



The Ten Commandments

(38) The Seventh Commandment

(5) Homosexuality

Exodus 20:14

1 Corinthians 6:9-20

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This is the 5th sermon on the Seven Commandment. The Seventh Commandment is “You Shall Not Commit Adultery.” The Seventh Commandment is about all of life from the perspective of the fact that we are sexual beings. And our topic today is homosexuality.

Obviously this is an important subject in our time. It is a prominent subject in our society. The world is intent on normalizing homosexuality. Huge sections of the so-called church are tripping over themselves to keep in step with the world rather than keeping in step with the Spirit. We must be clear about what the Bible teaches. We must call sin what the Bible calls sin. We must do that with an attitude of humility and love rather than superiority and hate. So there are a number of issues that we need to consider to help us to navigate the current environment in a way that is profoundly and thoroughly shaped and informed by the word of God.

There are three areas that we will consider in connection with the topic of homosexuality this evening. First we will see how the Bible unambiguously teaches that same-sex sex is sin. Second we will consider the idea of sexual orientation in the light of Biblical teaching. Third we will consider the gospel and its relevance to homosexuality. In order to cover these subjects we will have to draw on quite a number of passages of Scripture.

So first, I want to proclaim the biblical teaching that homosexual sex is sin. This is part of the broader biblical teaching that the only legitimate

place for sexual activity is between one man and one woman who are united for life in a marriage relationship. Homosexual practice is one of a number of sinful expressions of sexual activity. It is not the only sinful sexual activity. Heterosexual sex outside of marriage is also sinful. But homosexual activity is one of the ways of breaking the Seventh Commandment.

Let's have a quick look at the main texts. Leviticus 18:22 says, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination." There are a number of similar texts in the Old Testament laws. I will not read of all of them. In the New Testament there is Romans 1:18-32 in which Paul describes the judgment of God upon those who suppress the truth about his existence and instead worship the creature rather than the Creator. In that context Paul writes in verses 26-28, "For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done." (Romans 1:26-28)

Then you have a number of lists in the New Testament of the kind of people who will not inherit the kingdom of God and included in two of these lists are "men who practice homosexuality." (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:9-11).

Now there are those who claim to be Christians who have interpretations of these passages which end up gutting them of their clear and unambiguous meaning. One of the approaches is to say that these passages refer to homosexual activity that is associated with pagan worship practices and not homosexual activity in a committed relationship. The problem with that approach is that there is no hint in any of these texts that anything other than all homosexual sex is intended.

This kind of interpretation is a clear example of being conformed to the thinking of the world and trying to conform the Bible to the world as well. This kind of approach to Scripture by professing Christians is a

serious denial of the authority of the word of God and comes under the same condemnation that Jesus pronounced upon the Pharisees when he said in Matthew 15:6, “So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.”

Another approach is a way of interpreting the Bible that sees it as a part of an evolving revelation of the mind of God and sees that evolution as continuing to happen after the close of the canon. This approach takes certain principles of the Bible and works out the implications of them in the light of historical circumstances and insights with the result that what is appreciated by the culture is kept, such as a vague affirmation of love and what is not acceptable to the culture is denied and attributed to the cultural blindness of the biblical authors. And so in connection with homosexuality, it is claimed that the biblical authors did not understand that some people are born wired with a homosexual orientation. It is part of who they are in their very nature. And so it is cruel and oppressive to deny to them the satisfaction of their natural desires. So some professing Christians legitimate homosexuality by claiming that God’s revelation continues beyond the Bible and it continues to reveal his will in the light of human discoveries.

What we need to understand is that these approaches are a fundamental denial of the authority of Scripture as the word of God. All the approaches to Scripture that seek to legitimize homosexual behavior as acceptable to God are a denial of what Scripture claims for itself – to be the authoritative Word of the living God. When Jesus said, “It is written” he meant that what was written in Scripture is the final authority. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16 that “All Scripture is breathed out by God.....” And if all Scripture is breathed out by God, it all comes with God’s authority.

The fact of the matter is that the truth of Scripture is offensive to natural man. Paul in Romans 1 wrote that those who are not saved by the gospel, “by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” One of the fundamental results of the renewing work of the Holy Spirit is submission to the truth of the Word of God. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians he said, “when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it

really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

To contradict the word of God is a frightening thing. To call good what God calls evil is astonishingly presumptuous and the height of man-centered arrogance. And it is the opposite of love from a biblical perspective because it encourages people who go on with activities that place them under the wrath of God, assuring them that those activities are consistent with being in God’s favor. It is the opposite of love to encourage activities of which the Bible says that those who continue in them shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

The gospel is the only ultimate good news and the gospel includes a call to repentance. Jesus taught in Luke 13:3, “[U]nless you repent, you will ... perish.” To tell people that they do not have to repent of what God calls sin is to facilitate their perishing. That is not love. Love and the truth of God’s word cannot be divorced.

