

“Real Hope and Real Change”

Genesis 1:26-28

I would like to begin today by saying that this message is one that I do not want to preach, but one that I feel is necessary. There is never a good time, but today I feel compelled to do so. It was not on my schedule to preach, but several weeks ago when the topic was discussed at the Board meeting, I was encouraged to pursue it. It was just days before our last Board meeting that the issue rose to a new level and I felt the Lord urging me in this direction. This is an issue I have never preached on until today.

It comes with risks.

There is the risk of being misunderstood.

There is the risk of being rejected.

There is the risk of being branded as intolerant.

In some countries there is risk of criminal charges, even jail. Perhaps that will come here, I don't know.

This may also be a message that you do not want to hear. Given the nature of the issue that we will address, I must also say that it may not be suitable for children and if you find that it is uncomfortable for you, you may wish to excuse yourself as well.

I also need to give this disclaimer that the message itself comes from several other messages by pastors who have eloquently tackled the issue. So I draw much of my sermon from their collective wisdom.

Bill Gothard, founder of Institute in Basic Life Principles has said that “what one generation will allow in moderation, the next generation will allow in excess.” I would like to rephrase that to say that what one generation tolerates, the next will embrace.

What I have been compelled to preach on today has been an issue that over the past four decades has continued to erode the moral fabric of our country. It recently came to the forefront in a speech delivered by the President himself. It is the issue of

gay rights. If you rewind your memory banks back to the 2008 election cycle you may well recall the forum hosted by Rick Warren at Saddleback church where he pastors. In that forum you may recall that Presidential candidate and then Senator Barack Obama made this statement: “I believe that marriage is the union between a man and a woman. Now for me as a Christian...it is also a sacred union. God's in the mix.” But he went on to say in that same forum that civil unions are okay, referring to arrangements for same-sex couples that approximate marriage in every respect but the name

Once elected to the highest office of the land he revealed his real agenda by repealing the military's “don't ask, don't tell” policy. He has called for the repeal of DOMA or the “Defense of Marriage Act”, which President Clinton signed in 1996 that defines marriage as the union of one man and one woman. It also protects the individual states from being forced to recognize same-sex marriages performed elsewhere. On the White House webpage for “civil rights” 7 of his 10 accomplishments listed are for the gay rights agenda. And then most recently he stated that his views on same-sex marriage have evolved over the past several years, having been influenced by his. He stated that he supported it for personal reasons, but that it is also right for America. *One author went so far as to conclude that his Christian beliefs have no rational foundation.*

Recently on the Fox News Channel, two women were debating the issue. One was a professor religion at a university. She argued that the Bible is a living document and is meant to be interpreted through the window of culture, that its teaching should change with the values of society at the time.

This is an issue that needs to be addressed. It's the elephant in the room and we, the church, cannot bury our heads in the sand like some ostrich and think that the issue will somehow go away. Lest you think I am making this a political issue, I am

not. This is and always has been a moral issue. The pastor from whom I am using in the message has rightly said that “all spirituality flows from a correct perspective of God, and all heresy begins with a misunderstanding of God...In a day of controversy God’s church must not be silent.”

We will not spend time considering the scientific or psychological arguments and theories in favor of homosexuality nor will I spend any time discussing the medical and psychological ramifications for those who practice this behavior. My purpose is to consider what Scripture has to say on the matter, drawing conclusions from what we know to be truth rather than relying on what the American Medical or American Psychological Associations have concluded about homosexuality or even what our government may deem constitutional on the matter. I would rather pursue a course of understanding from what I consider to be truth provided for us by the One who is truth. The Bible is not opinion, it is truth. We will see from our study that God’s original design of marriage has a purpose and is the only acceptable and divinely ordained institution. So we are going to look at what the Bible has to say about homosexuality so that we can build strong Biblical convictions on the matter.

I’m uncertain about where you stand on the issue or if you have even given much thought about it. Maybe your conviction is solely that “if the Bible is against it, I’m against it” but you don’t really know why you believe what you believe. *I hope you will go away with strong convictions but also with strong compassion.* Convictions based on what the Bible says and compassion for all who still need Christ. Regardless of behavior, we are all sinners. In God’s eyes there is not one class of sinner greater than another. I am a sinner saved by grace. Others are sinners who need to be saved by grace. So we’ll consider what God’s Word has to say and then we’ll consider what our response should be. Just because culture accepts it or our laws legalize it does not

make the behavior right. So what does the Bible say about homosexuality?

