

A “Four Quadrant” Framework for Thinking about Homosexuality and the Church

Seeking a Helpful Model: Two Sides, Three Ways, or Four-Quadrants

In his book *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gay-vs-Christians Debate*, Justin Lee describes a “Side A/Side B” framework for discussing the Church’s various responses to the issue of homosexuality. In this paradigm, a “Side A” Christian would argue that homosexual relationships have the same value as heterosexual ones, and a “Side B” Christian would argue that the Creator’s intent for sexual intimacy is for male/female relationships exclusively. Lee’s Side A/Side B model is helpful to the degree to which it allows us to use neutral language in describing our positions (to say “I am a Side B Christian” has a much different weight than to say, “I am against homosexual marriage,” for instance), but it is unhelpful to the extent that it over simplifies this complex issue into a tidy either/or dichotomy.

Other pastoral leaders have tried to find alternative ways of framing the question: how should the church be when it comes to our response to homosexuality? One helpful model, for instance, is Bruxy Cavey’s “Third Way.” He suggests that rather than dividing this issue into a “Conservative ‘no’” or a “Liberal ‘yes’” dichotomy, churches can and should find a “third way” through this issue, one that is “honest and uncompromising in our call [to all Christ followers to follow Jesus as their Lord, their leader, their mentor and Master,” but that also recognizes “that people come to Christ in different ways and at different stages of spiritual understanding and ability.” In this sense, Bruxy would characterize his church as a “queer friendly church.” They “do not preach that people must change their sexual orientation in order to follow Jesus,” but at the same time, they state clearly that they “believe that marriage is established by God, and assumed and affirmed by Jesus to be a heterosexual union.” To the extent that this model helps us avoid dichotomies, it is useful, however some pastors and lay people may feel that the model lacks clarity; and while it does offer more options than the Side A/Side B model, still it requires us, in the end, to choose identify with a limited set of labels.

As an alternative to these models, we suggest a “Four-Quadrant” model, that allows churches and individual Christians to plot where they are currently on this issue, and initiate conversations about where they feel God would have them be.

The Four Quadrant Model: A Conversation Starter

Imagine a grid formed by two intersecting axes. The horizontal axis represents one’s view of Scripture and one’s commitment to the authority of Scripture: moving from left to right we move from a low view of Scripture (the Bible is just an irrelevant human book written by ancient people and has no bearing on the world today) to a high view of Scripture (the Bible is the inerrant, inspired Word of God and the authority for how we must live and what we must believe).

The vertical axis represents one’s anxious response to, or anxious presence among homosexuals and/or the gay community. From top to bottom we move from a non-anxious response to a highly anxious response. Admittedly, something like an “anxious response” is difficult to measure, but feelings like I need to change a person, or that I need to make my opinion of their lifestyle choice clear before proceeding with a friendship, feelings of judgment or repulsion, being unable to see a person except in terms of their sexual orientation, are all potential signs of an anxious response.

These two axes create four simple quadrants. Quadrant I represents those who have a non-anxious response to homosexuality, but this has little or nothing to do with any convictions about the nature of the Bible. Quadrant II represents those who have an anxious response to homosexuality, but not because of anything the Christian Scriptures say about it, rather for cultural reasons, perhaps, because of stereotypes they grew up with, and so on. Quadrant III represents people who have a high view of

Scripture, who take the Bible's teaching about sexual ethics seriously, and consequently they experience or exhibit an anxious response to the question of homosexuality. Quadrant IV represents those who have a high view of scripture and take the Bible's sexual ethic as authoritative, and yet, at the same time, are able to have a non-anxious presence with and among the gay community.

It is our conviction that Quadrant IV has the highest potential for us to have a redemptive presence and a Kingdom response to issues related to homosexuality in our neighbourhoods, communities and spheres of influence.

Is Quadrant IV Possible?

An obvious question about this model is whether or not it is, in fact, possible to be a Quadrant IV Christian. Can I really take the Bible as an authority and, at the same time, not respond negatively to homosexuality? Have I really taken the Bible as an authority if I do not make my position clear to my gay neighbours?

To this, we would suggest that, whether or not it is possible to do so when it comes to homosexuality, many Christians have found ways to be Quadrant IV Christians when it comes to divorce. That is to say, many Christians who take Jesus teaching about the sanctity and permanence of marriage seriously are still able to respond compassionately, graciously and lovingly to people in their lives who have experienced or are experiencing divorce. (When meeting someone who has been divorced, most Christians do not feel they need to explain that "they do not approve of divorce" before they can proceed with the friendship.) In such situations, many Christians are able to pray for healing and reconciliation, and offer support towards the same, while maintaining a non-anxious presence in the relationship.

Using the Four Quadrant Model:

The helpful aspect of this framework is that, rather than requiring Christians to choose one of two or three labels (are you a Side A or Side B Christian? Are you a Third-Way Christian?) it allows people to plot themselves on the grid by asking two simple questions: where are you when it comes to your view of biblical authority? And how are you when it comes to having an anxious response to your gay neighbours, family members, friends, or gay politicians, activists, celebrities, and so on?

