

Let me begin today by thanking Pastor Emerson for bringing a helpful and insightful message for us last week. Our church is blessed to have him as part of our family. Let me also say thank you to several people who have influenced this message today: Jon Tyson, Jackie Hill Perry, Debra Hirsch, Wesley Hill, Todd Wilson, and Preston Sprinkle, all of whom have written books that have been extremely helpful and from which I have drawn extensively. Let me also say thank you to several people who are a part of this church who are attracted to the same-sex who have read this message in advance and provided very helpful and loving feedback.

Of all the controversial topics we are going to discuss in this nine-week series on sexuality and relationships, this message on homosexuality has the highest probability of being not only the most interesting to a lot of people, but also the most upsetting to a lot of people. We are talking about something that has been hotly debated in our country for decades, something that has been heavily legislated around, something that has impacted a high percentage of families, and something that, for certain individuals, has dramatically shaped the direction of their lives. If you identify as gay, lesbian, or bi-sexual, I want you to know at the beginning of this message that you matter to God, you matter to this church, and you matter to me. We are really glad you are here. Because of the actions of certain people who claim the name of Christ, you have felt like the church is the very last place you would be welcomed. I'm sorry for that. You are welcomed here. We are honored that you are with us. As we've been saying this entire series, our source of what we teach is God's Word and our heart is one of compassion and love.

When I was in college there was a donut shop about two miles from campus. I had been at a variety of functions where donuts from this particular shop were served, and they were incredible. One day I decided to go to their shop and get a few myself. I walked in and noticed that next to the sign where they had their donuts listed along with their prices, there was another sign listing the sort of people they refused to serve in their store; homosexuals were at the top of the list. When I read it, my heart stung. It's one thing to say, "We clearly don't see eye to eye on this, but I value you as a person." But this was a rigid and unmistakable bullhorn of a declaration: "Because we don't see eye to eye, we want absolutely nothing to do with you." All I can say is that I am so thankful to God that that is not his heart toward any of us. Thank God that on the last night of Jesus' life, he lowered himself to serve and wash the feet of every man at the table, even the one who would betray him. Following the example of Jesus, it's our joy and honor to walk alongside people, love people, and serve people, no matter who you are, where you come from, or what you believe.

As we work our way through a discussion on homosexuality today, I want to focus on three key questions: (1) How did we get to where we are today? (2) What does God's word say about homosexuality? (3) How should followers of Jesus respond to the LGBTQ community?

Let's begin by talking about where we are today as it pertains to the discussion around homosexuality. We are in a very different place than we were just a handful of years ago. I grew up in the late 80s and 90s. I remember when Bill Clinton (which is fascinating on many fronts) signed the Defense of Marriage Act, which defended the right of states not to recognize the legitimacy of same-sex marriages. When Barack Obama was running for president, on numerous

occasions he said on record that he was staunchly opposed to legalizing same-sex marriages. What was clearly and repeatedly seen as far too progressive just a decade or two ago, even by those on the far left, is now assumed as a given today, by every single person on the left and even by many people who are moderate on the right. Seven years ago, the Supreme Court, in the case of Obergefell vs. Hodges, required all states to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples, which led to hundreds upon hundreds of gay couples lining up outside court houses, covered by every news outlet in America.

As I was growing up, there were only two or three shows on television with a gay character. Now, you'd find it almost impossible to find any show or movie without at least two or three gay characters. There is an entire genre of shows on Netflix featuring gay and lesbian story lines. In my high school of 2,100 students there was a boy named Daniel who was openly gay, and a girl named Paige who was openly lesbian. That was it. Two out of 2,100. A recent Gallup poll released in February 2022 noted that today, 20.8% of Gen Z's identify as LGBTQ. Compare that with just 2% of Baby Boomers and less than 1% of people born before the end of WWII. It is impossible not to recognize that western society and culture in America has seen an absolutely radical shift in the last few generations and even the last few decades. How did we get here? What brought about this change?

