

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

Unleashing the Power of the Truth – Part II **Pastor Ty Blackburn** **2 Corinthians 10:3-5** **January 25, 2015**

Please turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 10. This morning I wanted to look at an issue that has been much in the news in recent days, recent years, increasingly so, but recent days especially. Most everyone has heard of Kelvin Cochran, the Atlanta fire chief that was fired because he wrote a book, he's a professing Christian who self-published a book, Who Told You That You Were Naked?, in which he talks about the Scriptures, the teaching of the Bible, and he talks about homosexuality as a sin. He gave that book to a couple of employees of the fire department, and was suspended, and then later fired by Mayor Kasim Reed because he was more concerned about religious freedom, Mayor Reed said. I mean that Mayor Reed was concerned about religious freedom, which is amazing, isn't it? It shows just the backwardness of the way the world thinks. It wasn't okay for him to even entertain the idea as a man in the employ of the City of Atlanta, so he was fired for entertaining these ideas that were discrimination, discriminatory.

A few months back in October, we heard about the City of Houston, where lesbian mayor, Annise Parker, subpoenaed sermons from Houston's 400 city churches. She didn't follow through on it because of the outcry that rose up, but she was going to subpoena city sermons, sermons from those 400 city churches to ensure that hate speech was not being preached from the pulpits of Houston's churches. Hate speech defined by the new way of thinking is to disagree, to maintain that it is sinful to do what the Bible condemns, or forbids—homosexual relationships.

A couple of years ago the Boy Scouts of America reversed their practice, and have allowed homosexuals to now become Scout leaders. It is just a relentless assault upon the psyche of people in America, and the church feels it. There is this pressure to conform from without that is intensifying. The battle lines are being drawn, and it is becoming clear that unless we are willing to soft-pedal our message, to soften what the word of God says, we will be in the crosshairs of increasing numbers of people.

That is exactly what we talked about really a few weeks ago when we talked about ***Do not be conformed to this world...*** The world exerts external pressure to conform you into its mold, but what is the Christian to do? He is to be transformed from within by the renewing of his mind. It is not only pressure from without

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though, it is also pressure from within. Increasingly we're finding people who purport to be evangelical Christians who are trying to argue for the validity of monogamous homosexual relationships. A book that came out in the last year, God and the Gay Christian, by Matthew Vines, God and the Gay Christian, he argues that the Bible, this is in his words:

The Bible does not directly address the issue of same-sex orientation, or the expression of that orientation. While its six references to same-sex behavior are negative, the concept of same-sex behavior in the Bible is sexual excess, not sexual orientation.

This young man seeks to rewrite the Bible to suit his own tastes. In fact, he goes on in this book to make this audacious claim:

It isn't gay Christians who are sinning against God by entering into monogamous, loving relationships, it is the church that is sinning against them by rejecting their intimate relationships.

This is a young man who purports to believe in the Bible, that it is the inspired rule of faith and practice. Well there is a very helpful response to Matthew Vines' book, and I read the response of Al Mohler, and the professors of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who published an e-book, a response to God and the Gay Christian, which was very helpful in framing the questions, and the thought-forms that are being, you know, Satan is trying to peddle his lie always in the most clever way possible, and that book is very helpful in helping you think through it biblically.

So the pressures are there, but we need ourselves to be transformed by the word of God, and then to unleash the transforming power of God's word into this dark world. The folks that are trying to change us are not our enemies. We only have one enemy. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and powers, the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Our battle is with the enemy of our soul, Satan himself, but we're going to see as we look at the passage of Scripture in just a moment, our battle that we fight against him is one in which we fight with the truth. That the way that he holds people in bondage is through the lie, through deception, and that we have the mighty power of God's truth. And this passage that we're going to look at is really just a point of departure because the title of the message is 'Unleashing the Power of the Truth – Part II', concerning homosexuality, and God's view on

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homosexuality. But we're going to start in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, and look at these verses as a starting place to look at this broader topic. Look what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:3:

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 ~ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we bow before Your word, and we acknowledge that, Lord, we need to think your thoughts after you. We are people who, like sheep, we go astray. We don't want the things that we should want, we don't think the things that we should think, we need to be taught by You, by Your Spirit, through Your word. May You, during this time, illuminate the precious word of God, send it forth, and heal us. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

