

Bethany Presbyterian Church

***Purpose Statement***

*We believe God intends for our worshipping community to be grounded in God's love, centered on Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to be a blessing to our world, our city and one another.*

**Bethany Fall 2015 Roundtable:  
*Gay Christians, the Bible, Church and Culture***

**Purpose of the Fall Roundtable**

The Fall 2015 Roundtable has two major purposes, one spiritual and the other educational. First, participants will practice the spiritual disciplines of patience, forbearance, listening and love across differences, key marks of the church. We want to learn to be together well in Christ, defining ourselves at the center and not at the boundaries. Second, participants will learn about the topic. The Bible has something to say to it and we need to listen to each other's stories with the mind of Christ. In addition, Session will be starting a yet undefined process of discernment on what God might be calling Bethany to be and do in this season. The roundtables are a chance for elders to read the materials, study scripture and share in a small group setting along with members of the congregation. Elders, as participants, will not be gleaning findings or making decisions in this conversation around the table.

**Design**

This *Roundtable* demands some time commitment in weekly preparation. Participants will meet in groups of 9-10 people which will be led by a trained facilitator. The first meeting is the one exception: on this night Pastor Doug Kelly will give a context for the discussion and present a historical viewpoint and an emerging viewpoint around the question of gay Christians, the Bible, church and culture.

## ***The Schedule***

**Session One, Nov. 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>:** *Historical Overview and Recent Discussions* Doug Kelly

**Session Two, Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>:** *Two Evangelical Voices in Civil Discourse*

**Preparation:** watch 2 hour video of SPU forum “Let’s Talk About [Homo]sexuality” a conversation with Justin Lee and Ron Belgau, April 13, 2014. Click on this link: <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=justin+lee+and+ron+belgau&FORM=VIRE1#view=detail&mid=FBADD1AD7B5553C7D392FBADD1AD7B5553C7D392>

**Session Three, Nov. 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>:** *The Biblical Case against Same Gender Relationships*

**Preparation:** Richard Hays “Homosexuality” from his book *Moral Vision of the New Testament*.

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At the beginning of this session, there will be time for participants to share a brief response to this question, “How has this issue intersected your life story? Share one or two key touch points.”

**Session Four, Nov. 22<sup>nd</sup> and Dec. 2<sup>nd</sup>** (*Groups may substitute another date to make up for Nov. 25 – the night before Thanksgiving*): *The Biblical Case affirming Certain Same Gender Relationships*

**Preparation:** participants must read Steven Chalke’s article, “*A Matter of Integrity*”

### **A preparatory comment on the readings:**

Richard Hays teaches New Testament at a moderate to liberal theological seminary, Duke Divinity School. He wrote this chapter in 1996 at a time when some scholars on the left end of the discussion were too quick to make some overly sweeping claims about the Bible, church history and homosexuality. Hays is interested in making sure the discussion is tethered to serious Biblical study and thus is focus on Romans 1.

Steven Chalke is in a different context from Richard Hays. Rather than teaching in a moderate to liberal American institution, Chalke comes to the discussion from the British evangelical community. He spends less time on Romans 1 because he and his audience in the evangelical community have spent a lot of time in Romans 1 already. Instead, Chalke wants to broaden the discussion to include the wider Biblical doctrine of inclusion and how he feels some church positions have hurt others through exclusion.

Do not misread Chalke, thinking he cares less about scripture because he spends less time in specific Biblical texts dealing with homosexuality. He and his debaters have spent plenty of time already in Romans 1. Similarly, do not think that Richard Hays is not interested in the broader discussion of inclusion and the damage the church has done in the past; Hays simply wants his moderate-liberal community to remember the scriptural texts before rushing off in haste.

## Liturgy for Our Time Together

*Adapted from Godly Play Liturgy*

### Getting ready

**People:** We intentionally recognize and take serious that we need to prepare, to slow down, open our hearts to God and anticipate Christ's presence among us in our coming together. We check ourselves to see if we are ready.

### Crossing the Threshold

**Leader:** We choose to leave the way of the world and enter the space of the Kingdom of God, bringing our whole selves to the circle and choosing to be present as fully possible.

**People:** We come with our doubts, fears, and failings as well as our convictions, joys, and successes, our listening as well as our speaking.

