

Made In God's Image - Is God anti-gay?

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Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] And so we're going to be looking at some big subjects that's in the media, in the news a lot, in our discussions about our sexual identity, things about life, the sanctity of life, abortion and euthanasia.

So these are some of the topics, issues that we'll be looking at under this title, Made in God's Image. And the first one that we're looking at today is asking the question, simply, is God anti-gay? What does the Bible have to teach about that? Now, the title, I've stolen, and it comes from this little book by a guy called Sam Allerby, who's a pastor in an Anglican church in England.

And the subtitle is, Is God Anti-gay? And Other Questions About Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-Sex Attraction. So I recommend it as a great little book. Sam is somebody who struggles, he would say, he struggles with same-sex attraction.

That's how he would describe himself. And I have a number of these copies available this morning, not enough for everybody, but if you would like one, you can buy it off me for a couple of euro if you like.

[1 : 21] Also, by way of resources, if you're taking notes this morning, there's been sheets passed around with headings. You can write this down, but two websites that you might like to look up.

One is truefreedomtrust.co.uk. We had the director of that, Jonathan Berry, here a few years ago. You can listen to his talk on our church website. But there's a magazine called Ascend, which I get every month or two. It's excellent. Really helpful just in how we understand ourselves as human beings and how we relate to each other.

So I recommend that. So that's True Freedom Trust. And the other website is simply called Living Out. All one word, livingout.org.

So have a look at them in your spare time. You'll find some great stories, testimonies, and helpful things there. So, with all of that said, we're going to pray and then look at God's word together.

[2 : 34] We thank you that we come to a God who loves us, who made us, and who cares for us.

A God who understands us better than we could ever know ourselves. A God who knows what's best for us. And so we pray that you would give us hearts today that are open to you and to your truth, to your word.

So that we will understand ourselves better and how we should relate to one another. Help us then, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. So the question we're looking at this morning is, is God anti-gay? Now, sadly, many have the impression that God is against gay people.

And that's not surprising when you consider the attitude of the church. The message the world has heard from the church is that being gay is detestable and unforgivable.

[3 : 58] Gay people are unwelcome. Caleb Kaltenbach, who wrote a book, which is also very good, called Messy Grace, is now a pastor of a church, and he grew up with parents who were both gay.

And growing up as a child within the gay community, he attended gay pride marches. And he describes one experience as a young person.

He says this, He continues, Now, these attitudes are extremely difficult.

They are wrong. And they need to be repented of. We all need to repent. God is not anti-gay any more than God is anti-straight.

Looking back on his experience, Caleb, who I just quoted, writes this, Jesus' command to love your neighbour as yourself does not have an exception clause for a gay neighbour, or for that matter, any other neighbour we might find it hard to relate to.

[5 : 55] To be anti-gay is unloving and ungracious and does not represent the God of the Bible. So, four things we're going to discover or look at together this morning.

And I want us to be all-inclusive. So, there's an emphasis this morning on the word all. Okay? So, first, we are all uniquely created.

The story opens with this wonderful account of a loving God who creates a good and beautiful world. And the pinnacle of God's creation is the creation of human beings, people like you and me. We are first made in God's image. Look at verse 26, chapter 1, Genesis, if you have it open there. Then God said, Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, over the livestock and all the wild animals and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

Now, to be made in God's image means we are uniquely different from the rest of creation. We're all uniquely different in terms of how we look and our personalities and characters.

[7 : 23] But as a race, as a human being, we are different from the rest of creation. We've been made differently to the animals and the plants.

For example, God has given us a command to rule over the animals as an expression of God's rule over us. But also, to be made in God's image means we're not gods, but that we are like God. We're not the same as God, but we're similar to God. That means we have the capacity to relate to God. God talks to us, and, well, we can talk to Him.

God doesn't speak to the animals like He speaks to us. God treats us differently to the rest of creation. And God made us in this unique way so that we could be in relationship with Him, we could enjoy Him, and know Him.

So we're uniquely created, made in God's image, and made male and female. Look at verse 27. So God created mankind in His own image.

