

The Future of the Church and Homosexuality

The Bible and Homosexuality

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Well it's been a wonderful weekend at Truth Community Church and I know that many of you have been a part of our conference over the past 2 days, Friday and Saturday, and now concluding this morning on this subject of the Bible and homosexuality and we have gone through 4 messages leading up to this concluding climactic message here this morning. And I realize that many of you were not able to be with us, maybe you heard over the computer or something like that, but I'm not in a position to be able to review everything that we've said. That was almost 5 hours of material and I don't think you want me to do a 5 hour introduction into what I have to say here today although it's tempting to do so. I'm going to resist that temptation and simply bring kind of a concluding capstone to everything that we have said up until this point and today's message is titled "The Future of the Church and Homosexuality" and everything that has been said over the past 2 days informs what I'm going to say here but I want to say a couple of things by way of preface and that while we are particularly focused on the issue of homosexuality because it's the issue of our day in light of recent events that the United States Supreme Court and so forth, really I also want you to understand that everything that I'm about to say today has a very broad application. We wouldn't even have to talk about the issue of homosexuality at all in order for this to be directly relevant and particularly encouraging to you here today because what we're talking about as we go through this is really rooted in the purposes of Christ for the church and the purposes of Jesus Christ for his people are sure, they are good, they are certain and when we belong to Christ, we have a bright hope, a bright future and nothing that can happen in life whether in your individual sorrows or in what happens in the world around us, can ever diminish the gleaming hope that is always in our Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing can take away, not death, not life, not angels, nor principalities, nothing can take away from us the glorious future and the eternal love that God has set upon us in our Lord Jesus Christ.

So whatever's happening to us in life, whether in society or in your individual private life, whatever is happening, there is a sovereign hand of a good God wisely directing your Christian life to accomplish his purpose in order to bless you abundantly in the end. So no matter what happens, no matter how dark the headlines might seem to get, beloved, we always come back to the fact that we are secure in Christ. We are confident in him and therefore we live life from a position of strength and from a position of courage. We are not frightened by circumstances. We are not frightened by hostile men. We do not shrink back from the challenges of life. Instead we, as it were, we wave the banner of

Christ all the more in the light of what's happening and we rally around the flag of the cross and we gather around our hope and we find encouragement to go forth and to be strong and courageous as Scripture calls us to do and that's true generally and it is true specifically on the issue of homosexuality.

Now, for those of you that are visiting and I know that there are many visitors with us here today and I'm certainly glad that you're with us, I want you to know in advance that this is not a typical Sunday sermon what I'm about to do. I normally teach verse by verse. We are going through the book of Ephesians and we normally go through a book verse by verse on Sunday morning. This is a little different because of the nature of our conference; it is a necessary conclusion to a series of messages that have preceded us over the past 2 days. So basically today what we're doing is that I just want to give you a sense of where we go from here as Christians. Where should the church at large go in light of what's happened over the past 2 weeks and the endorsement and the embrace, the legal embrace and the societal embrace of that which the Bible calls sin.

I want to give you a couple of broad categories to think in. First of all, we're going to talk about what we cannot do and then we're going to talk about what we must do. So there is going to be a kind of a two-part fold to this message and there's going to be multiple sub points within each of those broad categories. And it's important for us to think in those kinds of terms, to think about that which is negative in the sense of that which we don't go down this road. Then also to embrace and to understand the positive and say, "Okay, here's what we do follow. This is what we do pursue. This is what we need to go after." And I feel a particular burden to say these things here today because and I'm not going to mention any names but I am not satisfied with the response that has come to this issue over the past couple of weeks from some of the most prominent names in Christianity. I think they are too dark. They are too pessimistic and they are not focused on the right issues. They still want to argue about the Constitution. They are frightened by the thought of persecution. They are not giving the people of God a way to go forward with hope and boldness and a courage that is worthy of our Lord. And to simply be negative and to say, "Oh, this is so bad!" and, "Look at what's been taken away from us!" And, "What about our religious liberty?" and to simply decry the negative aspects of it is not a path forward for the people of God. It is not spiritual leadership to talk in those terms without offering something constructive that people can rally around and go forward on. Now, I believe in the days to come that these men will do better and that we're simply seeing an initial emotional reaction and that they will rise to the occasion and vindicate the honor that their ministries have deserved over the past several decades and they will rise to the challenge, but right now I think that their steps are not all that they could be. So for us here today, for Truth Community Church and for whoever would join in around this message in the days to come in other media, I want to lay forth what I believe is a roadmap, is an agenda for us to embrace and to follow and that is attainable and that we don't have to be discouraged or intimidated by what is happening around us. Scripture has laid all of this out for us very clearly long in advance and let me just say and reiterate one more time: even if you're not engaged on the issue of society's embrace of homosexuality, the challenges that you are facing in your individual life, in your family, in your work situation, these principles apply equally as well there as well.