We need ourselves to be transformed by the power of the word of God. When we look around us, we can get very discouraged at the almost avalanche, the feeling of an avalanche of public opinion, and young people that have been brought up in our public schools, that have been taught from the very earliest time that this is just a lifestyle choice. The thinking is so much entrenched against the biblical viewpoint that we are swimming upstream, and it seems hopeless, and yet it is not hopeless because we have the power of God. There are people that we can minister to that need to be delivered. The reality is that though they profess to be happy, pursuing their pleasures, to be free, the Bible tells us they are really prisoners in misery, in chains. That we need to love them enough to speak the truth. Hate speech would be not to tell them the truth. That would be to hate them. God is a God of love, who loves us enough to tell us the truth, and we're responsible when we have opportunities to tell others the truth.

Now, we're going to gather our thoughts around the same two points we had last week, big points. The first is we want to try to *Create a Context for the Truth*, and secondly, to *Speak the Truth*. The first three points under *Create a Context for the Truth* are basically the same as they were last time. We said that when you're going to deliver a message, what God does when He speaks the truth, as He does

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always speak the truth in the context of a relationship. That is, He does something to demonstrate His love before He gives the law. He delivers the Nation of Israel from Egyptian bondage, and then He gives them His covenant. He says, “See how I love you, what I’ve done? I’ve taken you, though you didn’t deserve it. You weren’t seeking Me, I came down, and I brought you to Myself. Now, here is My covenant. Here is the way of truth.”

1) Creating a Context for the Truth:

And so there is an analogy that we should follow. We are called by the Scriptures to speak the truth in love, and so if we want to impact people in our lives, we need to first of all, love them as we speak the truth. How do you love someone when they are disagreeing with you, or coming against you with harshness, anger?

A) Pray:

Well the first thing we need to do to create a context for the truth is to pray, ask God for His blessing, and presence, and help. It is always what we need to do. We’re told to pray without ceasing. Pray and never stop is the idea. And so when we encounter an opportunity to talk with someone about an issue that is particularly difficult, we need to pray.

B) Put Off Pride, Put On Humility:

Secondly, we need to put off pride, and put on humility. When we are talking with someone who does not see things the way we see them, the second thing we need to do after praying is put off pride, and put on humility. We need to remember that the only reason we know differently than they do is because of the grace of God. That but for the grace of God, there would we be. So there is no basis for pride. The true Christian, as he’s walking in the truth, is humble, true humility.

C) Put Off Self-Interest, Put On Love:

And then we need to put off self-interest. Pray, put off pride, put on humility, thirdly, put off self-interest, and put on love. We need again to remember that this person’s lifestyle choice, or this person’s particular opinions are not about us. It is not about that they are offending us, it is about that they are in need, and they are offending God, and they’re in need of being connected to God. It is not about what they are doing to our society. It is not about the fact that our country is headed for

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judgment. That is not the issue when you are dealing with one person right there in front of you. The issue is to put off self-interest, and put on love because if we operate in that we can be very angry at the sinner. It is not our place. “Vengeance is Mine. I will repay,” says the Lord. Our place is to love. So the person is not the enemy, they are, in reality, just being deceived. They are a willing participant in their deception. Yes, they are responsible, yes, but like Jesus prayed for those who were crucifying Him, “Father, forgive them. They know not what they do. They don’t really fully understand. Even though they are willfully sinning against You, and against Me, they don’t fully understand.” What He is saying is, “Satan is operating, and they are of their father, the devil.” So much of what is happening is the reproduction of Satan’s bondage and darkness.

So we put on love. This is a person that needs to be loved and rescued. Rosaria Champagne was a tenured professor of English at Syracuse University. Her specialty was feminist studies. In the 90’s she was on the rise in her circle, in her area of influence—writing about feminist issues. In 1997, *Promise Keepers* came to Syracuse, and Miss Champagne lived with her lesbian lover, and had for a number of years, and thought that her life was exactly what she wanted it to be. She felt like she was living an enlightened life, and she had rejected her upbringing, her Catholic upbringing, and the name of Jesus no longer held anything but contempt for her. When she heard about *Promise Keepers* coming to town, and she had to write an editorial, and so she wrote an Op Ed that appeared in the paper. Basically, the title wasn’t this, she didn’t say the title in the message I listened to, but it was something like this, she referenced it but I couldn’t get the exact title. Something like ‘Please Stop the Stupidity’. *Promise Keepers*, you know, the stupidity of male patriarchy, the stupidity of imposing this belief in God upon others. So she wrote this extended article, and she received a lot of mail. She talks about how she had her hate mail, and she had her fan mail, and every day she would read. The letters were pouring in. She would read and decide if it was fan mail or hate mail. The hate mail she threw in the garbage, the fan mail she kept.

