

Evening Seminar: Walking With Gay Friends

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[0 : 0 0] Seemingly difficult or awkward, I'm prepared to take it, so please do feel free to ask later on. In the last couple of generations, there has been a dramatic shift in people's attitudes towards gay people.

It's evident, I think, in a whole host of ways. So openly gay celebrities now are no longer sidelined. There would have been a time when, if a celebrity was gay, they would have done pretty much anything to cover that up and to keep that from other people.

But now you tend to find that if a celebrity comes out and admits to being gay, it tends to add to their popular appeal and to their commercial value. And if ever you wanted proof that a culture has changed so dramatically, surely it is Welsh Rugby International there, Gareth Thomas, being able to publicly come out and declare himself to be gay, as he did a few years ago.

That really provides all the proof that you need. That would never really have happened, probably not even ten years ago, let alone a generation ago. Gay romance films are now pretty much mainstream.

Probably five, ten years ago, a film such as Brokeback Mountain would have been consigned to the specialist arty cinemas. But it was in fact a mainstream Hollywood blockbuster, this film of gay romance.

[1 : 2 2] I'm sure none of us here will have seen that or admit to having seen it if we have. Same-sex relationships are, of course, now legally recognised too. Legislation has changed all around the world.

People have introduced legislation for civil partnerships. And, of course, a number of governments have already introduced legislation for full same-sex marriage, with a number of other governments talking about doing the same thing.

And a number of world leaders now have come out and said that they are in favour of same-sex marriage. Oh, Johnny's taken away my picture of President Obama. There was a picture there. We had a little bit of adjustment on the colour.

So that is President Obama, who says, I hesitated on gay marriage, but I've just concluded that for me personally, it's important for me to go ahead and affirm that I think same-sex couples should be able to get married.

That was President Obama in an ABC News interview earlier this year. And that caused quite a storm over in the USA, with President Obama making that very clear declaration.

[2 : 2 0] So this cultural backdrop in mind, it's no surprise to us, I'm sure, that the Church finds itself really under immense pressure to change our stance on same-sex relationships.

There's cultural pressure. There is legislative pressure. There's media pressure. There's pressure from many influential voices, even within the Church. And to Christian leaders who maintain that same-sex sexual relationships go against God's revealed will in the Bible, the accusation is levelled that we're maybe out of touch, intolerant, or even homophobic and anti-gay.

Now, as evangelical Christians, the temptation, of course, when we're confronted with this kind of cultural tidal wave of popular opinion, the temptation, I think, is either to retreat and become silently ashamed of the Gospel and of Gospel teaching on human sexuality, or we may be tempted simply to go on the offensive and focus all of our efforts on maybe lobbying Parliament, protesting at various proposed changes to the law.

But if we're true evangelicals, then we ought, I believe, really to challenge ourselves by asking this question. Do I believe that the Gospel, that is the good news of Jesus Christ, do I believe that the Gospel is good news for gay people too?

Is it good news for Christians, and perhaps there are some Christians here this evening, who struggle with same-sex attraction, struggle with their sexual identity? I'm trying at this point not to make any eye contact with anybody in particular, in case you think, he's looking at me, he's looking at me, I'm not looking at anybody, just to be sure.

[3 : 56] Well, as we focus on this subject of walking with gay friends, I want to focus our thinking really around three main questions this evening, just to give you an idea of where we're going in the structure. Firstly, I'm going to ask, what are the causes of same-sex attraction?

What is it that causes some people to be attracted to those of the same sex rather than the opposite sex? Is there a gay gene? We're going to talk about that subject and hopefully help explode some of the myths around it.

Secondly, we're going to think, what does the Bible teach about same-sex practice? Not what do we think it teaches, what does it actually say when we look at various Bible passages? And then thirdly, we're going to finish by thinking particularly, what hope does the Gospel hold out to those for whom this is a personal issue?