### Building the Circle - Passing the Peace

**Leader:** We extend and receive welcome. We do best in hospitable places. In this group we support each other by giving and receiving hospitality. We take our place and make room for all to take their place.

**Leader:** *The peace of Christ be with you.*

**People:** ***And Also with you.***  
*The passing of the Peace of Christ.*

### Silence

**People:** We trust and learn from silence. Silence is a gift in our noisy world and a way of knowing in itself. We treat silence as a member of the group. After someone speaks we take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words. We only speak to improve the silence.

*Moment of silence.*

### Responding to Each Other

**Leader:** We learn to respond to others with open honest questions.

**People:** We practice and respond to Christ inside us as we explore Scripture, each other's stories, questions, perspectives, and silence which provide a special opportunity to learn from God and each other.

Scripture Reading (see pp. 4-5 for each day's scripture)

Prayer

### Roundtable Discussion

#### Blessing and Goodbye

**Leader:** We both give and receive blessing knowing that our ability to bless comes first of all out of our deep knowing that we are blessed by God.

**People:** The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord keep your coming in and your going out, now and always

Prayer

## Session One Scripture Reading: Psalm 147: 1-11

- 1 Praise the Lord! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.
- 2 **The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel.**
- 3 He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.
- 4 **He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names.**
- 5 Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.
- 6 **The Lord lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground.**
- 7 Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre.
- 8 **He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, makes grass grow on the hills. <sup>9</sup>He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry.**
- 10 His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;
- 11 **but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.**

## Session Two Scripture Reading: Colossians 3:12-17

- 12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.
- 13 **Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.**
- 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.
- 15 **And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.**
- 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.
- 17 **And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

### Session Three Scripture Reading: Romans 12:1-3, 9 - 13

- 1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
- 2 **Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.**
- 3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned....
- 9 **Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;**
- 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.
- 11 **Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.** <sup>12</sup>
- 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.
- 13 **Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.**

### Session Four Scripture Reading: Philippians 2: 1-11

- If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy,
- 2 **make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.**
- 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.
- 4 **Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.** <sup>5</sup> **Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,**
- 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,
- 8 **he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.** <sup>9</sup> **Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,**
- 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- 11 **and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

*Bethany Roundtable Fall 2015***GUIDELINES FOR SMALL GROUPS**

Small Groups at Bethany provide an opportunity to experience community in Christ. Part of our DNA, our character at Bethany, is that our unity is centered in Jesus, which allows us to be in community across differences. We will experience more of the reconciling power of Christ and learn to be together well by following these guidelines.

**BE AN ACTIVE LISTENER:**

- Stay focused on the one who is speaking
- Curb the impulse to formulate a response; rather, stay focused on really hearing what the speaker is saying.
- We are not individuals trying to win a debate, but are seekers of Christ with fellow brothers and sisters on the journey who have their story which we want to hear.

**USE "I" LANGUAGE:**

- Speak in the first person: "I believe...." "I think...." "My experience has lead me to think..."
- Rather than saying "That doesn't make sense," consider saying "My thinking leads to somewhere else..."

**AVOID CROSS TALK**

- Active listening is receiving, paying attention to the person speaking. Appreciate by nodding or with "hmm," "oh," "okay". If you speak, summarize what you've heard and ask questions to clarify. Listening does not require speaking.
- We are not giving advice in this time.
- We are not solving someone else's problem.

**SILENCE IS OKAY****TAKE A NON-EVALUATIVE STANCE:**

- We are here to listen to each other's hearts, souls and minds, not to put each other in a category.
- We have freedom to disagree, but we do so without questioning, implicitly or explicitly someone else's intelligence, motives or integrity.

**STRIVE FOR EQUAL TIME**

- Some of us need to be sensitive around not sharing too much
- Still others of us need to be willing to let others know who we are.

**KEEP CONFIDENTIALITY**

- What's shared in the group stays in the group.
- What you hear is not your story to tell.
- Session members will not be sharing your story.

## **Gay Christians, the Bible, Church and Culture**

### ***A Theological and Ecclesiastical Primer***

November 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Pastor Doug Kelly

#### **Some Preliminary Comments**

- Social issues have always been discussed in the church with various convictions expressed.
- There are other issues to discuss that are just as important. We are exploring future Roundtable discussions around such topics as Incarceration in America; God's Creation and Climate Change; Gun Violence; Homelessness in Seattle: Burden and Opportunity.

