

Homosexuality / COB / 06.21.15

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: me]** When I was in graduate school at Georgetown, my bathroom had mirrors along one wall plus on the medicine cabinet. So I saw my profile for the first time in years. I knew my hairline was receding, but from the front I looked about the same; my profile was shocking. So I started to shave my head down to the skin. Coincidentally, this was the fashion in DC for homosexual men. So people I met would ask me whether I was homosexual or a cancer patient or a skin-head Nazi.
- Until I went to college, I never knew of anyone having homosexual desires. But I was walking on campus as a freshman and saw two guys, who told me they liked to watch the way I walked. So I was thinking, “A compliment is a compliment, right? but I’m not sure what I’m supposed to do with that one.” My impulse was to just walk away, but that was what they were waiting for, and that’s why I was uncomfortable! I managed something polite, and then I did walk away, but I sure felt conspicuous for the next quarter mile.
- † I hope to talk seriously and sensitively about homosexuality, whether it is always a sin, and how we in the church should address this issue and treat people involved in homosexuality. This is a scriptural issue, so it deserves study; but it’s on our agenda because it’s very relevant culturally.
- The Supreme Court is deciding whether marriage should be re-defined to include homosexual couples. In a WSJ/NBC poll last month, 58% supported legalizing homosexual marriage.
 - The media is pushing beyond the issue of fair treatment, toward widespread acceptance of homosexuality as normal, as a good thing.
 - While government statistics show 2.3% of the population identifies themselves as homosexual; the percentage of homosexual characters on television can approach 50% for some shows. HGTV cancelled *Flip It Forward* after the hosts expressed views about traditional marriage.
 - The Navy is considering dismissal of a chaplain for speaking biblical truth about homosexuality in counseling sessions. It has become politically incorrect to speak out about homosexuality being sinful, and now people are starting to talk about that free speech as a hate crime.
 - And though I disagree with that, Christians need to be careful not to misuse their rights and scripture to express hate, derision, or judgment on others.
 - So, this is culturally relevant, scripturally pertinent, and on our agenda for today. Let’s pray...

Is Homosexuality always a sin?

- † **[Slide 2: Leviticus 18.1-4]** Our first question has to be, “Is homosexuality always a sin?”
- We begin in Leviticus 18. As we saw in the video [jointhebibleproject.com], Leviticus 18 is about the moral purity God demanded from the people of Israel so they could live in his presence.
 - **The chapter begins [18.1-4 NET]: The LORD [Yahweh] spoke to Moses: “Speak to the Israelites and tell them, ‘I am the LORD [Yahweh] your God! You must not do as they do in the land of Egypt where you have been living, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan into which I am about to bring you; you must not walk in their statutes. You must observe my regulations and you must be sure to walk in my statutes. I am the LORD [Yahweh] your God.”**