[8 : 36] In the image of God, He created them. Male and female, He created them. God made us different to each other. Different in terms of our sex.

We are either male or we're female. As male and female, we're equal in value and worth in God's sight.

But we're different biologically. And the primary point of our sexual difference is reproduction. So look at verse 28. This is the first command God gives.

God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number. Have children. Fill the earth and subdue it and rule over it.

So as a man and woman engage in sexual intercourse, they produce either a baby male or a baby female. And of course there's a context for this sexual union.

[9 : 38] It is to be within an exclusive relationship, what we call marriage, between one man and one woman. Verse, chapter 2, verse 24. Chapter 2, verse 24.

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife. And they become one flesh. So one flesh is that union, that intimacy that they enjoy together.

So this is how God has made us and designed us. And when God had finished all of creation, back in chapter 1, verse 31, God looked at his creation.

It's like he stepped back and looked at all that he made and he said it was very good. Each one of us is God's unique creation.

Each person a representation, a reflection of who God is. We are wonderfully made. So first, we are all uniquely created by God.

[10 : 45] Second, we are all sexually flawed. We are all sexually flawed.

You see, while God made a beautiful and good world, it's no longer all good and beautiful. The world and its people were all broken in different ways.

And Romans, the book of Romans, explains to us what happened. It kind of fleshes out a little bit more what Genesis 3 would have to say.

So let's go to Romans chapter 1. Romans 1, verse 21.

So what has happened? Well, it explains verse 21. For although they knew God, so it's talking about all people, although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him.

[11 : 57] But their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles.

You see, just like the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, that we just read about in Genesis, we're people who have pushed God out. pushed God out from the centre and put ourselves in the centre.

Rather than God tell us how we should live, we decide how we should live. It's a little bit like what happens when I get something from Ikea.

It's an exciting thing for me. Not many things excite me, but something from Ikea. Wow. I open it up and there's a box full of goodies, bits of wood, bags of screws, all kinds of little things, and an instruction book.

But why would you ever read the instructions when you can do it yourself? Of course, sooner or later, it has to be taken apart if I can and read the instructions.

[13:12] Well, in a sense, that's what we've done. We've ignored the creator, the designer of our lives. We've pushed him to one side. We have tried to live life without God.

We think we're being wise, but we're foolish, verse 22. Sooner or later, things become disastrous. And it has. The image that we were created in, the image of God, made to reflect him, made to represent him, has now been distorted.

It's broken. We no longer reflect God as we should. Now, one of the consequences of this brokenness is, and there are many, is that we are all now sexually flawed.

We no longer relate to each other as human beings as we should. We're all born where we are, where our sexuality is confused and mixed up.

[14:18] All of us, whoever we are, experience fallen sexual desires, whether those desires are heterosexual or homosexual. Very simply, men and women, we don't relate to each other as we're meant to relate to each other.

Now, before we move on, I think it would be good just to define a couple of terms. Sometimes you hear the expression homosexual or gay orientation.

That simply means you are attracted to someone of the same sex, a gay or homosexual orientation. The other is a heterosexual orientation.

That simply means you are attracted to someone of the opposite sex. Now, I want to be very clear about this. Neither orientation is sinful in itself.

If my orientation is that I'm attracted to the same sex or the opposite sex, that's not in itself sinful. It's what we do with our attractions.

[15:29] That's what's wrong. It's the behaviour that matters. It's how we live our lives. So, look at Romans 1, verse 24. Because we are fallen people, it says, God gave them over to, in their sinful desires of their hearts, to sexual impurity.

for the degrading of their bodies with one another. It's talking about all of us, whoever we are. This is what happens. Verse 25.

They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator who is forever praised. Amen. Rather than looking to Christ or to God for fulfilment and satisfaction, we look to each other, to relationships with each other and in all kinds of different ways, distorted relationships.

Because we have turned away from God's design, we now live according to our fallen sexual desires. That's why some with a homosexual orientation engage in same-sex relationships.

And it's why those with a homosexual orientation engage in multiple sexual relationships. And even those who seek to live within God's design, that is, a lifelong marriage between one man and one woman, even they don't relate to each other as they should.

