



# HOT TOPICS BIBLE STUDIES

TERM 3, 2014



# Abortion

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1. What are the issues that make abortion a difficult topic?

Often the debate about abortion polarises into two camps – the “right to life” camp and the “right to choose” camp. There are a few reasons why these titles may not be helpful. Firstly, the right to choose implies that women are completely free to choose whether to have an abortion or not. This brushes over the fact that many women feel like an abortion is their only option. Secondly, the right to choose is only given to the mothers – the children involved are given no similar “right”. Thirdly, the emphasis on “right to life” implies that this camp don’t care about the effects on women. Finally, and most importantly, the Bible generally doesn’t speak about rights. Rather, it speaks about our responsibility towards others rather than how others should treat us. God then holds us accountable for how we treat others, as in Genesis 9:6.

2. Read Genesis 9:6. Why is it wrong for people to kill other people?

## **Are babies human?**

3. Some would argue that foetuses don’t fall into this category of ‘human’ yet. They aren’t yet in the image of God. How do these passages treat unborn children:
  - Genesis 25:22
  - Psalm 22:10
  - Jeremiah 20:17
  - Luke 1:41

## **Does that matter?**

4. Some would say that, regardless of whether an unborn child is human, what really matters is that the mother has a choice whether to continue in the pregnancy. What does Romans 3:8 say about that line of thinking?

## **Is that even the right question?**

Many would argue that we actually don’t know when a baby becomes a human and so various people draw various lines in the sand. In some places, a baby does not have the rights until it takes its first breath. In other places it is not until 20 or 24 weeks into pregnancy. In some people’s minds humanity doesn’t begin until the foetus implants into the lining of the womb. From the Bible’s perspective, none of the passages give us an exact time when a baby becomes human. And yet, is this even the right question?

5. Why do people want to find a starting point for life?
6. Read Luke 10:25-29? Why would the man want to know who his neighbor is?
7. Read Luke 10:30-37. Does Jesus answer the question “who is my neighbour”?
8. What does he tell the expert in the law to do? How is this different to telling him who his neighbour is?

Asking “who is my neighbour” is an attempt to minimise who one’s neighbour is. In a similar way, asking who is actually human is just another way of asking, “who do I not have to treat as human”. Our sinful hearts always want to minimise our responsibility to others. Jesus always maximises it. Rather than asking, “do I need to love this child”, we need to ask, “how can I love this child”.

### **Grace**

9. Read Romans 3:21-24. What comfort can be given to those who have been involved in abortions?
10. How do these passages suggest we should treat people who have been involved in abortions?
  - Luke 18:9-14
  - James 2:8-13

### **Application**

11. How can we as Christians love:
  - Those who have been involved in abortions?
  - Those who are pregnant and are considering abortions?
  - Unwanted children?
12. How can we help overcome abortion at a societal level?

# Abortion Appendix

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A helpful book on understanding the pain of abortion is *Giving Sorrow Words: Women's Stories of Grief After Abortion* by Melinda Tankard Reist. Duffy & Snellgrove; Sydney, 2000

## Abortion Stats

**Choice** – *These percentages reflect the number of women in a study who presented at abortion clinics who said these statements are true for their situation. They all suggest that choice has been limited or removed.*

Didn't want others to know they had sex – 5%; Felt too old – 15%; Thought their health would suffer - 20%; Others say should terminate – 35%; Relationship at risk if continue – 35%; Partner could not cope – 65%; Can't afford financially – 75%; Could not cope – 90%; Continuing Jeopardise future – 100%

- Allanson S. And Astbury J. The abortion decision: reasons and ambivalence. *Journal of Psychom., Obstet., Gynecol.* 1995; 16:123-136. Cited in Women and Abortion p3.

## Gender Selection in India

The practice of aborting female foetuses because of a preference for sons is becoming more widespread in India, a Unicef report revealed Tuesday, with an estimated 7,000 fewer girls born every day because of the spread of cheap, prenatal sex-determination technology.

