

## **Introduction**

Good afternoon. I'm so glad you're here tonight for the seventh session in our *A Better Story: God, Sex and Human Flourishing*.

Today we are focusing directly on the topic of homosexuality.

Now, as we get started let's remember, always remember that we're not just talking about an issue, we're talking about people. Real people. "A diverse group of beautiful people created in God's image. People who are often marginalized and misunderstood, shamed and shunned by those who don't share their experiences. People who are infinitely valuable in God's eyes."<sup>1</sup>

This afternoon we have the gift of hearing again from Dylan and Spencer, two people from our church are. Dylan is gay, and Spencer is queer. And today, Dylan is going to tell us a little more of his story. And then I'll teach for about 45 minutes, and then we'll have Q&A for about 30 minutes. The first half of the Q&A will be focused on the lecture. So you should have received 3 slips of paper and an index card. The 3 slips of paper are for questions or observations you have concerning my lecture. The index card is for questions you want Dylan or Spencer to answer. So they will both come up and join me for the last half of the Q&A.

Alright, Dylan come on up. Thank you so much for being here.

Prayer...

Dylan...

Thank you Dylan.

## **Introduction**

There are three main parts to my lecture tonight. In the first section I'll walk through the three primary reasons that, according to Christianity, sex between men or sex between women is wrong. Second, I'll walk through the three most popular arguments today used by Christians to affirm that sex between men or sex between women is okay. And then in the final part of my lecture, I'll focus on the question of love: How can it be that we truly love LGBTQ+ people while also believing that gay sex is a sin?

### **Part 1: Three Reasons Why Christianity Teaches that Same-Sex Sexual Activity is Wrong**

Okay, let's get started. Part one: Three primary reasons why gay sex is a sin.

**(1. When the Bible talks about marriage, it says that sex-difference is part of what marriage is.)**

Number 1, when Scripture talks about marriage, it says that sex-difference (being male and being female) is part of what marriage is.

In the Bible the most important question about marriage is **NOT**

- “can two people of the same gender get married?”

No. In the Bible, the most important question about marriage is

- “What is marriage?”<sup>2</sup>
- “Is marriage a consensual union between two adults who fall in love and commit to each other?”<sup>3</sup>
- “Or, Is marriage a one-flesh union between two sexually different persons?”<sup>4</sup>

You see, some of the most important passages of Scripture in the Bible dealing with marriage put sex difference into the very meaning of marriage.<sup>5</sup>

We only have time to focus on one. If you brought a Bible, turn to **Genesis 2v18**. “*Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him.’*” Notice the last phrase “*helper fit for him,*” or in some translations “*a helper suitable for him.*”<sup>6</sup>

In Hebrew this is two words, עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ.

The first word, עֹזֵר, means “a helper.”<sup>7</sup> God is searching for a “*helper*” for Adam. But not just a helper in general. The second word, you see, tells us that the helper has to be a “suitable.” Now that’s a translation of a very tricky Hebrew word, which is כְּנֶגְדּוֹ. It’s a compound word. It comes from the preposition כְּ, which means “like,” and נֶגְדָּה, which when it’s used in a compound word with a preceding preposition, נֶגְדָּה means “opposite to.” So this word, literally translated is “like but opposite.” So God created for Adam a helper that is like him but opposite from him.<sup>8</sup>

Adam didn’t need another human to help. He needed a different sort of human. A כְּנֶגְדָּה. Similarity—כְּ, and dissimilarity—נֶגְדָּה. God creates Eve to be exactly that. She is a human “like” (כְּ) Adam. But she’s also a female, not a male, which is why she is different than Adam. She is נֶגְדָּה “opposite him.”<sup>9</sup>

Now some people who affirm gay marriage interpret this passage to “say that Eve’s dissimilarity doesn’t refer to her femaleness, but to other differences like...[her] personality. Quite frankly, I think this is a stretch. Certainly two people of the same sex will display differences”—different histories, experiences, physical traits, personalities. “One may be shy, while the other is outgoing; one may be Type A, while the other may be Type B. But it seems clear...that the otherness of Eve is precisely her sexual difference and not her different Strength Finders evaluation.”<sup>10</sup>

Go back to **Genesis 1v27**, the other foundational passage on marriage and the family. In **Genesis 1:27** we’re told, “*God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created*

*him; male and female he created them.” And then in the next verse God commands them to “be fruitful and increase in number.” And in Genesis c2:v24, they are “a man” and “his wife.”*

You see, the complementarity includes sexuality. Part of the purpose of” Genesis c2 is to explain what marriage is, and “why there are two sexes.” In fact listen to the conclusion of the chapter, the summary of the chapter. This is Genesis c2vv24–25, *“That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”* And then in the next chapter, Genesis c3, we see the fall, and the shame. And then c4 picks up the narrative with, this is Genesis c4v1, *“Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.”* The entire sweep of the story identifies sexual diversity as fundamental to what marriage is.<sup>11</sup>

Now when Jesus comes along, he doubles down on this view of marriage. In Matthew c19, when he’s debated with the Pharisees about divorce, he goes out of way to remind us that marriage requires a male and a female.

**Matthew c19v3**, *“And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?’ He answered, ‘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 they shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.’”*

For Jesus, sex difference is part of what marriage is. Marriage is the one-flesh union of two sexually different persons. It is part of God's very design of marriage.<sup>12</sup> Marriage, by definition, requires sex difference, it requires male and female.

In other words, in the Bible, marriage is, by definition, the lifelong union between two sexually different persons. That’s what marriage is. Marriage is *not* the lifelong union between two humans who fall in love and, oh, by the way, we Christians think it should be between a man and a woman.

## **(2. When the Bible talks about same-sex sexual activity, it always prohibits it.)**

A second reason Christianity teaches that same-sex sexual activity is a sin is whenever the Bible mentions same-sex relationships, it always prohibits them.

Now, to be honest, there are only a handful of passages in the Bible that directly mention same-sex sexual behavior. It’s not an issue that comes up very often because the Bible is just not fixated on homosexuality. And yet, when it does come up, it always prohibits same-sex sex.

Okay, so here are the five passages where the Bible directly addresses same-sex sexual activity:

1. Leviticus 18:22

2. Leviticus 20:13
3. Romans 1:26–27
4. 1 Corinthians 6:9
5. 1 Timothy 1:9–10

Two passages in the Old Testament, and three passages in the New Testament.<sup>13</sup>

I'll read just one of them. **Romans 1:26–27**, *“For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.”*

Here we are told that same-sex sex is *“unnatural.”* That doesn't mean it can't feel good, or be deeply fulfilling. What it means is that sex between women, and sex between men goes against God's purpose for us revealed in creation and reiterated throughout Scripture. And furthermore, this doesn't mean that gay sex is the worst or only form of sinful behavior. Don't get me wrong. It clearly marks out gay sex as serious, but it's not unique. In fact the Bible graciously points out lots of behavior that we should avoid because it goes against God's good purposes for us. Drunkenness, theft, greed, adultery—the Bible, like any good friend or mentor, is kind to show us pitfalls in life.

But let's go back to the main point here. Whenever the Bible directly addresses same-sex sexual activity it is prohibited. There is no diversity within Scripture with regard to gay sex. And “given what the Bible says about God's purpose” for “sex and marriage, this should not surprise us... God is opposed to all sexual activity outside of” marriage between two sexually different persons. So it's not that the Bible opposes all” gay sex “but approves of any and every sexual act between” straight people.”<sup>14</sup>

Alright, let's remember where we are. There are three parts to the lecture tonight. First, I'm going through the three primary reasons that, according to Christianity, gay sex is sin. So far we've seen that when the Bible talks about marriage, it says that sex-difference is part of what marriage is. And we've seen that whenever Scripture talks about same-sex sexual relationships, it's always negative. And now the third primary reason for believing that God's design and intent is for sex to only occur between a husband and a wife is that...