[17:04] We have all failed and we all fall in this area. Now, living according to our fallen sexual desire is not just simply a choice that we make, something that I decide to do.

It's actually judgment from God. Look at verse 24. Look at the words carefully. You see, we think at times that we're making all the choices, but verse 24, God gave them over to the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity.

It's like God removes his hand, removes his hand of restraint, and says, well, live however you want, do whatever you like. Verse 26, because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.

Even the 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.

You see, God's judgment is giving to us what we want. It's letting us live without any kind of restriction, any kind of restraint.

[18:21] And rather than bring blessing, it leads to brokenness and distorted lives. It leads to an eternity without God and without his good gifts.

And in case anyone is reading and thinking, well, you know what, I'm not like that. I'm not twisted. I'm not distorted. I don't have anything wrong. I'm sexually pure. We'll have a look at chapter 2, verse 1.

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else. For at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

let not one of us go pointing fingers at other people and saying what an awful life someone may live. All of us are sexually flawed, men and women, whatever our orientation may be. No one lives according to God's good design. So we are all uniquely created. We are all sexually flawed.

[19 : 38] God. Third, but we are all equally loved. We are all equally loved. God is our loving creator.

He loves us immensely. And in fact, the picture of the Bible all the way through is this, that the more human beings turn away from God, the more we rebel against him, the more he pursues us in love. Have a look at Romans chapter 5, verse 6. It's a wonderful description of God's love for us.

Romans 5, verse 6. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, when we were still powerless, when we were still living according to our sinful nature, when we were still acting out our fallen sexual desires, when we were unable to change our behaviour or attitudes towards each other, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

God had every right, and he has every right. He would be perfectly just to condemn us, but instead, verse 7, he dies for us.

[21 : 14] very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, those who do good, though for a good person, someone might possibly dare to die. It's possible that someone would die for a good person.

But, verse 8, God demonstrates his own love for us in this, while we were still sinners, enemies, rebels, walking away from God, ignoring him, pushing him out.

Christ died for us. This is the beauty of God's love. He doesn't say, now look, stop behaving like that, and then I will love you.

God doesn't say, change how you think or how you feel towards other people, and then I will love you. No, God sees us in our sexually flawed, sinful mess, and he says, I love you.

In fact, he doesn't just say it, he demonstrates it, verse 8. He demonstrated, he took action, he came into the world, the God-man came to us, and he died for us.

[22 : 33] That is the love of God for all people. And this love can be experienced. You see, when Christ died, something wonderful happened.

Look at just the last few words of verse 8. It said, Christ died for us. That's in our place. That's the meaning, in our place.

Jesus Christ came as someone who is absolutely pure, and he came to take all our sin, all our flawed sexuality on himself, all our past, all our struggles, so that we might be forgiven, and so that we might be treated as a sexually pure child of God.

He takes our sexually flawed sin and treats us as God's sexually pure son. Jesus is condemned in our place.

He sets us free from our past. He sets us free from our sin. He takes my life so that I can receive his good and perfect life.

[23 : 52] You see, one of the things about our sexual immorality, whether homosexual or heterosexual, is it can leave us feeling unclean and unacceptable.

We can engage in a relationship that's wrong. We can act out an image or a thought and we feel dirty inside. Well, the good news is that Jesus has come to take our uncleanness and to give us his cleanness.

Nothing that we can do can ever make God unclean. He comes to us to make us perfectly clean. Now, if we're to experience this love, it does require a response.

We were singing about it earlier. It requires repentance. A turning around from going the way we go to turning towards God. Entrusting our life to him.

He owns our life. He made us. He creates us. He knows what's best for us. And the only right thing to do is to submit to him and to follow him as the God who loves us more than we could ever imagine.

[25 : 04] So, we are all uniquely created. We are all sexually flawed. We are all equally loved. and we can all be graciously changed.

You see, God loves us so much that he not only just dies for us, he loves us enough to change us. You see, the image that we were made, created in the beginning, made in God's image, has now been broken but can once again be restored.