- † As we said last week, there is a way of life that God designed for us and there is a different way characteristic of the world. God’s point here was to contrast his pure way with the sinful way of the culture where they had been and of the culture where they were going. Vv.24-30 end this passage with a warning not to do the abominable things that other people do, but to learn to live God’s way.
- **[Slide 3: 18.9]** Between these two warnings is an application of this moral contrast concerning sexuality. E.g., v.9 [NET] says **“You must not have sexual intercourse with your sister.”**
 - God says a man is not to have any kind of sexual relationship with any close relative, nor with someone else’s wife, nor with a woman during the time of menstruation, nor with animals.
 - **[Slide 4: 18.22]** And in v.22 [NET], God says, **“You must not have sexual intercourse with a male as one has sexual intercourse with a woman; it is a detestable act.”**
 - The Hebrew verb here is [שָׁכַב], it literally means to lie down. In Israel, a man was not to lie down with another man; i.e. he was not to have a sexual relationship with another man.
- † Now let’s ask ourselves some questions.
- This verse contains one of a set of sexual prohibitions. Do not sleep with your sister, do not sleep with another man. Does it say, “do not sleep with your sister unless she is as willing as you are?” No. Does it say, “do not sleep with your sister unless she is of age and is as willing as you are?” No. It also does *not* say that sleeping with another man is bad only if one of you is not of age or not willing. This is always a sin.
 - **[Slide 5: 20.13]** Does it matter whether a man is the active participant or the passive participant, is this strictly about masculinity? No. Our text is not specific about that, but look at a parallel verse, **Leviticus 20.13 NET: “If a man has sexual intercourse with a male as one has sexual intercourse with a woman, the two of them have committed an abomination...”** Both the active and passive participant are guilty of sinful activity.
 - So without qualification, men are not to lie with other men. What about women with other women? We’ll see today that all homosexual behavior is sinful. We will talk about the women.
- † **[Slide 6: relevant]** Here’s a different question. This prohibition was part of the Mosaic Covenant which guided Israel. Even in this chapter, we see specific references to the historical context of establishing the nation. We are under a New Covenant which replaced the Mosaic Covenant, and we are in the church, not the nation of Israel. So do these restrictions apply to us? Three thoughts:
- First, yes, this prohibition applies to us, because the moral aspects of the Law reflected God’s character, which never changes, and which all people are supposed to reflect in ourselves. Even under the New Covenant, we know it is wrong to sleep with your sister. The same applies with a man sleeping with another man. If Paul or John vaguely refer in the New Testament to sexual immorality, we turn to Leviticus to see that this means we are not to have a sexual relationship with a close relative, someone else’s spouse, animals, or someone of the same gender.
 - Second, yes this prohibition applies to us, because the moral principles about homosexuality are repeated in the New Testament writings for the church. We will look at that in a moment.
 - Third, yes this prohibition applies to us, because it reflects what God designed in creation. We will consider that also in a few minutes.

- † My first college roommate was an art student. He had to practice technique by making thirty second sketches of people in motion. So I would pose in a series of movements; e.g. as a batter at the plate, starting my swing, making contact, following through. We'd play music, talk, it was fun.
- He kept inviting me to pose for his class, saying they needed a steady stream of volunteers; but there I would be sitting still on a stool, which didn't appeal to me, so I never went. I found out later that I would have been posing nude, and that made me wonder why my roommate was so insistent that I volunteer. He did end up marrying a woman, but I heard he was conflicted about his sexuality for a couple of years.
- † **[Slide 7: 1 Corinthians 6.9-10]** Does that matter today? Let's take a look at some New Testament writings for the church under the New Covenant.
- **1 Corinthians 6.9-10 NET: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God."**
 - We know we are saved as a gift of grace from God, so this is not about earning our salvation. But as we discussed last week, there are different results in a person who is saved and walks with God in the light compared to a person who walks by the flesh in spiritual darkness.
 - Where the NET has "passive homosexual partners" and "practicing homosexuals" the NASB says "effeminate" and "homosexuals." The Greek terms [μαλακός and ἄρσενικοίτης] indicate the passive and the active men engaged in sexual behavior together.
 - Any involvement in homosexual activity is unrighteous in God's sight, indicative of our depravity, our un-holiness, our walking in the darkness of sin, and thus our need for salvation.
- † **[Slide 8: Romans 1]** In Romans 1, Paul begins explaining the universal need among people for God's salvation by grace through faith in the gospel truth about Jesus the Christ.
- **He says in v.18 [NET] "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness..."** and then he talks about how people have turned away from God to believe false ideas, worship false gods, and serve created things.
- † **[Slide 9: Romans 1.26-28]** Then he says in vv.26-28 [NET] **"For this reason God gave them [people] over to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged the natural sexual relations for unnatural ones, and likewise the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed in their passions for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what should not be done."**
- The Greek verb for "gave them over" is παραδίδωμι. Because people turned away from God, he gave them over, he abandoned those people, to take the wrong path, to have depraved minds and do what should not be done.
 - **[Slide 10: unnatural relations]** There are a lot of sinful passions and activities mentioned immediately after this passage, but Paul started with something symbolic of depravity and sinfulness: homosexual passions and activities.
 - Men abandoned natural intimate relations with women to have passion for one another and to commit shameless acts with one another. Women did the same, abandoning heterosexual

passions and activities for homosexual ones. For men and women, homosexuality, all homosexuality, is sinful, indicative of our depravity and need for salvation.