I. THE BIBLE’S TEACHING ON HOMOSEXUALITY

There are very clear passages in Scripture that speak to this issue and unfortunately some are misinterpreted.

A. God’s Work in Creation

1. Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-25

We don’t read very far into the Bible to discover God’s plan for how the human race is to function. God’s desire and design was to make man in His image, and through His design He created both male and female, after which He blessed them and told them to be fruitful and multiply.

Four facts are seen in this passage.

The first is that to be made in the image of God means to have an essential likeness or similarity to God. The underlying meaning is one of correspondence. Somehow man the created is to correspond in his image to God, the Creator.

Second, the entire human race shares that image. Regardless of race, color, nationality, gender, age, physical condition, we have all been created in the image of God.

Third, that image is found in man and woman, male and female. What that means is that the image of God is seen in the relationship between a man and a woman in the union they make with each other.

One author put it this way: “God does not create man alone, neither does He create man/man or woman/woman. God creates man as male and female and only in community together is the image of God seen upon the earth.”

Fourth, procreation is God’s purpose in the sexual differentiation. They were each created uniquely to

complement each other in a way that would through the sexual act procreate. Man and woman are to be fruitful and multiply. A part of God's image is reflected in the physical union that takes place between a husband and a wife. In coming together they imitate the creative activity of God. Just as God brought forth new life in the Garden at creation, so a husband and wife mirror that creative activity by bringing new life into the world.

When you consider Genesis 2 we see that man was created but he was lonely. None of the other animals could satisfy his deep need for someone who was just like him, yet different from him. So God created a helper for him. That helper was not another man but was a woman. He needed someone who could cook and do the laundry. (Okay, I just threw that one in there.) At the conclusion of chapter 2 we clearly see God's intention for them that they – male and female – would come together in a physical union to become one flesh. This clearly teaches that God's design in relationship among the human race was to be heterosexual. Homosexuality must be seen from this initial discourse on sanctioned relationships as being outside God's intended design. The other passages dealing with this issue hinge on our understanding of this important foundational truth.

In God's design a homosexual relationship cannot become one flesh, it cannot be fruitful and multiply, it cannot reflect the fullness of God's image, and it cannot discharge their sexual drives in a manner consistent with God's Word. It is outside God's original design for marriage and for humanity. The pattern for God's design was in His creation of a man called Adam and woman called Eve and they were joined together to become one.

2. Matthew 19:1-6

When it comes to Jesus' teaching on the matter, some scholars conclude that because He didn't speak specifically about the issue and because He

promoted a message of loving others, that it must in some way be condoned by Him. That could be further from the truth. While He did not have anything specifically to say about the issue of homosexuality, He did have some clear teachings about marriage. From His teachings we can infer certain principles concerning relationships outside the context of marriage that is between a man and a woman. We can maintain that whenever He did speak of marriage He upheld this institution as divinely ordained by God. His view about human sexuality is consistent with the truth of Genesis 1 and 2 that recognizes the union of male and female for their created purpose in God's plan for humanity through the ages. Homosexuality contradicts the original and only pattern and plan of God. Jesus' silence is not an endorsement on homosexuality. God's work in creation was to make male and female to be His image bearers.

B. God's Word for Consideration

1. Old Testament Passages

a. Genesis 19

This is the account of Sodom and Gomorrah. Some time after Lot and his uncle, Abraham, had parted company, he settled in the city of Sodom. It was there that we find he had become a prominent citizen sitting at the gate of the city where town business was conducted and decided. Because the people of the city were extremely wicked, God had decided to bring judgment on them by destroying it. Abraham had attempted to intervene for the city on behalf of his nephew. Two angels visited the city the night before it was to be destroyed. They were going to stay in the open square but knowing the wickedness of the townspeople Lot encouraged them to stay in his home. It wasn't long before the men of the city surrounded the house ordering that they be sent out so they could have sex with them.