There was one letter she received from a pastor of the Reformed Presbyterian church there in town that she couldn’t file. It didn’t fit clearly into either category. It certainly wasn’t fan mail, and though he disagreed with her, it wasn’t hate mail. There was nothing unkind in what the man said, he challenged her presuppositions in a thoughtful way that caused her to think. It made her angry, but it wasn’t anger at hate, and it puzzled her. She threw it away. She actually decided to throw it into the hate mail, but then later that day she fished it out of the school’s recycling bin, put it back on her desk, and said, “I’m going to keep thinking about it.”

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After a week of it sitting on her desk, and her looking at it a few more times that week, she decided to call this pastor who had included his phone number. She wanted to do research on the errors of Christianity, and to talk about the Bible, and how it messes people up. As an English professor, she would like to study the literature, and she had tried to read the Bible, but found it difficult. She thought, “I would like to talk to this guy. I can do it for my research.” So she called him, and he was very kind to her, and talked with her a little bit on the phone, and invited her to come to dinner, that he and his wife would love to have her to the house for dinner. She came over, they talked to her, she reports in her testimony that she gives now that the only reason she was open to a second-time meeting with him was because the pastor and his wife did not witness to her, or invite her to church that first time. I’m not saying that it is always wrong to do that, there are certain moments where you should obviously witness to the person the first time you see them, yes, and where she was, she was glad that they just loved on her, and talked to her.

Now, the next time, and the time after that, they began to talk to her about the things of God, and what the pastor was doing was getting her into the word. “Let’s talk about the Bible,” and she was asking questions, and he was answering questions. Anyway, a two-year relationship, two years later she shows up in their church on a Sunday morning. A few weeks later she comes to know Jesus Christ as her Savior. Her name today is Rosaria Butterfield, and you can Google her, and look at her testimony online, it’s powerful. She talks about how God began to, through His word, as she read the Bible, she marveled at it, first of all, as an English teacher, at the literary beauty of it. How it had every genre, every genre of literature was in the Bible—poetry, profound philosophy, compelling narrative stories. And so as she read it, she found it more and more compelling, and yet she still was believing it was a bunch of garbage. But the more that she read it, and the more she saw this man and his wife who loved her, the more it began to get a grip of her. Until she finally came to consider, and she talks about, at one of the dinner parties at her home where a transgendered person, who used to be, she didn’t know his background, it was a man who had become a woman surgically, he said to her, “Rosaria, this Bible stuff you are doing is changing you.” She talks about how she fell down in a chair, and was just cut to the heart on that. “I don’t want to change,” but she said, “But what if it is true? What if this really is God’s word?” This person, this woman she called J said, “I used to be a Presbyterian minister, and for 15 years I fought my homosexual desires,” and ironically what that person did, what he did, was bring all of his books, including Calvin’s Institutes, and left them

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on her doorstep, and she began to read them, another thing God was doing until she was converted.

Now she testifies that God's word is true, every bit of it, and this person was in chains and bondage, but has found freedom. That's her testimony. That's what the Bible has told us is always true, but the world is telling us that this is not real, that this is not possible. But what we need to understand, creating a context for the truth means we of all people should be the ones who love the homosexual. We love the sinner and hate the sin. We hate the sin because we love God and we love the sinner. So we create a context for the truth by genuinely caring for these people, asking God to give us love, even as we talk to them. Asking God to give us the ability to see this is a person bearing His image, though they are walking in darkness right now, they bear His image, they are valuable to Him. They have dignity, "Give me the ability to honor them. They are just like me, Lord, apart from Your grace." So create a context for the truth.

2) Speak the Truth:

And then a second point, and this is where we're going to spend most of our time this morning, as we did last week, is *Speak the Truth*. And we're going to talk about three sub-points. We want to speak the truth about homosexuality, then speak the truth about God, and speak the truth about Christ.