**(3. There is a global, historic, multi-denominational, 2,000 year agreement about this.)**

This is what the church has taught for 2,000 years. And I'm talking about all branches of Christianity: Protestant, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic, and the list goes on. This is what most Christians at most times and in most places have believed: Christians in Africa, Latin America, Asia. Charismatics, Reformed, Wesleyan, High

Church, Low Church, Eastern Church, Western Church, the list goes on and on. There is a consensus across cultures and across centuries. And it has only seriously been called into question within the last fifty or sixty years.

Now, I'm not saying that there has been complete unanimity on every issue related to sexuality in the Christian tradition. But, when it comes to the belief that sexual difference, being male and female, is fundamental to what marriage is, and to who can have sex, there has been a uniformity to what the Church has believed matters to God, and thus ought to matter to us.

**Transition:** Alright, so those are the three primary reasons for believing sex outside of marriage between a man and a woman is wrong. But, like I said, over the last 50-60 years a growing group of Christians, even evangelical Christians, who now hold to an affirming view of same-sex relations.

## **Part 2: Popular Arguments in Favor of Same-Sex Relations**

So for the second part of my lecture I'm going to focus on three of the most popular arguments used for revising the historic position of the church.

### **(1. Prohibitions are only about non-consensual same-sex relations.)**

One of the main arguments used is that consensual, monogamous, same-sex relationships were **not** a part of the world of the Bible.<sup>15</sup> Since that world was so patriarchal and had such strict boundaries, there was “no room for the possibility of two men or two women of the same social status entering into a lifelong, equal partnership like we see so frequently today.”<sup>16</sup> And thus, whenever the Bible deals with gay sex, it is addressing exploitative relationships—masters having sex with their male slaves, older men having sex with younger teenage boys, or victims of war being raped by their male conquerers, and of course prostitution.<sup>17</sup>

And so, since the people in the Bible, according to this argument, only knew of gay sex in relationships of sexual exploitation, the passages in the Bible that so clearly prohibit gay sex are really only prohibiting exploitative gay sex.

If you want to read this argument for yourself. The most recent and best version of the argument can be found at The Reformation Project. [www.reformationproject.org](http://www.reformationproject.org). They just came out with a very well produced video with the title, “Did Same-Sex Marriage Exist in Biblical Times? A Response to N. T. Wright and Preston Sprinkle.” Or you can read Matthew Vines’ book, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent, 2014). Like I said, this is the best version of this particular affirming argument.

I’ll say three things about this argument.

First of all, while this is an important issue to debate, it’s really a peripheral debate. Remember, sex difference is an intrinsic part of what marriage *is* and what marriage *is for*. The Christian

view of marriage does not rest on whether we have evidence for ancient consensual same-sex relationships. And so for this argument to be enough to revise the global, historic, multi-denominational 2,000 year agreement of the church on sexuality and marriage it would have to also show that sex-difference is NOT essential to marriage in the Bible.

Second, go back and carefully read for yourself the prohibitions against same-sex sexual relations, and you'll see there is no mention of masters or slaves or prostitutes or rape or older men having sex with teenage boys. In fact, the language of Leviticus simply says that men (not just masters, or older men, or victors of war) should not have sex with other men (not just slaves, or younger boys, or war victims.) There's nothing in the Scriptural passages that limit the prohibition to acts of exploitation.<sup>18</sup> The commands in the Bible simply state in absolute and unqualified terms: Men should not have sex with other men, and women should not have sex with other women.

Third, the ancient literary and archeological evidence just doesn't support this particular affirming argument. Ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman physicians, philosophers, astrologers, authors, novelists, and poets thought and wrote about biologically-driven, from birth, fixed, life-long, same-sex erotic orientation, and about consensual, loving, same-sex marriages. This has all been firmly and widely established by both non-affirming and affirming, Christian and non-Christian, conservative and progressive historians, biblical scholars, philosophers, and scholars of literature, archeology, and sociology.<sup>19</sup> The ancient Greco, Roman, and Jewish world knew about both exploitative same-sex relationships and consensual, committed same-status, same-sex sexual relationships.<sup>20</sup>

## **(2. Ethical Trajectory)**

A second popular argument used to revise the historic teaching of the Church is the idea that there is an ethical trajectory that leads to affirming same-sex relationships.<sup>21</sup>

So basically the idea is that the Bible doesn't always give us a complete or fully developed position on all ethical matters. Take slavery, for example. The Bible never comes out and condemns slavery as an institution. However, we can see some rumblings along the way, some challenges. And so there is this trajectory in the Bible that doesn't quite condemn slavery but is moving towards that goal.

Some argue that you can see the same thing with women in the Bible. In the Old Testament its very patriarchal. In the New Testament there's a movement toward full equality and liberation. But when you follow the trajectory towards its logical conclusion, the patriarchal commands fade away.

Now, let's assume that's all true. That there is an ethical trajectory in the Bible with regard to slavery and women. I'm not saying I believe there is, I may or may not. That's irrelevant to the

particular issue at hand. What I'm saying is that let's assume this ethical trajectory way of reading the Bible is legitimate. The question becomes, can we identify a trajectory in Scripture for same-sex relations. Does the Bible begin to move away from prohibiting same-sex behavior? Is there anything in the Bible to suggest that same-sex sexual behavior might be included in God's good plans for us?

Well, there's not. From Genesis to Revelation, there is almost no change for God's boundaries to sexuality and marriage. Remember we saw this. I say almost no change.

We do see that polygamy deconstructed more strongly as the Bible moves along, than it does at the beginning. And secondly, Jesus himself tightened up the laws on divorce. He moved divorce into a much stricter ethic. But there's no development of the sexual ethic with regard to same-sex sexual behavior.

### **(3. Orientation)**

The third argument most common among the Christians who interpret the Bible as affirming is the argument from orientation. It often goes something like this: "If someone who's gay, if they didn't choose to be this way, if they don't have a choice in it, they're just attracted to who they're attracted to, then what's wrong with that? Being gay is who they are. *It's who God created them to be.* It feels unkind to tell them, sorry. Since you're not straight like the rest of us, you can't get married or have sex. That just doesn't feel right?"

This is not a stand-alone argument, but it's typically assumed within or alongside the other arguments. It's the argument from orientation.

As we try to listen really close to this particular objection to the historic Christian ethic, I think it's important to be very careful with this idea that people are born gay. The fact is we don't know if that's the case or not. For several decades there has been a massive amount of funding poured into a search for a biological basis to same-sex attraction. There have been twin studies, fraternal birth order and handedness studies, animal models, genetic research, hormonal studies, research into brain symmetry and neural connections. A search for a biological origin to homosexuality has been the primary focus on scientific research in this area. Studies focused on environmental contributions have not received funding.<sup>22</sup> So we don't know as much as we would like to know, or need to know about how it comes to be that the majority of the population is heterosexual, and somewhere between 3% and 7% of the population is same-sex attracted. In fact, the more that scientists have studied sexuality, the more they have discovered how much we don't know, how much we thought we knew, how much of our older understandings need to be corrected and modified in light of fresh studies, and how messy and complicated and diverse our conclusions are.<sup>23</sup>

In fact, listen to this recent summary by the American Psychological Association on the current state of research into the causes of sexual orientation:<sup>24</sup>

“There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.”<sup>25</sup>

I think the last two statements are really important. First, “there are probably many factors that contribute” to our same-sex attraction, and these factors vary from person to person.”<sup>26</sup> And second, most people do not choose their sexual orientation. Every lesbian, gay, and bisexual person I’ve spoken with about the origins of their sexuality has said they they simply found themselves with attractions toward the same-sex.

Now back to the question at hand. If people don’t choose their sexual orientation, how can we say that something someone didn’t choose, but is inside them, how can we say it’s wrong?