Lot, however, insisted that because they were in his home they were under his protection. When you

read the verse it is very clear by Lot's response that their interest was carnal and corrupt. That Lot was willing to give his two virgin daughters to them to do with as they pleased underscores the homosexual lust that burned within them. They were unsatisfied with his answer and his offer and pressed hard to break down the door to satisfy their homosexual desires with these two visitors. The angels reached out and pulled Lot to safety and then struck the men with blindness. The city was destroyed because of this perversity. If you are still unconvinced that homosexuality was the final straw that led to its destruction, let me read from **Jude 7. "In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire."**

The KJV says they went after **"strange flesh."**

The NLT states that they **"were filled with sexual immorality and every kind of sexual perversion."**

The Amplified renders it **"impurity and indulged in unnatural vice and sensual perversity..."**

Bear in mind that the most common term for homosexual activity is sodomy. **Greg Bahnsen in his book *Homosexuality: A Biblical View* writes "Sodom was utterly destroyed because it was a city full of homosexuals who day after day practiced their impious, sensual debauchery."**

b. Leviticus 18:22; 20:13

When you consider that in the latter passage it is named along with the sins of adultery, incest, polygamy and bestiality that received capital punishment, you clearly see God's opinion on the matter. It is clear from God's Law that homosexuality is a perversion of God's created order for man and woman.

c. Judges 19

This passage shows how depraved they had become

This story is very similar to the story of Lot. Here you have a Levite. He was from the class of people whom God had chosen to lead in worship. While traveling they stopped for the night in Gibeah and were taken into shelter by an old man. **Verse 22** states that while they were enjoying an evening meal, wicked men from the city came pounding on the door insisting that the old man give up the traveler for the purpose of having sex with him. The old man tried to reason with them by offering his virgin daughter and the man's concubine but they would not agree to the exchange. The man sent out his concubine who was raped and abused and then subsequently died the next morning. They were all corrupt and polluted: the men for their wicked intentions and actions, the Levite for sending out his concubine and the old man for offering his daughter. *This is a good example of what happens when men reject God's law and do what is right in their own eyes. Widespread homosexuality is one mark of a society that has forgotten God.*

2. New Testament Passages

a. I Timothy 1:8-10

Paul is talking here in this passage about the proper use of God's law. He says that generally the law is a good thing. He adds that the law isn't intended for those who keep it but rather for those who break it. Homosexuality (perverts - NIV) is listed along with murderers, idolaters, kidnappers, liars and other immorality. Paul's view of homosexuality is in direct agreement with the Old Testament that it is a sin classified along with the most horrific acts man can perform.

b. I Corinthians 6:9-10

When you read through the entire letter to the church in Corinth you come to the realization as Paul writes that the church unfortunately exhibited extreme moral laxity in allowing its members to

continue engaging in sin. Some were visiting prostitutes and trying to justify it from Scripture. That sounds a lot like today with many churches, denominations and individuals and even clergy who support or engage in homosexual activity. Paul's words are quite clear. In this passage Paul stresses the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian.

While he says that those who practice the sins mentioned in these verses will not see heaven, he is not advocating that they cannot be saved. Anyone can be saved no matter what sin they have committed. Paul is saying that if a person continues in sin and takes pleasure in it – seeking it out, he does not demonstrate a changed heart that is evidenced by someone who is a new creation where old ways, old lifestyles have passed away. As one pastor put it **“They have chosen sin over salvation, bondage over deliverance, guilt over forgiveness and death over life. Such a person cannot enter the kingdom of God.”** In order to be saved, we must first come to grips with our wrong behavior, our sin, and agree with God that it is sin and then change from continuing to do it. **“Shall we continue in sin so that God's grace can increase? God forbid! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” Romans 6:1-2**

c. Romans 1:18-32

This is perhaps the most compelling passage central to the issue of the unbiblical nature of homosexuality. As you continue to read through the early chapters of this letter to the Romans you see that it is just one portion of Paul's argument that all men are guilty before God. **“No one is righteous, not even one.” (Romans 3:10)** In chapter **1:18-32** the irreligious Gentile is guilty. In chapter **2:1-16** the moral man is guilty. In chapter **2:17-3:9** the Jew is guilty.

Romans 1 is a synopsis of what happens in a culture that ignores God.

Verse 21 says that as they turn away their hearts are darkened.

Verse 22 says that their professed wisdom is really foolishness. Though they feel enlightened, they are darkened.

Verse 23 says they ultimately turn to idolatry. They begin to worship themselves.