So if we are seeking to walk with gay friends, by gay friends, what I mean by that is perhaps those that we know, I'm sure a number of us will have colleagues or neighbours or friends or family members who identify as gay or lesbian or bisexual.

How can we actually get alongside them? What hope does the Gospel hold out to them? But also what hope does the Gospel hold out to those who are Christians, who perhaps don't identify as gay, but who admit to having a struggle in this whole area of same-sex attraction?

[5 : 08] So that's where we're going this evening. But before we tackle the first of those questions, I think it might be helpful just to spend a little bit of time tonight giving you a little bit of my own background and telling something of my own story.

Because I want you to know that I don't teach on this subject from the comfort of some kind of theological bubble. This is an intensely personal issue for me. I grew up in a church-going family, so I was taken to church from a very young age.

I was taken to Sunday school, so I grew up really with a belief in God from as young as I can remember, a belief in the truth of the Bible. But from around about the age of 10 or 11, I became conscious of feeling attractions to some of my male friends rather than to my female friends.

That was quite a shock to me. It was quite a confusing time. Not something I'd ever chosen, but just something simply that was there. And so I began as a 10, 11, 12-year-old to sort of battle through these thoughts.

What does this actually mean? How can this possibly happen to me? I believe in God, and I know that the Bible is very negative about homosexual practice. So, you know, how can I reconcile these two things together?

[6 : 13] And that was a real struggle for me. And I didn't feel at that age that I could share what was going on with anybody else. I certainly couldn't talk to my parents. Couldn't really talk to friends at school. Things were a lot less open than they would probably be today.

And to be honest, the very last place I was going to go was going to be the church, because the only time that I'd ever heard Christians talking about homosexuality, it was always in a very judgmental or very harsh or sometimes very condemning way.

So I was left, if you like, as I entered into teenage years to try and work through these things by myself and work through what this meant for me. And around about the age of 17, I think it was, I began to identify inwardly as being gay.

I remember picking up a book off my parents' bookshelves, and it was all about sort of puberty, adolescence. I remember reading in there that some people might have a phase of feeling attracted to the same sex.

I remember reading, you know, I'm thinking, well, if this is a phase, it's a very long phase, it's not going away. And then I came across this word gay. And I believe that that was probably the label that I ought then to attribute to myself.

[7 : 15] I didn't want to tell anybody else that. I certainly didn't want to be open about it. In fact, I wanted to do everything possible to hide that from other people. But inwardly, I certainly felt that I must be gay.

And I was then faced with a choice, really, at 17. I either keep going to church, keep reading the Bible, keep, quote, trying to be good. That's what I thought a Christian was in those days. Or I was going to explore this emerging sexuality.

I didn't want to be promiscuous. I didn't want to have many partners. Actually, my dream, if you like, as a 17-year-old boy was simply to find one special person to get to know and to spend my life with. And I did meet a guy of my own age.

We became great friends. Over a period of time, we fell in love and we entered into this long-term relationship together. And that relationship lasted from age 17 through to 24.

But at age 24, there was quite a dramatic turnaround, really, in my life. And that was initiated over a period of time, really. I think God working in my heart and mind, convicting me that the way I was living was displeasing to him.

[8 : 15] And I don't think simply because of my sexuality, but just because my whole life really wasn't focused on him. I pretty much moved away from the church at that stage, wasn't reading the Bible, didn't even have any sense of trying to be good, if you like, trying to be a Christian.

And so God brought me under conviction. And I remember one Sunday morning simply walking into a church. This was in Bournemouth on the south coast of England where I was living at the time. And actually, I remember I was living opposite this particular church with my partner at the time.

And we had an apartment that overlooked the entrance. And often we'd, I would look out on a Sunday morning and see all of these Christians, quite a big Baptist church down in Bournemouth. And they would flood out of this church.

And they'd be laughing and joking and smiling. One of those churches, you know, where people are happy when they come out. There are still a few. I'm sure you all come from churches like that as well, don't you? But I remember looking at these Christians and thinking there's something about them that was appealing.