No matter where you fall on this issue, it's important to understand the history, because it wasn't random. It was actually the result of a strategic, calculated, and highly resourced cultural campaign. In 1971, "The Gay Liberation Manifesto" was published, declaring war in no uncertain terms on society as it existed. The goal of the Gay Liberation movement was to normalize the acceptance of same-sex relationships and win the rights and protections associated with those relationships. They made a bit of progress, but as the 70s and 80s continued, AIDS swept like a wildfire through America, claiming the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, most of whom were gay men, casting a dark cloud over the movement as a whole. But then in 1998, 175 of the leading gay activists in America put together a war conference that met just outside of Washington, DC; they established a four-part agenda for the gay community in this country. In that meeting, a Harvard-trained social scientist, Marshall Kirk, and Hunter Madsen, a leading Madison Avenue advertiser, updated the homosexual manifesto and outlined a strategic and winsome public relations propaganda campaign in which they laid the groundwork for the next stage of gay revolution. To read it is to reverse engineer how we got to our cultural moment.

The manifesto details a three-pronged approach.

- Desensitize the public to gay relationships through "a continuous flood of gay-related advertising, presented in the least offensive fashion possible." Here are direct quotes:
 - "The main thing is to talk about gayness until the issue becomes thoroughly tiresome."
 - "Seek desensitization and nothing more."
 - "If you can get straights to think homosexuality is just another thing—meriting no more than a shrug of the shoulders—then your battle for legal and social rights is virtually won."

- Jam opposition by silencing dissent, using economic levers, advertising, and political means to attack people who might oppose the gay movement, in effect making any opponents seem like low-minded, backward bigots. As a sterling example of this, in 2017 the Rolling Stones magazine published “Meet the Megadonor Behind the LGBTQ Rights Movement,” which details how Tim Gill leveraged his 500 million dollar fortune and got organizations like the Ford Foundation (yes, that Ford) to leverage their many billions of dollars to fight for gay rights in court and attack those who held contradictory views. In the article he said, “We are going into the hardest states in the country, and we are going to punish the wicked”—meaning he is going to southern states and other red-voting states and inflicting financial and societal pain on those who disagree with the LGBTQ movement. Campaigns against companies like Hobby Lobby and Chick-fil-A, whose owners have a conservative view of marriage, are good examples, but there are countless others.
- Convert popular opinion by (1) convincing the American Psychological Association to remove homosexuality as a disorder, (2) changing legislation, striking down anti-LGBTQ laws like DOMA and winning legal protection, and then (this is really fascinating) (3) going after the church and convincing Christians to change their opinion of homosexuality as a sin. David Carter, who wrote on this in a book called Stonewall and who is a huge proponent of the LGBTQ movement, said the first two areas have been accomplished, but the third step has been stubbornly hard. Interestingly, whereas the majority of church-attending Christians 30 and older do not affirm that homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle to God, the drastic majority of Christians 30 and under do. This media and propaganda campaign, though it took an extra generation to penetrate the church, has nearly captured the entire younger Christian generation.

I’d like to share with you a few quotes from the book After the Ball, a national # 1 best seller, written by gay men who put this entire plan together:

The public should be persuaded that gays are victims of circumstance, that they no more chose their sexual orientation than their height. For all practical purposes, gays should be considered to have been born gay—even though sexual orientation, for most humans, seems to be the product of a complex interaction between innate predispositions and environmental factors during childhood and early adolescence. To suggest in public that homosexuality might be chosen is to open the can of worms labeled moral choice and sin and give the religious right a stick beat us with.

First, you get your foot in the door, by being as similar as possible; then, and only then—when your one little difference (orientation) is finally accepted—can you start dragging in your other peculiarities, one by one. You hammer in the wedge narrow end first. As the saying goes, allow the camel's nose beneath your tent, and his whole body will soon follow.

(The goal is the) conversion of the average American's emotions, mind, and will, through planned psychological attack, in the form of propaganda fed to the nation via the media.