A) Speak the Truth about Homosexuality:

First of all, speak the truth about homosexuality. Now, people like Matthew Vines, that I mentioned earlier in the message that wrote the book God and the Gay Christian, basically they have their opinion of what they want to be true, and they come to the Bible, and twist it to make it say what they want it to say. That's what this man does in his book. He actually interacts with six major texts of the Bible that speak about homosexuality, but he twists them, and distorts them. Exactly what Peter described in 2 Peter 3:16 when he says that the untaught, and unstable distort the Scriptures to their own destruction. The word '*distort*' means '*to wrench out, to twist*'. They look at the Bible, they wrench it out, and they twist it to make it what they want it to be, and that is to their own destruction.

But when you look at the Bible, and you just honestly step back from the Bible, and let the Bible speak, it is crystal clear what God has to say about sexuality. There is no doubt. In fact, I mean, one of the things that we ought to do as we look

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at it is start at the beginning. This is something that Matthew Vines does not do. Go to Genesis 1. When you speak the truth about homosexuality, sexuality in general, the very first pages of the Bible God sets before us His design for man. One of the most important things that you can know as a Christian is that you always need to interpret Scripture in context. This is true in reading anything, or interpreting anything—you interpret in context. If you want to really understand what the author means you look at the context, and that is certainly true of God’s word. And God sets down in the very beginning that He is laying the groundwork, and the basis upon which everything else He’s going to say rests. So if you come later to a verse, and you try to take it out of context, you forget, “Wait, look what God has already said.” He is assuming that you remember all that He’s already laid down. Well Genesis 1 and 2 is setting down the context for our understanding of life in general, all areas. We see there that God creates the world in six days, and on the sixth day He creates man. In Verse 26 He says:

Genesis 1:26-27 ~ Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” 27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

So in the very beginning, God creates man in His image, to reflect His likeness, and He creates man in two genders, male and female. And that the picture in Verse 27 is that male and female together are man and form His likeness. Then Verse 28 he says:

Genesis 1:28 ~ God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

After He makes man, in Verse 31 he says:

Genesis 1:31 ~ God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.

“It is exactly the way I wanted it. This is perfect.” That is the climax of a refrain through Genesis 1, God saw what He had made and it was good. God saw what He

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had made and it was good. God saw what He had made and it was good. When He completes man he says, ***God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.*** Then Chapter 2:18, you have this jarring, now what happens in Chapter 2 is God goes back to Day 6 and microscopes in on Day 6, and you see it unfolding, not in the just broad general category of Chapter 1, but in more of like a slow-motion instant replay. Looking at it so that you can see it more carefully what happened. We see that He forms man from the dust of the ground in Verse 7, and breathes into his nostrils the breath of life. He gives man the command in Verse 16:

Genesis 2:16-17 ~ “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; 17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

He had already told man to cultivate the garden, and gives this command, and then Verse 18 you have this jarring statement:

Genesis 2:18 ~ Then the LORD God said, “It is not good...

It was good, it was good, it was good, behold it is very good, it is not good. Now remember we are back into Day 6, man is made male, but not female.

Genesis 2:18 ~ “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.”

So the Lord makes a helper suitable, that is a completer, a counterpart, the one which makes him whole, and the helper suitable He makes is a woman so that He makes man, male and female. Man, male, is incomplete without the female. That is the picture, and it is illustrated in the fact that He then tells them, “Be fruitful and multiply.” Man by himself cannot fulfill the creation mandate to be fruitful and multiply. God has made man male and female to complete one another, and express that relationship even in their physical bodies by becoming one flesh.

Now, this is the Lord laying down the groundwork, and one of the concepts of biblical interpretation we need to understand is that the Doctrine of Progressive Revelation. That is that God teaches us little by little through the Bible, and in the same way, I’ve used the analogy before of if you’re going to learn calculus you have to first learn that two apples and two apples is four apples. You have to learn $2 + 2 = 4$ before you can ever hope to deal with differential equations, right? You

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have to then learn that $4 - 3 = 1$. Then you've got to learn $3 \times 2 = 6$. You've got to learn multiplication, and division, and decimals, fractions, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and it is painful for some of us to think of all these things again, isn't it? Oh no! Bad memories! Then you learn calculus. In the same way, God is teaching us, He's teaching, He gives His word in 1400 B.C., well after the fall, and His dealings with Abraham. You know, 4,000 years after His creation He gives His word, but He's telling us, to people who were in the dark, "This is who I am, this is My plan for your life." So He starts off with the $2 + 2$'s, and the $2 + 2$ is $1 + 1 =$ God's design. One man and one woman is equal to what God has designed. That is His perfection.

