

Can we love 'all love is love'? \* Q's from the pews  
August 21, 2022 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

Getting ready for this morning, I came across an article online entitled '8 LGBTQ activists share what love is love means to them.'<sup>i</sup> (You can find anything on the internet! ☺) Here's what one of them - Angelique Kenney – had to say:

"'Love is love' means to me that we all should be able to love how we want, and there's nothing wrong with any kind of love. Love is going to save our planet."

On the face of it, that's a really nice sentiment isn't it? Love IS a powerful force for good. There is a sense in which love WILL save our planet. And she's certainly hit on some of the most important values of our time – 'we should all be able to love how we want' – that's autonomy, the ability to make your own decisions without interference from others – and 'there's nothing wrong with any kind of love' – that's tolerance – the idea that everything is acceptable and we should all just embrace everything that everyone else embraces. 'Love is love' certainly fits into the cultural ethos of our time.

And that's why I think the world around us has so readily embraced the idea. As a culture, we love the idea of doing our own thing and making our own decisions and loving whoever we want and feeling good about whomever whoever else wants to fall in love with. And that, I think, is why 'all love is love' has so easily become a part of our shared cultural subconscious.

This raises an interesting question for us though as followers of Jesus. And it's the question that we have to consider this morning – can we love 'all love is love'?

Can we affirm the idea that all expressions of romantic love are equally valid in our Creator's eyes?

That's the question that we are going to work with here this morning and I'm going to break my answer down into two more questions.

First - ARE all expressions of romantic love equally valid in our Creator's eyes? (If 'love is love' is consistent with God's vision of love for human flourishing then great, we just embrace it and go with the flow).

Second - If not, how do we live and love faithfully in a culture that says 'all love is love'? Do we 'go with the flow'? Or go the opposite direction and hold protest signs at Pride parades? How do we live as children of the God who is love in a culture that says that 'all love is love'?

Those are really important questions to address and I'll unpack them one at a time as we go.

To begin though, I think that we need to define our terms. 'All love is love' is a lovely motto but it is incredibly vague and far ranging. Some people will use it simply to shut down an argument – well 'all love is love' – but when you really start to dig into it, you find some really uncomfortable possibilities.

Like, when Angelique Kenney says "we all should be able to love how we want," do they mean that romantic love between a child and an adult is legitimately love? What about four adults who've chosen a polyamorous relationship? Is that love? How about a man who has fallen head over heels in love for a woman who loves him head over heels too, despite the fact that he has a wife and kids at home? Is that

love? 'All love is love' seems like a lovely and self-evident idea until you press into it and find some really problematic possibilities.

For our purposes though, we're going to focus on what I \*think\* most people mean by 'all love is love.' I think that when most people say 'all love is love,' what they're really saying is that all forms of consensual, committed love are equally valid expressions of romantic love. By and large, that's the idea it conveys, right? Two men can love each other; two women can love each other; a man and a woman can love each other and as long as they are doing that in a committed, consensual relationship, they are equally valid expressions of love.

Now, I will grant you that on a purely human level, there is no decisive reason why any two adults, regardless of their gender, should not love each other. If love is the highest good and if you find that love with a person of the same sex, then sure, why not love each other? That's the way of the world.

But if love is NOT the highest good, but in fact the God who IS love is the highest good, then we need to think carefully about how the God of love defines love.

So let's ask the question – are all forms of consensual, committed love valid expressions of love in God's eyes?

Well, let's see. The Bible talks about homosexual practice in a handful of places – Leviticus 20:13 is one of the first ones – and there in Leviticus 20:13 it says:

13 " 'If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable.' (Lev 20:13 NIV).

That would seem to say to me that homosexual sexual activity is not a valid expression of love in God's eyes.

'But wait,' someone might say, 'weren't there all sorts of exploitative sexual relationships in OT times that Leviticus is talking about here? Like cultic prostitution where you'd go to a pagan temple and have homosexual sex to 'please the gods'? Or the practice of raping defeated enemies to humiliate them after you beat them?' THAT'S what Leviticus is condemning – the exploitative practices. And that's not what loving, committed homosexual couples want to do. This talks about the act, not the relationship, and so it has no real bearing on the question of whether consensual, committed love is valid in God's eyes. Same sex attracted people just want to have loving, fulfilling, monogamous relationships so Leviticus doesn't apply here.

