

Homosexuality and Pastoral Ministry

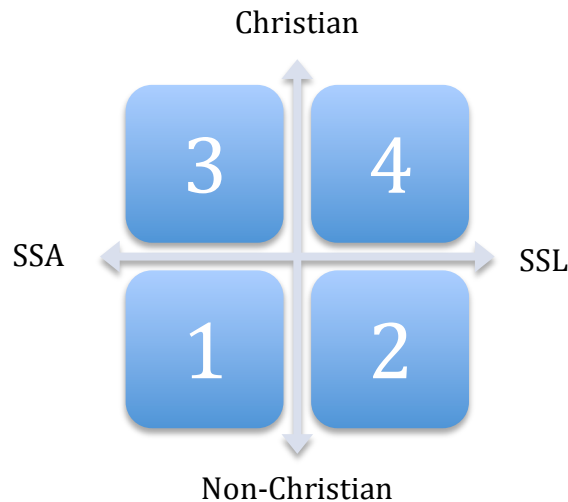
Introduction:

Homosexuality is no longer a “marginal” issue in our culture.

“There is no longer an ‘opt-out’ option. The conflict over homosexuality and marriage is here to stay. It’s only going to pick up steam. Barring a miracle from God, the clock will not be turned back. Most every Christian in every place in America is going to face a *direct, confrontational* challenge on this issue. You can’t escape this.”¹

“The relationship of homosexuality to Christianity is without doubt one of the main subjects of cultural conversation today. If you are a Christian in New York City [or California!], it is nearly impossible to talk about your faith without this being raised. Although it is not central to the gospel message at the heart of Christianity, right now the cultural moment requires that we be prepared to address this issue whenever we are publicly identified as Christians.”²

Framing the Issue



Q1 = SSA and Non-Christian (“I don’t love Jesus and struggle with SSA”)

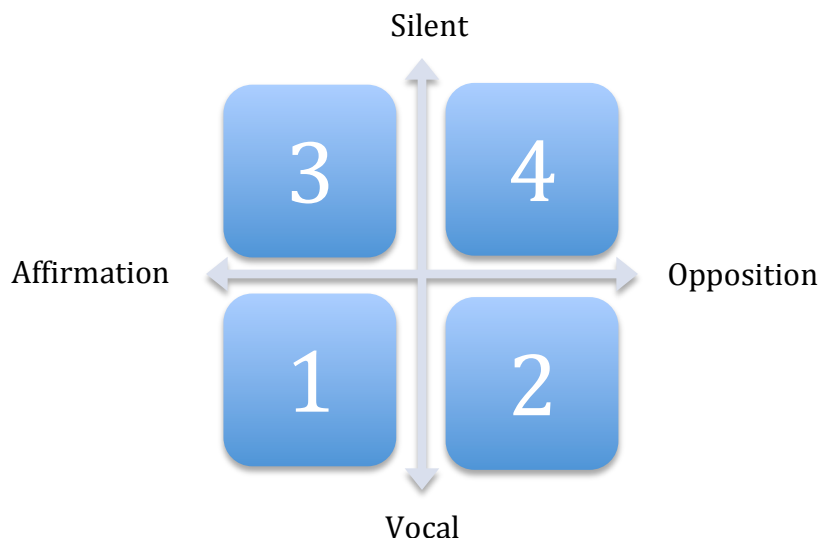
Q2 = SSL and Non-Christian (“I don’t love Jesus and I’m gay”)

Q3 = SSA and Christian (“I love Jesus and struggle with SSA”)

Q4 = SSL and Christian (“I love Jesus and I’m gay”)

¹ Owen Strachan, “Buckle Up/The ‘Culture Wars’ Are Only Heating Up”, <http://owenstrachan.com/2012/07/19/buckle-up-the-culture-wars-are-only-heating-up/>

² Tim Keller, “Christianity and Homosexuality: A Review of Books”, http://www.redeemer.com/news_and_events/newsletter/?aid=484



Q1 = Affirm SSL and vocal (“Homosexuality is compatible with Christianity or the Bible and we teach that”)³

Q2 = Oppose SSL and vocal (“Homosexuality is *incompatible* with Christianity and the Bible and we teach that”)

Q3 = Affirm SSL and silent (“Homosexuality is compatible with Christianity but we choose not to enter the debate”)

Q4 = Oppose SSL and silent (“Homosexuality is *incompatible* with Christianity but we choose not to enter the debate”)

Why are an increasing number of evangelical pastors in Q4?

Possibility #1 – We don’t know what to say and aren’t sure where we stand.

Possibility #2 – We aren’t aware of this issue in our context.

Possibility #3 – We assume it’s not an issue in our churches.

Possibility #4 – We’re intimidated by the increasing momentum of Q1.

