

Class 205 How to Engage Culture Without Marrying It: Session 3 Full Notes

Session Three: Navigating the Broken Society

3.1 Navigating the Broken Society: The Challenge of Homosexuality

In olden days a glimpse of stocking was looked on as something shocking,
But now, God knows, anything goes.

Good authors too who once knew better words now only use four letter words
Writing prose, anything goes.

The world has gone mad today and good's bad today,
And black's white today, and day's night today,
When most guys today that women prize today are just silly gigolos

And though I'm not a great romancer I know that I'm bound to answer
When you propose, anything goes

When mothers pack and leave poor father because they decide they'd rather
Be tennis pros, anything goes.

(Cole Porter, 1934)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. (The Apostle Paul, Romans 1:16-32, KJV)

It is only in the past 40 years that homosexuality has gone from being “the love that dares not speak its name” to something which even in America is on an equal footing with what we now call “traditional marriage.” If the recent gains of homosexual activists are not reversed in short order, America and the West will undergo a societal transformation whose consequences have not been properly understood. Perhaps even those opposed to “gay marriage” can only partially see the risks. For while abortion remains a personal matter in most cases, not truly impacting the broader culture, homosexuality and gay marriage in particular represents a new step in the devolution of our culture away. Gay marriage will definitely turn America and the West away from its Judeo-Christian roots and return us to a pre-Christian, anti-Christian concept of family life and the powers of the state to enforce a new orthodoxy. Much of what we will share in this class may subject us to legal action in the United States in a very few years and probably would already subject us to legal action in Canada and Scandinavia.

Society is in great conflict over this issue. While the will of the people has consistently been shown to be against homosexual marriage, homosexual activists have been very skillful in using the court system to advance their agenda on civil rights grounds. The trend in 2008 now seems to have turned irrevocably toward this unknown, new society. While conservative politics urges people to fight against the homosexual movement, Christian compassion compels us to reach out to those trapped in the homosexual “lifestyle.”

Clearly we are in a new environment, one in which anything goes. How can Christians navigate in this environment and remaining true to the call and the content of the Gospel?

3.2 Doesn't the Bible say...?

3.2.1. Understanding what the Bible teaches about homosexuality

Despite what many religious leaders are proclaiming, the Bible is very clear that homosexuality is sin. In fact, homosexuality is categorized as an *abomination*. This word in the Hebrew indicates that something is morally repugnant or shocking. Because Christians have made much of this word in expressing disgust at homosexuality we wish to point out quickly that the word (*toebah*; Strong # H8441) covers not only carnal sins but idolatrous sins and dispositions of the heart when viewed from God's perspective. Thus, to say that something is an “abomination” does not mean that it is the most horrible thing imaginable. For example, the list of things described as abominations in the Book of Proverbs includes false scales, lying lips, and everyone who is proud in heart!

Nevertheless, homosexual acts are a gross offense against God's moral order as viewed in both in Old and New Testament, as any fair reader must concede. Neither the Church nor

the wider society has understood the Word of God or the realities of homosexuality enough to avoid the sophistry of modern gay advocates. Princeton's WordNet database defines sophistry as "*a deliberately invalid argument displaying ingenuity in reasoning in the hope of deceiving someone.*"

As a case in point, recently some folks who are kindly disposed to the homosexual movement have made a "God hates shrimp" website as a joking way to counteract the unfortunate "God hates fags" mentality. We can laugh, but all these things raise issues that compel us to be a little better at understanding and explaining the Word to those who may be outside the embrace of the Church. Christians need to be clear about the differences between things God has permitted or forbidden for ceremonial reasons, dietary and health reasons, and moral reasons.