- † **[Slide 11: grace]** You might ask, well what about grace? Doesn't God forgive us for something like this? Yes, if you have homosexual passions or have performed homosexual activities, but you accept Jesus as your savior, God will forgive you. But grace does not give us permission to sin. Grace calls us into an intimate relationship with God, not to turn away from God to pursue the ways of the world. If you are tolerant of homosexual passions or activities in your life, then you are turning away from God to pursue the way of the world.
- **[Slide 12: love]** Well what about love, doesn't God love us no matter what? Yes, even if you have homosexual passions or behaviors, God still loves you; nothing can take that away. But God's love calls us into holiness and righteousness, what God considers healthy living; it does not desire for us to remain in corruption and sin.
 - God's love is why he extends us grace, so we can be spiritually born again to begin the purification process we call "sanctification." To be sanctified is to be holy, set apart to be like God and for God's purposes. God's plan is to transform believers to reflect his character and represent him here, just as he created people to do at the beginning.
- † **[Slide 13: Genesis 1.27-28]** So let's go back to the beginning, and look in Genesis. It is interesting that Paul contrasted homosexuality with what is "natural," that he implied homosexuality was not "natural." Because many people argue today that we should accept homosexuality because they think it is "natural." Paul disagreed, and the reason he disagreed is in Genesis.
- † First, let's refresh on our purpose: **Genesis 1.27-28 NET: God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground."**
- God created man and woman in his own image. That means a lot of things, but at its very foundation it means we were created to reflect God's own character, so we could carry out our dual mission of representing God here on Earth and multiplying the image of God by having babies and then raising them up to also be God's image bearers.
 - Obviously, only heterosexual intercourse can produce babies; this was part of God's design and purpose for people.
- † **[Slide 14:] Genesis 2.18 NET: The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion for him who corresponds to him."**
- The woman was to be a "help" [עֲזָרָה] to the man; and you women should not feel bad about that designation, since scripture uses the same word for God sometimes.
 - This woman, this "help," would be [זָרָה], meaning something opposite in the sense of complementary, something different but appropriate for the man.
 - So the woman would help the man in the purpose and mission God gave to people at creation: to reflect God's character, to represent God on Earth, and to multiply the image of God throughout the earth by raising children to also be God's image bearers.

- To do this fully, woman had to be different than man in a complementary way, so they could produce children. Heterosexual relationship was part of God’s natural design for people, so they could carry out their purpose working in complementary couples.

† **[Slide 15: Genesis 2.21-24]** **Genesis 2.21-24 NET: So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was asleep, he took part of the man's side and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the part he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one will be called ‘woman,’ [אִשָּׁה] for she was taken out of man [אִישׁ].” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and unites with his wife, and they become a new family.**

- “new family” is interpretive. The Hebrew term is [לִבְשָׁר אֶחָד], “one flesh.” This is a double entendre: the two people become one family and the two join together physically in sex.
- This answers the question about how Christians define marriage: the creation of marriage, of family, is part of God’s design in the creation of the universe: one man, one woman, coming together as a new family, to work together to reflect God’s character, represent God on Earth, and multiply his image through bearing children and raising them up to fulfill the same purpose.
- The question before the Supreme Court is not whether people can engage in homosexual behavior; not whether they can commit to each other in ceremonies; not whether they can live together; not whether they can enjoy employee benefits like heterosexual couples.
- The issue is what sort of union the state will recognize as marriage, as distinct from other relationships and associations. If we enshrine in law an unbiblical view of marriage, we diminish the concept to sexual expression, instead of God’s design as revealed in Genesis.
- A related issue is parenting. God’s design is for corresponding partners, one of each gender, to make up his representative family framework and multiply his image. It is true that many traditional families fail, but that doesn’t change the need for God’s form. Hundreds of studies support the view that children thrive more when they have active parents of both genders, and that communities thrive more when husbands and wives stay together.

† **[Slide 16: Genesis 2.18, 24]** God’s design in creation is why homosexuality is always sinful or unrighteous in God’s sight. His design for people includes a heterosexual element.