- <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/12/world/asia/12iht-girls.3869337.html>

## Abortion and saving Women's lives

**'The figures tell their own terrible story: 6.3 million abortions in England and Wales since it was made legal in 1967 and just 143 where a woman's life was in danger.** Even when combining the category where continuing with the pregnancy might have constituted a risk to health greater than termination the total number of abortions is less than half of one percent.'

dauidalton.net – David Alton is a member of the house of Lords in England. This is an extract from one of his parliamentary publications.

## Effects of Abortion from various studies cited in Ewing, S. *Women & Abortion: An Evidence Based Review.* Women's Forum Aust., 2005. (WA)

Finland. Suicide rate after abortion was 3 times that of general suicide rate and 6 times that of those who'd given birth. (WA p13)

- Gissler M, Hemminki E, Lonnqvist J. Suicides after pregnancy in Finland, 1987-1994: register linkage study. *British Medical Journal* 1996; 313:1431-4

USA. Study of 486 woman found those with one or more abortions 28% more likely to have *placenta praevia* in subsequent pregnancies. (WA p15)

- Taylor VM, Kramer MD, Vaughan TL & Peacock S. Placental praevia in relation to induced and spontaneous abortion: a population based study. *Obstet Gynaecol* July 1993; 82(1):88-91

‘there is a relative consensus among post-abortion psychology researchers that at least 10-20% of women who have had an abortion suffer from severe negative psychological complications. With at least one in four Australian women undergoing abortion over a lifetime, this relates to a large subgroup of the Australian population.’ – Women and Abortion p17

Californian study of 14,297 women after 1<sup>st</sup> abortion compared with 40,122 women with at least one live birth and no abortions. Abortion group had higher risks of ‘specific categories of adjustment reactions (21% higher), Bipolar disorder (92% higher), neurotic depression (40% higher) and schizophrenic disorders (97% higher)... categories of anxiety states (14% higher) and alcohol and drug abuse (16% higher).’ Quote from Women and Abortion p21

- Coleman PK, Reardon DC, Rue V & Cogle J. State-funded abortions vs deliveries: a comparison of outpatient mental health claims over four years. *American journal of Orthopsychiatry* 2002; 72:141-152.

Scotland. What women felt after abortion for foetal abnormality – Relief (30%), sadness (95%), depression (79%), anger (78%), fear (77%), guilt (68%), failure (61%), shame (40%), vulnerability (35%), isolation (27%), numbness (23%), panic spells (20%), crying (82%), irritability (67%), lack of concentration (57%), listlessness (56%), sleeplessness (47%), tiredness (42%), loss of appetite (31%), nightmares (24%), less frequent sex (50%), very rare sex compared with before(24%). (WA p24)

- White-Van Mourik MCA, Connor JM & Ferguson-Smith MA. The psychosocial sequelae of a 2<sup>nd</sup>-trimester termination of pregnancy for fetal abnormality. *Prenatal diagnosis* 1992; 12:189-204.

USA Study of 19,000 adolescents. “The prevalence of delinquent behaviour is strongly dependant on the form of pregnancy resolution. Specifically, girls who have abortions or give their babies up for adoption have substantially higher rates of juvenile delinquency than those who keep their babies.” (WA p31)

- Hope LT, Wilder EI & Watt TT. The relationship among adolescent pregnancy, pregnancy resolution, and juvenile delinquency. *Sociological Quarterly* Fall 2003;44(4):555-576

# Pornography

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Pornography has become big business. In the US alone, the amount of money generated by porn every year exceeds the combined revenue of the NFL, the NBA, and major league baseball. It generates \$13 Billion a year. \$3 Billion of that is just from the internet. One in eight internet searches is for porn. One in five searches on mobile devices is for porn. 85% of young men and almost 50% of young women look at porn at least once a month.

1. Why do you think that porn is such big business?

## **Read Matthew 5:27-30**

2. According to this passage, why is looking at pornography wrong? How serious is it?

## **Read Proverbs 5:1-14**

3. Why might the son be attracted to the adulteress?
4. What is the end result of going to her?
5. Why are people attracted to porn?
6. What can we learn from this passage about the danger of looking at porn?

