



Same-sex attraction

In the current cultural climate we want to be clear how GCC views sexuality, and how it relates to same-sex attraction. Although a dry statement in print may fail to communicate the subtleties, grace and love that are our overriding ethos, that said it's important simply to open up the discussion, so here goes.

This leaflet is part of an ongoing conversation around this topic. There is neither unanimity of opinion among the leaders of GCC, nor among the body of the church, and this leaflet represents our best conclusion and consensus at this point, given our understanding of biblical teaching. It should not be regarded as a final, authoritative or complete statement of where this church stands on these issues, but a point from which we are starting.

We're all in the same boat

The Bible teaches us that each person is uniquely and wonderfully made by God, valuable in His eyes and loved by Him. Yet each is also distorted by the sin that entered the world because of mankind's disobedience.

This means that all of us are separated from God, and the only true hope for each of us - whatever our sexuality - is in Jesus Christ. Jesus came preaching that God's kingdom was at hand but that we must be 'born again' to enter it. How? By accepting His offer of reconciliation and changing our natural thinking to be in line with God's ways (repenting). He then promises us life in abundance.

We cannot expect to change unless we are first born again, hence our strap-line: belong, believe, be changed—the order is crucial. God welcomes everyone, so we welcome everyone, and if later you come to put your trust in Him, He will work to transform you to be all He intends you to be.

Identity

Here's the thing: if your primary identity is in your sexuality, nationality, career, family, status, wealth or something else, you're going to have problems because ultimately those things can't live up to the weight (glory) you are giving them. When Jesus is our primary identity, and we seek to conform our lives to Him, all other relationships and concerns fall into their proper place (and are enhanced) because He is worthy of that glory.

Any person, activity, interest or possession that is more important to us than God is an idol, and however 'good' or 'right' it might feel, it will do us harm sooner or later if it's not put in its right place or removed. More importantly it will separate us from God (this is the meaning of the word 'sin').

Individuals' needs are important but we are also part of a community and the guidelines God has given us ensure the flourishing not just of individuals but of the community as a whole. When we put our individual desires first it can sometimes harm the community. So, for the good of the community we choose to put aside our individual wishes: but we do it gladly and in turn benefit from the community.

Cost and reward

God's offer of reconciliation and abundant life through Jesus is a free gift, but in response we commit the rest of our lives to Him. The Christian life is one of daily sacrifice - no longer in a temple, but done by serving God and others and changing to live the way He tells us is best. We should not be surprised when this grates against our natural inclinations.

No matter what desires or pre-dispositions we were born with, or situation we find ourselves in, whether as a result of nature, nurture or our own choices, Christians aim to conform everything to God's will. We each have a unique set of issues to deal with and He helps us with each one in turn as a perfect, loving father would do.

Christians are people who have found in God the real love of their lives and realise He knows us better than we know ourselves, so we gladly submit all other loves or desires to Him. God first loved us by sending Jesus to die in our place. We would not live in this way for anyone or anything else but we realise that He loves us beyond measure and uniquely knows the best way for us to live.

What He asks is often counter-intuitive and counter-cultural. Among other things we're told that those who mourn are blessed, that the meek shall inherit the earth, to love our enemies, that whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever gives up their life for Jesus will find it. Likewise, the Bible's teaching on sexuality goes against many of our natural desires (whatever our orientation), showing how God intended it to be enjoyed.

Same-sex attraction

So, to the specifics, which are to be read in the context of this whole booklet...

Sexual attraction and sexual relations, irrespective of the genders involved, is just one aspect of our lives (although an important one), where God wants us to conform to His standards and His best desire for us (which ultimately will be the most rewarding for us).

The Bible consistently teaches that the union of, and the long-term committed relationship between, a man and a woman (i.e. 'marriage') is the normal basis of family life and indeed this was affirmed in the teaching of Jesus. Many of the practices of marriage, and of the roles of men and women in marriage, changed throughout the time when the Bible was written; our modern concepts of marriage have changed further since Jesus' day.

However, although marriage is clearly part of God's plan for humankind, it is equally clear from biblical teaching that marriage is not for everyone, and indeed Jesus taught that in the life to come there would be no marriage at all! The Bible is clear that deep committed relationships between individuals, outside of marriage and outside of sexual relations, are also an important part of our God-given humanity. Difficulties arise once we start to look at sexual attraction and sexual relations outside of traditional marriage (i.e. marriage between a man and a woman).

Christians on all sides of the debate agree that promiscuity is unacceptable for Christians regardless of orientation. The issue we're addressing relates to committed, life-long, monogamous, sexual relationships with a partner of the same sex (or gay marriage).

When it comes to homosexual practices, despite that fact that they have been common throughout history we recognise that the Bible says relatively little about them. Nevertheless, the few passages in the Bible that do address the practice of homosexual acts appear to condemn them.

The Gay Christian Network recognises that some of its members believe same-sex attracted Christians should be celibate, some are not sure, and others believe same-sex marriage can be blessed by God. Some Christian brothers and sisters believe that passages in the Bible that have traditionally been interpreted as condemning homosexual acts should be understood differently, in the light of the original texts and of the culture and practices at the time - their interpretation and application is not without controversy.

Notwithstanding these challenges, and acknowledging that we are called to be both an inclusive community and one that points people towards the truth, here is where we stand at present, based on a consensus view:

- If you are same-sex attracted: we love you because God loves you and is concerned for all human beings, whatever their sexuality. All attitudes and actions which victimise or diminish people whose affections are directed towards people of the same sex are unwelcome at GCC. We are encouraged that many Christians now recognise and deeply regret the hurt caused by past and present failures in their responses to those who experience same-sex attraction.
- We affirm that biblical marriage is a life-long covenant between a man and a woman, an earthly institute created by God (and affirmed by Jesus) which includes and ap-

proves of appropriate sexual relations between the individuals. Despite the challenges in interpreting Scripture, we understand it to teach that all forms of sex outside marriage for all people are outside His will. We do not accept that holding these theological and ethical views on biblical grounds is in itself homophobic, particularly as they are held by many same-sex attracted Christians.

