



G O D . S E X U A L I T Y . H U M A N V A L U E .

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God, Sexuality, & Human Value – Part 1: God and Sexuality – Mark 1:15; Genesis 1:27; 2:24 – 09.15.19

Main idea: God is the best explanation for why human sexuality has meaning.

Part 1: A Christian Case for Sexuality

1) The emotional and sensitive nature of the topic.

I want to welcome everyone this morning to the first message in our series, “God, Sexuality, & Human Value,” as we seek answers from God’s Word on some of the most pressing issues of our time. In this series, we’ll address...

- What does God’s Word teach about human sexuality, gender, and homosexuality? Today, we’ll specifically look at the same-sex issue.
- What does the Bible teach on human value? Do all persons have intrinsic value? If we believe that all persons have intrinsic and equal value, then where does that value come from? Which worldview provides a case for our deeply held convictions that all people have value?
- Then, how does God’s Word lead us to think about abortion and the treatment of others who cannot help themselves or do anything for us in return?
- What does God’s Word have to say, if anything, to those of us who struggle with either sexual desires that we wish we did not have, or who have had or encouraged our wife or girlfriend to have an abortion? Is there a way out of constantly spinning our wheels in our relationship with God because of past shame and regret?
- What I believe we will see is that Christianity has incredible moral clarity to help us understand what we *see and feel* in the world today. Beyond this, I believe with everything that I am that Jesus Christ offers *good news* to those of us who are burdened and broken.
- We’re all aware that this is a very sensitive, complex, and emotionally charged issue. Various factors unfortunately muddle the issue and prevent people from hearing a Christian perspective on sexuality, but, as a pastor, I am trying to be faithful to do my job which is to communicate, in love, what Scripture teaches.

A. Introduction

We’re fully aware (especially in South Florida) that we live in a diversity of viewpoints and perspectives on these issues and I want to be clear, from the heart of our church...we welcome every single person from EVERY background and belief as we are all seeking Truth and Meaning. We have a deep conviction that every person has intrinsic value having been made in the image of God. So, let me be clear: We love you and we value you as a person regardless of your background or current lifestyle.

And when we allow Scripture to speak, we will *all* at some time feel a bit uncomfortable when confronted with Truths that challenge us to consider issues from God’s perspective, *as revealed in His Word*. Sometimes those truths sting. But our intent is never to hurt or embarrass, rather to simply be honest about what Scripture *actually* teaches. So, if anything we discuss over this series causes you some discomfort, please hear us out, don’t tune us out, and know that you’re not the only one because God’s Word challenges *all* of us.



God loves every single one of us so much, and His love is revealed by calling us to walk His path which may be brand new compared to everything we've ever felt or been told. No matter your persuasion or past, know this: There has never been a person alive except for Jesus Christ who has not needed God's grace to transform some aspect of his or her life. We all live in a broken world. We're all in need of redemption. We all *can* come to Jesus Christ who is an equal opportunity Savior.

Our marching orders from Jesus Christ are...

- a. We're not called to pick fights or seek controversial matters as a gimmick for online notoriety. 2 Timothy 2:24-26 says, "*And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.*"
- b. We want to be a people marked by Truth, Gentleness, and Respect. 1 Peter 3:15 reads, "*but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.*"

Reason and evidence are incredibly important, but gentleness is how you emotionally prepare the other person to receive those reasons for following that evidence. Emotional preparation often must precede epistemological reception.

- c. We're called, especially as church leaders, to equip one another to carry the Gospel into a broken and hurting world. Ephesians 4:12 calls Christian leaders, "*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.*"

When questioned on "Christianity's stance on homosexuality," Tim Keller responded, "I can't speak for all who call themselves Christians, I can only speak for my church. I'm not going to fall into that trap."¹ I agree. Today, I speak as the Pastor of Grace Fellowship: A Church for All Nations. Our desire has always been to speak the truth and help our community know and follow Jesus Christ.

- d. We're called to persuade the non-Christian. 2 Corinthians 5:11a reads, "*Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.*"

We're called to reach out to the struggling rather than strongarm our neighbors into believing. Persuasiveness is far more effective and Christ-honoring than reactivity. Invectives and abrasive rhetoric rarely lead others away from false belief systems. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 tells us, "*Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*" James 5:16a reads, "*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*" The church should be a place where the sexually broken can find healing through Jesus Christ and a family among His people.²

Before we go further, as a pastor, let me acknowledge the...

B. Failures of some churches in how we've tried to deal with these issues.

We can agree that the church in general has many shortcomings in treating all people well, as Jesus, the founder of the Church, instructed us to. We've sometimes been harsh, hypocritical, or cowardly.

Church and Pastor Stereotypes



First, *most* Bible-believing churches I've been personally acquainted with genuinely desire to help people. It's just that many may not know exactly how. However, as a follower of Jesus Christ, you need to realize that there is already a stereotype waiting for you, fashioned in the factory of Post-Truth contemporary Western culture.

Stereotype #1: Crotchety Curmudgeon: If Mr. Wilson from *Dennis the Menace* was a preacher. It's a mode of communication that is doctrinally accurate but emotionally abrasive. The pastor pats himself on the back for his position of simply "preaching the truth," but neglects to explain the context or the backdrop of a biblical worldview, that likely alienates persons with limited Bible background. All people hear is a gravelly voice growling, "Get off my lawn!" In other words, it's a *clumsy* handling of a very complex issue. For churches who hold to the faith, the issue has rarely been one of biblical fidelity, but of taking the time and effort to speak to this issue in an *articulate* but biblical way. When we handle sensitive and complex challenges, an articulate treatment is necessary. Otherwise, you just make a mess of it. Doctors, engineers, dentists, psychiatrists, and other professionals live in this world of "Precision or Catastrophe," and pastors should expand their toolkit to include scalpels and stitches rather than just a collection of sledgehammers.

Stereotype #2: Compromising Clergy who, most often, view their new position as theologically enlightened. They edit Scripture by modifying clear biblical teaching to fit their own emotional experiences. Thus, they accommodate rather than confront moral erosion. They scuttle exclusivist language, cherry-pick Bible verses, and avoid culturally controversial subjects (unless from an activist perspective). Preaching speaks to felt needs but avoids robust theology at all costs. Preaching then appeals primarily to the emotions rather than the intellect.

In a misguided attempt to "love people," the medicine becomes diluted and exchanged for the temporary placebo effect of, "God loves you just as you are." Instead of asking the hard questions, Scripture becomes subservient to sentiment. The question is, "Who is the real you?" For Christ-followers, our identity is not in our temptations or inclinations but in our Savior. When we speak of love, we should ask, "What is love?" and most importantly, "What is God's love?" God's love confirms our value but confronts our sin. Max Lucado says it this way, "God loves you just the way you are, but He *refuses* to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Jesus."³ When church leaders allow fear and cultural trends to dictate the direction of the church, the end result is broken people seeking help are left with little more than sugar-coated one-liners and no Redeemer. Instead of directing people to their need for a Savior, compromised clergy trip over one another in the mad rush to christen the next culturally accepted sin. Rather than a faith in the God of the ages whose grace is greater than our sin, you're left with an anemic Jesus who doesn't really save anybody because no one really needs a Savior because nobody is really sinful enough to need one. If you're a clergy person and find yourself in this description, I encourage you to come back to your first love. Is God or culture the ultimate authority?

Stereotype #3: Confused Christians who fear addressing the controversial. We hear things like, "Shouldn't we just focus on what unites us rather than on what divides us?" Let us remember that the message of the Gospel is divisive and offensive. "We should be tolerant!" Tolerance is being willing to have a rational discussion without resorting to physical violence or any other

form of coercion. Tolerance does not mean we all have to agree. That's exchanging freedom for forced conformity. For Christians, there's *unity* in the Gospel but not dictatorial conformity.

Stereotype #4: Rather, our approach should be molded by confidence in Jesus Christ and compassion towards all persons. Jesus Himself provides the framework for acting with genuine compassion. Al Mohler writes, "We must not be silent where the Bible speaks... Love requires us to tell the truth."⁴ Speaking the Truth is love.

OBJ:¹ Yet, some may misunderstand Christian teaching on sexuality as discriminatory. There's a popular fallacy that says, "If you disagree with homosexual acts then therefore you hate homosexuals" followed by lobbing pejoratives like "bigoted," "close-minded," "judgmental," "intolerant," or "hateful." One of the earliest derogatory tags applied to Christians was "haters of all mankind." Why? Because they chose to refrain from the sexual and social practices of the day.

RBTL 1: A consistent Christian says, "I love you too much to not speak up and allow you to continue in a direction that I believe results in your harm." Not to warn a person who is living in sin is a terribly unloving act.⁵

RBTL 2: We're being honest and consistent with what Christians have always believed. We're also called to speak with moral clarity, no matter how unpopular it may seem.

RBTL 3: We're not talking about political policy. Clear-thinking Christians consider Truth to be so powerful in its own right that politically motivated government coercion is unnecessary, counterproductive, and abusive. In their book, *Both-And: Living the Christ-Centered Life in an Either-Or World*, Rich Nathan and Insoo Kim distinguish between the categories in the same-sex debate:

First of all, I think it is absolutely vital that we understand the difference between Christian ethics, pastoral care, and public policy...Christian ethics addresses what is God's ideal for our sexuality. Pastoral care addresses how Christians should come alongside of those who are struggling with their sexuality...Public policy gets into practical concerns about what is enforceable, what is possible, what will harm the spread of the gospel and what is wise.⁶

RBTL 4: How far are you willing to take your disagreement with Jesus Christ and His followers? If you're willing to try and shut down opposing voices through litigation or public policy, that will result in closing churches or Christian schools, then you're setting yourself up for that same political power to be used to shut down your voice if the political pendulum swings the other way. In a society that values freedom, we can strongly disagree with one another but still advocate for the freedom to express alternative viewpoints. Anything less becomes a less desirable place to live. Consider whether you want to belong to a culture that punishes people who refuse to abandon the core values of their heart. That certainly isn't accepting, loving, or tolerant. Strictly speaking, to condemn intolerance is technically intolerant, unless tolerance is definitively universal.

¹ Throughout this manuscript, I will note an objection as "OBJ" and a rebuttal with "RBTL."

RBTL 5: From another stance, let's reframe the viewpoint that says believing the Christian view is equivalent to hate and homophobia. To believe the Bible, and thus be against a lifestyle that could be harming people, is not equivalent to hating people. *Disagreement and hate are not synonymous*. Koukl explains it this way, "Such labeling begs the question. Is one "kleptophobic" if he or she calls theft wrong? It is not always an issue of fear (phobia) at all, but one of sober judgment about what is right and wrong based on a given standard. For Christians the standard has been the Bible."⁷ If we are to treat one another with respect, let us avoid the false dichotomy of "Disagreement = Hate." We can still disagree with what someone does and still not hate them. If I'm honest, I don't always agree with everything that I do. Think about it. If we're all honest, all of us do or think things that we know we shouldn't. So, let's do our best to avoid muddling an already tense issue.

However...

2) What has always applied to all of us: Jesus' command to repent.

Mark 1:14b-15 *Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God,¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."*

Sam Allberry explains it like this:

On top of that, what the Bible says about homosexuality doesn't represent everything the Bible says to homosexual people. The Bible is clear on the prohibition but that's not the whole message of Christianity. It's one part of a much wider message. Mark 1:15 contains the first public words of Jesus' ministry, his first press conference... "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.*" To repent is to turn around. Jesus' call to repent is not at all flattering *to all of us*. You all are in the wrong direction. Your spiritual orientation is wrong. None of us, according to Jesus, are naturally inclined to live how God wants us to live. However, Jesus believes strongly that His message is *really good news!* For all of us, following Jesus will involve a *cost* and a *blessing*. Whoever we are, there will be things we will need to turn away from and there is also a blessing. Notice how Jesus is so upfront about the cost of following Him.⁸

So, who does Jesus' command to repent apply to? The answer is every single one of us. Can we also agree that the Gospel cuts all of us at some place and in some way? There was never a group who Jesus granted an exception clause to on the command to repent. Here's the point: We all need the Gospel *despite* our sexual preferences. So, anyone who thinks, "Well, I'm straight, so therefore I'm okay" has thoroughly misunderstood the message of Jesus Christ. There's no Hell #2 or people who need Jesus less than others. Romans 3:22b-23 tells us, "*For there is no distinction:²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" The message of the Gospel is clear: We all need what none of us has...moral perfection and a transformed heart to love and follow God. That's why we all need Jesus regardless of how we identify sexually.⁹ Saying "yes" to God requires saying "no" to yourself.¹⁰ Jesus never lowers the asking price.¹¹

But to understand this topic a bit better, let's take a look at the...

3) Christian contrast with the pagan world.

As we look at what the Bible teaches, it's helpful to remember that Christianity was not created in a vacuum. Two central distinctions set Christianity apart from the surrounding Greco-Roman world:

- a. Exclusive worship of Jesus Christ as God: Rejection of idol worship.
- b. Exclusive sexual monogamy: Sex is reserved for monogamous heterosexual marriage (Acts 15:29) ...a foreign concept in Jesus' day outside the Jewish community. What a revolutionary idea stemming from Jesus and the Apostles!

The early Christian writer Tertullian (155-240 A. D.), highlights this distinction between Christians and the culture in *The Apology*:

But we Christians look upon ourselves as one body, informed as it were by one soul; and being thus incorporated by love . . . among us all things are in common, excepting wives . . . and this is the only thing you enjoy in common; for you not only make no conscience in violating the wife of your friend, but with amazing patience and gratitude lend him your own.¹²

Tertullian's point: A Christian man is willing to share everything but his wife. Why? Because of the uniquely Judeo-Christian concept that sex is reserved for marriage.

On the contrary, being a Swinger was mainstream in the pagan world of the early church. There were several sexual norms that were widely accepted in Jesus' day outside of the Jewish community:

- a. Pederasty (child molestation).
- b. Sex with slaves (men, women, and children), prostitutes, mistresses, etc.
- c. Homosexual acts (homosexual orientation not required).

Virtually the only sexual prohibition in the world of the first Christians was a free male playing a submissive role.¹³ Philosopher Martha Nussbaum explains, "What is socially important is to penetrate rather than to be penetrated . . . the passive recipient is marked by that fact as of lower social status."¹⁴ Fortson & Grams write, "The sexual ethics of Paul the apostle and the early church which followed his teaching turned the Roman world upside down. In a radical reversal of Greco-Roman values, Christian leaders instructed believers that sexual relations were only acceptable in heterosexual marriage."¹⁵

Roman women of the time did complain but were essentially told to get over it and know their role as *something* there simply to produce a legitimate heir to the only one that really mattered, the free male. That's the sort of world that Jesus came into. That's the world that the Apostle Paul wrote those beautiful epistles to the early church. Those letters gave women something they did not have and could not find anywhere else: equality in value and worth before God and in the church. This is why historians of all beliefs note the untold number of women who flocked to Christianity during this time. The Christian teaching on sexuality was what allowed these precious women to see that Jesus and His followers were different. That meant that the message was clear for the first-century Roman male: No more idols and direct all of your love, affection,

and erotic energy towards your wife and your wife alone. No more slave girls, no more slave boys, no more men (slave or free), and tell the prostitutes goodbye. Every person other than your wife is sexually off limits. Today, regardless of our religious beliefs, we understand how healthy marital fidelity is to husband, wife, and the children.

So, what does the Bible actually teach about human sexuality? Believe it or not, this discussion begins in Genesis.

a. Old Testament

We must first understand the intent and purpose behind God’s creation of human sexuality before we can assess whether same-sex acts are a sin or simply an alternative preference. Simply put, the biblical bounds of sexuality are one man and one woman within the bounds of marriage for life. C. S. Lewis notes, “And there must be something good first before it can be spoiled. We called sadism a sexual perversion; *but you must first have the idea of a normal sexuality before you can talk of its being perverted*; and you can see which is the perversion, because you can explain the perverted from the normal, and cannot explain the normal from the perverted.”¹⁶

So, we have some questions: First, what does the Bible actually teach on same-sex sexual activity? Second, if the Bible actually prohibits same-sex sexual activity, are those prohibitions still in effect today? If not, then at what point “or in what sense,” can you get solid and relevant ethical instruction from the Bible?¹⁷ What is up for grabs when the next culture shift rocks the boat?

Genesis tells us that God created man and woman separate with complimentary roles but equal moral worth. Genesis 1:27 reads, “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*” Genesis 2:24 states, “*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*” Guys, this means when you get married, you need to make sure to cut your umbilical cord. While a detailed marriage *ceremony* is not outlined (complete with bride-zillas and mother-in-law-zillas), the substance of the marriage commitment is woven throughout these verses. What we find in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is that marriage is a big deal. In the beginning there was man and woman. God ordained marriage. The end of history will culminate in a marriage: Christ and the Church.¹⁸ Paul mirrors how a husband should treat his wife with Christ’s example. Ephesians 5:25 states, “*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*”

God’s purposes for sex are:

1. Procreation – God’s first command was “*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*” (Gen. 1:28).
2. Oneness – Nancy Pearcey explains, “Biblical morality is teleological: The purpose of sex is to express the one-flesh covenant bond of marriage.”¹⁹ It illustrates the symbolic commitment of “togetherness” in marriage.
3. Pleasure – This much should be obvious.

Some have objected, “But in the Bible we find men with multiple wives!” True...but it was never God’s design and Scripture also outlines the brokenness and suffering caused by departing

from God's revealed will for human sexuality. Not everything that Scripture records does Scripture endorse. John Piper writes:

By creating a person like Adam, yet very unlike Adam, God provided the possibility of a profound unity that otherwise would have been impossible. A different kind of unity is enjoyed by the joining of diverse counterparts than is enjoyed by joining two things just alike. When we all sing the same melody line, it is called unison, which means "one sound." But when we unite diverse lines of soprano and alto and tenor and bass, we call it harmony; and everyone who has an ear to hear knows that something deeper in us is touched by great harmony than by mere unison. So God made a woman, and not another man. He created heterosexuality, not homosexuality.²⁰

The first specific mention of homosexuality is found in...

- Genesis 19:1-14; Jude 7 Sodom & Gomorrah

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth² and said, "My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the town square."³ But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.⁴ But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house.⁵ And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them."⁶ Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him,⁷ and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.⁸ Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof."⁹ But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down.¹⁰ But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door.¹¹ And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door.¹² Then the men said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city, bring them out of the place.¹³ For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it."¹⁴ So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, "Up! Get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

Jude 7 just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

OBJ: The issue wasn't one of homosexual acts, but of a lack of hospitality.

RBTL: Gang rape is not good hospitality. Saying the problem was a lack of hospitality is to understate the case so entirely as to miss the entire point of the story.

OBJ: It was attempted non-consensual same-sex activity.

RBTL: In this instance, we allow the rest of the Bible to speak and help interpret what may be unclear. We will see that in both the Old and New Testament, the act itself is prohibited. The

biblical text focuses on the particular sexual activity. There is an obvious extra layer here: When coercion is added to prohibited sexual activity, it does extend the fallout by harming those who would have otherwise avoided what brings brokenness, shame, and ultimately regret. Fortson and Grams argue, “Even if one of the sins of Sodom against the strangers was inhospitality...one would still have to say that *homosexual acts and gang rape* were sinful in themselves. That is, one must accept that these were sins in order to accept them as examples of inhospitality.”²¹ A lack of hospitality is a sin but to say that it is the only sin or even the main sin here is to miss the forest for the twigs.

Today, there is a popular conception that loosening sexual restraint is somehow progress. But an attentive reading of history reveals that what is often called progress is actually regress to where we’ve already been. To illustrate this, let’s back up a bit and consider the world of Canaan where the Jewish people migrated to around 1500 years or so before Jesus.