And in fact, I felt quite envious. Here I was. I was in a loving relationship. I was very happy in that relationship. I had quite a good job. I had a nice car. I had a good income. I was able to have foreign holidays.

[9 : 17] In a worldly sense, I had pretty much everything I ever had dreamt of. And yet, deep down, I knew that I was unhappy. And God was also convicting me, really, that the life I was living was a life that wasn't pleasing to him.

So I walked into that church one Sunday morning. I can't remember an awful lot about the service itself, except for me there was a very tangible sense of the presence of God in that place on that day.

And that was very powerful to me. And I remember talking to one of the ministers of the church. And we subsequently met up the following week. I met him in his study at the church. He didn't know anything about my background.

I didn't tell him anything about my background. And he simply asked, look, do you mind if I read something to you from God's word? And I said, yeah, sure, that's fine. So he opened up the Bible and he read to me some verses from Jeremiah chapter 29, some very well-known verses.

I'm sure you'll be familiar to us. Jeremiah chapter 29, where God says, And I remember hearing those words as if they were God's direct call, really, to me.

[10 : 32] I remember at the time breaking down in tears, not something I was in the habit of doing and certainly not in front of anybody else. But it was very, very powerful that this was God's calling me, if you like, to put my trust in him.

I, by that stage, already heard the gospel. So I knew what it meant by then to be a Christian through faith in Jesus Christ. And so I took those words, really, as God's call to put my trust in him through Christ for forgiveness of sins and salvation.

And that was the beginning, really, of quite a dramatic turnaround in my life. So I knew immediately, nobody had to tell me, that becoming a Christian meant that I had to get out of that same-sex relationship. That was quite a difficult thing to do, but I knew it was the right thing to do.

But I want to stress that becoming a Christian wasn't, in any sense, a negative experience. I think sometimes, as Christians, we talk about all the things we give up. And, of course, there is a cost to following Christ. There are things to be given up.

But for me, becoming a Christian was a very positive experience as well. I mean, just really as that prophecy from Jeremiah said, God had plans to prosper me and not to harm me, plans to give me hope and a future.

[11 : 32] And that's certainly been my experience as I look back over the last 20 years or so now that I've become a Christian. Just to give you one example, I didn't have any clue up until that stage what I should be doing vocationally. I'd gone through a whole phase of being involved in different things, different jobs.

And I remember as a youngster, I had all these dreams. In fact, I wanted to do all the typically gay things. So I wanted to be an air steward. I wanted to be a travel rep. I wanted to be an actor. I went off to audition for a drama school.

I'm not saying, by the way, if you want to be any of these things, that means you're gay. Please don't misunderstand me. But those were the typically gay things when I was growing up. So I was a bit lost, really, in terms of what I was meant to be doing vocationally. But I remember on that day having a really clear conviction that God was wanting me to go and teach his word, the word that had worked so powerfully in turning my own life around, to teach that to other people.

I didn't know quite what that meant at that stage. But I remember saying to this guy, the day I became a Christian, I want to be a missionary. What do I do? And he said, well, probably you need to hold on for a little while. You've just become a Christian. That was good advice, but you never want to hear that when you're a young Christian because you think you know everything.

But I did hold on. And then a few years later, I went up to London to study at Bible College and then went on to serve in a church over in East London where I served as an assistant minister and youth worker for a number of years and then subsequently as the pastor of that church.

[12 : 48] And that was before joining the staff of the True Freedom Trust four years ago now and then took over as the director of that organisation three years ago. Let me tell you a little bit about True Freedom Trust and then we're going to get into our question.

True Freedom Trust is basically an organisation, Christian ministry, that is passionate about two things. Firstly, helping Christians to think biblically and compassionately about the whole area of sexuality, particularly same-sex attraction.

So we do an awful lot of teaching in churches, in Bible colleges, in Christian unions, in youth groups, in schools, really trying to communicate a biblical view of sexuality but also a grace-filled view.

