



Cross Impact IUPUI

Lesson 4 — *Homosexuality and the Christian*

Spring 2015 Semester

Thursday, February 26

A DOSE OF REALITY

- As of February 2015, thirty-eight states (including DC) have legalized same-sex marriage, including Indiana (only nine in January 2013); only twelve states still ban it in their constitutions, but four of those have one or more state or federal court rulings striking down its ban on same-sex marriage (ruling have been stayed pending appeal).
- The *Defense of Marriage Act* (DOMA), enacted in 1996, prevented the federal government from recognizing same-sex marriages and allowed each state to refuse recognition of same-sex marriages performed in other states.
- On May 9, 2012, Barack Obama became the first sitting U.S. president to publicly declare support for the legalization of same-sex marriage. Due in part to his leadership on this issue, DOMA was essentially found unconstitutional (at least Section 3) by the U.S. Supreme Court in *United States v. Windsor* in 2013.
- During the 21st century, *public support* for legalizing same-sex marriage has grown considerably, and various national polls conducted since 2011 (<http://bit.ly/1JRfHmx>) show that a majority of Americans support same-sex marriage (50-60%).
- This issue is obviously a popularly discussed topic, and is a very pertinent one for us to consider. In 1998, John Piper wrote—
 “Yesterday there was conference called ‘Here I Stand’ to address the issue of homosexually active clergymen in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Star Tribune, 10/10/98). On the front page of the Star Tribune there was the story of what appeared to be a hate crime against a homosexual student at the University of Wyoming who was in critical condition after being tied to a fence and beaten. In August, 641 Anglican bishops from around the world

gathered for the Lambeth Conference in Canterbury, England, and voted overwhelmingly to affirm that homosexual practice is ‘incompatible with Scripture.’ Full-page ads were recently taken out in USA Today and the New York Times and the Washington Post showing some 850 former homosexuals who gathered last summer at the Exodus conference and who declared there is power in Christ to be changed. Here in Minnesota, legal cases continually crop up about child custody and adoption of children by homosexual people. And most immediate of all, here in our church there are people who have homosexual desires and many more people among us who have people in their families whom they care about very deeply who consider themselves homosexual. The reality of homosexuality is inescapable today, and this...[should come as no surprise to us]” even as it did not to the biblical writers.

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

“The Bible is opposed to homosexuality...and every other sin...including mine.” (C. Anderson) — This statement is clear and accurate, contextual and balanced, and personal and convicting.

- **Genesis 1:27; 2:24** – God’s original design (“from the beginning”), appealed to by Christ Himself when commenting on marriage in **Matthew 19:4-6**, was one man and one woman united into one flesh. This is a sacred union and He prohibits us from adjusting it (cf. Matthew 19:9-12—options: marriage or abstinence). Pro-homosexual theologians make much of the fact that Jesus never explicitly condemns homosexuality. Despite overlooking John 21:25 and implicitly denying the authority of Scripture, they wrongly assume that Jesus’ silence about homosexuality implies *approval* of homosexuality, as if His silence about incest, child abuse, bestiality, and other sins implies His approval of them.
- **Leviticus 18:22; 20:13** – Homosexuality is forbidden in God’s Law, is called “an abomination,” and was worthy of the death penalty. In Proverbs 6, other abominable sins are listed—pride, lying, divisiveness, etc.
- **1 Corinthians 6:9-10** – Neither the passive nor active participants in homosexuality (see ESV note) will inherit the kingdom of God.

