

TRUTH IN LOVE: WHAT IT MEANS TO REFLECT CHRISTLIKE LOVE TO OUR LGBTQ+ NEIGHBORS

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Works Consulted: *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Various)*; *Bible For Hope Study Notes (Various)*; *The Gospel Coalition Website (Various)*; *The Gospel and Same Sex Marriage (Russell Moore)*; *God and the Transgender Debate (Andrew T. Walker)*; *Is God Anti-Gay (Sam Allberry)*

PROLOGUE: My Hope For This Conversation

Many Christians today feel cornered, bullied, silenced, or outright attacked by advocates of the LGBTQ+ movement. In many cases, this feeling is warranted. The LGBTQ+ movement has been very successful in winning the culture to their thinking, while many Christians are waking up to the reality that their voice and influence are shrinking (at least in the Western world). If a “culture war” exists, then we do not appear to be winning this battle. This atmosphere is, unfortunately, an ideal place for sin to creep into our hearts.

My hope for this seminar is that you would leave here feeling more confident in the Biblical worldview, more equipped to dialogue with those who disagree with us, and more hopeful in the power of the gospel to seek and save the lost. I hope and pray that we do NOT leave here with animosity towards anyone. I want us to understand the issues so that we can speak truth in love, not so that we can deepen our divisions.

With this in mind, I want to begin with the following affirmations:

1. God’s Word teaches that all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, deserve respect, compassion, and love. We ought to view LGBTQ+ people as fellow human beings created in God’s image, deserving of dignity and understanding.
2. Persecution from those who do not share our worldview is to be expected, but Jesus instructs us to love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who mistreat us. This shows that we are true children of our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:44). Doing so not only shows our “enemies” Christlike love but also glorifies God and guards our own hearts from sin (Luke 6:27-28). These teachings should shape our response to pressures and persecution from LGBTQ+ advocates as well as any other people or group that we might perceive as “our enemy.”
3. Our hope is always for the repentance and restoration of LGBTQ+ advocates. We hope and pray for the salvation of those who do not know Jesus as their Savior and Lord. We hope and pray for the repentance of those who claim to follow Jesus but teach or live inconsistently with God’s Word. We always desire the good of others, and we work and pray towards that end.

If we cannot affirm these truths, then I fear we are in sin and are ourselves in need of repentance before we begin this seminar.

PART 1: Covering The Basics

Who Are We?

Evangelical Christians have gotten a bad reputation in recent years. Some of this bad publicity is an inevitable result of holding to Christian convictions in a world that opposes the Kingdom of God, and some of it is a misunderstanding of who we are and what we believe. Secular news outlets tend to refer to “Evangelicals” only in terms of a political voting block. Even more so, we are almost exclusively talked about for what we oppose rather than what we support. As a result, many non-evangelicals primarily associate evangelicals with opposing same-sex marriage and being anti-abortion.

Some modern-day evangelicals have tried to correct this negative association by either avoiding or outright abandoning these issues. However, his hesitancy to speak biblical truth has benefited no one and has led to a great deal of confusion and hurt. If we do not want to be primarily identified by what we stand against, the solution is not to abandon or grow silent on our convictions. The solution is to be even more vocal about what we stand for.

D.W. Bebbington identified four defining characteristics of Evangelical Christianity.

1. THE BIBLE - Evangelicals are deeply committed to the Bible, emphasizing its authority, distribution, and teaching.
2. THE CROSS - Evangelicals maintain a cross-centered theology, focusing on Jesus' redemptive work on the cross and the resurrection.
3. CONVERSION - Evangelicals prioritize conversion, aiming to inspire changed hearts and lives through the message of the cross and the resurrection.
4. ACTIVISM - Evangelicals are characterized by their activism, actively engaging in evangelism, missions, moral reform, and educational efforts to advance the cause of Christ. These elements are fundamental to understanding the evangelical identity.

Why is this important? Understanding who we are and what we are striving for will not only help us to address contentious issues but will also help us to talk to those who disagree with us.

- When people challenge our authority - we point to the Bible.
- When people accuse us of hating LGBTQ people - we point to the Cross and Conversion.
- When people tell us we should be silent - we point to our Activist calling.

Biblical Sexuality

Ultimately any discussion about sex and marriage ought to begin with its origin, which we can read about in the Biblical Creation Account. Adam was appointed as the overseer of the Garden of Eden, with the responsibility to "have dominion over the fish of the sea, birds of the heavens, livestock, and all the earth, including every creeping creature" (Genesis 1:26). He was also commanded to "be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, and have dominion over the fish, birds, and every living thing on the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

Despite his responsibilities, Adam lacked a suitable partner, which God recognized as not good even in a sinless world (Genesis 2:18, 20). Therefore, God created a woman to be Adam's partner, different but complementary to him, enhancing each other like pieces of a puzzle fitting together.

This led to the establishment of marriage, defined uniquely between a man and a woman: "A man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). This phrase "one flesh" symbolizes the deep, complementary union between a man and a woman. The core of human societies hinges on this union, essential for continuation through procreation.

The biblical account shows that marriage is ideally a permanent union between a man and a woman aimed at forming a family and fostering procreation. The creation account also emphasizes that the marriage between Adam and Eve was meant to be gender-specific, monogamous, and lifelong, focusing on sexual exclusivity and fidelity. This counters practices like polygamy (multiple spouses) or polyamory (sexual relationships with people who are not your spouse) and sets a precedent for enduring partnerships as intended in the original design of marriage.

What Marriage Is

In discussing the basic composition of water—two hydrogen atoms bonded to one oxygen atom (H₂O)—we recognize a precise structure. Any alteration, such as adding or removing an atom, changes it into something else, like hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂), which, although similar in appearance, behaves very differently. Water's identity depends on this exact structure; changing the formula results in a completely different substance.

This principle parallels the debate on the nature of marriage. Traditional marriage, defined by the complementary union between a man and a woman, forms a distinct entity. This complementarity isn't just a minor detail but the foundation that supports the whole institution, including its principles of exclusivity and permanence.

Genesis 2:24 states, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." This passage highlights the fundamental nature of

marriage as intended from creation. If we redefine marriage to exclude this essential element, we don't just expand it; we fundamentally change its nature.

The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:31-32 describes marriage as a profound mystery that represents the union between Christ and the Church. If complementarity is optional, then why should marriage be limited to just two people committed for life? Advocates for redefining marriage often overlook these points, but they haven't yet convincingly shown that changing marriage's definition won't lead to significant alterations in its role and function in society.

Jesus Himself reiterated the original design for marriage in Matthew 19:4-6, emphasizing, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?"

Therefore, preserving the traditional definition of marriage isn't about resisting change needlessly; it's about affirming and upholding the integrity of an institution that was designed by God himself. Just as chemists wouldn't arbitrarily change the names of substances without causing confusion, society should be cautious about redefining marriage.

In defending traditional marriage, we are not enforcing an outdated norm but acknowledging a timeless truth about human relationships and their importance in building stable, thriving communities.

What Marriage Is Not

In recent years, societal perceptions of marriage and relationships have undergone profound changes. The advent of same-sex marriage has challenge traditional biblical concepts of trust, beauty, and sanctity within the institution of marriage. For example, a noteworthy legal expert has proposed the concept of "wedlease" in a reputable newspaper, suggesting that marriages should have set durations with options to renew upon expiration. Moreover, a prominent writer has advocated for "monogamish" relationships. In this model, while partners maintain a primary emotional bond, they also pursue multiple sexual relationships, as long as these occur within a transparent and honest setting. These proposals stands in stark contrast to the biblical directive found in Hebrews 13:4, which commands, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous."

Biblical marriage aims to unite the male and female aspects of humanity in a monogamous and lifelong commitment. Husbands and wives vow fidelity and exclusivity to each other, reflecting the design reaffirmed by Jesus in Matthew 19:4-6. The concept of "one flesh" in marriage emphasizes a comprehensive union of men and women, fostering physical, emotional, and spiritual connections specifically aimed at procreation and the nurturing of children. Even cultures who live with little or no access to God's Word still affirm this truth. While its origins are scripturally divine, the principle of marriage extends beyond religious boundaries and is universally accessible.

