

Isn't the Christian View of Sexuality Dangerous and Harmful?

MARCH 16, 2015 | **Sam Allberry**

CHRISTIAN LIVING

One of the most common and significant charges leveled against the traditional Christian understanding of sexuality and marriage is that it is damaging. Denying someone's sexuality is seen as denying who that person really is. It's telling people to repress something central to their identity and ability to flourish. This is harmful to anyone, but especially to teenagers coming to terms with their sexuality while still at a young age. Christians, it is claimed, are to blame for gay teenagers killing themselves.

This accusation has been made perhaps most forcefully by Dan Savage:

The dehumanizing bigotry set forth from the lips of faithful Christians give your straight children a license to verbally abuse, humiliate, and condemn the gay children they encounter at school. They fill your gay children with suicidal despair. And you have the nerve to ask *me* to be more careful with my words.¹

Many Christians are beginning to conclude the traditional understanding must be wrong if it's having this sort of effect on people. Surely, they reason, this kind of self-loathing and despair cannot be the fruit of God's truth.

Unspeakably Tragic

The first thing to say in response is that there have certainly been instances of young persons feeling driven to despair and even suicide in recent years—and attributing much of it to real or perceived pressure from Christian disapproval of homosexuality. This is a real situation. Many young persons are hurting profoundly on this issue. Who can deny how unspeakably tragic it is for anyone to feel such despair over sexuality?

Of all people, we Christians should feel the most grief at this problem, since we know the supreme value God places on all human life. We should care more than anyone when we hear of young persons in such torment.

Valient Contradiction, Gentle Restoration

We must also recognize that some have been abusive in their behavior and language toward gay people, thinking that in doing so they were somehow valiently advancing the cause of Christ. Though such behavior might come from self-professed Christians, it is itself not Christian in any way. It comes not by adhering to the message and example of Jesus, but by contradicting it.

In other words, it isn't true to say such torment is the inevitable result of traditional biblical teaching on sexuality. Yes, the convicting work of the Spirit can be painful. There is even a kind of self-loathing that can result when God makes us aware of the extent of our own sin (see [Ezek. 36:31](#)). But though the genuine work of God might take us to such a place, it never leaves us there. If we are convicted, it is so that we can be restored. The Spirit breaks us only to put us back together as our Maker intended. And a bruised reed Jesus will not break ([Matt. 12:20](#)).

Forgiven and Freed

You won't find Jesus teaching that your life isn't worth living if you can't be fulfilled sexually—that a life without sex is no life at all. You won't see biblical Christianity insist that our sexual proclivities are so foundational to who we are—and that to fail to affirm such proclivities is to attack people at their core. All this comes not from biblical Christianity but from Western culture's highly distorted view of what it means to be a human. When an idol fails you, the real culprit turns out to be the person who urged you worship it, not the person who tried to take it away.

The teaching of Jesus does two things: restricts sex *and* relativizes its importance. He shows us that sex in its God-given context is far greater than we might have realized—and yet even there it's not ultimate. It's not fundamental to wholeness and human flourishing. Jesus demonstrates this point in both his teaching and his lifestyle. After all, the most fully human person ever was celibate all his life.

The gospel shows us that there is forgiveness for all who have sinned sexually, and it liberates us from the mindset that sex is intrinsic to human fulfillment. That no one need to cast all his happiness on his sexual fortunes is not bad news, but good news. It's not the path to harm, but to wholeness.

¹ Quoted in Justin Lee, *Torn: Rescuing The Gospel From The Gays-vs.-Christians Debate* (<https://www.amazon.com/Torn-Rescuing-Gospel-Gays-vs--Christians-Debate/dp/1455514306/?tag=thegospcoal-20>) (Jericho 2013), 5. [review (<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/torn>)]

Sam Allberry is an editor for The Gospel Coalition, a global speaker for Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, and a pastor based in Maidenhead, UK. He is the author of a number of books, including *Is God Anti-Gay?* (Good Book, 2013), *James For You*, and most recently *Why Bother with Church*. He is a founding editor of Living Out, a ministry for those struggling with same-sex attraction. You can follow him on Twitter.

TAGS

HOMOSEXUALITY • SEXUALITY • TEMPTATION