- Leviticus 18:22 “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.”
- Leviticus 20:13a “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination.”

The assumption here is that the act was consensual.²² Robert A. J. Gagnon explains, “The bottom line for biblical authors: it did not matter why people willingly engaged in same-sex intercourse, just as it was unnecessary to parse the motivation of those who participated willingly in incest, bestiality, adultery, fornication, or heterosexual prostitution.”²³ Scripture simply prohibits the act in any relationship.

OBJ: But the dietary laws are right before this and we don’t follow those today. Or, are Christians inconsistent in their interpretation of the Old Testament?

RBTL 1: *Whatever is repeated in the New Testament we hold as authoritative today.*

These texts follow prohibitions against Molech worship and its mandatory child sacrifice. Yet no one argues that as long as you don’t burn your child alive in Molech worship specifically, other venues are acceptable.²⁴

Three kinds of law:²⁵ 1) Ceremonial (Israelite identifiers in contrast to the surrounding pagan world; 2) Civil (Function of the Israelite political system); 3) Moral (accessible to and binding on all nations). In the New Testament, Hebrews 10:12 teaches that we no longer make animal sacrifices because Jesus, the Ultimate Sacrifice, has already come. Tim Keller explains:

*In short, the coming of Christ changed how we worship but not how we live. The moral law is an outline of God’s own character—his integrity, love, and faithfulness. And so all the Old Testament says about loving our neighbor, caring for the poor, generosity with our possessions, social relationships, and commitment to our family is still in force. The New Testament continues to forbid killing or committing adultery, and all the sex ethic of the Old Testament is re-stated throughout the New Testament (Matthew 5:27-30; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; 1 Timothy 1:8-11.) If the New Testament has reaffirmed a commandment, then it is still in force for us today.*²⁶

RBTL 2: The earliest Christians were Jews and when Gentiles started becoming Christians, everyone needed clarification on what was standard Christian behavior and what was optional.

Was observing Jewish festival days and the dietary law mandatory for Gentile Christians? Was a ham sandwich sinful? As we referenced earlier, Acts 15 dealt with the influx of Gentile believers. Were they to adopt Jewish culture and keep up with the festivals, clothing requirements, and kosher diet? The church council comprised of Jews in Acts 15, highlighted monotheism and sexual purity as the hallmarks of Christian living, thus reaffirming the Old Testament sexual ethic as incumbent upon all followers of Christ. Acts 15:28-29 reads, “*For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.*”

Next is...

b. Jesus’ affirmation of the Old Testament.

OBJ: Jesus never spoke about homosexuality!

RBTL 1: Argument from silence. Just because Jesus never specifically named certain behaviors does not mean He’s endorsing them. Douglas Groothuis notes, “This is an argument from silence and is, thus, fallacious. Not talking directly about X does not mean you are not against X. Jesus did not directly speak against bestiality either. Jesus did endorse the moral law of the Hebrew Bible, which forbids deviant sexuality (Leviticus 18); and Jesus authorized the teaching of the Apostle Paul, who taught that sexual deviancy came from the fall (Romans 1:18-32).”²⁷

RBTL 2: All of Jesus’ disciples were first-century Palestinian Jews and so were the large majority of his hearers. They accepted the Old Testament’s prohibition of same-sex behavior in contrast to the surrounding pagan world. Because of this, Jesus’ hearer’s worldview categorized homosexual acts as sinful. Hence, there was simply no need for Jesus to argue for an idea that was already accepted. Where the Old Testament does speak to it, it is very clear. However, the entire Bible is not just about same-sex activity.

RBTL 3: Jesus Himself went on record endorsing the Old Testament as authoritative. Not even Jesus’ enemies, the Pharisees and Sadducees, who searched high and low for fault in Jesus, challenged Him about the authority of the Old Testament. Hence, we can conclude that Jesus’ perspective on sexuality is the same as the Old Testament view. In Luke 24:44, Jesus says that the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms *all* point to Him, and he also claimed, “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them*” (Matt. 5:17). Therefore, Jesus considered such acts as sinful in light of His belief in the Old Testament as the Word of God.

- Jesus came to fulfill, not destroy, the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:44).

RBTL 4: Jesus prohibits *porneia*, a word that serves as a miscellaneous drawer for any sexual act outside monogamous heterosexual marriage.

In Matthew 15:18-20, Jesus identified the source of spiritual uncleanness, “*But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality (porneia), theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.*” Jesus says that

these things are not the only things that make us unclean, but they are some of the things. Though Jesus doesn't name the sin of same-sex acts, he does include it with the use of *porneia*.

- In Matthew 19:1-12 Jesus references Genesis 1 when questioned about marriage. I very much appreciate Sam Allberry's exposition of this section of Scripture.²⁸ The Pharisees (often) tried to pin Jesus in theological debates (always a bad idea), such as in Matthew 19:3-9:

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"⁴ He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,⁵ and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?⁶ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."⁷ They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?"⁸ He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.⁹ And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

Notice, they're trying to trap Jesus. Jesus' first response is, "Haven't you read..." To an educated crowd, this is like getting dunked on in a game of pick-up basketball. Then Jesus goes to Genesis 1:27 "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Therefore, because God has made them male and female, we have marriage. Marriage is predicated, grounded, and based on gender.²⁹

Now, *this* is countercultural, but Jesus is saying that marriage, by definition, is male and female. This and only this kind of union leads to one flesh and the only sort that can produce another life. Then the disciples begin to freak out in verse 10 because it sounds a bit like commitment!

¹⁰ *The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry."*

¹¹ *But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given."*

¹² *For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."* Again, Jesus doesn't say "Try or test drive before you buy," or "Cohabitate to see whether the spark will last." *Jesus' point is that the only alternative to marriage is to remain sexually inactive or celibate.* You don't have to get married or have children in order to follow Jesus. In fact, many church leaders in the early church were celibate, sexually inactive men.

This seems *very* heavy but remember that all of us are broken and *attracted* to things we shouldn't be. *All* of us have *desires* for things we shouldn't.

It is costly for anyone to follow Jesus. No one gets everything their way sexually. Remember Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk. 9:23). You've got to learn to say "No" to yourself because not everything we feel leads to flourishing.

b. New Testament

- Romans 1:26-27

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 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. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Paul describes those who have rejected God's design and given themselves over to their fallen desires.

OBJ: Paul was referring to homosexual sex without consent such as an adult with a child.

RBTL: At this point, I greatly appreciate the intellectual honesty of the late Louis Crompton, a self-confessed homosexual and scholar in queer studies, who writes:

Some interpreters, seeking to mitigate Paul's harshness, have read the passage Romans 1 as condemning not homosexuals generally but only heterosexual men and women who experimented with homosexuality. According to this interpretation, Paul's words were not directed at "bona fide" homosexuals in committed relationships. But such a reading, however well-intentioned, seems strained and unhistorical. Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstances. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any Jew or early Christian.³⁰

OBJ: It's talking about a lack of consent.

RBTL: The point is about same-sex *acts*, not *roles*³¹ Robert A. J. Gagnon writes, "Paul does not present a picture where one party is being degraded and exploited, but rather portrays both partners as seeking to gratify their urges with one another and together reaping the divine recompense for their mutually degrading conduct. Had Paul wanted to limit his remarks to pederasty he could have used Greek words that refer specifically to such activity... *Contrary to nature* is a reference to erasing the stamp of gender placed on male and female by the Creator. The problem that same-sex intercourse posed for Paul was that it was same-sex, not that it was inherently exploitative."³²

- 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 "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, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

A correct translation of the Greek is not anyone who has same-sex attraction but those who pursue and practice those desires.

- 1 Timothy 1:8-10 *Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰ the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine,*

Q: Is homosexuality a sin? Or, Can a person be a homosexual and be a Christian? There is a difference between homosexual *attractions* and homosexual *acts*.

A: Temptation is not a sin; same-sex sexual activity, as well as heterosexual sexual activity outside of marriage are sin. The capacity to be tempted is not sin but it is a reflection of our fallen nature and a reminder that we need a Savior. We are not held accountable for our temptations but for our response to temptation. Jesus was tempted but remained sinless. Sam Allberry explains: “Desires for things God has forbidden are a reflection of how sin has distorted me, not how God has made me”³³

It’s acting on those desires that results in sin. We’re responsible for acting out our desires but Jesus Christ offers us the ability to show self-control.

Any Christian can be tempted but you cannot live a lifestyle of engaging in homosexual behavior and simultaneously be a follower of Christ...neither can you be a practicing adulterer, fornicator, child molester, murderer, thief, liar, blasphemer, idolater, swindler, or coveter, *but* you can be a Christian who is tempted by any of these sins. A heterosexual married man can be tempted to lust or commit adultery with other women but the temptation itself is not sin. This is why the Apostle Paul writes, “*We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ*” (2 Cor. 10:5).

James 1:14-15 says, “*Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*” Proverbs 14:12 reminds us, “*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.*”

The fallacy of the Sexual Revolution is that happiness and fulfillment are found in pursuing our “natural” desires. On the contrary, true life and joy are found in putting our “natural” desires to death through the transforming power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul encourages believers in the erotically-saturated city of Corinth, “*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it*” (1 Cor. 10:13).

OBJ: But these are just *natural* desires!

RBTL: That’s the point...while we are still made in the image of God, what comes “natural” is often not what should come, and that’s why we need a Savior.

OBJ: The Gospel is really hard for a gay person because it goes against who they really are.

RBTL: My desires and temptations are not who I really am; my commitments and beliefs define who I really am.³⁴

RBTL: If you're heterosexual and claim to have received the Gospel without any upheaval in your life, you've probably not received the real Gospel of Christ. Jesus loves us too much to leave us unchanged.

OBJ: But it's just all about love!

RBTL: Chad Thornhill raises a powerful point in response:

A possible retort might be here that what is being argued for (same-sex unions) falls under the hermeneutic of "love," which Jesus (Mark 12:28-31; Matt 22:37-39; Luke 10:27), Paul (Rom 13:8-10 ; Gal 5:14), and James (Jas 2:8-13) all affirm as central to Christian obedience. However, these commands come from a combination of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (Love God) and Leviticus 19:18 (Love neighbor). The irony here is Jesus, Paul, and James affirm the validity of Leviticus 19 for Christian practice. If their basis for establishing the centrality of love for Christian obedience is rooted in Leviticus 19, would we expect them to then be ignoring Leviticus 18 and 20? Clearly not. If these three chapters informed both their sexual ethics and their commitment to the centrality of love, can we so readily rend them apart? It seems to me this runs roughshod over sound and sensible hermeneutical principles. To claim the centrality of love is to stand upon Jesus, James, and Paul and Moses (cf. Lev 19). Erasing the validity of Leviticus from the foundation of ethical norms likewise erases the foundation for the centrality of love of neighbor which permeates the New Testament. Let's not throw Moses out with the bathwater.³⁵

If we allow Plato to interpret Plato, Aristotle to interpret Aristotle, and Kanye to interpret Kanye, we should also allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. Here's what stands out: Love does not replace the Law.³⁶ Rather, the Law shows us what we *should* be and do but cannot reach. The Law shows us the mountain we cannot climb and the glimpse of the city across the sea that is beyond our grasp. That's why Jesus came, not to abolish but to fulfill the Law (Matt. 5:17). Jesus came to do what we could not. Feel like a failure? Compared to God's perfect standard, we all are. That's why we need a Savior. Jesus Christ is the only one who can meet the qualifications of a true Redeemer. Look to Jesus. He will not cast you aside. Fortson & Grams note, "Only if there is real sin, real "lostness," and real judgment can there be real mercy—and real joy over repentance and redemption... Thus, Jesus' "love ethic" rests on the Mosaic law and the Prophets rather than replacing them."³⁷ Jesus even told the people to do what the Pharisees said because the Pharisees accurately taught the Bible... they just didn't practice what they preached. Matthew 23:1-3 says, "Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, ³ so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice."

- Therefore, God has always been clear about His design for human sexuality: Jesus' message of Good News includes redemption from sexual impurity, which includes same-sex activity.

Fortson and Grams write, "Sexual purity was a hallmark of the [early] Christian community."³⁸ Every church confession, whether Catholic, Protestant, Anabaptist, etc., that deals with sexuality has spoken with a unified voice. Scripture is clear that same-sex acts are outside of God's design from the very beginning and those guidelines are still in effect today. Next week, we'll look at reasons why God guides us the way He does, and how those reasons are accessible to all of us, regardless of our religious beliefs.

What now?

What does the Bible actually teach on same-sex sexual activity?

If the Bible actually prohibits same-sex sexual activity, are those prohibitions still in effect today? If not, then at what point “or in what sense,” can you get solid and relevant ethical instruction from the Bible?³⁹ What is up for grabs when the next culture shift rocks the boat?

Q: Is there hope for persons with same-sex attraction?

A: Yes!

- Sexual brokenness is not confined to homosexual behavior.⁴⁰ Mark 1:15

- Whatever you give up for Jesus, you’ll receive far greater blessings from Jesus⁴¹ – Mark 10:28-30 “*Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.”* ²⁹ *Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.”*

- Jesus offers you a new identity not determined by your temptation: No matter how we were born, Jesus calls all of us to be born again.

Michael Kruger reminds us, “In the end, Christianity triumphed in its early Greco-Roman context not because it was the same as the surrounding pagan culture, but because it was different.”⁴² In Christ, you are not defined by your struggle but as a new creation in Jesus Christ. Jesus, not your inclinations, proclivities, or attractions, is the main issue. Look to Him.

Recommended resources

- *Love thy Body* by Nancy Pearcey
- *Is God Anti-Gay?* by Sam Allberry
- *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition* by S. Donald Fortson III & Rollin G. Grams
- *Gay Girl, Good God* by Jackie Hill Perry
- *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* by Robert A. J. Gagnon
- *A Practical Guide to Culture: Helping the Next Generation Navigate Today’s World* by John Stonestreet & Brett Kunkle



God, Sexuality, & Human Value – Part 2: God and Gender – Mark 1:15 – 09.22.19

Main idea: Jesus Christ gives us a way out.

Welcome to Grace this morning as we examine the sensitive and complex issue of God and Gender. First, a bit of review...

We're all aware that this is a very sensitive, complex, and emotionally charged issue. As your pastor, I am trying to be faithful to do my job which is to communicate, in love and humility, what Scripture teaches. We're presenting this message for the flourishing and protection of our children and in order to give reasons accessible to all on why God's plan for sexuality is healthy and meaningful. We have a deep conviction that every person has intrinsic value having been made in the image of God. So, let me be clear: We love you and we value you as a person regardless of your background or current lifestyle.

And when we allow Scripture to speak, we will *all* at some time, feel a bit uncomfortable when confronted with Truths that challenge us to consider issues from God's perspective, *as revealed in His Word*. Sometimes those truths sting...but our intent is never to hurt or embarrass but to simply be honest about what Scripture *actually* teaches. When we allow Scripture to speak, here's one thing that will follow: Every single one of us, from every background, neighborhood, age range, or socio-economic situation, will at some point and in some way be confronted with truth that is tough to hear.

If you come from a church background where church is exclusively experienced as a weekend pep rally with the one theme of "Positive! Positive! Positive!" this may be a bit unusual. If you're not accustomed to hearing messages that deal with weighty topics, theology, or apologetics, it may be that God will whet your appetite for something more than the fleeting effects of a weekend injection of spiritually-laced emotional steroids to "help me get through the week." The transformative power of Jesus' good news offers far more than just to get you through a case of the Mondays. Let me be clear: There's not a thing wrong with being inspired and encouraged but what ultimately helps us survive the storms we face is a relationship with Jesus Christ, our living hope, *grounded upon immovable Truth*.

So, if anything we discuss over this series causes you some discomfort, recognize it as God's gentle encouragement, leading you from where you are to the beautiful place of where He wants you to be. Again, please hear us out, don't tune us out, and know that you're not the only one because God's Word challenges *all* of us. God's love is revealed by calling us to walk His path which may be brand new compared to everything we've ever felt or been told is true by those we love and respect. We all need to become more like Jesus rather than trying to edit Jesus to become more like us. We all live in a broken world. We're all in need of redemption. We all *can* come to Jesus Christ who is an equal-opportunity Savior.

Sledgehammers, clumsiness, and cowardice

We can agree that the church in general has many shortcomings in treating all people well, as Jesus, the founder of the Church, instructed us to. We've sometimes been harsh, hypocritical, or cowardly. What we want to do is point to Jesus because He's the only one who does not need to change.



Disagreement or hate?

Let's reframe the misunderstanding that says the Christian view is equivalent to hate and homophobia. Believing the Bible and disagreeing with a lifestyle that you believe is harmful is not equivalent to hating people. *Disagreement and hate are not synonymous*. Koukl explains it this way, "Such labeling begs the question. Is one "kleptophobic" if he or she calls theft wrong? It is not always an issue of fear (phobia) at all, but one of sober judgment about what is right and wrong based on a given standard. For Christians the standard has been the Bible."⁴³ If we are to treat one another with respect let us avoid the false dichotomy of "Disagreement = Hate." We can still disagree with what someone does and still not hate them. *If I'm honest, I don't always agree with everything that I do*. Think about it: all of us think or do things that we know we shouldn't.

What has always applied to all: Jesus' command to repent

Mark 1:15 "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.*" Jesus' command to repent and believe the Gospel applies to every single person, regardless of sexual identity or preference.

What made Christianity unique

Last week we learned the two main distinctions that set Christianity apart from the surrounding Greco-Roman world:

- Exclusive worship of Jesus Christ as God: Rejection of idol worship;
- Exclusive sexual monogamy: Sex is reserved for monogamous heterosexual marriage (Acts 15:28-29).

This was in stark contrast to the popular sexual practices of the day. "Swingers" were mainstream in the pagan world of the early church. There were several sexual norms that were widely accepted in Jesus' day outside of the Jewish community:

- Pederasty (child molestation);
- Sex with slaves (men, women, and children), prostitutes, mistresses, etc.;
- Homosexual acts (homosexual orientation not required).

As we discovered last week, virtually the only sexual prohibition in the world of the first Christians was a free male playing a submissive role.⁴⁴ Other than that, sexual anarchy reigned supreme. Since there was an abundance of slaves (men, women, and children), prostitutes, male escorts and female escorts, and other people of high social status who didn't mind being submissive behind closed doors, just about anything that moved was fair game.

Then Jesus Christ came into the picture and preached a message also carried by the apostles, of exclusive monogamy in heterosexual marriage. For a first-century Roman male, it would be difficult to imagine a more revolutionary message: No more idols, not only because God alone is worthy of our worship but also because idolatry is synonymous with sexual activity outside of marriage. Instead of all that, guys, you now direct all of your love, affection, and sexual passion towards your wife and only your wife. No more slave girls, no more slave boys, no more men (whether slave or free). And tell the prostitutes goodbye, too. Every person other than your wife is sexually off limits. Today, regardless of our religious beliefs, we understand how healthy marital fidelity is to the husband, wife, and the children. We have Jesus to thank for that.

As we briefly mentioned last week, Roman women of the time did complain but were essentially told to get over it and know their role as *something* there simply to produce a legitimate heir to the only one that really mattered, the free male. That's the sort of world that Jesus came into. That's the world that the Apostle Paul wrote those beautiful epistles to the early church that gave women something they did not have and could not find anywhere else which was equality in value and worth before God and in the church. In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul writes, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal. 3:28). This may be one reason why historians note the untold numbers of women who flocked to Christianity during this time. The Christian teaching on sexuality allowed these precious women to see that Jesus was different.

OBJ:² But it's just all about love!

