

Do Christians oppose inclusivity because of our traditional views on LGBTQ+ issues?
August 20, 2023 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

We have a very important question to consider here this morning:

Do Christians oppose inclusivity because of our traditional views on LGBTQ+ issues?

Now I'm going to be very honest with you. All this week, I have had nauseous feeling in my stomach and I think it has a lot to do with this question because it is very complex and it has significant real world implications.

Because, on one hand, I think that the Bible DOES teach the traditional view of sexuality: that marriage is meant to be between a man and a woman and any sexual acts outside of that are counter to God's plans for human flourishing and I can't speak against my conscience and not tell you that truth.

But at the same time, I realize that we are talking about real-life, honest to goodness people here who are valuable in God's eyes, who deserve to be loved, who are in some cases your friends and neighbours and co-workers, maybe even family. The rate of suicide and depression and self-harm amongst LGBTQ+ people is appalling and I don't want to contribute to that in any way.

What I would like to do though is to give people a safe space to explore these questions and to give you all the opportunity to think about it without feeling judged in any way.ⁱ

So what I want to do is to speak honestly and faithfully, graciously and truthfully. And I would appreciate it if you would be praying for me as I do. Because this is not an easy question.

But it is the question before us today and here it is: Do Christians oppose inclusivity because of our traditional views on LGBTQ+ issues?

What I want to do here is break this question into two and first ask – 'Do Christians oppose inclusivity generally?' and then bring in the question of same sex relationships issues later. Just to clarify, this person has asked about LGBTQ+ people generally, but I'm going to focus more on the question of same sex relationships, the L and the G part, without getting into a broader conversation about trans- and 2 spirit and genderqueer people because that's a totally different conversation.

And I guess while we're at it, we'd better define our terms because I think that inclusivity as a cultural value is an idea that means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. When I say 'inclusivity,' what I mean is this: intentionally welcoming people of diverse backgrounds and identities in a way that makes them feel valued and respected and encouraged to contribute. So when I say 'inclusivity,' I mean: intentionally welcoming people of diverse backgrounds and identities in a way that makes them feel valued and respected and encouraged to contribute. I

think that's broadly what people mean when they talk about inclusivity today so that's the definition that I'm going to work with.

So, are we as Christians opposed to that? Do we oppose welcoming people of different identities and making them feel valued and respected?

Well, admittedly, there was a time when it certainly looked like that. The church in North America doesn't have a great track record when it comes to inclusivity. If a Martian visited some churches on a Sunday morning, he might think that Christianity is primarily a white thing and there has historically been truth to the famous saying: '11 o'clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in Christian America.'

But that's not the way it should be.

Biblically speaking, the Church should be THE MOST inclusive community the world has ever seen.

Because at its heart, the Gospel is all about breaking down barriers and welcoming people in.

When God sent His Son into the world to seek and save the lost, He was intentionally welcoming people of all different backgrounds and identities into the family of God where they would feel loved and valued and encouraged to contribute. There was only one thing that would exclude us from God – our sin – but Jesus dealt with that so that no matter where we come from, if we trust Him and obey Him, then we are welcomed in. I mean, when Jesus went to the Cross, God broke down the biggest barrier of all – as Romans 5:8[10] says – 'While we were still sinners [and enemies of God], Christ died for us!' As humans, we had built a wall, trying to exclude God from our lives, and yet He broke it down, at His own expense (His one and only Son), so He could welcome us in. That's inclusivity.

And THAT inclusivity – God's inclusivity - is meant to inspire us to be inclusive. Ephesians 2:13-14 says this:

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away (Gentiles) have been brought near (to the Jewish people) through the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility (Eph 2:13-14 NIV).

There was a 'dividing wall of hostility' in the Jerusalem Temple, literally a stone that's been dug up that says – 'Jews may enter in but if you cross this threshold as a Gentile, we will stone you to death.' Paul refers to that and says 'Through the blood of Christ, that wall is gone and He is bringing peace to all people, together.'

On the Cross, Jesus tore down the wall between God and humankind so that we would go on to tear down the walls that separate us, no matter what they are.

And the early church got this. They were THE MOST INCLUSIVE subculture of all time. They sought to put Galatians 3:28 into practice: There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. That fact that God welcomed all different people with open arms meant that the Church welcomed all different people with open arms.

And this scandalized the world around them. The thought that slaves and masters could sit side by side in fellowship as equals scandalized the Roman world. The fact that Christianity welcomed women made other groups laugh at churches – ‘ha, ha, they include women; they’ll never last.’ The fact that the poor were given value by Christians totally upended the expectation of every secular Greek and Roman that Christians ran into.

They intentionally welcomed people of diverse backgrounds and identities in a way that made them feel valued and respected and encouraged to contribute in response to the fact that God did so first.