That's a legitimate argument to be made and many affirming Christian authors will make that argument; the problem though is that text just doesn't say that. Leviticus 20:13 is as broad and as general as it gets – it's not: 'if a warrior rapes another man' or 'if a guy goes to mess around with a cultic prostitute' – and there ARE words that Moses could have used to say that - they've done something wrong;' it's 'if a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, they've BOTH done something detestable.' The problem with saying that this is just about the act and not the relationship is that we can assume that the act WILL take place within that relationship. If the act itself is condemned, then it's not a stretch to say then that the relationship around it is also problematic (from God's point of view).

And by the way, just so that you don't think I'm unfairly picking on homosexuality here, please notice the rest of Leviticus 20. Historically, Christians have often seen homosexuality as an especially awful sin, but really, it's just one form of sexual sin among many, and many of those are *heterosexual* sexual sins. Like, look at verse 10 – adultery – not a valid expression of love; v. 11, sleeping with your mother – not a valid expression of love. V. 12, v. 19, sleeping with a daughter or daughter-in-law – not valid expressions of love, even if they take place in a committed, consensual relationship. We can't single out homosexuality as the only sexual sin; it's clearly not. All love is not love in God's eyes; homosexuality is only a subset of sexual sins in God's eyes.

'But wait,' someone might say. 'You've made the case from the OT but the OT law doesn't apply any more, right? Like, we can eat shellfish now and wear clothing of mixed fabrics because we live in a new era. So Leviticus doesn't apply to the question of 'all love is love.'

In a sense that's true; a lot of the Law was set aside when Jesus came, but when the NT affirms what the OT said, then there's reason to believe that it's still in effect. So Paul, in the NT, never quoted Leviticus to say you can't eat shellfish, but he DID in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 refer back to Leviticus to say that homosexual practice remains outside of God's will. In fact, the 'homosexual offenders' or 'men who practice homosexuality' in 1 Corinthians 6:9 is a compound word made up of two words in Leviticus 20:13. Leviticus 20:13 says you shouldn't 'lie' with another 'man;' 1 Corinthians 6:9 Paul crams them together to make a new word, saying that 'men-who-lie-with-men' are sinners. So sadly, we can't just write this off, saying that it doesn't apply to us anymore. It does.

'Well, hold on,' someone might say. 'What gives God the right to say what's right and wrong anyway?' We live in a day and age when autonomy and tolerance are at the top of our value list and we think that we should be able to do whatever we want. Why should God have any say in who I love? I think the answer for that comes in Romans 1:25. There Paul writes:

25 They [people] exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen.

Let me make two observations –

First – Paul points out to us that we have a Creator and that that Creator is God. We live in a world that was made by the God who loves us and set the world up in such a way that we will be able to thrive when we live within His parameters. By virtue of the fact that He created us, God, who IS love, has the right and frankly the wisdom to establish what is good and helpful and what is not.

Second – Paul points out that when we stop listening to God and do our own thing instead – 'worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator' – things go awry. The decision to ignore God's will and love whomever you want is a case of worshiping and serving created things – namely, your own intellect – instead of God – and we see what happens in verse 26.

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. (Perversion is not a good translation – they chose that word when

homosexuality was not culturally acceptable and so weighed it down with a moral judgment instead of translating it more accurately, as in the KJV's 'error.'

But the point is this; when people begin to define what's right and wrong for themselves (a la 'all love is love'), they are resisting their Creator's good intentions. Men with men, women with women – these fall outside of what God has created and established as 'good.'

So is it true that 'all love is love'? That all expressions of committed, consensual love are equally valid in God's estimation? No. Not all love is love in God's eyes.

Now if that's true, that among other heterosexual relationships, homosexual relationships are not valid expressions of love in God's eyes, then what is? If not all love is love in God's eyes, what is love?

