

Introduction

Wesley Hill is a devout Christian. He is fully committed to the Christian view of sex that is clearly and consistently laid out in Scripture and affirmed by the Church: that sex is only honoring to God when it is between a man and woman who are married to one another, and all other acts of sex are sinful. This is what Wesley Hill clearly believes and practices. Now, listen to the opening paragraph to his excellent book, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*.

“By the time I started high school, two things had become clear to me. One was that I was a Christian. My parents had raised me to be a believer in Jesus, and as I moved toward independence from my family, I knew that I wanted to remain one—that I wanted to trust, love, and obey Christ, who had been crucified and raised from the dead ‘for us and for our salvation,’ as the creed puts it. The second thing was that I was gay. For as long as I could remember, I had been drawn, even as a child, to other males in some vaguely confusing way, and after puberty, I had come to realize that I had a steady, strong, unremitting, exclusive sexual attraction to person of the same sex.”¹

I’m beginning tonight’s talk with Wesley’s story for three reasons:

1. First, when we talk about homosexuality, we are **talking about people**. So we must learn to “look at the face of” those among us who are gay. We must look at their face, and discover that this person has a soul, a history and a life, that this is a person that God loves.²
2. Second, Wesley Hill did **not choose** to be attracted to other men. He lives his life with unwanted, unchosen homosexual desires. For some people, sexual orientation is a choice, for others it is not.
3. And third, growing as a Christian does **not guarantee** that a same-sex attracted person will stop experiencing homosexual desires any more than it means a Christian who was born deaf will be healed. There is a mystery to how God does or does not answer our faithful prayers. He is able, but he is not obligated to give us what we ask.³

Transition: And now, let’s see God’s view of homosexuality. And to do that, we start in creation. But don’t open your Bible just yet.

From Creation to New Creation: When it Comes to Sex, Gender Matters⁴

First let’s have a pop quiz. There are seven days of creation described in **Genesis 1**. Which day is the only day **NOT** described as good? [Answer: Day 2]

- We’re told on **day 1** when God **makes** the **light** and **divides** the **light** and the **darkness** that it was good.

- Twice on **day 3** when God **separates** the **waters** & the **dry land**, we're told that it's good.
- Then on **day 4** we're told that it's good.
- And **day 5**
- And **day 6**
- And finally, in **v31** we're told *"God saw all that he had made, and behold it was very good."*

But back on day 2, there's **silence**. Crickets.....*only there aren't crickets yet*. So day 2 is different. Now why is that?

Well, let's look at it. Notice **Genesis c1v6**, *"And God said, 'Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day."*

Now remember, **Genesis 1** describes the world how it appears to our eyes.

What do you see as you look out at the world, as you look out through these windows? What you see is a canopy, a big blue canopy or shell separating heaven and earth. And **what's this canopy doing?**

It's **dividing** heaven and earth. It **separates** the highest heavens where God dwells from the earth where humans dwell. And in not describing it as good, the writer of **Genesis** leaves us with a **pregnant silence**.

And **that silence** is going to **give birth** to the **whole trajectory** and **direction of history**.

The story the Bible tells is the story of the whole creation moving to something far, far better than what we have at the beginning.

In the beginning it was good, it was very good. In the end it will be flippin' marvelous.

You see, according to the culture that produced the Bible, heaven and earth are actually two different dimensions—not locations, but dimensions—overlapping and interlocking dimensions of the same reality. The Bible uses the word *"heaven"* to mean "God's space which intersects at the moment in various strange ways with our space, but one day" heaven—God's space—and earth—our space—will be fully integrated. And the **Bible describes that as the marriage of heaven and earth**.⁵

So think about this. In the beginning, God set up a series of complementary pairs—pairs that first of all He separates, but eventually He will unite:

- darkness and light,
- heaven and earth,
- sea and dry land,
- male and female,
- God and creation.
- And later in the Biblical story there'll be another polarity set up, the polarity of Jew and gentile. And God will put a boundary—the boundary of circumcision and the law of Moses—to divide, to separate Jew and Gentile to keep them apart.

And these **complementary pairs**, this is the **engine room** which drives all of God's plans for creation.

And this is all over the pages of Scripture. But one of the really cool places to see this is in the book of **Ephesians**. If you have a Bible with you, find it. Find Paul's letter to the **Ephesians**.

- In **Ephesians c1vv3–10** we get a sort of panoramic sweep of the whole of history, from **v4** as God *"chose us...before the foundation of the world"* to the completion of all of God's purposes in **v10**, *"the plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth."*

And notice, **the completion of God's plan** is to remove the boundary between **heaven and earth** so that all things in heaven and on earth can be brought together and united in Christ.

- And in the next chapter in **Ephesians c2vv1–10**, it's the **polarity of God and humanity** that is overcome.
- Then in **c2vv11–21**, we see that God overcomes the **polarity of Jew and Gentile**.
- And then in **c5vv22–23**, we see the **polarity of man and woman** resolved in marriage.

And so listen to **Ephesians c5v31** where Paul is talking about the difficulty and beauty of marriage. And in the climactic moment of his writing on this, he reaches back into creation, into the polarity of male and female sexual differentiation, he takes this from **Genesis 2:24** and applies it to Christ and the Church. Here it is. **Ephesians c5v31**, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."*

This is the great story the Bible is telling from **Genesis 1** to **Revelation 22**. The story of history from beginning to end is the story of

- **God coming to us in Jesus Christ and making us his.**
- **A union of opposites.**

And according to **Ephesians 5**, **marriage**—the one flesh union of a man and a woman

- is **the symbol** of that greater union,
- the greater marriage of Christ and his bride, the church.

That's the pattern of **Genesis 2**. Eve is taken from Adam's rib—a separation, a forming of a pair of different bodies, different human forms—*"She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man"* (**Genesis 2:23**). The forming of complementary pairs symbolized in their bodies. And then the joyful re-union. *"The two shall become one flesh."* Male and female, this creational pairing—of humans who are different from each other, with different bodily forms—coming together in marriage, this is **designed** as

- one of the great **signposts** to the **meaning of all of history**.
- A signpost to the **great joy** that awaits us, the great feast and celebration,
- the great and overwhelming **experience of God's love** on the day we hear the cry, from **Revelation 19:6–7**, *"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him glory for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his Bride has made herself ready."*

And this is the reason why same-sex sexual relationships are forbidden in Scripture.