3.2.2. And why should He care anyway?

In His Word, God forbids His people to engage in certain behaviors such as idolatry worship, occult practices, and a variety of sexual practices. Theologically, we could say that God forbids these practices for two main reasons:

1. God is a jealous God. Human jealousy is very ugly but God has a holy jealousy, which is part of His love. He doesn't want you to get away from Him, and He wants the best for you, without harming you. His jealousy is the passionate intensity He has for you to belong to Him alone. He has bought us at a great price – the blood of His Son – and so He wants us to walk in His own plan for our lives, which will provide a better future for us.
2. God knows that these practices are destructive to individuals, relationships, and society. The harm they create may be physical and/or emotional, as well as spiritual. Because of the way he has designed families and individuals, God forbids us to engage in behaviors that: (1) are contrary to nature; (2) should be viewed as dishonorable and shameful; or (3) are destructive to the human personality.

When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, He was freeing them from a pagan environment that did not understand sexual boundaries. Because of this, the Law of Moses gives a very specific listing of practices He considered evil, so there could be no doubt: rape, incest, homosexuality, etc. As matters of morality these prohibitions are of course retained in New Testament teaching. Activists think it is important that Jesus did not mention homosexuality; however, as an Orthodox Jew, Jesus would not have needed to prohibit homosexuality. Think about his teaching on adultery and this should be apparent.

Please note: Christians are not prudes. And God is not against sex – as Christians we believe He invented it! (The US is the only industrialized nation which "makes enough babies" to replace its population, and that's because Evangelical Christians enjoy procreating. In our society it is clear that more liberal Christians do not procreate – by and large they tend to have abortions instead.) What God is against is sexual activity outside the boundaries of the marriage relationship. The general term for this in the Bible is *fornication*. More modern translations of the Bible may render this word as "sexual immorality." God's attitude towards sexual sin is simple: "Flee fornication." (1 Cor. 6:18a) And of course, all Bible evidence and the nearly uniform evidence of all cultures across time is that marriage is between a man and a woman. Thus God disapproves of sexual intimacy between any two people other than a husband and a wife.

3.2.3. Are all sins the same?

Ultimately in New Testament terms we understand that the only sin that keeps people out of God's Presence in the failure to repent and obey the Gospel.

However, our sexuality is such an important part of our God-designed humanity that sexual sins are indeed worse than most other sins. Sexual sins deform and damage our personality at a fundamental level, such that one can even be confused about the most basic identifying mark of his own humanity – whether he is male or female. When we commit sexual sin with another, we can bring untold damage to that person as well. Even sexual sins committed in isolation harm others; they can not only become destructive to our personalities, but also create barriers to real intimacy with our spouses.

For this reason Christians have always taught against fornication and Judeo-Christian cultures (and many others) have often strongly legislated against adultery, homosexuality, and incest. Even in Connecticut adultery was a criminal act into the 1990's.

3.3 How did we get here?

3.3.1. Symptoms and causes

But while Scripture speaks very strongly about homosexuality, condemning it in the strongest terms, the Bible also views it as a symptom of society's breakdown. It is not a true cause of societal breakdown (although it may be an accelerant) but is definitely a milepost along the way.

In Romans 1, Paul traces the descent of cultures:

- Failure to glorify God
- Failure to thank God
- The profession of worldly wisdom
- Active idolatry
- God gives them over to impurity
- God gives them over to shameful passions (this includes homosexuality)
- God gives them over to a reprobate mind
- Active promotion of evil without shame

Viewed in this light, homosexuality is not the cause of the downfall of society but is as we have said a mile marker to tell us how far we are on a journey towards the dissolution of society. Paul echoes the persistent cycle of ruin and revival commonly seen in the Old Testament historical books. Many times in the Bible and in Christian history we have seen societies fall into immorality, only to be renewed as God's people received and brought fresh fire into the society and called people back to the Living God. This was often not without trouble and persecution.

3.3.2. Secularism and the Fall of Western Civilization

The current movement towards homosexuality needs to be viewed in the larger context of Western society choosing secularism. The subject of secularism is of course too large for this format, but we can describe it biblically as an "antichrist movement" designed in a

spiritual sense to cause people to fall away from adherence to the God of the Bible and His vision for society. Secularism find fertile soil in the rebellion of men's hearts, exemplified in Psalm 2 and the final rebellion against God's order. In the West, secularism will typically produce:

- Rejection and denigration of male authority in the family.
- The assumption by the State of the traditional functions of the family.
- Rejection of spiritual authority and an undermining of the authority of the Bible.
- Broad rejection of traditional sexual morality.
- A willingness to apply relativism to moral questions.
- The creation of substitute civil religions and movements, meant to fill the spiritual vacuum created by the end of the old order.