## **Read Matthew 22:36-40**

7. How might looking at pornography be unloving to:
  - a. God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Your spouse?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. Your children?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - d. The wider circle of people you have relationships with?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - e. The people in pornographic images?

**Read 1 John 1 :8-9**

8. What hope is there for those who have sinned?

**Read Colossians 3:1-14**

9. According to verses 1-4, what is the motivation for putting sin to death in our lives?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. What steps can people take to put sin to death in their own lives?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. How can we help others put this sin to death?

**Helpful Resources**

At Covenanteyes.com you can find lots of helpful resources to help understand pornography, why its unhelpful and how you can escape it. Covenant Eyes is also a helpful internet accountability program that monitors your usage and sends a report to your trusted accountability partner.

# Homosexuality

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1. What are some of the issues that make homosexuality a difficult topic to discuss?

## **Read Romans 1:16-32**

2. What is the major problem with all of humanity (v18-23)
3. How does God feel about this?
4. How does God deal with it?
5. According to this passage what do we need to understand about homosexuality?
6. Some would say that homosexuality is pretty much the worst sin (or at least among the worst). How does this understanding stack up with v26-32?
7. What is the solution to all this sin in the world?



8. How might we be ashamed of the gospel, particularly in relation to homosexuality?

**Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11**

9. How is our sin dealt with in the gospel?

10. How does this passage answer the objection that being homosexual is who a person is...  
It can't be changed?

**Bringing it together**

11. What are some of the ways Christians have treated homosexuals badly?

12. For a Christian who has same sex-attraction, what should they be encouraged to do?  
What would it be wrong to expect of them?

13. If someone told you they were gay, what sort of things would you need to think about in order to care for them?

# Homosexuality Appendix

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If you are struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction then a valuable group to seek help from is Liberty Christian Ministries - [www.libertychristianministries.org.au](http://www.libertychristianministries.org.au)

Some helpful books are:

- *What Some of You Were* Christopher Keane (ed.) Matthias Media – a series of testimonies from those effected by same sex attraction in themselves or relatives, followed by a gospel explanation.
- *Pure Sex* Philip Jensen and Tony Payne. Matthias Media – A clear explanation of God’s plans for human sexuality and an outline of how we got to where we are today in our sexualised culture.

A helpful series of short, readable books are the Love Won Out series:

- *The Heart of the Matter: the Roots and Causes of Female Homosexuality*
- *The Truth Comes Out: The Roots and Causes of Male Homosexuality*
- *Responding to Pro-Gay Theology: What does the Bible really say*
- *When a Loved One Says “I’m Gay”*.

This interview is very helpful:

<http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=16576#.U5wv2pSSzUu>

## **A battle I face**

*An interview with Vaughan Roberts, Rector of St. Ebbes Church, Oxford, by Julian Hardyman, Senior Pastor of Eden Baptist Church, Cambridge, about same-sex attraction*

<http://www.evangelicals.org/>  
Sept. 27, 2012

Julian: Vaughan, earlier this year your book *Battles Christians Face* was republished in a fifth anniversary edition. You added a new preface which included these words: This 'is the most personal of my books, partly ... because I wrote out of my own experience. We all face battles in the Christian life, some of which are common to each of us, while others are shared only by a few. Of the many battles I could have written about, I chose to focus on eight which, to a greater or lesser degree, I face myself'. What responses have you had?

Vaughan: The fact that a pastor struggles with image, lust, guilt, doubt, pride and keeping spiritually fresh is not exactly a revelation to anyone who knows their own heart and understands that Christian leaders are weak and sinful too; and the admission of an occasional struggle with depression causes no surprise these days. The fact that the other chapter is on homosexuality, however, has caused a small ripple of reaction and led some to ask why I wrote those words and what I meant by them.

## **Defining yourself?**

Julian: Does the disclosure that same sex attraction is one of your personal battles mean you are defining yourself as a homosexual?

