

What Alderwood Teaches about Human Sexuality

In Short:

At Alderwood, we affirm that human sexuality is a gift from God, designed to be expressed within the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman. Sin has corrupted God's original intent for human sexuality and affected all people, no matter their marital status, sexual orientation, or beliefs. All sexual activity outside of a marriage between a man and a woman is sin, including both lustful thoughts and sexual behavior. However, temptation and sin are not the same thing, and mere attraction or orientation are not culpable sins that require repentance. Every follower of Jesus is responsible to resist whatever sexual temptations they face and submit their sexuality to the lordship of Jesus. Furthermore, it is sin to dehumanize, abuse, slander, or oppress anyone based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, personal beliefs or history.

At Alderwood, we do not expect everyone within our church family to agree completely on this issue. Our most strongly held beliefs and the beliefs that we require all members to hold can be found in our “Essential Doctrine” statement. Our position on human sexuality, while important, is secondary to that, and we ask that our church family submit to it without causing division, while being free to personally hold differing convictions about what the Scriptures teach on this issue. For those in teaching and leadership roles, we require that they teach Alderwood’s position in good faith in whatever way they are representing Alderwood.

The Long Version:

It is hard to identify an area of Christian theology that affects people on a more personal level than human sexuality. Our nature as sexual beings produces both some of the greatest joys in life and some of the greatest hurt and disappointment. Because of the deeply personal nature of sexuality, the damage that is done when the Church misrepresents Jesus through our words and actions on this topic is immense. Our aim must be to both convey the truth revealed in the Scriptures about how God designed us sexually and how God calls us to live, and to do so in a way that consistently displays the radical grace and compassion of Jesus. Our position on human sexuality arises from the following convictions on what the Bible teaches.

God’s design for human sexuality and our nature as sexual beings are aspects of his good creation. God created male and female as the two categories of biological sex. Embracing and living in accordance with one’s biological sex is part of honoring God’s good design. God also created marriage as a permanent union of one man and one woman. As in all areas of life, human flourishing is dependent on alignment with God’s good design.

All sex outside of marriage as defined by scripture is sin, including premarital sex, adultery, and homosexual acts. Lustful thoughts and the use of sexually provocative material such as pornography is also sin, as God’s standard is sexual purity of body, heart, and mind.

Since sin entered the world, all human beings have been corrupted by sin. This corruption affects the sexuality of all people regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status. Heterosexual and homosexual sin are both affronts to God and require repentance and forgiveness. However, temptation is not the same as sin, and merely experiencing sexual attraction is not sinful until that attraction is indulged in lustful thoughts or actions. Temptation is a part of life in this fallen world, even for Jesus, and no one is required to repent from them.

All people are created in the image of God and therefore are deserving of respect, dignity, and love. It is always sinful to abuse, dehumanize, or slander someone, and it is dishonoring to Christ for a follower of Jesus to mistreat someone because of their sexuality.

Appendix 1: Interpretations of specific passages

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image;
he created him in the image of God;
he created them male and female.

While many in our culture today are trying to make the case that gender is a social construct and that there is no place for anyone to judge whatever gender identity someone chooses, the teachings of the scriptures are clear that sex and gender are actually part of God's good creation and are fixed categories. As a part of recognizing that God has created biological sex, human beings have a moral responsibility to live in alignment with the sex they were created and not put themselves in the place of God by trying to change or alter that reality. This does not mean that people must submit to cultural gender stereotypes, but it does mean that any act that is an attempt by a person to reject their biological sex is sin. In our fallen world, the human race is afflicted by all kinds of genetic conditions outside of God's original will, and among those are rare intersex conditions that present in people who do not fit neatly into the category of male and female. Exactly what it looks like for these intersex people to honor God with their sexuality is a complex, case by case, pastoral question that requires wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The existence of these people, however, does not negate the reality of God creating the human race as sexually dimorphic with only two biological sexes, male and female.

Genesis 2:24 This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.

This passage is the culmination of the creation of Adam and Eve, and shows that the idea of marriage is not a human invention but rather a gift from God. God created men and woman, as well as the one flesh union that we call marriage. From the very beginning, marriage is defined in the Scriptures as being a life-long union of one man and one woman. While the Bible records

many examples of sexual unions outside of this definition of marriage (polygamy, homosexuality, heterosexual sex outside of marriage), these unions are never described as being in line with God's will and they consistently lead to negative consequences. In a modern, secular society, the government may define marriage in any number of ways, but for followers of Jesus, the Scriptures are what reveal God's will and vision for marriage.

Matthew 5:27-28 "You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus consistently teaches that sin is a matter of the heart and not just outward behavior. He applies this to sexuality in these verses, making it clear that honoring God with our sexuality includes what we choose to think and meditate on, and not only what we do with our bodies. This standard also makes it clear that every human being is culpable of sexual sin; not only those people who don't conform to a traditional understanding of sexuality.

Matthew 19:4-6 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that he who created them in the beginning made them male and female, '⁵ and he also said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?'⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."