We believe you can be both full of grace and full of truth as you think about issues of sexuality. So we do that, a lot of teaching, but we also work then with individuals who are struggling in these areas.

So that will be people who, like myself perhaps, have come out of a background, being involved in a same-sex relationship or just in any sense being involved in any kind of gay lifestyle. Or in fact, more of the people that we support will be Christians who perhaps have never been involved in a same-sex relationship but have been conscious of a struggle in this area and we seek to provide biblical encouragement and pastoral support.

[14 : 00] And I'll put up at the end of the talk details of our website where you might want to go and have a look. There's an awful lot of information on there and testimonies and articles and so on, ways that you can support us and pray for us as a ministry which we would really appreciate.

Okay, well let's move on now to think about the first of our three questions. What are the causes of same-sex attraction? Well, there's a wide-ranging consensus among most of the respected experts in this field that we need to accept what is known technically as a multi-causation model.

In plain English, that simply refers to a recognition that there are a number of different factors which contribute to how our sexual attractions and desires develop.

Okay, a number of different factors. So some people will focus on biological and genetic factors. Now, the fact is there is no one gene or set of genes that in and of themselves have been discovered, if you like, that make somebody gay.

Okay, that is a fact. It simply isn't there. People have made various claims over the years but there is no one gene or set of genes which in and of themselves make somebody gay.

[15 : 19] An awful lot of research is being done into the biological and genetic potential causes towards homosexual attractions. I think we should be prepared to accept as Christians that there may well be biological and genetic factors just as there would be, in fact, in every other part of our makeup.

So the way we look is affected by genes. The temperament that we have can be affected by genes. There is no reason to say that actually there can't be, in some measure, some genetic factors that may influence the development of same-sex attraction.

Now, some Christians have a real problem with that because they say, oh, well, what does that mean? Does that mean then that God makes people gay? Well, no, absolutely not. I don't think it means that at all. We need to remember as Christians that we are born into a fallen, broken world.

Not one of us here was born with a perfect set of genes. Now, some of you are looking really surprised at this point. I am sorry to disappoint you. You were not born with a perfect set of genes.

Each of us are born into a fallen, sinful world. What did David, the psalmist, say? He said, surely I was sinful at birth. Sinful from the time my mother conceived me. So even if it were proved one day, and personally I doubt that it ever will be, but if it were proved that there is a gay gene, that people are born with a fixed orientation, that doesn't lead us to conclude that therefore God makes people gay.

[16 : 38] It simply would be a reflection of the fact that we are born into a fallen, broken world. And in a fallen, broken world, every aspect of who we are is impacted by the fall, including our sexuality.

So for some people that will, if you like, be visible in terms of the fact that they are attracted to the same sex rather than the opposite sex. This is a quote here.

I don't know if you can read that. I can read it out if that would be helpful. But this is by a guy called Dr. Francis S. Collins. He is head of the Human Genome Project. So this is a guy who really knows what he is talking about in this area.

And he is referring here to a study that was undertaken of identical twins over in the USA. Basically, this was where one of the twins was predominantly or exclusively attracted to those of the same sex.

What was the likelihood that the other twin would also be predominantly or exclusively attracted to those of the same sex? And he concluded, having looked at this study and finding that, in fact, about 20% of the twins were actually same-sex attracted.

[17 : 45] And that was quite high because it was compared to 4% of males in the general population. Indicating, he says, that sexual orientation is genetically influenced but not hardwired by DNA.

And that whatever genes are involved represent predispositions, not predeterminations. I think that's a really helpful phrase. That phrase there, not hardwired by DNA. So it's not as simple as saying people are born either go straight.

In fact, I want to challenge this evening and I want us all to think about this, challenge this whole concept of a binary model, if you like, of gay or straight or possibly you'd have to add in a third of bi, as some people would call themselves bi.