- **1 Timothy 1:8-11** – Among other sins, homosexuality is against God’s Law, is contrary to sound teaching, and does not accord with the glorious gospel of the blessed God.
- **Jude 7** – Sodom and Gomorrah experienced God’s fiery judgment because of their unnatural sexual sins (**Genesis 19:1-11**) and thus serve as examples of God’s displeasure and punishment.
- **Romans 1:21-32** – Homosexuality is idolatry. This passage depicts the idolatry of sinful human nature in three cycles of three steps: (1) vv. 23-24; (2) vv. 25-27; (3) vv. 28-32.
 - *Step 1* - Human beings exchange God for what God has made; we prefer the creature to the Creator.
 - *Step 2* - God hands us over to what we prefer.
 - *Step 3* - We act out externally and bodily in our sexual relations a dramatization of the internal, spiritual condition of the fallen human soul, namely, the horrendous exchange of God for man and the images of our power.
- **Romans 1:26-27** – Homosexuality is unnatural. It may be exacerbated by one’s physical bent, family background, social upbringing, and personal history, but its roots are in sin. Homosexual scholars most commonly argue that Paul is talking about people whose natural bent was heterosexual, but who were forcing themselves to be homosexual—that’s what made this unnatural. *The Other Dark Exchange: Homosexuality, Part 1* by John Piper (<http://bit.ly/XBwRKJ>) considers and textually rebuts these arguments. Quite simply, however, we notice that this kind of logic doesn’t work with any of the other sins in verses 29-31 (e.g., we would never say, “Murder is okay as long as its not against your nature”).
- **Romans 1:26-27** – Homosexuality is God’s judgment on our sinful idolatry (also consider STDs and AIDS), but so are all sins (vv. 28-32; cf. Matthew 11:23-24).
- **Romans 1:21-32; Ephesians 5:31-32** – Homosexuality hijacks the dramatization of God’s relationship to His people.¹
- The concept of “**design**,” already alluded to above, is a key biblical consideration for thinking through this issue. When we studied *The Reason for God*, we made the following three observations:
 - “People think that what it means to be truly human is to be free to chose their own path, that what liberates humanity is to be free of restraints that dictate how we should live. But in many ways, this idea (that freedom is the absence of restraints) misses the complexity of what freedom is. The video host shared this example: you cannot just eat anything you want—you have to restrict your freedom of diet to get the richer, deeper freedom of good health and longer life. Musicians restrict themselves now (practice) to be released later into the far richer and deeper freedom of being able to perform and express themselves.

The key therefore is not to avoid every kind of restriction and constraint—but to find the constraints that are liberating. If that is true when it comes to diet, vocations, hobbies, sports—why wouldn’t it also be true for the moral and spiritual realms? Freedom is not the absence of restrictions; it is the presence of the right restrictions. The commands laid out in the Bible are not there to limit us or to oppress us, but are the blueprint on how to unleash our full human potential.

Again, the video host illustrated this idea of freedom by referencing a car’s designer’s manual. That manual’s rules (i.e., change the oil every 3,000 miles) aren’t meant to deceive, frustrate, or oppress the car owner, but rather to provide instruction on how to maximize the vehicle’s potential. The instructions aren’t busy work; they are absolutely necessary! The same is true in the animal kingdom—a fish must honor its design (living in water) or it will die. Its desire for freedom from all restraints will inevitably result in its demise. So it is likewise true for humanity—human flourishing will be known only if we honor our design and implement the right restrictions.”

 - “God defines marriage and sex very carefully. Marriage is the union of one man and one woman, which must be publically acknowledged, permanently sealed, and

physically consummated. The Bible envisions no other kind of marriage, nor sex in any other arena. Because sex is a God-invented way to say to another person, “I belong completely and exclusively and permanently to you” (i.e., not “alone” but instead “one flesh” in Genesis 2:18, 24)—it was not intended to be used outside the permanent, exclusive commitment of marriage. That is the designer manual’s instruction for human sexuality, in order for human flourishing and full human potential to be known in that area.

People say that God wants to restrict the way we have sex. But don’t we *all*? For example, very few people think it is acceptable for adults to have sex with young children. (For another example, see <http://bit.ly/1zdXJRW>.) The issue is finding the right restrictions—the restrictions that will allow us to flourish (as the video put it, that are “in accord with your own design”).”

- “Some acknowledgements: (1) When this topic comes up, the rhetoric often gets heated—and those who represent the Christian position are not always respectful of those who disagree, nor do they have sound reasons for their position. (2) We all have ways we think the world should be; and we all have the right to try to contend for those views respectfully. (3) The gospel—that we are saved only by sheer grace—should help Christians do this without self righteousness, a poor character trait that has been hurtfully directed toward many homosexual people. For an example of how a gospel-centered, gracious Christian might deal with this topic, see <http://bit.ly/Xz3818>.

Now, some biblical considerations. First, homosexuality is not God’s original design for sexuality (that is, it is not in according with God’s designer manual to maximize human potential and flourishing). Sex is designed for marriage between a man and a woman. But that belief should have no impact on a church’s or a Christian’s desire to love and serve the needs and interests of all their neighbors (Luke 10:29-37), including gay people, people of other faiths, and so on.

