

Unshakeable, Colossians 3:5 “Grace, Truth and Sexuality” Part 2, 3/12/17

We come to our study in Colossians to Paul’s instructions on how to live a life of freedom and power in light of the gospel, in light our union with Christ as we looked at 2 weeks ago in 3:1-4, now we get to verse 5.

Colossians 3:5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: **sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.**

1) Equip you with a more biblical view of sexuality 2) Understand the deeper problem of our sin 3) Awaken a more loving, gracious and truthful approach to the LGBT community and your loved ones who struggle with or identifies as something other than heterosexual.

When it comes to the issue of homosexuality, I believe the Church in the last few decades in some cases has failed on both fronts- to teach truth and to love well.

Former evangelical- *“In all the years that I had been a Christian growing up in the church, they made exactly one argument against homosexuality. The argument from “Ickyness.” Being gay is icky and being gay is the worst kind of sinner you can be. Period, end of story, Amen, pass the casserole. When you have membership with no theological or doctrinal depth that you’ve neglected to equip with the tools to wrestle with hard issues the moment ickyness no longer rings true for young believers their faith is destroyed. This is why many young ex-evangelicals points to their turning point the first time they really got to know someone who was gay. If your belief on homosexuality is based on a learned disgust, the moment a gay person no longer disgusts you, you have nothing left.”*

To some degree that was my experience. And then I got a job and worked with a guy who was gay and he was really a great guy, in fact nicer than some church people. And I began to question what I was taught.

This week three things: 1) Call to truth 2) A call to love 3) A Call to those with Same-Sex Desire

1) A Call to Truth: A defense of the Biblical view on Homosexuality

Now we’ve already laid some major groundwork for this last week. If we don’t have a firm grasp on depravity, that fact that we are all born with disordered desires of all kinds, including sexual desires.

Does the Bible have anything to say about homosexuality? Maybe it wasn’t even something that was around back then and so Scripture didn’t address it.

Six passages in Scripture that address homosexuality directly. Three in the Old Testament and three in the New Testament. **Genesis 19, Leviticus 18, 20, Romans 1,**

1 Corinthians 6, 1 Timothy 1. This tells us two things: On one hand, this is not in any way a major theme of Scripture. The Bible addresses the topic of greed 20x more than homosexuality. At the same time, just because it's not a major theme of the Bible, doesn't mean the Bible is silent. It is not a gray area and there is a consistency in the Biblical teaching on homosexuality- that it is sin and it is not according to God's design.

Now in the time we have this morning I can't address every one of these texts, look at the context and do it justice. So the text I want to look at is Romans 1 because I believe it is the clearest and Paul's argument is definitive.

Paul's aim in these early chapters of Romans is to demonstrate that the whole world, both Jew and gentile is inherently sinful and has committed sin in God's sight and therefore in need of salvation. He describes it as a whole as a humanity that has turned from God and embraced idolatry and wickedness. The essence of this problem is captured in

v.25 They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised.

As I said last week the biggest disorder we have as humanity is disordered worship. We say, God we don't want you, we want your stuff.

In v. 24-32 Paul talks about the consequences when the human race turned from the worship of God to worship of self and creation. Now often we think of God's judgment as lightening bolts from the sky and disaster, but here Paul instead says that God's judgment is, essentially giving us what we want. **Three times Paul says that in response to our rejection of God that he "gave them over" v.24, 26, 28.**

In v.24 God gave them over to all kinds of sexual desires...v. 28 God gave them over to a depraved mind, all kinds of wickedness and greed, pride... all kinds of disordered worship. One the consequences of this exchange of worship is homosexuality.

Romans 1:26-27

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another.

Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Because humanity exchanged worship of God for created things, God allows our natural, God-designed sexuality to be exchanged for unnatural sexual desire that goes against God's design. That is the "penalty", the consequences Paul is talking about.

Now here is where some scholars begin to look for another way to interpret this. And if we come to Scripture looking for every possible way to make it say something other than what it says because it doesn't fit our world-view or sensibilities you will be quick to accept an easy out. There are a few LGBT affirming interpretations of this passage within Christian circles. Let me share with you the most widely used interpretation.