- We recognise that other long-term committed friendships occur that are God-given, may be life-long and involve various genders. Yet we are concerned that the practice of homosexual acts, even within life-long committed relationships, is outside of God's will revealed in the Bible.
- As each person is unique, so is each situation. None of us at GCC is yet perfect, and God lovingly deals with our shortfalls in the order and manner of His choice as only He can. As such, we aim to be a community of grace in which those who experience same-sex attraction and seek to live faithfully in accordance with biblical teaching are welcomed and affirmed. We want to provide a safe place where such Christians can share and explore their stories with fellow believers for mutual encouragement and support as we all help each other grow together into maturity in Christ.
- We commend and encourage all those who experience same-sex attraction and have committed themselves to chastity by refraining from homosexual practices. Their same-sex attraction would not bar them from being involved in leadership within GCC and we recognise that they can bring invaluable insights and experience to the sphere of Christian pastoral ministry.
- We welcome and support the work of those individuals and organisations who responsibly seek to help Christians who experience same-sex attraction to live in accordance with biblical teaching. Some same-sex attracted people may seek and experience changes in the strength or direction of their feelings but we recognise that for most people this may not be the case.
- We welcome sexually active lesbians and gay men (including those committed to same-sex marriage) to our public gatherings. However, we do so in the expectation that they (like all of us) remain open to any promptings of the Holy Spirit toward lifestyle changes. We offer acceptance, grace, gentleness, patience and ongoing pastoral care.

"All human beings some of the time, and some human beings most of the time, have deep heartfelt longings for kinds of sexual intimacy or gratification (multiple partners, pornography, whatever) which do not reflect the creator's best intentions for his human creatures, intentions through which new wisdom and flourishing will come to birth. Sexual restraint is mandatory for all, difficult for most, extremely challenging for some. God is gracious and merciful but this never means that his creational standards don't really matter after all."

Singleness

It's important to emphasise that we hold to the biblical teaching that it's best that all unmarried Christians should refrain from sex. You can be single for many reasons: age, choice, same-sex attraction, circumstance, death of your spouse, divorce, and so on. A fulfilled life comes not from being married and sexually active, but from living in the practical knowledge of God's love in Christ as saviour.

Indeed the Bible raises singleness to the same value as marriage and positively affirms that in many ways single Christians are more able to focus on God, His kingdom and His calling on their lives. Living life as a single person has many advantages; it can also be difficult at times, regardless of the reason.

What we all need is intimacy, but in our culture that word has become synonymous with sex. True intimacy involves trust, familiarity, understanding, fellowship, affection, experience, communion, confidentiality, relationship and so on: that's what we really need.

Family

You see, we were never meant to live in isolation: the modern secular narrative that we can live life our way, and we should put our individual ambition and desires first, is contributing to a broken society with loneliness, identity confusion, addictions, relation-

ship breakdown and mental health issues.

Likewise, it is not possible to live the Christian life alone—God made us to be interdependent—we need to help each other and that is why we gather together in large and small groups to work out the implications of our faith in day-to-day life.

It is an equally modern error to think that we can live just as couples (or even immediate family units) without being part of a larger community.

One of the great pictures of the church is that of a huge family of the children of God. At GCC we are working out what it means to really live as a family in our contemporary society and how to ensure that every person can be a part of that and enjoy the benefits and intimacy that results.

We aim to provide a genuine experience of being in that wider family— sharing our lives so single people can benefit from being part of a large family and those with their own families can enjoy the benefits single people can bring.

It's not easy, so please treat us with grace as we learn: why not join us in working it out?

Other sexuality/gender issues

Much of what we've said applies to any other sexuality issues. When it comes to issues of gender, biology, identity, attraction and expression, we treat each person with the dignity and care they need for their specific situation. Although general principles for the good of the Christian community apply, we do not have a one-size-fits-all approach to pastoral care of an individual.

"God gives us the sacred gift of the prerogative of choice but God does not give us the privilege of determining a different outcome to what the choice will entail."

What can you expect of GCC if you are ...

... a practising homosexual, not a Christian, and interested in Jesus and what he says?

You will be welcomed like anyone else and we'll tell you about Jesus.

... a Christian who is same-sex attracted and seek to make God number one in your life?

You will be welcomed like anyone else and we'll walk alongside you to help you work out your salvation and deal with the challenges you face.

... struggling with any other issues of sexuality?

You will be welcomed like anyone else and we'll walk alongside you to help you to deal with the challenges you face.

... not interested in Jesus?

This man turned the world upside down. Billions of people have followed Him and been willing to give up their own desires and plans for him; millions have even died for him. Questions of sexuality are important but there's a bigger issue here. So at least come and take a look at what he had to say: it may not be what you think.

Resources and further reading

This leaflet cannot fully explain why we've come to these conclusions, and you may have many questions, whether or not you are same-sex attracted. We have found the information and resources on the Living Out website (www.livingout.org) to be helpful to our deliberations. Especially as it is run by people who are committed Christians that are attracted to people of the same sex.



Living Out

GCC is also a member of the Evangelical Alliance (www.eauk.org) and while in agreement with its statement on homosexuality, we felt we wanted to express a fuller picture than is contained therein.

evangelical alliance
together making Jesus known



Connect

If you'd like to discuss any of this with us please get in touch with one of the leaders who will point you to someone who can help.

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