I feel the weight of that. And I want to be very careful here. I don’t mean to sound cold, or robotic, or insensitive. But “the Christian sexual ethic does not hinge on the causes of sexual orientation. Whether an impulse comes ‘from within’ or is the result of” your experiences, or your environment, or, more likely some combination of both, “Christianity teaches that...[we are to evaluate our] impulses in light of God’s revealed will for behavior and whether a pattern of behavior ought to characterize [us]...over time.”<sup>27</sup>

All of us have to learn to “think beyond ‘God made me this way’ to ‘How does God want me to grow in Christlikeness such that I display the fruit of the Spirit in my life and my relationships.’”<sup>28</sup>

**Transition:** And yet, I think the main reason why some Christians are changing their view of sexuality and marriage is because of love. The lack of love and care for LGBTQ+ people, many of whom have been harmed by the church.

### **Part 3: The Question of Love**

In fact, for the last part of this lecture I want to focus directly on this issue. Can we truly love and honor LGBTQ+ people while believing that all sex outside of marriage between two sexually different persons is sin?

Let’s get really personal. Can you, can I, can our church truly love LGBTQ+ people without changing our theology?



This question is incredibly important. It seems to me that most straight Christians who embrace an affirming theology do so because they believe it's the only way to truly love and honor their LGBTQ+ friends and family members.

Theologically, the primary question is: *is the historic view of marriage true?* But for many people, the love question—*is it loving?*—is the more meaningful and compelling question.

Look statistics are tricky. (You know the saying, “there are three kinds of lies: Lies, damned lies, and statistics.”) And yet, they are important, and can be quite helpful. I'm going to share some jaw-dropping statistics now. These come from a massive study conducted over a 6 year period, that drew together the expertise of Northwestern University, the University of Chicago, and other serious research groups and organizations. It's a well done, peer reviewed, piece of research. The survey, the results, and analysis can be found in the book by Andrew Marin, *Us Versus Us: The Untold Story of Religion and the LGBT Community* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2016).

1. 86% of LGBTQ people in America were raised in the church. (And that's remarkable, because only 75% of Americans were raised in a religious community. So the LGBTQ community raised in the church is 11 points higher than the percentage for average Americans.) And by the way 3/4 of the gay community were raised in theologically conservative churches.<sup>29</sup>
2. 54% of the LGBTQ people left the church after the age of 18. And this is exactly double the amount of the general American population who left the church after the age of 18. And only 21% of the LGBTQ+ people who left the church, left because of the church's belief. The primary reason for leaving was not beliefs, it was negative personal experiences: they did not feel safe, or were kicked out after coming out, or were excluded from relationships with leaders, or their church was unwilling to even talk about sexuality, or they were not allowed to volunteer (not because they were having gay sex, but simply because they were attracted to the same sex.)
3. Now here's a crazy statistic. Only 9% of the general American population who has abandoned the church have indicated that they are open to returning to the church. But 76% of LGBTQ+ people in America who have left the church are open to returning. Look, real quick, this represents nearly 8 million people. Nearly 8 million LGBTQ+ people are open to coming back to the church. 8 million sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, friends, and neighbors. Now, the survey clearly indicated they are open to returning to the church, on one condition: that the church changes. But not theologically. Only 8% of those who were open to return to the church said that the church would have to change its theology. All of the others said, it was love: the desire to be engaged in a loving, patient, realistic, authentic, and supportive community. Just be who we say we are. Just live up to our hype, that's all.

As I read this survey, here's the conclusion I've drawn: It's not the church's theology that's driven LGBT people away—by their own admission. It's been the church's lack of love and care. Our doctrine isn't the problem. Our posture is.<sup>30</sup>

Let me read just two quick personal testimonies to illustrate.

1. Ben, a 29 year old gay man raised in the church. “I left the church because I couldn't find one person who cared to listen to my story. I mean really listen. I'm talking about listening to the extent of investing into my journey with my faith so deeply that I can actually call them ‘brother’ or ‘sister’ and mean it.”<sup>31</sup>
2. Tasha, a 21 year old lesbian living in Miami, FL. “All I wanted was to feel loved by those in the church I grew up with...Love is giving me time to be with you to figure this out together. If you let any church people read this, tell them I don't have to be right to feel loved. I have to be dignified in our disagreement.”<sup>32</sup>

Church we do not need to change our theology of marriage to love and honor—truly love and honor—LGBTQ people.

Look at it this way. At the start of the gay rights movement in 1969, evangelicalism's leading voices, Billy Graham, Francis Schaeffer, John Stott, and C. S. Lewis (who had died just a couple years before) had all cast a positive vision for our brothers and sisters who are gay.<sup>33</sup>

But then, over the course of the 70s and 80s a new idea entered the Christian world: the idea that if you are gay and a Christian, the goal of your journey with Christ needs to be that would become heterosexual. That you should pray the gay away.

- The goal was “to make homosexuals dissolve into the heterosexual majority.”<sup>34</sup>
- That if you were gay, when you came to Christ it was your duty to learn to be like heterosexuals, and that heterosexuals have nothing to learn from homosexuals.

Well, as it so happens, the great 40 year experiment of “shoving homosexuals into the” Holy Spirit's Play-Doh Fun Factory and squeezing them out in perfectly straight lines has been a colossal failure. All the manliness retreats, all the talk therapy, all the slow-release synthetic estrogen injections and electroshock, left the large majority of people still implacably, indomitably homosexual. Often traumatized, sometimes married with kids—or at least divorced with kids—but still gay. The 2013 closure of Exodus International, the largest ‘ex-gay’ ministry in the world, marked the beginning of the end for the ‘cure’ approach to homosexuality.”<sup>35</sup>

But by the grace of God the cures didn't work. **And “in the wake of the failure of the cures, we have been forced to ask whether there is any other way in which same-sex desires can be sanctified.”** “And we do find an alternative path—in fact, we find this path winding throughout scripture, utterly ignored and yet necessary for Christians of many sexual orientations. What if,

instead of trying to switch [someone's]...sexual desires from homo- to hetero-," a gay man or woman "tried to express [their]...gay desires chastely? What if" a Christian lesbian "sought to honor and express [her]...longings to love, share [her life]...with, commit to, cherish, serve, make a home with, and become family to someone of the same sex?"<sup>36</sup>

What I'm getting at is the fact that "the Bible uses both opposite-sex *and same-sex* love to teach us what love truly means. Both kinds of love are used as images of the love God has for his people and for our individual souls; both kinds of love are used as models for how we should live in relationship to God."<sup>37</sup>

And don't get me wrong. "These two kinds of love are not interchangeable. They have different structures, different expressions.

- Whenever the Bible uses sexual love to teach us about the mutual love of God and humankind, it's always the love of one man and one woman, as in the Song of Songs or Ephesians 5.
- Whenever the Bible uses same-sex love to teach us about God's love for us and ours for him, it is [always] nonsexual and nonmarital love...
- In scripture, same-sex and opposite-sex love are equally intimate, equally sacrificial—equally real and holy."<sup>38</sup>

There are three examples of same-sex love in the Bible that sit right in the heart of the story the Bible tells. None of these three pairs of intimate friendships are marginal to the central plot of Scripture. I'm talking about the love between

- David and Jonathan,
- Ruth and Naomi,
- and of course, Jesus and John.<sup>39</sup>

Each of these same-sex love stories are nonsexual and non-marital, and yet they are truly love stories that model God's love for us and ours for him in ways that heterosexual married love falls short. In each of them we see the way that a longing to love another person of the same gender can be a lamp given to you by God to light the path ahead.

"There is often so much beauty, self-gift, and holiness in our own same-sex loves and in the same-sex loves of the people around us. Scripture is not silent about this beauty. These loves are not simply blank spaces, places where God turns his face away...God in his Word and in the history of the Church offers us guidance on how to bring our...loves into harmony with his will."<sup>40</sup>

Let's pray.