Homosexuality in the Bible is not the same version as what we see today. Paul in Romans 1 is addressing a harmful version, where slaves were being taken advantage of, abusive, rape, the practice of pedophilia, which was happening in that day. Not monogamous, loving same-sex relationships between adults. Because Paul would not have known about monogamous loving same-sex relationships, that didn't exist.

On a scholarly level you need to know that this has been widely refuted and dismissed. No respected scholar is making this argument anymore. Why? Because it is not historically accurate. It is revisionist history. We have plenty of **historical artifacts**, pottery and writings from Paul's day and before, from the cities in the Roman empire that depict and describe adult, reciprocal, consensual same-sex relationships. This practice was around during Paul's day so Paul was not ignorant as some have attempted to paint him. Secondly, because Paul doesn't just talk about men but also **lesbianism**, and there was no common practice of pederasty. Thirdly, Paul would have been very much aware of homosexual relationships of all kinds. In fact, in first **Corinthians 6:11 Paul tells us that some of the members of the church in Corinth were saved out of an LGBT lifestyle.** Paul knew them personally.

So again, we are back to where we began the conversation, disordered sexuality is a result of the fall of man. That sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and woman is not according to God's design and that it is sin, which includes homosexuality. The Bible gives no permission, out-clause or end around to fulfilling our sexual desires outside of marriage. Here's my exhortation: Don't have a lazy, shallow, fuzzy theology of sexuality. You need to know why you believe what you believe. And you need to help your children wade these difficult waters. Facebook has 30 different sexual/gender identity categories... Book recommendations, Home Builders in April.

But for now, that's as far as we want to go on the call to truth, because we need to talk about a **call to love.**

And that starts with an apology. Because there has been an awful lot of unloving, merciless, graceless things done to or said about homosexuals and the LGBT community under the banner of Christianity that is not compatible with the gospel message. They range from gay jokes, stereotypes and name calling to hateful picketing signs, to parents disowning children, to avoiding gay people, to dehumanizing the LGBT community, to violence... Church we have some dirty

laundry. And because of this, the sad reality is that for many, Christians are known as anti-gay and homophobic. While some of that is an unfair stereotype, some of that label we need to own for our behavior. And not just those Christians out there... but I wonder if we have some repentance to do. I've had to repent because of the things I've said, contempt I've had in my passed.

How does true gospel Christianity express itself toward sinners?

Luke 18- The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Imagine, anniversary I sit Shannan down, candles, card and just talk to her and I say, "Babe, we've been married 12 years and I just want to tell you how awesome of a husband I am." That's what is happening in parable.

The Pharisee exalts his own moral and religious merit. Self-righteousness always produces contempt. It is smuggled into comparison. Others aren't as moral and religious as I am. Spirit elitism always creates social separatism. Pharisees were masters at ostracizing. Not true gospel Christianity.

On the flip side, the tax collector who was supposed to be the "sinner" beats his chest...have mercy on me...The tax collector walked away justified.

Gospel is the great equalizer. We are more sinful than we ever dared believe and simultaneously more loved, forgiven and accepted in Christ than we ever dared hope.

Luke 10- Good Samaritan

The "sinner" in the story again becomes the model for us.

Those who receive mercy, grace, forgiveness and love should give mercy, grace, forgiveness and love. That doesn't mean that we dismiss truth, because speaking truth is loving...but it ought to be impossible for us to accept the gospel and show contempt for LGBT people.

So in light of this let's get real practical about how true Christianity should work itself out in love toward LGBT people, and all people for that matter.

1) **Humility NOT self-righteousness.** Tim Keller- "Churches should feel more like the waiting room for a doctor and less like a waiting room for a job interview. In the latter we all try to look as competent and impressive as we can. Weaknesses are buried and hidden. But in a doctor's waiting room we assume that everyone there is sick and needs help. And this is much closer to the reality of what is going on in church."

2) **See people NOT politics.** Sometimes when we have a conversation with a gay person we think we are having a conversation with the entire LGBT political movement! Every individual person is worthy of honor, respect and inherent worth because they are created in the image of God. Are you seeing people or agendas?