My goal isn't to moralize any of this, but rather simply to understand history. We didn't come to believe what we believe by happenstance. It's not that we are more intelligent or less intelligent than people who came before us. We simply live a few decades after a group of brilliant, resourced, and highly determined people attempted, in their own words, to wage a cultural war and change our "emotions, mind and will" about this subject. Many people have studied this and concluded this was the most successful targeted cultural shift that has ever occurred in human history.

While the Gay Liberation movement was advancing their agenda, certain religious conservatives with a far right leaning political persuasion decided to push back, often with very non-Christlike means, the most famous example of which would be Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church. Every Christian leader I've ever met thinks this guy was certifiably crazy. In no way did he ever represent the average evangelical. But despite that, because of the attention he drew with his publicity stunts, like leading anti-gay protests outside of military funerals and at the funeral for a gay man named Matthew Shepherd in 1998, repeatedly shouting: "*Matt is in hell. Matt is in hell,*" his voice of hate was seen as representative of the church at large, with devastating consequences. In the fascinating book, [UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity](#), a poll showed that when non-Christians are asked to describe Christians, 90% of them think "anti-gay." More than anything else, being anti-gay is the single most glaring attribute about Christians to the non-Christian world—not our love for God, not our love for people, not our love for Scripture, not the tens of thousands of hospitals and orphanages and schools and food banks and homeless shelters that have been opened in Jesus' name, but being anti-gay. Speaking as a pastor, I think one of Satan's most sinister agendas is to drive a wedge between the church and those in the greatest need of the church, between God and the people God is pursuing with his love.

That's a brief fly-over on where we are and how we got here. If it feels like it's been a bit of a cultural war, that's exactly what has happened: it's involved politics, legislation, media, marketing, big corporations, education, religion—and it has shaped countless lives. Now, let's move to the second part of this message: what does the Bible have to say about homosexuality? It's important to note up front that the Bible isn't about homosexuality. It's a book about the God who made the world and all mankind to live in this world, and how, even after mankind rebelled against God and tarnished the world he made, God, out of his infinitely great love, came on a rescue mission to redeem humanity and restore all creation through the person of Jesus Christ. That's what this book is about. But sexuality is a common theme in this book, and homosexuality in specific on a few occasions. I want to look at four passages: two from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament.

The best place to start is Genesis 2, when God created mankind. Genesis 2 describes how God made Adam. Adam looked at all the different animals and assigned them all a name, but in looking at all the animals there was no companion found for Adam. There were other living things, but there was no one like him. Genesis 2:18 says, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" God made Eve and brought her to Adam to be a helper suitable for him. This is the marriage God designed—one man and one woman. Those who view the Bible to be affirming of same-sex relationships say that the reason Eve was a helper suitable for Adam is not because she was a woman, per se, but because she was

human. She is not like one of the animals Adam named; she's another human being, and any human being, male or female, could be a divinely sanctioned mate. The problem with this view is that it does not deal sufficiently with the passages. The word for "helper suitable" is the Hebrew word *kenegdo*. It means "like / against" or "similar but opposite." In one way Eve is like Adam because she is a human being. In another way, she is not like Adam because she is a woman, not a man. It is specifically her shared humanity but her different gender that makes her the ideal spouse for Adam. She is a helper but not one like him, a helper that is different than him, allowing not only for a more complete partnership and companionship, but also for the ability to be fruitful and multiply. This passage is key for the conversation not only because it introduces us to the divinely designed aspect of gender and marriage, but also because when Jesus was asked about marriage, he referred back to this passage to ground his answer in the principles found in the Genesis account. Jesus said marriage consists of one man and one woman, leaving their respective families, coming together to form a new family and to be faithful to one another for the rest of their lives.

The next key passage for this discussion is found in the book of Leviticus. Leviticus is the book where people's reading through the Bible in a year plan goes to die. It's not people's favorite book. But the premise of all 27 chapters of Leviticus is that God has called his people to be holy, to be different, to be set apart from the rest of the world. God's people have unique expectations and standards placed on them specifically because God is holy, and as his people, God calls them to be holy. In Leviticus 18:22 we read, "Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable." Leviticus 20:13 says, "If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads."