### **Recommended Books**

The following list is adapted from Preston Sprinkle, “Pastor/Leader’s Guide,” *The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender*, 23–25.

#### **Historic Christian Sexual Ethic**

- Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*. In between scholarly and practical, this book thoroughly examines what the Bible says about same-sex relations while helping straight people think more compassionately about LGBTQ+ people.
- Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*. A robust scholarly work that’s heavy on exegesis and lacks in graciousness. Gagnon’s book is a must read for anyone who desires to dig deep in the scholarly issues. Model the exegesis, but not the tone.
- Sam Allberry, *Why Does God Care Who I Sleep With?* A short yet clear and thoughtful book on Jesus’ teaching regarding sex, and how this will lead us closer to fulfilling our deepest longings than we might realize.
- Sam Allberry, *Is God ‘Anti-Gay?’* A very short yet clear and thoughtful book on what the Bible says about same-sex relations. SO GOOD!!!
- Mark Yarhouse, *How Should We Think about Homosexuality*.

#### **Memoir (holding the historic Christian sexual ethic)**

- Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting*. A short, engaging, ground-breaking book. Easy to read and hard to put down. Wes Hill authentically describes what it’s like living as a celibate gay Christian. A must read for any straight Christian.
- Gregory Coles, *Single, Gay, Christian*. A beautifully written memoir with a healthy dose of intelligent reflections on life, God, sex, the Bible, and sexuality. Another must read for any straight Christian.
- Ed Shaw, *Same-Sex Attraction and the Church*. An excellent book written by a pastor who experiences same-sex attraction. A good blend of relational, theological and ministry-related advice.
- Eve Tushnet, *Gay and Catholic*. And her follow up book, *Tenderness*.
- Rachel Gilson, *Born Again This Way*.
- Jackie Hill-Perry, *Gay Girl, Good God*.

#### **Youth / Youth Leaders**

- Preston Sprinkle, *Living in a Gray World*. A down-to-earth look at what the Bible says about marriage and same-sex relationships and how Christian teens can navigate living in a sexually confusing world.
- Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Sexual Identity*. Written directly to youth leaders, this book contains a good blend of theological, pastoral, relational, and ministry-related advice.

#### **Revisionist Christian Sexual Ethic (The “Gay Affirming” Position)**

- James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*. Hands down, *the* most compelling academic book that argues for God’s blessing on same-sex marriage in the church. Readable, but still quite scholarly.
- Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*. An easy to read, yet well researched book that argues for God’s blessing on same-sex unions in the church.
- Colby Martin, *Unclobber*. An affirming pastor argues that the so-called prohibition passages have been misunderstood and don’t apply to modern-day same-sex marriage.

### **Psychology / Counseling**

- Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*. A great one-stop shop to get a solid overview of same-sex sexuality from the perspective of a leading Christian psychologist.
- Lisa Diamond, *Sexual Fluidity in Women*. A leading psychologist shows that women experience more sexual fluidity (i.e., changes in sexual and romantic desire) than men. Though not a Christian book, this book is helpful for understanding the unique sexuality of women.

### **Guidance for Families and Friends of LGBTQ+ Loved Ones**

- Bill Henson, *Guiding Families of LGBTQ+ Loved Ones*. (Both the “Expanded Edition” and/or “The Essentials Edition.”) Hands down *the* best resource for helping families, friends, and church leaders navigate their relationships with LGBTQ+ loved ones.
- Brad Harper and Drew Harper, *Space at the Table*. A book written jointly by a Christian father (Brad) and his gay son (Drew). A truly beautiful and eye-opening book that’s incredibly helpful for parents with LGBTQ+ kids.
- Caleb Kaltenbach, *Messy Grace*. A book written by a straight pastor who was raised by gay parents. This is a remarkably example of holding the historic Christian sexual ethic with deep and tender and effective love. This book shows the messiness of accepting without approving, love and grace, compassion and conviction.

### **Church and Relationships**

- Greg Johnson, *Still Time to Care: What We Can Learn from the Church’s Failed Attempt to Cure Homosexuality*.
- Caleb Kaltenbach, *Messy Truth*. A follow up from *Messy Grace* (see note above) in which the author focuses on ways churches can cultivate compassion without sacrificing conviction.
- Andrew Marin, *Us Versus Us*. Excellent insights into the religious background of LGBTQ+ people and why so many have left the church.
- Bridget Eileen Rivera, *Heavy Burdens*. This book shows us how Christians have wounded many of the LGBTQ+ children of the church. Not everyone will agree with every argument in the book (I don’t), but an honest account of the real harm the church has inflicted is essential to bind up some of the wounds.

## **Appendix 1**

***Some people have argued that the Bible does not condemn all homosexual acts, it only condemns exploitative relationships—rape, prostitution, pederasty—or promiscuity, but it doesn't rule out mutual, loving homosexual relationships.***

That interpretation was advanced in 1980s by John Boswell,<sup>41</sup> and it's been popularized more recently by Matthew Vines.<sup>42</sup> But this argument does not stack up to the evidence on two significant fronts.<sup>43</sup>

First of all the ancient Roman world “knew a great deal about what people today would regard as longer-term, reasonably stable relations between two people of the same gender. This is not a modern invention.”<sup>44</sup> For example, Kyle Harper, the historian of Ancient Roman slavery and sexuality, has shown that while “same-sex marriages between women, or men, had no standing or consequence in public law...that fact hardly diminishes the extraordinary testimony we do have for durable forms of same-sex companionship. In a peaceful and prosperous society, amid a highly urbanized...empire...same-sex pairs openly claimed, and ritually enacted, their own conjugal rights.”<sup>45</sup>

“Since Paul was as well educated and well read as he was (he quotes secular authors like Epimenides, Aratus, etc.), he would have been quite familiar with the vast homosexual literature of the Hellenistic world in which tender, committed, nurturing homoerotic love was celebrated. No doubt, he would have known of Emperor Nero's own homosexual marriage to Sporus. Since Paul ministered for a length of time in Corinth, he may well have known firsthand of many other homosexual marriages.”<sup>46</sup>

So “the idea that in Paul's day it was always a matter of exploitation of younger men by older men or whatever...of course there was plenty of that then, as there is today, but it was by no means the only thing. They knew about the whole range of options.”<sup>47</sup>

It's simply not true to say that we are reading this in a different context and that makes our situation different.

Second, when Paul writes about homosexual sex, he is not just speaking of exploitation, there's mutuality in view in these relationships. For example, in Romans 1:26 when Paul mentions female homosexual relations, he was writing in a culture that knew nothing of exploitative female homosexual relations. Instead, at that time, “female homosexual relations were mutual, nonpederastic, and not the result of an out-of-control sex drive.”<sup>48</sup> Like I said before, Paul knew about the full range of homosexual practices and relationships, and “despite all of this, at no point does Paul say even the slightest positive thing about homosexual practice. Instead, every time he addresses it, he rejects it as an option for Christians. Perhaps what may be most helpful to stress here is the fact that the precise language Paul uses in condemning homosexual practice is far more comprehensive than many English translations may imply. For example, the recently

published 3rd edition of Walter Bauer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 2000) rejects the earlier speculative views of Derrick Bailey, Scroggs, and others who hypothesized that in 1 Corinthians 6:9 Paul was only opposing homosexual prostitution. This lexicon, which is the recognized definitive authority for First Century AD Greek, argues that the terms which are mistakenly translated by the NIV as "male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders" in fact refer comprehensively to the passive and active partners of any homosexual relationship, not just ones that are commercial or abusive. The same conclusion is argued in detail by most of the recent scholarly commentaries on 1 Corinthians, including those authored by F.F. Bruce, C.K. Barrett, and Anthony C. Thiselton. It is also a view that is supported at great length by Robert A.J. Gagnon in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Abingdon Press, 2001). Gagnon is a graduate of Harvard and Yale, and he is now Professor of New Testament in Pittsburgh. Although he is not an Evangelical Christian, Gagnon's book is enormously useful and has been reviewed very positively by leading biblical scholars such as Brevard Childs of Yale, James Barr of Oxford, etc. If I had the time to develop my thoughts here, I would stress that Paul does not speak of "homosexuality" in the abstract in 1 Corinthians 6. Instead he uses the language that he does precisely in order to include ALL homosexual acts (whether receptive or active), but to EXCLUDE homosexual orientation."<sup>49</sup>

## **Appendix 2**

### ***How can it be wrong if I was born this way?***

Does God make people gay? Does God make a person attracted to the same sex? Does God make a person with a homosexual orientation?