So you understand that at the beginning, then when you come to Genesis 19, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, you understand. In fact, what happens is, remember Genesis 3? The fall happens. Man does not submit to the word of God. God said, "I gave one command—don't do this, don't eat from that one tree." Man eats from the tree and everything is ruined, and you see how rapidly man descends into darkness. The fall happens in Genesis 3. In Genesis 4, Cain kills Abel. In Genesis 5, the descendent of Cain boasts about how he's killed more men than Cain did. In Genesis 6, man is embracing evil to the point that God has to send the flood to wipe off the wickedness of the earth, to start over. And then in the rest of Genesis, you see all manner of sexual sin and perversion.

I mean, you have in Genesis itself, we have adultery, prostitution, rape, incest, and homosexuality all in the first book of the Bible. And what God is saying here is, "Look what a mess man is. Look how rapidly he departs from God's design." Genesis 19 is to be understood in that light. In Genesis 18, the Lord appears to Abraham and promises him that He's going to give him a son. He promises the birth of Isaac, and then He tells him, "Let me tell you what I'm about to do. I'm about to judge Sodom and Gomorrah, because the outcry of their wickedness has reached Me. Their wickedness is so great. The moral outcry from their wickedness is so great that I've come down to see what's going on, and to act." The Lord and two angels appear to Abraham as three men, and then the two angels go on to Sodom, and what happens when they get there—remember Abraham's nephew Lot lives there—they go to the city square. Back then you didn't have the Holiday Inn and that kind of thing. You go to the city square, and if someone invites you to stay in their house, you can stay with them, or you just stay in the square. You kind of pitch your tent, your lean-to there, and that's a place that you can stay that should be relatively safe.

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So they're in the city square, and Lot comes and find them, and says, "You've got to come with me. Come with me quickly. Come to my house." Well, they go to his house, and it's not long after they've eaten their meal that there's a loud knocking on the door, and Lot looks out, and there are dozens and dozens of men who have gathered around the house because they want to have relations with these two attractive men. Apparently these angels were handsome men, and they all want to have relations with these two men. Lot encourages them, "Please don't do this wickedness," and they say, "Listen, who are you, you outsider, to come here and judge us? We'll do worse to you than we do to them." The angel reaches out around the door. Lot had closed the door behind him. He reaches around the door, pulls him back in, and the people are trying to get in, and the angels strike them with blindness. And to show the incredible wickedness, what it says there in this chapter is that now that they're all blind, they weary themselves trying to find the door. They still want to carry out their wickedness. You would think if you're blind, if you just got struck blind, "Maybe I need to reevaluate," but they didn't.

So the angels get Lot and his family, and get whoever else will come him, and they take them away and the fire of God falls upon Sodom and Gomorrah, the two wicked cities of the plain. What is God saying there? Look at God's holiness. Look at His righteousness. Look at the way sin and depravity destroy, and turn from it.

You have Leviticus 18:22 and the Mosaic Law that God lays down for His people. Look at the context. Look at Verse 21. It actually relates to what we talked about last week, the sin of abortion.

Leviticus 18:21 ~ You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the Lord.

They would offer their babies to the Canaanite deity Molech. As an offering, they would put them to death in the fires, hoping that the god Molech would bless them. So for the parents' own blessing, they would sacrifice the child. That's what he says in Verse 21. Then Verse 22:

Leviticus 18:22 ~ You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.

It couldn't have been more clear. In fact, look at the next verse:

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Leviticus 18:23 ~ Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion.

There's nothing new under the sun. It's not like we're so sophisticated as people would have you believe today, that we understand and have these orientations that they never had before. That's not true. That's a lie. Sin has always been with us, and if you give yourself to it, you will find yourself controlled by it. And the reality is this sin is just like every other sin. All of us, apart from the grace of God, we are hopeless and helpless.

Leviticus 20:13 ~ If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.

In the Old Covenant, as Israel was a theocracy, God was to rule them by His law, and there were many capital offenses that are no longer capital offenses. This was one and adultery was also one. Murder, of course, was a capital offense, but there were a number of things for which you died. It shows the horror of this kind of sin, the damage that it does to the person and to society.

Now let's go to the New Testament. Let's go first to 1 Timothy 1:10. I remember in college (I was at a Baptist College) my psychology class, the first problem, psychology class, and my psychology professor made the statement that the Old Testament condemns homosexuality, but the New Testament does not. Look at this, at 1 Timothy 1:10. Let's start with Verse 8:

1 Timothy 1:8 ~ But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9 realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who...