I think we see that best in Genesis 2. Genesis 2:15, God creates Adam and then says (v. 18) 'It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper (or partner) suitable for him.' And he looks among the animals but none of them fit the bill and so God creates another human being. The implication then is that romantic love requires a degree of similarity. (Human/animal – doesn't work; human/human – does work). But notice, when He creates another human being, He creates one that is similar but different. Eve complements Adam and it is their complementarity that enables them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the world.

I want you to notice too verse 24 - 24 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen 2:24 NIV). When Jesus wanted to lay down the parameters for legitimate marriage, He pointed to this verse (Matthew 19:4-6) implying that this is the blueprint for romantic love in God's eyes. A man and a woman, to the exclusion of all others. That means then that homosexual relationships fall outside of God's good vision for love – but not only that – polyamorous relationships fall outside of God's vision for love – adulterous relationships fall outside of God's vision for love – heterosexual relationships where one spouse mistreats another – that's outside of God's vision for love. God's intention for love is – one man, one woman, similar but different but equal tied together in a committed, consensual love.

So, to answer our question, can we as believers love 'all love is love'? No, I don't think we can. 'All love' is *not* equally love in God's eyes and so I don't think that we can affirm the idea that it is. They might say 'all love is love;' but I would say 'TRUE love is defined by God – a man and a woman, committed to one another to the exclusion of others.' That is what God's authoritative Word leads me to believe.

But here's the next question – how do we live in a world that embraces the notion that 'all love is love' when we cannot affirm it ourselves? It would be really easy to just go with the flow and say 'hey why not, love whoever you want' but that would be going against what our loving Creator says is good and right. I think that we need to find a way to honour and love same sex attracted people, without affirming their sin, the same we that we would honour and love someone struggling with drug addiction, greed or pride. We can never forget here that we are talking about real life people, about something that is near and dear and absolutely central to their identity, and so whatever we do, we need to do it with kindness and with grace. TRUTH and grace, yes, but heavy on the grace.

So let's consider three case studies here to think about how to live and love with truth and grace an 'all love is love' world.

First, let's say your neighbour asks you to put up a pride flag on your front lawn. Or let's say your boss insists that you have to put a pride flag on your door or a pin on your uniform. What do you do? You know from God's point of view that all love is not legitimately love and He is your highest authority, but you've still got to live with these people day by day. What do you do?

To answer that, I'm going to defer to this book – *Compassion without compromise* – because I think they give a level headed response. In this book, they say 'resist the urge to give in...'

"Because you do not support that flag. Since homosexuality is not God's plan for human flourishing, you know that flag represents a declaration of independence from God's will... [What's more] resist any effort to be drawn into a dead-end debate. Simply maintain that you would "rather not" post the flag. If asked, "Why?" reply that you "don't align with that particular cause." [GG: if you were really cheeky, you could suggest that maybe they should put a cross on their door and see how they feel about that ;)] When asked "Why?" humbly reply, "I value our friendship, respect your right to maintain your opinions, and ask that you show me the same respect." Humble resistance is the key."<sup>ii</sup>

That seems reasonable to me. And just an aside – this is where working hard and honest as a Christian is important. If you've already made an effort to be a hard worker and reliable in every other case, my experience at least has been that people are willing to honour your convictions, just as you honour theirs.

Second, what do you do when you get invited to a same-sex wedding? They're living out their conviction that same-sex love is truly love and they're marking it by getting married; what do you do?

Again, I think *Compassion without Compromise* is helpful:

As heartrending as we find it to give this answer, we advise believers not to attend a gay "wedding." ...

Weddings are a worshipful celebration of the God who made marriage. ...

When we attend weddings, we are joining with the assembled congregation and the host of heaven to say "Yes!" We are not only agreeing with the decision of two people to enter into a holy bond. We are agreeing with marriage as a God-ordained institution. We are agreeing with the God who designed the marriage bond. We are actually glorifying the God who seals two souls together.

But none of these things happen when two men or two women determine to call their relationship "marriage... The "wedding" that takes place is a celebration of something that deeply offends our God. In a very real way, it is a worship service for a god of our own invention. How can we join such a God-dishonoring event?<sup>iii</sup> (For another perspective, see endnotes<sup>iv</sup>).