Some people say, No one is born gay, but choose to be gay. And since they choose it, God is not responsible for their same-sex orientation.

Some people say, Yes. And if someone is born gay, then God must have made them that way, and if God made them that way, then being gay must be okay.

This debate is often framed as ‘nature versus nurture.’ Some say that *nature* determines whether someone will be gay. That is, some people are born with a same-sex orientation that is fixed at birth. Others say that we are all born heterosexual, but nurture (life circumstances, family upbringing) sometimes cultivates gay desires: sexual abuse, an absent father, a domineering mother, or too many sisters that treated little Bobby like a doll growing up. So are people born gay? Or do they choose to be gay? Or did something happen in their upbringing that made them gay?”<sup>50</sup>

What does Science teach us? Well, the biological hypothesis for the origins of homosexuality has been forcefully advanced for two decades now. In fact research attempting to establish biology as the primary determinant in homosexuality remains the the primary focal point of research.

“Studies of environmental contributions [to homosexuality] have not received funding, and previous studies have been neglected in favor of the current emphasis on nature over nurture.”<sup>51</sup>

“Given the limitations in the research...most experts today believe that sexual orientation is the result of many possible contributing factors. [And] these factors are likely weighted differently for different people. The American Psychological Association” has recently summarized the current state of research on the causes of sexual orientation.<sup>52</sup>

“There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.”<sup>53</sup>

I think it is very important that we pay close attention to the last sentence. It makes two significant assertions that we need to recognize. First of all, “people do not choose to experience same-sex attraction...[People do not choose] to have a homosexual orientation...They find themselves with attractions toward the same sex. [And second,] it is unclear why some people experience same-sex attractions or have a homosexual orientation...There are probably many



factors that contribute in one way or another, and these factors probably vary from person to person.”<sup>54</sup>

So, we do not yet know if there our sexual orientation is in our genes, our DNA, our biology or not. But we do know that people do not choose to experience same-sex attraction. And that makes it tough to make sense of if homosexual behavior is okay.

“However, the Christian sexual ethic does not hinge on the causes of sexual orientation. Whether an impulse comes ‘from within’ or is the result of one’s environment, or, more likely, if an impulse is the result of some combination, Christianity teaches that believers evaluate their impulses in light of God’s revealed will for behavior and whether a pattern of behavior ought to characterize the Christian over time.”<sup>55</sup>

I love how Justin Lee puts this in his book *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate*. (By the way Mr. Lee was the founder of the Gay Christian Network. He’s one of the most influential leaders of the Side A approach to LGTQ issues (i.e., affirms monogamous same-sex relationships for Christians).

*Just because an attraction or drive is biological doesn’t mean it’s okay to act on... We all have inborn tendencies to sin in any number of ways. If gay people’s same-sex attractions were inborn, that wouldn’t necessarily mean it’s okay to act on them, and if we all agreed that gay sex is sinful, that wouldn’t necessarily mean that same-sex attractions aren’t inborn. ‘Is it a sin?’ and ‘Does it have biological roots?’ are two completely separate questions.*<sup>56</sup>

John Corvino is a professor and chair of philosophy at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. He’s rather well known for his weekly column, “The Gay Moralist,” and his public debates with Christians who hold the view that same-sex-behavior is immoral. In one of his blog posts he makes the same case as Justin Lee.

*Wouldn’t a genetic basis for homosexuality prove that God made us this way? No, it wouldn’t — at least not in any helpful sense. Put aside the difficulties about establishing God’s existence of discerning divine intentions. The fact is that there are plenty of genetically influenced traits that are nevertheless undesirable. Alcoholism may have a genetic basis, but it doesn’t follow that alcoholics ought to drink excessively. Some people may have a genetic predisposition to violence, but they have no more right to attack their neighbors than anyone else. Persons with such tendencies cannot say ‘God made me this way’ as an excuse for acting on their dispositions. ‘Whoa!’ you might object. ‘Are you saying that homosexuality is a disorder like alcoholism?’ Not at all. The difference between alcoholism and homosexuality is that alcoholism has inherently bad effects whereas homosexuality does not. But this distinction just reinforces my point: we do not determine whether a trait is good by looking at where it came from*

*(genetics, environment, or something else). we determine whether it is good by looking at its effects.”<sup>57</sup>*

“Biblical Christianity has always taught that people are born with a sin nature, which affects our whole being: our intellect, bodies, emotions, and desires. Paul describes humanity as those who live ‘in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind’ (Eph. 2:3). We have passions and desires that are etched into the fabric of our ‘flesh,’ a term that most often denotes ‘our sin nature.’ Likewise, Jeremiah says, ‘The heart’—the core of our desires and affections—‘is deceitful above all things, and beyond cure. Who can understand it?’ (Jeremiah 17:9). Earlier the prophet said that our sin is ‘engraved on the tablet of our heart’ (17:1) and etched into our being like spots on a leopard’s coat (Jer. 13:13). Ezekiel says that the human heart is made of stone and is dead (Ezek. 1 36:26–27). This doesn’t mean that all of our desires and passions are wrong. But it does mean that some of them very well could be, and we need God’s revelation to sort out which ones are right and which ones are sin. Again, the logic that if same-sex desires are biological they are therefore okay to act on is not a Christian logic. Remember the words of Lee: “Is it sin?’ and ‘Does it have biological roots?’ are two completely separate questions.”<sup>58</sup> “Paul tells the Galatians that the ‘desires of the Spirit are against the flesh,’ and the Spirit works ‘to keep you from doing the things you want to do’ (Gal. 5:17). That is, sometimes what we ‘want to do’ is at odds with what God’s Spirit says we should do. This side of heaven, our desires cannot be fully trusted. Christian theology has always taught that our desires are tainted by sin and are terrible instructors of morality. The fact that people, even Christians, have same-sex desires does not change the ethical question: Is it God’s will to act on those desires?”<sup>59</sup>

### Appendix 3

***It is sometimes claimed that the “unnatural acts” condemned in Romans 1 is something other than loving, committed, same-sex sexual behavior.***

I know of three ways this phrase is interpreted in such a way that it does not condemn loving, committed, consensual, same-sex sexual behavior.

(1) *When a person acts against their sexual nature, and specifically speaking in this passage, when a heterosexual acts against their nature by committing homosexual practices.* This view has been frequently repeated since it was first invented by Derrick Sherwin Bailey in 1955 in his book, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*. This interpretation is mistaken. “Virtually no New Testament scholar of any stature (regardless of his or her theology or sexual orientation) now supports it. Based on the evidence of similar vocabulary in Philo and Josephus, who are Jewish authors from the First Century AD, the present scholarly consensus is that, whether we agree with the New Testament or not, Paul rejected homosexuality in all of its forms as a violation of God’s moral order for our lives. See now C. E. B Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark 1975) pages 125-127; Douglas Moo, *Romans* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Eerdmans, 1996) pages 113-118; Leon Morris, *Romans* (Eerdmans 1988) 87-93. Especially convincing is, once again, the thorough re-examination of all the arguments pro and con offered by Robert A.J. Gagnon, in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Abingdon Press, 2001).”<sup>60</sup>

Currently, those who do not interpret this passage as condemning modern, consensual, loving, committed same-sex relations tend to argue either the 2<sup>nd</sup> or the 3<sup>rd</sup> point.