And then he gives a list of sins.

...who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers 10 and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching,...

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It's very clear. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul here gives a warning that is well heeded by everyone who makes a profession to godliness. He's writing to folks who claim to be Christians, and he's reminding them, "Listen, if you're truly a Christian, you should be putting off sin and putting on righteousness." That is, you may still struggle with sin, and the reality is that we will struggle with sin, and the reality is that no matter what your particular bent toward the sins that you struggle with, you will probably wrestle with them all the days of your life, but by God's grace, you should be making progress and growth in holiness. There will be places where you put things so far behind, that it seems as though you can't even recognize yourself from where you were before, if you keep walking in holiness and righteousness with the power of God's word, being transformed by the renewing of your mind. But he's reminding them that some people want to continue to live in their sin, though they claim to be saved. Look what he says in Verse 9:

1 Corinthians 6:9 ~ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

That's the message of the Gospel, what we were, what we are, and what we're becoming. But he uses the terms effeminate and homosexual. Paul actually coins the term homosexual there in the Greek. From what we can tell, he's the first one to use this term. He puts two Greek words together, which basically means *a man and bed*, to go to bed with a man, and it appears that he's basically using Leviticus 18 and 20, because those same two words are used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. He's bringing those two Greek words about a man lying with another man, and he coins the phrase *homosexual* out of that, and then we find it in subsequent Greek literature. But when Paul says effeminate, he's speaking of the passive party in a homosexual relationship (the word means soft in its root), or homosexual the active party in the homosexual relationship. He says both are condemned.

Now, the last passage is Romans 1. You have this picture of depravity in Romans 1:18-32, where the apostle Paul begins by talking about it, and he's basically articulating his Gospel. That's what Romans is about is the Gospel of God. Paul has just said in Verse 16, "I'm not ashamed of the Gospel." Just a few verses back

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he said, “I want to preach it to you,” and basically what Romans is, is the proclamation of his Gospel. But the good news of God, the way of salvation starts with the bad news. And so in Romans 1:18, his good news begins with the bad news.

Romans 1:18 ~ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,...

God’s wrath is revealed against men who are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. That’s exactly what I was talking about earlier with what Matthew Vines is doing. He’s suppressing the truth, holding it down in his unrighteousness. And we all can do this to justify our sin. Whatever it is, we can suppress the truth, and our own guilt sometimes will lead us to want to do that. He goes on to say:

Romans 1:19 ~ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

This is basically a portrait of every single person apart from God. Look what he says next in Verse 21:

Romans 1:21 ~ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

They knew God, they knew that God had made Himself known to them in their hearts, they see God all around them in creation, they have a sense of morality in their hearts, and they deny that. They don’t worship Him or give thanks. They turn away from Him, and by turning away from Him, they become futile in their speculations. The word here is *reasonings*. They begin to think unbiblically about life. Remember 2 Corinthians 10 we looked at earlier, where it said we destroy strongholds, we demolish strongholds, and we demolish speculations? The idea is

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that the human mind apart from God can reason itself into anything, and the human heart can desire anything. That's the reality, and if you turn away from God, your mind will think in more and more darkened ways, and your heart will love more and more darkened things. Look what he says after:

Romans 1:24 ~ Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

God gives them over to greater sexual lust.

Romans 1:25 ~ For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Now in Verses 26 and 27, the downgrade continues:

Romans 1:26 ~ For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

That could not be more clear. What happens is homosexual sin is part of the downgrade that happens when you turn away from God, and when a society turns away from God. You basically see what happens when you continue to resist God individually, and then He gives you over to degrading passions starting out as heterosexual impurities, and then if you continue to turn away from Him, He gives you over to homosexual passions, and if you continue to turn away from Him, Verse 28, God gives you over to a depraved mind to do those things which are not proper:

Romans 1:28 ~ And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,...

And then he goes in Verses 29 to 32 to describe all manner of wickedness that comes. It's clear that God shows that homosexuality is not a valid lifestyle choice for a Christian. It's not a fixed orientation. That's what people would have you

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think today is that it's something they can't change. "I was born this way." Some people believe they were born this way. Someone says, "Ever since I was a little boy, I wanted to play with dolls and I wanted to wear girls clothes." These are realities that people describe, but the fact that you have a desire in your heart does not make any behavior right. This is what's happening is people believe because they have these desires, they must fulfill them. "This is who I am." But the Bible's picture is no. The Bible's picture is yeah, you're a human being. Surprise, surprise, you have ungodly desires, and if you acted on all your ungodly desires, the world would be a wreck. Your world will be a wreck.