#### **A Brief History of Why We are Talking About This**

- For 19 centuries the Christian Church has viewed homosexual behavior as contrary to God's intent, design and will for human sexual relationships.
- Beginning in the late 1960's a new understanding of homosexuality and a new attitude by Christians of that orientation began to voice a challenge to the church's stance.
- In 1977 our denomination's General Assembly passed an Authoritative Interpretation of the Constitution declaring that "avowed practicing homosexuals" could not be ordained in to the offices of the church as deacons, elders or pastors.
- In 1997, an amendment to the Book of Order was passed stating that "fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness" was a requirement for ordination to the offices of the church. This decision was overturned in 2010, allowing Presbyteries and individual Sessions to interpret these standards for themselves "to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life."
- Other main line denominations – Episcopal, United Church of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran – and some non-denominational evangelical churches such as Eastlake Community Church, Seattle have made similar changes.
- In 2014 the General Assembly changed the Book of Order's definition of marriage to read in part: "Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people (traditionally a man and a woman) to love and support each other for the rest of their lives."
- June 26, 2015, the US Supreme Court decision made same sex marriage legal in all states. Before the decision, it was legal in 37 states.
- Bethany's History:

- Bethany's had a policy in the 1990s prohibiting people engaged in same gender relationships from being members at Bethany.
- This policy was replaced in 2002 by the *Holiness and Leadership Statement* which does not prohibit membership for gays and lesbians but does prohibit people in same gender relationships from taking on leadership roles at Bethany
- A February 2015 Session Memo to the congregation reiterated, that although the 2014 General Assembly changed marriage language in the Book of Order, that Bethany's policy on marriage was unchanged and that same sex marriages would not be permitted on church property. The memo also announced the beginning of roundtable discussions as a forum to talk about important issues

### **A Word on the Practice of Corporate Discernment**

- While this Roundtable is not a specific corporate discernment exercise of Bethany, we will be engaging in some discernment practices such as studying scripture, listening to others' experiences, engaging the issue without haste, and being free to disagree in love.
- Elements of Church Corporate Discernment from the New Testament leading up to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 9 – 15).
  - Listening to people's stories of their experience of God in their lives
  - The church reflection on that experience
  - Serious re-reading and engagement with Scripture
  - Active role of the assembly and not just leaders
  - Importance of silence and prayer for discernment to take place
  - Discernment over a long period of time
  - The necessity of opposition and debate openly carried out as vital to discernment (Luke shows no embarrassment in sharing all the opposition and debate stories in Acts)
  - Significance of personal and pastoral communication of decisions once made. from Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture & Discernment: Decision Making In the Church*.
- Over the last 2,000 years the Christian church has built upon the above elements and cultivated other corporate discernment practices including:
  - A number of scripture study practices including the principle of scripture interpreting scripture; noticing context – literary, historical, cultural; the rule of love.
  - Listening to Church tradition
  - Contemplative practices of examen, lectio divina, scripture memorization and group spiritual direction.



The number of opinions on homosexuality and the place of gays and lesbians in the church are legion. Outlined below, are two major views I'm calling, simply for clarity, The Historical Viewpoint and An Emerging Viewpoint.

(Some of this material is from Jeff Lincicome's "Sammamish Presbyterian Church All Church Conversations on Homosexuality: Theological Primer, May 4 and 7, 2014")