This is fairly clear teaching prohibiting same-sex relationships between two men. Some have looked at these passages and said, "Because that is in the Old Testament, and we are new covenant people, it is not relevant to us." Though there are certain commands from the Old Testament that are not relevant to new covenant Christians, one universal principle that nearly all scholars agree on is that if a command from the Old Testament is repeated in the New Testament, then it is as relevant today as it was then. For example, there are many times in the Old Testament where God's people are commanded to keep the Sabbath, but that command is never given in the New Testament. Although keeping the Sabbath is a good idea, and it promotes health and human flourishing, most scholars would say that you are not sinning if you work on Sunday. In this covenant, refusing to keep the Sabbath is more sinning against yourself than sinning against God. That argument works for the Sabbath because, again, the New Testament never commands us to keep the Sabbath. But that argument doesn't work for homosexuality, as there are three different passages in the New Testament that explicitly condemn same-sex relationships. In addition to that, the surrounding context of these passages in Leviticus refers to practices which are clearly impermissible for God's people today. If you read those passages, you'll see prohibitions not only against homosexuality but also against incest, adultery, bestiality, and sacrificing your children to idols. No one is making a case for Christians practicing any of those behaviors, so it's not logical to make the case for Christians being permitted to practice homosexuality based on that train of thought.

That's two Old Testament passages; what about the New Testament? Before opening up the relevant passages, let's talk about the view of homosexuality in the first century Greco-Roman world, which was the historical and cultural context from which and to which the New Testament was written. Often there is the assumption that when the Bible, and the New Testament in particular, references homosexuality, it's talking something other than we are talking about. Some think, "We know homosexuality to be loving, monogamous, committed relationships between mature adults, but they knew homosexuality to be about power dynamics or pederasty or male prostitution, not orientation." So when the Bible speaks to homosexuality, it's addressing the worst kind of it, not the modern kind of it. That is a very common argument, but does it hold up?

If you look at scholarly works like Craig Williams' Roman Homosexuality from Oxford Press and KJ Dover's Greek Homosexuality from Harvard University Press, both of which are affirming of same-sex relationships, they make the case, historically speaking, that the ancient world knew a great deal about enduring, committed same-sex relationships. Not only were there many specific examples of notable public figures in long-term, loving, same-sex relationships, it was written about in Plutarch and even Plato. Lesbian marriage relationships were written about by Lamblicus, Lucian, Clement, and Ptolemy. World-renowned scholar NT Wright has said:

As a classicist I have to say that when I read Plato's Symposium, or when I read the accounts from the early Roman empire of the practice of homosexuality, then it seems to me that they knew just as much about it as we do. In particular, a point which is often missed, they knew a great deal about what people would regard as longer-term, reasonably stable relations between two people of the same gender. This is not a modern invention, it's already there in Plato. The idea that in Paul's day it was always a matter of exploitation of younger men by older men or whatever, of course there was plenty of that then, as there is today, but it was by no means the only thing. They knew about the whole range of options there....We have been conned into thinking this is a new phenomena.

Thomas Hubbard, professor of classics at the University of Texas, said, "Homosexuality in the early imperial age of Rome may have ceased to be merely another practice of personal pleasure and began to be viewed as an essential and central category of personal identity, exclusive of and antithetical to heterosexual orientation." In other words, when the New Testament speaks about homosexuality, the writers had in mind either exactly the same thing we have in mind, or something that is at least astoundingly similar.

With that in mind, let's dive in. The primary New Testament passage on this is found in Romans 1:21-27.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever

praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

In this passage Paul is making the argument that people knew God and understood how they were supposed to honor God. But instead of worshiping the creator, they decided to give their loyalty and affection to created things. God, rather than forcing people to worship him, allowed mankind to do whatever they wanted and to follow their lusts, resulting in sexual immorality, lesbian female relationships, and gay male relationships. If you read the entire book of Romans, you'll understand that in Romans 1-2 Paul is building a case that all humanity is sinful, under condemnation, and in desperate need of salvation. In chapter 2, he proves the sinfulness of the Jewish people by showing how they have rejected the laws of Scripture. But in chapter 1, the passage we just read, Paul proves the sinfulness of the non-Jewish people by how they have rejected the laws of nature, with homosexuality being his chief example. These homosexual relationships are seen as proof of mankind rejecting God, as the byproduct of mankind rejecting God, and as punishment for mankind rejecting God.