This whole idea that people have a fixed orientation is actually a little bit of a myth. Yes, it's true that most people, I would imagine most people here, if we look at it as a spectrum, most people will be exclusively or predominantly attracted to those of the opposite sex.

There will be some people, maybe even here, who will be predominantly or exclusively attracted to the same sex, a lot less people. But actually there'll be some people who will be somewhere in between. And actually, over our lifetimes, our sexual attractions can fluctuate as well.

[18 : 56] So I know of a number of people who in their teens have had some experience of same-sex attraction, perhaps have developed a crush, somebody of the same sex, but actually they've got into their twenties and beyond and found that there's no hint of same-sex desire.

That's actually just proved to be a phase which has passed. This is one of the reasons I get really concerned when there's pressure on young people to come out and declare themselves to be gay. And, you know, in some schools it's not uncommon, as I say, for people in their early teens, pre-teens even, to come out and declare that they're gay.

And I think that's far too soon because it's not giving young people an opportunity to allow their sexuality and their sexual attractions to develop. So it's not as simple as saying that there is a gay gene, but certainly we have to be open to the fact that, as with everything else, our sexual attractions can be influenced by genetic biological factors.

Other factors would include environmental factors. So this is all to do, really, with upbringing. And what you find that often people's views get polarised, really, between these two causes.

So it's what's often known as the nature-nurture debate. You've probably heard that and it relates to a number of other areas as well. This argument as to whether somebody is born gay or whether their environment and upbringing makes somebody gay.

[20 : 12] So, for example, environmental factors could include maybe somebody going to a same-sex school, a same-sex boarding school. Now, as it happens, I went to a same-sex boarding school from the age of 8 to 13.

And as I look back on that time, I'm convinced personally that that had quite an influence in terms of how my own sexual attractions developed. Not least, I can remember, this was in Oxford where I was born and brought up.

And I remember on a Saturday morning we were told that we were allowed to go out into Oxford and look around the shops after school, would you believe, on a Saturday morning, horrendously. We were allowed to go out and look around the shops and we had to go in a group of a minimum of four boys at the head.

And whatever you do, whatever you do under no circumstances, talk to girls. That was the instruction given. So just remember, this is now a group of sort of pre-professional, almost adolescent boys, hormones raging all over the place.

Don't direct any of that towards girls. That was the message that was being given out. And you can see how that's an unhelpful start, if you like, to an adolescent. Now, I cannot take that experience, and as I say, there are lots of factors which I think played a part in my life, but I can't take that and say, well, same-sex schools clearly make people gay.

[21 : 24] It's not as simple as that. In fact, most of the people who went to that same school, some of us here maybe have been to same-sex schools, and it has no influence at all on how our sexual attractions develop.

But certainly in my case, I believe it did, and it may well be a factor for certain people. Other factors, for example, I know of a number of people who've grown up in an all-female environment. This is boys growing up in an all-female environment, or indeed girls growing up in an all-male environment.

That tends to happen slightly less. But if you take the example of maybe a boy growing up and dad has left, and he's maybe got a couple of sisters, so it's mum and a couple of sisters, that's the only influence he has in the home as he grows up.

And for some people, that seems then to affect the way that their sexual attractions develop. But again, you've got to be very careful because there are equally as many people, maybe even more people, who have been born into that situation or find themselves in that situation, but who it's not impacted their sexual attractions at all.

And then relational factors. Now this is, again, a lot of this is theory. It's very difficult to prove one way or another. Research has been done around this area, but this is to do now with relationships mainly within the family, but also with peer groups.

[22 : 36] So for example, there are some people who are convinced that not having a very good relationship with their same-sex parents influences their sexuality. So I've certainly, within my work in Truthroom Trust, I've met a number of guys who, for one reason or another, have not had a great relationship with dad, and they seem to think that that has influenced the way that their sexual attractions develop.