Because of their actions we see three times in this passage (**vs. 24, 26, 28**) that **“God gave them over.”**

When a society suppresses the truth of God and turns away from His revelation exalting the creature rather than the Creator, He abandons them. He simply allows them to go on in their sin until the society is completely given over to its depravity. He doesn't send fire and brimstone as He did in Sodom and Gomorrah. He does something worse. He doesn't intervene. That leads to moral chaos resulting in a society that will devour itself in its own lust. God's judgment is to do nothing and let men bring on their own judgment.

This passage in Romans reveals the first result of such abandonment by God - widespread lust, impurity and open immorality. According to polls and census cohabitation is on the rise, even among Christians. The second result according to our passage is open homosexuality. Lest you think that the practice of homosexuality is permissible today because we live by love and not the law, this passage reinforces what the Old Testament teaches that it is a sin. It is a practice that is condemned.

When we consider what both the Old and New Testaments have to say on the matter we must conclude that this lifestyle is sinful because it is not the Creator's design nor does it have the purpose for which we were created. To practice such behavior is nothing less than man's abandonment of his created purpose in pursuit of his own lustful pleasure. They have abandoned God, who has given them over to their own depravity.

We have taken a brief look at what the Bible has to say on the matter. **So what should our response be to those who support or practice homosexuality?**

II. THE BELIEVER'S RESPONSE TO HOMOSEXUALITY

A. Offer Hope

I Corinthians 6:9-11 “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. 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.”

Truer words of hope have never been spoken: **“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.”** The church in Corinth had people with a past – murderers, adulterers and homosexuals. They were all brought together under the banner of the cross, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Their sins had all been forgiven by the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, every last one of them. Their desires had been redirected, changed, transformed. Is it any wonder that in his second letter he will remind them that **“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold all things have become new.”** (II Corinthians 5:17)

If we as Christians need further convincing that we should not engage in homosexual activity, let Paul's words to the Romans suffice to remind us that we are not to **“be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds.”** (12:2) We are to be transformed not conformed.

If you need a reminder, take stock in some of the things that maybe you and I have done on our journey to embrace eternal life. **“But such WERE some of you.”** Underline that word **“were”** and take special notice that it is in the past tense. Be reminded that we too have been saved out of sin and remember that any sin condemns us to hell, not just one type of sin. We need to repent. Therein is hope.

The Corinthians were saved through a lifesaving encounter with the living Christ. Leaving any sin is hard. It's a habit, but there is hope in the transforming power of Christ who alone can free us from the bondage of any sin. We need to offer such hope in Christ by living before them a close relationship with the very One who transformed us. Most modern counselors don't try to change the homosexual because they can offer no lasting help or hope. Only Christ can.

If we want to show them that through Christ there is hope we can't go around bashing their lifestyle and chant that God hates homosexuals. We learned last week that God hates sin in general, but He loves the sinner and wants an eternal relationship with him or her that only comes through the transforming saving power of Christ who died for us as the Holy Spirit works in the life.

While we don't condone their lifestyle, we need to show Christ's love through consistent life practices that demonstrate a changed life and be clear that it is only possible through the transforming power of Christ in me. Offer hope.

B. Offer Help

Among homosexuals, statistics are staggering. In reports from practicing psychiatrists, they state that 73% of homosexuals are less happy than the average person. Of that group 70% say it is not due to social stigmatization. We need to help them see that Christ can help them through their despair.

1/3 of homosexuals are alcoholics.

78% are affected by some sort of STD.

50% of suicides are among homosexuals. Keep in mind that this is among a group within our society that only comprises around 3% of the population.

Judge Martough, chief magistrate of the New York City Criminal court states that homosexual activity in some way accounts for 1/2 of the murders in large cities.

One Pastor wrote that “people tend to believe lies that reinforce their own selfish personal beliefs.”

These beliefs are shaped by their own lust and perpetuated by a society that both endorses and embraces sinful lifestyles of all kinds. We are constantly being bombarded by attitudes and beliefs that are totally opposed to the Bible. We must be careful about what we allow to form our opinions all the while standing firm on the conviction that the Bible is the only acceptable standard for truth about homosexuality, not Oprah, not the View, not CNN, not TV shows like Glee, not even the President or Congress or the Supreme Court. If we move toward creating laws protecting the homosexual lifestyle never lose sight of the truth that it is sin, but there is always hope and help for the sinner, every one of us, and it's found in the grace of God.