The second passage that is helpful for this discussion is one we have read several times over the past few weeks.

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

The phrase in question is “men who have sex with men.” This phrase has been translated in a variety of different ways by a variety of different people and Bible translations, some of which have caused incredible pain. Some render the Greek words here as “effeminate,” “homosexuals,” “male prostitutes,” or “sodomites.” Honestly, it can be tough to translate this because what exactly does it mean to be gay? Does it mean those who feel some level of romantic attraction to a person of the same gender, those who feel exclusive attraction to people of the same gender, those who engage in sex with people of the same gender, those who are in a committed relationship with a person of the same gender, those who are active in the broader gay community? There is a broad spectrum of experiences. What is this passage condemning? The feelings, the orientation, the activity, the lifestyle? When you look at this passage in the original language, I think it is abundantly clear that Paul is condemning as sin not a person's romantic feelings for a person of the same-sex, or a sense of exclusive orientation toward homosexuality, but rather the act of homosexual intimacy.

There are two Greek words in question here: *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. “*Malakoi*” is a word that simply means soft; it is a reference to the passive partner in the male-male sex act and was sometimes used to refer to male prostitutes, call boys, or the younger male in a homosexual relationship. “*Arsenokoitai*” is a word that Paul invented. He coined this phrase specifically based on the command from Leviticus 20 we referenced earlier. Leviticus 20:13 says:

“Whoever shall lie with a male as with a woman”

In the Greek it reads:

“Hos an koimethe meta **arsenos koiten** gynaikos”

The words in question are highlighted; they mean “lying with a man; bedding a man.” Paul takes those words from Leviticus and invents a new compound word, arsenokoitai. Again, what’s spoken of as sinful is not a romantic feeling or an orientation, but the act of sexual intimacy with a person of the same gender. There is no reference to or qualification based upon age, coercion or consent, power dynamics, prostitution, love, or committed monogamous relationships, but simply a continuation of the Old Testament prohibition brought into the New Testament clearly identifying same-sex relationships as outside God’s moral law.

But take note of this: in this passage, homosexuality is not the only or the primary sin spelled out. There are nine such sins, including all kinds of sexual immorality to level the playing field, greed, drunkenness, and slander. Homosexual practice isn’t stigmatized or isolated as a particularly taboo sin, but simply as one other type of sin from which we need redemption, just like every other sin. Of all people, Jerry Falwell, the leader of the moral majority spoke on this:

The lack of love in the church towards the gay and lesbian is undeniable. We'll take a drug addict in, we'll take in an alcoholic, we'll take in anybody. But if gays and lesbians attempt to come in the door, people slide over. They don't want to sit by them. They don't want anything to do with them. It's just the opposite approach the Lord would take. Unless we open the doors and show love, we're never going to solve the problem.

He hit the nail on the head. God’s arms are open wide to all people, which means the doors of the church should always be open to all people as well.

This leads naturally to the third question of the day. We’ve talked about how we got here and we’ve looked at what the Bible teaches; now let’s talk about how we as God’s people are to respond.