Historically, civilizations (including those with little or no exposure to God's Word), have esteemed the union of one man and one woman primarily for its unique capacity to perpetuate the human race. Likewise many ancient philosophers who did not share the biblical worldview Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Plutarch have all acknowledged the critical role of marriage, underscoring a universal recognition of its significance that transcends religious and cultural confines.

My point is this: When anyone expands marriage beyond one man and one woman in a lifelong monogamous relationship - they are going against God's good design and against human nature. Anytime we go against God's good design we are in sin and there will be unforeseen negative consequences.

What Has God Revealed to Us About Marriage?

As previously mentioned, marriage represents a divine establishment created by God with the intent to support the progression of the human race, maintain societal stability, and fulfill the innate desire for connection and intimacy between men and women.

At the same time, we should understand that the primary purpose of marriage is to glorify God, as seen in 1 Corinthians 6:16-20. This purpose can be understood on two levels.

1. First, (as we have already discussed) marriage is an integral human institution woven into the fabric of existence and human civilization.
2. Second, within the context of the Bible, marriage symbolizes a real life parable of the most paramount truth in all the universe: the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A close examination of Paul's words in Ephesians 5 reveals a significant perspective on marriage dynamics. Paul instructs wives to submit to their husbands in a manner akin to their submission to the Lord. Husbands, in turn, are urged to love their wives selflessly, just as Christ loved and sacrificed for the church. This passage emphasizes the profound unity between the relationship of husband and wife and the relationship between Christ and the church.

Throughout Ephesians, the apostle Paul refers to the concept of a "mystery." This mystery, according to Paul, encompasses God's plan to unify all things, both in heaven and on earth. He reveals that marriage is also a "mystery" that conveys the message of the gospel of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection for sinners. Marital imagery is employed to evoke the concept of reconciliation central to the gospel in that two who are different (male and female) come together as one (a new family) and are united forever in love. This is a testimony to God's good plan for us in that two who are different (God and humanity) come together as one (as Christ and his bride the church) and are united forever in love.

This perspective carries deep implications for understanding marriage beyond its mere creation. The Bible suggests that God's design for the complementary nature of marriage serves the

purpose of redirecting our focus toward Jesus and His redemptive work for the church. This perspective transforms marriage and family into symbolic representations of God's overarching intentions for the universe.

Moreover, the book of Revelation adds another layer to this understanding. It portrays the ultimate culmination of history using marital imagery—a vast multitude exulting in the marriage of the Lamb and His bride, clothed in righteousness. This imagery underscores the idea that earthly marriage is a prelude to the heavenly union of God and His redeemed. When we consider this, we see that marriage is much more significant than just a loving commitment between two people.

What Is the Government's Role in Marriage?

Marriage is more than a religious institution; it is foundational to society and contributes to the common good. Just as civil laws against theft are justified by their social benefits and not just their biblical origins (Exodus 20:15), marriage laws support the welfare of children and societal stability. Government involvement in marriage supports a social structure that benefits society.

From a Christian perspective, while God is the ultimate source of moral guidance, including marriage, the state upholds marriage for its societal benefits. Marriage unites men, women, and children, promoting societal harmony and child well-being. The state's interest in marriage is based on its positive outcomes, particularly for children. Recognizing marriage helps protect children by advocating for their right to be raised by both a mother and a father when possible.

Both the Bible and social science agree that children do best in stable homes with both parents. Ephesians 6:1-4 emphasizes the importance of both parents in child upbringing. This balanced role supports the idea that dual parenthood is crucial for child development.

While a mother's presence at birth is certain, a father's role must be socially supported and encouraged. The decline of marriage and rise of non-marital childbearing correlate with increased child poverty and social instability. Upholding a strong definition of marriage promotes shared parental responsibilities, essential for children's development. Proverbs 22:6 highlights the importance of proper upbringing: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." By supporting a biblically informed definition of marriage, the state recognizes and reinforces its value to individuals and society, enhancing national health and prosperity.

What Is the Church's Role in Marriage?

Churches play a vital role in promoting and supporting the biblical view of marriage. Through teaching and pastoral care, they influence societal attitudes towards marriage, encouraging adherence to God's design. Ephesians 5:25-33 describes the relationship between Christ and the church as a model for marriage, highlighting love, sacrifice, commitment, and mutual

respect. This passage instructs husbands and wives on their roles and portrays the profound and committed nature of marriage as intended by God.

Local churches also serve as supportive communities that foster strong marriages. They provide guidance for couples, emphasizing faithfulness and lifelong commitment. Churches promote healthy intimacy within marriage and practice church discipline to uphold these sacred bonds, as outlined in Matthew 18:15-17, which discusses addressing sin within the community. In this way the church ought to be a safeguard against the sins that threaten marriages like adultery, abandonment, or abuse.

While governmental policies provide the legal framework for marriage, churches offer a spiritual and communal framework that encourages couples to embrace God's vision for marriage. This dual approach (church and state) secures the welfare of children and society and nurtures the spiritual health of the church community, highlighting the complementarity of civic and religious understandings of marriage.

Responding to the Revisionists

In today's Christian communities, there is a need to address the advocacy for same-sex marriage by some who identify as Christians. This trend often involves interpretations of Scripture that diverge from traditional biblical teachings.

- Jesus warned about false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but are inwardly ravenous wolves (Matthew 7:15).
- John also warned to be cautious of those who do not abide in the teaching of Christ (2 John 1:10-11).
- Peter spoke about false teachers who bring in destructive heresies (2 Peter 2:1-22).

These warnings emphasize the importance of maintaining doctrinal purity. In our modern context doctrinal confusion often comes to us around issues of sex, gender, and marriage. Proponents of same-sex marriage within Christian contexts often argue that traditional teachings on homosexuality cause harm, that the Bible does not address modern sexual orientations, that committed same-sex relationships are not mentioned (and therefore not condemned) in Scripture, and that biblical prohibitions are culturally biased.

However, these arguments often come from a reinterpretation of Scripture to align with contemporary social norms, rather than from a traditional understanding. This reinterpretation typically relies on external moral frameworks instead of Scripture, which has historically supported a consistent understanding of marriage and sexual ethics.

Jesus reaffirmed the traditional understanding of marriage by referencing its origins in creation: "He who created them from the beginning made them male and female... a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Matthew

19:4-6). This definition emphasizes that marriage is a union between a man and a woman, which same-sex relationships do not fulfill scripturally.

The argument for redefining marriage to include same-sex unions overlooks the biblical narrative that portrays marriage as a covenant reflecting Christ's relationship with the church (Ephesians 5:25-32). This covenant is both procreative and unitive, transcending human regulations and reflecting divine intention.

To assert that the Bible supports same-sex marriage requires ignoring clear scriptural texts and historical interpretation. The Bible explicitly addresses homosexual acts as sinful (1 Corinthians 6:9-11) and does not recognize same-sex marriages. The absence of scriptural endorsement for such relationships is significant.

Biblical marriage is about more than personal fulfillment; it reflects God's image and fulfills His mandate to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). This union inherently involves the potential for procreation, which same-sex unions lack. This biological reality supports the biblical purpose of marriage.

Ultimately, upholding biblical Christianity means affirming God's design for marriage. We maintain this definition not to exclude, but to faithfully follow the teachings entrusted to us, promoting a societal structure aligned with divine intent. We advocate for a vision of humanity and the church that flourishes under God's rule, fostering a society where every institution, including marriage, reflects His wisdom and love.

PART 2: How Did We Get Here?

The Western Christian church faces a significant challenge due to the sexual revolution, which questions long-held Christian beliefs and values. For centuries, the church upheld certain moral standards that are now being rapidly dismissed or reversed in favor of new societal norms.

This change reflects a broader shift in Western thought and culture. Historically, the church provided moral guidance for Western society, but today its teachings are increasingly marginalized, dismissed, or outright ridiculed. The European Enlightenment's emphasis on human reason over divine revelation has led to a culture that often dismisses the supernatural aspects of Christianity. Consequently, Western society has drifted from its Christian moral roots towards a more secular and relativistic worldview.

These changes have vast and complex implications, challenging the church's stance on sexual ethics and the traditional family structure. Innovations like birth control, normalized divorce, and advanced reproductive technologies have reshaped views on marriage and relationships. As early Christians adhered to apostolic teachings, today's church must hold firm. Paul warned Timothy of a time when people would reject sound teaching and seek teachers to suit their passions (2 Timothy 4:3-4). This warning is especially relevant today as society endorses ideologies conflicting with biblical teachings.