RBTL: Chad Thornhill raises an excellent observation:

However, Jesus' commands to Love God and Love your neighbor come from a combination of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (Love God) and Leviticus 19:18 (Love neighbor). The irony here is Jesus, Paul, and James affirm the validity of Leviticus 19 for Christian practice. If their basis for establishing the centrality of love for Christian obedience is rooted in Leviticus 19, would we expect them to then be ignoring Leviticus 18 and 20?⁴⁵

If we allow Plato to interpret Plato, Aristotle to interpret Aristotle, and Kanye to interpret Kanye, we should also allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. Here's what stands out: Love does not replace the Law.⁴⁶ Rather, the Law shows us what we *should* be and do but cannot reach. The Law shows us the mountain we cannot climb. That's why Jesus came, not to abolish but to fulfill the Law (Matt. 5:17). Jesus came to do what we could not. Feel like a failure? Compared to God's perfect standard, we all are. That's why we need a Savior. Jesus Christ is the only one who can meet the qualifications of a true Redeemer. Look to Jesus. He will not cast you aside.

The final bit of review is on sin and temptation.

Q: Can a person be a homosexual and be a Christian?

A: There is a difference between homosexual attractions and homosexual acts. Temptation is not sin; same-sex sexual activity, as well as heterosexual sexual activity outside of marriage are sin. The *capacity* to be tempted is not sin but it is a *reflection* of our fallen nature and a reminder that we need a Savior. We are not held accountable for our temptations but for our response to temptation. Jesus was tempted but remained sinless. Sam Allberry: "Desires for things God has forbidden are a reflection of how sin has distorted me, not how God has made me."⁴⁷ We're responsible for our response but Jesus Christ offers us the ability to exercise self-control.

What are we and what is our ultimate identifier?

In addition, I'd like to suggest reframing the discussion in a biblically faithful and *rational* manner. *So, how do we talk about this issue?* One of my colleagues offers a unique but clarifying suggestion: "There are no "homosexual people," but rather people (made in God's image just like you and me) who struggle with homosexual desires and may even give into those desires and commit homosexual acts. Referring to them as "homosexuals" is problematic, because:

² Throughout this manuscript, I will note an objection as "OBJ" and a rebuttal with "RBTL."

1. We allow a person to identify themselves by their sin or temptation, thereby denying (or at least ignoring) the image of God in favor of some other image of their own choosing, and
2. We as Christians (may) begin to believe that's what they are, i.e., that they are "homosexuals" and are less valuable or less deserving of grace than those who aren't "homosexuals."
3. Imagine if we let everyone who struggles with a particular sin identify themselves by that sin to the point where they internalize it and it, in their minds and that of others, becomes who they are (like adultery, drug addiction, thievery, lying, etc.). *We would be starting out with a flawed anthropology, which equates the things we do with our actual identity, which seems to me is counter to Jesus' message about grace and redemption.*"⁴⁸

Let's start where Scripture starts. Identifying a person as first and foremost a *person* elevates rather than denigrates their worth. Such an approach is thoroughly biblical and may be an effective tool for deescalating an already tense topic.

OBJ: Are you saying people go to hell for being gay?

RBTL: The Bible tells us in Romans 6:23, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Which sins lead to death? The Bible makes no qualification or distinction. Any sin separates us from God and according to Romans 3:23, we've *all* sinned. So here's the dilemma: According to Scripture, even if you take the sexual sin entirely out of the picture, we're still not in the clear. Even if we're sexually pure in mind and body (highly unlikely for any of us), we're still guilty and thus, we *still* need a Savior.

Why are we addressing God, sexuality, and gender?

Are Christians obsessed with this or do they treat it disproportionately compared to other behaviors that fall outside of God's design?

- Scripture addresses it in both the Old and New Testament.
- No other sin issue is being celebrated like this.

RBTL 1: The truth is that this issue affects us all. Even if you're not a Christ follower, at the very least, this is a topic of interest. Whatever you think about it, we can all agree that it is one of the most pressing issues of our time because our culture is saturated with it. Think about it...it's an entire genre on Netflix. We have Pride month, Pride day, and parades, along with an increase of gay characters on television and children's shows (such as Arthur's gay wedding), which are all now part and parcel of our culture. We address this for the sake of guiding our children.

RBTL 2: For Christians, there's no other issue being advocated and forced upon us like homosexuality. This is why we speak. John Piper writes, "What's new is not even the celebration and approval of homosexual sin. Homosexual behavior has been exploited, and reveled in, and celebrated in art, for millennia. What's new is normalization and institutionalization. This is the new calamity...The difference is: We weep over our sins. We don't celebrate them. We don't institutionalize them. We turn to Jesus for forgiveness and help."⁴⁹

- Sexuality is a powerful but dangerous gift when misused.

We also address sexuality because it a powerful thing. One commentator writes, "Warming by the fire is wonderful, but outside the fireplace, the flames will reduce your cabin to cinders.

Using things and other people for our ends leaves us standing in a heap of ashes.”⁵⁰ Unrestrained sexual passion is the pathway to bondage and brokenness, not freedom.

Think about it this way, a pilot flies out of Bangalore, India, on the way to Miami, Florida, to watch the professional football home team of South Florida (the New England Patriots or any of the three teams from New York), but diverges from the correct flight track by only 3% at the beginning. The plane would end up hundreds of miles off track. The point is that with something as powerful as sex, it’s vitally important to stay within God’s design.

OBJ: Doesn’t God want me to be happy?

RBTL: God is not *opposed* to your happiness...but genuine happiness, what the Bible calls “joy” is found in living in *connection*, rather than in *conflict*, with God and His Word. God desires for us to experience a deep sense of abiding joy and that cannot be found apart from living in accordance with God’s design. Happiness and holiness go hand in glove.⁵¹ Holiness is the source of lasting happiness that flows from a personal relationship with God.

We could ask it from another angle, “Does God want me to feel pleasure?” The answer to that is yes...but He does not want us to experience false or fleeting pleasure. The greatest pleasure possible can only be found in knowing God and doing His will. Without this, all is vanity. In the words of philosopher William Lane Craig, “The chief purpose of life is not happiness, but the knowledge of God.”⁵²

You have to answer this next question for yourself: Are you genuinely willing to consider God’s perspective? Are you willing to consider that God’s plan is good or even best? Think about it...if I’m genuinely not convinced something is best for me, I’m not going to follow it. One of the aspects of the image of God is that we all want to live fulfilling lives. Tragically, some even take their own lives in the quest for happiness because they think death is more preferable to life. Before making a decision to reject what may seem unfamiliar or confrontational, we all would do well to assess whether we’re willing to entertain a different perspective before rejecting it outright. Walter Kaiser’s question should cause us to give serious consideration: “What if God really does exist and has a view by which he will judge the world in the end?”⁵³

- If God exists then it follows that we are created, so there’s a design and a healthy way to live and this also includes our sexual life.

Consider the following illustration: When an arcade machine is broken, they put an “out of order” sign on it. Order is connected to function. And function is connected to intent. Without intent there cannot be a goal or purpose. It follows that order, intention, and function must all work together if something complex like an arcade game or the universe is to exist and persist.⁵⁴

Q: Could it be that the core of this question goes back to whether or not God exists?

A: If God does exist, then there’s evidence to believe that we are created and designed. The universe is not the result of randomness, and neither are we. Therefore, human flourishing and living a healthy life depend on how well our actions fit within this design, which also includes our sexual life. I believe God is the best explanation for human sexuality and *why* it has meaning.

As Nancy Pearcey says the goal of her book, *Love Thy Body*, “is to show that a secular morality “doesn’t fit the real universe.””⁵⁵

Q: What are the ramifications on sexuality if God does not exist?

In the 19th century, philosopher Karl Marx wrote, “Religion is the opiate of the people,”⁵⁶ or, in today’s language, “you have a mental disorder if you believe in God.” We could respond in two ways: First, if God does not exist, your brain is the result of chaos, so your standard of mental health rests upon a titanic theory of chaos. We are free to believe that reason or the parameters of mental health got here by chance, but then there is no basis to believe that very statement.⁵⁷

Richard Taylor explains it this way:

Thus, the naturalists seem to be caught in a trap. If they are consistent with their naturalistic presuppositions, they must assume that our human cognitive faculties are a product of chance, purposeless forces. But if this is so, they appear grossly inconsistent when they place so much trust in those faculties. But. . . if they assume that their cognitive faculties are trustworthy and do provide accurate information about the world, they seem compelled to abandon one of the cardinal presuppositions of metaphysical naturalism and to conclude that their cognitive faculties were formed as a result of the activity of some purposeful, intelligent agent.⁵⁸

Simply put, if God does not exist, then we cannot trust our ability to reason. C. S. Lewis puts it in this light, “No thought is valid if it can be fully explained as the result of irrational causes.”⁵⁹ Atheistic naturalism claims that everything (including your mind) developed by chance. How can a randomly formed thing be a logical processor? Richard Purtill’s point is spot on, “So a mindless nature could produce mind only by chance. But if mind is only a chance product of nature, how can we trust our reasoning powers, how can we expect our minds to give us the truth about anything?”⁶⁰ In summary, *if atheism is true then there’s no reason to think that it’s true* because our very mental faculties are the result of a process that is less than flawless.

Second, we can perceive that a person’s *morality* often determines their theology or philosophy. Deep down, most of us have a strong sense that there is a God but because we’re unwilling to change our lifestyle we suggest academic arguments that sound intellectual but are merely smokescreens for the heart of the issue which is moral and a matter of the will: I. Want. To. Be. In. Charge. Sexuality aside, this mindset applies to all of us. It’s Frank Sinatra’s song “My Way” lived out.

OBJ: “I am not my body!” As radical ethicist Joseph Fletcher stated, “To be a person . . . means to be free of physiology!”⁶¹

RBTL 1: Such a statement depends upon the question of origin. If God exists, and we are created and designed, then there is a purpose in and for our bodies, both male and female. If we are not designed but the result of chaos, then there is really nothing sacred or ultimately valuable about our bodies. Philosopher Donn Welton explains, “The Bible does not separate the body off into a lower story, where it is reduced to a biochemical machine. Instead the body is intrinsic to the person.”⁶² Why should your body not be informative of who you are? Why should feelings immediately trump biology? If biological reality conflicts with subjective emotions, at what point or upon what basis should feelings overrule facts?

RBTL 2: The Apostle Paul acknowledges struggles with the flesh, “*For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,* ²³ *but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.* ²⁴ *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* ²⁵ *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” (Romans 7:22-24a). The Apostle Paul acknowledges the struggle with fallen warped desires but also points to Jesus Christ as the one who can deliver us.

As a church, we’ve sought to clarify in our bylaws what we understand to be sound biblical teaching on Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, and Sexual Behavior:

We believe that each human being is deliberately born into this world under the providential superintendence of God (Psalm 100:3, Proverbs 22:2), and that their gender at the time of their birth reflects His purpose for their lives (Jeremiah 1:5). Consequently, it is contrary to God’s will, and is therefore sinful, to modify one’s gender-identity whether physical or psychological. We believe the Bible is also very specific regarding acceptable sexual behavior. Acceptable sexual behavior is exclusively reserved to occur within the confines of a monogamous marriage union of a consenting man and woman (Matthew 5:28, 1 Corinthians 7:2-3; Hebrews 13:4). Any sexual behavior outside of this relationship is considered to be fornication and therefore prohibited as outside the scope of God’s will (Ephesians 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5).⁶³

OBJ: Sounds like you’re trying to advocate those outdated traditional moral standards. We’re in the 21st century now. You need to be on the right side of history. The church needs to catch up with the times!

RBTL 1: First, consistent Christians want to be on the right side of God and stick with God whose truth and character does not change.⁶⁴ The early church was told the same thing but that’s precisely why they *changed* history because they were unwilling to change what made Christianity Christian.⁶⁵

RBTL 2: Second, to say that a current viewpoint is definitively and absolutely going to be on the right side of history shows that we really don’t know history. It also may indicate a fair amount of arrogance that you know what will be “*The One*” viewpoint that will be on “The right side” of history. Throughout history, what was accepted as common and even moral has often gone from the spotlight to the dumpster of public opinion. One day you’re Vanilla Ice with your one “Hit” and the next, you’re out in the cold on the ice.

RBTL 3: Third, ultimately, this entire discussion comes down to a question of Authority: Who decides who gets to change? Are we willing to allow God’s Word to speak, or are we committed to twisting it to say what we want it to say? If you disagree with the Bible, why are you the one who gets to change it? What greater wisdom do you have that replaces such ancient wisdom? Moreover, where does it stop? Who gets to say when it gets to stop? Bestiality? Child molestation? Lying? If God exists, then He is a maximally Great Being and holds authority that we do not. Every time we attempt to override God’s design, we find ourselves grinding against the very fabric of the universe.⁶⁶

OBJ: But I feel boxed in!



RBTL: Our flesh *does* box us in in one way or another, but the good news of Jesus Christ offers a way out. The Apostle Paul, sharing his testimony to King Agrippa recounts, “*And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’*”¹⁵ And I said, ‘*Who are you, Lord?*’ And the Lord said, ‘*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting*’ (Acts 26:14). The goads were prods to keep the animal out of the ditch and pointed in the right direction. Jesus was the voice in the story and his point to Paul (then Saul) was clear: Repent and turn to me instead of rebelling and pushing against me.

To illustrate the question of authority, let’s take a brief glance at one of the most prominent New Testament authorities of the 20th century, German Lutheran scholar, Rudolf Bultmann. He desperately wanted Christianity to survive the modern scientific era. How relevant in the 20th century was a religion with miracles like walking on water and raising the dead? Christianity needed to adapt to the culture and keep up with the times. His solution: “Demythologize” the Bible by removing the “false stumbling-blocks” to Christianity (such as references to the supernatural). His explanation is as follows:

The purpose of demythologizing is not to make religion more acceptable to modern man by trimming the traditional Biblical texts, but to make clearer to modern man what the Christian faith is. He must be confronted with the issue of decision, be provoked to decision by the fact that the stumbling-block to faith, the *skandalon*, is peculiarly disturbing to man in general, not only to modern man (modern man being only one species of man). Therefore, my attempt to demythologize begins, true enough, by clearing away the false stumbling-blocks created for modern man by the fact that his world-view is determined by science.⁶⁷

Bultmann’s purpose to make Christianity palatable to modern man is encapsulated in quite possibly his most famous statement: “it is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles.”⁶⁸ In other words, historic Christianity and science are incompatible. So, if there is an apparent conflict, who gets the boot? For Bultmann, a supernatural Christianity must be ushered out for the latest hypothesis. Again, the question of authority bubbles to the surface.

In Bultmann’s own words, he sought to deliver Christianity from itself. The real question is whether Christianity needs to be adjusted to fit a particular worldview. What Bultmann failed to recognize is that the worldview of scientism (the belief that science can explain *everything*) is both intellectually problematic but also excludes the larger community of mankind. In attempting to demythologize Christianity and thus remove barriers to its acceptance, Bultmann did the exact opposite. Craig Keener notes, “Bultmann, however, unwittingly excluded from the modern world the majority of the world’s population . . . in a manner that current sensitivities would regard as inexcusably ethnocentric . . . Bultmann’s perspective was not a result of biblical scholarship per se but of a particular philosophic epistemology.”⁶⁹ In other words, outside the West, most cultures believed in the supernatural. Walter Wink levels a stinging indictment for compromisers where he writes, “People with an attenuated sense of what is possible will bring that conviction to the Bible and diminish it by the poverty of their own experience.”⁷⁰ Bultmann’s error was not,

as he calls it, “trimming Scripture” but of torpedoing the miraculous reality woven throughout all of Scripture. Bultmann’s approach has been devastating to entire denominations who have taken an allegedly enlightened view towards Scripture.⁷¹

The question here is why does God’s Word need to be adjusted to fit a particular current worldview? Why should the Ancient of Days become subservient to a fleeting shadow? What a waste to exchange the one life we have to impact the world for temporary cultural popularity. To throw the testimony of Christian martyrs, Scripture, and what makes Christianity Christian into the woodchipper in order to satisfy this present age, is to wake up a generation later and find that you’re left with nothing. Whether it be Caesar’s Roman Empire, Marx’s almighty State, ISIS’s caliphate, Narendra Modi’s Hindu nationalism in India, or the American clergy person who says God’s design for sexuality is no longer applicable to us enlightened ones, they will all eventually crumble into the ever-growing dust pile of vain attempts to fire God and establish a new Authority over human existence. Jesus Christ still lives, and His Church will move forward with the good news of the Gospel.⁷² Trying to save Christianity from itself does the opposite.⁷³

So, here’s the question: Could the LGBTQ+ issue be the crossroad facing the church today as Bultmann faced scientism in the past century? Some church leaders are now changing what they’ve previously taught as true. Not because of a firm conviction that they’ve misread the Bible but due to cultural pressure outside and sometimes within the church. As we referenced last week, this frequently manifests itself in one of two ways: First, a muddled “it’s all about love anyway” sort of 11th commandment. Love is not defined or connected to truth. It’s a term that’s haphazardly thrown out as a magic sort of fix-all. If love is comprehensive acceptance of all behavior, then love becomes morally hollow. But if love is definable, does it include loving and accepting those who believe that natural marriage is the best for human flourishing? If not, where is the authority to arbitrarily decide what behaviors or perspectives are okay or not? The point is that, at some point, you have to answer the question of authority.

On the other hand, it’s because we love our city and must raise high the Good News of Jesus Christ that has transformed persons from every background throughout the millennia.

RBTL: The current popular sexual orthodoxy is not progression but regression. Some say Christian morality is both old and repressive, but history teaches us the opposite. When you seriously study (blogs that project personal diatribes by so-called “angry atheists” do not qualify as historiographical research), the Canaanites, Greeks, and Romans, you discover how Christianity is anything but oppressive. Far from it. Christianity is redemptive. For example...

Respect for women

The great preacher John Chrysostom in the 4th century A. D., directed Christian men to follow the commands of Scripture and cherish their wives. He even offers examples for how men should speak:

I have taken you in my arms, and I love you, and I prefer you to my life itself. For the present life is nothing, and my most ardent dream is to spend it with you in such a way that we may be assured of not being separated in the life reserved for us...I place your

love above all things, and nothing would be more bitter or painful to me than to be of a different mind than you.⁷⁴

Christian women enjoyed a more protected status than pagan women because, in the church, men and women were viewed as moral equals. Not so in the culture of the day.

We have records from the 1st century of women complaining of the rampant unfaithfulness of husbands, but they were told, by one Roman poet, “intercourse is more pleasurable with boys than it is with women.”⁷⁵ What a horrendously twisted world. But this is the world that Jesus came into in order to redeem it. None of these things are new! The only thing that’s new is now we have space-age technology that allows us to fulfill our fantasies...to our further disillusionment and despair.

Christianity formed a barricade of respect and protection for both women and children. Monogamy means that a wife no longer had to compete with others for her husband’s love.⁷⁶

Protection of children

Jesus did several important things...

- 1) Established that children were people;
- 2) Elevated children as the ideal citizens of the kingdom of heaven;
- 3) Warned against mistreating children when abuse of children was the social norm of the day.

Beth Felker Jones writes: “True consent was a rarity in the world in which Christianity got its start. *Christianity, we might say, invented consensual sex* when it developed a sex ethic that assumed that God empowers individuals with freedom.”⁷⁷ If you believe that consent should factor into sexual activity, you need to thank Jesus Christ. You should be thankful for the Apostles who carried the same message they had received from Jesus into Africa, Asia, Europe, and every corner of the Greco-Roman world. If you’re not yet a follower of Christ and you believe strongly that consent is a necessary prerequisite for sexual activity, know that the materials for your belief are borrowed from Christianity. It could be that your strong belief in this could cause you to consider that Jesus is *more* than just a Rabbi who expounded noble ethics.

- Where we find ourselves today: The Sexual Revolution preaches a different Gospel and offers a false savior.