### The Historical Viewpoint

- The Historical Viewpoint argues that, according to the Bible, homosexual activity is not God's original intention or design. The Bible sees homosexual acts as universally negative and sinful in all their physical expressions, consistently lifting up heterosexual marriage as normative and God's plan for sexual relationships. There are six passages in the Bible that mention same-gender sex and they are all negative.
- Interestingly enough, although Emerging scholars would argue about whether all these scripture passages are applicable to today's discussion, they too would agree that these scripture passages speak with one voice and it is negative.
  - *"Whatever the interpretation of these (Bible) passages, however, it has to be acknowledged that nowhere does the Bible actually affirm same-gender relationships." – Steven Chalke, p. 4*
- Still, the Historical viewpoint would not classify same-gender relationships as a worse sin than any other. In Romans 1, the most extensive passage on homosexual acts in the Bible, homosexual activity is one in a list of sins including envy, murder, strife, deceit, gossip, slander, boasting and more.
- The Historical viewpoint acknowledges that Jesus had nothing to say about same-gender relationships. However, while others might take this to signal Jesus did not care, the Historical viewpoint would argue that Jesus' thinking was most probably simply in line with the view of his day. That is, an argument from silence is hard to make. The debate we are having today just was not part of the 1<sup>st</sup> century landscape.
  - *"If Jesus or his followers had practiced or countenanced homosexuality, it would have been profoundly scandalous within first-century Jewish culture. Such a controversy would surely have left traces in the tradition, as did Jesus' practice of having table fellowship with prostitutes and tax collectors." - Richard Hays, p. 395*
- The Historical viewpoint would argue that men and women were created for one another, "Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Genesis. 2:24). Thus the complementarity of male and female is given a theological grounding in God's creative activity. This is partly why the New Testament texts in Romans and I Corinthians advocate against same gender sex: it does not fit with the new creation in Christ.
- The Historical viewpoint would argue that, although the church in times of historical discernment has reinterpreted the Bible – about slavery, about the

ordination of women - it has been able to do so under the Bible interpretation principle of scripture interpreting scripture. It has been able to point to conflicting passages of scripture on the issues at hand. That is, Paul may advocate that “women remain silent” in some letters, but Peter reaches back to Joel on Pentecost to declare that “your sons and your *daughters* shall prophecy” that is, “preach” (Acts 2: 17). Paul does not condemn the awful practice of human slavery. However, in Philemon he urges a slave owner to treat his slave, Onesimus, as a free man in Christ. Furthermore, the arch of the Biblical narrative is based on freedom from oppression. No such disagreement among texts exists in the Bible with regards to same gender sexual relationships.

- The Historical viewpoint would argue that although being homosexual does not keep one from being a Christian, the only faithful expression of sexuality for the homosexual person is celibacy. Any physical same gender sexual expression is outside those boundaries and is considered sin.
- The historical viewpoint would argue that sexuality is not the basis for defining a person’s identity or for finding meaning and fulfillment in life. Our identity is found instead as children of God.

### **An Emerging Viewpoint**

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Proponents of gay and lesbian covenanted partnerships would ask the question: **Does the Bible really talk about this at all?** Why would they say that?

- Because while it is true that the Biblical norm is heterosexual relationships, an Emerging viewpoint would argue that what we are talking about today is a completely new concept – a committed, monogamous, same gendered relationship between two people who are naturally (some would say created to be) attracted to one another. An Emerging viewpoint would say this is a brand new idea that biblical writers had no conception of, and thus we need to look at the Bible with fresh eyes.
- An Emerging viewpoint would argue that while the Bible is universally negative regarding homosexuality, it only talks about homosexuality as going against one’s natural state. So same gender sex is couched in the framework of going against “who you were made to be.” It was always an act of rebellion while no one considered whether or not it was actually one’s natural state of being.
- An Emerging viewpoint would say Paul in Romans and I Corinthians is arguing against Roman and Greek same gender sexual practices which were often connected with idol worship or heterosexual adult males having sex with boys which was common in the Roman world.