Christians are called to respond not by retreating or compromising but by reaffirming their commitment to biblical truths. The church must engage these cultural challenges with a deep understanding of Scripture and the cultural forces at play. Peter exhorted Christians to always be prepared to defend their faith with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). This defense includes upholding the sanctity of marriage as defined in Genesis 2:24, where God institutes marriage as a lifelong, exclusive union between a man and a woman, foundational to both Christian doctrine and societal well-being.

Birth Control and Contraception

Modern contraception, especially "the pill," has changed the relationship between sex and procreation, playing a significant role in the sexual revolution by separating sex from parenthood. This shift has led to new interpretations or dismissals of the moral dimensions of sexuality.

While the Bible does not directly address modern birth control, it does emphasize the sanctity of sex within marriage and its connection to procreation. Genesis 1:28 commands, "Be fruitful and multiply," linking sexual union to bearing and raising children. Malachi 2:15 highlights the spiritual and procreative purposes of marriage, asking, "Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring." These passages show that sex and procreation are interconnected within marriage, designed for mutual fulfillment and continuing God's covenant community.

The issue of birth control is complex, requiring careful consideration of biblical principles, theology, and practical wisdom. The Bible views marriage as a covenant relationship that includes companionship, love, and procreation. Genesis 1:28 underscores procreation as fundamental to marriage, with children seen as a blessing from God (Psalm 127:3). Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 discusses the importance of mutual consent in marital decisions, including family planning.

Christian couples are called to exercise stewardship, managing resources wisely and responsibly. In family planning, this involves considering health, financial stability, and existing family responsibilities.

A key ethical consideration is maintaining an openness to life. This means that while not every act of intimacy must lead to procreation, the marriage should be life-affirming. Couples may use birth control to responsibly space or limit children due to physical, emotional, or economic concerns while valuing the gift of life as part of their commitment.

Ultimately, the decision to use birth control should be made by the married couple through prayerful consideration and mutual consent, seeking God's wisdom. Each couple must consider their unique circumstances, health, and family responsibilities.

It is important to distinguish between contraceptives that prevent pregnancy and those that terminate a pregnancy. The Bible affirms that life begins in the womb, so willfully terminating a pregnancy is considered taking a human life.

Divorce

Scripture advocates for the permanence of marriage. Jesus said, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:9), emphasizing that marriage is a divine covenant. In Malachi 2:16, God says, "I hate divorce... so guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless." As a result, divorce has always been regarded with seriousness in the Christian church, reflecting the sanctity and seriousness of marriage. Initially, divorce was allowed only under strict conditions, usually requiring proof of guilt, often due to adultery. This strict approach emphasized the seriousness of ending a marriage, likened to "the death of a small civilization" because of its emotional and societal impact.

In the 20th century, societal attitudes shifted towards sexual liberation, and legal reforms, like no-fault divorce laws starting in California in 1969, made divorce easier without proving fault. This reduced the stigma associated with divorce and, as a result, the high view of marriage has grown weaker with each passing generation.

Unfortunately, the church's response to no-fault divorces was weak. Some Christian leaders, perhaps to avoid appearing hypocritical or to align with cultural norms, moved away from biblical teachings on marriage's sanctity. This alignment with cultural values weakened the church's stance on divorce. This dilution of biblical standards compromised the church's credibility on

marriage and sexuality. It was a missed opportunity to uphold a countercultural commitment to marriage. The evangelical community, in particular, struggled to speak persuasively on these issues.

To address these developments, the modern church must reaffirm its commitment to the sanctity of marriage. Churches need to apply biblical principles, teach about marriage's gravity and permanence, support couples through challenges, offer biblical counseling, and implement church discipline when necessary, in a spirit of restoration and love.

By returning to a scriptural understanding of marriage and divorce, the church can stand as a beacon of hope and truth. This steadfast commitment offers an alternative to prevailing cultural norms and demonstrates the transformative power of living under God's design. This not only honors God but also promotes the welfare of families and society's health, embodying the redemptive heart of the gospel.

Advanced Reproductive Technologies

Scripture affirms that children are a heritage from the Lord (Psalm 127:3), and the traditional model of family reflects a natural biological reality grounded in creation itself. Genesis 1:28 commands man and woman to "be fruitful and multiply," a command that inherently links procreation with the marital union. Likewise, the marital act, as described in Genesis 2:24 where a man "shall hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh," is deeply connected to the potential of bearing children. This connection between marital unity and procreation reflects a divine design that fosters both familial bonds and societal stability.

The use of reproductive technologies challenges these foundational principles by introducing third parties into the conception process, such as donors and surrogates, and by enabling parenthood in contexts detached from the covenantal framework of marriage. Such practices can obscure the roles and responsibilities inherent in traditional parenting structures and dilute the understanding of parenthood as a covenantal stewardship entrusted by God.

Moreover, these technologies often commodify human life, treating sperm, eggs, and even the womb as marketable goods rather than gifts entrusted by God. This commercialization of human reproductive capabilities raises serious ethical questions about the dignity and sanctity of human life and the implications of turning what should be a loving union into a transaction.

As Christians, we are called to uphold the sanctity of life and the integrity of family structures as ordained by God. While empathizing with the deep desires for parenthood, and wanting to support those who struggle to conceive, we must also critically assess the moral implications of achieving parenthood through means that may not align with biblical principles. It is essential to engage in these discussions with compassion, understanding, and a firm grounding in Scripture, promoting alternatives that align with God's design for family and procreation.

In this transformative era, the church must provide clear guidance on these complex issues, support individuals struggling with infertility through compassionate care and prayer, and promote ethical alternatives like adoption that align more with biblical values. By doing so, the church not only stands as a beacon of moral clarity but also as a testament to the love and wisdom of a Creator who designed human life to flourish within the bounds of His divine will.

Cohabitation: Sex Outside of Marriage

Historically, marriage was revered as the sole legitimate context for sexual relations and procreation—a cornerstone of societal stability and personal maturity. The Scriptures are clear on this point, as Hebrews 13:4 admonishes, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." This verse not only underscores the sanctity of marriage but also the moral boundaries that accompany it.

In previous centuries, non-marital cohabitation and extramarital sex were not only socially discouraged but occasionally deemed illegal, reflecting a societal commitment to the biblical model of marriage. However, by the early 2000s, the landscape had dramatically changed. The rise in cohabitation rates, alongside an increase in births outside of marriage particularly among women under 30, illustrates a significant transformation in the perception and practice of family life. This decline in marital sanctity and the surge in acceptance of sexual relationships outside of marriage have precipitated a cultural and moral shift unparalleled in history. Tom W. Smith of the University of Chicago highlighted the radical change in family structures over a single generation, indicating a profound disconnection from historical familial norms.

The erosion of these foundational values has led to a weakening of the societal moral framework, a decline that Western civilization appears increasingly incapable of countering. The failure of Christian churches to staunchly address and uphold biblical teachings on these matters has not only diminished their influence but also challenged their credibility, particularly regarding debates on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. The current push for the full acceptance of homosexual relationships can be seen as an extension of the earlier efforts by some within heterosexual communities to weaken the stigma against pre-marital and extra-marital sex.

As Christians, it is imperative to return to the foundational principles outlined in Scripture, which advocate for the sanctity of marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman. This return to biblical fidelity involves not just preaching against the tide but actively demonstrating the beauty and stability that biblical marriage offers. Churches must take a proactive role in teaching and modeling the virtues of commitment, fidelity, and purity, as well as providing support and guidance to those navigating the challenges of modern relationships. By doing so, they can help restore the integrity of marriage and family life, offering a beacon of hope and a testament to the enduring truth of God's design for human relationships, as affirmed in Matthew 19:4-6, where Jesus himself reiterates the divine intention for marriage, established from creation.

The Same-Sex Revolution

From 2008 to 2014, American public opinion on same-sex marriage shifted from the majority viewing homosexual behavior as immoral (2008) to a majority supporting legal recognition of same sex marriage (2014). This change reflects strategic influences and cultural changes described in Linda Hirshman's book, "Victory: The Triumphant Gay Revolution."

Hirshman identifies the "four horsemen" of moral judgment that had to be overcome: the perceptions of homosexuality as "crazy, sinful, criminal, and subversive."

