

youthESource Bible Study

Do You Believe in Love...Real Love?

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If love is love, and God is love, then isn't same sex love okay?

Overview & Purpose

2013 was a busy year when you look at the number of times the issue of homosexuality hit the news outlets in one way or another. There was everything from the battle at the Supreme Court over DOMA, various sports professionals coming "out of the closet," several states legalizing gay marriage, to the reaction over the remarks made by Phil Robertson from "Duck Dynasty," just to name a few.

Without a doubt, the whole issue of homosexuality is a huge reality that is impacting the lives of our students, families and congregations in general. There is no avoiding the topic, and because of that it is important that we really look at what God's Word says in its fullness so we can lovingly, intelligently and unashamedly state what we believe, why we believe it and how that influences our words and actions.

Definitions matter...

[Leader - Because you want to make sure everyone is on the same page when discussing this issue, start by setting the "ground rules" of what is meant when a certain word is used. This will help bring clarity to the conversation and will help in the processing of the topic by allowing everyone to present their thoughts/ideas/questions in the context of an unchanging foundation.]

Because the topic of love and homosexuality can be a potentially "volatile" discussion matter, it is important that we set a few "ground rules" for the discussion. First, for our conversation to have a chance to be fruitful, we need to maintain a high level of respect for each other. A great rule of thumb is that in everything you say, you should strive to honor yourself, honor others and to honor God.

Secondly, we want to make sure that we are all on the same page when it comes to the words that we use and the meaning behind them. So, we are going to establish the definitions for the following words and use that as our foundation to build upon throughout our study. *(The definitions below have been garnered from dictionary.com and C. S. Lewis' The Four Loves to help facilitate the conversation if the students get stuck or can't agree.)*

Homosexual - a person who is sexually attracted to members of the same sex

Homosexuality - sexual desire or behavior directed toward a person or persons of one's own sex

Agape love - the love of God or Christ for humankind

Eros love - physical love; sexual desire

Philia love - close friendship or brotherly love

Storge love - parental affection, the instinctive affection which animals have for their young

God's Love

With some definitions under our belt, let's look at what God's Word has to say about love. When it comes to the topic of love, especially God's love, three passages are used with regularity. They are (have students look them up and read aloud):

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8(a)

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

1 John 4:7-12

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

After looking at those three passages, what type of love do you believe they are referring to if we utilize the definitions of the four types of love listed earlier?

Are there other passages in Scripture that you can think of that speak about God's love?

What type of love are those passages referring to (agape, storge, philia, or eros)?

God in His very nature is love, agape love. It is a love that goes beyond anything we can imagine. Humanity got a glimpse of that love as Jesus hung on the cross. Romans 5:6-8 captures that picture of love so beautifully by saying, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

That is love! But let's get back to the original question, "If love is love, and God is love, then isn't same sex love okay?"

Outside of true love, what are some other aspects that make up the nature of God? *(Some examples are perfect, merciful, faithful, judge, jealous, unchanging, etc.)*

Just as God is 100% love, He is also 100% holy. Sticking with the importance of definitions, what would be your definition of holy? *(Some examples are set apart, a spiritually pure quality, one perfect in goodness and righteousness, etc.)*

Scripture talks about God being holy and the call for us to be holy. A great verse to look up is:

1 Peter 1:14-16

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

If God is 100% holy, then He is without sin. He is blameless and pure. Matter of fact, God hates sin. And through His word we see the practice of homosexuality (acting upon that sexual desire for someone of the same sex) called sin. Some great texts for this are:

1 Timothy 1:9-11

We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

Romans 1:26-27

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Throughout Scripture we see several things reveal themselves over and over again.

- God is love and love is at the very core of all that He does
- God is holy and hates sin
- The practice of homosexuality is sin

(Have students process these three statements carefully to make sure everyone is on the same page. If there are disagreements, go back and have the group read through Scripture to see where the disagreements are coming from for your group. This may take you through various other passages, which is a positive because as students wrestle with this important topic in the lens of God's Word--as opposed to what the world is telling them--it can really strengthen their faith and understanding.)

If the three statements above are all true, how do we respond to the question at the very beginning, "If love is love, and God is love, then isn't same sex love okay?" *(Let the students really process through this question as well.)*

The world in general wants people to say "yes" to that question, and if you disagree then it tends to get you labeled as homophobic, intolerant, or maybe even hateful. Yet, when we understand that God is love and God is holy, we also realize that God doesn't contradict Himself. This allows us to have a firm foundation from which to stand in regard to the conversation of homosexuality.

But not only do we have a firm foundation on which to stand, we have something powerful and life-changing to offer to those who are struggling with homosexuality and to the world as a whole. We have the opportunity to share with others the love of God that forgives sins, heals lives, changes hearts, gives hope and saves souls. We have the chance to share with others about Jesus Christ.

Continuing on from John 3:16, we read in verse 17 these powerful words:

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

We also read later in John:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)

God is completely holy so He can't tolerate sin. God is also completely love, so He offers hope, forgiveness and restoration for "those who repent of their sins and turn in faith to Jesus Christ, who suffered the punishment for the sins of ALL people by his death on the cross and rose from the dead to give those who trust in Him new and abundant life, now and forever" (John 10:10; 1 John 1:8-10). Keeping these two aspects of God in mind helps us to stand up for the truth in regards to homosexuality and to also give hope for those who are struggling.

[Leaders - My hope is that this Bible study helps you and your students to begin the hard conversations and to continue to dig deeper into God's Word to see what love truly is, what God has to say about homosexuality (and all sexual sins for that matter) and how we as believers can respond with love, conviction, and knowledge.]