The same with girls not having a very good relationship with mum. Very difficult to prove this. Certainly it is quite a recurring theme amongst people who struggle in this area. But of course, just because there's a link doesn't mean there's necessarily that that's a cause.

Link doesn't necessarily mean cause, but it certainly does seem to crop up. One of my fears in this area is that it can lead to a sort of blame-the-parents culture. Oh, well, it's my dad's fault because he wasn't there for me.

What we're saying is it could be a factor for certain people, but it's not meant then to lead to blame and say, well, it's because of this that this has impacted me. Another area of relational factors could be abuse.

I mean, I've known of a number of people, for example, who've suffered abuse in their early years. And you can imagine, for example, take, for example, a woman who's maybe been abused by somebody of the opposite sex.

[23 : 53] You can imagine how easily that could lead to her maybe growing up almost hating and fearing the opposite sex. And I've known of a number of women who've said to me, like, it's actually, I feel much safer with another woman.

So in other words, they've been driven into the security of a relationship with another woman because of that early experience with an abusive man. I've known of women in their later years who have been very happily married and had children, had no hint of same-sex desire, but then in their later years have developed same-sex attraction, sometimes in their 40s and 50s.

Likewise, that can happen too with men. So there are a number of different factors that can play a part. One writer very helpfully says this, talking about this multi-causation model.

This would mean that the form and strength of each person's same-sex desire has a distinctive, perhaps unique mix of biological and psychological factors and it may be better to speak of homosexualities in the plural.

I hope you can see the point that's being made there. He's basically saying, look, each of us are unique. We're knit together in our mother's womb. So different factors are likely to influence different people in different ways.

[25 : 04] So there is no one theory that fits everybody. You can't simply say, this is what causes somebody to be same-sex attracted. It is not as simple as that. There are lots of different factors that can contribute.

Okay, you may come back to that subject in some of the questions and pick things up from that. But for now, let's think secondly. What does the Bible teach about same-sex practice?

Well, the first thing I think I need to say is that the Bible does only ever speak about same-sex practice. Okay, it never ever talks in terms of orientation. That simply is not a biblical concept at all.

So there is no reference in the Bible to people being gay. There's no reference in the Bible actually to people being straight or bisexual. That simply is not a biblical concept.

The Bible only talks in terms of sexual practice and it's basically divided into two camps. There is sexual practice that is pleasing to God and sexual practice that is displeasing to God.

[26 : 04] Sexual practice that is pleasing to God is sex that takes place within the context of a heterosexual marriage between one man and one woman. Sexual practice that is displeasing to God is any sex that takes place outside of that context.

That's the simplest way that I can put it to you this evening. So there is not this emphasis in the Bible on homosexual practice as somehow being the worst of the worst.

You may have picked up over your past in teaching and so on this word abomination. We'll talk about that in a moment. But I think sometimes as Christians we grow up with this feeling that homosexual practice is somehow the worst sin of all.

Some people say is it the unforgivable sin? And that's not at all the emphasis in the Bible. The emphasis in the Bible is on God ruling out any and all sexual practice that takes place outside of heterosexual marriage.

So in fact what the Bible is concerned about is the fact that sex has been given by God as a good gift to be enjoyed exclusively within marriage.

[27 : 15] That's the emphasis in the Bible. I remember once hearing a quote from a woman called Lynn Lavner. Lynn Lavner is an American and she's a comedian.

She's a Jewish lesbian comedian. You're probably not used to hearing Jewish lesbian comedians quoted. You may wonder what on earth is he doing reading that kind of literature? Look, it's my job. I read all kinds of things. I'm allowed to.

But Lynn Lavner she's making a tongue-in-cheek point here but she actually has a very serious point. She says there are six admonishments in the Bible to homosexual practice. That's slightly debatable but it's certainly less than ten and 362 admonishments to heterosexual sin.

That doesn't mean she says that God doesn't love heterosexuals it's just that they need more supervision. Now I like that comment. You see the point she's making? She's just seeking to redress the balance.