1. Crazy: The American Psychiatric Association and American Psychological Association initially labeled same-sex attraction as a mental disorder. Persistent activism led to a revision of this stance in the early 1970s, changing public perception.
2. Sinful: Liberal religious leaders challenged traditional biblical interpretations condemning homosexual acts, influencing broader societal acceptance. However, the Bible remains clear on sexual morality. Romans 1:26-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 emphasize the need for repentance and Christ's redemption for homosexual acts.
3. Criminal: Legal battles challenged laws against homosexual acts, with landmark rulings like *Romer v. Evans* and *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003 decriminalizing homosexual behavior, shifting legal and societal perspectives.
4. Subversive: Media portrayals of homosexuals as harmless and kind-hearted countered the notion that homosexuality threatened societal norms.

These changes culminated in significant legal victories, including the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and the Supreme Court's *Obergefell* ruling in 2015, which legalized same-sex marriage nationwide. Media influence and a lack of organized defense for traditional marriage values also played roles in this cultural shift.

Christians must engage in cultural dialogue with grace and truth, holding firm to biblical definitions of marriage and sexuality while presenting the transformative gospel message. While society changes, scriptural truth remains steadfast. As 1 Peter 3:15 advises, Christians should "always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect." Our responses should be informed, courageous, compassionate, and understanding. The church's role is to uphold biblical truths and navigate societal changes with a commitment to love and outreach, reflecting the heart of the gospel in every cultural engagement.

The Gender Revolution

The human body has endured centuries of contradictory treatment—sometimes idolized, other times ignored. People have invested enormous amounts of money and effort in sculpting their

bodies to fit cultural ideals of beauty. Yet, this obsessive pursuit often leads to an unhealthy focus on appearance at the expense of recognizing the body's intrinsic value and function.

In recent times, the body has been increasingly perceived as a hindrance, something to be altered or overcome to achieve true personal freedom. This perception is particularly evident in transgender ideologies, where the physical body is seen as a barrier to one's authentic self. Proponents of this view advocate for the use of puberty blockers, hormone therapy, and extensive surgeries to align one's physical appearance with their gender identity. This approach reduces the body to a mere avatar for the self, neglecting its natural and essential role.

More profoundly, the Bible views the body and soul as an inseparable unit, created by God. In Genesis 2:7 (ESV), it is written, "Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature." This verse illustrates the unity of body and spirit from the moment of creation, emphasizing that human beings are not merely souls trapped in bodies, but rather embodied souls, where both elements are intricately connected and vital to our identity.

The New Testament further affirms the sanctity of the body. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (ESV), Paul writes, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." This passage underscores that our bodies are sacred, being temples of the Holy Spirit, and should be treated with honor and respect. The implication is clear: our physical form is integral to our worship and service to God, not merely a temporary vessel.

Additionally, the Incarnation—the act of God becoming flesh in the person of Jesus Christ—profoundly underscores the significance of the human body. John 1:14 (ESV) states, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." This act of divine incarnation highlights that the body is not to be despised or seen as an obstacle but is part of the divine plan. Jesus' bodily resurrection also points to the future hope for all believers: that our bodies will be restored and glorified. Philippians 3:21 (ESV) says, "who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."

This holistic understanding underscores the body's dignity and purpose, not merely as a vessel for the soul but as an integral aspect of human identity. Our bodies are part of our created being, imbued with purpose and meaning by our Creator. In moments of suffering, confusion, or cultural pressure, remembering this divine perspective can guide and ground us. By recognizing the inherent value of our bodies as designed and loved by God, we can navigate the complexities of life with a deeper sense of purpose and identity.

Instead of seeing the body as a malleable obstacle or a mere tool for identity projection, we should recognize and cherish its intrinsic worth. This perspective invites a deeper appreciation of the body's role in our existence, both now and in the life to come. By honoring the body as an

integral part of our identity and destiny, we align with a more holistic and dignified understanding of what it means to be human.

Conclusion

All of these movements fall under the umbrella of what is commonly referred to as “the sexual revolution.” The last sixty or so years has seen an astounding upheaval in the way people view sex, marriage, children, and gender. This revolution poses a significant challenge for the Christian church, but we are not alone in facing these challenges. The New Testament describes believers as scattered and sojourners. In ancient Rome, early Christians were strangers in a polytheistic society. Peter addressed these believers as temporary residents (1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11). An early Christian text, the Epistle to Diognetus, describes Christians as having no permanent home yet being at home everywhere.

Today, the church faces a unique challenge. This moral revolution directly opposes core Christian principles. It didn’t appear suddenly; it followed decades of changing intellectual and social attitudes. As the sexual revolution continues to gain public support, the church may become marginalized. Christians now have a choice: withdraw and isolate themselves or engage with culture, reform, and proclaim the gospel.

Though Christians might feel like strangers in the world, this should not end our testimony or faithfulness. Peter says believers are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). Today, being steadfast in Christ means openly living and speaking their faith, upholding Scripture’s authority, the sanctity of marriage, and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Even in spiritual exile, the gospel remains unchanging and firm.

PART 3: Bringing The Gospel To The Issue

As we have already seen, marriage is a divine institution established by God. It is an intimate and covenantal connection between a man and a woman, exclusively devoted to each other as husband and wife throughout their lives. This union also symbolizes Christ's relationship with His redeemed church. Marriage is more than a social construct; it is a divine institution designed to reflect the love and unity between Christ and the church. By adhering to these biblical principles, we honor God's design and proclaim the gospel through our marriages.

A Biblical Worldview of Same-Sex Attraction

Feelings of same-sex attraction and a same-sex orientation are part of the flawed and disordered nature of human sexuality, a result of the world's imperfection due to humanity's sinful actions. In Genesis 3, we encounter the significant moment when the first man and woman defied God. This original sin had ramifications not just on Adam and Eve, but on the entirety of the created order. The apostle Paul summarizes this concept in Romans 8:

"For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (Romans 8:20-21, ESV)

Verse 23 of the same chapter indicates that a part of creation subjected to death and futility includes human bodies—particularly those of the redeemed:

"And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."
(Romans 8:23, ESV)

Feelings of same-sex attraction and same-sex orientation are within this category of longing, awaiting the redemption of our bodies. This implies that they share common ground with various other forms of disordered bodies, minds, and emotions. Every individual experiences some form of brokenness and disorder. All people possess inclinations to desire things that they shouldn't desire. We all have disordered emotions, thoughts, and bodies.

This understanding necessitates careful distinctions to avoid causing unnecessary harm to others or oneself. All forms of disorder and brokenness stem from sin—both original sin and our inherent sinful nature. While it is accurate to describe same-sex desires as sinful in the sense that they result from disorder due to sin and go against God's revealed will, it's important to note that a desire caused by sin and rooted in sin does not equate to committing a sin. Sinning occurs when rebellion against God manifests through our disordered states.

Therefore, Paul's condemnation is centered on same-sex intercourse, not merely same-sex desire. This is most clearly articulated in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (ESV):

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, ESV)

The term "men who practice homosexuality" refers to both the active and passive partners in homosexual intercourse. The emphasis is on the action itself, not just the desire. It's important to note that homosexual practice is not singled out; it is listed alongside other sinful behaviors. The key point is that it's not a one-time act that condemns you, but a continuous, unrepentant commitment to this lifestyle that leads to exclusion from the kingdom of God. Those who persist in such practices without repentance will not enter the kingdom of God; they will face judgment.

It would be inconsistent with love and the teachings of Jesus' gospel to endorse homosexual activity, whether through passive acceptance, supporting same-sex marriages, or endorsing the ordination of practicing homosexuals within the Christian faith.

We should not be intimidated in this matter. The world may assert the opposite of what's true: that cautioning those engaged in homosexual practices about the ultimate judgment is an act of hatred. However, it is not rooted in hatred. Hatred seeks destruction, not salvation or inclusion in a loving community. Sin, including homosexual practice, as well as greed, idolatry, reviling, and drunkenness, can lead to exclusion from God's kingdom, as stated in the Word of God. In response, love issues warnings, extends pleas to repent, and offers support to help individuals lead a life that leads to eternal salvation.

"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4:15, ESV):

By adhering to these biblical principles, we honor God's design and proclaim the gospel through our lives, encouraging others to follow the path that leads to eternal life.