- In many ways, God designed us to be varied: some of us are left handed, some have red hair, some are better at art than math, some farm while others sell stocks, we could go on and on, listing differences among us which not only are acceptable to God, but actually part of his diverse creativity and his design for us to need one another.
- Gender differences are another part of his diverse creativity and his design for us to need one another. Homosexuality is not. In fact, homosexuality is antithetical to God’s design for gender differences, complementarity between spouses, and the reproduction aspect of our purpose as individual people and as a family unit.
- This explains why we are not talking about a “rights” issue in the same sense as equal rights for women or for ethnic minorities. Being African or Hispanic in ethnicity is not sinful; neither is being a woman; but pursuing homosexual passions and activities is.
- That said, I don’t advocate jailing people for homosexual behavior or denying homosexual couples jobs or shared employee benefits. There is no need to distinguish them in amoral

situations. I think Chik-fil-a handles this well: they will hire people who identify themselves as homosexual; but those employees have to accept that they are coming into a Christian business environment: there will be Christian music playing, there will be prayer and talk of Christ in business meetings, and all employees have to act with Christian morals in the workplace.

Implications

- † **[Slide 17: sources of sin]** Let me sum up the biblical teaching by saying that the universal opinion of Bible-believing church leaders for two thousand years – right up until now – has been that homosexuality – the passions and the activities – are sinful. What is not always clear is how to handle this issue as individuals and as a church.
- † Two questions people have are about nature. First, it should be clear that even if people are being true to their own feelings and desires when they engage in homosexuality, they still are sinning. They are exchanging what God designed to be natural for what they consider natural impulses.
- † Second is the issue of nature verses nurture. Are people born with homosexual tendencies or is this something that develops in them because of their experiences?
 - Many people believe they were born with homosexual feelings. I can understand that. I remember a friend who was homosexual asking me one time whether I had ever considered trying it. I laughed, because there are pictures of me at age two kissing girls, and women always were my greatest temptation. I have never had a doubt about my sexual preference; so I can understand if someone with a homosexual preference has the same lifelong certainty.
 - Christians sometimes argue that homosexuality has to be a nurture issue, not genetic. To be sure, a lot of people are exploited by their corrupted nature and sinful culture to try sinful indulgences that otherwise would not be attractive to them. But we should understand that a person's corrupted nature could give them homosexual tendencies from the start.
- † So, if people are born with such tendencies, should we accept it? And must God be ok with it, if he allowed them to be born this way?
 - No. I was born with a fierce temper, but scripture makes it clear that this was not God's original design, it is a result of my corrupted human nature. And scripture makes clear that I am not to succumb to my sinful tendencies: that despite my burning anger, I am not allowed to kill people; actually, I am not allowed even to strike people; actually, I am not allowed even to speak harshly to people! because in succumbing to my corrupted tendencies, I would be sinning, I would be going against my purpose of reflecting God's character and representing God here.
 - And note that scripture says even my anger is sinful, that the passion for violence itself is sin, not just acting on it. It is the same for homosexuality, the passion and the act are sinful.
- † **[Slide 18: individual]** So, what if you have homosexual desires or homosexual experiences?
 - First trust in Jesus. Trust Jesus as your savior, and you will experience redemption [which is freedom from the power of sin], and you will experience sanctification [which is healing and transformation from corruption into purity and righteousness].
 - As part of your trust, submit to Jesus. Allow him to rule in your life. Find your identity and validation in knowing you are created in God's image, saved by Christ's blood, and transformed

by the Holy Spirit. Sex is part of who we are, but sex should not have the exalted status it has in this culture. Jesus is the fullest example of what it means to be human, and he never had sex.