There’s a movement as well to reinvent a new Jesus, “the welcoming and affirming prophet who would never turn away anyone or call people to repentance and self-denial,”⁷⁸ but this is not the Jesus of Scripture. The Sexual Revolution preaches that our subjective feelings are to be followed and defended at all costs. Fulfillment is found through fulfilling unfillable sexual desires. The only morality is whatever you *feel* like you need to do. But, the promise of the sexual revolution is a lie because when a certain act, what we see on a screen, or a partner doesn’t satisfy, we feel the urge for more “creativity” which leads to deeper brokenness and guilt.

As far back as 1952, C. S. Lewis helps us see how obsession with sex inexorably pushes a society further and further off its axis:

You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act. Now suppose you came to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let everyone see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food? There is nothing to be ashamed of in enjoying your food: there would be everything to be ashamed of if half the world made food the main interest of their lives and spent their time looking at pictures of food and dribbling and smacking their lips.⁷⁹

Lewis' point is more or less that inside God's design, sex is a healthy gift, but outside it morphs into a brutal master. As Nancy Pearcey clarifies the point of her book, *Love Thy Body*, "My goal in *Love Thy Body* is to show that a secular morality "doesn't fit the real universe.""

Q: Are homosexual activity/same-sex acts worse than other sins?

A: All sins are immoral. It's been said, "All sin is equal in its damnation but not in its destruction." Certain sins are more destructive to the human person. Again, it is possible to say, "Your behavior is wrong, but I still love you." So, let's look at a few of the effects of living outside of God's design and the effects of the Sexual Revolution. Here are a few signs of cultural decline:

- On November 12, 2018, *The Jakarta Post* carried the story titled, "Crazy in love? Japanese man marries hologram."

The article reads, "Akihiko Kondo poses next to a hologram of Japanese virtual reality singer Hatsune Miku as he holds the doll version of her at his apartment in Tokyo, a week after marrying her in Nov. 2018...." "I never cheated on her, I've always been in love with Miku-san," . . . "I've been thinking about her every day." Two-dimensional characters can't cheat, age or die, he points out. "I'm not seeking these in real women. It's impossible." Even in a country obsessed with anime, Kondo's wedding shocked many. But he wants to be recognized as a "sexual minority" who can't imagine dating a flesh-and-blood woman. "It's simply not right, it's as if you were trying to talk a gay man into dating a woman, or a lesbian into a relationship with a man." "Diversity in society has been long called for," he added... "I believe we must consider all kinds of love and all kinds of happiness."⁸⁰

- As far back as 2016, writing for the British newspaper *Daily Mail*, Khaleda Rahman reports, "'We don't hurt anybody, we are just happy': Woman reveals she has fallen in love with a robot and wants to marry it."⁸¹

The article states, "A French woman has revealed she is in love with a robot and determined to marry it. Lilly's partner is a robot called *InMoovator*, who she 3D-printed herself and has been living with for a year. On her Twitter page, where she goes by 'Lilly InMoovator,' she says: 'I'm a proud robosexual, we don't hurt anybody, we are just happy.' Now, Lilly is reportedly engaged to the robot and says they will marry when human-robot marriage is legalised in France."⁸²

- Then here in the United States, Professor Elizabeth Stephens filmed the documentary, "Ecosexual love story" in which she encourages people to "Have sex with the earth to save it."⁸³ She and her partner, who identify as "Ecosexual," licked trees, played with mud, and made love with the environment while naked.

- In connection with Annie Sprinkle, Ph.D., Stephens published their manifesto: We make love with the Earth. We are aquaphiles, teraphiles, pyrophiles and aerophiles. We shamelessly hug trees, massage the earth with our feet and talk erotically to plants. We are skinny dippers, sun worshippers, and stargazers. We caress rocks, are pleased by waterfalls, and admire the Earth's curves often. We make love with the Earth through our senses. We celebrate our E-spots. We are very dirty."⁸⁴
- Then there's "Sologamy," the option to marry yourself. *The Telegraph* carries the story, "I Married Myself and it was Truly Empowering."⁸⁵

Here's what we're left with: It's either anybody's opinion ("Who are you to impose your morality on me?") or what God has revealed in nature and in Scripture. It's likely going to become more bizarre before, or if, there's any sort of a turnaround. Much of our current intellectual climate on sexuality illustrates the Apostle Paul's statement, "*always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth*" (2 Tim. 3:7).

What are the effects of living outside God's design? Let's take a look at a few of the effects of the Sexual Revolution?⁸⁶

- Sacrifices children. When you tamper with the family, you harm the kids. Julia Yost writes, "One effect of the sexual revolution has been to subordinate children, and the duties owed them, to the desires of adults. Marriage has been redefined so as to serve, rather than constrain, adult desire."⁸⁷

Our intent is to protect the children. When adult sexual fulfillment (an erotically driven sort of crass egoism) becomes a sacred category, the effects on children are disturbing. Institutionalizing and christening adult sexual expression damages the health of families and children because it exalts the self at all costs, even when it means adult preferences take precedence over children. An unqualified quest for personal "expression" above parental duty leads to a rise of divorce, single parent homes, absent fathers, breakdown of the family unit, and emotionally neglected children who find more familiarity with doubt than normative human relationships. Sexually driven egoism has an acidic effect on parental duty, which in turn spawns a number of societal challenges that intersect with everything from public policy, social and mental health services, to incarceration and law enforcement. In the frantic rush of adults expressing their sexual appetites, the question of how children are affected seems to be left somewhere far in the background.⁸⁸

As we know, these shifts are the fruit of the sexual revolution of the 1960's and did not blossom in a legal vacuum. It's the reverse pinnacle of a culture in decline. I see a profound correlation between death of God, rise of egoism, and the decay of the family.⁸⁹ For our parents with children experiencing gender confusion, know that there is hope in Jesus Christ and that you do not have to fold to the pressure to inject hormone-altering drugs into your child's body. Your role as a parent is to guide through, rather than confirm, your child's confusion. Remember that childhood itself can be confusing. Do monsters live under the bed or does Santa Claus really exist? Help and guide your children through the pressures they face from the outside and the confusion they experience within. Don't give up on them or feel you have to please *other adults*

whose agendas are pressuring parents to make life-altering decisions for their little children to avoid being labeled “intolerant.”

The American College of Pediatricians identifies eight dangers of gender confusion in children:

1. Human sexuality is an objective biological binary trait: “XY” and “XX” are genetic markers of health – not genetic markers of a disorder.
2. No one is born with a gender. Everyone is born with a biological sex.
3. A person’s belief that he or she is something they are not is, at best, a sign of confused thinking.
4. Puberty is not a disease and puberty-blocking hormones can be dangerous.
5. According to the DSM-V, as many as 98% of gender-confused boys and 88% of gender confused girls eventually accept their biological sex after naturally passing through puberty.
6. Children who use puberty blockers to impersonate the opposite sex will require cross-sex hormones in late adolescence.
7. Rates of suicide are twenty times greater among adults who use cross-sex hormones and undergo sex-reassignment surgery, even in Sweden, which is among the most LGBTQ – affirming countries.
8. Conditioning children into believing a lifetime of chemical and surgical impersonation of the opposite sex is normal and healthful is child abuse.⁹⁰

In the excitement to overturn a traditional understanding of gender, negative outcomes for children are often attributed to angry Bible thumpers.⁹¹ Encouraging children to experiment with LBGTQ lifestyles is to push them toward documented danger of severe physical health risks and psychological trauma.⁹² Normalizing aberrant sexuality neglects to warn children of a lifestyle that carries similar life expectancy as straight-lining heroin or other hard drugs.⁹³ In their haste to remove allegedly restrictive sexual mores, adults have removed rather than strengthened a layer of protection for children.

- Subordinates women.

If there are no women, then how can there be women’s rights...or can a man identify as a woman and receive scholarship or grant money allocated to women? We’ve been told for generations, “Science says...” as a not-so-subtle hint to science as the ultimate arbiter of truth. The men in white lab coats are the unspoken but accepted priests of the scientific age. So why is it now that biology or science no longer matters? Why do feelings get to trump biological fact? What a fascinating discussion it is.

- Self-destructive: Physical harm, health risks, & suicide.

Again, let me reemphasize, our intent is not to hurt or embarrass, but to speak the truth in humility and love because of Jesus’ great love for us. Whenever God says, “Thou shalt not,” one of the things He’s saying is, “Don’t hurt yourself.” John Stonestreet and Brett Kunkle remind us of how our culture often dispenses with Truth and how we need to look at the facts before we endorse a lifestyle.⁹⁴

According to HIV.gov, out of the 38,700 new HIV cases each year, “Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men bear the greatest burden by risk group, representing an estimated

26,000 of new HIV infections per year.”⁹⁵ Robert Gagnon provides the following list of ways this lifestyle affects one’s health:

- A twenty-five to thirty-year decrease in life expectancy.
- Chronic, potentially fatal, liver disease—contagious hepatitis, which increases the risk of liver cancer.
- Inevitably fatal immune disease, including associated cancers.
- Frequently fatal rectal cancer.
- Multiple bowel and other infectious diseases.
- A much higher than usual incidence of suicide.
- A very low likelihood that its adverse effects can be eliminated unless the condition itself is.
- An at least 50% likelihood of being eliminated through lengthy, often costly, and very time-consuming treatment.⁹⁶

Increased risk of suicide: According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information and the *Western Journal of Medicine*, “It is estimated that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adolescents are 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts.⁹⁷ Of those who are homeless, about half have attempted suicide at least once.”⁹⁸ In her lengthy article for the *Western Journal of Medicine* titled “Health care problems of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender patients,” Rita Lee summarizes, “Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender patients are at increased risk of suicide, eating disorders, substance misuse, and breast and anal cancer.”⁹⁹

- Psychological harm.¹⁰⁰

Increased mental health risks: Writing for the *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, Russell and Fish write, “Today’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth come out at younger ages, and public support for LGBT issues has dramatically increased, so why do LGBT youth continue to be at high risk for compromised mental health?”¹⁰¹ Some have claimed that teen “jokesters” skewed the data. But this claim has come under heavy pressure from telling studies designed to identify such things. The data says that the overwhelming majority of teens are honest regarding their sexual activity and orientation.¹⁰² Nancy Pearcey states the case clearly, “No matter what the current secular philosophy tells them, people cannot disassociate their emotions from what they do with their bodies.”¹⁰³

- Sets an unhealthy precedent. It doesn’t end with institutionalizing same-sex activity.

OBJ: Slippery Slope fallacy!

RBTL: Not if you have evidence to back it up. We hear terms like “Increased sexual rights” and people respond that this is a good direction. We went from natural marriage to same-sex marriage to 50+ genders in less than 4 years. Set up a social media profile and notice the section on gender.

Cathy Young, writing for *Time* in an article titled, “Polygamy Is Not Next,” explains, “Supporters of same-sex marriage have generally dismissed such arguments or mocked them as scaremongering. But there has also been a steady trickle of articles from the left asking what’s so wrong with legalized multi-partner marriages. Some even argue, as writer and academic Fredrik DeBoer does in a recent *Politico* essay, *that polygamy should be the “next horizon” of social*

liberalism.”¹⁰⁴ According to Gallup polling, “*acceptance of polygamy has doubled in the past 15 years.*”¹⁰⁵

Glenn Sunshine writing for *The Stream*, gives an ominous prediction for the future of American jurisprudence concerning marriage which I will quote at length:

The transgender agenda will continue to be promoted and expanded, based on the premise that you are your feelings and desires and that who you are on the inside matters more than biological facts. If sexual complementarity is not necessary for marriage and family, then there is no logical reason why marriage must be limited to two people. *We can expect and are already seeing a call to recognize polyamory as a legitimate form of marriage. After all, it is simply another form of sexual self-expression, and if a group of people want to have sexual relations with each other, society should not impose its arbitrary constraints on sexual behavior by insisting only two can be married to each other at a time.* I suspect that this will be the next front in the battle over marriage, and I expect it to be legalized within the next few years.

A more distant implication is the legalization of incestuous marriages. If marriage is fundamentally about the romantic attachments of the couple and not about children, there is no logical reason to prohibit incest. Should a woman in an incestuous relationship become pregnant, prenatal genetic testing and abortion can take care of any problems that might result. The “yuck” factor may delay this for a time, but apart from a change in worldview, we can expect legalization of incest to come sometime after polyamory.

Another result will be the normalization of pedophilia, which is also being advocated by some today. If children are sexual beings by nature, we can expect continuing downward pressure on the age of consent. Further, the argument is already being promoted that pedophilia is nothing more than a different sexual orientation. There will be resistance to this based on the well-known harm that comes to children from sexual abuse, but sooner or later that will begin to be de-emphasized or swept under the rug, much like the many medical problems associated with homosexuality have been. Ultimately, we can expect that the combination of reducing the age of consent and the redefinition of pedophilia as a sexual orientation will eventually lead to its normalization. *Beyond these, it is possible that other sexual activities will be normalized as well. Wesleyan University already has on-campus housing for a wide range of sexual preferences, including sado-masochism. Bestiality is another candidate for recognition. These may be more distant prospects than some of the others, though with the success of 50 Shades of Grey normalization of sado-masochism may come sooner than we would expect.*”¹⁰⁶

Not to be outdone, Katherine Timpf reports on Yale University hosting a workshop teaching sensitivity to bestiality: “Yale hosted a “sensitivity training” in which students were asked to consider topics such as bestiality, incest, and accepting money for sex... Event director Guilianna Berry ’14...“The goal is to increase compassion for people who may engage in activities that are not what you would personally consider normal.” McDevitt referred to the range of activities discussed in the workshop as “sexual diversity.””¹⁰⁷

Quite possibly the most nightmarish trend is the push to normalize pedophilia. Before we delve deeper, we should note that pedophilia and child molestation are not technically one in the same. Pedophilia is sexual attraction towards children whereas child molestation is acting on those desires, though both exemplify depravity and a need for the cleansing power of Jesus Christ. Yet, we are seeing a push to normalize pedophilia within the amoral catalogue of mental and/or physical disabilities. For example, Janet Upadhye writes of Todd Nickerson, who finds himself attracted to underage girls but has never acted on his impulses.¹⁰⁸ Nickerson even runs a website called “Virtuous Pedophiles” for “inactive” or “non-practicing” pedophiles.¹⁰⁹ Upadhye pleads Nickerson’s case for a hard and fast distinction between “pedophile” and “child molester.”¹¹⁰ Writing for the *New York Times*, Margo Kaplan, associate professor at Rutgers School of Law, seeks to reassess the moral dimensions of pedophilia by erasing the “misconception that pedophilia is the same as child molestation. One can live with pedophilia and not act on it.”¹¹¹ Although she states, “A pedophile should be held responsible for his conduct — but not for the underlying attraction,” she still seeks to include “non-practicing pedophiles” in the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.¹¹²

Unless we are willing to entertain the possibility that sexual brokenness could be primarily *moral* in nature, rather than solely a cause of environment, we may find ourselves forever wandering in the dark trying to find what makes pedophiles “tick.”¹¹³ *A priori* rejection of a moral dimension of human fallenness hampers the search for cause and cure from the very start. But our most basic moral sensibilities testify that the core of what’s wrong with child molestation is that it is profoundly evil.¹¹⁴

Fortson & Grams write, “Like cake, love takes the shape of the mold into which it is poured.”¹¹⁵ Are you willing to adopt a blanket approach to accept any activity so long as someone slaps the label of “love” on it? When Pandora’s Box has been thrown open, sin never just sits still. This is another reason why Scripture holds marriage and the family as sacred because when you mess with the family and sexuality you mess with the kids. This is also why we do not bend biblical truth to fit culture. Why? Because eventually, after each successive generation chipping away at what they feel is an uncomfortable angle of biblical truth, you’ll have little to nothing left. This is why we don’t throw Scripture into the cultural chipper. Once more, it comes back to “Who decides?” and “Where does it stop?”

- Where the conflict really lies: Denial of Truth and reality.

OBJ: But this sort of statement may be offensive.

RBTL: The Gospel of Jesus Christ cuts us all in one way or another but it does so that we would see our need for Christ. Scholar Robert Gagnon writes, “God did not offer up Jesus Christ for the purpose of rubber stamping and affirming all human desires.”¹¹⁶ Rather, Jesus came to redeem us from our fallen desires. Being alerted to our need for redemption is a necessary component of redemption.

The need for Epistemic humility: When our conscience is confronted with difficult truths, are we willing to consider the possibility that *we* need to change *or* do we claim that the church, pastor, Bible, etc. needs to change? Truth by nature is challenging. When the truth rubs me the wrong way, do I respond with, “I need to change, *or* the truth needs to change?” Accepting truth *only*

when it is convenient will not lead us to the peace we seek. The path of truth may be rocky at times, but it *does* lead to peace.

If our inclinations are the only game in town then we're really at a loss for any sort of moral direction for human behavior. An observation of a brute fact such as, "I have this or that attraction or tendency," an observation of something that *is*, has nothing to do with whether it *ought* to be as it is or whether or not I *should* allow it to be an authoritative voice in my life. Are my ethics and morality simply whatever I *feel*, or is there something more?

If our explanation is: "Well, you *seem* hardwired with these desires, so therefore, you should be encouraged to follow them," we still need to answer the question, "*Does that apply to all desires?*" And if not, upon what basis or authority do we distinguish between the desires we should follow or reject? Some may argue that we should act on our desires so long as they do not hurt anyone else. However, a supercomputer is likely required to factor the weight of data that would be needed to accurately assess whether or not our behavior will result in harming others.

At some point, we're reminded that it's a question of authority. Not accepting God's authority doesn't mean that we're without it, only that we've exchanged it for something else. The moment we establish *any* standard, filter, or limitation on our natural inclinations, we've just fallen into the "Authority Trap" and possibly committed the very same sin of intolerance that Christians are accused of. It's that your authority has a different ID number. If your line in the sand is nothing more than your personal arbitrary option or preference, then what grounds do you have to speak to another person stepping over that very same line?

Furthermore, for years, the premise has been that a person is "born this way" but now it has shifted to where gender isn't really a thing but that we can "identify" as or with any gender. OBJ: But what if I'm born this way? Or, "If God didn't want people to be gay then why did He create them that way?"

RBTL 1: First, God does not tempt anyone nor is this present world as God originally created it. We all deal with fallen desires. From the environment to us, we see decay. In a broken and fallen world, we *all* deal with our fallen desires, what the Bible calls "the flesh." Same-sex temptations are one of the many symptoms of the brokenness we encounter in the world. Every single one of us has something inside of us that draws us to sin. The Bible calls it the "flesh." Galatians 5:19 outlines some of these behaviors, "*Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*" None of us is exempt from the struggle of the flesh or the redemption and hope available through Jesus Christ.

Greg Koukl gives the following thought experiment:

Why think the state of nature is an appropriate guide to morality? The basic argument can be summed up this way: Anything that is natural is also moral. Homosexuality is natural (the claim goes). Therefore, homosexuality is moral. What happens when we go down that road? ... If scientists isolated a gay-bashing gene, would violence toward

homosexuals be acceptable? Hardly. If there really were a gay-bashing gene, the correct response would be to fight its influence, not to surrender to it.

Seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes noted famously that life in an unregulated state of nature is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” Morality protects us from the brutality of living in a world where people act out their impulses. *Animals* always do what comes naturally.

Since living according to nature would result in all kinds of barbarism, how does it make sense to invoke the natural state of things to justify anything? The difference between doing what comes naturally and principled self-restraint is called civilization. Morality that counters one’s natural inclinations rather than approves them is our only refuge from a life that is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

Here’s how the reduction looks:

Claim: Any “natural” tendency or behavior is morally acceptable.

[Explanation]:¹¹⁷ If gay-bashing comes naturally for someone, it must be okay. This is obviously wrong.

