

## The Human Sexuality Question

Human sexuality, including homosexuality, same-sex attraction and sexual identity, is probably the most pressing and controversial issue facing the American church today. In personal discussions and throughout entire denominational gatherings, people are wrestling through this topic's many facets and nuances. Due to the importance of the subject, the leadership team of Springs Community Church considers it imperative to express our Bible-based viewpoint. We will also present how we intend to implement our beliefs, based on the grace and truth of Christ.

Some have questioned why the church seems to be singling out the issue of homosexuality. This is a fair question. We believe this question deserves to be addressed separately from other issues of faith, because of the following:

- 1) **The Deep Biblical Struggle:** Many churches and denominations (Reformed Church of America included) have already, or are contemplating a split over this specific issue. Christian leaders are not struggling over polygamy; no one is walking in to our church wondering what our stance on adultery is. However, there is a deep struggle over homosexuality. Churches, leaders and denominations lack clarity in understanding and speaking to this matter confronting us all. Muddled thinking contributes to the struggle.
- 2) **An Alternative Biblical Interpretation:** There are those on the progressive/liberal side of this issue that are not "tossing out the Bible," as is often charged, but are arguing for a shift in our understanding on biblical grounds. These Christian men and women have a high view of Scripture and make their argument from a biblical standpoint. We need to listen closely not simply dismiss them.
- 3) **An Alternative Rooted in Love:** Many of those who argue for an "open and affirming" position regarding homosexuality contend that this is a movement of love, consistent with both the Gospel and the heart of God.

The SCC leadership team has wrestled with this issue for more than 10 years. Through reading, discussion and prayer, we have come to embrace two biblical convictions about human sexuality. We will seek to lead the congregation in light of them both. They are:

- 1) *We believe whole-heartedly that the Lord deeply and passionately loves those who are same sex-attracted and/or identify as LGBT (John 3:16).*
  - While we were yet sinners (heterosexual and homosexual), Christ gave himself for us and, in love, invites us to new life – kingdom life (Romans 5:6). The statement "God hates gays" is a gross, unbiblical falsehood and contrary to the heart of God.
  - The Lord invites – no, he actually woos – LGBT people to seek him. He promises that all (homosexual or heterosexual) will find him if we seek him with all our hearts (Jeremiah 29:13).

- The Lord entreats his church to be a community of invitation and kindness (Colossians 3:1) to all peoples regardless of sex, color or orientation—not a place of condemnation (Romans 8:1).

2) *We believe that the Lord created us in His image (**imago Dei**) and in that image we were created male and female (Genesis 1:27). From this creation design the Lord instituted Christian marriage between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24).*

- Scriptural revelation affirms this created order. (Matthew 19:5; Ephesians 5:31-32).
- Deviation from his created order, i.e. sexual activity outside the context of heterosexual marriage, is considered sin (1 Timothy 1:10).
- In the story of God (Creation—Fall—Redemption—Restoration) homosexuality is located in the Fall (Romans 1:26-27).

The deep struggle that Christians and the Church face today is how to hold these two biblical convictions together. We believe Jesus is inviting SCC to walk in the tension between both convictions, not letting go of either one. He himself came full of GRACE and TRUTH (John 1:14, 17), and calls us, especially in these challenging times, to walk in both.

A foundational kingdom-life principle for our community of faith is the Grace and Truth Matrix. It will be helpful to apply as we think through this difficult subject.

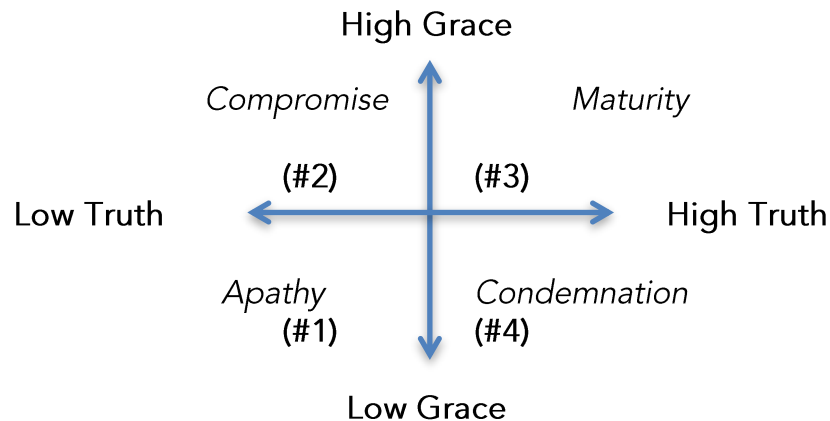
Through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the grace of the living God flowed from the throne of God to a lost and broken world. It is still flowing through the church and maintained by the Spirit. The Lord's will is for kindness, mercy, love and forgiveness to flow through his bride today, the gathered people of God. We are called to be a people of HIGH GRACE.