The Good News for Every Sinner

The essence of the gospel message is that God offers salvation to everyone, including both heterosexual and homosexual individuals, who trust in Jesus. He counts them as righteous because of Christ and assists them, through His Spirit, in living lives that please Him despite their inner struggles.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, emphasizes that some of them had engaged in sinful behaviors, including fornication, adultery, theft, drunkenness, and homosexual practices. However, they were not cast out but embraced:

"And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:11, ESV)

Their embrace by God involved putting their faith in Jesus, turning away from their sinful behaviors, and renouncing their sinful desires. God justified them by imputing Christ's righteousness to them, making them acceptable in His sight and adopting them into His family.

They were also "washed," meaning God removed all their guilt and shame, as Christ bore their sins on the cross. Their trust in Christ made all that He accomplished apply to them, cleansing them of their sins.

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1, ESV)

Furthermore, they were "sanctified," set apart by God for His purpose, and given His Spirit to empower them toward holiness. This divine power could overshadow their disordered desires with something more magnificent and appealing, enabling them to walk in a way that pleases God, even in their brokenness.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17, ESV)

The core of Christianity lies in God saving sinners through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The most extraordinary news is that Jesus' sacrifice allows even the most unconventional sinners, whether homosexual or heterosexual, to be rescued from their destructive paths. They can be cleansed, justified, sanctified, and welcomed into God's satisfying presence through faith in Jesus Christ.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1, ESV)

This is the heart of our message. Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection bring hope and transformation to all who believe, offering a new life that transcends our past sins and struggles. The gospel proclaims that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace, and His power can redeem and renew any heart that turns to Him in faith.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9, ESV)

In summary, the gospel message is one of hope, redemption, and transformation for all who place their trust in Jesus. It is the promise of a new beginning and the assurance of God's unwavering love and grace. This is the message we are called to share with the world, inviting everyone to experience the life-changing power of the gospel.

Loving People With Gender Confusion

So far, we have focused a lot on people with same-sex attraction, but it is also important to address the rising trend of gender confusion or gender dysphoria. Let's start by addressing the trans-worldview logically before seeking to address it emotionally.

The "Wrong Body" Worldview

This worldview asserts that there are at least two distinct, real categories of person —male and female. This worldview also asserts that some individuals are tragically mismatched with their physical bodies. These persons are often described as being born into the "wrong body." Most people who ascribe to this worldview do not believe that they are women becoming men or men becoming women, rather they believe that real men can be born into female bodies and real women can be born into male bodies. This is why "gender reassignment surgery" has been replaced with the term "gender affirming surgery."

Note, however, that this narrative fundamentally depends on the existence of a binary gender system. Without a clear binary, the concept of being in the "wrong body" loses its meaning.

The "Non-Binary/Gender-Fluid" Worldview

This worldview questions the very existence of binary gender categories, proposing that maleness and femaleness are social constructs rather than inherent realities. It suggests that the diversity of human experiences cannot be confined to a binary system. This worldview posits that language and societal norms create gender categories, which are inherently fluid and diverse. Gender is seen as a spectrum rather than a binary.

Note, that this worldview is completely incompatible with the "wrong body" worldview. Gender cannot be both an objective reality and a social construct. If gender itself is an illusion, the premise of being misaligned with one's body becomes nonsensical. Yet, a majority of people who affirm one of these worldview simultaneously affirm the other worldview.

An Incoherent Worldview

The contradictions between these two transgender narratives reveal deep philosophical and practical tensions within the movement. The "wrong body" worldview seeks validation within a binary framework, while the "non-binary/gender-fluid" narrative aims to deconstruct that very framework. These opposing views complicate efforts to create a coherent, unified understanding of gender identity, leading to ongoing debates and conflicts within society and the transgender community itself.

It is crucial to realize that the transgender worldview is almost always based on feeling rather than reason. Gender dysphoria affects people's emotional wellbeing and echoes a universal human feelings of alienation and the desire for true self-fulfillment. Allies of the trans-community also tend to come to their conclusions because they understand that gender-dysphoria hurts

people and the trans-community has been historically misunderstood and mistreated. These allies have an emotional investment in standing up for justice for those marginalized by society.

A Christian Response:

While we can see the logical incoherence of the transgender worldview, and while we know what scripture says about gender and human sexuality, it is absolutely crucial to recognize our calling to respond with both truth and love. It is neither helpful nor christ-like to dismiss, mock, or belittle the feelings of emotional distress that arise both in the trans community and in their allies

In addressing gender dysphoria, we must affirm the inherent dignity and worth of every person while upholding the truth of God's design. Romans 8:20-21 reminds us of the brokenness of creation: "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." This includes our understanding of gender, which is marred by sin but can be redeemed through Christ.

Christians must navigate these complex issues with compassion and clarity, offering support and hope rooted in the transformative power of the gospel. As 2 Corinthians 5:17 declares, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." We are called to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), providing a vision of wholeness and redemption that transcends the confusion and brokenness of our current cultural moment.

The Bible does not even entertain the idea that a person could be born into a wrong gendered body or that a person could be born as something beyond or between male or female. The apostles and prophets did not address this issue for the same reasons they did not address how to use social media wisely. When the scripture does not address a specific issue directly (a.k.a. "Thou shall not steal") then we must look for overarching principles that we can apply to our specific issue. We should use compassion, discernment, and adherence to biblical principles while addressing the complexities of this issue.

Here are some principles that can guide us in addressing this issue with individuals who are struggling with gender-dysphoria or gender-confusion.

1.SHOW COMPASSION: Emulate Jesus' compassion when dealing with someone experiencing gender dysphoria. Acknowledge their pain, listen sympathetically, and pray with them, recognizing the high rates of depression and anxiety among trans people. It is NEVER wrong to sympathize with someone's pain or struggle.

2. ASK WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON: Understand that gender dysphoria and gender confusion often coexists with other issues. Addressing these underlying conditions first can help people struggling with gender-identity to become more comfortable with their biological sex.

3. ESTABLISH CLEAR BOUNDARIES: Uphold biblical convictions and remind them of what you believe about the goodness of God's creational and redemptive designs. Avoid affirming gender

transitions as a valid way to address the struggles they feel, but do not condemn or criticize them if they share with you that they are considering a transition. Instead, share your concerns from a place of love.

Another aspect of this issue that has come up often in recent years is the idea of transgender children and youth. There is an ongoing debate about the legality of “gender-affirming” surgery for under-aged persons and the health risks and complications that can arise. There is also a growing concern among many that the transgender worldview is being promoted or praised in schools and in media aimed towards children. This has caused many to worry about how they will respond if their child or grandchildren begins to question their gender identity.

The three principles listed above 1) SHOW COMPASSION, 2) ASK WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON, and 3) ESTABLISH BOUNDARIES, are all helpful in talking to children and youth, but I would also add the following to the list as well:

1. **DON'T BE ANXIOUS ABOUT NON-STEREOTYPICAL INTERESTS:** Recognize that children may not conform to traditional gender norms and that this is normal. Avoid letting cultural stereotypes about masculinity and femininity dictate perceptions of gender dysphoria. Sometimes, adults accidentally (or purposely) put the idea of gender confusion into a child's still-developing mind when, in reality, they are just a sensitive or creative boy or a rambunctious and physically active girl.

2. **KNOW WHEN TO GET PROFESSIONAL HELP:** Younger children naturally have a lot of questions about gender. However, if a child continually expresses gender confusion (especially if it continues on into puberty), it might be a good idea to seek professional help. Sometimes, gender confusion is the result of unseen sexual abuse or some other form of trauma that you may not be aware of. A licensed Christian counselor or therapist can be very helpful but do your research beforehand.

3. **DON'T GIVE AWAY YOUR AUTHORITY:** Maintain parental authority and set boundaries for your child's well-being. Guide them toward holiness rather than immediate happiness, even under cultural pressure. For as long as you have legal guardianship over your child, you need to do what you can to promote health and godliness.

4. **GUARD AGAINST NEGATIVE CULTURAL INFLUENCES:** Be vigilant about social influences and consider removing children from environments that promote the transgender worldview. This may mean avoiding certain schools, certain forms of media, or social media platforms. Almost every child feels a deep sense of awkwardness and confusion during puberty, which can make them especially vulnerable to outside influence. Their desire to find validation for their feelings and the approval of others may make them more willing to entertain ideas that they might not have thought of if the ideas were not presented to them. It is crucial that you have an open and ongoing conversation about why you are avoiding these things. They need to understand that is not out of fear but out of concern and a desire for their wellbeing.