In an attempt to justify a position that God is approving of homosexual marriages, some people make the case that Jesus never personally addressed homosexuality. This argument is flawed for multiple reasons. First, homosexual acts are clearly condemned multiple times in the New Testament letters, and all Scripture is authoritative, not only the words of Jesus. Secondly, in this passage Jesus does in fact repeat and affirm the Genesis 2 definition of marriage as being the permanent union of one man and one woman. This definition precludes homosexual marriages from being a part of God's intent.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males,¹⁰ no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God's kingdom.¹¹ And some of you used to be like this. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

There are two errors often made by Christians when formulating a view of sexual sin. The first is to overstate the severity of sexual sin, turning it into an act that is far worse than other sin and puts a person into a category outside of the normal human experience. The second is to diminish the importance of sexual purity, arguing that God wouldn't judge someone based on how they choose to express their sexuality and that the followers of Jesus shouldn't condemn homosexual acts or premarital sex. Paul's teaching in the passage above refutes both of these errors, placing sexual sin right in the middle of a long list of sins, all of which are opposed to the way of Jesus but none of which place someone outside the reach of God's grace and forgiveness through Jesus.

Hebrews 4:14-16 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

It has been a common teaching within the church at large that same-sex attraction in itself is sinful, and not just lust and homosexual behavior. This teaching has caused tremendous harm, particularly to gay Christians who have a deep desire to follow Jesus but find it impossible to “repent” from an attraction they seemingly have no control over. The reason for this mistaken belief is a misunderstanding of the distinction between sin and temptation. We are morally culpable for our sins, but not our temptations. The concept of attraction is akin to temptation - it is the draw towards something that would be sinful if it were acted upon. Christians are not called to repent from temptation, because temptation is not sin. This is evident in Hebrews 4, where we are told that Jesus was tempted *in every way* that we are, yet was without sin. If Jesus, our sinless and perfect savior was tempted in every way, then we need not feel guilty or shameful about our temptations or the need to repent from them.

James 1:14-15 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

This passage gives further definition to the distinction between temptation, desires, and sin. James teaches us that temptation springs out of our desires, but that it’s not until desire has “conceived” that it gives birth to sin. As long as we resist the desires of our flesh and reject the temptations that they can produce, we have not yet sinned. A same-sex attraction or a gay sexual orientation is a description of what kinds of desires and temptations someone faces. But whether we face homosexual or heterosexual temptations, we have not sinned until we have given into them.

Appendix 2 - FAQ’s (What does this mean at Alderwood?)

1. Are gay, trans, or LGBTQ people welcome at Alderwood?

Yes, gay, trans, and LGBTQ people are welcome at Alderwood. Jesus came for all of us, and every person is in the same position of judgement before God apart from the grace and mercy of Jesus. We welcome everyone to attend our services, groups, and Bible studies.

2. Can an openly gay or trans person become a member at Alderwood.

It depends on what is meant by this question. If “openly gay or trans person” refers to someone who is upfront and open about being attracted to people of the same sex or having an internal sense of their gender that does not align with their biological sex (gender dysphoria), then that

person can absolutely become a member at Alderwood as long as they are committed to living in line with God's design for their sex and gender, and to following the sexual ethic of Jesus as outlined in the above statement.

However, if "openly gay or trans person" refers to someone who is embracing a life of expressing their sexuality or gender that is in conflict with Jesus' sexual ethics, then that person could not be a member of Alderwood. Membership at Alderwood involves a commitment to the church's beliefs as well as a submission to Jesus' ethics as we follow Jesus together. We all fall short of this standard, and the grace of God is sufficient for our mistakes no matter how big they may seem. But anyone who is actively and intentionally rejecting Jesus' teachings, on sexuality or any other matter, cannot be a member of our church in good standing.

3. Is it permissible for an openly gay or trans person to serve in leadership at Alderwood?

Please see the distinction above. Yes, it is permissible for someone who is attracted to people of the same sex or who experiences gender dysphoria to serve in church leadership, as long as they are not acting on those attractions or desires in ways that contradict God's design for sexuality. Attraction, temptation, and feelings are not sin - what we do in response to those experiences with both our thoughts and our actions is what we are morally culpable for.

Appendix 3 – Further Reading

Allberry, Sam. *Is God Anti-Gay?: And Other Questions about Jesus, the Bible, and Same-Sex Sexuality.* Updated ed., The Good Book Company, 2023.

DeYoung, Kevin. *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* Crossway, 2015.

Sprinkle, Preston. *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue.* Zondervan, 2015.

Sprinkle, Preston. *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say.* David C. Cook, 2021.

Yarhouse, Mark A. *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture.* IVP Academic, 2015.

Hill, Wesley. *Single, Gay, Christian: A Personal Journey of Faith and Sexual Identity.* Zondervan, 2015.

Via, Dan O., and Robert A. J. Gagnon, editors. *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church.* Edited by Preston Sprinkle, Zondervan Academic, 2016.