As such, this Four Quadrant Model is presented as a tool to help church leaders initiate and lead conversations with ministry teams, boards and individuals about where they (or their church) is, where they feel God would have them (or their church) be, and what might have to happen for us to move in that direction on the grid.

The following diagram and discussion guide is intended to be used in this way, as a simple visual exercise to initiate and lead constructive conversations about our response to the question of homosexuality.

A Four Quadrant Framework for Thinking about Homosexuality in the Church

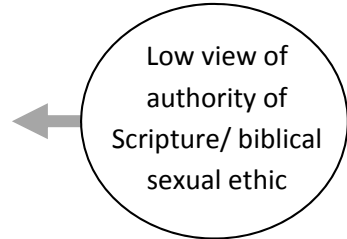
Quadrant I.

Christians who have abandoned or reinterpreted the teachings of Scripture as an authoritative source for sexual ethics, and fully affirm homosexual behaviour; Some “main-line” “liberal” denominations

Luke Timothy Johnston “I think it important to state clearly that we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good. And what exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience and the experience thousands of others have witnessed to, which tells us that to claim our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God has created us.”

Non-Christians who embrace contemporary sexual ethics without consideration of Biblical teaching.

The LGBTQ Movement as a political movement



Quadrant II.

The Non-Christian, classic “Homophobe”—expresses disdain or repulsion towards homosexuals, but based in acculturated views of machaicism, gender stereotypes, etc. without reference to Scripture.

The Christian who rejects the homosexual as irredeemable, untouchable, etc.
(Westborough Baptist Church)

The “gay-basher”

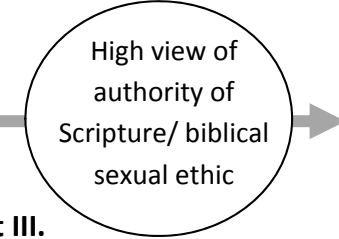
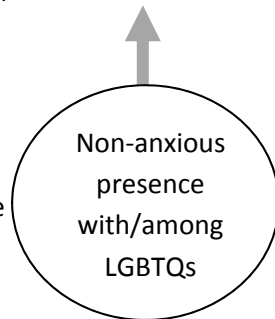
People whose views towards homosexuality are formed by religious texts other than the Christian Bible.

Quadrant IV.

Non-anxious response to LGBTQ people/expressions/activity, without compromising on high view of scriptural sexual ethics.

Cf. The Christian who firmly believes that divorce is not God’s plan for marriage, but can relate “comfortably” with divorcees in a redemptive way.

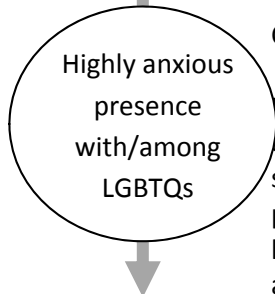
Christians who can affirm what is “affirmable” in homosexual longings (i.e. desire for belonging, to be loved, intimacy, friendship, etc.) without compromising commitment to Scripture. Cf. C. S. Lewis’s view of the pederasty occurring at his childhood boarding school as a young man, as related in *Surprised by Joy* (see Chapter VII), “Eros, turned upside down, blackened, distorted, and filthy, still bore the traces of his divinity.”



Quadrant III.

The traditionalist, the fundamental Evangelical stereotype. The Christian who experiences an anxious (not necessarily antagonistic) response to homosexual behaviour, arising especially from their commitment to maintaining a high view of Scripture.

Certain “Love the sinner, hate the sin...” responses to LGBTQ issues.



Marked by an inability to separate cultural understandings of affection and expressions of gender from biblical teachings on sexuality. For example, embracing, hand-holding, and other forms of physical contact are in many cultures understood entirely platonically; likewise many of our understandings of “maleness” and “femaleness” are acculturated and not specifically drawn from Scripture.

Anxious response to homosexual behaviour

Commitment to Authority of Scripture

Questions for Discussion:

1. What quadrant are we in, and how would we know?
2. As a church, what quadrant are we in?
3. Assuming Quadrant IV has highest potential for us to have a redemptive presence, what steps can we take to move from where we are towards “quadrant IV”?
4. How can we move towards Quadrant IV without slipping into either III, or I?
5. How do we work with Quadrant II people in our churches?
6. What does a Quadrant IV Christian look like as an individual?
7. What does a Quadrant IV Church look like?
8. Are we clear on what aspects of gender-typed behaviour is actually biblical, and which are acculturated? Are we willing to let go of non-biblical assumptions regardless of what quadrant we’re in?
9. Are we clear on what expressions of affection are non-sexual biblically, vs. culturally?
10. Where are we as a movement?
11. Where do we want to be?
12. Is it possible to be a Quadrant IV Christian? (i.e. when does “non-anxious” begin to become compromise?)