So I want to suggest to you this evening that actually one of the key verses the key verse in fact on sexuality is found in Genesis 1-3. Genesis 1-3 provide what we could call a foundation for developing a theology of sexuality.

[28 : 20] And I think it's really important when we're trying to debate these issues and maybe discuss with friends the Bible's teaching on sexuality that we don't just run to these half a dozen or so verses that mention same-sex practice but that we actually speak from the overall teaching of the Bible and that's why I'm saying that we need to develop what I call a theology of sexuality so we understand God's purpose for sex within the Bible.

And so the key verse I suggest to you this evening is actually this verse in Genesis 2 verse 24 and I realise here we're jumping in right at the end of the creation encounter I don't really have time to go into all of the contents I just would ask you to bear with me and to accept that this is a key verse and you might want to look that up later and do a little bit of study around it but here if you like is God's declaration invention of marriage here is his definition what we could call a theological definition of marriage and there are three elements to it listen to Genesis 2 24 therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to or united to some versions say his wife and they shall become one flesh notice then the three elements here's what defines a marriage theologically firstly there is a man leaving his father and mother that means leaving his birth family his own family in order to set up a new family unit so there's a definite transition if you like from his own family set up a new family there's then a holding fast to or a uniting to his wife so again that suggests a ceremony something formal not something casual not just we move in we're getting on well let's live together no there's something very definite there's a uniting to what the bible will later call marriage of course and then you notice then and only then they shall become one flesh and there's the reference to sexual union that one flesh sexual union is meant if you like as the cement which God uses to deepen and strengthen a relationship between a man and his wife now why do I say that is a key verse well the reason

I say it's a key verse is because when you get through to the New Testament what you discover and I've given you three references there and what you discover is that actually Genesis 2 24 is repeated and reinforced in the New Testament so for example Matthew chapter 19 Jesus there is being questioned by the Pharisees on the subject of divorce and in answering that question Jesus quotes Genesis 2 24 word for word ok thereby reiterating that marriage is the only place for love and attraction to express themselves sexually you'll find that the apostle Paul in Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 6 he also quotes Genesis 2 24 word for word and it is a really sound principle of biblical interpretation that when New Testament writers bring forward and reiterate something from the Old Testament that that means it's not something we can simply dismiss today some would urge us to do and say well it's culturally irrelevant things have changed today no

Genesis 2 24 was valid in Moses day it was valid in Jesus and the apostles day it's valid in our day too so I like to think as Genesis 2 24 rather like if you imagine the Bible here and Genesis 2 24 is like a thread that you can pull right the way through the Bible beginning in Genesis right the way through the Old Testament through Leviticus where you have an awful lot of teaching on sexuality and right the way through to the New Testament where when you come to the New Testament you come across this word this term sexual immorality and sexual immorality is actually a translation of the Greek word porneia porneia and porneia in the Greek really carries with it the meaning of any sex outside of heterosexual marriage that's really what's behind that word porneia so porneia for example would include incest it would include prostitution it would include lust it would include same sex practice it would include adultery sometimes people say well Jesus never talked about gay people he never mentioned homosexuality well that's not strictly true because if you look at Matthew 7 for example

Jesus is talking there about things that come out of our hearts that make us unclean impure and Jesus in speaking from Mark 7 uses that term porneia and any first century Jew hearing Jesus use that word would have understood him to be meaning all sex outside of heterosexual marriage whether that be same sex or opposite sex so Genesis 2 24 I suggest to you is the key verse that's our foundation and what I want to do then is just look at two of the specific references we're not going to look at every single one of the references that mention same sex practice I'm just going to take two as an example and the first is Leviticus 18 verse 22 now this is the one which of course is familiar to many people you shall not lie with a man as with a woman it is an abomination and I don't know about you but I find that sometimes this is the phrase that is latched onto by some