Now this is not only true concerning homosexuality. It is true for every sin. It is true for any approach to the Bible and the Christian life that does not take all of the Bible seriously and which proclaims, “Peace, peace when there is no peace.” (Jeremiah 6:14) The call to repentance is serious business. The calling of the Christian life is a high calling. Paul teaches us, for instance, that if we give away all that we have and if we give up our bodies to be burned, but do not have love – we gain nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Jesus says that if we do not deny ourselves and take up our cross we cannot be his disciples. He says if we do not confess him before men he will not confess us before his Father in heaven. The biblical claim is that living in sin is incompatible with being right with God and those who deny the biblical teaching that homosexual behaviour is sinful are facilitating the eternal condemnation of those who continue in that sin.

So the Bible clearly and unambiguously teaches that homosexual sex is sin and you cannot be a faithful and loving Christian by denying that fact. We must be gentle and loving in our interactions with all people, but that never means denying anything that the Bible teaches.

Next I want to deal with the idea of sexual orientation and the language that is used to speak of homosexuality in our society. The point that I will make is that it is not biblical language and that the current terminology carries with it assumptions that are contrary to the Bible and ultimately condemn people to bondage to this form of sinfulness.

The term “homosexual” was coined in Germany in the 19th century by social reformers who were then already seeking to normalize homosexual behaviour. The term “sexual orientation” is rooted in the teaching of Sigmund Freud. Here is how Rosaria Butterfield describes the significance of this. “The concept of sexual orientation was first used by Freud, and its effect, if not intent, was to radically resituate sexuality from its biblical/creational context to something completely new: the foundational drive that determines and defines human identity. Nothing short of personhood was at stake. By defining humanity according to sexual desires and segregating it according to its gendered object, Freud was – intentionally or not – suppressing the biblical category of being made in God’s image, male and female, and replacing it with the psychoanalytic category of sexual identity” (*Openness Unhindered*, loc. 1667).

So the terminology of sexual orientation which defines people as either heterosexual or homosexual or bisexual is an example of unbiblical ideas infiltrating the whole of society including the church in ways that are below the radar. The Bible does not define people according to the objects of their sexual desires. And to do so is to create categories that negate biblical categories. The Bible does not describe people as being heterosexual or homosexual. When it speaks of homosexuality it speaks in terms of homosexual activity. So Leviticus 18 speaks of lying “with a male as with a woman.” Romans 1 speaks of women exchanging “natural relations for those that are contrary to nature.” 1 Corinthians 6 speaks of “men who practice homosexuality.”

The Bible describes actions when referring to homosexuality. It does not define people according to their sexual desires. But that is what the language of sexual orientation does. A person is either a homosexual or a heterosexual. That is what they are according to this language. Their sexual orientation defines them. And that kind of language is rooted in

all kinds of secular psychological assumptions that are contrary to the biblical teaching about human personhood and personal identity. And its purpose is to normalize homosexuality.

How does the Bible refer to human beings? We are made in the image of God. That is what defines us. We are made by God and we are made for a relationship with God. Our God-relatedness is what defines us. The next defining category is “sinner.” After the fall we are God-related beings who have become sinners. The term sinner, no matter how it is expressed, is a term of God relatedness. We are sinners in relation to God. And then for Christians our relationship to Jesus is what defines us. We are in Christ. We are followers of Christ. In Christ we are God’s children. This is the language that the Bible uses to define us. So Paul can write, instance, in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come.” So for a Christian to think of himself or herself as a homosexual – even a celibate homosexual is to define himself in a way that the Bible never does and so he or she is thinking of his or her personal identity in a none-biblical way.

If we think of homosexuality in the light of biblical categories, we come to a very different place than if we think of homosexuality as something that defines a person. Human beings are created by God as either males or females. Males and females were designed by God to be sexually attracted to the opposite sex and for sexual activity to take place only within the marriage between a man and a woman. The same sex, sexual attraction is the result of sin. It is rooted in the fact that we are fallen sinful creatures. And it is one of all kinds of ways that all human beings are broken by sin and have disordered desires.

The theological term for this is total depravity. Total depravity is something that we all share. It is part of what the Bible means when it defines us as sinners. The Reformation Study Bible in an article on Original Sin and Total Depravity says, “Scripture diagnoses sin as a universal deformity of human nature, found at every point in every person.” Jeremiah 17:9 is a key verse, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” The Bible also uses the term “flesh” to refer to our sinful nature. So Galatians 5:17 says

of Christians, “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for those are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

So same-sex sexual desires are desires of the flesh. They do not define us. The biblical concept that defines us in our brokenness is “sinner” and sexual attraction for a person of the same sex is one of the many different ways that sinners have sinful desires. This is very important for our self-understanding, our self-concept. It means that homosexual desire is not a natural morally irrelevant desire. It is a desire that results from the sinful nature that we all share as human beings. And we all have sinful and disordered desires. People who are not sexually attracted to people of the same sex have other sinful desires including other sinful sexual desires. The prevalence of heterosexual sexual sins shows that homosexuality is just one form of the sinful deformity of our human nature.

And there may even be a genetic component to this. The jury is still out on whether there is a genetic component to homosexual desire, but whether there is or not is not a threat to the biblical teaching. Our whole nature is corrupted including our genetics. Some of us are genetically disposed to sin in one way. Some are genetically disposed to sin in other ways. Our genetic dispositions are never an excuse for sin. The biblical teaching of total depravity means that every part of our being, our minds, our wills, our hearts, and our bodies, including how we are wired are all affected by sin.