Second, note that there is *not* widespread division over what the bible says about homosexuality. All three branches of Christianity (Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant) agree—and the vast majority of Bible scholars have agreed for centuries—on at least four conclusions: (1) that every mention of homosexual practice in the Bible says that it is wrong; (2) that it is specifically prohibited in both the Old and New Testaments; (3) that it did not just reflect the prejudices of the day, but rather cut against the views of ancient cultures; (4) that the whole arc of the Bible begins with a heterosexual marriage (Adam and Eve) and ends with the vision of one (the wedding feast in the book of Revelation).”

HOMOSEXUALITY IN SOCIETY

Dealing with this issue politically, there is a balance:

- **Political involvement is necessary.**

As we have seen biblically, homosexuality is a harming sin on a society. So, its normalization in society will “dull the ‘reflexive recoil,’” harm individuals, weaken marriages, and hinder child-rearing, among other consequences. There is “salt and light” wisdom in political involvement regarding this issue.

- It must be undertaken in prayer (1 Timothy 2:1-4) and grace (Titus 3:1-7; Colossians 4:5-6).
- It must make a clear distinction between the homosexual agenda (which is our enemy) and the homosexual person (who is our mission). “Those who suggest that Jesus would be happy to be the best man in a gay wedding are creating a god in their own image. So too are those who suggest that Jesus would be protesting the event (or worse, a funeral!) with signs about God hating homosexuals” (C. Anderson).
- It must recognize that there is no utopia in a fallen planet.² Some of the most immoral things (e.g., pride) can never be made illegal.

- It must recognize that all persons have been created in the image of God and should be accorded human dignity. Therefore, “hateful, fearful, unconcerned harassment of persons with a homosexual orientation should be repudiated. We believe that respect for persons with a homosexual orientation involves honest, reasoned, nonviolent sharing of facts concerning the immorality and liability of homosexual behavior. On the other hand, endorsing behavior which the Bible disapproves endangers persons and dishonors God” (J. Piper). It is helpful to remember that living in a free country should benefit and restrict both sides. I recently wrote the following to my senator, “Just as those proponents of the homosexual agenda should have freedom to verbalize and practice their worldview, so should I—that is the simple essence of religious liberty that makes our country so unique and blessed. Unfortunately, such freedom will not always be practiced with respect, gentleness, humility, grace, and deference—but the absence of those sweet dispositions should not cause us to destroy a good position.”
- **Political involvement is not our mission.**

“God has not called us to win elections, but to win souls and hearts and minds; he has not called us to control Congress, but to preach the gospel; he has not called us to be safe, but to tell the truth; he has not called us to avoid conflict, but to love everyone (1 Thessalonians 3:12)” (J. Piper).

- Sometimes, what is bad for the nation (i.e., moral decay), may not be bad for the church (i.e., gospel opportunity, clearer distinction between the church and world, purging of nominalism).²
- We can fulfill our mission in America, even with this sin being legalized (e.g., slavery and emperor worship in Rome).³

What do you do with a Christian who is struggling with homosexuality?

- Any biological (e.g., so-called “gay gene”) or familial roots of homosexuality do not sanction or excuse homosexual behavior, but those factors should deepen our compassion and patience for those who are struggling to be free from sexual temptations.
- Believers who are struggling with this issue should be careful not to label themselves as “homosexual.” Rather, they should say, “I struggle with homosexual desires” (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17). That’s a very small—and huge—distinction.⁴ For me, “I’m a new creature in Christ, but I struggle with brokenness in my heterosexual lust.” For you, it may be, “I’m a new creature in Christ, but I struggle with brokenness in my homosexual lust.” In this perspective, we are on the same team, rejoicing in Christ and struggling together by His grace to deny our flesh and follow Jesus.
- They must recognize that their desires (i.e., “bent”) may not immediately change (cf. Romans 8:21-28).⁵
- For them, sanctification includes recognizing and renouncing homosexual behavior as sin, rediscovering healthy friendships with people of the same sex (esp. in groups), embracing a moral sexual lifestyle, growing in the knowledge of and love for God, and in the age to come rising from the dead with a new body free from every sinful impulse. This freedom comes through faith in Jesus Christ, by the power of his Spirit (cf. 2 Peter 1:1-11; Galatians 5:16-26; 6:7-9; Ephesians 6:10-18).
- We must practice Colossians 1:28-29; Galatians 6:1-10; James 5:20; Jude 23 with these brothers and sisters.
- We must be bold both to say that homosexuality is wrong (in keeping with a good biblical hermeneutic) and to believe that “such were some of you” can still happen regularly (1 Corinthians 6:11).