Therefore: Just because an impulse is natural does not mean it’s moral. Homosexuality cannot be justified this way.¹¹⁸

RBTL 2: Second, if God exists, then we are not the sum total of our proclivities or inclinations. Our desires do not have to determine our behavior. For some of us, this is a heavy cross to bear because our desires and feelings are so strong. Yet, the Gospel of Jesus Christ offers unparalleled resources to those of us that struggle with the flesh. Tendency to temptation does not mean there is no escape. An addictive personality, outbursts of anger, lying, or any sort of behavior...we’re all born with something that we struggle with. Proclivity is not determinism. In Christ, we can have a new identity of purity and holiness that gives us the confidence that even though we may be pulled in many ways, who we really are is hidden in his hand. *That* reality gives us the strength and confidence to crucify the flesh and live for something greater than our fleeting passions.

However, if God does *not* exist, then there is a strong case for the logic of determinism:

- a. There is no spirit or soul and everything that you are is reducible to physical reality;
- b. You will be and behave in accordance to your chemical composition;
- c. Thus, no one can ever truly “change.”

Thus, it’s difficult to say that we’re ultimately *morally* responsible for our actions. Furthermore, if we throw out morality then why are you even concerned? You shouldn’t judge me for my view because I really couldn’t have chosen otherwise.

RBTL 3: Third, scientific studies in the area of epigenetics hold great encouragement. In a fascinating article titled, *Epigenetics, DNA: How You Can Change Your Genes, Destiny*, John Cloud explains:

Biologists offer this analogy as an explanation: if the genome is the hardware, then the epigenome is the software. “I can load Windows, if I want, on my Mac,” says Joseph Ecker, a Salk Institute biologist and leading epigenetic scientist. “You’re going to have

the same chip in there, the same genome, but different software. And the outcome is a different cell type.”... At its most basic, epigenetics is the study of changes in gene activity that do not involve alterations to the genetic code but still get passed down to at least one successive generation. These patterns of gene expression are governed by the cellular material--the epigenome--that sits on top of the genome, just outside it (hence the prefix *epi-*, which means above). It is these epigenetic “marks” that tell your genes to switch on or off, to speak loudly or whisper. It is through epigenetic marks that environmental factors like diet, stress and prenatal nutrition can make an imprint on genes that are passed from one generation to the next.¹¹⁹

The point: You are not just your DNA. *Your desires can be affected by your behavior. Actions can cultivate a gene that has proclivity towards something.* Genes can jump generations because the epigenome has to do with your lifestyle. Here’s the relevance to our topic: Every time we give in to our temptations, we bolster behavior that feeds a habit. The more we allow that habit to go unchecked, the more it forms into an addiction. The longer the addiction grows the more it shapes what we think about the most important things (God, our identity, others, etc.). Even if a proclivity is genetic, why would we trust our genetics as a moral guide? Walter Kaiser argues, “Some types of personality are apparently inborn, and we think of these varieties of personality types as equally good, but alcoholism, schizophrenia and a tendency to violence may also be linked to genes, and we look at these as genetic defects. We view them as bad and try to control their expression.”¹²⁰ We need something more robust than feelings for the foundation of our lives. William Lane Craig writes, “The important thing is not how you *got* your orientation, but what you *do* with it.”¹²¹ The point here is that even if we believe our desires are *heavily* influenced by our genetic composition, it does not mean we should follow them.

OBJ: But alcoholism, schizophrenia, or violence are obviously unhealthy.

RBTL: According to the data, so are homosexual acts.

- Why it’s unfulfilling: No person or relationship can bring ultimate fulfillment.

As we mentioned earlier, at its core, gender dysphoria and transgenderism are rooted in a rejection of absolute truth and reality. No matter how far out you go, it always comes back to whether or not there’s absolute truth.

OBJ: But the gay people I know are some of the nicest people I know!

RBTL: Let me be clear: we’re *not* saying that persons who struggle with homosexuality cannot be nice people. Let’s be careful of getting distracted by personality. Morality is never an issue of personality. Rather, it is one of righteousness.

- Why it’s dehumanizing: We are more than our sexual desires.

OBJ: Everything about you should be celebrated! So, take pride in everything about yourself.

RBTL: We are not reducible to our sexual appetites; we are more than that.

- Why it’s untrue: Sexual expression is not a necessary condition of happiness.

What about celibate single adults who haven’t yet found a spouse? What about someone who has a medical condition or injury? Let me clarify: You don’t have to be married or have children to live a meaningful life! Marriage isn’t required. Neither is marriage a requirement to fulfill the Gospel. In his book *Out of a Far Country*, Christopher Yuan explains, “I had always thought that

the opposite of homosexuality was heterosexuality. But actually, the opposite of homosexuality is holiness...Biblical change is not the absence of struggles but the freedom to choose holiness in the midst of our struggles.”¹²²

Jesus teaches us that sex is not the key to personal/human fulfillment. A personal relationship with Him is the key. Jesus says in John 6:35, “*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*” Jesus is saying He’s not a supplement or an Amazon add-on item but that He’s the One and the *only* One who can satisfy us on a deep level. No other person can bring that level of satisfaction.¹²³ If you disagree, then you’re going to be crushing those around you with unrealistic impossible expectations. Economist and philosopher Jennifer Roback Morse writes, “It is a medically established fact, that no one has ever died from NOT having sex.”¹²⁴ The Gospel of Jesus Christ informs us to our *deepest* need (not sexual fulfillment), of a lasting, substantive remedy for our sin and guilt.

OBJ: Are you trying to make everyone become a Christian?

RBTL: We’re not trying to *make or force* anyone to do anything. Not only does coercion never really work but it is a fundamental misunderstanding of Scripture and the very nature of Truth. Consistent Christians believe that Truth is persuasive in its own right. Coercion never helps people really get to the Truth because Truth requires belief and commitment which are issues of the intellect and the will rather than a sheer survivalism to conform or be crushed. Roger Williams’s strong Christian faith led him to promote the beautiful idea of “Soul Freedom” during a time in early colonial Rhode Island. Williams was one of the early proponents of particular colonies or states not adopting an official denomination or religion. His ideas fed deeply into the American ideals of religious freedom. He encountered persecution for his views but was consistently Christian in the idea that Jesus never instructed His followers to *force* non-believers to believe in Him.¹²⁵ Rather, Jesus modeled for His followers how to make disciples by giving a reasoned defense of truth in the spirit of gentleness and respect. The Apostle Peter carries Jesus’ sentiment where he writes, “*but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect*” (1 Pet. 3:15).

Is there a way back? There’s good news!

- The Way Back: Homosexual acts are not the unpardonable sin. The Good News of Jesus Christ still applies to the LGBTQ+ community.

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, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ 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.*

This is what Jesus can do for us: He will wash us clean, sanctify and set us apart for a special purpose of using our gifts and talents for something that lasts. He will justify us so that we’re no longer defined by our past.

- How do we find the way back?



Sam Allberry shares a question by a man weighing the cost to follow Christ: “If I was to follow Jesus, what would that mean for my current, committed gay relationship? My relationship has been the best thing that has ever happened to me. What could possibly be worth giving it up?”¹²⁶ I am indebted to Sam Allberry for his response to this question. He highlights Mark 10:28-30a *Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.”*²⁹ *Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel,*³⁰ *who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time. According to Jesus, the first thing we leave is relationships. Jesus says, “Even in this age you will receive 100-fold.”* Jesus is saying, “Whatever you give up for me, you’ll receive far more from me.” Jesus says those who come to Him receive *family*. We are to treat our church family as family. The Church should be a place for community.

We receive a new *identity* in Jesus. Our culture says, “You are your sexuality and your *feelings* determine your sexuality because your *feelings* are the key to understanding and being yourself.” What a sad accounting of our identity. Scripture teaches us that our body is our sexual identity. It’s part of our eternal identity *but* our sexual feelings are *not* eternal. At birth and in heaven there were not sexual feelings.

OBJ: Culture says our body is alterable, but your sexual feelings are written in stone.¹²⁷

RBTL: The Good news of Jesus Christ says *your sexual feelings are not the essence of who you are*. Culture says your sexuality is *everything* and fulfilling those desires is *vital and necessary* to being fully and completely human. If you lack value or if you don’t feel that you’re a part of the human family, then you’ll likely conclude that your life doesn’t have any real value. And if our lives lack value and meaning, then we’ll likely conclude that our life isn’t worth living. But Jesus Christ gives us hope and a way out.

Sean Doherty, a follower of Jesus Christ who experienced same-sex attraction from an early age writes, “Without denying or ignoring my sexual feelings, I stopped regarding them as being who I was, sexually, and started regarding my physical body as who I was . . . Rather than trying to change my feelings so that I could change my label, I changed my label and my feelings started to follow suit.”¹²⁸ Philosopher Nancey Pearcey follows, “Though our feelings are important . . . they are not what define our identity. Nor are they a reliable guide to God’s purposes. Because we are fallen and sinful, our feelings fluctuate over time. The most reliable marker of who we are is our physically embodied, God-given identity as male and female.”¹²⁹

When you come to Jesus Christ in this church, you are not an embarrassment, but you are our joy and our crown. Physical appearances notwithstanding, Jesus Christ makes all things new. All things. When we read the Bible and we see “all” it means that the invitation of Jesus Christ, His love and forgiveness, is open to all who would come to Him. All.

Q: How do we help?

- Avoid surface answers.

Whether you’re a Compromiser or a Curmudgeon, avoid surface answers.

- Listen. Seek to spend time with people who don’t believe like you.

- Pray for wisdom and favor: Wisdom to know what to say and how to say it and favor so they *want* to hear what you have to say.
- Emphasize how Jesus Christ offers a new identity to any and all who struggle with the flesh. Paul also prayed for his “thorn in the flesh” to be taken away and it wasn’t...yet he remained faithful to the Lord. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 reads:

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

There’s not one of us who doesn’t struggle with something. Know this: the power of Jesus Christ is enough to lead us from where we are to where we can be. Even if you encounter ridicule in the face of your faith in Christ or just by admitting your openness to the possibility of God’s way being meaningful and true, be encouraged by Tertullian’s timeless words, “If then (as I have elsewhere declared) we Christians are expressly commanded by our Master to love our enemies, whom then have we left to hate?”¹³⁰

High five on making it to chapter three ☺ It's tough to imagine a pricklier set of topics than what we've chosen to broach. We often skip over or tiptoe around these issues in church life because of the fear that people will be offended, stop giving, or outright leave the church. Or we try to redefine them as something else altogether. But here's the decision that I can't make for you and you can't make for another person: Would you prefer a pastor sidestep tough topics? Would you rather walk through a religious exercise that you know is disingenuous? In the words of Kimberly Wilkins, "Ain't nobody got time for that." Even if you are not yet a Christian, you should still expect Christian leaders to be honest about what Scripture actually teaches, and do so in a way that captures the style, substance, and spirit of the text.¹³¹ Tension is not a bad thing. Cults and cult leaders have no internal doctrinal tension. If we're willing to hear it out and press through and allow God to speak to us through His Word, there's tremendous personal growth waiting for us on the other side. In physical exercise, it's often the workouts we want to avoid that have the greatest benefit.

If you're a Christian leader, strive to improve your communication skills. Read more. Get up early. Place your thoughts before critical thinkers and allow them to help your teaching improve. Seek the Holy Spirit's help in your verbal and written defense of the Gospel. Seek to be saturated by the love of God. Pray that your communication takes the posture of Christ-glorifying humility. Deny yourself and exalt Christ. But never ever lower the asking price. Just don't do it. Be faithful to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ and let the chips fall where they may. Be courageous. Be teachable. Be humble. But never compromise on the core issues of the faith.

I'm not saying we should look for controversial topics merely for the sake of controversy. Church drama can arise from taking a well-intended idea and elevating it to DEFCON 1 and demanding universal conformity within the church. We should hold non-essentials with an open hand, but the core of Christian faith should be held with the closed hand. This is what brings us to our topic today.

Now, we're all aware that when we raise a topic like, "Human Value," it literally could be dozens of messages. But since we don't have that luxury, we're going to concentrate on the *clearest* and *most obvious* teachings of Scripture on human value. We'll observe the unbroken thread throughout Scripture and how those beliefs about human value were lived out in the earliest days of Christianity. We'll see how Jesus confirmed and made clear the essence of the Old and New Testaments. Jesus helps us see what the attributes and character of God look like in high definition. Jesus also reinforces what we all deep down know is true: every human life, no matter the age or shade of skin, is precious.

In the movie, *The Matrix*, Morpheus says to Neo "You've felt it your entire life, that there's something wrong with the world." What we often see is not what should be. The behaviors that most disturb our souls cause us to think about the source of goodness and evil. Deep down, we know that there exists a reality above cultural customs and personal tastes. What do we know? We know that some things are absolutely wrong (Nazis, racial hatred, harming children, etc.). What's the best explanation for that knowledge? Scripture teaches us that God is the source of all goodness and has given us an internal sensor, the conscience, that enables us to recognize the

difference between good and evil. Our revulsion and reaction to violations of human rights are because we know that human rights should not be trampled *because* we know that justice exists. This is a moral statement. In order for there to be a right there has to be a wrong.

I believe a strong answer for our internal moral compass is the notion that we have been created in the image of God. Jonathan Threlfall lists six implications of what he calls, “Imagedness,” or being made in the image of God: “First, humans are, by their very nature, relational. Second, humans are constituted for a relationship with God and the rest of creation. Three, sin perverts expressions of imagedness. Four, imagedness and sinfulness together render the human condition paradoxical. Five, this paradoxical condition has epistemic implications. Six, the image of God is being restored in believers.”¹³² On the one hand, we have access to profound moral knowledge. On the other, we find ourselves, if we’re honest, wrestling with desires and thoughts that we know are not right. On this paradox of human nature, the brilliant Christian philosopher, Blaise Pascal writes, “If there were no obscurity man would not feel his corruption; if there were no light man could not hope for a cure. Thus, it is not only right but useful for us that God should be partly concealed and partly revealed, since it is equally dangerous for man to know God without knowing his own wretchedness as to know his wretchedness without knowing God.”¹³³ In Jesus Christ, we find both the diagnosis and the cure for our problematic condition.

Our goal in this chapter is rather ambitious: To make a case that Christianity provides the *best* explanation as to why we all have value.

Let’s take a look at human value and consider,

1) If we believe that every person has value, then what is the source of that value?

One popular option is...

a. Atheism (Naturalism): No God. No soul. No spirit. All that exists is matter (stuff).

Philosopher of science Michael Ruse reports:

The position of the modern evolutionist...is that humans have an awareness of morality...because such an awareness is of biological worth. Morality is a biological adaptation no less than are hands and feet and teeth ... Considered as a rationally justifiable set of claims about an objective something, ethics is illusory. I appreciate that when somebody says ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself,’ they think they are referring above and beyond themselves...Nevertheless...such reference is truly without foundation. Morality is just an aid to survival and reproduction, ...and any deeper meaning is illusory...¹³⁴

If morality is just a mechanism for keeping the species alive, its connection to any greater moral law falls flat. If morality is just a tool for survival then we must come to the same conclusion about human rights and human value because both exist in the category of morality. William Lane Craig observes:

If we were to rewind the film of human evolution and start anew, people with a very different set of moral values might well have evolved. As Darwin himself wrote in *The Descent of Man*, “If men were reared under precisely the same conditions as hive-bees, there can hardly be a doubt that our unmarried females would, like the worker-bees, think

it a sacred duty to kill their brothers, and mothers would strive to kill their fertile daughters, and no one would think of interfering.” For us to think that human beings are special and our morality is objectively true is to succumb to the temptation of speciesism, that is to say an unjustified bias in favor of one’s own species.¹³⁵

Some may respond, “But, we need to live moral lives in order for society to function. It makes the neighborhood safer and the city cleaner if we all just play nice.” To this we can say, “Of course!” A certain level of lawfulness is necessary to human flourishing and a place where people want to live. A society where persons treat one another with value is preferable than one where people steal from, attack, murder, and rape one another...but that’s not the same as explaining *why all humans have intrinsic value not in what they can do or produce but because of what they are*. But why, on atheism, should there be any difference in human ethics? On atheism, what distinction is there between humans and lower animals?

According to the logic of the Apostle Paul, if Jesus is not raised then death is the final period on the last page of one’s life (1 Cor. 15:32b). “Hope” is a mirage in a universe that will one day be stripped of even primitive life as it expands into the horizon of a silent and permanent heat death of zero degrees Kelvin.¹³⁶ Bertrand Russell’s anguished words are a fitting epitaph:

I look out upon the night of nothingness. The revolutions of nebulae, the birth and death of stars, are no more than convenient fictions in the trivial work of linking together my own sensations, and perhaps those of other men not much better than myself. No dungeon was ever constructed so dark and narrow as that in which the shadow physics of our time imprisons us, for every prisoner has believed that outside his walls a free world existed; but now the prison has become the whole universe. There is darkness without, and when I die there will be darkness within. There is no splendour, no vastness, anywhere; only triviality for a moment, and then nothing. Why live in such a world? Why even die?¹³⁷

Yet Russell goes on to give a pep talk to facing the ultimate absurdity of life with bravery grounded in “the firm foundation of unyielding despair.”¹³⁸ Naturalism, in the words of A. J. Hoover, is “a “smuggler’s civilization,” since it continues to nourish itself on values derived from another worldview...naturalism also smuggles in values and can’t subsist without them.”¹³⁹ These smuggled values including intrinsic human value, make sense on Christianity but are rather hollow on naturalism.

Here’s how it plays out: Since billions of humans inhabit the planet, and they are just one of many species, who is to say why preserving endangered species shouldn’t take precedence over human life? Speciation trumps humanitarian mercy. Humans are the cause of earth’s woes and should be seen through the lens of hostility. Second century AD Greek physician Soranus’s work *Gynecology* contains a haunting chapter titled “How to recognize the newborn that is worth rearing.”¹⁴⁰ After outlining positive indications of health, the chapter concludes “And by conditions contrary to those mentioned, the infant is not worth rearing is recognized.”¹⁴¹ Hitler repeatedly echoed this sentiment in *Mein Kampf* with warnings against a humanity that “ceases to be true to its pedigree and intermingles with the mongrels.”¹⁴² British cleric Thomas Malthus’s (1766-1834) portrayal of certain persons as “useless eaters” illustrates this mindset well.¹⁴³ It was likely the Nazi’s pursuit of eugenics to its logical extreme that caused Westerners to become

disenchanted with the concept. H. G. Wells writes over a century ago, “I believe that if a canvas of the entire civilized world were put to the vote in this matter, the proposition that it is desirable that the better sort of people should intermarry and have plentiful children, and that the inferior sort of people should abstain from multiplication, would be carried by an overwhelming majority. They might disagree with Plato’s methods, but they would certainly agree to his principle.”¹⁴⁴

Here’s the point: Without a firm foundation that all persons are intrinsically valuable, the slide towards a pragmatic valuation of persons becomes almost inevitable. Persons hold value depending on where they land on the scale of benefitting society. Who gets to decide the scale of who and what matter? Whoever holds the power. Safeguarding human value necessitates a foundational commitment that all persons matter, something hard to establish on naturalism.

Princeton University ethicist Peter Singer claims, “Surely there will be some nonhuman animals whose lives, by any standards, are more valuable than the lives of some humans.”¹⁴⁵ He also states, “Human babies are not born self-aware, or capable of grasping that they exist over time. They are not persons; therefore, the life of a newborn is of less value than the life of a pig, a dog, or a chimpanzee.”¹⁴⁶ Singer is consistent in that if there is ultimately no God, there’s no ultimate *moral* distinction between humans and lower animals. If true, then there’s ultimately no absolute moral law against the law of the jungle being the law of the land. Disturbing? Maybe, but chillingly consistent. The point here is that when God is removed, so is the ultimate grounding for considering and treating one another as we ought.

b. Polytheism (Paganism): I serve the gods and they fuel my good fortune and self-advancement.