You see, when we entrust our life, here's the promise, if I entrust my life to God, I can be graciously changed. What will that change look like?

Well, three things. First, I am changed. Look at 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17, so just go forward a little bit.

2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17. 2 Corinthians 5 verse 17.

[26 : 21] We read it at the very beginning. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, if anyone has entrusted their life to Christ, the new creation has come or they are a new creation, the old is gone, the new is here.

It's a wonderful picture of what God has done for us. We are new creations. Just think of that image from creation itself, that dirty little caterpillar grub that forms into a chrysalis and then all of a sudden it bursts from its shell into a beautiful colourful butterfly.

The old is gone, the new has come. God now looks at us, when we trust in him, as a new creation. He transforms us into new people.

He gives us a fresh start, a new beginning. He gives us new desires to live his way. He gives us his Holy Spirit so that we can live and obey him.

You see, God now sees us differently to how we see ourselves. We often view each other in terms of our sexuality, that person's gay, that person's straight.

[27 : 46] God doesn't do that. He either sees us as one that you are a new creation, or he looks at people and says, you are a potential new creation.

Now, wouldn't that transform our whole view of one another if we could see each other in that way? We are either a new creation, or someone's a potential new creation.

When we entrust our life to Christ, I am changed. I am a brand new person. Second, I am being changed.

Now, just as we receive or are given this new creation, that does not mean perfection. We will continue to struggle with our sexual desires.

We still will face temptation. We will fail and we will fall. All these things will go on through our life. But there is a process of change going on through our life at the same time.

[28 : 58] if you just go back a page or two or a chapter or two to 2 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 18. 2 Corinthians 3 verse 18.

It says there, because of the change God has brought about, well, let's read verse 17, actually. Now, the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So we can come to him, and we and we all who with unveiled faces contemplate or reflect the Lord's glory, so as we've received this new creation, as we are new people, we are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Did you get that? We are being transformed into his image. God, by his Holy Spirit, is changing us and transforming us into his image.

God's desire is to make us more like the Lord Jesus. That's what he's seeking to do in us all. You see, we think it's all about changing behaviours, about changing how I feel.

[30 : 31] Well, the change that God is interested in is transforming us into the image of Jesus. The question is not what is my orientation and should my orientation change, but am I becoming more like Jesus?

That's what he's changing us into. So I am a new creation, I am being transformed and changed into the image of Jesus, and third, I will be changed.

We need to go back a couple more pages to the end of 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 49. 1 Corinthians 15 verse 49.

Here's a wonderful verse about who we are or rather what we will become.

Verse 49, and just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so just as we have been like our ancestor Adam in our fallen nature, broken image, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man, talking about Christ.

[32 : 00] One day we will be like Jesus. We were made in the image of God, but that image has been broken and distorted.

We are in the process of being transformed bit by bit, shaped and conformed to be more like Christ each and every day, but we can also look forward to that image being completely restored and made right.

We will bear the image of the heavenly man, the Lord Jesus. One day we will experience our full and final transformation no more sin, no more temptation, no more struggles, no more confused sexual desires.

The broken image will be fully restored and we will be like Jesus. You see, the point is, God is not anti any one of us.

He longs that people like us would run to him just as we are, however we feel, whatever we have done, that we would run to him so that we can become more like Jesus, forgiven people, that we could be changed to be more like him bit by bit, with the future hope and the assurance of one day, I will see him and I will be like him.

[33 : 39] That is God's plan for every human being. That is his desire. Uniquely created, but sexually flawed, wonderfully, equally loved, and by trusting in him, we can all be graciously changed.

let's pray together. Father, thank you for your word, for its truth, for its clarity, helping us to see that we have been made by you.

Yes, we confess that we have pushed you out and we are sorry, we repent of that. Thank you that you love us.

You love us enough to die for us, but love us enough to go on changing us. And we pray that by your Holy Spirit that you would continually transform us to be made more like the Lord Jesus.

Do your work. and help us to have that vision before us that one day we will see Jesus and we will be like him. Thank you in Jesus' name.

[35 : 09] Amen. We're going to sing as we reflect on what we've been through.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.