Possibility #5 – We view homosexuals as “abnormal”: they are not like us.⁴

Possibility #6 – We believe homosexuals have “turned aside”: their sin is unnatural.

Possibility #7 – We believe homosexuals are defined by their identity.

Possibility #8 – We don’t believe homosexuals can change

History of Salvation ⁵	Creation	Fall	Redemption	Restoration
Misunderstandings of homosexuality	they are not like us	their sin is not like ours	they are defined by their sin	they don’t agree
The Gospel Truth	we’re all created in God’s image	we’ve all turned aside	we get a new identity in Jesus	we hope in future grace

³ Note the recent debate about Heather Ackley, professor of theology at APU and this article in the Christian Post: <http://m.christianpost.com/news/50-hand-picked-christians-trained-to-convince-churches-to-re-interpret-scriptures-gay-boundaries-105342/>

⁴ Adapted from *Love Into Light: The Gospel, The Homosexual and the Church*, Peter Hubbard, 2013

⁵ Ibid.

Why should we enter the conversation?

1. Because this is a golden opportunity to let “the foolishness of God” prove itself “wiser than men” and to demonstrate that the “gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”.
2. Because the opportunity is ripe for a winsome, Biblically-faithful, Gospel-centered, God-honoring answers to questions the culture is asking.
3. Because the “spiral of silence” is a real danger.
4. Because religious liberty is at stake (think weddings, adoption, tax-exempt status).
5. Because false teaching needs to be refuted (1 Tim 5.20; 2 Tim 4.2; Titus 1.9).
6. Because we are accountable to God to warn people about the wages of sin (Ezekiel 3.17-19)
7. Because it will come with the blessing of God!

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake
Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matt 5.10-12)*

Some Practical Considerations:

1. Consider adding a statement on “Human Sexuality and Marriage” to your official Statement of Faith.
2. Revise wedding and facility policies to exclude homosexual ceremonies and pastoral participation.

Some Pastoral Considerations:

1. Assume that gay people are in your congregation and make your church a safe place for them to talk about their struggles. Let them know we are for them and not against them.
2. Be humble and honest about your own struggles with sin and the power of the gospel to help you fight that struggle. Make it easy to talk about. “Churches should feel more like the waiting room for a doctor and less like a waiting room for a job interview” – Tim Keller
3. One sermon won’t do it. We probably need to make regular application to homosexuality (among other sins) and how the gospel speaks to sexual brokenness.
4. Honor singleness. Some people will struggle with SSA all their lives and therefore not marry. Is that okay?
5. Honor marriage. Do you hold up beautiful examples of Biblically faithful marriages?
6. Provide pastoral care and resources. Sam Allberry says, “Pastoral care for those with SSA does not need to be structured, but *it does need to be visible.*” People struggling with SSA need to know the church is ready to support and help them.
7. Don’t define people by this issue – be a friend, listen, try to understand them. But don’t let your relationship be one dimensional.

8. Invite homosexuals to the table on the same terms as every other sinner: repentance and faith in Jesus alone.
9. Remember that the gospel demands everything from all of us – gay, straight, self-righteous and pagan. We must change in response to the gospel. God will not bless (indeed he forbids!) homosexual sin. God has a right to tell us who we are and what we can and cannot do with our bodies.
10. See this as an opportunity rather than a threat. Could God use one of the most controversial moral issues in our nation to awaken His church rather than damage it?

Some questions to provoke discussion:

A young man starts attending your church and wants to be baptized. When you interview him for baptism he explains that he believes that Jesus Christ died for his sins and that apart from Christ's atoning work being applied to his life, he would be eternally lost. He also tells you he's gay. Do you baptize him?

A couple starts attending your church. They profess faith in Jesus Christ and demonstrate a desire to follow him. They also want to get married. When you start marriage counseling you find that they the man used to be a woman and has undergone a sex change. What do you do?

A gay couple comes and ask you to marry them and/or that they want to be married in your church? What do you say? What are your policies? On what do you base your decision?

Same couple as the previous question. This time one of them wants to get a divorce. What do you tell them?

Following the Supreme Courts striking down of DOMA, the State of California decides that you cannot discriminate in hiring or services offered on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. If you do, you will lose your tax-exempt status. You discriminate against applicants who are practicing homosexuals and those wanting you to perform or host weddings. What do you do?

You've taken a public stand on homosexuality in your church and revised your statement of faith to include a provision about "Human Sexuality and Marriage". Your church becomes known as the "anti-gay" church in the community and people in your church start feeling pressure from their friends and co-workers who know they go to "that" church. How do you respond?

A girl in your church has been taught that being a lesbian and a Christian are compatible. She even uses the Bible to support her view and claims that she believes the Bible is inerrant and infallible. She is upset that you don't share her views and claims, "That's just your interpretation." How do you respond?

Can't reasonable Christians differ on this issue?