

Email Exchanges on the Topic of Sexuality
Mako Nagasawa
Letter 2

Hi *****,

Thanks for your thoughtful reply. Before proceeding onto more discussion about the relevant Scriptures and the relationship between them, I want to say that I appreciate learning a little more about your story and experience. I want to sympathize as much as I can with the challenge of being someone in your position. And I admire the personal and relational integrity with which you have approached it so far. You mentioned making room for gay people and gay Christians, and I want to just briefly note that I try to be as conscientious about that as possible. While the related political and social issues have not been part of our discussion, I can imagine that you might be wondering how I think through those things. If at some point you are curious about that, I'm happy to talk about it, but I won't assume that you are and I won't belabor the point now.

In these conversations, I also have in my heart and mind many other people who have wrestled with the same questions intellectually and emotionally. Some are like you in their position and life experience. Some, however, are Christian people who feel same-sex attractions, and nevertheless understand Scripture differently from you, and meet with Jesus in Scripture to nourish themselves and sustain the commitments appropriate to their convictions. I admire those friends as well. And the way this issue is woven into Scripture, and handled and thought through, has implications for how we receive Scripture for other facets of our lives as well. So this discussion is as personal for others, myself included, as it is for you, on many levels. That means that while I can definitely understand why you might value your own personal experience so highly, I don't know how personal experience can be the ultimate criterion of truth.

So for example, in 1 John 4, the Greek word 'agape' does not encompass 'romantic love' in the way you suggest. Rather, it tempers, reshapes, and qualifies it. The English word 'love' can be used with reference to any number of things: our parents, spouse, country, and ice cream. But the Greek world had four words for 'love,' depending on what you were talking about. 'Eros' was the word that was used for erotic love, sexual passion, and, interestingly enough, patriotism. However, John in his letter is speaking not of 'eros' but 'agape,' the highest devotion. In a Christian sense, God expressed agape love towards us in Christ to cleanse us from sin (1 Jn.4:10). As we return agape love to God, this speaks of our utmost, holy devotion to Him. And then only as we participate by the Spirit in the agape-love that Jesus has for other persons, are we to agape-love others in a way that is appropriate to us as people (1 Jn.4:7; Jn.15:1 – 17). Agape love towards God tempered, reshaped, qualified, ordered, and organized the other three forms of love we can express: eros (erotic, romantic, patriotic, passionate), storge (familial), and phileo (friendship). C. S. Lewis' book *The Four Loves* is a nice reflection on that. To absolutize eros, storge, and phileo forms of love into the primary place of agape (our first love for God) would be tantamount to loving self, another person, parents, the United States, or ice cream as the highest good; that would be idolatry. So we're back to asking the questions of how do we love God, and how did God order and shape our other loves, including sexual/romantic love.

To return to some of the relevant passages, here's a question that comes up when we read Romans 1:21 – 32. When Paul refers to what is 'unnatural' in sexual relations in 1:26 – 27, you believe that he means 'unnatural *for them*.' I'm gathering that you believe that Paul would say something like this: 'To one's self be true. If same-sex desire is, or feels, 'natural' for a person, then it is correct to act on monogamously and lovingly.' If this is what you are doing to the passage, then, what should be said of bisexual desire, which is a bit more complicated to live out in practice? Is bisexuality an intentional part of God's creation that should be lived out through two marriage partners simultaneously: one male and one female?

Thanks,
Mako