The prime example of the wicked fruit of militant secularism is Nazi Germany, where for two generations the Bible had been undermined. A generation then arose which was seduced by economic and nationalistic concerns because it either did not know or did not care what the Bible had to say on the issues. This is an oversimplification but, humanly speaking, it is clear that most of the moral changes which have occurred in the three most important historic Protestant nations (America, Britain, Germany) over the past 150 years would not have occurred if a critical mass of people in those societies resisted them on Biblical grounds.

Because we live in times of such rapid and momentous change it is hard to see the larger picture. With the acceptance and even promotion of abortion, gay marriage and a thoroughly secular worldview, it is clear that European civilization can no longer be viewed as "Christian" in any meaningful sense. These changes, together with the apparent impending Islamification of that region, may mean that Europe as it has been understood for 1200 years or more may simply cease to exist in our lifetimes.

3.4 The way out: how do we relate to homosexuals?

3.4.1. Missing the point, missing the boat

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. (The Apostle Paul, 1 Cor. 6:9-11)

At this point it seems fair to say that homosexuals (and everyone else who's not a Christian) are pretty tired of hearing us say that we love the sinner but hate the sin. The fact of the matter is that a fair number of us are flunking both parts – hating the sinner and loving the sin.

It's not our role here to talk about why some people are gay, but I agree personally that Scriptures like this are used too often to club nonbelievers. In fact, these verses were written to church folks who were giving the people outside the four walls a run for their money in the sin department. This verse is a reprimand, not a doctrinal treatise on who goes to Hell. We have missed the point.

And if we miss the point we will miss the boat. God is doing something important in our society by harvesting a multitude of homosexuals into His Kingdom. And He invites us to cooperate with Him in the work of outreach and healing.

Paul is quick to tell the saints, "Such were some of you." In the Corinthian Church there were those who had committed every sin on that list. And that list includes homosexuals. The Blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse and free all who are willing from homosexuality or any other sin, great or small. Paul knew this but we seem to have forgotten it somewhat. Is it possible that we have been failing gays because we have held back from them the only thing that can help them?

3.4.2. What do we have to offer gays? A message of hope!

Paul uses three important salvation words to describe the change which God made in the Corinthians. First, they were **washed**. In Christ, homosexuals and all who have sinned can find cleansing. Jesus saves us from our sin and from the guilt and condemnation it brings. In Him we can be clean and feel clean.

Second, they were **sanctified**. This verb means to make holy or set something apart for special uses. This means that God lays His hand on you for His own purposes. In a larger sense it will mean that we can find a fulfilling life outside of those things we once devoted ourselves to.

Finally, they were **justified**. This means they were giving right standing or approved status before God. With this comes God's acceptance and a new platform from which to find our self-worth and personal security and dignity. These matters are at the heart of so much sexual sin, whether heterosexual or homosexual. Christ Jesus gives us worth built on God's love and acceptance.

All three of these can give hope to gays looking for a way out. Not all gays want a way out, but many do.

3.4.3. And power to change...

We usually forget that Paul's strong message of Romans 1 begins like this:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Have we forgotten this? Or is the balance box the answer for the ills of society? Are we ashamed to say that the Gospel is the answer and has this power? Perhaps we're ashamed because we know we do not have the goods and can't deliver anyone from anything. Is this a deficiency in the Gospel or in its heralds?

3.4.4. And a picture of love in action.

Homosexuals and many secularists are desperately looking for a picture and example of a loving and just society. But who can display the love of God except for those who have already experienced it? We must admit that the examples of Christianity seen by gays are too often hateful. We have a long way to go before the world sees our deeds matching our

words. But my point is that this is possible – the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We need simply let Him guide us to be compassionate as Jesus was. We serve the God who touched the leper!