5. CELEBRATE THE BEAUTY AND GOODNESS OF GENDERED BODIES: Body-dysmorphia goes beyond gender. More than ever before young boys and girls are being pressured to look a certain way, and many feel uncomfortable in their own bodies. As often as you can, show appreciation for bodies and do not criticize other people's bodies (especially their body or your own body). No one should be made to feel bad about their body, especially the parts of their body that were a part of God's good design. Teach children to appreciate the beauty and creative potential of gender differences. Teach them why it great to be a man ro a woman. Highlight how gender complementarity is integral to God's design and manifests in family and worship settings.

PART 4: Preparing for Pushback

Persecution Will Occur

If you were faced with imprisonment and imminent death, what content would your final written correspondence include? In the context of 2 Timothy, which marks Paul's final words from his confinement, he uses this last letter to embolden and infuse hope into others. Specifically, concerning Timothy, he makes a heartfelt plea:

"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me." (2 Timothy 1:8-12 ESV)

Paul's message is a powerful reminder that the gospel is worth suffering for because it holds the promise of life and immortality. His unwavering faith, even in the face of death, serves as a beacon of hope and strength for Timothy and all believers. Paul's final words are not just a personal farewell; they are a call to courage and faithfulness in the mission of the gospel. This message is timeless and continues to inspire Christians today to stand firm in their faith, no matter the circumstances.

As Christians, we can draw strength from Paul's example and his exhortation to Timothy. We are reminded that our calling is not based on our own works but on God's purpose and grace.

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Romans 8:18, ESV)

"For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:17-18, ESV)

Let us, like Paul, be unashamed of the testimony of our Lord and be willing to share in suffering for the gospel, confident in the ultimate victory of Christ over death and the promise of eternal life.

Do Not Be Ashamed

In 2 Timothy 1:7-8, Paul reminds Timothy that God has not given him a "spirit of fear," but rather a spirit of power, love, and self-control. He then urges Timothy not to be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of Paul's imprisonment. Paul earnestly implores Timothy not to experience shame in two primary regards.

Firstly, Timothy should not be ashamed of "the testimony about our Lord." Paul is essentially saying, "Timothy, regardless of the challenges, no matter what happens to me, and despite what authorities might do to you or the church, stand firm in your proclamation of the gospel." This phrase, "the testimony about our Lord," encapsulates the essence of the gospel. Timothy is called to hold steadfastly to this testimony, even in the face of persecution and adversity.

Secondly, Timothy should not feel shame concerning Paul's imprisonment. It is crucial to note whose captive Paul claims to be. Paul explicitly declares that he is not imprisoned by Rome, but under the authority of "our Lord." Paul's confinement aligns with the purpose and intentions of Christ.

Paul's exhortation to Timothy is both a reminder and a call to courage. He is to rely on the power, love, and self-control given by God, to boldly proclaim the gospel, and to take heart knowing that Christ is sovereign over all circumstances. This call to be unashamed and unwavering in faith echoes throughout the letter, urging believers to stand firm in their faith despite challenges.

Paul's message to Timothy is timeless. As Christians, we are called to stand firm in our faith, to proclaim the gospel boldly, and to remember that Christ is sovereign over all our circumstances. Our confidence should not be in our own strength, but in the power and purpose of God. As we face trials and opposition, let us remember Paul's words and be inspired to live out our faith with courage and conviction:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16 (ESV))

In these challenging times, let us hold fast to the gospel and stand firm, knowing that our hope and strength come from Christ, who upholds all things and empowers us to live for His glory.

Share in Suffering for the Gospel

Paul urges Timothy to "share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God" (2 Timothy 1:8). He reminds Timothy that he is not alone and that others have faced similar pressures.

Paul highlights Onesiphorus as an example of this shared suffering. Unlike those who abandoned Paul, Onesiphorus sought him out and supported him without shame. The key, Paul

emphasizes, is enduring suffering "by the power of God" (2 Timothy 1:8). This means relying on God's strength, not just personal resolve, especially when feeling weak (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Christians should expect and brace for suffering, knowing it comes with standing for biblical truth. This means supporting those who are enduring hardships, standing firm in faith, and doing so with God's power and love (Ephesians 4:15).

In today's culture, Christians should not remain passive when fellow believers face challenges for their faith. We should stand with them, unashamed of the consequences, and always act through God's power.

Paul's plea to Timothy centers on the gospel: "Living righteously in this antagonistic world begins with recalling the gospel." The gospel reminds us of our salvation, calling, and God's power to endure.

Salvation in the Bible includes past, present, and future aspects:

- Past: Saved from sin's consequences.
- Present: Being saved from sin's influence.
- Future: Will be saved from sin's presence.

This holy calling comes through hearing the gospel, which is proclaimed by others (Romans 10:14), and the work of the Holy Spirit (John 6:44; Titus 3:5).

Paul's instructions to Timothy remind us that the Christian life involves suffering for the gospel, relying on God's power, and unwavering commitment to the truth. We are called to stand firm in our faith, support one another, and boldly proclaim the gospel. Let us take courage from Paul's example, living out our faith with conviction and love, trusting in God's power to sustain us.

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (2 Corinthians 12:9, ESV)

PART 5: Getting Practical

Should I Attend A Gay Wedding?

While attending a wedding can be seen as a gesture of love and friendship towards the individuals involved, it also signifies public approval and celebration of the union.

Christians believe that attending a wedding affirms the solemn covenant of marriage before God and the gathered witnesses. Even in a secular context, the public nature of the ceremony implies that attendance endorses the union. This is why weddings have guests—to serve as witnesses to the legitimacy of the marriage. Even if you believe that it is possible to attend a wedding without affirming the union, weddings are festive occasions that involve celebrating the couple's union. There is no way for a Christian to condemn sin in thought or word while celebrating it in practice.

Also, consider this from the couple's point of view: Would you want a guest at your wedding who couldn't celebrate your union? Would you want a guest at your wedding who did not approve of your union?

Many Christians who feel pressure to attend gay weddings do so because they fear that deciding not to attend could strain their relationship with the couple. This may be an inescapable result, but we cannot control how other people respond to us. Being hated for holding biblical convictions does not mean you did something wrong. Jesus himself said that this would happen to us (See John 15:18).

So, if we find ourselves in the situation of being invited to a gay wedding, what should we do?

Practical Advice:

BE OPEN ABOUT YOUR FAITH: If you are close enough to a gay couple to be invited to their wedding, then they should know that you are a Christian. If you have LGBTQ+ friends or family who would be surprised to learn that you are a Christian, what does that say about your faith? The longer you wait to “come out” as a Christian, the more difficult that conversation will be. You do not want them to find out you are a Christian after they have invited you to their wedding.

GRACIOUSLY DECLINE: There is no rule or wedding etiquette requiring you to explain why you won't attend someone's wedding. You could simply not show up or find a convenient excuse. However, this approach is dishonest and avoids the truth. As Christians, we should not lie, omit the truth, or avoid owning up to our beliefs and convictions. I strongly recommend that you communicate your decision clearly and lovingly, explaining your reasons for not attending while affirming your ongoing love and care for the individuals involved. This might involve personal conversations or a thoughtful letter to express your position. Additionally, depending on your closeness to the couple, consider spending time with the couple around the time of the wedding, or finding other ways to show your love for them. As far as it is in your power, keep a friendly

relationship with them without sacrificing your convictions. “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (Romans 12:18).

BE CONSISTENT: Christians should strive for consistency in their decisions regarding their sexual ethics and their decision to attend or not attend weddings. Would you attend the wedding of a Christian and a Muslim (1 Corinthians 7:12)? Would you attend the wedding of a couple who are openly entering into an “open marriage” (Hebrews 13:4)? We should note that not all non-christian marriages are sinful and to be avoided, HOWEVER, there are more types of sinful unions than just the same-sex variety. Likewise, if you are more troubled by your relative in a same-sex relationship than you are by your relative who is cohabitating out of wedlock, then we may be the ones who need to repent before we call others to do so.

How Should I Approach Transgender Name Changes and/or Preferred Pronouns?