The Church has been and is meant to be THE most inclusive community in the world, a place where people feel safe, where people feel welcome, where people feel like they belong, no matter where they come from. The Church should be a place where we can all wrestle with the hard questions and deny ourselves, take up the Cross and follow Jesus together.

So do Christians oppose inclusivity as a principle? No, we don’t. Frankly, because of what Jesus did, we should be the first and foremost community that intentionally welcomes people of diverse backgrounds and identities in a way that makes them feel valued and respected and encouraged to contribute.

Now, when you add in the question of same sex relationships, things become a little more complicated. Because as I’ve already said, the Bible presents same sex relationships as sin, as counter to God’s plan for human flourishing.

There are a handful of places where I could go to show you that but I think 1 Corinthians 6:9 is an important one. 1 Corinthians 6:9 in the Berean Study Bible, which I think is the best way to translate this passage, says:

9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who submit to or perform homosexual acts, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor verbal abusers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

Now two things I want you to notice here: homosexual acts are not the only thing labeled as sin. There are ten things listed there that exclude people from the Kingdom of God and heterosexual people can do all ten. The Church has been a little over-the-top historically when it comes to same sex stuff while turning a blind eye to other things, but the reality is that if we’re going to faithfully listen to Scripture, we need to acknowledge that lust, idolatry, greed, adultery, anger and abuse are just as much sin as homosexual acts are.

So that's one point – sin is sin and it doesn't matter if you're homosexual or heterosexual – but the second point is this: the Bible does identify submitting to or performing homosexual acts as sin. It's right there – men who submit to or perform homosexual acts. Now your Bible might say something different but that translation really gets at the heart of what Paul wrote.

The first word he uses is the word you'd use to talk about the 'feminine partner' in a homosexual relationship and the second word is actually a combination of two words that appear in another passage that calls same sex sex acts sin: Leviticus 18:22. Leviticus 18:22 says: 'Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.' And here Paul pulls those together to say that both the one who lays with a man and the man who is laid with are guilty of sin.

So just like greed and abuse and adultery, homosexual acts are counter to God's plan for human flourishing.

Bring this back into our larger question and I think that this raises a very important question: does inclusivity mean affirming everything a person does? Does inclusivity mean welcoming people with open arms no matter what they do?

If it does, then I guess Christians oppose inclusivity because we can't affirm or applaud same sex sex acts (or greed or adultery or abuse for that matter). We simply can't embrace everything that everyone does, if it runs counter to God's will.

But that being said, I'm not even sure that people who promote inclusivity would apply inclusivity that way. I have a hard time believing that an inclusivity trainer would applaud me for saying what I've just said, which is logically what would be required if inclusivity meant affirming everything a person does.ⁱⁱ

So I think what we really need to do as a church is to ask 'what does Christian inclusivity look like?' Because clearly, breaking down barriers and welcoming people in is something that's very important to God. And yet we can't call 'good' what God has called 'sin.' So what does 'inclusivity' look like from a Christian point of view? Here I think we can learn a lot from Jesus.

Let me real quick run you through three different case studies.

First, the woman caught in adultery, John 8:1. The teachers of the law bring Jesus a woman who was caught in adultery (they should have brought the man too frankly) and they want to stone her. Jesus though stoops and writes on the ground so that people quit gawking at her and then says 'He who is without sin can cast the first stone.' They all slink away because they know they're just as guilty as her.

What does Jesus do next? He goes to her and says: 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then

neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (Joh 8:10-11 NIV).

'Neither do I condemn you' is a very inclusive statement. He embraces her, He welcomes her with open arms. Instead of stoning her He sets her free and gives her life. But then He says – 'go now and leave your life of sin.' He doesn't affirm everything she does, but He does embrace her as a person who is worthy of love and valuable in God's eyes.

Case study two, Zacchaeus in Luke 19. Zacchaeus was a corrupt tax collector, a traitor to his people and an accomplice to the Roman occupiers and yet when Jesus met him, He said, "Zacchaeus, I'm coming to your house today." He didn't exclude him because of his sin, rather He sat down with him and talked with him, leading Zacchaeus to proclaim: 8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." (Luk 19:8 NIV).

Jesus embraced him as he was but didn't affirm the sinful things he did. And Zacchaeus recognized that he would have to leave that old way of life behind. Jesus didn't affirm everything Zacchaeus did, but He did embrace Him as a person who is worthy of love and valuable in God's eyes.

Finally, the Samaritan woman at the well – John 4. Jesus goes up the this lady who's drawing water in the heat of the day – which is pretty suspicious since most women did that early in the morning – and gets into a conversation with both a Samaritan (sworn enemy of the Jews) and a woman! He embraces her and welcomes her in and yet she calls her on her stuff – she's had five husbands and she's shackled up with a sixth guy without getting married. Jesus here doesn't affirm everything she does, but He does embrace her as a person who is worthy of love and valuable in God's eyes.

