given identity, first as a child of God and then in their God-given gender.

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<sup>9</sup> James 5:16

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 16:25, Luke 17:33

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 9:10-13

<sup>12</sup> 2 Timothy 4:3

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 1:27-28

We also recognize others have a physical disorder in their sex development. They are of equal worth before God and are not “lesser” Christians in any way.

### **Conclusion**

Our heart of compassion leads us to speak with clarity because we believe the clarity of Scripture guides us into the life of a disciple. At the same time, our clarity is never intended to condemn people and must always lead to compassionate support as the church community comes around those struggling to provide encouragement, comfort, mercy, and hope. Additionally, we must humbly recognize every single one of us is saved by grace alone.

In all of our teaching, we point people to Jesus—His love for us, the example of His life, His death to atone for our sin, and His resurrection which empowers us to a new way of living. He is our hope, and He is our passion.