- You might have been born with this tendency or you might have lived in such a way to develop it, but now Jesus calls you to a new birth and a new life, one that brings you to God's character and obedience to God's commands.
- † If you have put your faith in Jesus and committed to follow him, then emotionally accept God's forgiveness. You might still experience unwanted sexual desires, but you do not have to feel ashamed. We all need Jesus every day. Undesired thoughts come to everyone, it's how you respond to them that is important.
- You should respond by repenting. Don't let your mind dwell on homosexual passions and don't participate in homosexual activities. Choose to trust and obey God, no matter how hard it is; choose what we call the top line approach, making obedience more important than desire.
- † Don't start convincing yourself that God, the Bible, or life is not fair. Fair would be for all of us to end up in Hell. God allows a lot of suffering, but whatever our lot in life, it's better than what is fair.
- I was thirty-five before I got married, so I know it can be hard to be chaste. But that's what God asks of those of us who are single, those who never find a spouse, those who have a spouse who is paralyzed, those who are separated or divorced.
 - Perhaps someday God will bless you with love and desire for someone of the opposite and complementary gender, so you can get married; until then, focus on walking with God and serving him.
 - And remember that you are not alone. You are an important part of our church community. If you believe in Jesus, you are welcome in his church.
- † **[Slide 19: church]** That leads us to the question of how the church is to react to homosexuality.
- I would stress that we should hate the sin, but love the sinner. People with homosexual tendencies are people who need Jesus, like the rest of us. Homosexual lust is no worse than my heterosexual lust or my temper or any other sin that takes us away from Christ-likeness.
 - I was fortunate to find out that several of my college friends were homosexual. I was fortunate, because I was their friend before I found out, so I could see that they were worth knowing.
 - Now it was strange when one of my roommates began having men over. He dated a pretty girl the year before, but once he moved in with me he found himself a boyfriend. His former girlfriend would ask me how I felt about living with him when he "came out of the closet," and I would ask her how it felt to be the last girl who dated him before he "came out of the closet."
- † It was uncomfortable to live with someone engaged in homosexual behavior, but what if we had some admittedly homosexual people come to church?
- I would welcome them. Yes, I would ask them to respect our culture; I would not want them exhibiting homosexual behavior in our gatherings, just like I would not want any of us to exhibit sinful behavior in our gatherings. But we should welcome them and mediate God's love, grace, and truth to them in the context of our community. That's what we do, right? We love sinners even though we hate their sin.

- It should not be harder to do this with someone who has homosexual tendencies. We should not act in fear or prejudice. Their preferences are not contagious; they are not overtly evil.
- † On the other hand, we should be bothered by the push to accept homosexuality as normal and good, and we should resent accusations that we are hateful to speak out about immorality.
- Everybody wants to promote and legislate their sense of morality: the homosexual movement wants to promote and legislate their morality; I want to promote and legislate mine. And this is no different than when we say it is illegal to use cocaine, steal crops, or chop people into pieces.
 - I fear the government one day will tell churches we have to marry homosexual couples or else be guilty of discriminating against them. Thus we would face the decision of suffering state penalties to obey God or sinning to protect ourselves from the state.
 - I also fear the government might tell us we have to hire practicing homosexuals as pastors and staff or be guilty of discrimination. I would hire someone who confessed to homosexual desires but was abstinent; but someone willfully sinful should not be a pastor or staff member.
- † There are a lot more questions we could ask. What if you are invited to a homosexual wedding, should you go? Or what if a homosexual couple asks you to work for the wedding, like baking the cake, should you do it? Should you boycott an openly homosexual business, to make a statement? In the adult class, we can discuss a few of your questions, if you like.
- † I do want to answer one more now. Leviticus 20.13 calls for a death sentence on homosexual people in Israel, so should we advocate that punishment today in this New Covenant time period?
- No. God's character never changes, and his purposes for people never change, but the mission he puts before us to fulfill his purposes does. Israel was to enforce morality in order to live with God's presence and shine his light into other cultures. Now we have received Christ's sacrificial death on our behalf, so we can be in God's presence, actually have the Holy Spirit indwelling us, despite our impurity.
 - And our method of fulfilling our purpose, our mission, is to mediate God's grace, love, and truth to people through sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. So rather than kill or jail those involved in homosexuality, Jesus calls us to engage with them as loving friends and neighbors.
 - Focus your resistance on the few promoting the sin, not on the many who suffer in it. We can help people heal and grow spiritually if Christ's love and grace flow through us, but not if we instead are sharing disdain and hate. Jesus calls us to engage with sinners as loving friends and neighbors.
 - Let's pray . . .