One of the things that has been impressed upon my own heart in going through this conference is that we don't need a special agenda to respond to the issue of homosexuality. There is not a specific brilliant idea that we need to come and deal with this one issue as if it was any different than any other issue that we face. Beloved, trust God, trust the Scriptures and believe that what we have in Christ and what we have in his word is sufficient for any challenge that we would face and that it is sufficient and we just apply the basic fundamentals of what Scripture says about trusting God and being faithful to him and how we testify to Christ to a lost and dying world. We just keep doing what we've been doing all along. We don't alter our trajectory. The beauty of being anchored in Scripture is that you don't need to come up with anything new as circumstances change and that's what we're going to see here today.

Well, let's talk about what we cannot do and again, just keeping this in the general focus of what we've been talking about over the past couple of days as we address the future of the church and homosexuality, how do Christians, how should the church respond to this situation? Well, let's lay out first of all what we cannot do. First of all, as we've seen from over the past 2 days, first of all, what can we not do? First of all, we cannot approve homosexuality. We cannot approve homosexuality. We cannot bend on this issue as our society has done. We are not to follow the lead of the world into further darkness. To accept homosexuality would be unfaithful to Scripture. It would be unfaithful to Jesus Christ, the one who has saved us from our sins. That's about all that I'm going to say about that because the prior 4 messages have outlined why that is unthinkable for us to do. It is unthinkable for us to affirm people in their sin. To affirm them in darkness. To tell them that God is okay with you being gay and then letting them just meander their way into eternal destruction. It is unfaithful to Christ. It is unfaithful to Scripture. And it is unfaithful to unsaved people to make such a statement. So faithfulness to God and faithfulness to our fellow man forbids us from following the world and giving our stamp of approval to homosexuality.

So we will be faithful and we won't even be unfaithful to homosexuals who need to repent and believe the Gospel. When they tire of their sin, when they find themselves weary of the destructive lifestyle that they have chosen and pursued, when they are without hope and when they are perhaps facing death and saying, "What happens to me when I die? I need someone to save me." Beloved, we as a church, we as Christians, the Scriptures will be there to offer hope, not having to backtrack on a compromise that we made under the influence of popular opinion right now. We will take the long-term view. We will trust God. We will not drink in the spirit of our age. We cannot approve homosexuality no matter what else we do.

Secondly, what we cannot do. Secondly, we cannot stop homosexuality. It's not even what we're called to do. But we can't stop it and I say this to help you have a sense of relaxing a little bit maybe, of not being quite so uptight about what we see happening around us because it's not within our power to stop this surge of sin in our society. As we saw last night or as we saw yesterday, the messages tend to run together in my mind a little bit, first of all, we need to understand that Romans 1 indicates that we are seeing a

judicial act of God upon our society; that he has given our society over to this depraved mindset as a judgment on our prior ungodliness. Romans 1:18 says, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Notice the order: there is an ungodliness that is followed by unrighteousness. And long before our society ever embraced homosexuality, there was a prior abandonment of the fear of God and the authority of Scripture and what we're seeing now is just the outworking of the inevitable consequences of turning away from God. There is no such thing as a righteousness that is apart from a fear of God and the righteousness of Christ.

So we must know the times and be sober in spirit and as we see this unfolding and we are informed in our understanding by what Scripture says about these sorts of things, rather than trying to rouse ourselves up and to stop sinners from sinning, which they do by nature, we need to realize the gravity of what we're facing. The gravity of what we are witnesses to; of seeing God's hand handing over a society unto judgment and we are seeing it play out exactly like Scripture says that we would. Men pursuing unnatural lusts and having that become predominant in our society. Beloved, if God is exercising judgment, we are not going to stop the progress of his hand and what we do instead is we humble ourselves, we tremble before him, we plead for his mercy, we confess that we too are guilty of our own sins even if we're not guilty of those of the society at large. We recognize the times and we're sober in spirit but we don't take upon ourselves an impossible burden of saying, "I must somehow stop this."