3.5 The way forward: transforming a society

3.5.1. The perspective of Jesus

"All is full of criminality and vice; indeed much more of these is committed than can be remedied by force. A monstrous contest of abandoned wickedness is carried on. The lust of sin increases daily; and shame is daily more and more extinguished. Discarding respect for all that is good and sacred, lust rushes on wherever it will. Vice no longer hides itself. It stalks forth before all eyes. So public has abandoned wickedness become, and so openly does it flame up in the minds of all, that innocence is no longer seldom, but has wholly ceased to exist." (The Roman philosopher Seneca, first century A.D.)

We know that our society stands in need of transformation and that the rise of homosexuality simply displays the brokenness in our culture. The Gospel has succeeded wherever it has gone to change society by transforming individuals and families, too.

The Bible has many examples of cities and even societies returning to more wholesome standards of sexual morality. Jesus' perspective was that any place could be brought to a place of repentance. What could make it happen? His own presence and power released in that city!

Read the following important quote from author Francis Frangipane:

"He then began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent" (Matt. 11:20). Jesus has a word to say, not only to us as individuals, but to entire cities as well. In anger He rebuked Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (Matt. 11:21); with tears, He cried out to Jerusalem (Luke 13:34). If He expected cities to repent in the first century, He expects cities today to repent as well.

It was in this very context of reproofing cities, however, that Jesus made a statement which unveiled the scope of God's redemptive power. Listen to His rebuke, but also to its hidden promise. He said, "For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes" (Matt. 11:21).

Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities known for their debauchery and sin. Yet, Jesus said that His life, revealed in power, can bring even the vilest of cities, places which ought to be destroyed, to "sackcloth and ashes." The strategy, therefore, to win our cities is for the church to reveal Christ's life in power. Yes, the revelation of Christ in us as individuals, and the power of Christ displayed corporately through us, can turn our worst cities back toward God!

Today, many cities are ripe for revival. What hinders the turning of the people's hearts? Part of the answer lies with the church, with our sins of self-righteousness, indifference and unbelief. The Lord said if His people would humble themselves and pray, seek His face and turn from evil, He would then heal their land (see 2 Chron.

7:14). The future does not belong to the world; it belongs to the transformed church. Indeed, let us never forget: God "desires all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4). With this in mind, Paul taught that entreaties and prayers should be made on behalf of all men, "for kings and all who are in authority" (1 Tim. 2:1-4). The sacrifice of Christ provides for the salvation of all men. Heaven waits only for the church to act.

One may say, "But, that was then. Our cities are worse. They are beyond redemption." Not so. Jesus continued His rebuke of cities, saying, "If the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day" (Matt. 11:23). Amazingly, when Christ is manifested in power, Jesus said even Sodom could find repentance!

I have heard many ministers compare Los Angeles or New York to Sodom. Good. These cities have seen hell, now let the church show them heaven. They need to see Jesus revealed in His church. The promise of Christ is that even Sodom could repent in the atmosphere and revelation of Christ's power. If there is hope for Sodom, there is hope for your city as well!

3.5.2. Transforming our society's sexual values

Standing for truth

It will be necessary to uphold, in as loving and Christlike a way as possible, the truth of God's Word concerning all matters of sexual purity. This will also mean living out the example. The world laughs at our protest of homosexuality because the church is filled with adultery, abortion, pornography and divorce.

Standing in prayer

The mountains of apathy and complacency in the church are perhaps the hardest to climb of all. Would anyone be willing to wager that the last 35 years of our history would have been different if the Church had sowed to the Spirit in prayer more than it had watched TV?

The typical American Christian has almost certainly spent more time watching cable news reports and reading Christian material about homosexual activists than he has praying for them.

Is it possible that an overemphasis on the "culture war" has deprived the Church of its real weapons - those of love and prayer and releasing the Presence of God?