- 3) **Sensitivity NOT stereotypes**- Sometimes I hear people talk about how real men... are hyper-masculine... real women do this...do the sensitive male a disservice, the rough and tumble girl a disservice.
- 4) **Love people NOT projects**. Don't treat an LGBT identifying person as a project. If your goal is to make a gay person straight, please stop... To fix them, your motive is not love. So instead practice hospitality, invite them into your home, get to know them, just listen... example.
- 5) **Good news NOT moral conformity** first. Our goal as a church is not to get them to stop doing what they are doing in regards to their sexuality. In the same way if someone walks in our doors that is greedy we wouldn't first try to convince them to stop being greedy. Our goal is to introduce them to the savior, Jesus! This is what we have to offer as our greatest treasure. Our hope is transformed hearts that lead to transformed lives.

Truth in love.... The balance. A Call to those who **struggle with same-sex desire?** Maybe you are here and that's you and I want to address you today.

- 1) **Understand that same sex desire does not equal sinning**. It is not unchristian to experience same sex attraction any more than it is unchristian to get sick, result of a body that is fallen and broken. It is the acting out in lust, action that becomes sinful. So if you are acting out through pornography, fantasy, chat rooms, hook-ups- put it to death. Acting out in sexual immorality is incompatible with your commitment to Christ if you are a Christian.
- 2) **Acknowledge the presence and pain of a disordered sexuality**, with all the ambiguity of where it came from- much like other disorders and disabilities -and do not define your God-given personhood by your disordered sexuality. **If your overriding identity is LGBT my encouragement to you is to pursue Christ and an identity as his disciple.**
- 3) **Seek authentic Christian friendships with both sexes, especially in groups**. The hardest part of the struggle is a desire for relationship and the fight against isolation or the wrong kind of community. Build a community that supports and protects. Honest and open community...what is so harmful particularly in a large church is people come and go here, but often are not meaningfully connected and no one really knows you, and if you have a habitual sin I can't tell you how important it is to have a place of real and honest community where you can speak of these things and have people to hold you to them. When we isolate ourselves it is a breeding ground for sin...it has a greenhouse affect, in a negative way. But when we get it into the light it begins to loose some of its power. It's not a silver bullet but it helps. This is true for all of us. And so I call on us — especially families — to go out of our way to have people (especially single people) over for meals and other gatherings.
- 4) **Resolve to live a chaste and, if necessary, celibate life by the power of God's Spirit**. We need to talk about this one just a little bit before we close. Because I realize that this one may feel like really bad deal. Like a jail sentence. You mean, if these desires don't change I may never experience the kind of intimacy and fulfillment of longing that I desire? I know that is hard to hear.

Two thoughts, the first one is a hard...but real truth you must hear and believe. And this is for all of us.

1) Following Jesus is costly to our desires.

Matthew 16:24

Those who seek to be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. We have domesticated that to mean that we won't have 2nds or 3rds at dinner table. or I'll let Aunt Mildred stay for Christmas. At the time of Jesus if you took up your cross it meant that you forfeited your life. And of all the symbols he could have used that is the one he went for. Give up your very sense of self, our identity. That version of me I have been finessing, it must go to Jesus. If you believed that following Jesus was not going to cost you anything, in fact not cost you your life, but merely be a more comfortable option...then you weren't told the truth!

If it cost that much why would I become a Christian? If I have to give up that fulfillment. Because the call to deny our fleshly desires and is simultaneously a call to joy, soul-satisfying and ultimately eternal joy!

2) There is true fulfillment of our deepest longings in Christ.

Find deeper joy in a relationship with Christ.

God is not a cosmic killjoy. He is aligning us to live within his designing for our joy. Wherever the Scriptures call me to obey I've been looking to surrender, no matter how difficult and see if it leads to joy. Pursuing my joy in God alone.

An eternal fulfillment awaits us in Christ.

Matthew 19:17-30

Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us? Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne,

you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake

will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

There will never be a long-suffering sinner who didn't get everything they longed for in this life that finally reaches the shores of heaven and looks Christ in the eye and says, "The suffering wasn't worth it!"