Before we begin this discussion, we might want to revisit the affirmations from the beginning of our seminar. To summarize:

God's Word teaches that everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, deserves respect, compassion, and love. We should view trans or gender-confused individuals as fellow human beings created in God's image, deserving of dignity and understanding. Jesus commands us to do good, to bless, and to pray for everyone, especially those we perceive as being “enemies” or “against us.” Our hope is always for the repentance and restoration of LGBTQ+ advocates and the salvation of those who do not know Jesus. We pray for the repentance of those who claim to follow Jesus but live inconsistently with God's Word. Our desire is always for the good of others, and we work and pray towards that end.

Addressing the Complexity:

When addressing transgender pronouns, it's important to recognize that our approach may vary based on our relationship with the individual. Different contexts and levels of intimacy require responses always rooted in love, respect, and wisdom. For example, if you are a medical professional in an ER, quarreling over pronouns can be inappropriate, counterproductive, and may hinder effective care. Using the person's preferred pronouns may be necessary to focus on the patient's immediate health needs.

Conversely, Christian doctors and healthcare professionals dealing with patients seeking gender-reassignment surgery or other significant medical procedures need a different approach. In these situations, it is essential to engage in compassionate dialogue, offering alternatives that align with both medical ethics and biblical convictions. The goal is to provide holistic care that

considers the physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being of the patient, gently guiding them toward choices that honor their God-given identity.

Even for those of us who are not in the medical profession, addressing transgender pronouns also requires considering context and relationship dynamics. In a professional work environment, it may be appropriate to follow your employer's guidelines, provided you can do so with a clear conscience. Some argue that using pronouns that do not align with your beliefs constitutes dishonesty. If this is your conviction, strive to maintain integrity and avoid dishonesty.

However, it's important to acknowledge that we might be mistaken in our assumptions about someone's gender. Some transgender individuals do not present in a way that makes their transgender status apparent, and others may not conform to typical gender norms. Given these possibilities, it may be wise to defer to preferred pronouns in casual relationships or those lacking the depth necessary for gospel-centered conversations on gender and sexuality.

We must also be careful not to hide or lie about our beliefs. While it may not be appropriate for a Christian bank teller to argue about pronouns with a customer, if an opportunity arises to share our Christian convictions, we should do so with conviction and compassion. In deeper relationships, such as with close friends or family members, there is more room for honest and heartfelt conversations about faith and identity. These relationships allow for a greater degree of influence and understanding. It's important to balance truth with love, sharing your beliefs gently and respectfully while maintaining a strong relational bond. These conversations can be more personal and may include discussing your faith perspective on gender and identity, always rooted in love and a desire for their ultimate well-being.

In all situations, our approach should be guided by a desire to reflect Christ's love and truth. By considering the context and depth of our relationship with the individual, we can navigate these sensitive issues with grace and wisdom. Always seek the Holy Spirit's guidance, and let your actions and words be a testament to God's love.

Practical Steps for Interaction

1. **USE PREFERRED NAMES:** Using your trans-neighbor's preferred name is a simple way to show respect and foster a peaceful working relationship, and using a preferred name can be a bridge of kindness. Names may have gendered connotations (we assume Jack is male and Jill is female) but there is nothing sinful about legally changing your name. If I changed my name to Harriet that might seem strange, but it is not immoral. Similarly, I once knew a man named Leslie. Should I have refused to call him by his name because that is typically a girl's name?

2. **HANDLE PRONOUNS WITH CARE:** Pronouns are where things get complicated because most pronouns are inherently gendered. As Christians, we are called to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). As was already stated, if you feel using a pronoun that does not conform to the person's sex at birth would be a lie, then do not lie, but also realize that going out of your way to use a pronoun that a person does not identify with is going to be seen as rude and offensive (regardless of how we feel about it). In Romans 14, the Apostle Paul teaches us the

value of not causing needless divisions or stumbling blocks. The context was very different (dealing with honoring special days of worship and whether or not someone should eat meat sacrificed to idols), but the general principle (summarized in verse 19) is that if we can find a way to hold to our convictions without causing division, we should pursue that course of action. For example, using the pronoun non-gendered pronoun “they” might be a way for you not to offend needlessly while also not compromising your convictions. The trans person you are working with may not find that acceptable, but as Christians, we should be willing to go as far as we can without sinning to show respect to others. At the same time, we should not violate our conscience or willfully sin for the sake of compromise.

3. STAND FIRM IN YOUR BELIEFSr: It is going to become increasingly difficult to avoid the topic of trans rights or LGBTQ issues. It is better to be prepared for the conversation when it arises than to be caught off guard and feel ill-equipped to state what you believe and why. When the topic comes up, it might be helpful to begin by affirming that everyone has the right to their beliefs while gently sharing that your faith informs your perspective. You might say something like, “In my faith, we believe in loving and honoring those who disagree with us. Can we agree to respect each other even if we disagree?” Being calm, respectful, and able to express your views clearly will go a long way towards others hearing what you have to say.

4. REALIZE THAT NOT EVERY CONVERSATION NEEDS TO BE ABOUT GENDER/SEXUALITY: It’s natural to desire our friends, family, and neighbors to come to know Jesus, especially when they are grappling with issues like gender identity. However, it’s crucial to understand that not every interaction needs to focus on these topics. Building a strong, trusting relationship is often a prerequisite for meaningful dialogue about faith. When we push too hard on sensitive issues, we risk alienating the very people we hope to reach. Instead, it may be wise to focus more on nurturing our relationships showing genuine care and interest in their lives. As trust grows, so does the opportunity to share our faith and perspectives in a loving, respectful manner. Remember, our willingness to listen and engage on a variety of topics can pave the way for more open and fruitful conversations about faith and identity in the future.

Encouragement for the Journey

Facing these conversations can be daunting, but take heart. Jesus assures us not to be afraid because He is with us (Matthew 10:26-33). He promises to give us the right words when we need them (Luke 12:12). Even if the interaction is difficult, remember that nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39).

In every interaction, seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Pray for wisdom and a gentle spirit (Philippians 4:5). As you honor Christ in your words and actions, you will find His peace and strength, enabling you to reflect His love and truth in all circumstances.

PART 6: Some Final Thoughts

Reject The False Dichotomy

In today's culture, we're often told we have only two options regarding our interaction with the LGBT community: either affirm their choices or distance ourselves from them. However, Jesus offers a third way—an approach rooted in the gospel. He shows us how to respond with both grace and truth, demonstrating that we don't need to choose one over the other.

Jesus' ministry was paradoxical. He consistently upheld God's righteous standards, emphasizing that He hadn't come to abolish the law:

Matthew 5:17 (ESV): "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

At the same time, He attracted those considered outcasts. Both the oppressed and oppressors found a place at His feet. This perplexed the religious and secular powers of His time. His crucifixion was orchestrated by a collaboration of religious and secular authorities, while a former prostitute washed His feet and a thief defended His honor from the cross:

Luke 7:38 (ESV): "and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment."

The apostle John described Jesus as "full of grace and truth":

John 1:14 (ESV): "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Embracing truth without grace leads to harsh fundamentalism, while emphasizing grace without truth results in empty sentimentality. Compromising either diminishes our resemblance to Jesus. To represent Jesus to the LGBT community, we must embody both grace and truth. This approach would likely provoke a response similar to His—repelling the arrogant and attracting the broken.

Jesus' teachings in the Gospels guide us in cultivating a ministry characterized by grace and truth. Though we will inevitably fall short of perfectly embodying Christ, this should be the aspiration of every church.

“Judge Not” Is Not A License For Silence

"Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matthew 7:1). This verse is often quoted but frequently misunderstood. People tend to use it to support a view where nothing is considered wrong. However, Jesus couldn't have meant that.

Just a few verses later, Jesus speaks of a narrow path leading to life and a wide path to destruction:

Matthew 7:13-14 (ESV): "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

He also stated that the world hates Him because He testifies about its evil deeds:

John 7:7 (ESV): "The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil."

Clearly, this isn't a passive approach. Jesus' followers did the same. Paul instructed believers to expose works of darkness:

Ephesians 5:11 (ESV): "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them."

John the Baptist confronted Herod and paid the price for it. Therefore, "judge not" doesn't mean we don't communicate when something contradicts God's Word.