Transition: Now let's pause here for just a moment, and see how this clarifies two of the important questions Christians often face with regard to homosexuality.

((1. Love Matters, But it is Not Enough))

First of all, the challenge of love. People often say, if two men love each other what's wrong with them expressing that love through sex. And the Christian answer is that love does matter, but when it comes to sex—it's not enough.

Now on the one hand, there definitely are great virtues embodied in many homosexual relationships—I do hope you know that many gay partners experience profound devotion, care, and sacrificial self-offering.⁶

And whenever there is a “longing to give love to” another person and to “receive love from another” person, in the words of C. S. Lewis, this longing, this desire bears “traces of... divinity.”⁷ As Mother Theresa famously said, “Where there is love, there is God.”

And yet, when we see sex in the whole sweep of the Biblical story, we see that sex needs more than love.

- For example, if love is enough, then we have no way of explaining why adultery is an action that turns against Christ.⁸
- Or think about sadomasochism where partners make themselves vulnerable to harm while manifesting real trust that their lover will not go too far. If love alone justifies sex, then there is no way to explain how sadomasochism degrades rather than dignifies our humanity.⁹

“If we want to distinguish between fulfilling and corrupting sexual relationships, we **cannot talk only of love, or consent, or mutuality.**

- However much my **neighbor’s wife** and I are drawn to each other, our bodies are already promised to others.
- However deep and intense may be a **father’s affection** for his adult daughter, to give himself sexually to her is a perversion of love, not a fulfillment.”¹⁰

The quality of love in a relationship,¹¹ the “traces of divinity” that are obvious in so many homosexual relationships, this “does not and cannot by itself provide the necessary content and structure for” sex.¹² When we allow the big, beautiful narrative of the Bible to give us God’s picture for sexuality, then we see that **God is not against gay love. He’s against gay sex.** Because as wonderful as love is, and as much as love matters, when it comes to sex, love is not enough.

((2. It’s the Whole Bible, Not Merely a Few Passages))

A second challenge we often face is the fact that there are not very many passages in the Bible that deal directly with homosexuality. I’ve frequently been told something like, “There are only a few places in the Bible that deal with homosexuality. It’s not nearly such a big deal as Christians make of it today. Jesus himself didn’t even talk about it. And in each of the cases where the Bible does talk about it, it’s somewhat obscure and wrapped up in the cultural matters of its time. And if those few passages weren’t in the Bible, nothing else that’s in the Bible would make us think God was against homosexuality.”¹³

One example of this line of reasoning is the great actor Ian McKellen—he played Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings*. Truly one of the great actors of our day. He’s well-known, deeply respected

gay man. And he's said that he finds the passages in Scripture that condemn gay sex (**Genesis 19; Leviticus 18 and 20, Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, 1 Timothy 1**)¹⁴ he said these passages are so offensive that whenever's he's in a hotel room, he finds the Gideon Bible and he tears out those pages.

Now, McKellan is a fantastic actor, but my point is that he's a bad Bible scholar. Because, as we've seen there's a consistent Scriptural teaching on sex and marriage, and these six passages that directly condemn homosexual actions are "merely ancillary confirmation that same-sex sexual intimacy is ruled out of bounds" by our Creator.¹⁵ The Bible's teaching against homosexual activity is not just about a handful of controversial proof texts. It's the whole Bible, the whole shape of history and reality, from beginning to end that condemns homosexual acts.

Summary

So let's go back and put all of this together.

The Bible shows us that **the beauty, and truth, and deep significance of sex is premised upon** a union of **complementary pairs**—male and female. Only this is capable of signifying the love and the intimate and unbreakable union of Christ and the church.¹⁶

The prohibition of homosexual behavior is

- grounded in the warp and woof,
- the entire unified narrative of Scripture from beginning to end,
- the entire shape of history and reality as God designed it to be.

In our gender and sexuality we're designed as **symbols** pointing to **God's plans**, to the **union of Christ and the Church**.

- Same-sex sexuality lies about this.
- So does adultery.
- So does sex outside of marriage.
- So does a sexual relationship that refuses to be open to children, because the marriage of Christ and the church is a fruitful union.

But singleness testifies beautifully to God's plans, because singleness communicates that human marriage and sexual expression in this life is not ultimate.

- Christ is sufficient,
- and the marriage of Christ and his people is our true hope and goal.
- In the resurrection there will be no marrying or giving in marriage, because the Marriage Supper of the Lamb has come.

And so, the condemnation of same-sex relations is not just some arbitrary rule,

- and “it’s not just cultural conventions from the ancient world.
- And it’s not just that the Biblical writers didn’t know anything about loving committed same-sex sexual relationships
- and were only concerned with exploitative same-sex sex.

No. It’s the goal, the romance of history, the overwhelming love of God in Christ that rules out same-sex relationships as legitimate expressions of sexual love.”¹⁷

Transition: And so that’s the way the Bible as a shows gay sex to be outside of God’s will. Now let’s turn to the most extensive treatment of the subject in Scripture: **Romans c1vv18–32**.

The Great Exchange

If you have a Bible, please find this passage. I’m going to point out **8 important issues** in this section of Scripture.¹⁸

1. First, in these verses, Paul is working with the Biblical story of the **CREATION AND THE FALL**.

In **v20** we read, *“ever since the creation of the world.”*

Then in **v22**, Paul speaks of humans *“claiming to become wise.”* And that’s an echo of **Genesis c3v6**, where we’re told that Eve *“saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise.”*

Then in **Romans c1v32** we read about *“God’s decree that”* sinners *“deserve to die.”* And this is exactly what God says in **Genesis c3**.

And so, **Romans 1:18–32** is a theological analysis of culture through the lens of Creation. In other words, Paul is taking a description of certain cultural practices and laying them over the top of **Genesis 1–3**, so that the patterns in creation and the fall inform and give shape to our understanding of ourselves and the world we inhabit.

That’s the first thing to recognize about this passage.

2. Second, Paul describes sin in terms of an **EXCHANGE**.

- (1) **v23**, they *“exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.”* That’s the essence of sin. A rejection of

the God who made us. **Turning** from him, **and exchanging** his glory to serve created things.

- (2) **v25**, *“they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.”* So here again, exchanging the truth of God for the lie of worshipping and serving things within the creation.