Besides, we need to be realistic about the whole situation. The homosexual lobby is not going to go away. The fact that they have this Supreme Court decision in their hand is not their final destination. All this is going to do in human terms is simply embolden them to seek even greater gains and so we're not going to stop that. The mere fact that we preach is not going to stop an entire sinful movement in its tracks and it's not within our power to do that so don't take on to yourself a burden and a responsibility that you cannot possibly fulfill. The homosexual lobby is not going to go away. And beloved, as we think that way, as we understand that, I find it personally very helpful to understand and to realize that homosexuality was present throughout biblical times as well. It's addressed in the Old Testament. It was present very prominent in the culture of the New Testament as well in the surrounding culture. Did that stop the people of God? Did that hinder the advance of the purposes of Christ? Did it keep his church from growing? No. No, quite to the contrary. In the midst of a pagan, depraved culture, the church of Christ was born in the book of Acts and grew and flourished.

So this is not...they do not have a stranglehold on the spirit of God and the movement of what God intends to do. It's helpful for us to realize that what we're seeing is nothing new over the course of the history of man and so while we grieve over what we see, we should not be shocked and we should not think that it's within our meager power to stop this growing snowball that's rolling down the mountain. It just doesn't work that way and rather than thinking that we should do something to try to stop it in political or legal means, we need to realize and humble ourselves and say, "This manifests our weakness. This manifests how much we need to humble ourselves before God and to cry out for him, for help for mercy, for him to act because it's beyond our power." And you know,

I'll tell you, this is just my judgment on the situation: the church of God, the church of Christ, the professing church, let's say it that way, the so-called evangelical church, it's evident that the professing people of God are not yet sufficiently humbled under what has happened because there is not a sufficient humbling and a crying out to God in this, rather we're bemoaning our own personal loss. Bemoaning the circumstances that we find ourselves. Worried about the loss of our rights. And there is not that spirit of crying out to God in the midst of oppression that we've seen from the Psalms in our Tuesday night studies, and a crying out to God and a humbling that says, "I am helpless in this situation." That spirit is not animating the discussions that are about and so there is no reason to think that this is going to get better until the people of God seriously humble themselves under what's happening and cry out for mercy. We're still too convinced of our own strength and ability and we need to abandon that and admit our weakness before God and admit our weakness before the powers that are at work and to find ourselves humbly casting ourselves at his feet. We can't stop it and so while we grieve over it, we're not shocked and we don't try to take on that which is beyond our power to accomplish.

Now thirdly, we said we can't approve homosexuality, we cannot stop it, thirdly, I would say this: we cannot ignore it. That's why we've had this conference this weekend. We cannot ignore it and, frankly, I've had to come around to this position over the past many years. You know, I wanted to ignore it in my ministry. I would have preferred not to speak publicly about this issue because it's such a shameful and dark sin and you would prefer not to even inject it into the minds of people at one level. But this is the world that we live in and even as parents with young children, I'm not saying that you should introduce your children to this at a particularly young age when they are barely old enough to read or write. I'm not saying that but even as young families, we need to understand that this is the world that our children are going to grow up in and we need to be somehow proactive and instructing them in righteousness because the world around us is going to be quick to fill in the vacuum if we don't. We can't ignore it. We ignore it and you ignore it as parents to your own peril. And as a church, just seeing the way that Christians are unsettled by this issue, seeing the way that proponents of homosexuality are perverting and twisting even the Scriptures trying to make them seem like they support the lifestyle that God so evidently condemns, we can't ignore it. We must rise to the occasion. We must meet the challenge of our age and face it and we can't ignore it because the activists are aggressive. They are well organized. They are litigious. They are media savvy as has been evidently displayed to us over the past several years. They have a sympathetic media. They have sympathetic politicians. It is simply part of our world and so we must deal with it. That's why we had this conference.

So we can't approve it. We can't stop it. We can't ignore it. There is one other thing that we can't do as the people of God: we cannot fear it. We cannot be afraid. That is not worthy of Christ and that is not worthy of our God. We cannot fear homosexuality or its advance in society. Why do I say that? Finally we're going to turn to God's word here this morning. As Christians, we don't live from a position of fear at all. That is not the call of God on our lives. Turn to the book of Proverbs if you would, Proverbs 3 and just reminding you of some very basic scriptural truth. Proverbs 3, verses 5 and 6. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own

understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight." If trust is anything, it's a spirit of confidence and an absence of fear and our confidence is rooted not in knowing how political events are going to unfold in the coming years. Confidence and trust is not found in the direction of society. We come back to our God. We come back to Yahweh. We come back to our covenant-keeping, promise-making and promise-keeping God who has said that he will be with us, he will watch over us, he will sustain us, he will keep us. And we rest in that regardless of what happens around us in our circumstances. We trust our God all the way and we do not lean on our own understanding. And someone might say and might object, "But this is really bad. This is uncharted waters for our nation. Don't you realize what has happened to our Constitution? Don't you realize that we're under tyranny? Don't you realize that these people have other agendas planned?" To which I say, "Alright, do you know what? I don't understand, I don't know where all of that is going and it's not even relevant to the point at hand because we trust in the Lord with all of our heart, with an undivided heart, with a purity of commitment and a purity of trust that is worthy of him that says, 'I will not accept fear and in all my ways, even in these ways of the society around me, I will acknowledge his sovereign care over my life and I will trust him and not be afraid.'" This is basic spiritual life, isn't it? This isn't anything new. Nothing has changed in that regard for us.