(2) *This is a condemnation of same-sex intercourse based on the fact that it can’t procreate.* “Some think that Paul believes that same-sex intercourse is wrong because it can’t procreate. Paul believes, so the argument goes, that the only valid form of sex is that which seeks to bear children. *Para physin*, therefore, refers to any form of nonprocreative sex — heterosexual or homosexual. If this is what *para physin* means, then of course this would condemn not only same-sex relations, but also a huge swath of evangelicals who use condoms, take the pill, or get snipped in order to have sex without the burden of child-bearing.”<sup>61</sup> However, this is an argument built around the *assumption* that Paul thought that sex was valid only if it seeks to bear children. One would have to show that Paul held such a belief. Such an argument has not been made.

(3) *This is better translated “against culture” and is built on a prevalent cultural denigration of women and thus to be rejected.* Some argue that *παρὰ φύσιν* should be translated “against culture,” that is, “against the way Paul’s culture expects people to act. James Brownson says that the phrase *para physin* means to go against ‘what we could call ‘social’ realities.’ According to Brownson, ‘Male-male sex in particular was ‘unnatural’ because it degraded the passive partner into acting like a woman.’ Brownson believes that Paul’s ‘moral logic,’ which underscores his

use of *para physin*, is loaded with misogynist assumptions about women. When a man has sex with another man, he makes that man act like a mere woman. And *that* is unnatural. The implication... is that Paul's assumptions about the inferiority of women should not be observed today."<sup>62</sup> However, Paul's writings are not chauvinistic. It is true that Paul's surrounding Jewish and Greco-Roman culture promulgated some pretty awful things about women. And "some ancient writers revealed these terrible assumptions about women when they critiqued same-sex relations."<sup>63</sup> "Contrary to his fellow Greco-Roman and Jewish writers, Paul seems to have a rather high view of women. He calls several women 'co-workers' (Rom. 16:3–4; Phil 4:3), 'workers in the Lord' (Rom. 16:6, 12), deacons (Rom. 16:1–2; 1 Tim. 3:11), prophets (1 Cor. 11:5; cf. Acts 21:9), and he calls Phoebe a 'patron' (Rom. 16:2) who apparently funded much of the early Christian mission. He possibly calls Junia an 'apostle' (Rom. 16:7), though translations differ. In Christ there is neither 'male nor female' (Gal. 3:28) and women have just as much authority over their husbands' bodies as their husbands have over theirs (1 Cor. 7:3–5)—a revolutionary statement in its own right. Find another statement among Paul's contemporaries who said something as radical as: 'The husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife' (1 Cor. 7:4). Even if Paul advocates for different roles in marriage (Eph. 5:22–33, for example), he commands men to self-sacrificially serve their wives, and he never suggests that females should submit to their husbands because they are inferior to men. Instead, Paul says that submission reflects the beauty and equality of the Triune God. And I don't think Paul had a low view of Christ and the Spirit." In light of all of this evidence, "it's unlikely that Paul considered same-sex intercourse to be 'unnatural' because it... makes the passive partner act like an inferior woman."<sup>64</sup>

#### **Appendix 4**

##### ***We don't really know what μαλακοὶ and ἀρσενοκοῖται mean?***

It is true that the meanings of μαλακοὶ and ἀρσενοκοῖται (1 Corinthians 6:9–10 and 1 Timothy 1:10) have been notoriously debated. . . . See Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, chapter 7, “Lost in Translation: Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10,” pp 103–20).

## Appendix 5

***Jesus never explicitly condemned homosexual practice. It is sometimes argued, therefore, that this should matter to the discussion.***

This is true. “Jesus never mentions same-sex relations. Not once. Jesus never directly addresses the question of whether two men or two women could fall in love, get married, and have sex.”<sup>65</sup>

The fact that Jesus nowhere explicitly condemns homosexual practice “is hardly evidence that he approves of homosexual practice. After all, one could also point out that, as far as the gospel record allows us to know, Jesus never condemned wife abuse, embezzlement, cannibalism, or a host of other evils. What are we to make of this? Certainly not that he approves of these activities. Really the safest conclusion is that Jesus never bothered to deal with a long list of sins because he did not need to. They were already condemned very clearly, whether explicitly or by implication, in the Old Testament.”<sup>66</sup>

“The main issues that Jesus addressed were areas where the Jews of his day had twisted or misinterpreted the Old Testament, and they needed to be corrected. They thought, for example, that just because we are commanded to love our neighbor in Leviticus 19, this justifies us in hating our enemy. So Jesus corrects their misunderstanding. Otherwise, according to Jesus himself, his ethics are the EXACT same as the Old Testament. See the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:17-20, where he makes this point.”<sup>67</sup> “Every Jew who wrote” about same-sex sexual activity for 500 years before Jesus, during Jesus’ time, and for 500 years after Jesus all agreed: same-sex relations were against the will of God.<sup>68</sup> In other words, the Judaism that existed for 500 years before Jesus and for 500 years “after Jesus unequivocally condemned same-sex behavior. And the condemnation was unqualified and universal, scattered across many diverse sects of Judaism.”<sup>69</sup> So even though same-sex relations were widely accepted in the Greco-Roman world, “never once do we see a Jewish leader, thinker, writer, or rabbi sanction any form of same-sex erotic behavior.” This includes same-sex peer relationships, both male and female, and even same-sex marriage.<sup>70</sup>

“Despite the lack of explicit teaching from Jesus on the topic of homosexual practice, I think we can safely infer that Jesus condemned it in any form. I say this based on the “law of excluded middle.” In Matthew 19:1-12 Jesus takes up the matter of marriage and sex. He reminds his contemporaries that God’s original plan for human beings was lifelong faithful marriage between a male and a female. Accordingly, Jesus condemns any who would break up “what God has joined together.” Furthermore, Jesus insists that there is no approved ground for a divorce apart from sexual infidelity (“fornication,” which includes willful desertion) on the part of one’s spouse. The disciples were astonished to hear this very strict position, since the conventional teaching of Jesus’ day was that a man could divorce his wife for virtually any cause, just so long as he followed the proper procedure (giving her a bill of divorce). In their shock the disciples exclaimed that if what Jesus was teaching is the case, it would be better to avoid marriage! Jesus surprises them again, perhaps, by affirming a life of singleness as a status that God approves, just

like marriage. But what is notable for our discussion is that as far as Jesus is concerned, there is no THIRD option! One must either be chaste ("a eunuch... for the sake of the kingdom") or one must be faithful in a heterosexual marriage ("male and female" "united to his wife"). Surely if Jesus wanted to affirm life-long committed homosexual unions, here is where he needed to do it because his own disciples were astonished at the radical and difficult requirements he seemed to set before them. But Jesus did not allow that third option."<sup>71</sup>

### ***Random***

At the beginning of tonight's session, I read to you from the beginning of Wesley Hill's marvelous book, *Washed and Waiting* about his own life as a man living in holiness and chastity with unwanted homosexual desires. Now I want to read to you from a letter written by a woman named Rebecca. Like Wesley Hill, she too is a devoted follower of Christ. And she writes about her own enduring affliction of same-sex attraction. She does not act on her unholy sexual desires, she is devout and godly and has experienced little change in her deep-seated lesbian desires even as she has grown in the fruit of the Spirit and in sanctifying grace in other areas of her life. And her ability to exercise godly self-control over unwanted sexual desires is a shining example of sanctification.<sup>72</sup> In a letter to another Christian, Rebecca writes:

- "How do we help a young person come to grips with a potentially lifelong conditions so that hope deferred doesn't lead to disillusionment and abandonment of the faith?"
- How do we help couples in mixed orientation marriages hold on to their marriages?
- What do we need to do to make lifelong celibacy a viable option in our culture for those who face that reality?
- How can we think cross-culturally and missionally with non-Christians who easily misinterpret our theological jargon so we don't harm the cause of Christ?"<sup>73</sup>

Friends, both Jesus and Paul are very clear: if we do not repent of our sexual sin, *all* forms of sexual sin lead to destruction. They lead to being excluded from God's kingdom. They lead to the terrifying experience of the wrath of God when Jesus judges the world.

