

PASTORPEDIA™

Cutting Edge Conversations for Pastors and Church Leaders

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The sexual identity crisis in the church

No room for any more jokes!

Large and small pulpits have heard their share of jokes about “God did not create Adam and Steve” or something else that gets a giggle out of even the deacons. Never again. This is serious.

All of us who know what our people are thinking and grappling with recognize there are serious struggles in strong Christian homes as children and others grapple with an identity that God gave them but they may not like much for now.

We must help them and stand with the families. But how? Most seminary courses did not touch this five years ago, and sometimes we go head-in-sand at church.

Perhaps our thoughts and struggles will motivate more thought and actions of concern. We do hope so.

*Standing with you,
Knutte, with Jeff and Jim*

How should we respond from upfront?

Jeff Bogue

- We should respond calmly. We should understand why a lot of this conversation makes sense to people. They have an unbiblical definition of love, happiness, and even purity.
- We need to meet people where they are. Don't just lump people into categories or assume that you understand their thinking.
- We need to preach *for* Christ, not *against* people. Sometimes we don't do a good job of vision-casting around the truth of God's Word and even the truth of having our identity in Christ.
- Finally, let the Bible do the heavy lifting. Instead of having a "*hot topics weekend*," preach through the Gospels. Preach through the Scripture, and when the Scripture raises the issue, let it be raised that way.

Jim Brown

- Be consistent, kind, and loving as you speak on the subject.
- Lace the message with grace and truth and allow the Bible to speak for itself.
- Don't shy away from it either—point people to the gospel and how it meets us in the middle of the mess.
- My experience has shown that our people are grateful to have another voice for their own kids to hear from.

Knute Larson

- Lovingly and carefully, as Jesus did to the worst of sinners. He was certainly harder on hypocrites than he was on sincere strugglers and admitted sinners.
- With biblical teaching, which brings weight and strength, and which God promises to honor. When you preach and teach in an expositional way, you cover whatever that verse covers. You don't pick on people.
- Certainly with confidentiality and protection of anyone in your church. Some pastors have erred by bringing up cases which others would recognize.
- By having a constant mood of grace and showing how God loves all of us as sinners and identifying as a fellow struggler and sinner. "He gives hope" and "He is one of us"—the two main answers in a poll once taken at the church where Charles Swindoll pastored, in answer to a question about why they liked his sermons.
- Certainly not be speaking as if sexual-identity struggles are the worst of the worst or can have no place in the church or a Christian home.

Can our people or their children wrestle without rejection?

Jeff Bogue

- I hope so, I think that's really hard because we've made sexual identity a taboo subject in the church. We need to get away from that, and go at every debate with truth in love.
- Really take the time to understand what your kids are actually saying. Sometimes when they say, "I feel like I might be gay or I might be bisexual," what they're actually saying is "I'm struggling to understand something." They're not necessarily announcing a decision. So talk with them about why they're struggling with it and understand the root of all those things.

Jim Brown

- Absolutely, there must be a place where this conversation can surface; otherwise, the children or person will not find godly counsel.
- The enemy sends all kinds of confusing signals, for he is the author of confusion; so we must create a space to speak life and truth into the confusion.
- Far too many times people are afraid to talk honestly because of the fear of rejection. The Word of God is our guide, and it trumps all the lies and confusion the world sends every day!

Knute Larson

- I certainly hope so. The church is not a museum of the perfect but rather a hospital of fellow sinners and strugglers. Church should be a place where people can grapple with any sort of sin. A pastor should certainly have the mood of wanting to listen to and sympathize with and give shepherding guidance to any family or person struggling.
- Each of us would have to answer this individually for the place where we minister. It is possible to preach as if you are above the struggles of life, and therefore others should be also.
- Of course, every church leader, with the appropriate oversight board, would have to decide how far people can go when they are practicing any sin, including homosexuality. Surely, we want them to attend, with hopes of embracing the scriptural truths.

How do we journey with our people?

Jeff Bogue

- We help them understand the questions that are really being asked and understand the background behind it. This is a major generational issue, and for an older generation (I put myself in that category) how people could think this way or feel this way is very, very foreign to us. So, trying to be a resource and a help is important.
- A big part of this is to go back into Scripture to observe how people wrestled with sin and then to lean into that gentle and understanding way of restoring them.

Jim Brown

- That's exactly what it is: a journey!
- I believe we must remind them of God's original intent and how He created male and female.
- So many identity problems stem from a citizenship issue. We must remember that we are not made to fit in here on earth. This is not our homeland, nor are the values and systems that are in place. We are here on a mission trip to share the gospel and to live for the values of our God.
- We must create a non-judgmental environment where grace and truth preside freely.

Knute Larson

- Closely, and a step at a time. In a large church you make sure someone on staff and possibly someone trained in such technical struggles is walking with the family or the person struggling with sexual identity. A lot of listening and praying would be involved. Also, some recommended reading from experts who have studied this kind of crisis and present recommendations from a Bible point of view. And not a lot of rushing.
- Certainly, the environment for any person to go to his or her pastor with such a problem would be that the pastor-shepherd shows empathy and sympathy and love from the pulpit, and does not preach as if he is above everyone else. And that does happen.
- Lead the church from the foot of the cross.
- I do think a regular pastoral prayer in worship services that includes a loving request for people in need or in struggles helps give a background for people to speak to their pastor and ask for help.

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