What do you do with a professing Christian who is practicing homosexuality?

- “Holy ostracism” — a blend of personal separation, confrontation, and evangelism (1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15)
- The goal of that separation is restoration (1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 2:6-8; Galatians 6:1).

HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE GOSPEL

- The **unbelieving homosexual** (and **the believer who struggles** with this) needs a change of orientation, but not from homosexuality to heterosexuality. He/she needs a reorientation from lies to truth, from the worship of self to the worship of God (Romans 1:21-32), which only Christ can do (John 14:6; 1 Thessalonians 1:5, 9-10).
- The **unbelieving homosexual** needs to put his/her faith in Christ alone for forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7), righteousness (Romans 1:16-17), and life and godliness (Ephesians 2:4-7, 10; Titus 3:4-8; 1 John 2:6).
- The **believing heterosexual** needs to merely share the gospel, believing that in its message of Jesus Christ, the “worst” sinner (him...and you) can find cleansing, justification, and sanctification (1 Corinthians 6:11). Numerous biblical examples and passages proclaim this (e.g., Rehab, Paul; Isaiah 1:18; 1 John 1:7, 9)!
- The **believing heterosexual** needs to befriend unbelieving homosexuals so that he/she can display the love of Christ and speak the grace of Christ (Matthew 9:10-13; Luke 7:36-50; John 8:1-11).⁶
- The **believing heterosexual** must commit to discipling his/her children regarding biblical manhood and womanhood. Ultimately, the solution to homosexuality (and etc.) in the church is evangelism without and discipleship within.

CONCLUSION

Because of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we can have tremendous hope when we consider this issue, for it may be today as it was 2,000 years ago—“such were some of you; but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11).

REFERENCES

- *Why is Homosexuality Wrong?* – <http://bit.ly/pTUzn4>
- *Discerning the Will of God Concerning Homosexuality and Marriage* – <http://bit.ly/WnCE5o>
- *The Other Dark Exchange: Homosexuality, Part 1* – <http://bit.ly/XBwRKJ>
- *The Other Dark Exchange: Homosexuality, Part 2* – <http://bit.ly/X4CVKi>
- *Beliefs about Homosexual Behavior and Ministering to Homosexual Persons* – <http://bit.ly/XBBOOD>
- *How Can We Help Christians Who Are Struggling With Homosexual Desires?* – <http://bit.ly/XBBhRQ>
- *How Should Christian Friends Respond to a Friend Who Has Entered a Homosexual Relationship and Moved to a Church That Accepts It?* – <http://bit.ly/XBBCUz>
- “The Bible is Opposed to Homosexuality...and Every Other Sin...Including Mine.” – <http://wp.me/p1mGTB-cP>
- *Exodus International Ministries* – <http://wp.me/1rxHe>
- *Genesis Counseling* – <http://bit.ly/WnddAQ> or <http://bit.ly/XBEvVp>

ENDNOTES

¹ “The reason Paul focuses on homosexuality in these verses is because it is the most vivid dramatization in life of the profoundest connection between the disordering of heart-worship and the disordering of our sexual lives.

We learn from Paul in Ephesians 5:31-32 that, from the beginning, manhood and womanhood existed to represent or dramatize God’s relation to his people and then Christ’s relation to his bride, the church. In this drama, the man represents God or Christ and is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. The woman represents God’s people or the church. And [intimacy] in the covenant of marriage represents pure, undefiled, intense heart-worship. That is, God means for the beauty of worship to be dramatized in the right ordering of our [marital lives].

But instead, we have exchanged the glory of God for images, especially of ourselves. The beauty of heart-worship has been destroyed. Therefore, in judgment, God decrees that this disordering of our relation to him be dramatized in the disordering of our sexual relations with each other. And since the right ordering of our relationship to God in heart-worship was dramatized by heterosexual union in the covenant of marriage, the disordering of our relationship to God is dramatized by the breakdown of that heterosexual union.