And when we do this, when we reject God and exchange the truth about him, we also exchange the truth about ourselves, because we’re made in the image of God.

- (3) And so we get **vv26–27**, *“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 me and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.”*

There is a natural order to sexual relationships. God designed sex for a man and a woman. In this passage God is teaching us that when human cultures reject the creator, they also reject the creation order for sexual relationships.

3. And this brings us to the third issue. In response to our rejection of God, God **HANDS US OVER** to ongoing patterns of sin.

- **v24**, *“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.”*
- In **v26**, *“For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions.”*
- And in **v28**, *“God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.”*

So the actual existence of same-sex attraction is not a **sign** that it’s okay to be gay. It’s a sign of God’s judgment on humans. It’s a sign that humans have rebelled against God, and God has handed us over to the destructive consequences of our rebellion.

4. Number 4, notice how **OUR MINDS** are described.

- At the end of **v21**, *“they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”*
- And in **v22**, *“Claiming to be wise, they became fools.”*

In other words, **our moral intuitions**, our experiences, our own beliefs about morality, including about gay sex, are inadequate.

“Human nature, as we experience it...cannot itself provide the norms for human sexual behavior. What seems ‘natural’ to us may, in fact, be contrary to our nature as God’s creatures. Behavior that is natural in the sense that we are readily drawn to it, may in fact be unnatural — inappropriate to who we truly are. Experience alone — the prompting of love alone — cannot...be our sole tutor and guide; [because] our experience is broken and distorted. It must be reshaped and redirected with the guidance of Scripture.”¹⁹

Our minds and experiences mislead us, because in our sin our thinking is futile and our hearts are hardened. Left to our own understanding, we’ll think wrongly about these things. We need to learn from and be corrected by what God says in his Word.

5. Number 5, this passage condemns **same-sex sexual practices and desires**, but it does **NOT ADDRESS SEXUAL IDENTITY**.

The Bible does not condemn gay people. God is talking about gay sex, lesbian sex, and lustful sexual desires.

God does not define us by our sexuality. If you’re gay you’re not a separate category of person. God defines all of us in only three ways. (1) As made in his image. (2) As male or female. And, (3) as being either in Adam or in Christ. In Adam, our sinful actions and desires exclude us from the kingdom. But by putting our faith in Christ, all that changes. [[1 Corinthians 6:9–11](#)]

6. Gay sex is **NOT THE ONLY SIN IN THIS PASSAGE**.

Look at [vv29-32](#), *“They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.”*

So there are all kinds of sins listed. In fact, every time the Bible speaks of same-sex sexual practices it always lists them alongside all kinds of other sins.

- None of us are off the hook!

It won’t do to demonize one particular set of sins. So **homosexual acts do have a particular prominence** in this passage. We’ll come back to that in a minute. But for now, we need to see that homosexual conduct is a particularly vivid example “of something that is the case for all of us: as we reject God we find ourselves craving what we are not naturally designed to do.”²⁰

7. Seven: Paul doesn't just criticize people who do these things. He also criticizes **THOSE WHO GIVE APPROVAL TO HOMOSEXUALITY**.

v32, *“Though they know God’s decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”*

“It is important to be clear about the definition of tolerance and its place among Christian virtues.” Tolerance is definitely a virtue in many situations, but love holds a superior place in the Christian worldview. (E.g., **1 Corinthians 13:13**).

“Love and tolerance overlap but [they] are not identical concepts. The Bible describes a God who loves the entire world but does not tolerate sin. In fact, in the few instances when words that could be translated as tolerance or intolerance occur in the biblical text, they generally appear in contexts that *condemn* tolerance of wickedness.”²¹ In the Bible, tolerance of sexual immorality is a **vice**, not a virtue.

8. And finally, number 8. **HOMOSEXUAL SIN IS SERIOUS**.

It's not an insignificant lifestyle choice.²²

This whole section begins by talking in v18 about *“the wrath of God”*—God's settled, measured hostility towards sinful men and women, boys and girls.

And the section ends in v32 by talking about the reality of God's future judgment of death for sinners.²³

And in **Romans c1**, same-sex erotic relationships are “the single most powerful symbol of the world's alienation from God.” They stand out “incandescently, as a measure of the gulf between” the purpose of love and sex in God's creation and the sexual disorder of Roman society. “Same-sex attraction” is a powerful and prime example of “the estrangement of men and women, at the very level of their inmost desires, from nature and from the Creator of nature” himself.²⁴

Transition: Alright, we've covered a lot of ground. From creation to new creation, from the whole sweep of the biblical drama and from **Romans c1**, we've seen that same-sex attraction is not what God originally intended for any of us. Now how should we, as the Church, deal with this?

Being the Church Today

Here are four tasks for the Church today with regard to homosexuality.

((1. Do Not Cave into the Pressure to Affirm Homosexual Behavior))

First of all, we should **not cave into the pressure** from society²⁵ or the pressure from our own moral intuitions as they have been shaped by the deep stories of identity, freedom, and love told by our culture. We must avoid the temptation **to affirm same-sex attraction**.²⁶

Now don't get me wrong. God calls us to be very loving toward all people.

- We should go the extra mile to stress respect for our homosexual friends, neighbors, church members, and family members.
- And we should go the extra mile in protecting them from harassment, prejudice, discrimination in public housing, education, and employment.

And yet, we must not do anyone the unkindness of implying that the Bible is less clear than it is.²⁷

“The failure of the church to help the homosexual make the transition out of homosexual practice and into sexual wholeness will make the church an accomplice to the very form of behavior that God finds detestable. The church will become an enabler of the practicing homosexual's loss of spiritual transformation and, possibly salvation.”²⁸

Centuries of bigotry toward homosexuals, while undeniably wrong, ought not to reflexively guilt-trip the church into silence on” the issue.²⁹ To do that would be to deprive people made in God's image—people who are therefore infinitely precious and beautiful—to **maintain an embarrassed silence and never say anything** is to deprive them of the hope of the gospel.³⁰

Transition: That's one task.³¹

((2. Don't be Blind to Heterosexual Sins.))

