

HETEROSEXUALITY IS NOT THE GOAL - HOLINESS IS

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 - "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. [19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

There's a reason the title for this teaching is so crucially important. In 2013 headlines rocked with the news that after 37 years *Exodus International*, a ministry whose stated mission was to help gay Christians become straight, announced it was shutting down. The president of *Exodus*, **Alan Chambers**, who has a wife and children and previously identified as gay, has acknowledged that he has "ongoing same-sex attractions." And those attractions never went away.

The reason this seemed to add fuel to the homosexual lobby and the reason it also added credibility to those in the church who endorse monogamous, consensual, same-sex relationships isn't hard to see. Once you make the **goal** of the Christian message the **conversion** of same-sex oriented people to opposite-sex orientated people the validity of your theology hinges on those sexual transformations being successful - at least most of the time. And when that **doesn't** happen, everything else you say is called into question.

But what if this whole premise is faulty? What if the assumption that God is calling all **homosexual** people to become **heterosexual** people is simply not the case at all? That is what I want to argue in this teaching. I want to argue God's plan is different than many in the church have been proclaiming. The goal for the homosexual isn't **heterosexuality**. It's **holiness**. And, just as it is for the heterosexual, it's **treasuring Christ above all while we all await the final redemption of our bodies**.

Again, let me be clear, I don't believe it is God's plan to take all homosexual people and make them heterosexual as part of their conversion experience. I'm certainly not saying that He **never** does that or that it is **impossible** for God to do that. But I want to explore with you why I think the process of sanctification as it's described in the Scriptures probably **won't** involve the **removal** of same-sex desires in the process of personal sanctification. I want us to see how God's plan is bigger than that. God will lead homosexually oriented people into a growth in Christ just as He uses the desires of heterosexually oriented people to lead into growth in Christ. Sexual desires - like **all** inward desires - play a role in demonstrating our love for Christ that wouldn't be possible without those desires.

I say that because that's how God uses all of the desires - tainted as they all are by the Fall and original sin - in **my** heart and **your** heart to teach **us** to grow in patience and reliance on Christ. God uses - in **all** of us - our fallen, sin-stained hearts, to cause us to live with **longing** and **hope** for a redemption of our bodies that isn't **completed** yet. We are weaned from a prideful glorying in self to treasuring Christ alone.

This is where we are headed in our study tonight:

- 1) **A LARGE PART OF THE ANIMOSITY AGAINST WHAT IS PERCEIVED AS THE INTOLERANCE OF THE CHURCH AGAINST SAME-SEX INTERCOURSE COMES FROM A MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE MESSAGE OF THE CHURCH TO THOSE EXPERIENCING SAME-SEX ORIENTATION**

When the church expresses the idea that God's will for all same-sex oriented people is to **convert** them and make them heterosexuals we play into the hand of those who say we simply reject gay people as people loved by Father God. Let me read a lengthy portion from a letter from a concerned mother to the *Huffington Post* in January, 2014:

"I am here to share my testimony. Please know that I am *not* here to debate the issue of homosexuality. I would never do that because I do not have all the answers and will probably never have them in this life. The Bible warns of false teachers and I would never say anything that might possibly be considered false teaching. However there are some things I feel led to share that I know beyond a doubt are true and I will share those with you tonight."

"First, I need to let you know that I have been a Southern Baptist all my life. I attended Sunday School and church as a child. I married a man with the same Christian principles as me and we raised our two children in the church as well. My husband is an ordained deacon, I taught Sunday School, sang in the choir, taught vacation Bible School, attended Bible studies and revivals just like most of you. Both my children were saved and baptized at an early age and two of my three small grandchildren have already been baptized. We are a Christian family with deep roots in the church and the teachings of the Bible."

"Seven years ago, we found out that Lance is gay. We were totally blind-sided and devastated because never in a million

years would we have guessed it. Also, because it was such a public thing, the situation was so much worse on the family. I do not want to go into the personal details of that revelation, but I will tell you that the first thing I did was fall to my knees and ask, "What would Jesus do?" I almost immediately knew the answer... love my son. And that is what I have done. Never once did I ever think about turning my back on him. Never once was I ashamed or embarrassed. My feelings were more of sadness and just sheer disappointment in life.

"If you believe that being gay is a choice, then the rest of what I say will not matter. I do not know why, but even as a staunch Christian, I personally never believed that being gay was a choice. I never knew a lot of gay people, but the ones I did meet I felt compassion for because I could feel their pain of being rejected and my heart always went out to them. Even though I never did believe Lance chose to be gay, I did not accept it as quickly as my husband did. His attitude was "It is what it is." My attitude was "Yes, it is what it is but my God can perform miracles so I'm going to beg for a miracle to zap Lance and change him to straight!" And I did just that. I continued to love my son, stand beside him, and defend him, but for several years I continued to pray relentlessly for a miracle."