Vaughan: No, it doesn't. It's important to reiterate that I have acknowledged a struggle in all eight of the areas the book covers and not just in one. The brokenness of the fallen world afflicts us all in various ways. We will be conscious of different battles to varying degrees at different moments of a day and in different seasons of our lives. No one battle, of the many we face, however strongly, defines us, but our identity as Christians flows rather from our relationship with Christ.

All of us are sinners, and sexual sinners. But, if we have turned to Christ, we are new creations, redeemed from slavery to sin through our union with Christ in his death and raised with him by the Spirit to a new life of holiness, while we wait for a glorious future in his presence when he returns. These awesome realities define me and direct me to the kind of life I should live. In acknowledging that I know something of all eight battles covered in my book, therefore, I'm not making a revelation about my fundamental identity, other than that, like all Christians, I am a sinner saved by grace, called to live in the brokenness of a fallen world until Christ returns and brings all our battles to an end.

### **Gay clergy**

Julian: Evangelical Anglicans are widely reported as saying there shouldn't be gay clergy. What does that mean for you?

Vaughan: The press is often very misleading here. There is no objection to people being church leaders because of a homosexual orientation. The focus of the argument is over teaching and practice. Evangelicals say that clergy should uphold the Bible's teaching that sex is only for heterosexual marriage in teaching and lifestyle, both of which I do.

Julian: You might not be meaning to say anything fundamental about your identity by acknowledging that homosexuality is a personal issue for you, but there are many who will hear you in that way and are likely to label you accordingly. Would it not have been better to have kept silent?

Vaughan: I have been very grateful for the friendship and wisdom of my Advisory Group (Peter Comont, Jonathan Lamb, Will Stileman and Pete Wilkinson), who keep me accountable and provide much needed counsel. They, along with close family and friends, have known for a considerable time that I experience same-sex attraction. We have thought through these issues together and, although the words in the preface are very low key, I didn't take the decision to write them lightly.

In fact, I included some personal references when I first wrote the chapter on homosexuality six years ago, but I removed them before it was published because we were all conscious of the potential dangers of unhelpful labelling and of the pressure for me to engage increasingly in a single issue ministry - something I'm very keen to avoid. I felt it right to include the new preface, however, with their support, because of an increasing conviction that there does need to be more openness in this area among evangelical Christians, given the rapidly changing culture we live in - and the resulting increased pressure on believers who face this battle.

### **Pastoral concern**

Julian: As a pastor, you must have had folk who have confided in you pastorally about their same-sex attractions - has that affected your decision to be more open?

Vaughan: Certainly. I pray for them every Monday from a list that is divided in two: those who continue to seek to be faithful to the Bible's teaching that the only right context for sexual intercourse is in a marriage between a man and a woman and those who have moved away from that view. Sadly the second group is growing.

Julian: Why do you think that is?

Vaughan: I've often wondered whether more might have persevered if they had felt there was another way open to them other than the affirmation of a gay identity and lifestyle advocated by the world and the isolation they experienced in the evangelical church with their largely private battle.

The world stresses freedom and authenticity and says: 'Everyone is born straight, gay or bi. You need to be true to yourself and accept who you are'. Same-sex attraction is seen as being entirely natural for some, who are therefore encouraged to embrace their identity as gay people and live it out in whatever way they choose. This message is supported by the individual stories of many whose openly gay lives offer a model of a particular way of living. By contrast, however, we in the church are too often heard to be presenting only a negative message which can leave them feeling deep shame and discourage them from emerging from the isolation of a lonely and private battle, which creates a fertile soil where temptation increases and compromise becomes more likely.

Julian: How do you think churches communicate that negative message?

Vaughan: The problem is largely caused by the fact that most of our comments on homosexuality are prompted, not primarily by a pastoral concern for struggling Christians, but by political debates in the world and the church. We do need to engage in these debates, but it's vital that we're alert to the messages that some of our brothers and sisters may be hearing.