We cannot live in fear because we know the true and living God. He has commanded us to trust him. He has proven himself worthy of our trust. The outcome for us is going to be good in the end. There is no reason for fear and to be fearful simply because society is degenerating around us is ultimately to be unfaithful to God. Our Lord said, "Be anxious for nothing," in Matthew 6, and he intends us to do that. He intends us to obey him even from the depths of our hearts and to cultivate that trusting, restful spirit that says, "Though the waves are bounding around me, I'm secure in the boat because Christ is with me here." And when we manifest that kind of trust in the midst of the cataclysm that is happening around us morally in our society, we are manifesting the glory of God and not the spirit of our age. So we don't give in to fear just because of what we see happening around us.

Further, beloved, turn to Matthew 16, if you would. In Matthew 16, Jesus is talking to his disciples and he had asked them in verse 13, he asked them, he said, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" In verse 14, they give voice to the incredible confusion that was surrounding the ministry of Christ at the time. They say, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." And Jesus said, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus blessed him and he said, "My Father who is in heaven has revealed this to you." And look at what he says in verse 18, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock," here's what I want you to see, Jesus says, "I will build My church." In the midst of a confused and spiritually misdirected society in the first century and there was a complete misunderstanding of who Christ was around him. In response to one man saying, "Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus in the midst of such seemingly meager reasons for confidence says, "Peter, on the confession that you just made, I will build my church." Christ's power to build his church, to bless his people and

to establish his will is not contingent upon the opposition of men. He has the sovereign ability, the sovereign right and the sovereign intention to build his church and the fact that he will continue to do it in the midst of the society that we find ourselves in today is simply going to be a greater manifestation of his power. The victory is greater when the opponents seem stronger. It is a greater accomplishment to defeat the Green Bay Packers in football than it is to beat a junior high football team. And as men raise up with the impression, with the stamp of approval from the United States Supreme Court and when they rise up with that level of approval and authority, humanly speaking, and Christ deliberately, intentionally, without any diminishment of his ability, continues to build his church, his power and his glory are going to be put on even greater display. Trust God's word. Trust Christ when he says, "I'm going to build my church." And if you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ today, you are included in his intentions. He is not only going to add people unconverted now to his church in the future, he is going to continue to build and sanctify you. He's going to continue to conform you to his image and his ability to do that, the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit is completely undiminished by what we see in the homosexual world around us.

So why would we be afraid? Think about it this way: on what grounds in light of all that Christ has said and all of the promises and commands that he has given, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart. I will build my church. Nothing will separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age," and we just keep multiplying these great promise us is that our Lord has made to us. On what ground would you enter into his presence and say, "I'm aware of all of these promises, Lord, but I am afraid. I don't think that you can pull it off. This is just too big even for you"? Let's hold it up and view it for the lack of faith and the culpable unbelief that that is. Let's just take Jesus at his word, why don't we, and he says he'll be with us. He will build us. He will keep us. He will deliver us safe to heaven. Let's just take Christ at his word and rest and be content in that no matter what happens around us.

That is the kind of confidence and trust of which he is worthy. That is the kind of confidence and trust which is our prerogative as Christians to enjoy. To say just a little bit more: that's our duty as Christians to trust him triumphantly and courageously even when circumstances seem to dictate to the contrary. Beloved, it doesn't take trust, there is no victory of heart in trusting Christ when everything is lined up the way that you want it to be in life. There is no glory in victory if your opponent forfeits, is there? No, no, the victory, the glory, is when you trust in the midst of opposition and come out safe on the other side. The glory is found, the victory is gained, when you trust and you don't know what's going to happen. You don't know the outcome whether homosexuality in society or the sorrows of your own life or the challenges that you currently face. Don't wait to trust God until you see how it comes out because that's not your victory. Your victory is standing up like a man and saying, "I will trust the word of God solely on his own authority no matter what I see happening around me." That's the kind of Christians that we're going to be here at Truth Community. That's the standard. That's what we call ourselves to because that's the call of the word of God on our lives. So we cannot fear. To fear would be to betray our God. To betray our Christ. To doubt his word. To question his providence. And so we can't fear no matter what happens in the days to come. Our God

has the situation fully in hand. His sovereign rule has not been compromised. His directing providence has not been shattered. We are in his hand where we are safe and where we ever love to be. Nothing has changed. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever and so we are not afraid as we look to the future. We can't be.

