



## Church is a movement that tells a better story

By Steve Chalke

### CHAPTER THREE.

#### **Church is when you work with the LGBT community. 1 Corinthians 13**

This episode will help you **engage, reflect and respond** to Church is. We encourage you to explore each episode with friends - if you do, let us know! We'd love to hear about it and your thoughts and ideas.

Each episode has a companion video and each episode title mirrors one of its key themes. Thanks for downloading.

**Companion video:** [churchis.co.uk/stevechalke](http://churchis.co.uk/stevechalke)

**Chapter:** THREE of FOUR



W W W . C H U R C H . C O . U K



## Church is when you work with the LGBT community

### 1 Corinthians 13 (NIV)



*<sup>1</sup> If I speak in the tongues[a] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,[b] but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

### **Love is key.**

The issue of how we engage with and respond to the LGBT community has caused much debate and division within the church. One of the things that I'm best known for is my passion for inclusion, and a few years ago I wrote an article on the subject called 'A matter of integrity'.

I was calling on the church to discuss, and once again explore, what the Bible has to say on the subject. I honestly believe that by taking scripture seriously and grappling with it at the deepest levels reveals some short-comings in the way we have understood it. This, in turn, has led to the tragic and on-going rejection by many churches of the LGBT community.

**Because for some it's such a dividing debate I'd like to draw your attention back to 1 Corinthians. Let's keep a loving approach to this conversation at the very forefront of our minds and our discussion.**

*Please continue to the next page to read an excerpt from 'A matter of integrity'*



## ***'A matter of integrity' - an excerpt***

Promiscuity is always damaging and dehumanising. Casual and self-centred expressions of sexuality – homosexual or heterosexual – never reflect God's faithfulness, grace and self-giving love. Only a permanent and stable relationship, in which respect and faithfulness are given and received, can offer the security in which well-being and love can thrive.

One tragic outworking of the Church's historical rejection of faithful gay relationships is our failure to provide homosexual people with any model of how to cope with their sexuality, except for those who have the gift of, or capacity for, celibacy. In this way we have left people vulnerable and isolated. When we refuse to make room for gay people to live in loving, stable relationships, we consign them to lives of loneliness, secrecy and fear. It's one thing to be critical of a promiscuous lifestyle – but shouldn't the Church consider nurturing positive models for permanent and monogamous homosexual relationships?

Traditionally, it is argued that the injunctions – of both the Old and New Testaments – against homosexual activity are irrefutable and therefore any attempt to interpret them in new ways betrays the Bible. Things, however, may not be as we thought.

For many, a central issue is the exegesis of the second Genesis Creation Story (Genesis 2:4-25), which is the one that Jesus later refers to, as recorded in Matthew 19:5: 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' (Genesis 2:24).

Was the author intending to enshrine the view that all lifelong sexual unions should be exclusively heterosexual because this is a 'creation ordinance'? Or, is this simply the normative illustration, whereas the critical truths of the story lie elsewhere? If it is the former, then it is perhaps legitimate to refer to practicing homosexual sex, even within a lifelong relationship, as having 'fallen short of God's ideal' and to state that those who are not heterosexually orientated are 'in need of restoration'. But, if it's the latter, then does the 'norm' necessarily infer the 'ideal'? Or is it like the 'norm' of being right-handed, which never implies any failing of those who are born left-handed? If so, then neither of the earlier negative definitions is appropriate, but instead cause a great deal of unnecessary pain and, sometimes, terrible tragedy.

Why am I so passionate about this issue? Because people's lives are at stake. Numerous studies show that suicide rates among gay people, especially young people, are comparatively high. Church leaders sometimes use this data to argue that homosexuality is unhealthy when tragically it's anti-gay stigma, propped up by Church attitudes, which, all too often, drives these statistics.

I believe that when we treat homosexual people as pariahs and push them outside our communities and churches; when we blame them for what they are; when we deny them our blessing on their commitment to lifelong, faithful relationships, we make them doubt whether they are children of God, made in his image.

## Questions:

### Follow

- Do you feel able to be honest with your community about what you think and feel?
- Regardless of your starting point, are you willing or able to have your mind changed?

### Church

- Does it concern you that the LGBT discussion has become such a contentious point of debate?
- Should the church be focusing on other things? What should they be?

### Action

- Who are the people in or near your community who need to know that they are welcome and accepted as they are?
- What are you going to do to extend a hand of kindness and grace?