- *“A growing number of scholars, including evangelicals, argue that what the New Testament writers have in mind when they refer to homosexual practice could not have been the loving and stable same-sex unions of the sort that exist today, of which they knew nothing. Not only did the concepts of being either ‘homosexual’ or ‘heterosexual’ not form the primary axis of Roman thinking about sexuality, no Latin words for these two ideas exist. (It is because of this that many scholars...prefer to use the terms ‘heterogenital’, ‘homogenital’ and ‘homoeroticism’ when referring to Greco-Roman sexual behavior.)” - Steven Chalke, p. 3.*
- An Emerging viewpoint would argue that these cultural practices were at the forefront of New Testament writers and that they were not thinking of a broader picture that would include an understanding of same-gendered orientation or what a committed, covenantal same gender relationship would look like: intimacy, care, love and mutual nurture and support.
- An Emerging viewpoint would admit that one can argue that the previous changes in church interpretation of the Bible concerning slavery and the ordination of women came out of the classical discernment principle of “scripture interpreting scripture,” and that there is no parallel scriptural counter to the universal condemnation of homosexual acts we find in scripture. However, an Emerging viewpoint would ask “does that settle the discussion?” What about Jesus’ ethic of inclusion?
- Continuing, an Emerging viewpoint might ask, “What if by holding closely to this law (condemning homosexual relationships) we actually make people break other laws of God and withhold God’s good gifts?” What if for some, to live into God’s desire that “man would not be alone” could only be lived out same-gendered? Wouldn’t going against this and marrying the opposite sex, for example, be a fraud? Does one have to choose between a life of being alone with no hope of any alternative and a life in a relationship that is less than its full intention?
- In other words, an Emerging viewpoint would say, “We know that the Bible universally condemns same gender relationship and we would be universally against homosexual practice that is simply lust driven, promiscuous, or an exercise of adults overpowering youth. However, a same gendered, monogamous, covenanted relationship between two people which is an expression of the meaning and intention of marriage is not really discussed in the Bible at all, except on the meta-narrative level of not being alone, of bearing good fruit, and of living a holy life in service to Jesus Christ. That is the kind of Godly, Biblical relationships we are for.”
- An Emerging viewpoint would say that some homosexual Christians may be called to be celibate, as a gift from God. Yet, if they have not been given that gift, and Emerging viewpoint would say that homosexual Christians should be free to enter into monogamous, covenant relationships that let them live out their life in a God – honoring relationship.

## The Biblical Passages Concerning Homosexuality in Particular

Here are the six Bible passages that speak to same gender sexual acts.

- **Genesis 19:1-29** tells the story of Sodom and Gomorrah when the men wanted Lot to release his male guests so that they could gang rape them. As Richard Hays remarks in his chapter, it is not particularly relevant to our discussion since it is fundamentally about sexual violence.
- **Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13** part of the “holiness code” for Israel, lists homosexual behavior as one of the prohibited acts. The challenge for some is that the holiness code also lists things that have since been understood to be prohibited in their particular time and place: codes about diet, circumcision, menstruation, etc. Thus some have questioned whether these verses remain normative for today. (Hays and Ron Belgau in our video do argue that Paul’s teaching in the New Testament has linguistic connections with Leviticus 18:22.)
- **I Corinthians 6:9-11** and **I Timothy 1:10**. In these New Testament holiness code passages, not unlike other codes of their day, same gender sexual acts are prohibited.
- **Romans 1:18-32**. This is probably the most important Bible text for our discussion. Participants in the Roundtable will want to spend some time in the entire context of Romans chapters 1 – 3. Our video will spend some time here; half of Hays’ article is in dialogue with this passage, and Steven Chalke gives it a lot of attention in his article.

**Places of agreement** regarding this passage on both sides of the gay Christian discussion:

- Context: Paul is primarily interested in showing that all of humanity has fallen and not trying to condemn homosexuality *per se*.
- The church historically has misinterpreted this text to say that the great sin of the passage is homosexuality and because of this all the other sins follow. Both sides today clearly see that the sin Paul points to is *idolatry*. And from this particular sin of chasing after other gods of our own making comes all the brokenness: same gender sexual acts, gossip, hate, obedience to parents, etc.
- The wrath of God in the passage is *not* because of homosexuality. Neither is God’s wrath *coming* because of homosexuality (contra the fundamentalists after hurricanes Katrina, Sandy and the one next month). God’s wrath is already manifest, it is God’s letting the people go into the sin of idolatry with all its manifestations.
- The text is clearly negative on same gender sexual acts.

**Places of Disagreement** about Romans 1:

- Is Paul condemning all homosexual acts or those he is aware of in his historical context – those that are promiscuous, those involving abuse of power, and those having to do with idol worship?
- What does Paul mean when talking about people committing acts against their nature? Does he know about homosexual orientation? If he did, would that make a difference or not?
- Is Paul in Romans 1 talking about the sin of all *humanity* (Richard Hays) or in particular the sin of *Gentiles* (Justin Lee in our video)?

**Personal Goals for the Roundtable? Consider These:**

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- Be able to articulate a Biblical/theological rationale for my position
- Be able to articulate a Biblical/theological rationale for the other position
- Ponder the question, “Is this an essential article of my theology? Is it right up there with my Christology, the resurrection, the incarnation, the Trinity? Or is this a non-essential in which brothers and sisters can disagree while maintaining fellowship?”

**Posture for the Bethany Roundtable**

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- “Perkins Posture”
- “Bethany Posture”