Now we move to the good news and believe it or not, the biblical analysis is part of the good news. There is no good news in the language of sexual orientation. There is no good news if homosexuality is just another legitimate form of being a human being. All that does is confirm us in the bondage of sin. But there is good news in the biblical description of human beings and the biblical diagnosis of our sins and our sinfulness because the message of the Bible is about being delivered from our sins and our sinfulness.

Listen again to 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men

who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9–11)

“Such were some of you.” That is the good-news. The good news inherent in the Scriptural diagnosis of our sinful condition is that salvation in Jesus Christ is designed for sinners of all kinds. Some of us are tempted by the love of money, or status or comfort. Some of us are tempted by lusting after people of the opposite sex to whom we are not married. And some of us are tempted by same sex desires. The good news of the gospel is for all of us. The power of God in the gospel is sufficient for every sin and all sin. There is forgiveness for sinful actions and sinful thoughts and sinful inclinations. And there is deliverance from the bondage and power of sin. Paul says, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

Now this does not mean that the saved will experience the fullness of their salvation in this life. There are Christians with same-sex attractions who are delivered from them during this life. But there are also Christians who are not delivered from those attractions in this life. It is possible to be a Christian and remain celibate and struggle with same sex attraction his whole life. God does not promise that we are completely renewed during this life. But the renewal will begin in true believers so that they are loving God’s law and seeking to live by it. They may even fall into sin, as we all do, but if they are true believers they will not live in sin.

Now for someone who has same sex attraction and believes in Jesus and is being renewed by the Holy Spirit, he will be willing to live a celibate life as part of his obedience to Christ and as part of his having the law of God written on his heart. That does not mean that he will never fall, but it does mean that he will love God and his law, and he will seek to live his life according to it. That may well be very difficult. But God does not promise us a life without difficulty. He does not promise us a life without temptation and struggle. I already quoted Galatians

5:17 which says, “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

That struggle belongs to Christian experience as long as we are in this life. Some experience it in one way. Some experience it in another way, but we all experience it. It is not for nothing that Paul uses the imagery of warfare to describe the Christian life. In 1 Timothy 6:12 he writes, “Fight the good fight of faith....” This is the nature of the Christian life for everyone.

Now this is a live issue in our day and age. Perhaps it has always been, but it certainly is today. Probably most of us know of people who are attracted sexually to members of the same sex. Probably most of us know of people who have left the church in order to live engage freely in homosexual activity. There may be people among us who are sexually attracted to members of their own sex and not to members of the opposite sex.

If there is one or more among us are tempted in this way, I urge you to think about yourself and your situation in the light of the word of God and in the light of the good news of the gospel. If you conform your thinking to the ways of the world, you are heading for disaster. The world will affirm you. The world will tell you that that is who you are and you have to be yourself in order to have a satisfying life, but the world is wrong – tragically and destructively wrong.

We are not defined by our desires. We are made by God and for God. The way to life and blessedness is the way of salvation in Jesus Christ and the way of being renewed in the image of Christ. That involves dying to self. It involves that for all of us, no matter what our particular struggles and inclinations are. Just giving into our desires is the way of death. One of the great themes of the New Testament is that in Christ it is possible to live a life that is pleasing to God – not perfectly in this life, but nevertheless really. The Bible does not hide the fact that this is sometimes very hard. But it insists that the Christian life is the life of blessedness and true well-being. There is no better way to live than the life that is the result of salvation in Christ – the life of submission to God

– the life of love and service – the life of putting God’s will before our own.

The most important thing about us is not our sexual desires, but our relatedness to God. We are made by God for God. We are made in the image of God. We were made for fellowship with God and to fulfill our humanity in service to God. And salvation is all about restoring us to God and the life of living for God. Jesus gave his life so that we might be delivered from sin – its curse and its bondage. Sin is the great enemy of our souls. Sin promises pleasure – but the pleasures are fleeting and the costs of infinite and eternal. Sin and death go together. Sin and destruction go together.

And for those of us who are not tempted by this particular sin, we are just as broken – just as disordered in our desires. We are just twisted in different ways. We need to be humble. We need to be gentle. We need to be loving. Also in our language. Also in our attitude towards this whole issue. It’s hard in every age. But it’s especially hard in the current climate, in which every possible way is being pursued to affirm homosexuality. We must stand firm on the truth of God’s word. We must call sin what the Bible calls sin. But we must seek to express ourselves in ways that reflect God’s call to us to be humble and loving and gentle.

To speak the truth in love is a challenge. But that must be our goal. The world accuses us of hate and bigotry and intolerance. We cannot escape those labels because of the way that they are defined. It uses the same language for the Bible and thus for God himself. We must seek to be like Jesus who never compromised on the truth, but who was known for his care for those who were considered unclean by the religious establishment. We must resist any tendency to despise others and to show love as the Bible calls us to love.

Let me close with a couple of verses from 1 Peter 2, verses 11-12, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:11–12)