My own good fortune and self-advancement is the exclusive goal. This is the essence of idolatry. When my own good fortune is *the only* goal, then I may lack restraints against throwing *other people* under the bus in order to get there. Enter in the high (or low) point of paganism: human sacrifice.

Canaanite society provides us with a textbook example: “Children were dedicated (‘passed over’) and burned to Molech at the Tophet in the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem.”¹⁴⁷ In this system, children were not considered valuable as persons to be nurtured and protected but as *things* to advance adults. The weak were sacrificed for the strong. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel railed against this practice (Jer. 19:5; Ezek. 23:37-39). Harry Thurston Peck notes:

The religion of the Carthaginians, like that of the other Canaanitish peoples, was a form of fire-worship. As with all Semites, the rites and practice of religion formed a part of the daily life, and profoundly influenced the development of their civilization. Their chief god, Molech, represented the destructive influence of the sun, and in his temples human victims were immolated with fire. These victims were usually prisoners taken in war, but not always, for when Agathocles besieged the city, we are told that 200 noble children belonging to native families were offered up to secure the favour of the god.¹⁴⁸

Fertility was at the core of Canaanite religion. Obedience to the dictates of Molech was believed to result in favorable weather patterns, which in turn escalated one’s agricultural profit. At the

heart of child sacrifice was the great exchange of one's offspring for the prospects of a better economic tomorrow. This was the ancient equivalent of blood money that came not from a warlord's treasury but from the innocence of the cradle.

Historical records speak to this grisly practice in Carthage in modern day Tunisia (which was settled by Canaanites) as late as 310 B.C.E. according to the first century B.C.E. Greek historian Diodorus Siculus:

Therefore the Carthaginians, believing that the misfortune had come to them from the gods, betook themselves to every manner of supplication of the divine powers . . . In their zeal to make amends for their omission, they selected two hundred of the noblest children and sacrificed them publicly There was in their city a bronze image of Cronus extending its hands, palms up and sloping toward the ground, so that each of the children when placed thereon rolled down and fell into a sort of gaping pit filled with fire.¹⁴⁹

Carthage, that great North African power that bled Rome almost to the point of collapse, was settled by Phoenicians from Canaan. These early settlers (like most colonists throughout human history), imported their customs and religious beliefs.

The Greek historian, Plutarch provides another layer to the horrific scene: "the whole area before the statue was filled with a loud noise of flutes and drums so that the cries of wailing should not reach the ears of the people."¹⁵⁰ If Carthage was a colony of Canaan, imagine what it was like in the motherland. These accusations of child sacrifice are hardly confined to anti-Carthage Roman propagandists. Paolo Xella, Josephine Quinn, Valentina Melchiorri, and Peter van Dommelen conclude children were in fact included in the sacrificial economy.¹⁵¹

This is one of the reasons why God said enough is enough and raised up faithful prophets to decry this heartless cruelty. Both the Hebrew prophets and the New Testament writers considered demon worship as the real force behind polytheism because this sort of "worship" involved either the sacrifice of children and/or sex with temple prostitutes or random strangers.¹⁵² In Psalm 106:37-38, the Psalmist writes, "*They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; ³⁸ they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood.*" Theology and worldview matter. What we believe about the world and one another can lead us to acts of kindness or cruelty. This is why the biblical writers are so concerned with *what we believe*. In both the Old and New Testament, the prophets and apostles constantly drill away at false and deceptive systems of belief. The Apostle Paul instructs the Corinthians, "*No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons*" (1 Cor. 10:20).

Without God, it almost always devolves into the strong preying on the weak. Even when we do have the knowledge of God it doesn't mean we'll always obey what we know to be true. But without God we're lost in the dark in a minefield.

One of the greatest epochs in the Old Testament is God's delivering the Israelites out from under Egyptian bondage. Literally, an entire nation was enslaved. Think about that. Then when they

enter their new homeland, something curious begins to happen: they begin to fade away from following the God who broke their chains of slavery. So how could the Israelites, having recently escaped a brutal Egyptian culture that embraced infanticide (Ex. 1:16), be so heavily influenced by the same? Scholar J. A. Thompson offers a suggestion:

It may have been due in part to the subtle attraction of the wealth to the Canaanites. They had fine homes, splendid art, fine literature, good trade connections around the east, and an apparent superiority in every way over the people of Israel. The unthinking Israelite may have been inclined to associate this wealth with some imagined favor of the gods of Canaan, and as a result he may have forsaken the simpler non-sensuous faith of Israel.¹⁵³

The seduction of wealth and grandeur is nothing new. As the Apostle Paul later warns, “*the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs*” (1 Tim. 6:10).

What sort of anthropology produces a worldview in which child sacrifice is not only allowed but also applauded? According to the Apostle Paul, the first step on the descent of depravity begins with a rejection of natural revelation and the conscience (Rom. 1:18-31). Opposition to these practices came from an entirely different ideology: the Hebrew conviction that even unborn children are fully human.¹⁵⁴ Both the Hebrew prophets and the early church stood up for children. On one hand, the false gods demand the sacrifice of our children. On the contrary, Jesus Christ gave Himself for His enemies. That’s us, according to Romans 5:8, “*but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*”

c. Theism: Morality without an example.

If God exists, then God is a Maximally Great Being with all virtues and no vice. God is the sum total of every good quality. You get all of the arguments for a Great God, but not an example of what this actually *looks like in real life*. What does the God who exists want from me?

d. Christian Theism: For human rights, Christian Theism offers a foundational belief that all persons of every age, stage, and shade have been made in the image of God and thus are all worthy of dignity and respect.

Jesus shows us what this looks like. Nancy Pearcey illustrates this point:

The only logical grounds for affirming that “all men are created equal” is an appeal to a Creator . . . Even the arch-atheist Friedrich Nietzsche recognized that the “Christian concept . . . of the ‘equality of souls before God’ . . . furnishes the prototype of *all* theories of equal rights. . . . A Christian concept of personhood depends not on what I can do but on who I am—that I am created in the image of God, and that God has called me into existence and continues to know and love me.¹⁵⁵

Here are a few relevant Scriptures that speak to human value:

Genesis 1:27

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 9:6

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

Since human life is a gift from God and reflects Him, murder is an attack upon God's image.

Exodus 20:13

Thou shalt not murder.

Deuteronomy 30:18

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live,

Psalms 139:13-16

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

If you struggle with low self-esteem, remember this verse. You are a wonderful work and God doesn't make any junk.

Jeremiah 1:5

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.

Galatians 1:15

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace.

Mark 10:13-16

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

What a powerful, culturally challenging statement by Jesus. The disciples thought Jesus was a big deal and he had places to go, people to heal, and Pharisees to intellectually smack down. Jesus had no time for little children, right? Then Jesus shockingly declares that unless a person humbles themselves like a child, he or she will not receive the kingdom of heaven. Rather than denigrating and sidelining the little ones, Jesus elevates them as the prime model of the ultimate kingdom. Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, presses pause and acknowledges the little children because they are people, too. While the disciples should have known better because they knew the Old Testament, it seems they may have absorbed the wider Greco-Roman concept that children didn't matter all that much (except as future soldiers or

legitimate heirs to their father). Either way, Jesus' words and example were shocking as they were convicting.

We not only find vast support in Christian theism for the idea that all persons have value, but also foundations for unity. For example, Paul's admonition to slave owners to remember that they also had a Master in heaven blazes the intellectual trail to freedom (Col. 4:1). Scripture also points to a day where persons from "*every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,*" will stand *together* before God as His redeemed people from every conceivable place and culture on the planet, yet as one family (Rev. 7:9). This "all nations" snapshot stands in stark contrast to the Empires of crushed and oppressed peoples. The Bible presents God weaving together a beautiful tapestry of unified persons into a new nation, a new family. No longer are those persons identified by old ethnic prejudices or racial hatred, but by a collective unity in belief that Jesus is Lord. Because of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul writes, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal. 3:28). Because of Jesus, a Christian man can say to another, "You are truly my brother from another mother." Wayne Grudem explains:

Paul was saying here that when people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds are able to love one another and work together in the church, this is remarkably different from the tendency throughout history for people of different backgrounds to live in animosity and sometimes even war against one another. But God brings it about because in Christ he has "*broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility*" (Eph. 2:14). Angels see this and rejoice, while demons witness it and are infuriated.¹⁵⁶

One way we can see how Christianity clashed with the majority culture is to read their early writings. One of these is the *Didache*. Benjamin Wiker notes:

The first-century A.D. catechetical manual, the *Didache*, makes refreshingly clear what pagans will have to give up...once they entered the Church. It begins with the ominous words, "There are two ways: one of life and one of death—and there is a great difference between the two ways." The pagan converts are then confronted with a list of commands. Some of which would have been quite familiar and reasonable to Romans, such as, "You will not murder" and, "You will not commit adultery" (although for Romans, abortion wasn't murder, and a husband having sex with slaves or prostitutes was not considered adulterous). But then followed strange commands (at least to the Romans), "You will not corrupt boys"; "You will not have illicit sex" (*ou porneuseis*); "You will not murder offspring by means of abortion [and] you will not kill one having been born." Against the norm in Rome, Christians must reject pedophilia, fornication and homosexuality, abortion, and infanticide.¹⁵⁷

For followers of Christ, there's no more of the following:

- Exposing your unwanted children who've been born.

In the early church, this extended even to the unborn. Epistle of Barnabas, "Thou shalt not slay the child by procuring abortion; nor, again, shalt thou destroy it after it is born. Thou shalt not withdraw thy hand from thy son, or from thy daughter, but from their infancy thou shalt teach

them the fear of the Lord.”¹⁵⁸ The early Christians were horrified at the practice of *expositio* and responded with mercy.

- Aborting your unwanted unborn children.
- Sex with anyone who is not your spouse (only your wife or husband)
- Pederasty (sexual activity with children). This is a *major* theme in the writings of the early church fathers. They condemned time and time again the “corrupting/polluting” of boys.¹⁵⁹ Jesus valued children and warned of judgment for those who would offend one of these little ones.

Let’s take a look at the specifics of human value. Who qualifies?

2) Specifics of human value: Who qualifies?

OBJ: There’s a difference between being a human and being a person. Persons have rights but not all *humans* do.

RBTL: The great Hebrew king Solomon said, “*There is nothing new under the sun.*” When you look at the history of humanity, you find the unsettling fact that we’ve looked for reasons to deprive one another of basic human rights far more often than we have tried to secure those same rights. Once a distinction is raised between humans and persons, the very essence of human rights is up for grabs.

For our purposes here, we’re going to primarily focus on the little ones. Why focus on children? In every culture there is one constant: children are the most vulnerable among us. No matter the neighborhood or nation, the little ones are entirely dependent upon the adults.

In the following section, let’s use the acronym “SLED” to inquire about the unborn in relation to human value and human rights.

SLED¹⁶⁰

- **Size:** Does someone’s weight or height determine whether or not they are human?

Q: At what point does life begin?

A: Embryology has known the answer for quite a while.

1. Male sperm and female ovum combine; in other words, fertilization is a process that culminates in conception.
2. The result is a *zygote*. At this point the ovum and sperm cease to exist as independent entities.
3. “the nuclei of the sperm and ovum *dynamically interact*,” and “in so doing, they both cease to be. One might say they die together.”
4. *Zygote* has 46 chromosomes.
5. The *zygote* is a living biological organism.”¹⁶¹

- **Level of Development:** High school students, you are *less* developed than your parents...but does that mean your parents are more human than you are?

Francis Crick argues, “No newborn infant should be declared human until it has passed certain tests regarding its genetic endowment and if it fails these tests, it forfeits the right to life.”¹⁶²

Peter Singer writes, “a three-year old is a gray case.”¹⁶³ On life and death decisions for the disabled, he states, “Killing them, therefore, cannot be equated with killing normal human beings, or any other self-conscious beings. This conclusion is not limited to infants, who,

because of irreversible intellectual disabilities, will never be rational, self-conscious beings.”¹⁶⁴ *The Telegraph* reports, “Killing babies is no different from abortion, experts say: Parents should be allowed to have their newborn babies killed because they are “morally irrelevant” and ending their lives is no different to abortion, a group of medical ethicists linked to Oxford University has argued.”¹⁶⁵

Pearcey exposes this logic as follows: “To support abortion, by sheer logic, we must decide that human life in its earliest stages has no real value—so little that it may be killed for any reason. Then we must decide that at some later stage it is transformed into a different kind of being of such high value that killing it is murder.”¹⁶⁶ This is one of the reasons why we need Jesus Christ. I believe both the words and example of Christ are the *best* safeguard we have for valuing and protecting our children.

If a person does not come into existence at conception, then when? If not then, when?

Philosopher Mark Foreman inquires, “The question isn’t whether life begins at conception but *what is it*. At what point does a human organism come into existence?”¹⁶⁷

OBJ: Some argue, “But an acorn is not a tree. Therefore, a fetus is not a human. Just as the acorn has the potentiality to be a tree, the fetus also has the potentiality to be a human; but since potentiality is different from actuality, it follows that the fetus is not actually a human, and the acorn is not actually a tree. Thus, adulthood or development equals a thing’s nature.

RBTL: The acorn is by nature oak. It is an undeveloped tree. It develops *as* an oak tree, not *into* an oak tree. It is correct to say that the acorn is not a tree, but *its nature is still oak*. We don’t develop *into* a human being, but we develop *as* a human being. Foreman clarifies, “What you are by essence is what you are from the beginning.”¹⁶⁸

- **Environment:** Does your location make you more or less of a human being?

Q: At what point does the *fetus* become a person?

A: Let’s remember that *fetus* is Latin for unborn child. It’s unfortunately a smokescreen. “*Fetus*” has less emotional hooks than “child” or “baby.”

- **Degree of dependency:** Does dependence upon another person make you more or less of a human being?

OBJ: It’s not human if it’s relying on an outside source to sustain its life.

RBTL: What about an adult relying on equipment or a person in a coma? Do you stop being a person?

Significant questions about abortion

- 1) What about rape or incest?

RBTL 1: First, we as Christians recognize the horror of violence and condemn all forms of sexual violence. The righteous judgment of God awaits all those who commit such acts and refuse to repent. Christians have provided tremendous resources to help women who have been victimized by sexual violence. Our church offers a variety of ways for women to be helped and cared for.

RBTL 2: Second, imagine a baby produced through love, a random one-night stand, or violence? Does the value of the baby diminish? The question on *how* the child got there does not answer whether or not they are human. Even Judith Jarvis Thomson who famously defended abortion on

demand in her article, “In Defense of Abortion,” writes “Surely the question of whether you have a right to life at all, or how much of it you have, shouldn’t turn on the question of whether or not you are the product of rape.”¹⁶⁹

RBTL 3: Third, who is the guilty party? The mother? The baby? The criminal? The guilty party of a pregnancy resulting from rape is not the mother, or the baby, but the rapist. You do not punish the child for the crime of the father. You punish the guilty person, not the innocent one.

RBTL 4: Fourth, moreover, data suggests abortions from rape or incest account for a mere 1% of all U.S. abortions. So, the argument on these grounds is far more a paper tiger than a widespread health epidemic.¹⁷⁰ Pro-abortion arguments are largely emotional in nature, divorced from scientific data and our most treasured moral beliefs that human life is intrinsically valuable and worth protecting. Why do some of us automatically default to what only applies to less than 1% of all abortions?¹⁷¹

RBTL 5: Fifth, statistics on reasons for abortions (Florida). The state of Florida records a reason for every abortion that occurs within its borders each year. In 2018, there were 70,083 abortions in Florida. This table lists each reason and the percentage of abortions that occurred because of it.

Percentage	Reason
.01%	The pregnancy resulted from an incestuous relationship
.14%	<u>The woman was raped</u>
.27%	<u>The woman's life was endangered by the pregnancy</u>
1.0%	<u>There was a serious fetal abnormality</u>
1.48%	The woman's physical health was threatened by the pregnancy
1.67%	The woman's psychological health was threatened by the pregnancy
20.0%	<u>The woman aborted for social or economic reasons</u>
75.4%	No reason (elective)

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The data seems to suggest that the vast majority of abortions are not for health reasons, but for personal convenience. Here we find a plausible parallel between the ancient practice of child sacrifice and contemporary abortion culture: both sacrifice children for the benefit of adults.¹⁷³ Handicapped or inconveniently timed children are not *needed* so they are not *wanted*.¹⁷⁴ Even so, in ancient pagan human sacrifice there was still a reverence for spilling blood¹⁷⁵ whereas contemporary aborted children are discarded or sold for research.¹⁷⁶ Just in the U.S. since Roe v. Wade in 1973, according to the Guttmacher Institute, 60,069,971 unborn children have been aborted.¹⁷⁷

2) What about to save the life of the mother?

RBTL 1: First, if the goal is to save the life of the mother, *it’s not direct abortion*. Trying to *save* the mother is the intention but if the baby dies, it’s tragic. This is not the same as an abortion which is a medical procedure with one goal: the *intentional* termination of a human life.

RBTL 2: Second, with the advance of medical technology, Eamon O’Dwyer, professor emeritus of obstetrics and gynecology at NUI Galway, sees *direct* abortion as almost always unnecessary to save the life of the mother, “As experienced practitioners and researchers in obstetrics and gynecology, we affirm that direct abortion is not medically necessary to save the life of a woman.”¹⁷⁸

RBTL 3: Third, even if you argue *for direct abortion* to save the life of the mother, it does not follow that abortion on demand is morally permissible outside of that.

3) No one should be able to tell a woman what to do with her body.

RBTL 1: Is an unborn baby just another “part” of a woman’s body? Is it a piece of tissue or something far more?

- Independent DNA, heartbeat, brainwave, fingerprints, etc.
- If allowed to come to term, is able (if provided the proper nourishment), to live on its own. No ordinary “body part” is capable of this.
- Can have a different gender than the mother.

RBTL 2: In terms of women’s rights, what if the baby is female?

At this juncture, we need to understand that, just as in the ancient world, unborn females and the physically challenged have the most to lose in an abortion culture. Steve Connor reports that gender selection may account for a global shortfall of up to 200 million girls since 1990.¹⁷⁹ Abortion has been referred to as “gendercide” because worldwide, little girls are the majority of abortions. Statistically speaking, “The three deadliest words in the world are, ‘It’s a girl.’”¹⁸⁰ Again, this is yet another reason why we desperately need to embrace the love and hope found in the good news of Jesus Christ. Only He can give us the forgiveness and hope that we need.

Abortion culture is a practical war on women and the weak. Plato would give a standing ovation for eugenics-esque selective genetic testing that allows parents to deliberately weed out unborn Down Syndrome children. All Canaanite, Greco-Roman, and contemporary pragmatic rationalizations aside, the selective termination of females and special needs persons should grate against our essential moral sensibilities. In the haunting words of Kevin DeYoung, “Where in the progression does our humanity begin and end? Where does life become valuable? When are we worth something? When do human rights become our rights? What if Dr. Seuss was right and a person's a person no matter how small? Why celebrate the right to kill what you once were? Why deny the rights of the little one who is what you are?”¹⁸¹

4) “I’ll admit it’s a life...but one worth sacrificing.”

RBTL 1: The pro-abortion movement is now becoming more honest with the advance of medical technology. In her article, “So What If Abortion Ends Life?” Mary Elizabeth Williams concludes “The fetus is indeed a life. A life worth sacrificing...All life is not equal.”¹⁸² This is a throwback to an ancient pagan idea of the strong over the weak. Solomon said, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecc. 1:9).