Jesus emphasized that judgment isn't just about expressing a contentious truth but about our response after sharing that truth. He wasn't sent to condemn the world but to save it:

John 3:17 (ESV): "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Though Jesus pointed out many people's wrongdoings, He didn't condemn them. Instead, He drew people close and befriended sinners.

True judgment occurs not when we speak truth but when we dismiss someone as a person. Have we established bonds with the gay and lesbian community? Are we their friends? Do we welcome them into our homes? When we meet someone gay, do we primarily see them as individuals created in God's image? Are we actively advocating against abuse, injustice, and discrimination faced by the LGBTQ+ community? Remember, Jesus didn't die only for one group; His love encompasses all.

As believers, our love for our gay neighbors must outweigh our stance on sexual morality. Our relationship with them shouldn't hinge on agreement about sexuality. We shouldn't compromise our position, but we shouldn't sever ties if others disagree. Instead, we should draw them closer:

Ephesians 4:15 (ESV): "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."

By following Jesus' example of grace and truth, we can engage with the LGBT community in a way that honors God and reflects the heart of the gospel.

In Matthew 7:2-5, Jesus teaches:

Matthew 7:2-5 (ESV): "For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

Jesus addresses hypocrisy and emphasizes our inability to see our own sins. He assumes the log is in our eye, highlighting that every human heart is corrupt. Without Christ, our hearts are impure. Treating one sin as worse than others shows we haven't acknowledged our own sinfulness. As John Owen said, "The seed of every sin is in every human heart." Recognizing this truth brings humility and brokenness. We're all sinners. Paul reminds us in 1 Timothy 1:15:

1 Timothy 1:15 (ESV): "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."

Jesus illustrated this in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:23-35). If we are repulsed by someone else's sin without being deeply moved by God's forgiveness, we have lost touch with the gospel. The gospel compels us to extend the same grace and mercy we have received. Critiquing sexual sin harshly and stigmatizing individuals misrepresents the heart of the gospel and fails to reflect Christ's forgiveness and grace.

To approach others with grace and truth, we must first acknowledge our own sinfulness and need for God's mercy. We should embody the humility of those forgiven much, always mindful of our need for grace. As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10:12:

1 Corinthians 10:12 (ESV): "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."

Galatians 6:1 (ESV): "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted."

Our response to sin, including sexual sin, should be marked by humility, grace, and a deep awareness of our need for God's mercy. By doing so, we honor the gospel and create a community where forgiveness and restoration are possible. Let us remember that we all need grace, and let that truth guide our interactions with others, especially when addressing sin.

Did Jesus “Never Address Homosexuality”?

Those seeking to legitimize the homosexual lifestyle often claim that Jesus never explicitly addressed homosexuality. While technically true, this argument lacks substance. Jesus also never explicitly mentioned rape, child abuse, fraud, or idolatry, yet His stance on these issues is clear.

Jesus had two ways to establish ethical guidelines regarding sexuality. He could have condemned each possible deviation one by one, or He could present a positive framework for what is right. Consider it this way: if I want to identify my wife among five women, I could either point out the ones who aren't my wife, or I could proudly declare, "That wonderful woman there is my wife."

Jesus consistently upheld the Mosaic understanding of sexual relations as sacred within heterosexual marriage. By affirming this, He implicitly rejected any deviations.

We should follow Jesus' example by providing a constructive perspective on sexuality. As the apostle Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 6, the biblical view of sex is profoundly elevated. It signifies a deep union between two distinct individuals, a physical bond that should mirror unity and oneness in every aspect of their relationship. This is why sexual activity outside the context of marriage is so harmful. Anything less than complete unity within the covenant of marriage falls short of human dignity. God's original intention for sex was to symbolize an entire relationship, reflecting the unity between two distinct genders and symbolizing God's love for humanity. Sex extends beyond mere physicality; it mirrors the Creator's design. We should reclaim the positive and beautiful aspects of covenantal love and sexuality.

Remember That Change Is Always Possible With God

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus begins His ministry with the word "repent." This term might bring to mind images of intense street preachers, but it simply means acknowledging Jesus' authority over our lives. Every generation creates its own moral standards. Even the LGBTQ+ community has a strong moral code. However, the Bible criticizes the idea of doing what seems right in our own eyes, implying we set our standards instead of following God's. Accepting Jesus means replacing our personal judgments with His Word, which is challenging for everyone.

The Bible challenges all generations differently. For some, it might be Jesus' teachings on non-violence, equality, or sexuality. Christians who support the homosexual lifestyle might be

influenced by current culture, adapting their interpretation of the Bible to fit what society says is right. We are at a point where we must choose between the approval of the world or Jesus.

Some argue that discussing same-sex behavior is hate speech. However, if the biblical view of sexuality is true, withholding this truth isn't loving; it might be cowardly. Love requires sharing what God's Word says, even if it's difficult.

If I love my gay neighbor, friend, or family member, I'll share God's Word honestly. Not telling them wouldn't be loving; it would be neglect. Both they and I need to approach Jesus with humility, recognizing our sins. No one goes to hell just for being homosexual, and no one goes to heaven just for being heterosexual. Rejecting Jesus' authority and refusing to acknowledge our brokenness is what separates us from God's grace.

If my gay neighbor, friend, or family member disagrees with me, I'll try to act like Jesus. I won't judge or reject them; I'll keep them close and warn them of the coming judgment. When we distance someone after sharing the truth, we judge them and fail to represent Jesus. But if we say "peace" where there is no peace, we fail our role as messengers of the gospel.

Can God change our sexual desires? Yes, over time and with effort. However, immediate or miraculous changes are rare, and many will continue to struggle until Christ returns. The key is that our identity in Christ overcomes any former definitions. Through His grace, we will eventually be whole.

The Gospel Is Always The Message

Whenever Jesus encountered people caught in sexual sin, He focused on the underlying issues rather than the sin itself. In John 4, He met a woman who had been married five times and was living with a man who wasn't her husband. Instead of condemning her, Jesus revealed that her actions were driven by a deeper thirst. He offered her His eternal love, which fulfilled her in a way no relationship could.

A more striking example is in John 8, where a woman caught in adultery was brought before Jesus. He said, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." Notice the order: first, He accepted her, then He called her to change. Jesus knew she needed to feel His love and acceptance before she could change. God's acceptance empowers us to break free from sin, rather than being a reward for having done so.

My approach isn't just to warn a young woman about the dangers of premarital sex. I tell her that God loves her deeply and has pursued her. He took on her shame and made her pure in His eyes. The only way to break free from idolatry is to know the love of a Father who is greater than any boy's attention.

Similarly, I don't just warn a young man about the dangers of pornography. I tell him that God has a purpose for him and died to free him from sin, so he can be a man of honor. Jesus' last words on the cross were "It is finished," not "Do better."

Only the depth of God's acceptance can free us from idolatrous pursuits. Our message isn't just about stopping sexual sin; it's about inviting people to see God. Only awe at God's love can free us from lesser attractions.

We must be prepared to endure hardship for our faith. Throughout history, many have faced significant trials for their beliefs. Are we ready to sacrifice our reputation, see our congregations shrink, or even face imprisonment for the gospel? Speaking both grace and truth will come at a cost, and we must be ready to pay it.

Consider John the Baptist, who was beheaded for speaking against Herod's immoral behavior. If this happened today, people might criticize him for not sticking to "grace and love." Yet, Jesus praised John for speaking the truth. The same spirit that opposed John exists today. Do we have the courage to stand firm as he did?

C. S. Lewis, in "Mere Christianity," advises that if the Bible's teachings on sexuality trouble you, focus first on understanding Jesus. If you conclude that He is Lord, then trust Him to guide you on this issue. The core of Christianity is the gospel, not sexual ethics. Our message should center on the cross, not primarily on sexual morality.

However, we must also address these issues when they arise. We can't delay indefinitely. Grace can't overshadow truth; we must share both. The gospel is our guide for balancing grace and truth. Jesus' crucifixion shows us how to navigate challenging times – not by avoiding them, but by sacrificing ourselves for others.

FURTHER READING:

- [The Gospel And Same-Sex Marriage](#) by Russell Moore
- [God And The Transgender Debate](#) by Andrew T. Walker
- [Is God Anti-Gay](#) by Sam Allberry
- [Strange New World](#) by Carl Trueman
- [The Dignity Revolution](#) by Daniel Darling
- [Gay Girl Good God](#) by Jackie Hill Perry