A second task is to avoid **blindness to heterosexual sins**. Although we've focused tonight on homosexual sins, remember this is one of nine teachings in our series. And it's the only one focused on homosexuality. All sex outside of marriage between a man and a woman is terrible. Looking at pornography is an awful sin. Fooling around with your boyfriend or girlfriend is a devastating sin.³²

We should not think that “same-sex sin is somehow farther from the reach of God's redemption than other expressions of sexual sin.”³³

“Each of us, because of our decadent culture and our own sinful proclivities, faces sexual temptation in an endless variety of guises, and this is just as true for married persons as it is for single persons,” for people attracted to others of their own sex and for people attracted to the opposite sex. “This is why the Bible has as much to say about adultery and lust as it does about

premarital promiscuity. **In the end, every one of us has to decide day by day, to Whom do we belong?**³⁴

Transition: That's a second task.

((3. Remember We are Talking about People))

Third, ultimately we are not dealing with issues to be solved. We are talking about people, “people to be loved, even to the point of weeping with those who weep, shedding tears of grief and sadness with them. We will not communicate” God’s better story for sex and human flourishing if “our posture is overly muscular and not sufficiently brokenhearted.”³⁵

And the best way to remember we’re talking about people is to become friends, to share real life together, to listen and learn from those among us caught up in the heartbreaking complexity of these issues.

Let’s listen to Christians with same-sex attraction who have fully embraced the Church’s historic and orthodox teachings on sexuality. There are so many helpful resources for this. For example, let me tell you about three important websites:

- First, there is a catholic website, www.everlastinghills.org. It’s centered around a set of interviews of 2 men and a woman who stopped engaging in homosexual relationships because of their Christian faith. The centerpiece of the website is a beautiful movie, it’s about 2 hours.
- Second, I recommend to you is www.livingout.org. This is one of the very best resources for same-sex attracted Christians, and those of us who have gay friends and family.
- Third, www.spiritualfriendship.org. This is another website that I can’t recommend enough.

And then there are a number of really good books written by Christians with homosexual attractions who are living in chastity. Some of these Christians are married, such as Mario Bergner,³⁶ Melinda Selmys,³⁷ Rosario Butterfield,³⁸ and Peter Ould.³⁹ While others are single, such as Wesley Hill,⁴⁰ Eve Tushnet,⁴¹ and Martin Hallett.⁴²

Transition: Now, as we develop real friendships, and learn to listen to gay people we will be greatly helped in our fourth task which is, to stop offering simplistic solutions.

((4. Refuse Simplistic Solutions))

There is a diversity among people with homosexual desires. Like I said at the very beginning of tonight, for some sexual orientation is a choice. Rosario Butterfield, for example, narrates her own lesbian experience in this way. But for many others, such as Wesley Hill, being gay is not a choice; it is something they find themselves experiencing.

What's the cause of it? We don't know. Theology and science point us to a number of factors that could possibly be the cause. Things like biology, childhood experiences, environmental influences, and adult experiences.⁴³

And furthermore, sexuality rests on a continuum, ranging between fluid and fixed.⁴⁴ Many people do change their sexual identity over the years, and many people who try to change their sexual orientation aren't able to do so.

There's mystery here. And so we must avoid simplistic thinking. "Sanctification is not coterminous with heterosexuality."⁴⁵ I began tonight's session talking about Wesley Hill. He is a devout and godly man who has experienced very little change in his homosexual desires.

In fact, at one point in his book, Wesley writes: "Like Paul, I have prayed fervently, desperately, tearfully on multiple occasions for God to take away this *'thorn in my flesh.'*"⁴⁶ And yet God has not.

Please don't tell someone, "If you want healing from same-sex attraction, it *is* available, and you have only to say yes." That's not true. Just like it's not true for depression, or Down's Syndrome, or the death of a loved-one, or any of the other shadows of the fall.

In a fallen world, learning how to be God's children is not easy, for any of us. "The counter-formation of fragmented identities involves commitment to a long and, at times, arduous journey of relearning and reshaping...deeply-rooted feelings and thoughts. For some, skilled counseling may be required, especially for those from abusive backgrounds or whose identity has been hollowed out in the dark corners of contemporary life. For [some it's] a process of patient formation through the example and modeling of others, in small groups and one-to-one discipling. Learning how to be God's [child] and his image bearer is a lifelong calling that belongs to every one of us."⁴⁷

Transition: (1) Don't cave in to the pressure to affirm homosexual behavior. (2) Don't be blinded to heterosexual sins. (3) Remember we're talking about people. And (4) Refuse simplistic solutions.

Conclusion

As I bring this teaching to a close, let's finish by looking at Jesus. Turn to [Matthew c8](#).

And while you're finding this passage, remember that "each of us needs to know in the depth of our soul" something God tells us in Romans, it's this. Quoting: *"There is no one righteous, not even one...All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."*⁴⁸

Being heterosexual does not bring you to Jesus. Heterosexuality doesn't justify us before God. The only way we are justified before God is *"through faith in Jesus Christ."*⁴⁹

Sooner or later, we all deal with sexual struggles of one kind or another. Young or old, male or female, single, married, widowed, divorced. Whether you're attracted to people of the same sex, or opposite sex, or both. No one in this room is straight. **All of us are bent and twisted out of shape because of Adam's Fall.** "We all need forgiveness and healing for our...sin; and...Jesus is more than willing to meet us...in our brokenness, in our shame, in our sin."⁵⁰

Listen to [Matthew c8vv1-3](#), *"When [Jesus]...came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.' And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I will; be clean.' And immediately his leprosy was cleansed."*

You may know yourself to be unclean because of sexual sin. Jesus is able to make you clean. If you are a Christian believer he *has* made you clean. You may feel too dirty to come into contact with Jesus. You may feel like surely he could want nothing to do with you. But did you hear v3?

Did you hear what happened when Jesus encountered someone who was unclean?

He doesn't recoil in horror.

He reached out and touched the person.

This evening, whoever you are, whatever you've done, whatever your sexual brokenness, whatever your sexual struggles, Jesus wants to be in contact with you. He wants you close to himself.

In the book of Revelation we hear Jesus saying to us, *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."*⁵¹

As we open the door of our lives to the Lord Jesus, he will humbly "enter in—bringing with him all of his grace and beauty and power—washing us, sanctifying us, and justifying us in his own glorious name!"⁵²

Let's pray.

Recommendation

Wesley Hill. *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*.

Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [2010] 2016. *Remember, there are many, many different ways in which people are homosexual. And so part of what is important about this book is that, first of all it offers insight into one particular type of male homosexuality. All homosexuality is brokenness due to the fall, but Dr. Hill's is of a type that is more along the lines of a natural fallenness than a moral fallenness. The source of his homosexuality is not some moral failing on his part. His sexual brokenness goes all the way back to the very beginning of his life, it is more like a physical disability. He was raised a Christian, and embraced Christianity all along the way. His sexual brokenness is not a result of immorality on his part. He is a devout and godly man who does not act on his sexual desire in a way that dishonors God, and yet he has experienced no change in his homosexual desires even as he has grown into the fruit of the Spirit and in sanctifying grace in other areas of his life.*

Rosaria Champagne Butterfield. *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into the Christian Faith*. Pittsburg, PA: Crown and Covenant Publications, 2012. *An autobiography describing the transformation of a postmodern lesbian professor into a Christian wife and homeschooling mother.*

Rosaria Champagne Butterfield. *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ*. Pittsburg, PA: Crown and Covenant Publications, [2015] 2016. *I think there are 3 important things about this book. First, it shows the conversion of a mind. Dr. Butterfield is an intelligent woman who was a tenured professor of English and women's studies at Syracuse University. Her speciality was feminist and queer theory and 19th century British literature. She was not a Christian, she did not see sexuality through a Biblical lens, and she was against that way of looking at sex and gender and relationships. And so this book shows how she came to repent, to see these issues from God's perspective. Second, Butterfield was a lesbian. And she became a lesbian as a young adult through consequences of her own moral fallenness. So this book is insightful into one form of lesbianism, a form that is more about moral fallenness than natural fallenness. And third, Butterfield was an adult when she converted, and so this book shows us the way in which one woman came to Christ as an adult.*

Robert A. J. Gagnon. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001. Many argue that Gagnon is the foremost Christian scholar in the U. S. on this subject, and this is the most thorough book written on the subject.

Miscellaneous

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,⁵³ and it's been popularized more recently by Matthew Vines.⁵⁴ But this argument does not stack up to the evidence on two significant fronts.

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.”⁵⁵ 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.”⁵⁶

“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.”⁵⁷

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.”⁵⁸

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

Second, Paul is not just speaking of exploitation, there's mutuality in view in these relationships. Remember, 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.”⁵⁹

It is sometimes claimed that the “unnatural acts” condemned in Romans 1 is, generally speaking, 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).”⁶⁰

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

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. 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.” “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.”⁶¹

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.⁶² 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?"⁶³

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 splendour, 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.

¹ *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness & Homosexuality*, updated & expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [2010] 2016), 21.

² Pope Benedict XVI, “Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, Benedict XVI, Angelus, St Peter’s Square, Sunday, 10 January 2010,” http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20100110_battesimo.html.

³ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ* (Pittsburg, PA: Crown and Covenant Publications, [2015] 2016), 140, summarizing Christopher Yuan.

⁴ For the bulk of this exegesis of Genesis 1 (and much of the actual wording I’ve used) in relationship to maleness and femaleness as binaries rooted in the creative will of God and how this is foundational not only to marriage but also to the storyline of the Bible, I’m indebted to Matthew Mason’s lecture, “The Great Exchange: Same-Sex Sexuality and the Gospel” delivered as the second plenary session for the 2016 Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Christ Our Hope. You can find this lecture, along with two others, at <https://www.adhope.org/media>.

⁵ “It’s as though heaven and earth have a kind of risky engagement at the [present] moment. But one day there will be this marriage, they will be brought fully, completely and permanently together” (N. T. Wright, “Will God Bring Heaven & Earth Together? NT Wright on 100 Huntley Street,” online video. Accessed March 18, 2018.)

⁶ Ephraim Radner, *A Time to Keep: Theology, Mortality, and the Shape of Human Life* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 104. “This is one of the great unveilings of the AIDS pandemic.” (Radner, *Time to Keep*, 104). We must all recognize that “wherever such love and affection are present, something of great human significance occurs” (Gilbert Meilaender, “The First Institutions,” *Pro Ecclesia*, VI: 4, p446).

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (NT: Harcourt, Brace & World, INC., 1955), 110. And also, “a being which can still love is not yet a devil” (C. S. Lewis, “Preface to the Paperback Edition,” *The Screwtape Letters* [NT: Macmillan, 1973], x).

⁸ When we locate the moral meaning of sex “only in the love-giving dimension of our sexuality...[we’re] unable to explain why the sexual relation must be given a history, why fidelity to one’s spouse is required, even when love draws us toward another possible partner” (Meilaender, “The First Institutions,” 446).

⁹ And furthermore, to say that love is what matters and that two women who love each other, or two men who love each other are okay to engage in sex, that separates the love-giving dimension of our sexuality from the life-giving dimensions of our sexuality. And as we saw several weeks ago, we can’t tear apart the purpose of sex to unite two people from the purpose of sex to create life. “The giving and receiving of sexual love should in its very nature be ordered toward procreation.” “The conception, gestation, and rearing of children should not be separated from the bond of marital love” (Meilaender, “The First Institutions,” 446).

¹⁰ Meilaender, "The First Institutions," 447. "The body is the place of our personal presence. And moral significance must therefore be found not only in the spirit that characterizes our relationships with others, not only in mutuality and communion, but also in the bodily relationship itself. To suppose that mutual love is all that is needed to make a relationship right is to ignore the moral significance of the body. It is, in fact, a kind of dualism that separates our true self from the body" (Meilaender, "The First Institutions," 446).

¹¹ One famous, oft quoted example of this justification for homosexuality is Frederick Buechner, "One of the many ways that we are attracted to each other is sexually. We want to touch and be touched. We want to give and receive pleasure with our bodies. We want to know each other in our full nakedness, which is to say in our full humanness, and in the moment of passion to become one with each other. Whether it is our own gender or the other that we are chiefly attracted to seems a secondary matter. There is a female element in every male just as there is a male element in every female, and most people, if they're honest, will acknowledge having been at one time or another attracted to both. To say that morally, spiritually, humanly, homosexuality is always bad seems as absurd as to say that in the same terms heterosexuality is always good, or the other way round. It is not the object of our sexuality that determines its value but the inner nature of our sexuality. If (a) it is as raw as the coupling of animals, at its worst it demeans us and at its best still leaves our deepest hunger for each other unsatisfied. If (b) it involves some measure of kindness, understanding, and affection as well as desire, it can become an expression of human love in its fullness and can thus help to complete us as humans. Whatever our sexual preference happens to be, both of these possibilities are always there. It's not whom you go to bed with or what you do when you get there that matters so much. It's what besides sex you are asking to receive, and what besides sex you are offering to give. Here and there the Bible condemns homosexuality in the sense of (a), just as under the headings of adultery and fornication it also condemns heterosexuality in the sense of (a). On the subject of homosexuality in the sense of (b), it is as silent as it is on the subject of sexuality generally in the sense of (b). The great commandment is that we are to love one another-responsibly, faithfully, joyfully-and presumably the biblical view is implied in that. Beyond that, "Love is strong as death," sings Solomon in his song. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it" (Song of Solomon 8:6-7). Whoever you are and whoever it is you desire, the passion of those lines is something you are quick to recognize." From Frederick Buechner, *Whistling in the Dark: A Doubter's Dictionary* (New York: Harper Collins, [1988] 1993), 67-68.