RBTL 2: Who are we to label that a life will have no value? Let’s be careful not to slip into the trap of the past where entire classes of persons were declared not fit to live *or* their lives were not worth living.

- 5) What about genetic testing and aborting a child who would otherwise be crippled or Down Syndrome?

RBTL 1: Have tests or doctors ever been wrong or misdiagnosed something? Are you willing to risk your child's life for a doctor's tests?

RBTL 2: Do persons with physical or mental limitations still have value? An endorsement of selective and elective abortion based upon these criteria is an endorsement of the belief that only the strong and intelligent have value. It's not a new position, the Greeks almost universally practiced post-birth inspection. If the infant didn't meet their standards, the child was discarded. Victoria Brignell observes:

We can also tell a lot about a culture's values by the language it uses. Neither the Greeks or the Romans had a word equivalent to 'disabled' but the term that they often use is 'teras' (for the Greeks) and 'monstrum' (for the Romans). These are the same words they use to describe mythological monsters, such as the Gorgon Medusa. The Latin 'mutus' referred to both somebody who couldn't speak and someone who is stupid.¹⁸³

Again, these are *old beliefs and practices*, which is why we desperately need the good news of Jesus Christ that will turn our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.

- 6) If we outlaw abortion won't it mean that more children will be raised in poverty? It may be better for these children to be aborted than grow up in such circumstances.

RBTL 1: Following this logic, it would lead one to make the case: Why don't we just abort all the children of poor parents?

RBTL 2: Michael Spielman undercuts the very premise of "poverty necessitates abortion" viewpoint:

In large measure, abortion is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Whereas birth is a declaration of faith and hope, abortion is a declaration of cynicism and fear. "Experts" will tell us that poverty makes abortion necessary, but what if abortion returns the favor by perpetuating more poverty? "Quality of life" is a fuzzy distinction, but it's nearly impossible to argue that the health and emotional well-being of the average American child has improved in the 40+ years since abortion was legalized. Of the ten states that actually rate highest for overall quality of life, seven have abortion ratios below the norm. More significantly, of the ten states rated highest for government health and integrity, eight have abortion ratios below the norm—and nine have enacted state-level restrictions on abortion. On the other side of the ledger, only one of the 17 states that publicly funds abortion (Washington) is rated among the top ten for government health and integrity...Abortion is fatal to innocent unborn children, but it's scarcely less dangerous to the health and well-being of the society it purports to improve.¹⁸⁴

RBTL 3: Mental and emotional effects and sense of guilt cannot be dismissed.

1. Dilation and Curettage – Insertion of a sharp instrument called a curette into the placenta that cuts the fetus/unborn infant into pieces.

2. Dilation and Extraction, D&X (Partial Birth Abortion) – The fetus/unborn infant is delivered feet first. The head is left inside the first canal. A sharp instrument is used to puncture the rear of the skull at the base and the brains are sucked out. Once dead, the fetus is fully delivered.
3. Dilation & Evacuation – The abortionist inserts a pliers-like instrument into the uterus. The abortionist then grabs whatever part of the fetus it comes into contact with. Pulls and/or twists the fetus out of the womb, thus causing dismemberment then death
4. Suction – 28 times stronger than a vacuum. The baby is sucked out into a jar.
5. Saline injection (saline amniocentesis). The baby breathes in the salt and is poisoned by it while the acidic substance eats off the outer layer of skin. Death generally takes around one hour. An abortive method where a highly concentrated salt solution is injected into the placenta. The fetus/infant takes the salt into the lungs as well as swallowing it. The mother delivers the body a day or two later.¹⁸⁵

- 7) Most people who are against abortion will never even become pregnant. Men shouldn't have a voice on this issue.

RBTL 1: The assumption is that unless you've been directly affected you can't speak to it. If so, then a woman shouldn't have anything to say about how much a man gets paid. The idea that I must first experience something before being able to comment on it breaks down quicker than a Ford Pinto in a fender-bender. Experience equals expertise simply doesn't work. Here are a few reasons why: Must an oncologist first need to have cancer before being able to provide treatment for cancer patients? Should we require a psychologist to only give treatment to mental disorders that he or she has experienced? The end result to this misguided but emotionally charged claim is for virtually all human dialogue to grind to a halt. We will all stay in our own experiential silos with only our personal experiences to offer. Reason, science, data, double-blind experiments hold no weight in this sort of world. Rather than helping one another progress to a better tomorrow, the intellectual regress is irreversible. Emotionalism (that may or may not be grounded in reality), overtakes "the best idea wins."

RBTL 2: Abortion is anti-women. Pearcey is direct:

A culture that practices abortion and infanticide is a culture that demeans women and disrespects their unique contribution to the task of reproduction. It does not treat women's ability to gestate and bear children as a wondrous and awesome capacity but as a liability, a disadvantage, a disability. It does not value and protect women in their childbearing capacity but seeks to suppress women's bodily functions, using toxic chemicals and deadly devices to violently destroy the life inside her.¹⁸⁶

Abortion to Infanticide: The slippery slope from abortion to outright infanticide is well documented, such as in the abstract of a British *Journal of Medical Ethics* article:

Abortion is largely accepted even for reasons that do not have anything to do with the fetus's health. By showing that (1) both fetuses and newborns do not have the same moral status as actual persons, (2) the fact that both are potential persons is morally irrelevant and (3) adoption is not always in the best interest of actual people, the authors argue that what we call 'after-birth abortion' (killing a newborn) should be permissible in all the

cases where abortion is, including cases where the newborn is not disabled.¹⁸⁷

David Boonin, in his book, *A Defense of Abortion*, *Cambridge Studies in Philosophy and Public Policy* published by Cambridge University Press, is more honest than many in the pro-abortion movement when he chillingly writes of his son in the foreword:

In the top drawer of my desk, I keep [a picture of my son]. This picture was taken on September 7, 1993, 24 weeks before he was born. The sonogram image is murky, but it reveals clear enough a small head tilted back slightly, and an arm raised up and bent, with the hand pointing back toward the face and the thumb extended out toward the mouth. There is no doubt in my mind that this picture, too, shows [my son] at a very early stage in his physical development. And there is no question that the position I defend in this book entails that it would have been morally permissible to end his life at this point.¹⁸⁸

To talk so calmly, yet so cold-bloodedly, of executing one's own child is unnerving but entirely consonant with Boonin's premise.

By and large, the acceptance of abortion is a worldview, rather than a scientific issue.¹⁸⁹ The data seems to suggest the vast majority of abortions are not for health reasons but personal convenience. Abortion on demand is quite possibly one of the greatest cultural indicators of crass egoism. I submit this is a focal reason why abortion has remained at the forefront of ethical and political debates for the past 40+ years. What is ironic is the visible emotional turmoil expressed by some over animal mistreatment. Compared to the silence from many of the same over abortion, the so-called "respect for all life" rallying cry becomes radically inconsistent.¹⁹⁰

Claiming to be an advocate for children while simultaneously supporting abortion on demand is contradictory. The ontology of abortion categorizes unborn children not as persons but as excess biological matter, so the claim must be qualified: "*Children who are allowed to be born have intrinsic value*" but they're fair game before that. At the end of the day, if we're not all people, then we will experience an inexorable chiseling away at our human rights and liberties. This may be why Francis Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop wrote in their book, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, "Cultures can be judged in many ways, but eventually every nation in every age must be judged by this test: *How did it treat people?*"¹⁹¹ The good news of Jesus Christ helps us see that babies are not our enemies. They are our future and our responsibility. Even if we fundamentally disagree with Scripture, it's healthy for us to ask, "Where does my passion come from? What drives my view?"

Q: How did the early church clash with the surrounding culture?

A: The church was firm that infanticide and abortion were murder and pedophilia brought the righteous judgment of God. The Epistle of Barnabas (80-120 A. D.) speaks of those: "who know not Him that made them, who are murderers of children, destroyers of the workmanship of God; who turn away him that is in want, who oppress the afflicted."¹⁹²

Justin Martyr (100-165 A. D.) dedicates an entire chapter of his *First Apology* to the "Guilt of exposing children" which I will quote at length:

But as for us, we have been taught that to expose newly-born children is the part of wicked men; and this we have been taught lest we should do any one an injury, and lest we should sin against God, first, because we see that almost all so exposed (not only the girls, but also the males) are brought up to prostitution. And as the ancients are said to have reared herds of oxen, or goats, or sheep, or grazing horses, so now we see you rear children only for this shameful use; and for this pollution a multitude of females and hermaphrodites, and those who commit unmentionable iniquities, are found in every nation. And you receive the hire of these, and duty and taxes from them, whom you ought to exterminate from your realm. And anyone who uses such persons, besides the godless and infamous and impure intercourse, may possibly be having intercourse with his own child, or relative, or brother. And there are some who prostitute even their own children and wives, and some are openly mutilated for the purpose of sodomy; and they refer these mysteries to the mother of the gods, and along with each of those whom you esteem gods there is painted a serpent, a great symbol and mystery. Indeed, the things which you do openly and with applause, as if the divine light were overturned and extinguished, these you lay to our charge; which, in truth, does no harm to us who shrink from doing any such things, but only to those who do them and bear false witness against us.¹⁹³

Another one of the byproducts of the good news of Jesus Christ is care for the outcasts (which the early church exemplified). Over 1,850 years later, the great British pastor, Charles H. Spurgeon, confronted skeptics with the dare, “The God that answers by orphanages, let him be God.”¹⁹⁴ Because of the generosity of the people of Grace Fellowship: A Church for All Nations, a number of orphanages exist that otherwise would not. One of these homes serves orphans who are also HIV positive. They’re able to have a family through the leadership on the ground, clean food and water, life-skills training, and the knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because a group of Christ-followers in South Florida were moved by the love of God, these children have a home, food, clean water, education, and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Because of the love of God, something rises up within us to care for those who cannot care for themselves. Because of Jesus, we desire to defend the defenseless and provide for the helpless. This is the heart of God. Again, if you’re passionate about human rights, you need to become a Christian precisely because the Gospel of Jesus Christ informs *why* you hold those deep sentiments and beliefs.

In 258 A. D., the godly deacon Lawrence provided such a profound Christian testimony that it challenged the core of the Roman value system:

According to the Christian tradition, Deacon Lawrence, knowing that the fervor of Valerian’s hatred was extending to all Christians who owned property, began to give it all away. He distributed the money and treasures of the Church to the city’s poor, believing the clear admonition of the Savior that they were blessed and especially loved by Him. Valerian heard the news and wanted the treasure to satisfy his unbridled lust for worldly power. So, he offered Deacon Lawrence a way out of sure death. If he would show him where the Church’s great gold and silver were located, he would issue an order of clemency, sparing his life so that he could continue his work. Valerian was delighted when the deacon asked for three days to gather all the gold and silver of the Church together in one central place . . . For three days, Deacon Lawrence went throughout the city and invited all the beloved poor, handicapped, and unfortunate to come together.

They were being supported by a thriving early Christian community who understood the Gospel imperative to recognize Jesus in the poor. When Valerian arrived, Deacon Lawrence presented him with the true gold and silver of the Church, the poor. The emperor was filled with rage . . . He ordered Deacon Lawrence to be burned alive, in public, on a griddle . . . It is still said to this day that all of Rome became Christian as a result of the faithful life, and the death, of this one humble deacon.¹⁹⁵

Value was more than gold or silver. The poor, the aged, the children, are valuable in God's sight, and so they should be in ours as well. This was the essence of Lawrence's testimony.

Rivaling the accepted custom of exposing infants in the ancient world was the blood-spattered pits of the gladiatorial games. After observing the horrific slaughter, a Christian leader named Telemachus could no longer stand it. He entered the arena running to each gladiator, begging them to stop. Although the accounts differ, Telemachus was killed that day for taking a stand against the cruelty that was the order of the day. His willingness to sacrifice his own life for condemned criminals and nameless foreign prisoners of war reflects the example of Jesus Christ who gave Himself over for the guilty. Even secular historian William Lecky goes so far as to declare:

There is scarcely . . . any other single reform so important in the moral history of mankind as the suppression of the gladiatorial shows, and this feat must be almost exclusively ascribed to the Christian church. When we remember how extremely few of the best and greatest men of the Roman world had absolutely condemned the games of the amphitheatre, it is impossible to regard, without the deepest admiration, the unwavering and uncompromising consistency of the patristic denunciations.¹⁹⁶

Telemachus' actions snapped many of his contemporaries out of their blood-soaked stupor to the voice of the Creator, in that all human life has value. Afterwards, Emperor Honorius banned the gladiatorial games in the Roman Empire via imperial edict in 404 A. D.

Chattel slavery was ended through the efforts of Christians who derived their ideas and motivation from the Bible. William Wilberforce's Christian faith was the driving force behind his drive to end chattel slavery in the British Empire.

OBJ: But what about the crusades, religious wars, and other acts of violence inspired by religion?

RBTL 1: There's a fundamental difference between obeying and disobeying Jesus. Jesus told Pontius Pilate, "*My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting*" (Jn. 18:36a). Jesus never instructed His followers, "Declare war in my name" or "In the name of my cross, conquer and convert!"

OBJ: Christianity is oppressive!

RBTL: Only to oppressors and those who want their power to be unchecked. If you're without power or oppressed, Christianity is liberating and gives you hope that one day the ultimate judge will set everything right.

Godly men such as George Mueller built orphanages and delivered untold numbers of orphans out of heartbreaking conditions in the time of the industrial revolution.¹⁹⁷ Christian compassion

eventually made its way into public policy known as child labor laws.

3) Our sin, shame, and guilt can be overcome through Jesus Christ's salvation, grace, and peace (More on this in the next chapter).

Next Steps

- If this is your past, you have an opportunity to help others.

How?

- a. Be confident that God's Word addresses the issue clearly.

Stay informed. Get an ultrasound. Research abortions. You guys are smart. For any big decision in life we research it before deciding.

- b. Respond with compassion, kindness, and love.
- c. Reach out to our ministry partner, *First Care*.

OBJ: You're not pro-life, you're pro-birth!

RBTL: Yes, we are! Christians by the thousands are responding with support for adoption. We support First Care, orphanages, and provide a host of ministries to families and children from all walks of life.

- *Surrendering the Secret* abortion recovery group – Monday, Oct. 7-Dec 12 @6:30p, location given once registered. Limited space.
- Bottles for *First Care* in the lobby.
- Adoption and/or foster parenting.

In the name of Christ, forbear! Through the grace of Christ, reach out and be forgiven. Because of the blood of Christ, receive His forgiveness for all your sin. Because of the resurrection of Christ, believe in Him as the perfect substitute for your sin, shame, and regret.

Recommended reading

- Scott Klusendorf, *The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture*.
- O. M. Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity*. Translated by Brian McNeil. *Highly recommended reading*
- Francis A. Schaeffer, *No Little People*.
- Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*.
- C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.
- Mark Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*.

God, Sexuality, & Human Value – Part 4: Regret and Redemption – Luke 7:36-50 – 10.06.19
Main idea: His grace is greater.

In this final chapter, we'll address the incredible resources available in the good news of Jesus Christ regarding our regret. Regret seems to be part of the human condition. The Greek philosopher Aristotle argued, "Bad men are full of regrets."¹⁹⁸ Aristotle did not consider himself to be within that class. On the other hand, the Gospel of Jesus Christ erases the surface distinction between "good" and "bad" people. As we saw in chapter 1, Jesus launched his public ministry with an announcement for *all* of us to repent of our sins and believe the gospel (Mk. 1:15). Even the great British preacher Charles Spurgeon, in his sermon, "What We Would Be," admits, "Never do I look back upon my own past without regret."¹⁹⁹ Does your regret make you feel isolated? Often, we don't try to wallow in the past but sometimes thoughts and memories pop onto the radar screen of our heart and mind. We didn't place it on our daily planner but all of a sudden, while we're driving (or flying) down I-95 or digging into a TropiChop at Pollo Tropical, the feeling of deep regret begins to sink in. It's frustrating and can be downright destabilizing. In this chapter, I hope you will see that your regret, guilt, and shame should not keep you from God. Rather, those are the very signals that show us we need the grace of Jesus Christ. Every single one of us will make a decision about Jesus: will you trust Him, reject Him, or procrastinate by kicking the decision to follow Jesus down the road?

The Gospel of Luke 7:36-50 records one of Jesus' most profound explanations of regret and redemption:

³⁶ *One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table.*

Meals in first-century Jewish culture took place while reclining around a table rather than sitting in chairs. When we look at the host, we grow a bit suspicious. Was this a setup rather than a genuine invitation? (To those of us that have been set up before, we know the "We'd like to take you to lunch" or "A group of us would like to have a meeting" statements signify an agenda behind the request). Or, the invitation could have been in the spirit of a genuine and respectful conversation in the search for truth. Or was it a veiled setup? What was really going on?

³⁷ *And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment,*

There was a certain sense of decorum and etiquette. It's sort of like when you're at a fancy dinner and your 3 plates are surrounded by 15 utensils and you forget where to start first. Is it outside in or inside out? Then you have to make a decision and grab the biggest fork you can find and start going to town. Or when you're at a nice restaurant with friends and colleagues and your crazy uncle shows up and shows out. Well, in this situation, word apparently quickly got around that Jesus was eating at this Pharisee's house and a certain "*woman of the city, who was a sinner*" found out and showed up. In the home of a religious professional, a Pharisee at that, you can imagine the likely unified reaction: What is *she* doing *here*? But remember, Jesus is known as a "friend of sinners." Friends don't feel they need a signed invitation to drop in to visit a

friend who is in the area. This woman had these two things against her: She was a woman, and she was a notorious sinner. But she had apparently been seeking in her heart.

³⁸ *and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.*

Let's stop right here to say, if you're ever at a dinner party and someone walks up or sneaks up, and starts kissing your feet, you need to run because you're not Jesus. Only Jesus can turn a "not okay" situation like this into a transformational story of grace far more profound than anyone there expected.

When was she forgiven? Since Jesus was a friend of sinners it's likely she had heard the Gospel before and repented.²⁰⁰ Although Luke does not include her backstory beyond a couple of lines, the Apostle John reminds us, "*Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written* (Jn. 21:25). Everybody knew who she was and what she was into, but she didn't let others keep her from Jesus.

³⁹ *Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."*

The Pharisee's reaction towards Jesus was something like, "If you were really a prophet, if you actually had the prophet mojo, you'd just know. If that internal spiritual black-belt were legitimate, you'd kick people like this woman, this sinner, back to where she belongs." The logic was rather simple: God is holy, and sinners are not. Therefore, sinners and God shouldn't mix. Since I know a lot about God, I shouldn't associate with those who don't. Notice there's a gaping lack of any sort of missionary spirit to share the knowledge of God with those far from God. Furthermore, the Pharisee did not even consider that he was in need of God's forgiveness. Warren Wiersbe writes, "Simon said to himself, "She is a sinner"; but he needed to say, "I am a sinner.""²⁰¹ Do you see other people's sins as greater than yours? Or do you view your sin as greater than Christ?

In context, this account was a response to Luke 7:33-34 "*For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.'*"³⁴ *The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'*" See what Jesus is doing? He's exposing religious smokescreens. They're trying to delegitimize Jesus because he associates with people far from God. Instead of trying to run from this label, Jesus *completely owns it*. By answering the Pharisee's internal thoughts, Jesus answers the question of whether or not he is a prophet. But knowing another's thoughts is a bit beyond prophet status. Now you're looking at deity status.

⁴⁰ *And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."*⁴¹ *"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.*"⁴² *When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them*

will love him more?” ⁴³ Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.”

This is not rocket science. But notice how Jesus is speaking to this Pharisee: Jesus is graciously speaking *to him*. Jesus is shifting the Pharisee’s thinking to see that He, “*came to seek and to save the lost*” (Lk. 19:10b).