I mean, you could say, "I'm just angry. I just yell," like I'm kind of yelling right now, but in sin we can yell, can't we? "I just yell." So you terrify your children. You make your wife anxious and nervous. She's really having to wrestle before the Lord with anxiety about keeping you happy all the time. "Yeah, that's just the way I am. I just can't change." No, God says you can. God says you're accountable. You say, "Well, it's genetic." Well, first of all, listen. There's a lot of stuff happening in the study, the human genome project. They're basically saying things now like you can change your genes. I think that may be true. I've always thought that even if it's genetic, it doesn't justify it. You may be genetically disposed toward some sin. I'm genetically disposed toward another. But in Adam, we're all genetically disposed to perversion, and sin, and unrighteousness, and God says, "No, don't do it."

Are you going to live by what you want, or are you going to follow God? How stupid it is for us to live by what we want, and God's word is so clear on this. "Follow your heart," the world says. "To thine own self be true." Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" You want to follow your own heart, your own desires? No, you don't. You want to follow your own thinking, your own reasoning?

One of the proverbs that's repeated twice in Proverbs is in 14:12 and 16:25. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death." That's the reality, and in that sense, this sin of homosexuality is absolutely no different than every other sin. You pick your poison. That's why we shouldn't be condemning. If you don't struggle with that sin, you shouldn't condemn someone else that does. You struggle with other things. The ground is level at the foot of the cross, and it should be level, because we are all filthy sinners that need a Savior.

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This is something I think that the church ironically has struggled with, and it's something that in the reading that I've done in the last few years, and particularly recently, that we're trying to do better at is realize that there is no doubt that we have people in our congregation that have struggled with these things or may still be struggling with these things.

Now, you can't live an ungodly lifestyle, an unrepentant lifestyle, and say that you're a Christian. That's what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 6. If you want to live a life of adultery, and you're not going to repent of that and change, and work at changing from that, you can't possibly know Christ. And if you want to live a life of unrepentant homosexuality, then you can't possibly know Christ. There is no such thing as the gay Christian the way Matthew Vines would posit it.

Now, there are Christians who struggle with homosexuality, because every Christian struggles with lust. The apostle Paul says in Romans 7:18, he's speaking for us as believers, "I know that in my flesh dwelleth no good thing." So we need to be a place where not only are we reaching out and loving the people in darkness and inviting them in, but when they come in, we're willing to walk with them and help them, because we're all sinners in need of grace, in need of help, and that's why the message that we have, we have the Gospel. It's not only the truth about homosexuality, but it's the truth about God that we need to give them. The truth about God is He is holy. He really is the one who has made all things. He's the one who made us, and what He says about us settles it. If He says He wants it this way, then it is that way. Doesn't He know best? He's the designer. Even if you feel like you want to go a certain way, if your feelings are leading you that way, and your thinking is leading you that way, and God's word says this other way is the way to life, which way are you going to go? I pray you'll go the way that God says.

Not only His holiness, but His goodness—the Scripture makes clear that God is good. I mean, think about this. When He makes His initial relationship with man, He gives him one command. "Don't eat from that one tree." This is the heart of God toward man. He's not a God who wants to forbid things that we need. Think about that. The whole world was wide open. You could run as far as you wanted to in any direction. There was only one tree. This one fence was right there. Don't you sometimes feel like, and this is what Satan basically does, that he tells you that God is a cosmic killjoy, that God is holding you back, that God doesn't want you to be happy? But look at God in Genesis 3. He puts the fence around only one place, one tree. "Enjoy the bounty of My goodness." That's the heart of God.

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Now, when sin enters the world, there has to be a lot more fences, because our hearts are perverted. Our hearts are a mess, and we don't know it, and we need protection. So God then puts more and more fences up, saying, "No, you can't go here. No, you can't go here." But the heart behind it is the same. Why did He put the fence up there in the first place? It's because that is the path to death. Everything else is the path to life. "That one spot is the path to death. Stay away from that." Was He right or wrong? He was right.