¹² Meilaender, "The First Institutions," 446.

¹³ E.g., Victor Paul Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979), 53. Also, see Wesley Hill's account of his public debate with Justin Lee, the founder of the Gay Christian Network (<https://www.qchristian.org>), in which Lee "made a statement to the effect of, 'I think the only reason we are having this debate is because of the so-called 'clobber passages' [Genesis 19:1-29; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:10-11] each one of which is somewhat obscure and addresses specific cultural matters of its time. If those passages weren't in the Bible, nothing else that's in the Bible would make us think God was against same-sex marriage.' (Again: that's the gist of what he said, and he can correct me if I got him wrong.)" (Wesley Hill, "Why Do We Think the Bible is Against Same-Sex Marriage?," *Spiritual Friendship*, May 8, 2018).

¹⁴ Genesis 19:1-29; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:18-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 1:8-11.

¹⁵ Wesley Hill, "Why Do We Think the Bible is Against Same-Sex Marriage?." "If we understand sexual ethics the way the church, almost universally, has done for the past fifteen hundred years, then these texts are just not very significant for the ethical debate. Their proper place is in a footnote, indicating that they offer a welcome, but small, degree of confirmation that a position reached for other, much weightier, exegetical and theological reasons is indeed correct." Even if this small handful of Biblical passages that directly speak against same-sex relations six passages, even if none of them were in the Bible, "the church would still" know that homosexual sex is a sin (Stephen R. Holmes, "Listening to the Past and Reflecting on the Present," in Preston Sprinkle, *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, Counterpoints: Bible and Culture, ed. by Stanley H. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 175). "The church's stance against homosexual activity isn't the product of a few Bible proof texts that speak directly to the issue of same-sex practice; it is the result of the Bible's holistic vision of human sexuality, which pervades Scripture" (Wilson, *Mere*, 54).

¹⁶ Mason, "The Great Exchange."

¹⁷ Mason, "The Great Exchange." "There is no way of arguing otherwise except by rendering the coherence of Scripture itself fictive and by divorcing the knowledge and discussion of God as 'Creator of Heaven and Earth' from the Scriptures altogether." The progressive views of sexuality are "a kind of attack upon Scripture itself in its foundational authority for the created world's order." (Radner, *Time to Keep*, 103).

¹⁸ These eight observations are from Matthew Mason's lecture, "The Great Exchange."

¹⁹ Meilaender, "The First Institutions," 447.

²⁰ Sam Allberry, "What does the Bible say about homosexuality?," <http://www.livingout.org/the-bible-and-ssa>.

²¹ Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 27. See Revelation 2:20. See also, in the NRSV, Psalm 101:5; Micah 6:11; Revelation 2:2; and in NAB see Genesis 34:7; 2 Timothy 4:3.

²² Homosexual sex is serious because its scandal smacks right into the middle of the foundational story told by the Bible. The joy that will be Christ's when he sees the purified and perfect people of God. That's the meaning of history. And the entire narrative of the Bible is driven by these complementarities, these polarities, these binaries. From another, equally powerful, aspect of the Biblical narrative, Ephraim Radner contends: "The argument is often made, for instance, that the Bible's attention to homosexuality (e.g., Lev 19:22; 20:13) is, even if accepted as such (and most scholars now do), extremely limited in extent. Thus, one might rightly wonder how the topic could take on such an important role in current debate and prove such a scandal among our churches' common life. For some, it seems as if this focus elevates a minor scriptural concern out of some kind of irrational fear. But we can no more dismiss Scripture's and Judeo-Christian tradition's sexual concerns here than we can allow a modern compassion toward the suffering of battered selves to less our concern over suicide and euthanasia. For the argument just outlined above is one that must necessarily heighten the importance of homosexuality as a religious stumbling block because it places its scandal smack in the middle of one of the central claims of the Christian faith: *creatio ex nihilo* as an act of love that manifests God's true being." "Nonheterosexual, nonparentally tethered, and unstable partnerships whose procreative directions are either stymied or disoriented are unassimilable within the scriptural description of God's creative purpose...Even apart from any explicit discussion of homosexual behavior, this fact appears obvious; and given the few explicit references to such behavior, their brief articulation when it *does* occur can be seen not as arbitrary but rather as expressive of a necessary (if not always dominant) aspect of human life as 'creature.' There is no way of arguing otherwise except by rendering the coherence of Scripture itself fictive and by divorcing the knowledge and discussion of God as 'Creator of Heaven and Earth' from the Scriptures altogether." (Radner, *Time to Keep*, 96–7, 103). The Biblical view of sex reduces "the sex act down to the most basic constituents of male and female." Gender is a "prime determinant in the propriety of a sex," and therefore gay sex is a particular kind of rebellion against the male-female reality God has built into creation. This is a kind of sin that clearly goes against the grain of God's intentions (Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013], 95).

²³ "It is important to recognize that Paul is talking here in social rather than individual terms. He is describing what happens to culture as a whole, rather than particular people. The presence of same-sex desire in some of us is not an indication that we've turned from God more than others, but a sign that humanity as a whole has done so. It is not the only sign, and in everyone there is no doubt more than one sign or another - but it is a sign nevertheless" (Sam Allberry, "What does the Bible say about homosexuality?").

²⁴ Harper, *Shame to Sin*, 94.