Media reporting often doesn't help and can give the impression that we think this particular sin is especially heinous. Also, in countering the simplistic binary model of the world that people are either born gay or straight (or, occasionally, bi), we are prone to make overly dogmatic comments ourselves about causation and cure. These can be heard to imply that homosexual attraction is just a matter of personal choice. This only increases the sense of shame already felt by those who experience unwanted same-sex attraction and can leave them with the impression that this is a battle that is not safe to share with others in the church. I have become convinced, therefore, that we need not only a greater openness in discussing issues of sexuality, but also a more positive vision and presentation of the nature of faithful discipleship for those who struggle in this area.

### **Biblical teaching**

Julian: Let's come back to the biblical teaching on homosexuality. What does the Bible say?

Vaughan: The Bible is very clear that God loves everyone, and welcomes all into his family, the church, through faith in Christ, whatever our gender, class or race and, we might add, sexuality. We do need to keep stressing that. But we also need to recognise the fact that the Bible is consistently negative about homosexual sex, and, indeed, about any sex outside heterosexual marriage.

Julian: Some people say, 'That's the ideal but Christians can't always live up to ideals'. They argue that homosexual sex within loving, committed relationships may be a lesser evil than loneliness or promiscuity. Is what you are saying heading in that direction?

Vaughan: No, I'm certainly not saying that. The Bible presents only two alternatives: heterosexual marriage or celibacy. Celibacy, whether deliberately chosen as a vocation or reluctantly accepted as a circumstance, is hard. But when tempted to self-pity, I remind myself that that's true, not just for those attracted to the same sex, but for all who remain single despite longing to be married or those who, for whatever reason, are denied sex in their marriages.

### **Sin and circumstances**

Julian: So the message to Christians with same-sex attraction sounds pretty tough: 'stay single, stay pure'.

Vaughan: That's not all there is to say. It's important to distinguish between sin, which can only be seen as negative, and circumstances, which, even when hard, may still be viewed positively.

While homosexual sin must always be resisted, the circumstances which often accompany same-sex attraction should be accepted as a context in which God can work. There is, without doubt, a difficult aspect to those circumstances, such as, for example, the frustration of not being able to experience the intimacy of a sexual relationship or a feeling of isolation because of the sense of being different. They can nonetheless be viewed in some senses positively, because of a recognition that God is sovereign over them and can work in and through them for his glory, the

good of others and our own growth into the likeness of Christ.

This perspective should transform how we view all the difficult circumstances in our lives. We're not called to a super-spiritual positivity which denies the frustration and pain; nor are we to embrace a passivity which spurns any opportunity to change our situation. But we are to recognise the loving hand of God in all we experience and see it as an opportunity for service, growth and fruitfulness.

Julian: That's a very different perspective from just 'grimace and stay pure': how does it work out in practice?

Vaughan: I have found that those I've learnt most from have invariably been believers who have grown in Christian maturity by persevering through significant difficulties. The experience of blindness, depression, alcoholism, a difficult marriage, or whatever the struggle may have been, is certainly not good in and of itself and yet God has worked good through it, both in the gold he has refined in their lives and the blessings he has ministered through them. I have seen the same dynamic at work in some godly believers who have experienced a seemingly intractable attraction to the same sex. By learning, no doubt through many difficult times, to look to Christ for the ultimate fulfilment of their relational longings, they have grown into a deep and joyful relationship with him. Their own experience of suffering has also made them sensitive and equipped to help others who struggle in various ways. Those who have not married have embraced the Bible's very positive teaching about singleness as a gift (see 1 Corinthians 7.32-35), whether chosen or not, which, I imagine, alongside loneliness and sexual frustration, has afforded them wonderful opportunities for the loving service of God and others. I know that I myself would not have had nearly as much time for writing and speaking at missions or conferences if I had been married. I've also had more time for friendships, which have been a huge blessing to me and, I trust, to others as well.

### **Death and resurrection**

Julian: That's encouraging. But what about the pain, surely that's very real? What do you do with that?