This I think is a very valuable lesson when it comes to thinking about inclusivity as Christians. And this is a very important model for us when it comes to thinking about LGBTQ+ people and sinners of all kinds, really. Jesus models for us intentionally welcoming people of diverse backgrounds and identities in a way that makes them feel valued and respected and encouraged to contribute without necessarily affirming everything they did.

Diverse backgrounds – you see here Jesus talking to a Jewish woman, a Samaritan woman, a Jewish man, a rich guy, less well-off ladies, respectable high-society kind of people and the people who have to draw their water at midday to avoid the judgmental stares of the respectable ladies.

Jesus intentionally welcomed ALL those people and He did so in a way that made them feel valued and respected and encouraged to contribute. All those religious guys wanted to stone that poor lady; Jesus looked at her with concern and affection and protected her. That Samaritan woman was shocked that a Jewish man would talk to her; turned out He was a rabbi

and He was willing to listen to her ideas and engage with them. That's making them feel valued and respected and encouraged.

And yet He did it without affirming everything they did. In fact, He said 'I value you as a person but I want to see you become who you were made to be in God's eyes. I want to see you become the very best version of yourself that God made you to be.' And He helped them onto the road in that direction.

That I think is the model for us when we think about inclusivity as Christians. We want to intentionally embrace people from all different backgrounds and circumstances, make them feel welcome and respected and valued, and help them to grow in the image of God. We want to give them space and security to wrestle with the question of whether what God says is true or not and if the life He has for them is better than the one that they are currently living.

I mean, that was me, twenty five years ago. I don't wrestle with same sex attraction but I had my own sins that were just as serious in God's eyes. And I needed space and help to think through what the Bible was saying without feeling judged or condemned or looked down on. And by the grace of God, I found a community that welcomed me in, put up with some of my more misguided ways of thinking and helped me to see that God is indeed good.

We need to be that for people who wrestle with all kinds of sin, be they heterosexual or homosexual, alcohol related or drug related, pride related or possessions related. We need to be more loving and more accepting that the online communities that people find because others have abandoned them. We need to love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Preparing for today, I found an article by a SSA Christian who holds to the traditional view of sexuality and found it to be really insightful. I'll post the link on Facebook but here's one highlight:

The church should be the place where anyone can come and feel welcome, regardless of background, lifestyle, beliefs, gender, sexuality or anything else. The gospel is for everyone and all are invited to meet Jesus at the cross (Galatians 3:28; John 3:16). Part of that welcome will be encouraging people to express their questions and doubts and wrestle with the teaching they're hearing. But it's also important for our churches to be honest about the things that we stand for, that make us distinctive as Christians and shape our community life together.ⁱⁱⁱ

That, I think, is Jesus' way of inclusivity. Not necessarily embracing everything a person does, but embracing that person wholeheartedly and helping them to become more and more like Christ. In the past, the Church has been too tolerant of heterosexual sin and too hard on homosexuality; I think that we need to call sin sin, whatever entangles us, and help each other to deal with it.

You've probably heard it said: the Church is not a museum for saints, it's a hospital for sinners. I would actually take it a step further and say that the Church is actually the rehab wing, where

we get a new lease on life and help each other to grow in holiness and goodness. But we'll only get there if we welcome each other in the first place.

So here's the plan. Welcome everyone; help everyone to grow in Christlikeness.

BENEDICTION

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 - May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

ⁱ If you'd like to learn more, I highly recommend Preston Sprinkle's *People to be loved: Why homosexuality is not just an issue* (Zondervan, 2015). *People to be loved* is a gracious, well-researched exploration of this question that works hard to consider both sides of the argument. The church library has a copy.

ⁱⁱ Let me tease this out. If inclusivity means accepting everything a person does and believes, then logically, people should accept and applaud my assertion that 'According to the Bible, same sex sex acts are sin.' If inclusivity means accepting everything, then you'd have to accept and value and respect that assertion. But I don't think that that would fly; I suspect that I would be accused of not being inclusive enough. Which means, by extension, that I'm being excluded by the community that argues for inclusion. And what's the basis for the judgment that I'm not being inclusive enough? A community ethos which of course of exactly what I'm leaning on to make the assertion that 'According to the Bible, same sex sex acts are sin.' It's just that in our case, God's Word shapes our community ethos and ethical standard.

ⁱⁱⁱ Anne Witton, "What does it mean to be a truly inclusive church?" Accessed 2023-08-17.
<https://www.livingout.org/resources/articles/105/what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-truly-inclusive-church>