⁴⁴ Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

Jesus’ point is “because she has been forgiven much, she loves much. That is, her behavior gives expression to her forgiveness.”²⁰² When Jesus makes the parallel that much love comes from much forgiveness, he is reverse-leveraging guilt and regret. The Pharisees thought that sin, guilt, and regret, were written in permanent ink but Jesus comes and reorients their thinking entirely. It really makes a lot of sense when you sit down and think about it. The Pharisees were very smart people but they, like us sometimes, just accepted what they felt or were told without really assessing it. If you’ve really messed up and have been far from God and Jesus gives you a fresh start, then it just makes sense that you should be extremely grateful for that and should “love much.”

All of us have sin. The question is whether we’re willing to admit it. If our sin is great, when we come to Jesus Christ in faith and repentance, we experience how His grace is greater. If this is true, then He can be glorified in us through forgiving us of our sin. The deeper the shame and regret, the more profound we understand and experience the love of God. An attitude of, “That person, neighborhood, or group, *really* need them some Jesus. You know, those alcoholics, druggies, criminals, need help. In other words, those who are not like me. You see, don’t get me wrong, Jeff, I’m not perfect, but I’ve done fairly well. I give to charity, pay my taxes, don’t leave my trash can out past the HOA-imposed deadline, help my family and friends. I’m a good person! If I’m being honest, I don’t really need Jesus as much as *them*.” If that is how we view ourselves, then we’re in a precarious place. It’s often not the flashy sins that keep us from God but the intoxicating poison of pride. Scripture tells us that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (Jas. 4:6). In fact, the so-called “big sins” more easily remove our excuses as to why we don’t need God. Some of us have felt the weight of our brokenness and addictions. We know it. Jesus knows about it. Our former friends may have told everybody about it. Our family is downright ashamed about it. If the weight of your sins has crushed you into the ground, know that His grace is greater. The third verse and chorus to Matt Papa’s song, “His Mercy is More,” are spot on:

What riches of kindness He lavished on us,
His blood was the payment His life was the cost,
We stood ‘neath a debt we could never afford,
Our sins they are many, His mercy is more.

Praise the Lord
His mercy is more,



Stronger than darkness,
New every morn',
Our sins they are many, His mercy is more.²⁰³

We don't lie to ourselves or blame others. We look to Jesus who has taken responsibility for our sin and given His life on the cross for us. You see, Jesus blasts away at the ideas that some people really don't need God and others are too far from God to ever come back.

⁴⁷ *Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.* ⁴⁸ *And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”*

Notice that Jesus acknowledges her sin. He even says her sins are *many*. Yet here's where the hope of the Gospel shines: “*her sins, which are many, are forgiven*” (v.47). “*For she loved much*” refers not to the *cause* of her forgiveness, but the *result* of it.²⁰⁴ Bible commentator Joel B. Green explains, “She does not need forgiveness from God, but she does need recognition of her new life and forgiveness among God's people.”²⁰⁵ I. H. Marshall adds, “love is the proof that a person has received forgiveness, and the more people are forgiven, the more they will love.”²⁰⁶

⁴⁹ *Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?”* ⁵⁰ *And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”*

Everyone around the table began to comment on what just happened. They were understandably shocked at Jesus forgiving her sin. Only God could forgive sins, right? Bingo. Here's what's fascinating: Luke doesn't record Simon's response. The narrative ends open-ended. How did Simon respond to Jesus? We don't know. The question is how will you respond to Jesus?

What does this teach us? His grace is greater than your...

- Self-perception or others' perception of you.

Imagine being this woman...the eyes of everyone on you. But she had experienced the cleansing power of Jesus Christ, and when she came to Him, all she could do was weep at his feet. Some of us struggle with how others perceive us. But don't let others keep you from Jesus.

- Temptations.

Some of us have experienced what the Puritan Richard Baxter warned of:

You shall see neither hook nor line, much less the subtle angler himself, while he is offering you his bait. And his bait shall be so fitted to your temper and disposition, that he will be sure to find advantages within you, and make your own principles and inclinations betray you; and whenever he ruineth you, he will make you the instruments of ruin to others.²⁰⁷

No matter what we may be caught up in, the lifeline of the Gospel is still available to all who call upon Jesus Christ in faith and repentance. However deep you feel you're in the pit, however far you are from God, know that Jesus Christ specializes in hard cases.

- Failures and regrets.

Jesus stands ready to exchange His salvation, grace, and peace for our sin, shame, and guilt. If God exists and Jesus rose from the dead, you're not too far gone. So, let's lift up the cleansing

power of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus you can get past your past. If you're teetering on the precipice of despair, come into the open arms of the Savior. He won't push you away or slap a list of improvements you need to make before He will accept you. Don't run away from Jesus; run to Him. The question for us today is "What are we going to choose?"

N. T. Wright recounts, "The nations of the world got together to pronounce judgment on God for all the evils in the world, only to realize with a shock that God had already served his sentence."²⁰⁸ Christ's call to repent was not just an admonition to accept certain propositions but rather, "it involved a total reorientation that was to affect every sphere of life."²⁰⁹

There are no castaways in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God often uses the unlikely. My favorite hymn is "And Can It Be" written by the great hymnwriter, Charles Wesley in 1738:

VERSE 1

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior's blood
Died He for me, who caused His pain
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

VERSE 2

He left His Father's throne above
So free, so infinite His grace
Emptied Himself of all but love
And bled for Adam's helpless race
'Tis mercy all, immense and free
For O my God, it found out me!
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

VERSE 3

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light
My chains fell off, my heart was free
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God shouldst die for me?

VERSE 4

No condemnation now I dread
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine

Alive in Him, my living Head
And clothed in righteousness divine
Bold I approach the eternal throne
And claim the crown, through Christ my own
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou my God, shouldst die for me?²¹⁰

This can be your story. This can be your song. Where are you with Jesus Christ? Are you willing to consider that His claims could be true? How do you know you're acceptable to Jesus? According to Jesus, if you're weary and heavy-laden (Matt. 10:28). If you're weary of soul, you're an ideal candidate. He has an incredible plan for all of us if we're willing to follow Him. He's trustworthy. Repent and believe the Gospel. Then follow in believer's baptism by immersion. Connect with a local church and use your skills and talents for Christ. There is hope for you! Be encouraged by the words of the Apostle Paul, "*And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ*" (Phil. 1:6).

¹ Tim Keller & David Eisenbach, “What do Christians have against homosexuality?” *The Veritas Forum*, November 29, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZFCB9sduxQ>.

² Sam Allberry, *The Village Church Institute Forum: Is God Anti-Gay?*, July 14, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHRGCWsGL7I>.

³ Max Lucado, *Just Like Jesus*, <https://maxlucado.com/products/just-like-jesus/>.

⁴ R. Albert Mohler, “My Take: The Bible condemns a lot, but here’s why we focus on homosexuality,” *CNN*, May 21, 2012.

⁵ S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams, *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), xii.

⁶ The full quote is as follows, “First of all, I think it is absolutely vital that we understand the difference between Christian ethics, pastoral care, and public policy. These 3 categories presented by Dennis Hollinger, president and distinguished professor of Christian Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, helpfully distinguishes how we can navigate this discussion. Christian ethics addresses what is God’s ideal for our sexuality. Pastoral care addresses how Christians should come alongside of those who are struggling with their sexuality. When it comes to a Christian approach to public policy, we still have to decide our approach in a pluralistic society that doesn’t necessarily agree with a Christian view of sexuality. As Christians relate to politics, we can’t simply say, “Well, this is what it says in the Bible.” We can’t demand that everyone—Christian and non-Christian alike, people who know Jesus and people who don’t—follow this. Public policy gets into practical concerns about what is enforceable, what is possible, what will harm the spread of the gospel and what is wise.” Ed Stetzer, “Both-And: My Interview with Rich Nathan – What is the value of a church being a ‘Both-And’ church?” *Christianity Today*, Dec. 10, 2013, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/december/both-and-my-interview-with-rich-nathan.html>, Rich Nathan and Insoo Kim, *Both-And: Living the Christ-Centered Life in an Either-Or World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013).

⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), in *Logos Library System*.

⁸ Allberry, *The Village Church Institute Forum: Is God Anti-Gay?*

⁹ The call to deny yourself applies to...

- Husbands: Love your wife...
- Wives: Respect your husband...
- Children: Obey your parents...
- Parents (specifically fathers): Ephesians 6:4 *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*
- Employers, masters, those with authority. Treat those under you “justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven” (Col. 4:1b).
- Employees: do whatever you do as unto the Lord.

¹⁰ Stetzer, *ibid.*

¹¹ Trevin Wax, “Rob Bell and Andrew Wilson discuss Homosexuality,” *The Gospel Coalition*, May 10, 2013, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/rob-bell-and-andrew-wilson-discuss-homosexuality-some-thoughts/>.

¹² Tertullian, *The Apology of Tertullian and the Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius*, trans. W. M. Reeve and Jeremy Collier (London: Newberry House, 1889), 111.

¹³ Benjamin Wiker, “Gay Marriage—There is nothing new under the sun,” *Catholic World Report*, May 22, 2012, <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2012/05/22/gay-marriage-nothing-new-under-the-sun/>.

¹⁴ Martha Nussbaum, *Philosophical Interventions* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 73, in Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018), 105.

¹⁵ Fortson & Grams, 43.

¹⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 44.

¹⁷ A. Chadwick Thornhill, “The Bible, Same-sex Sexual Activity, and the Parameters for Flourishing,” *Moral Apologetics*, January 1, 2018, <https://www.moralapologetics.com/wordpress/the-bible-same-sex-sexual-activity-and-the-parameters-for-flourishing-part-1>.

¹⁸ Allberry, *The Village Church Institute Forum: Is God Anti-Gay?*

¹⁹ Pearcey, 29.

²⁰ John Piper, *Desiring God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 211.

²¹ Fortson & Grams, 207.

²² *Ibid.*, 196.

²³ Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 110.

²⁴ Pearcey, 183.

²⁵ Pearcey, 183-184.

²⁶ Keller explains, “In short, *the coming of Christ changed how we worship but not how we live*. The moral law is an outline of God’s own character—his integrity, love, and faithfulness. And so all the Old Testament says about loving our neighbor, caring for the poor, generosity with our possessions, social relationships, and commitment to our family is still in force. The New Testament continues to forbid killing or committing adultery, and all the sex ethic of the Old Testament is re-stated throughout the New Testament (Matthew 5:27-30; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; 1 Timothy 1:8-11.) *If the New Testament has reaffirmed a commandment, then it is still in force for us today*. Further, the New Testament explains another change between the Testaments. Sins continue to be sins—but the penalties change. In the Old Testament things like adultery or incest were punishable with civil sanctions like execution. This is because at that time God’s people existed in the form of a nation-state and so all sins had civil penalties. But in the New Testament the people of God are an assembly of churches all over the world, living under many different governments. The church is not a civil government, and so sins are dealt with by exhortation and, at worst, exclusion from membership. This is how a case of incest in the Corinthian church is dealt with by Paul (1 Corinthians 5:1ff. and 2 Corinthians 2:7-11.) Why this change? Under Christ, the gospel is not confined to a single nation—it has been released to go into all cultures and peoples. Once you grant the main premise of the Bible—about the surpassing significance of Christ and his salvation—then all the various parts of the Bible make sense. . . . *So where does this leave us? There are only two possibilities. If Christ is God, then this way of reading the Bible makes sense and is perfectly consistent with its premise. The other possibility is that you reject Christianity’s basic thesis—you don’t believe Jesus was the resurrected Son of God—and then the Bible is no sure guide for you about much of anything. But the one thing you can’t really say in fairness is that Christians are being inconsistent with their beliefs to accept the moral statements in the Old Testament while not practicing other ones.*” Tim Keller, “Old Testament Law and the Charge of Inconsistency,” Redeemer Presbyterian Church, June 2012, http://redeemer.com/news_and_events/newsletter/?aid=363.

²⁷ Douglas Groothuis, “A Time for Truth and Courage,” Facebook, June 10, 2015, https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10205886318951372&id=1660534018. For a rich apologetics, check out Groothuis’ massive 752-page, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011).

²⁸ Allberry, *The Village Church Institute Forum: Is God Anti-Gay?*

²⁹ *Ibid*.

³⁰ Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality & Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 114.

³¹ Fortson & Grams, 31.

³² Gagnon, 349, 350.

³³ Sam Allberry *Is God Anti-Gay?* rev. and expanded ed. (UK: The Good Book Company, 2015), 32.

³⁴ Pearcey, 180.

³⁵ A. Chadwick Thornhill, “The Bible, Same-sex Sexual Activity, and the Parameters for Flourishing,” *Moral Apologetics*, January 1, 2018, <https://www.moralapologetics.com/wordpress/the-bible-same-sex-sexual-activity-and-the-parameters-for-flourishing-part-1>.

³⁶ Fortson & Grams, 170.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 171, 173.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 28.

³⁹ Thornhill, *ibid*.

⁴⁰ John Stonestreet & Brett Kunkle, *A Practical Guide to Culture: Helping the Next Generation Navigate Today’s World* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2017), 199.

⁴¹ See Allberry, *The Village Church Institute Forum: Is God Anti-Gay?*

⁴² Michael Kruger, “One Trait that Set Apart the Earliest Christians,” *The Gospel Coalition*, October 28, 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/one-trait-that-set-apart-the-earliest-christians/>.

⁴³ Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, *ibid*.

⁴⁴ Benjamin Wiker, “Gay Marriage—There is nothing new under the sun,” *Catholic World Report*, May 22, 2012, <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2012/05/22/gay-marriage-nothing-new-under-the-sun/>.

⁴⁵ Thornhill, *ibid*.

⁴⁶ Fortson & Grams, 170.

⁴⁷ Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 32.

⁴⁸ I am indebted to Dr. Nicholas Dodson for his contribution on this point.



- ⁴⁹ John Piper, “So-called Same-Sex Marriage,” *Desiring God*, June 26, 2015, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/so-called-same-sex-marriage>.
- ⁵⁰ Daniel Bush, & Noel Due, *Live in Liberty: The Spiritual Message of Galatians* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 190.
- ⁵¹ John Piper, “Does God Want Me to be Happy or Holy?” *Desiring God*, March 20, 2015, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/does-god-want-me-to-be-happy-or-holy>.
- ⁵² William Lane Craig, “The Problem of Evil,” *Reasonable Faith*, accessed July 12, 2016, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/reasonable-faith-podcast/>.
- ⁵³ Kaiser, *Hard sayings of the Bible*, *ibid*.
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[e%20you%2C%20and%20I%20prefer%20you%20to%20my%20life%20itself.%20For%20the%20present%20life%20is%20nothing%2C%20and%20my%20most%20ardent%20dream%20is%20to&pg=PA1#v=onepage&q&f=false.](#)

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Furthermore, SSM carries chilling overtones for parental rights. Melissa Moschella notes, “In an MSNBC promo spot a couple of years ago ... [Melissa] Harris-Perry claimed, ‘We have to break through our kind of private idea that kids belong to their parents or kids belong to their families and recognize that kids belong to whole communities.’ Her claim reflects the troubling but not uncommon view that the education of children, particularly their formal education, is first and foremost the task of the state rather than parents... If Gutmann, Macedo, Harris-Perry and others are correct, and children *do* belong to the larger community at least as much as they belong to their parents, then the state’s views about the best way to raise and educate children should trump the parents’ views, and there is no principled basis for opposing the sorts of intrusive state actions described above. By treating marriage and family as a mere construct of the state, and denying the normativity of the intact biological family, the majority in *Obergefell* have effectively enshrined this statist vision of childrearing in our law.” Melissa Moschella, “To Whom Do Children Belong? How Same-Sex Marriage Threatens Parental Rights,” *The Witherspoon Institute*, October 5, 2015, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/10/15407/>.

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¹⁷⁹ Steve Connor, “The Lost Girls: It Seems That The Global War on Girls Has Arrived In Britain,” *The Independent*, January 14, 2014, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/the-lost-girls-it-seems-that-the-global-war-on-girls-has-arrived-in-britain-9059610.html>. Connor notes, “In parts of India, notably the relatively affluent north-west states of Punjab and Haryana, the sex ratio of certain age groups is now about 1.2 or above - meaning there are 120 boys for every 100 girls. While in some parts of China, especially those where the Han Chinese form the main ethnic group, sex ratios among children have reached as high as 1.4 or even 1.5 - one-and-a half times as many boys as girls. In both these regions of the world, the vilification of girls is deeply engrained within some elements of the population. A Punjabi proverb, for instance, likens raising a daughter to watering your neighbor’s garden, while an old Chinese saying states that it is better to have one crippled son than eight healthy daughters.”

¹⁸⁰ Documentary, *It’s a Girl*, directed by Evan Gray Davis (2012), <http://www.itsagirlmovie.com/>, in Pearcey, 70.

¹⁸¹ Kevin DeYoung, “Questions for Our Pro-Abortion Friends, Church Leaders, and Politicians,” *Desiring God*, August 28, 2012, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/questions-for-our-pro-abortion-friends-church-leaders-and-politicians>.

¹⁸² Mary Elizabeth Williams, “So What If Abortion Ends Life?” *Salon*, January 23, 2013, in Pearcey, 62-63.

¹⁸³ Victoria Brignell, “Ancient world: Smearred in mustard, paraded naked - the curious and often cruel treatment of disabled people in Anci,” *New Statesman*, April 7, 2008, <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/crips-column/2008/04/disabled-slaves-child-roman>.

¹⁸⁴ Michael Spielman, “Does Poverty Lead to Abortion, or Does Abortion Lead to Poverty?” *Abort73.com*, December 28, 2017, <https://www.abort73.com/blog/does-poverty-lead-to-abortion-or-does-abortion-lead-to-poverty/>.

¹⁸⁵ John and Paul Feinberg, & Aldous Huxley, *Ethics for a Brave New World* (Crossway Books: Wheaton, 1996), in *Logos Library System*.

¹⁸⁶ Pearcey, 69.

¹⁸⁷ Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva, “After-Birth Abortion: Why Should the Baby Live?” *Journal of Medical Ethics* Vol. 39, No. 5 (2012): 262. Kim LaCapria, writing for the popular website *Snopes*, does her utmost to discount the unsettling claims in the original article. The questionable academic merits of so-called Internet “experts” are illustrated by LaCapria’s personalized bio: “Kim LaCapria is a New York-based Content Manager, *Snopes* community member, and folklore enthusiast. She has been writing for *Snopes* since 2014, and never gets tired of unraveling urban legends. When not working, she enjoys air hockey, jjimjilbangs, and casual mermaiding.” Kim LaCapria, “After Birth Abortion,” *Snopes*, July 29, 2015, <http://www.snopes.com/after-birth-abortion/>, <http://www.snopes.com/author/kim/>.

¹⁸⁸ David Boonin, *A Defense of Abortion*, *Cambridge Studies in Philosophy and Public Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), xiv.

¹⁸⁹ “Historically, the greatest evils in the world have occurred when those in power have made their own interests supreme at the expense of other human lives, and then dehumanized said human beings to justify their actions.” Addison Merryman, “Abortion in Worldview,” *The Chronicle*, March 24, 2016, <http://www.dukechronicle.com/article/2016/03/worldview-in-abortion>.

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¹⁹² *The Epistle of Barnabas*, Philip Schaff ed., *The Complete Ante-Nicene & Nicene and Post-Nicene Church*

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¹⁹⁴ Charles Richmond Henderson, “Christianity and Children,” *The Biblical World*, Vol. 8, No. 6 (December 1896): 477.

¹⁹⁵ Keith Fournier, “St. Lawrence, Deacon and Martyr,” *Catholic.org*, https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php? saint_id=366.

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²⁰⁶ Marshall, *ibid*.

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