"Well, Lance is still gay. However, I did get a miracle. It is just not the miracle I prayed for. You are looking at the miracle tonight. The miracle is that I learned to have unconditional love and compassion for my son and others in the gay community. I haven't marched in parades or spoken at conventions, but I do feel that God has led me to speak out concerning the church's role. My son is a Christian and wants to be able to worship, but he does not feel that the church cares about him and has pretty much disowned him as a fellow believer. There is something terribly wrong with that and I have to speak up on behalf of my son and others who find themselves in the same situation."

"When I was a little girl, I went to a celebration with my grandparents on the courthouse lawn in Laurel. I was thirsty and ran to drink some water from one of the water fountains. My grandmother screamed at me to stop. When I looked at the fountain it had the word 'Colored' on it and she told me I had to drink out of another one. I was only 6 years old but I knew something was just not right about that. Just as my heart told me something was wrong that day on the courthouse lawn, my heart is telling me that something is wrong with the way the church treats those who are gay."

Now, that's a very moving letter. You can feel the pain in that mother's heart. Like any mother she wants a future for her son. She wants a future for her son in the **church**. And she wants to know the church will love her son just as God loves her son. And please know right now that I think **all** of those desires are the right desires to have. They are **proper** and **good** desires.

If I were talking with that mother I would want to make sure she knew God loves her son just as much as He loves me. I really mean that. God's love for her gay son isn't one ounce lighter than His love for me or for you or for Billy Graham. That's the first thing any good church should tell this mother.

But it's not the only thing. In fact, if any church believes God loves her son just as much as He loves any of us that church would be **obligated by love** to tell this mother, not only does God love her son **as much** as anyone else, but He loves her son the **same way** He loves anyone else.

And here's how He loves you and me and everyone else. Because He loves me He is constantly telling me many of the things I truly **want** to do, I **mustn't** do. If He loved me **less** He would let me do what I felt inclined and oriented to do. He would put my **feelings of fulfillment** above the **eternal reward** of His sometimes difficult will for my life - like I would never let a small child choose not to go to school or visit the doctor or make a 15-year-old get a summer job instead of just watching TV. But because He loves me He constantly leads me away from my own immediate desires. He doesn't assume because I deeply **want** something it is loving to **allow** it.

While I don't doubt this mother's sincerity, I think there are three points - three phrases - in her letter that are tragically mistaken. Let me give you the brief quotes and then comment on them:

First quote - "....the first thing I did was fall to my knees and ask, "What would Jesus do?" I almost immediately knew the answer... love my son." And again, later in the letter - "....I learned to have unconditional love and compassion for my son and others in the gay community."

It is admirable and Christ-like that this mother respond to her son with love - **always**. Nothing should change this. And it is

noble that her love be **“unconditional love.”** Her son **should** be loved in this way. A son doesn't **earn** parental love by heterosexuality. And above all I think this mother is wise to point to Jesus Christ as her source and example of unconditional love.

Having said that, she should read deeply and carefully about Jesus' unconditional love in the New Testament. Jesus loved the woman caught in adultery unconditionally when He warned her to **“sin no more.”** Jesus loved unconditionally the rich man who was destroying himself with his orientation toward his possessions when He told him to **“sell everything he had and give it all to the poor.”** Jesus loved the whole church at Ephesus unconditionally when He told them He **“hated the works of the Nicolaitans.”** Because Jesus loved the lost unconditionally He told them flat out that **“Except you believe that I am He you will die in your sins.”** It is Christ's unconditional love for the church at Thyatira that caused Him to say, **“...But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. [21] I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. [22] Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works....”**(Rev.2:20-22).

The obvious point is unconditional love never treats the beloved as though his or her **actions** are inconsequential. Love always cares **more** about what the beloved does. Not **less**. This leads into the next quote from this mother's letter:

Second quote - “...If you believe that being gay is a choice, then the rest of what I say will not matter. I do not know why, but even as a staunch Christian, I personally never believed that being gay was a choice.... When I was a little girl, I went to a celebration with my grandparents on the courthouse lawn in Laurel. I was thirsty and ran to drink some water from one of the water fountains. My grandmother screamed at me to stop. When I looked at the fountain it had the word ‘Colored’ on it and she told me I had to drink out of another one. I was only 6 years old but I knew something was just not right about that. Just as my heart told me something was wrong that day on the courthouse lawn, my heart is telling me that something is wrong with the way the church treats those who are gay.”

This mother is not the first one to see the emotional impact of linking her cause with racial discrimination. Abortionists have done this for years, pleading the rights of women to choose and reminding us of the days when color of skin kept slaves bound to the wills of their masters. Labor unions plead for increased pay and shorter work weeks by reminding us of the days when black slaves had no rights or protection from the horrid labor conditions of the plantations. It is moving and compelling to link a cause with the memorable injustice of racial discrimination.

But she has no logical right to link same-sex intercourse with color of skin. Color of skin isn't an activity. Same-sex intercourse is. Color of skin - **any** color - doesn't play into God's created order for life on earth or in His kingdom. Jesus wasn't white. Color of skin can't possibly add or take away from the outworking of God's will for any life. Same-sex intercourse does. The color of my skin doesn't effect in any way my ability to keep God's Word. Same-sex intercourse does. Color of skin isn't linked in any way with one syllable of condemnation in the Scriptures. Same-sex intercourse consistently and universally is.

