

## **12 Pointers for talking about homosexuality to people who aren't Christians (and to people who are).**

### **1. Talk about it in the context of other questions.**

If you talk about this topic and no others, it will seem like an attack. Try to deal with it along with other objections to Christianity (e.g. in a series of talks).

### **2. Talk about it in the context of other questions.**

Sexuality is one of the most often raised objections people have to the Christian message. If you are talking about objections but fail to mention it or refuse to tackle it, it will be really obvious. And your silence will send the message that you either don't have an answer, or that your answer is so horrible that you'd rather not mention it.

### **3. Acknowledge (and apologise for) the failures of Christians.**

Gay people have been treated pretty badly by Christians, as a group and often individually too. It's important to acknowledge that, and to apologise for it. Don't expect one apology to wipe away everything that gay people have experienced from Christians, but it will at least communicate respect. We need to appreciate, and acknowledge, that there are lots of reasons for gay people to avoid Christians and to avoid listening to you - it may have taken a lot of courage for them to listen to what you have to say.

### **4. Listen (or show you've listened) to the stories of gay people.**

If you're having a conversation with a gay person, don't assume you know all about them; ask them about their life and their experiences and listen to their answers. It communicates that you value and care for the person you're talking to, and it establishes a relationship of trust.

It's harder to do this in a talk, but could you talk about friends or people you've spoken to (without betraying any confidences, otherwise people will be scared to talk to you for fear of becoming a talk illustration). If you can't, maybe you need to meet some gay people?

### **5. Remember gay people will have sinned in all sorts of ways (just like everyone else).**

It's tempting to focus just on sexuality, but remember that this is just part of a person's identity and experience, and it will be just one part of a person's sin. Our greatest problem is that we are alienated from the God who made us and loves us, and the consequences of this alienation show themselves in all sorts of ways. Don't focus on just one of them.

### **6. Remember you're talking to, and about, real people.**

It is easy to talk about sexuality as an abstract category or as a threat to the moral fabric of society. But remember you are talking *about* real people, and you may well be talking *to* real people - people made in the image of God who are loved by God but living separated from him. You have more in common with these fellow human beings than you might first imagine.

### **7. Remember to talk about Jesus!**

As you try to explain the Bible's view of sexuality and deal with the key passages that mention homosexuality, it's very easy to forget to talk about Jesus. But as you look at Jesus, you see the welcome God offers to all kinds of people, from all kinds of backgrounds. He is firm in dealing with sin, but he always does it in the context of a loving

and compassionate welcome. And Jesus gave up everything for us, so that we could be welcomed back into God's family. So we can trust that he has our good in mind when he calls us to give something up for him.

### **8. Don't just preach the six main passages.**

There are six key Bible passages that mention homosexuality (Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13; Romans 1; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:8-10), and all of them speak negatively of sex between two people of the same sex. For obvious reasons lots of arguments centre around these passages and it's important to be able to understand and explain them. But don't preach *only* these passages. Make sure you explain the bigger picture the Bible gives of human relationships and sexuality, and of how they symbolise the relationship God wants with his people in Christ. As you do that, the implications will become clearer, not just for gay people but for all of us.

When you do mention the key passages, make sure you put them into their context in God's plan for humanity. The story of Sodom is a description of human depravity but also highlights the justice of God, along with his mercy and patience. The levitical laws are part of God's gracious covenant to establish a relationship with wayward humanity. And when Paul mentions homosexuality he always does so as one small part of the picture of fallen humanity, a picture which encompasses all of us, and he always goes on to proclaim the grace and mercy God shows to all people in Christ. Gay people need to see this bigger picture. And so does everyone else.

### **9. Keep your applications as broad as you can.**

A biblical sexual ethic is demanding for all of us whether we are single or married, gay or straight. Whatever our situation it will confront and deny our sinful desires, whatever they might be, although the implications will work out differently for different people. As you talk about this, show that the Bible doesn't single out gay people, but that it challenges all of us, and not just in the area of sex and sexuality.

### **10. Be careful when you talk about the possibility of change.**

There's an obvious question about whether God could or would make a gay person 'straight,' and whether this is necessary if a gay person is going to live as a Christian. Be VERY careful how you answer these questions.

We believe in a God who is powerful, and who works personally in the lives of his people. We have to acknowledge that if God wanted to change a person's sexuality, he could. But nowhere in the Bible are we told to expect that he will. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Paul mentions 'men who have sex with men' amongst a list of other sinful behaviour. Then he says, *'and this is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.'* The Corinthian Christians Paul has in mind have been changed by their encounter with Jesus, but his focus is on their new status having been justified and sanctified by Jesus. They have changed from people who would not have inherited the kingdom of God, to people who will as part of God's family, and their behaviour now reflects that. But he doesn't elaborate on whether or not their sexual preferences changed.

The truth is that all of us should expect to change when we give our lives to Jesus and as God works in us by his Spirit. But the change we expect is much deeper and more wide-

ranging than a change in our sexual preferences. We should expect to be made more like the Lord Jesus. And this is a change we can promise to everyone who comes to Jesus.

### **11. Recognise the cost of what you're saying.**

When a person trusts Jesus it will have huge implications for their lives, but it's important that you realise what these implications might be for a gay person who trusts Jesus. Going without sex will be a significant part of it, but only one part. It might mean them breaking off a committed relationship, it might have legal implications if they are married, and it might include children. They might lose friends and their place in a community. It could mean them remaining single for the rest of their life and facing life without the security and support of a family, and they might never have children.

The new life offered to us by Jesus and the future hope he gives us make these costs worth it, but never treat them lightly or flippantly. And you might need to face up to the responsibility of the church to be the family and community that a gay person will need if they are going to live their life for Christ.

### **12. Watch your language.**

Gay people will be hypersensitive to the words you use. Don't use "homosexual" as a noun (or as an adjective if you can help it) - it treats a person's sexuality as their whole identity, and it's an outdated medical term anyway. It's much better to use terms like "gay" and "LGBT," words that gay people would use to describe themselves. There might be different ways these terms can be understood, but it's better to use the words non-Christians would use and then have a conversation about what we mean by them, rather than dictating the terms of the conversation. And if you aren't sure, then ask.

Be careful how you talk about gay people, not just in public, but in private too. If we're going to talk about anything with integrity, what we say in private should match what we say publicly. And what we say in private is likely to represent what we really think. Also, you may well be talking to gay people who haven't told you (or anyone) about their sexuality. If you are, then what you say about gay people will send a clear signal about whether you are a safe person to talk to or not.