It's perfectly possible that there maybe someone at this Synod who has never done this. Who has never turned to Christ for forgiveness and cleansing. Maybe same-sex sins your sins. Maybe your sins are other sins. But do you see, they exclude you from God's kingdom. Can I urge you this morning, to turn from them. To turn to Christ and put your faith in him?

God does not define us by our sexuality. God defines us by how we respond to his Son, Jesus. He made us, with a good design, including a design for our sexuality. After he rebelled against him, motivated by the extraordinary love of a perfect bridegroom, Jesus came into his world to win us

back. He came to people who hated him, in order to love us. He came into a world under the wrath of God because we exchanged God for things in the creation to worship them instead. He came to people facing death, and he died for us. To sanctify us and cleanse us and present us to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle, that as his bride we might be holy and without blemish. That he might love us and nourish us and cherish us as his own body, of which we are members by faith in him.



<sup>1</sup> Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2021), 21.

<sup>2</sup> Sprinkle, “Leaders Forum: Handbook,” The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Sprinkle, “Leaders Forum: Handbook,” The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Sprinkle, “Leaders Forum: Handbook,” The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Sprinkle, “Leaders Forum: Handbook,” The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender, 5.

<sup>6</sup> When I taught on this subject in 2018, I focused on the way Genesis chapter 1 hooks into the entire story of the Bible, and places the creational pairing of male and female—of humans who are different from each other, with different bodily forms—coming together in marriage as a profound reality at the heart of the whole story of God’s good creation. The coming together of male and female in marriage is “a signpost pointing to that great complementarity of God’s whole creation, of heaven and earth belonging together” (N. T. Wright). Marriage, as a unity between sexually different humans, is central to the much larger story of creation and redemption. It’s a sign pointing to the meaning of history itself. That teaching is on our website in the sermons section in the series “A Better Story: God, Sex, and Human Flourishing (2018).” The title of that particular lecture is, “The Great Exchange: Same-Sex Attraction.” The manuscript can be found here, [https://clovermedia.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/7572d4795b/attachments/Great\\_Exchange\\_The\\_Incarnation\\_2018.pdf](https://clovermedia.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/7572d4795b/attachments/Great_Exchange_The_Incarnation_2018.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> It doesn’t necessarily imply inferiority. In fact, quite the opposite is often the case in the Bible. For example, God himself is called the *אֱלֹהִים* of Israel in Exodus 18, and Deuteronomy 33, and in countless psalms. In fact 16 of the 19 times that the word *אֱלֹהִים* is used in the Bible it refers to God. See Greg Johnson, *Still Time to Care: What We Can Learn from the Church’s Failed Attempt to Cure Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 155.

<sup>8</sup> This word is only used here in the Hebrew Bible (2:18, 20). It demands sexual differentiation in marriage. *אֲדָמָה* is difficult to translate. It comes from the preposition *אֲדָמָה*, which means “the like of, like, as” (BDB, 453); and *אֲדָמָה*, which, when used in a compound word with a preposition preceding, means “in sight of, opposite to” (BDB, 617). So the word means something like, “like but opposite” or “as opposite him” or “like against him” (Gordon Wenham, *Genesis*, 2 vols., Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Dallas Word Books, 1987], I:68).

<sup>9</sup> Preston Sprinkle, *People to be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just An Issue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2015), 32.

---

<sup>10</sup> Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 33. See also chapter 1, “Holy Otherness,” for a fair and balanced treatment of the interpretive approaches to the necessity (or not) of sexual differentiation for marriage in Genesis 1–2. In particular he makes two points. First, following the Side A scholar, James V. Brownson in his *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), perhaps the most thorough Biblical defense of Side A, that “one flesh” in Genesis 2:24 does not necessitate an opposite-sex couple. Instead of requiring sexual difference, the phrase “one flesh” or “united” emphasizes two people forming a new kinship bond in marriage. I.e., “one flesh” demands “that two people leave their former families and create their own new family.” And thus, “Genesis 2:24 doesn’t inherently rule out homosexual marriages” (Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 31. Gordon Wenham, who follows the traditional Christian approach to disapproving of same-sex sexual activity, is more temperate: “one flesh” “does not denote merely sexual union that follows marriage, or the children conceived in marriage, or even the spiritual and emotional relationship that it involves, though all are involved in becoming one flesh. Rather it affirms that just as blood relations are one’s flesh and bone...so marriage creates a similar kinship relation between man and wife. They become related to each other as brother and sister are,” *Genesis 1–11*, 71). Second, in Genesis 2:18, the word “suitable” *רִצְוֹן* (used only in 2:18, 20 in the Hebrew Bible) does demand sexual differentiation in marriage. See the main body of my lecture for this argument.

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, *Still Time to Care*, 155.

<sup>12</sup> As Preston Sprinkle points out, Jesus did not need to cite Genesis 1:27. “In order to confront divorce, all Jesus needs to do is cite Genesis 2:24: ‘the two shall become one flesh.’ And indeed, he uses the one flesh statement from Genesis to forbid divorce: ‘What therefore God has joined together, let no person separate’ (Matt 19:6). But Jesus goes out of his way to include the ‘male and female’ bit from Genesis 1:27, which is rather irrelevant for the divorce question...The reference to sex difference (‘male and female’) is superfluous and unnecessary for Jesus’ point about divorce—if, that is, sex difference makes no difference in Jesus’s understanding of marriage. For Jesus...sex difference is part of what marriage *is*. It’s the one-flesh union of two sexually different persons” (Preston Sprinkle, “Why Didn’t Jesus Mention Homosexuality?,” Pastoral Paper, The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender, 6).

<sup>13</sup> Many Christians assume that the story of Sodom (Genesis 19:1–10) was about homosexuality. In fact, this is where the word “sodomy” comes from. But this is a bad interpretation. The story portrays attempted “violent gang rape as a display of power by, most likely, heterosexual men.” It doesn’t have anything to say about same-sex marriage, or same-sex romantic desire, or being gay, or sexual activity between loving and consenting men or women. And furthermore, whenever latter passages in the Bible refer back to the story of Sodom, they do not mention same-sex sexual behavior. Isaiah, for example, focuses on false religion and social injustices (Isaiah 1:10–17; cf. 3:9). Jeremiah follows Isaiah and adds the sin of adultery to the list. And Ezekiel specifically defines the sin of Sodom as gluttony and greed. Some people read Jude 6–7 as an interpretation of Genesis 19 in which same-sex sex is the focus. Modern translations are part of the problem here. The NIV reads the pertinent word in Jude 7 as “perversion.” The ESV reads it as “unnatural desire.” In Greek the word is, *σαρκὸς ἑτέρας*, “other flesh.” *ἑτέρας*, ironically, is the word from which we get our word *hetero*, as in heterosexuality—attraction to the opposite sex. “The sexual immorality of the Sodomites had to do with going after “other flesh,” and quite plainly, not the *same* flesh.” The context is important. Jude 6 refers back to a time when “angels...did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling.” I think this is a reference to Genesis 6:1–4, which I interpret as angels having sex with humans. Thus, Jude 6–7 connects the story of Sodom to Genesis 6, it seems that the “other flesh” is angels. (See Preston Sprinkle, “Was Homosexuality the Sin of Sodom?” Pastoral Paper, The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender, 1.)