Vaughan: Yes, the pain is real - I can't deny that. The world, the flesh and the devil all conspire to make sin appear very attractive, so it will be hard for believers to remain godly in this area for the sake of the kingdom of God. To do that you need a clear understanding of the call to self denial in the kingdom - and the dynamic of resurrection life proceeding out of sacrificial death. Christ does call us all to a life of costly suffering as we take up our crosses for him, but, just as it was in his experience, that way of the cross is the path to life: 'Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it' (Mark 8.35).

Julian: Surely that promise is fulfilled in the new creation?

Vaughan: Ultimately, yes. But, we should recognise that the blessings that flow from costly service of Christ are not only received in the future, but are also promised in the present. Jesus taught that those who lost out relationally or materially because of their commitment to him and the gospel could not only look forward to eternal life in the future, but would also receive 'a hundred times as much' as they had lost 'in this present age': 'homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields - and with them, persecutions' (Mark 10.29-30).

Julian: What does that look like in practice? And what does it mean for churches?

Vaughan: Those words of Jesus bring both great encouragement and profound challenge. Are our churches providing a spiritual family for those who are missing out on other contexts of relational satisfaction and support for the sake of the kingdom? Undoubtedly many, like myself, do experience a profound sense of loving community within the church, but there will always be room for improvement. We must face the uncomfortable fact that a significant reason why some Christians leave evangelical churches and choose to enter the gay community instead is because they perceive the alternative to be one of unsustainable isolation and loneliness.

### **Caring churches**

Julian: What sort of things can churches do?

Vaughan: While being careful not to put any pressure on those who don't want to be more open, we could be looking for appropriate ways of enabling greater openness from some. I heard recently about a church where a young believer spoke honestly in a public testimony about his ongoing experience of same sex attraction. That was a real encouragement to some in the church who struggled in the same way and made it easier for them to speak with others. Another church has begun an occasional meeting for members in this situation. It has been a spur to some to speak about their struggles for the first time, knowing that they are not alone and that there is support available. Other Christians have found Wesley Hill's book *Washed and Waiting* really helpful. His refreshing honesty about his own experience and his godly approach have provided an excellent model to many, as well as giving supportive church members a deeper insight into the similar struggles of others. Alex Tylee's *Walking with Gay Friends*, written from a woman's perspective, has similar strengths.

Julian: What advice would you give to those who have not felt able to share their experience of same-sex attraction with other Christians?

Vaughan: I would strongly urge them to take a first step and think of at least one mature believer they could trust and be open with. We haven't been called to live as isolated Christians, but rather as members of God's family in local churches. Churches are imperfect, just as we all are as individuals, but they are the context in which God means us to grow together as disciples. Many of us have found that honesty about our struggles with trusted brothers and sisters has not only been an encouragement to us, but has also made it easier for others to open up to us about their own battles. Parachurch organisations can also be a useful resource. The True Freedom Trust (<http://www.truefreedomtrust.co.uk>), for example, has been a great help to many.

### **Looking for change**

Julian: And is change possible? Can these attractions be redirected or altered?

Vaughan: The development of sexuality is complex and is, I think, best understood as being on a spectrum, along which individuals can move, especially in the years soon after puberty, but also later. A small proportion of people, including Christians, find that they remain exclusively attracted to the same sex as they grow into mature adulthood. God has the power to change their orientation, but he hasn't promised to and that has not been my experience. Research suggests that complete change from exclusively homosexual desires to exclusively heterosexual ones is very rare. While supporting the right of anyone to seek help to change if they wish, our emphasis needs to be on encouragement to be godly and content in current circumstances.

Julian: So how does that happen?

Vaughan: It's important to recognise that very often God's power is seen, not by him removing our temptations and difficult circumstances, but by giving us the strength to persevere and live for him in the midst of them. Understanding this profound principle of God's power being seen in weakness will transform our attitude towards all our battles as believers. We will then be able to see our struggles, including the experience of living with same-sex attraction, not just negatively, but also positively.

Julian: Thank you, Vaughan, for your openness and wisdom.