The church is also the conduit of God's truth. The truth of who God is, who we are, and what the gift of salvation is, flows in his bride today, the gathered people of God. We are called not only to be a people of HIGH GRACE, but also to be a people of HIGH TRUTH.

Sometimes God's grace and God's truth feel contradictory, even jarring. Yet Christ came and lived in the fullness of both. We are called to love people well and at the same time speak truth in love to each another. If we fail to do either, then we are not living in the fullness of grace and truth. We remain immature and broken.

In the following matrix, there are four quadrants. Churches around the world tend to function generally in one of these four quadrants as they face various issues. Below we will apply the Grace and Truth Matrix to the issue of homosexuality.

## GRACE AND TRUTH MATRIX



- 1) **Apathy:** Churches fail to love people with the compassion of Christ and also fail to speak the truth of God in love.
- 2) **Compromise:** Churches seek to be open and affirming to LGBT people—those with same-sex attraction, and those struggling with sexual identity. However, these churches interpret Scripture in a different way, trying to compromise or reconcile plain Scripture with what they desire to be applicable and compassionate for today's culture.
- 3) **Maturity:** Christ Jesus exhibited this maturity, an integrated character—wholeness. He calls the church to develop the same. Churches love people well; they invite them into a community where they can wholeheartedly seek the Lord, and also discover the truth of God's revelation.
- 4) **Condemnation:** Churches proclaim the clear teaching of Scripture regarding homosexuality, but fail to embrace LGBT or same-sex attracted people with the love of Christ. This comes across as condemnation and judgment.

As a church, SCC seeks to live in the third quadrant: to love people with the amazing grace of the Lord and at the same time speak the truth in love. We call this spiritual maturity or wholeness. This two-pronged focus will guide the decisions we make about important ideas and activities such as sacraments, service, membership and leadership. We will rely on the Spirit to direct us as we pray, discuss, and endeavor to live in the Maturity quadrant. We will purposely integrate the concepts of grace and truth in all areas of kingdom life, including human sexuality.

### An Invitation:

For the Same-Sex Attracted: If you are same-sex attracted or have a loved one who is, we invite you to journey with us. We believe that God loves you deeply. SCC desires to be a safe place for you to seek the Lord. For you and our entire congregation, we will strive to be a place of transformation and renewal.

For Those Who Disagree with Us: We also extend an invitation to those who may disagree with one of our biblical convictions—to those who may question our balance between the expression of grace and the proclamation of truth. We do believe that there are issues on which we can disagree and yet still connect in fellowship as brothers and sisters in Christ. We only ask you not to stir up antagonism regarding this issue. There will always be room for civil and sincere exchange of ideas.

For Those Who Agree with Us: We want to invite you to not only continue to worship with us, but would you become advocates of this position of grace and truth. We believe this is an important message that is not being spoken in many areas of our culture.

For Those Who Continue to Wrestle with this Issue: You are also invited to journey with us. Our leadership team continues to encourage discussion and prayer on this issue. We recommend the following valuable resources:

- Wesley Hill, *Washed and waiting* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010, 2016). Dr. Hill shares his personal journey of same-sex attraction and his belief that the Lord does not bless or condone same-sex sexual activity.
- Preston Sprinkle, *People to be loved: why homosexuality is not just an issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015). Dr. Sprinkle is a leading, compassionate conservative voice. In *People to be loved*, he offers a thoughtful and thorough look at Scripture while sharing stories of various people across the spectrum of this complex topic.
- Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2010). Dr. Yarhouse approaches the topic as a Christian psychologist who has compassionately walked with a variety of people over a long period. (Note the pink triangle on the cover of this book. It is a sign of solidarity with people who are same-sex attracted, but not condoning same-sex activity. Previously, the Nazis used this symbol to identify and shame LGBT people. It has since become a symbol of support for the gay community.)

If you would like to discuss this issue further with a leader in our community of faith, we will gladly set up an appointment. Pastor Eric, or any member of our Elder team, is available to talk about this issue or any other one important to your heart. We believe we need more respectful conversation (even disagreement) in our world today. Such discussions, however, must honor both the word of God and the people of God.

In Grace and Truth,

Pastor Eric Carpenter and the SCC Elder Team