²⁵ “In contemporary North America, it’s become very difficult to talk about any kind of sex as bad sex. We live with enormous cultural pressures to tolerate any and all ‘private’ behavior. This pressure makes it difficult for our lives—body and soul—to mean anything. Because we’re told that sex is private that it’s ‘none of our business,’ we have difficulty recognizing the distortions of sin as the distortions that they are. We’re tempted to write them off as private choices. But if we want to...show the world—in truth and beauty—what it means to ‘glorify God’ in our bodies (1 Cor. 6:20), we have to be able to see distortion as distortion. We need the tools to discern when sex tells the truth about God and supports human flourishing and when sex denies the reality of God and is harmful to human beings” (Jones, *Faithful*, 41). But we live in a society where those who are not Christians and those who are Christians, we have all been “wooded by the idea of sexuality as a private matter, purely a concern between consenting adults behind closed doors. Increasingly, then, the church has no place in the bedrooms of believers” (Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age* [Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015], 63). And we can take courage from the fact that the Bible is so consistent and so clear on this issue. But it’s not only the Bible, it’s also the Church. Church tradition is also clear. “Christians of the past have consistently taught...and...the vast majority of ordinary believers have always thought” this way (Todd Wilson, *Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Sexuality* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017], 36). “Until recently the orthodox Jewish and Christian teachings opposing same-sex marriage have remained constant; it has not even been a subject of serious debate” (Dale S. Kuehne, *Sex and the iWorld: Rethinking Relationship Beyond an Age of Individualism* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009], 26). “Something that has been inconceivable for virtually the entire history of the church—namely the moral approval of same-sex marriage—has in the past decade become not just conceivable but, for more and more Christians, acceptable” (Kuehne, *Sex and the iWorld*, 25).

²⁶ Back in 2013, Dave Kinnamen, the President of the Barna Group, a research organization focused on the intersection of faith and culture, wrote that “the data shows that evangelicals remain countercultural against a rising tide of public opinion” regarding same-sex marriage. And “if the sands have shifted under evangelicals’ feet in the last 10 years, we at Barna predict it will seem the ground has completely opened beneath them during the next 10. In part, that’s because the very belief that same-sex relationships are morally wrong is deemed by many to be discriminatory and bigoted” (David Kinnamen, of the Barna Group, quoted in this online article: “America’s Change of Mind on Same-Sex Marriage and LGBTQ Rights,” Barna Group, July 13, 2013, <https://www.barna.com/research/americas-change-of-mind-on-same-sex-marriage-and-lgbtq-rights/>). And “opposing intolerance of the sexual practices of others functions as a badge of intellectual open-mindedness and membership among...cultured society” (Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 26).

²⁷ Each time the Bible addresses directly homosexual behavior, three times in the Old Testament and three times in the New Testament, there is total consistency. In other words, there is coherence across the Bible. There is no tension or ambiguity. This “does not mean there are no...challenges and it certainly does not mean that Scripture clearly answers every personal or pastoral or missional question we face today in our culture” (Andrew Goddard, “James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: A Critical Engagement*,” [2014], https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/026e/f3e5b3f42d35d62c1d7ee00db65b7d4b95b3.pdf?_ga=2.20420670.741299810.1540934630-2080394918.1540934630). What it does mean is that every time the Bible directly addresses the issue there is a radical opposition to all same-sex intercourse.

²⁸ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 489.

²⁹ Kuehne, *Sex and the iWorld*, 24–5.

³⁰ As we saw a few weeks ago, when Christianity was just getting started, this was a radical difference between Christians and their surrounding society. And now, here in the West, we are once again in the position the Church started in. “Orthodox Christian sexuality [was and is] a moral ideology that set [us] ... apart from the world” (Harper, *From Shame to Sin*, 102). “Christians’ views on sexuality go back nearly two millennia and have been embodied in the lives of ordinary believers the world over” (Wilson, *Mere Sexuality*, 37). In the words of Dale Kuehne, “It is almost always an exaggeration to say that Christendom ever spoke with a unified voice on any issue, but if ever there were issues on which there was theological consensus, it was on sexual ethics and the definition of marriage” (Kuehne, *Sex and the iWorld*, 26). “In his carefully researched book on the significance of sexual difference for the moral theology of marriage, Christopher C. Roberts shows that for centuries, there has been a Christian consensus on sexuality. He explains: ‘After an initial patristic period in which Christian beliefs about sexual difference were fluctuating and diverse, a more or less rough consensus on sexual difference existed from the fourth to the twentieth centuries’ (Christopher C. Roberts, *Creation & Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage* [New York: T&T Clark International, 2007], 185–86. Quoted in Wilson, *Mere Sexuality*, 171–72 n17). Contra John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980); John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Villard, 1994); Andrew Sullivan, ed., *Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con; A Reader*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 7–21. But now, for the first time in the history of the church church leaders are approving of homosexual practices. In the words of German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg, “If a church were to let itself be pushed to the point where it ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the biblical norm, and recognized homosexual unions as a personal partnership of love equivalent to marriage, such a church would stand no longer on biblical ground but against the unequivocal witness of Scripture. A church that took this step would cease to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church” (Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Revelation and Homosexual Experience,” *Christianity Today*, November 11, 1996, www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1996/november11/6td035.html).