So that's what we can't do. Let's pivot into what we must do. What is the positive agenda for the church of Jesus Christ in times like this? What is it that we as individual Christians should be thinking about and orienting our life toward in the days to come? I mean, think about all the constitutional things and all the political and legislation and, you know, are they going to sue pastors if we don't do gay marriage? What do we, what do we, what do we do? Beloved, listen: strip all that stuff away, it's just external distraction. What we must do, this is point number 2, it is not complicated, it is not even unique to our day: we simply do what Christ has commanded his disciples to do. It's simple in principle. There is nothing complicated for us to understand. What must we do? I'm going to list out 6 items here. I gave you 4 things that we cannot do, I'm going to give you 6 items now that we must do.

First of all, we humble ourselves. We humble ourselves in light of the world's fascination and approval of homosexuality. We humble ourselves. This is very critical for us and we tried to emphasize this to some extent over the prior 2 days. Beloved, it is easy for us on an individual or on a corporate level, it is easy for us to point out the sins of others and ignore our own but as I've said to you many times over the years and I will hopefully continue to say in the days to come, repentance for you is not a matter of repenting of the sins of society of which you are not personally guilty. That's not the spirit of repentance to say, "Oh, I reject the sins of my society." It's good that you do that but understand that that's not personal repentance. What about your own sins, the things that you are guilty of? Are you turning from sin in your own life? Your own anger? Your own lust? Your own deceit? And that kind of stuff. We have to humble ourselves enough to remember that we examine our own lives even as we are discerning about the society that is around us.

Look over at Matthew 7. We must humble ourselves enough to confess our own sins in the presence of God, to examine ourselves, and to remember our past. Jesus said in Matthew 7:1, a word that I understand is greatly twisted against us by those who have no part in the things of the Lord, but in Matthew 7:1, will not worry about the misinterpretations that are thrown against us and we'll just take it for what the Lord means for his people here. In Matthew 7:1, he says, "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

We humble ourselves enough to examine ourselves and to confess before the Lord and before others, not our individual sins but, you know, "I'm a sinner too. I too need a

Savior. I too needed to be born again." And we examine ourselves and we realize that we ourselves even as Christians fall short of the glory of God. So we don't simply go immediately to the attack on the sins of society, we start with ourselves and we look in the mirror, as it were, and say, "Lord, forgive me. I am the man of unclean lips. I am the man of an unclean heart. I am the man, I'm the woman of deceit. I'm the woman of gossip. And Father, I confess that and I humble myself before you and I ask you to forgive me for my own sins for I have dishonored my Savior with my life today," the past week, the past month, whenever the last time was that you confessed sin in your own life. We humble ourselves and not simply lift ourselves up in pride because we're not guilty of the sins of the society around us. There is plenty of sin in your own life to keep you busy confessing before God how you have fallen short. So we humble ourselves even as believers along that line.

Now along with that, I want you to turn over to Ephesians 5. There are different places that we could have gone to make this point but I just want you to go to this text which we will get to fairly soon in our exposition of Ephesians. Ephesians 5:6, this is incredibly humbling because Paul says, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things," meaning going back to verse 3 where he said "immorality, impurity, greed must not be named among you, no filthiness or silly talk, coarse jesting." Verse 5, "know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." Paul goes on in verse 6 and says, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." Watch where he goes. You don't see this coming. He says, "Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light." He reminds them of their prior unconverted past. He says, "You used to be the child of wrath. You used to be the one who was dominated by the devil. You used to be the one who was dead in trespasses and sins and now you are a child of light simply because God had grace and mercy upon your soul and brought you to Christ in order to deliver you from your sin. Remember your own spiritual past. You formerly were darkness and somebody graciously shared the Gospel with you." Christ exercised power over your soul and saved you and cleansed you from your guilt and forgave all of your sins and adopted you into his family, purchased you out of the slave market of sin and paid the price for your redemption. Don't you remember that? Do you remember what Christ did? Do you remember what your former life was like? Well, remember that lest you become puffed up against the society that is around you. We proclaim the Gospel as forgiven sinners, not those who are righteous in our own merit. We merely extend to unsaved people the same mercy that has already been shown to us and we don't adopt an attitude of superiority. We humble ourselves and realize, "Do you know what? I was a sinner too. I needed grace myself. I still sin in my own life." And we humble ourselves before God and before men.