So today when He says, "Stay away from this," what is He saying? It may feel like life, but it's death. God is good. His Commandments are not burdensome. They're for our life, and so we believe that He's good. I can understand that you feel like this orientation is something that you can't change. Jesus Christ can change it, and you can change. That's the good news. We all as Christians ought to be able to tell stories about what we used to be and what we now are.

The truth about Christ, I want to close by looking at Titus 2:11-14. Homosexuality, the truth about that is it is not a fixed orientation. It's a choice, and it's a sinful choice. The truth about God is He's holy, but He's also incredibly good, abounding in loving-kindness. He loves sinners. He hates sin, but He loves sinners who will repent and turn to Him.

Titus 2:11 ~ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires...

How are you to live? You're to deny ungodliness and worldly desires. You don't live by your desires, not if you're a Christian. You've been born again, and now your charge is Jesus bought you, He came into the world to bring salvation to help you change:

...and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

He came to redeem us from every lawless deed, to buy us out of slavery. That's what the word redeemed means, to pay the redemption price so that you can be no longer in chains, but free. And He does that so that you and I can learn how in walking with Him, to more and more deny ungodliness and worldly desires, and to

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more and more live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age. It's an ongoing process. You get saved when He gives you a new heart and you look to Christ. When you cry out like Psalm 107 said, when you realize you're in misery and chains, and you feel like you can't be free, that's good news that you know you can't be free, because you have to have someone else set you free, and Jesus Christ is His Name. He will send forth His Word. The Word of God is Christ, and He will heal you. He will break the chains. He will shatter gates of iron, break bands of bronze, and He will start to sanctify you. But when the real issue comes, are you willing to submit to Him and humble yourself before Him?

There's an interesting passage in Judges that I want to talk about just for a moment in closing. In Judges 19, you have an eerie resonance with Genesis 19. Genesis 19 was the story of Sodom. Judges 19 is a story basically of a Levite, that is, one of the priestly casts in Israel, who is going after his concubine who has run away from him. He finds her, and he's taking her back home, and he's on the way back with his servant and his concubine, and he wants to stop for the night. The servant suggests, "Hey, why don't we stop in this Jebusite city. It's like a good place to stop," and the Levite says, "No, we're not going to stop among foreigners. We're going to go to our people, the people of God," and so they go on ahead to Gibeah to a town of Benjamin. They go into the city square. There an old man sees them in the city square and says, "Please come to my house. Come to my house." They go to his house, and Benjamites, that is, people from the nation of Israel, the people of God, the men surround the house and say, "Send out that man. We want to have relations with him." It's the same exact thing. But you know, there's a refrain in Judges at the end of Judges. The whole purpose of the book of Judges is summed up in this refrain, Judges 19:1 that starts that story about what happened. It begins this way: "In those days, there was no king in Israel," and then it talks about what happened. And that is echoed by a previous time it said it in Judges 17:6. It says:

Judges 17:6 ~ In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.

In Judges 21:25 the book ends:

Judges 21:25 ~ In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

The problem is that when you do what is right in your own eyes, you are headed for destruction. What you and I need is a King, and that's the message of Judges.

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You don't continue living and doing what's right in your own eyes. You submit to the King. He breaks your bonds, He sets you free, and He leads you in paths of righteousness for His Name's sake. He brings you into His body and surrounds you with other people who also formerly were in bondage and who are going to help each other to grow in holiness. May God help us see opportunities to share the good news of the King who will set free those in bondage, call people to repentance, and see them come to faith in Christ.

We have the message that people desperately need to hear, and the reality is they are, if they're walking according to the ways of the world, they are in misery in chains. Even if they don't realize it, they will soon. And in their hearts, when they go to bed at night, before they drift off to sleep, when they wake up in the morning, they know they're in misery. Jesus Christ is the answer.

Let's go to Him in prayer...

Our Father, we thank You for the wonder of Your truth, the clarity of Your word. We thank You that it speaks to every issue in life. We pray that You would help us to be people who walk in Your truth with such focus that we do think Your thoughts after You, that we're not conformed by the ways of thinking, but we're transformed by the renewing our mind, and that we would be people who are filled with the joy of such a glorious Savior that takes those who though their sins are as scarlet, He makes us white as snow. You're a God who gives beauty for ashes, a God who promises that You will restore the years the locusts have eaten. No matter how helpless we are, Lord, Jesus is able. Jesus is able. May He be glorified in the lives of more and more people who are set free by the power of His blood. We pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

"Unleashing the Power of the Truth – Part II"

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