³¹ “In the first place, yes, same-sex sex acts are inherently (not circumstantially) immoral (i.e., in the classic language, “intrinsically disordered”), and that is part of what Christians are given to say in the world. But we are always *also* called to say *another* thing, and that is this: The people who perform those acts, or who want to, are fearfully and wonderfully made. They are beloved of God, and they should be loved, honored, and and sheltered by all of us who name the name of Christ too. The problem, though, is that so many of us downplay or omit one or the other of these two truths when we speak about homosexuality. There’s an apocryphal Luther quote that goes like this: “If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the Word of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Him. Conservative Christians are fond of using this quote to insist that we must stand up for the truth of the historic Christian sexual ethic even as it is being attacked in contemporary Western cultures, and that to fail to do so is to fail to be orthodox, faithful, biblical. And, in a mainline Protestant church like the one I belong to, I feel the force of this. These days it can seem easy to preach Christ in every way *but* the way that He challenges progressive sexual mores. It can feel like taking the easy road to harp on Fr. White’s second paragraph in the excerpt above rather than the first. And yet “the world” that “Luther” mentions in that quote is not always the world of progressive secularism/liberalism. Sometimes “the world” attacks the truth of Christ on the *second* point that Fr. White mentions — by tempting Christians to demean, disdain, ignore, overburden, or otherwise harm LGBTQ people. “The world” and “the devil” can manifest themselves in so-called “progressivism,” yes—and they can manifest themselves just as easily whenever a Christian heaps shame on LGBTQ people (“There’s something more askew in your life than there is in that of heterosexuals,” is what a pastor once told me), or offers a quick solution to their complex dilemmas (“Just get married!” is literally the advice I saw from a conservative Christian last week, as if I haven’t ever considered that possibility), or caricatures their sex lives (“Gay culture is inherently promiscuous”), or damages their faith (“If you want healing from same-sex attraction, it *is* available, and you have only to say yes,” I have been promised by Christians numerous times), or in any number of other ways attacks their dignity. If you are in a so-called conservative church and you are loudly proclaiming the truth about homosexuality at every point *but* at the point where that truth insists on the worth and lovability of LGBTQ people — if you are binding up heavy burdens on them and not lifting a finger to help (cf. Matthew 23:4) — then you are not proclaiming Christian truth, no matter how much you may seize the high ground and claim otherwise. Christian truth is a many-splendored thing, and we can fail to let its facets gleam in characteristically “progressive” ways as well as in “conservative” ones” (Wesley Hill, “Where the World Attacks,” *Spiritual Friendship*, July 25, 2018).

³² The problem is that “pride, lust, bitterness, anger, and a multitude of other sins lie behind our sexual sins in a way that prohibits sweeping generalizations as to the evil of one over and against all others. After all, there are heterosexual perversions and abuses that are unspeakably abhorrent. A heterosexually married man who rapes and abuses his wife is committing horrific evil that is in no way mitigated by the fact that it is heterosexual. God forbid that anyone might suggest otherwise” (Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 99–100). In Matthew c5vv27–30, our Lord Jesus tells us, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, but it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.” If you do not control your sexual imagination, your sexual desires it is a wicked sin (Scot McKnight, *Sermon on the Mount*, The Story of God Bible Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013], 92). We must not use our imaginations to reduce a person to an object in order to satisfy our own desires (Matthew Mason, “Man and Woman He Created Them: Same-Sex Desires, Gender Trouble, and Gay Marriage in the Light of John Paul II’s Theology of the Body,” 16. Accessed online). When we use someone in our minds as mere objects, completely under the control of our own fantasies; when we use someone mentally to satisfy our own desires, then we rob that person of their personhood. When you isolate the sexual pleasure, and try to get it by itself, with out the life-long commitment of marriage, you are experiencing one of the primary brokennesses of sex. You are reducing the other person to a body that you use for your own purposes. And by the way, even if you are faithfully married, if you look at your spouse in a way that reduces him or her to an object for satisfying your sexual urge then that is the type of adultery that Jesus is describing (John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, transl. intro. and index by Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, [1979–1984] 2006), 43:2.). This applies to women looking at women. And to men looking at men. And notice, this is not about noticing that someone is attractive. In v28, Jesus says that lust is when you look at someone “with lustful intent.” So this is about intentionality, about lingering, about stoking the desire. And Jesus is telling us that it is deadly serious.

³³ Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 99.

³⁴ Gordon Hugenberger, “Homosexuality,” June 15, 2004, <https://www.parkstreet.org/teaching-training/articles/homosexuality>. In the same article, Hugenberger goes on to say, Homosexuality is not “worse than any of the zillion sins I commit every day. In fact, it is tribute to the infinite grace and mercy of God that the sanctuary roof stays up each day that I walk into the room. In any case, we are not on some kind of crusade to single out those who may be dealing with this issue. Although I want the liberty to be honest with the Bible and to address this topic from time to time, I have no intention of so stressing it that the...homosexual guests and visitors who are not interested in changing will feel put off or unwelcome (or at least no more put off or unwelcome than the many materialists who are not yet interested in changing). On the other hand, I want to say enough so that those who are trying to surrender this part of their lives to Christ will be encouraged, and also so that the rest will not be misled by a culture that increasingly is allowing only one side of the discussion to be heard.”

³⁵ Wilson, *Mere Sexuality*, 137.

³⁶ Mario Bergner, *Setting Love in Order* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995)

³⁷ Melinda Selmys, *Sexual Authenticity: An Intimate Reflection on Homosexuality and Catholicism* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2009) and *Sexual Authenticity: More Reflections* (Vulgata, 2013)

³⁸ Rosario Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Crown & Covenant, 2012). And *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ* (Crown and Covenant Publications, [2015] 2016)

³⁹ Peter Ould's writings are archived online at <http://www.peter-ould.net/>.

⁴⁰ Hill, *Washed and Waiting*.

⁴¹ Eve Tushnet, *Gay and Catholic: Accepting My Sexuality, Finding Community, Living My Faith* (Ave Maria Press, 2014).

⁴² Martin Hallett, *Still Learning to Love: A Personal Journey to Wholeness in Christ* (HOW, 2004 revised edition).

⁴³ Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends* (Bloomington, MA: Bethany House Publishers, 2010). The American Psychological Association recently summarized the current understanding of the causes behind homosexuality when they stated: "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" (American Psychological Association, "What causes a person to have a particular sexual orientation," <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/orientation.aspx>.)

⁴⁴ Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 140.

⁴⁵ Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 140.

⁴⁶ Hill, *Washed and Waiting*, 23.

⁴⁷ Glynn Harrison, "Who Am I Today? The Modern Crisis of Identity," *Cambridge Papers: Toward a Biblical Mind*, <http://www.jubilee-centre.org/10178-2/>. Accessed September 13, 2018.

⁴⁸ Romans 3:10, 12

⁴⁹ Galatians 2:16

⁵⁰ Wilson, *Mere Sexuality*, 138.

⁵¹ Revelation 3:20

⁵² Wilson, *Mere Sexuality*, 138.

⁵³ Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*.

⁵⁴ Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent, 2014)

⁵⁵ 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 Hephaestion, and from mythology there is Achilles and Patroclus.

⁵⁶ Harper, *From Shame to Sin*, 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).

⁵⁷ Gordon Hugenberg, "Homosexuality."

⁵⁸ Wright "Interview with Anglican Bishop."

⁵⁹ Hugenberg, "Homosexuality."

⁶⁰ Hugenberg, "Homosexuality."

⁶¹ Hugenberg, "Homosexuality."

⁶² Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 143.

⁶³ Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, 139–40.