Now, having done that, what else do we do? Well, secondly, we teach the Bible. We teach the Bible. Go over to Matthew 28. We teach the Bible so that men will know the counsel of God and wherever God gives us opportunity, we go and we declare his word. We declare the counsel of God whether it's over a cup of coffee in a restaurant or whether it's in a conference like this or wherever the Lord opens doors to us, we take the Bible

and we unfold its meaning to men. Matthew 28:18, and there is a very important point wrapped up in this. There are a lot of important points wrapped up in this. But just to remind you of this familiar passage, what is it that we do now? Now that the world has changed around us, what do we do? What did Jesus tell us to do? It's not complicated. He says in verse 18, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." We won't do a full exposition of the passage here, just simply note that Jesus said, "You go and teach. You go into all of the nations with all of their darkness, with all of their idolatry, with all of their sin, with all of their hostility. You go in my name on my authority and you teach what I said." Well, we can do that, right? We've got a Bible. We understand the basic principles of Scripture. We can go and do that. That's attainable. That's something that we can do.

So rather than being distracted off into some kind of political strategy to try to counter the events of the age, as the church, as Christians, we recognize the primacy, the centrality of Scripture in what we do and it is only the Scripture that has any converting power on unsaved men anyway. As I've said many times, you can put up colored lights and you can roll out the fog machines and turn up the music and it's not going to do anything to a hardened heart. What pierces hearts, what converts men, is the converting power of the Scripture whether they are reading it or hearing it proclaimed. That's what the Spirit of God, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. That is our only weapon against what is happening around us and yet it is the all-sufficient weapon in the hands of God. So we'll teach the Bible so that men will know the counsel of God.

Here's the thing, beloved, kind of piggybacking on the thought of no fear, well, there's a positive side to that and there have been times over the past several days that I start to see a little glimpse into the spirit of what I'm about to describe. Turn over to Romans 1, just after the book of Acts. Romans 1. As we teach the Bible in these dark days, what do we expect to happen? What is our anticipation? What do we look for in the midst of this? Romans 1:14, the Apostle Paul said, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." Why? "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." What do we do as we teach the Bible? We don't teach it in fear, we do it with eagerness. We do it with a sense of expectation that God is going to bless the preaching of his word done in faithfulness even in the face of hostility from the world around us. We teach the Bible with an expectation of blessing. We preach as though we are those on attack in enemy territory, knowing that we have the firepower, as it were, forgive the military analogy if it offends you, but we realize that we are going in strength and power and in the power of the word of God. In the power of the Holy Spirit. And we are eager to do this in order to be faithful to God, to display his power and to see his power operating in the hearts of sinners and seeing them turn from sin and believe in Christ. The very first thing that we want to do is teach the word of God in the power of the Spirit, in reliance on the work of God in the hearts of those who hear, with an expectation that we are going to see people turn to Christ even in this dark age. Paul said, "I'm eager," and right after

that he goes into, "Well, the wrath of God is revealed and you see how it is unfolding and all of the wickedness in society." Before he talked about the wrath of God, he said, "I can't wait to preach the Gospel. I can't wait to declare Christ to unsaved men and I expect for God to show his power as we do." So we teach the Bible. We, as it were, are renewed and refreshed in our commitment to do just that, not shrinking away from it in light of what's happened.

So, do we see homosexuality flourishing and growing and gaining greater power? We're just driven back and the waves simply toss us back more on the rock of God's word, on the rock of our Lord Jesus Christ where alone is our refuge, where alone is our power and we preach it, God helping us, without any compromise whatsoever. Declaring the full counsel of God knowing that it is able to sanctify people and build them up in Christ and to bring them to repentance. And so when I'm thinking rightly about it, I could not be happier to be alive today in this society. I couldn't be happier to be a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ right now today in this era in which we live. We should all feel that way about giving testimony to Christ in our circles in this age and realizing that the worth of the soldier is proven in battle, not in times of peace. We'll rise to the occasion. We'll stand firm on the word of God and we'll be confident of what he'll do over time to bless us as we are faithful to him. Like I said last night: to Luther, to Calvin, to Spurgeon, to Martyn Lloyd Jones, battles were given to them in their era. In a sense, while we stand on their shoulders now and their faithfulness lights our way, their teaching informs our understanding of Scripture, we stand on their shoulders but we recognize that God did not give this day, this time in history to them, he gave it to us and he gave it to us so that we would be faithful and that we would vindicate the word of God just like they did in their era. So we embrace it. God has providentially appointed us for exactly this time. Somehow in his wisdom and in ways that we don't understand, he has shaped you and me as Christians for exactly this moment in history. That is glorious. We have an occasion to rise too of our own. Luther rose up against the Catholic Church. We'll be faithful to God in our day whether anyone notices or not. So we'll teach the Bible.