Now that being said, your friend or family member may think that you are rejecting them outright by not attending their wedding, so I think that it is vitally important to still be able to communicate your love for them, even if you don't agree with their actions. See if you can visit them after or find some way to build into them outside of the wedding itself. Brad Harper, who works with the Center for Faith, Sexuality and Gender has a good rule of thumb: "Always opt for positive relational connection as long as it does not compromise your principles."<sup>v</sup>

And finally, third, what do you say when someone says to you 'Don't be such a prude. All love is love!' That's a tough one, because you probably won't have time to repeat to them everything I've just said. I mean, they could watch this message on YouTube but even then I don't know if it would convince them.

I think I would handle it in one of two ways, depending on who they are.

If this is someone who is in a committed same sex relationship and maybe even antagonistic towards Christianity, I think I would probably say what I did earlier – ‘if we humans are the highest authority, then sure, you have every right to find affection and fulfillment with whoever you want, regardless of their gender... but as a Christian, I don’t think we ARE the highest authority. I believe that there IS a God who loves us and wants the best for us and I just can’t affirm what He doesn’t.’

It would be interesting too to ask why they think all love is love and if they’ve given any thought to the wide ranging implications of that statement. It sounds good, but if you tease out the implications, you end up with some pretty awkward possibilities.

I mean you could try saying ‘if all love is love, then TRUE love is defined by God, a man and a woman’ but that’s not super helpful. The problem with ‘all love is love’ is that it shuts down conversations. Right, they say ‘all love is love,’ they’ve made a self-evident point and probably don’t want to hear any objections. I tried to think of a quick slogan to say in response but at that point you’re just pummeling each other with jingoistic mottos. You know, it might just be smart to say ‘what makes you think that?’ and then listen.

And that’s actually the second response I think I would have, especially if the person you’re talking to isn’t really committed one way or another. Something that I think we’re going to find more and more is younger family members, friends, having to question their sexuality in a way that just didn’t make sense a generation ago. You may legitimately have a grandchild come up to you at some point and say ‘I hear the world saying ‘all love is love’ and I kinda agree but I don’t know for sure, but you’ve been so loving to me in the past that I value your perspective’ – well then, you can walk carefully with them through these ideas. You can listen to them and affirm the struggle that they might be going through because of the cultural pressures that they feel all around them. It breaks my heart to hear the statistics around self-harm and suicide when you’re talking about LGBTQ teens; we can’t let that happen.

And notice – the importance of loving people as they are because Jesus first loved us. It’s all too common for Christians to be known for what they’re against – ‘loves’ that run counter to God’s ways – then what we’re for – namely the kind of sacrificial love that Jesus shows to us. It’s important for us to be gracious and loving people, even when we don’t agree with everything other people do. If a child or grandchild comes to you and says ‘I’m gay,’ don’t flip out. Don’t condemn them outright.<sup>vi</sup> You want to be the FIRST person that they are willing to talk to about these complex and very intimate circumstances. Be the kind of person you would want to help you through the struggles of life.

Preston Sprinkle has a helpful maxim in his book – *People to be loved*. He writes – ‘Love means accepting one’s humanity without affirming everything they do.’<sup>vii</sup> We need to put that into practice, because that’s what Jesus did. We want to love people the way that Jesus does and help them on the path to a kingdom ethic.

All love may not be love, but let us share with others all of Jesus’ love.

BENEDICTION - 2 Corinthians 13:11 - Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.bustle.com/p/8-lgbtq-activists-share-what-love-is-love-means-to-them-in-donald-trumps-america-7278041>

<sup>ii</sup> Adam Barr and Ron Citlau, *Compassion without compromise*, chapter 9 (Olive Tree digital)

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/gay-wedding.html>

<sup>v</sup> [https://www.centerforfaith.com/sites/default/files/cfsg\\_pastoral\\_papers\\_6.pdf](https://www.centerforfaith.com/sites/default/files/cfsg_pastoral_papers_6.pdf), pg. 12.

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-parents-of-gay-children.html>

<sup>vii</sup> Preston Sprinkle, *People to be loved*, pg. 84.