Homosexuality is the most vivid form of that breakdown. God and man in covenant worship are represented by male and female in covenant [intimacy]. Therefore, when man turns from God to images of himself, God hands us over to what we have chosen and dramatizes it by male and female turning to images of themselves for sexual union, namely their own sex. Homosexuality is the judgment of God dramatizing the exchange of the glory of God for images of ourselves (see the parallel uses of ‘exchange’ in verses 25 and 26)” (J. Piper).

² From a 2012 panel with Alistair Begg, Mark Dever, and Voddie Baucham, answering the question, “How are you helping your people think through the issue of homosexuality?”:

Mark mentioned that we must prepare our congregation by making sure that they understand that there is no utopia in a fallen world – i.e., immoral does not equal illegal, and *visa versa*; moral does not equal legal, and *visa versa*. Some of the most immoral things (e.g., pride) can never be made illegal. Therefore, the law will have to follow what most people believe for it to function in a fallen world. Alistair piggy-backed on that by alluding to David Well’s observations that when “ought-ness” is removed from a culture (i.e., you ought not do such and such), we end up having a complicated legislated community. Churches don’t need the bigger stick to bring “ought-ness” back; we need to give the gospel – this “characterless” culture gives us an opportunity, not to bring the bigger stick to bear, but to share the gospel. Thus, what is bad for the nation (i.e., moral decay), may not be bad for the church (i.e., gospel opportunity, clearer distinction between the church and world, purging of nominalism).

Mark added that while that is true, homosexuality will lead to misery in our culture, which we will all participate in, and it’s too bad that we’ve had to get here for those aforementioned benefits to be known. A flourishing culture is better for the church (even though history shows that the church has not navigated that well, thus resulting in the Christian nominalism we see around us).

³ In that 2012 panel, Mark Dever also highlighted that we must decide whether or not we can live in America with this sin – no doubt we have some terrible areas in our culture and it’s getting worse, but we’ve had terrible areas in our culture for years, and God has been overwhelmingly merciful. We shouldn’t talk about this in an apocalyptic sense, and we must decide that we don’t need these benefits to preach the gospel. We must decide that we can preach the gospel from inside a jail.

⁴ “Just like John Piper is a new creature in Christ, even though he still struggles with the sins of impatience, lust, and pride, Christians who struggle with homosexual desires are not homosexuals. In Christ they are new creatures who struggle with the temptations of homosexuality. And I just want to come along side them and say, ‘Get that as your paradigm, and let’s struggle together in chastity and in purity until we’re dead’” (J. Piper).

⁵ “Before I turn away from that question, let me say to those of you who struggle with this that this is not hard for me to empathize with or imagine. I don’t want those of you who are wrestling with this to feel like, ‘O, this is just the worst possible thing imaginable.’ I don’t feel that way. What I feel is simply the need to admit brokenness before the Lord. Set your face to say, ‘My heart is broken, and I am weeping, because for reasons I don’t understand I am broken in my sexuality. I’m broken. I wish I weren’t. I can choose to turn my brokenness into sin...’ See, I don’t think it’s sin to be broken. It’s the result of sin to be broken. But to just be that way, to feel that way, I don’t think is any more sin than my feeling heterosexual. [My heterosexual sin] is unnatural, it’s broken, but now I have the choice with my heterosexuality to make it sin or to make it holy. A person who wrestles with homosexual temptations and desires has the same choice: to sin with it, or to be chaste and to seek to overcome and to move into something more God-appointed. So don’t hear me isolating it as the worst of all sins. It is part of a brokenness that I share. I think John Piper’s personality is broken. I could give you specifics: they would have to do with anger, self-pity. And I’m just wired to like certain sins a lot. I think it’s partly genetic. I saw it in my grandmother and my mother. I think it’s partly family-based, and it’s just me. I’m broken. So I can choose to let that brokenness govern me and turn it into sins. Or I can choose to say, ‘I’m going to deal with the brokenness I have and try to steer my way through my brokenness to do as much good for others and avoid as much sin as I can’” (J. Piper).

⁶ “We believe that Christian churches should reach out in love and truth to minister to people touched by homosexuality, and that those who contend Biblically against their own sexual temptation should be patiently assisted in their battle, not ostracized or disdained. However, the more prominent a leadership role or modeling role a person holds in a church or institution of the Conference, the higher will be the expectations for God’s ideal of sexual obedience and wholeness. We affirm that both heterosexual and homosexual persons should find help in the church to engage in the Biblical battle against all improper sexual thoughts and behaviors” (J. Piper).