Thirdly, what must we do? We must be gentle before men. We must be gentle before men. Look over at 2 Timothy 2. It's not ours to be abrasive in spirit. Oh, we'll be accused of being abrasive simply because we speak the truth but let there not be truth to an accusation that we were quarrelsome in spirit as we did so. 2 Timothy 2:24, "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will." As we teach the Bible, we're mindful of the spirit that God calls us to handle ourselves in, not in an angry, contentious spirit but in a spirit of kindness, of patience even when we are being wronged and we anticipate being wronged in the days to come. We expect people to misrepresent us, to lie about us, to do bad things to us. And in the midst of all of that, we will adopt the spirit of our Lord who has gone before us, who stood before those who tried him when they spat upon him, when they blindfolded him, when they beat him with their fists, when they thrust the crown of thorns into his head, when they nailed him to the cross and there was an utter lack of a spirit of retaliation in

him. He could say, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." So we recognize our responsibility to be gentle even as our Lord was gentle and gracious to us in our sin and rebellion against him.

Wouldn't it have been awful, Christian, speaking to those of you that know the Lord, wouldn't it have just been awful if in light of your profane rebellion against God, kind of drawing upon my own personal history here, the way that you cursed the name of Christ some of you right here, cursed the name of Christ, wouldn't it be awful if Christ had retaliated in kind against your soul at that time and had struck you down in accordance with the guilt that your sin deserved? And rather than showing you grace, he had exercised justice and judgment against you? Wouldn't that have been just awful? Those of you that drank in false religion and perpetrated it and propagated it and misled others? Wouldn't it have been awful if Christ had not been gentle and merciful to us? What would have become of you? What would have become of me if Christ hadn't been a gracious, merciful Savior? A precious Redeemer and friend? Who would have thought that a Lamb like that could rescue the souls of men.

Well, if we have received grace like that, then it should manifest itself in the way that we go to lost people and express ourselves. We express ourselves with a gentleness and mercy that is tinged by the greater mercy that we received from Christ ourselves. We remember that and so we must be gentle before men and when we think about the realm of homosexuals, I believe that in time God will display the fact that from this moment going forward, there was a harvest for the Gospel of homosexuals waiting to be had. And if that proves to be true as I believe it will, certainly he's not done saving sinners, is he? So he's not done saving homosexuals. When God saves homosexuals in the days to come, the glory of that will be awesome and he will be magnified still more by his grace on those who rebelled. We're gentle before men.

Fourthly, what must we do and especially in light of what we just said? We must be ready to minister to repentant homosexuals. When homosexuals are converted to Christ, we will have to help them establish new life patterns and help them grow in Christ. As babes in Christ, we will have to nourish them and help them along just like, Christian, someone earlier in your life came alongside you in your ignorance and weakness and showed kindness and helped nourish you in Christ. A pastor, a friend, in my case, an elder who came alongside and just spent time with just me. There was no one watching and God bless Maurice Robertson for the way he poured a gentle, instructive spirit into the life of someone who had just come to Christ.

Well, beloved, when a harvest of homosexuals converted to Christ is manifested and some of them come, then what we've received we'll give to them as well and they are going to need a special measure of help. As we have started to see in our families, you know, there is something about the nature of the homosexual life that separates them from their family. That some of them are separating and they just seal off and they stop communicating with their families. Well, when they come to Christ, what's going to happen when those that they thought were their friends abandoned them for that? What's going to happen to them? They are going to have to find in us, in the people of God,

those who are willing to patiently minister to them to work through the outworking of change. To work with them and to be patient with them as they struggle and sometimes fail with the remnants of the temptations of their past life that enslaved them. We're going to have to teach them what it's like to break off relationships. To change their cell phone numbers. To destroy homosexual material in their possession and just in very practical ways say, "This is how you do it."