- *With rich relationships.* When Jesus walked among us, he welcomed everyone to his table. In fact, the primary critique against him by the religious community was that he didn’t spend enough time with other “spiritual” people but rather with tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners. Those who the religious establishment didn’t want were the very people Jesus seemed most excited to dine with and deepen relationships with. As followers of Jesus, that has to be our heart. Those in the LGBTQ community are in unique need of rich relationships—71% of gay and lesbian people under the age of 25 report feeling sad and hopeless and 45% (four times the rate of straight students) report having seriously considered taking their own life within the past year. If Jesus were walking among us today, the gay and lesbian community would be drawn to him like a magnet, and when they were in his presence, they would know how loved they are. We are the body of Christ; the same should be true of us. I know the capital C church has

partially failed at this in the past. But shame on us if it's easier to find a hook up in an app or a gay bar than it is to find deep and meaningful relationships in our church. I know a number of life groups in our church who have a gay or a lesbian member. They have been welcomed, they have been loved, they have a seat at the table just like anybody else. We want that to always be the case.

- *With true discipleship.* When Jesus calls us to become his disciples, he calls us to deny ourselves, which means we lay down anything in our lives that may not honor God in order to follow him. Jesus calls us to count the cost and take up our cross, which means we evaluate the price of following Jesus, and we decide that even though it is costly, Jesus is worth it. Our hope as a church, for all people, is to help one another take up our cross, lay down our lives, and follow Jesus. Those who are gay and lesbian have a uniquely challenging cross to carry. It is our job to help them carry that difficult cross. Listen to the way Justin Lee, an exclusively same-sex attracted Christian, describes what it was like as a teenager processing through what it meant for him to be a disciple:

I knew that if I wanted to serve Christ with my life, and if He was calling me to celibacy, then I would have to be celibate. I considered what this would mean. Obviously, it would mean no sex. Ever. Imagine telling any teenage boy that he can never have sex, that he must go his entire life without being able to experience it even once. I imagine his response would be less than enthusiastic. Mine was likewise. As a teenager, abstaining from sex is difficult enough when you know you're waiting for the right time. It's far more difficult when you know there will never be a right time, even if you find the right person. It wasn't just the physical pleasure I wanted; I craved the intimacy of sex. I craved the experience of total vulnerability with another human being. To go without sex was one thing, but to go without romance and companionship was quite another. People don't marry for the right to have sex; they marry for love and the opportunity to build a life together with another human being. I was going to have to give that up, too.

Can we all agree that it is a difficult road to walk? As brothers and sisters in Christ, we have a responsibility to support people on their journey to the cross, and the more challenging their journey to the cross, the more support we should give. It's not our job to apologize for the standards Jesus has set for each one of us, but it is our job to shoulder the load and help one another carry the weight.

- *With encompassing Wisdom.* Those who are gay and lesbian need God's wisdom for a unique set of questions in life. Should I refer to myself as gay or lesbian, or rather as someone who experiences attraction to the same-sex? Should I share my sense of orientation with everyone in my life, or just my closer community? Should I consider pursuing a marriage relationship with someone of the opposite gender, even though I don't have romantic feelings for them? How do I navigate close friendships with people of the same gender without crossing emotional lines? What do I do with my desires to have and raise children? These are important, pressing, life-impacting decisions, and as a church, we need to meet people where they are and help them seek God's wisdom for each and every question they face.

- *With family support.* There are certainly several dozen people in this room who experience same-sex attraction and hundreds of people in this room who have a family member that is gay or lesbian. There are moms and dads, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, and grandparents who have had a conversation they were not prepared for with someone they love dearly. You've asked so many questions about why this happened—was it something you did? You've experienced feelings of grief, anger, loss, embarrassment, depression. This is obviously something that has chiefly impacted someone you love, but it has also deeply impacted you. I want you to know that our church is here to meet you right where you are, to love you right where you are. You don't have to try to pretend to have a "perfect family." You don't always have to try to put on a good face. You can be honest about what you are dealing with and know that God is going to meet you in this, and our church family is here for you, too.

Our vision as a church is to connect people to Jesus. Jesus taught the highest level of sexual ethics found anywhere in history before him, and yet sexual sinners from all over the spectrum were drawn to him. As his followers, the same should be true of us. He beautifully and flawlessly wed conviction and compassion. As his followers, the same should be true of us. If you are here and you are gay or lesbian, I just want to say again: we value you. Thank you for listening to all of this, and if there is any way our church can serve you, it would be our great honor and joy.