<sup>14</sup> Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?: And Other Questions About Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-Sex Attraction*, Revised and Expanded (Epsom, Surrey, UK: The Good Book Company, [2015] 2022), 38.

<sup>15</sup> James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 166, 170; Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent, 2014), 23–44, 106.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Vines, “Transcript (from The Biblical Case for LGBTQ Inclusion), The Reformation Project, <https://reformationproject.org/same-sex-marriage-homosexuality-biblical-world/>. Accessed October 22, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Much has been written about homosexuality in the ancient world. “The classic study on Greek homosexuality is by Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978). The best book on Roman homosexuality is by Craig Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Oxford University Press, 2010). Other helpful treatments of homosexuality in the Greco-Roman and Jewish world can be found in Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, 57–102; Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Thomas K. Hubbard (ed.), *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), esp. 1–20. On female homoeroticism in the ancient world, see Bernadette Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Matthew Vines has a very good popular level summary of Greco-Roman material in his “*God and the Gay Christian*, 33–44, 106–14 (Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 201 n4).

<sup>18</sup> Preston Sprinkle, “15 Reasons for Affirming Same-Sex Relations—And 15 Responses,” Pastoral Paper, The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender, 4.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective*, trans. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 81; Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 132–37. Amy Richlin, “Not before Homosexuality: The Materiality of the *Cinaedus* and the Roman Law against Love between Men,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3 (1993): 523–73; Rabun Taylor, “Two Pathic Subcultures in Ancient Rome,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7 (1997): 319–71. This is not to say that the Greco-Roman world had a modern understanding of “homosexual” identity. “The term *homosexuality* is a modern sociological construct invented in the nineteenth century, and *gay* and *lesbian* refer to people whose identity is based on their sexual attraction. But ancient people didn’t think in terms of sexual identity; they thought in terms of gender identity” (Preston Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 58).

<sup>20</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>21</sup> I’ve copied this entire section, nearly verbatim, from Sprinkle, “15 Reasons for Affirming Same-Sex Relations,” 9.

<sup>22</sup> For an introductory bibliography to these studies, see Mark A. Yarhouse, *How Should We Think About Homosexuality?*, Questions for Restless Minds, series ed. D. A. Carson (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022), 14–15, and endnotes 14–16.

<sup>23</sup> Sprinkle, “Leaders Forum: Handbook,” The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Yarhouse, *How Should We Think about Homosexuality?*, 15.

<sup>25</sup> American Psychological Association, “What causes a person to have a particular sexual orientation,” <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/orientation.aspx>.

<sup>26</sup> Yarhouse, *How Should We Think About Homosexuality*, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Yarhouse, *How Should We Think about Homosexuality?*, 16.

<sup>28</sup> Yarhouse, *How Should We Think About Homosexuality?*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> This and all subsequent statistics from Andrew Marin, *Us Versus Us: The Untold Story of Religion and the LGBT Community* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Sprinkle, “Leaders Forum: Handbook,” The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender, 16.

<sup>31</sup> Sprinkle, “Leaders Forum: Handbook,” The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Sprinkle, “Leaders Forum: Handbook,” The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender, 17.

<sup>33</sup> For an excellent account of this story, see Greg Johnson, *Still Time to Care*.

<sup>34</sup> Eve Tushnet, *Tenderness: A Gay Christian’s Guide to Unlearning Rejection and Experiencing God’s Extravagant Love* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Marie Press, 2021), 22.

<sup>35</sup> Tushnet, *Tenderness*, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Tushnet, *Tenderness*, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Tushnet, *Tenderness*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Tushnet, *Tenderness*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> For an excellent exploration of these three same-sex relationships, see Tushnet, *Tenderness*, chapter 2, “Order in Same-Sex Love.”

<sup>40</sup> Tushnet, *Tenderness*, 39.

<sup>41</sup> John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>42</sup> Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*.

<sup>43</sup> Preston Sprinkle does an excellent job responding to this argument by looking at the relevant primary sources in *People to be Loved*, 45–48. See also his recent blog, “Did Consensual Same-Sex Sexual Relationships Exist in Biblical Times? A Response to Matthew Vines,” August 30, 2022, The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender, <https://www.centerforfaith.com/blog/did-consensual-same-sex-sexual-relationships-exist-in-biblical-times-a-response-to-matthew>.

<sup>44</sup> N. T. Wright in “Interview with Anglican Bishop N.T. Wright of Durham, England,” May 21, 2004 by John Allen, Jr. for *National Catholic Reporter*. Accessed online. E.g., It’s right there in Plato, see especially Aristophanes’s speech in the *Symposium*. In addition, Alexander the Great and Hephæstion, and from mythology there is Achilles and Patroclus.

<sup>45</sup> Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 36. In addition to citing numerous historical documents, Harper references Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*, The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 59 and John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: 1994), 53–107. And yet, as Harper warns, “it would be a grave mistake to say that the Romans had anything resembling tolerance for homosexuality. The code of manliness that governed the access to pleasures in the classical world was severe and unforgiving, and deviance from it was socially mortal. The viciousness of mainstream attitudes toward passivity is startling for anyone who approaches the ancient sources with the false anticipation that pre-Christian cultures were somehow reliably civilized toward sexual minorities” (Harper, *From Shame to Sin*, 37).

<sup>46</sup> Gordon Hugenberger, “Homosexuality.”

<sup>47</sup> Wright “Interview with Anglican Bishop.”

<sup>48</sup> Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 98.

<sup>49</sup> Hugenberger, “Homosexuality.” For a fair and balanced summary of the relevant literature, see Preston Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 55–68.

<sup>50</sup> Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 127.

<sup>51</sup> “Studies have been published on a number of supposed connections, including research on twin studies, fraternal birth order and handedness, and animal models (in which homosexual behavior is either observed in nature or the result of genetic, hormonal, or other manipulations). Some of the most recent research has considered genetic scanning and brain symmetry and neural connections” (Yarhouse, *How Should We Think about Homosexuality?*, 14–15. And see footnotes for primary references on each of these studies.

<sup>52</sup> Yarhouse, *How Should We Think about Homosexuality?*, 15.

<sup>53</sup> American Psychological Association, “What causes a person to have a particular sexual orientation,” <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/orientation.aspx>.

<sup>54</sup> Yarhouse, *How Should We Think about Homosexuality?*, 15.

<sup>55</sup> Yarhouse, *How Should We Think about Homosexuality?*, 16.

<sup>56</sup> Justin Lee, *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-Vs.-Christians Debate* (New York: Jericho, 2012), 62.

<sup>57</sup> John Corvino, “Nature? Nurture? It Doesn’t Matter,” *John Corvino*: <https://johncorvino.com/2004/08/nature-nurture-it-doesnt-matter/>. Cited in Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 131.

<sup>58</sup> Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 131–32.

<sup>59</sup> Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 132–33.

<sup>60</sup> Hugenberger, “Homosexuality.”

<sup>61</sup> Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 94.

---

<sup>62</sup> Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 94–5. Citing, Brownson, *Bible, Sexuality, Gender*, 245. Sprinkle also references, for an argument similar to Brownson, Daniel Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality* (San Francisco: Alamo Square, 1994), 79.

<sup>63</sup> Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 95. Citing *Philo, Abr.* 135–36.

<sup>64</sup> Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 95–6.

<sup>65</sup> Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 69.

<sup>66</sup> Hugenberg, “Homosexuality.”

<sup>67</sup> Hugenberg, “Homosexuality.”

<sup>68</sup> Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 67–8.

<sup>69</sup> Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 70.

<sup>70</sup> Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 70.

<sup>71</sup> Hugenberg, “Homosexuality.”

<sup>72</sup> Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexuality Identity and Union with Christ* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown and Covenant Publications, 2015), 143.

<sup>73</sup> Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 139–40.