And in that, we will point them to Ephesians 4. Look there with me. Ephesians 4:22-24. We'll have to take them to this passage and say, "in reference to your former manner of life, you need to lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." To tell them that, "God has given you a new mind in your salvation. He has given you a new nature. Live according to that. Feed that new nature in Scripture, in prayer, in fellowship with God's people and separate yourself from the prior relationships that lead you into sin." For them it won't be easy. For us it may not be easy but we recognize that this is the privilege and opportunity of the church to welcome in new life, new babes and say, "Oh, we have the chance to be the incubator in which their life takes root." And somehow I fear that, not necessarily in our church, but in churches in general, that we must be careful, we must be prepared in advance when this harvest of souls begins to come in that we don't treat them like Jewish Christians tried to treat the Gentile Christians as though they were second-class although they were on the outside there; second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. If Christ saves them, they are going to be equal co-heirs with Christ with us regardless of their prior sin. So we must be prepared to minister to repentant homosexuals.

Fifthly, I'm almost done here. Fifthly, we must brace for persecution and that's okay. We realize that as we stand for Christ, as we teach his word, as we declare homosexuality to be a sin that must be repented of rather than a lifestyle to be embraced, we realize that many will oppose us. We accept that. Scripture tells us in 1 John 3, it says, "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you." So we won't be surprised and we won't resent the trouble that that brings but we will rejoice in what it means.

Look at Matthew 5:10-12. You know, there are so many people saying, "Oh, persecution is coming! It's going to be really bad! It's going to be really bad!" and just whip us up into a sense of fear and then sometimes tag on a request for donations at the end of the fear mongering. Well, what did Jesus say about persecution? Verses 10 through 12 of Matthew 5, he said, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." That word "blessed," it means people like this are a privileged recipient of divine favor. Blessed are those who have been persecuted because you are on the receiving end of the grace of God. Verse 11, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me." "When that happens," Jesus says, "be frightened and go into hiding for they are certain to win the victory over you." Wait, I wasn't looking at the page when I said that. Let's check against here. No, that's not what he said. Look at this in verse 12. He said something completely different. He said, "Rejoice and be glad, for your

reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." If persecution comes to us, then we should be positioned by a prior understanding of Scripture to realize that this is a grace from God, that we don't go into heaven on a gilded carpet when our Lord suffered on Calvary in order to save us. We recognize it is a privilege to share in his sufferings, to be a fellow sufferer with Christ. To identify with the prophets who were slain and persecuted before the days of Christ. To identify with the shed blood of martyrs in the days following the apostles. Sometime if you have it on your shelf, just pick up Fox's "Book of Martyrs" and open it at random and look at the faithful record of men who are forgotten by time now and yet there you read their words of simply wanting to trust Christ and be faithful and say, "If you must take my head, take my head, because I will trust my Christ." Do you see how noble all of this is?

We're being taught, we're starting to be conditioned by some Christian leaders to fear persecution and to be drawn into a sense of fear and concern. Jesus taught us just the exact opposite. He said, "If this comes to you, rejoice and be glad because you are going to be identifying with the people of God. What happened to them happens to you. Realize that you are in the flow of a noble heritage and that's a great privilege to be in." And he says still further, he said, "Your reward in heaven is great if this happens to you. It's out of all manner of proportion that the little bit of suffering that you have here for the sake of Christ today, he multiplies in blessings in the end." He totally reverses the way that we are being said to look at our day and age right now. So while we say, "Okay, this may happen," we say it not in fear, we say, "If it comes, we'll be confident. We'll rejoice. We'll be glad because it will be a signature mark that we do not belong to this world because they do not persecute their own." Why would they? You know, Satan doesn't divide against Satan.

So lastly in all of this, kind of a summary point here, number 6: we take heart. We take heart. We take courage. We stand strong. We model to the world. We model to each other. We model to our children. We model to a future generation yet to be born what it looks like to be spiritual men in a time like this. Jude 24, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." Christ will keep us in this age. Christ will use us in this age. Christ will bless us in this age.

We know what we must not do, we know what we must do and knowing that, we go forward in peace and confidence and unconquerable joy.

Let's bow together prayer.

Father, we thank you that you have raised us up for such a time as this. We thank you for the certain expectation that you will prove yourself faithful to us in such a time as this. We thank you that our Lord Jesus has gone before us in the matter of persecution and suffering and come out safe on the other side, resurrected from the grave and now triumphant at the right hand of God and we walk in his steps. Lord, if you would grant to

us as Philippians says, "To you it has been granted for Christ's sake not only to believe in him but to suffer for his sake," if you grant that to us, Father, we tell you now that we will humbly receive it. We will rejoice in it and we trust you even as we say those things, not knowing what the outward working of it might be. But we don't have to know the outward working, our God, because we know you. We know that you are faithful. We know that you are good to your people, that you are always blessing us no matter what happens. So I pray for these dear brothers and sisters in Christ that are gathered before me today and I pray, Father, that the security and the confidence to which your word points us would be the security and confidence which animates the spirit of their hearts both now and forever more. Amen.

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