Take special note of the way this mother cleverly builds her argument from the foundation of saying, **“...If you believe that being gay is a choice, then the rest of what I say will not matter.”** In other words, this is her non-negotiable starting point in the debate. She admits she doesn't even allow other viewpoints into the conversation.

We've already studied in depth the argument that falsely says **personhood is defined by inward orientation**. We've seen how it is used by those who practice **zoophilia** (sex with animals) and **pedophilia** (sex with children). All of these groups claim they are merely fulfilling their inward orientations and that forbidding any of these is **discrimination akin to racial discrimination**

because, and this is the important point, people are what they desire just as much as they are black or white.

My point here is simple. **Being gay** isn't an activity. **Same-sex intercourse** is. To compare same-sex intercourse with color of skin is a confusion of categories.

Third quote - "...Even though I never did believe Lance chose to be gay, I did not accept it as quickly as my husband did. His attitude was "It is what it is." My attitude was "Yes, it is what it is but my God can perform miracles so I'm going to beg for a miracle to zap Lance and change him to straight!"

It is in consideration of this quote that I formed the title for this message - **"Heterosexuality Isn't the Goal - Holiness Is."** And it is in consideration of this third quote that we get at the heart of the main teaching point - **A large part of the animosity against what is perceived as the intolerance of the church against same-sex intercourse comes from a misunderstanding of the message of the Scriptures to those experiencing same-sex orientation.**

It's at this point we finally are ready to read again our opening text - **1 Corinthians 6:18-20 - "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. [19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."**

The homosexual - whatever the source of orientation - is called in the same way all of us are called to glorify God in this present earthly body. We **all** have desires that don't go to the cross willingly. In the subject of human sexuality the **circumstances** in which we receive the call to honor Christ vary greatly. But the **summons** to put Christ above all is exactly the same.

For some that call means honoring Christ by remaining faithful to their heterosexual marriage partner in the face of sexual temptation to do otherwise. No amount of hormonal desire or temptation can justify sexual unfaithfulness. For some the call means honoring Christ by living with a spouse who is far from a loving ideal of what was expected when the marriage vows were taken. This is often a much more challenging call than singleness. For some the call will mean serving Christ in the calling of a single life. This calls for a demanding sexual abstinence in a world howling after sexual expression. This call would include, but isn't limited to, those with same-sex attraction. For all of us the call of Christ is the same - **"Glorify God in your body"(1 Corinthians 6:20).**

2) **THERE IS A REASON GOD DOESN'T ANSWER OUR PRAYERS FOR IMMEDIATE CHANGE**

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 - "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. [19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

When Paul commands the church to **"flee from sexual immorality"** he means Christians continue to be inclined - oriented - toward it. Conversion doesn't eliminate immoral desires. Following Christ means battling fallen orientations. I am not surprised this mother's prayer for her son to become **"straight"** went unanswered. We are not promised we will be given desires that never conflict with Father God's will. Not **any** of us. This is the importance of Paul's testimony of his own similar request in **2 Corinthians 12:7-9 - "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."**

Note it well. The process of my growth in sanctification here on earth **includes** and **requires** the frustrating temptations that **aren't** removed. This is how Christ increasingly **attaches our hearts to greater realities than our own satisfactions.** This is how the Holy Spirit teaches us **patience** and **hope** in a grand **future** redemption. We only learn self-denial gradually. We have to be **taught** to hope in what we still don't see in terms of our own deliverance and redemption.

It might be the saddest paragraph in this well-intentioned mother's letter when she can only consider **two** possible miracles regarding her son, Lance. **Miracle number one** was that God would make him heterosexual. She started out praying for this. **Miracle number two**, the one she says God gave her, was the renewed acceptance of her son's homosexuality and the practice of the loving practice of same-sex intercourse in the gay community wherever it was lovingly practiced.

And I'm so saddened that she missed totally the promise of a third miracle provision. And the one she missed is precisely the one so thoroughly promised and emphasized in the Scriptures. God wants to give special grace to **all** sinner who haven't had

their sinful inclinations removed. God wants to fasten their hearts to greater realities than their ongoing desires. God wants **all** struggling, growing-in-Christ sinners to wait in hope for a grand miracle that still lies in the future and serve Him with patient restraint in the meantime. Christ can be the sustaining **"bread of life"** who will override all other hungers. And He will ultimately transform all waiting hearts.

All of this is summed up in these great words from the Apostle Paul - **Romans 8:23-25** - **"And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. [24] For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? [25] But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."**

This is the commonly shared pathway into the full grandeur of what we don't yet possess in Christ Jesus. It must be walked by all those who treasure Christ above immediate fulfillment. And it is the pathway to a longer, slower, but brighter eternal joy. And this is the message any loving church must proclaim.