[33 : 39] Christians certainly this is when you're talking to people maybe who are outside of the church those who identify as gay this is maybe what they have heard in the past and this thought that homosexuality is an abomination and therefore it gives the impression that we're saying that actually it's the worst of the worst but I want to issue a little challenge to you this evening I want to suggest that after tonight at some stage you go home and you do a little concordance search of that word abomination or if you're using the NIV it will probably be translated detestable so detestable or an abomination do a little word search and see what you come up with you might be quite surprised so for example there are a number of different verses in Proverbs that suggests that things such as lying are an abomination to God haughty eyes that is proud eyes eyes that look down upon other people gay people perhaps that's an abomination to God there's a verse in Proverbs that says that anyone who turns a deaf ear to God's words in other words you read something in the Bible and you think oh dear that's a bit tough

I'll tell you what I'll give that a miss and I'll have a time of prayer instead and then praise says this verse their prayers are an abomination to God isn't that quite scary none of us have ever done that before dodgy weighing scales are an abomination to God dodgy weighing scales some of you are looking really worried now it's not bathroom scales don't worry we're talking here weights and measures just for the sake of clarity but you see the important point the important point is we mustn't get carried away and some Christians I think in the past have got really carried away and they sort of zoom in on this word abomination and particularly if we're using it selectively to apply to one particular sin whereas in fact the Bible would apply it to all kinds of sins as I say I issue that challenge just to have a little search through Proverbs and to dwell on some of those verses in there now of course the other argument about a verse like Leviticus and this is an argument that's often put to me is well look you Christians it's all very well but you're selective with the way you treat the Old Testament so you take certain things from Leviticus and you say well that applies today but then other things you say well no that doesn't apply today so for example most Christians

I know would be quite happy eating a BLT sandwich or a packet of prawn cocktail crisps but what about the teaching in Leviticus that says we shouldn't eat pork and we shouldn't eat shellfish now how do we sort of bring those two things together and reconcile them well what about that verse in Leviticus that talks about not wearing clothing made of mixed fibers we could do a little exercise tonight and check each other's labels we won't it will get very embarrassing we're not going to do it but you know why isn't the church speaking out about the abomination of polycotton shirts now again it can make us smile but actually it's a very serious point how do we argue this how do we answer that kind of question well the great news is that actually Jesus hasn't left us in the dark he's made it very clear how we're to interpret the Old Testament in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says I've not come to abolish the law so he's not come simply to dismiss it but he has come he says to fulfill it that means to complete it to fill it up we could say so surely when we're deciding which of the

Old Testament laws no longer apply to God's people Christian people today we have to consider which of them Jesus has fulfilled through his coming into the world and his death on the cross that's the basis so let me give you an example on that basis we can say with confidence that none of the sacrificial laws have to be followed by Christians today I mean I didn't see anybody sacrificing a pigeon or anything as you came through the door today to make yourself clean why don't we do that well we don't do that because the writer of Hebrews tells us Christ died once for all it's not that Jesus has abolished the law he has fulfilled it he is the fulfillment of all of that Old Testament teaching on sacrifice and ritual so actually now as Christians we have the freedom to come to God directly through Christ we don't have to make sacrifices another example on that basis we know that we can with confidence eat a BLT sandwich or prawn cocktail crisper whatever it is we might like how do we know that well because

Mark 7 verse 19 Jesus declared all foods clean ok so that's the basis on which we interpret the Old Testament but I would challenge anybody to find anywhere in the New Testament where Jesus now declares all sexual practices now clean look through the Gospels it simply isn't there in fact in all of the teaching in the Old Testament everything that Jesus teaches everything that the Apostles teaches it backs up everything that's taught in the Old Testament so it backs up that Genesis 2.24 principle it backs up the Levitical holiness code if you like which is the way that God's people were to be holy and one of the ways in which God's people are to be holy is through sexual morality and that's not been fulfilled if you like by Christ because actually Jesus teaches his Apostles teach that today we are to flee from sexual immorality we're to avoid sexual immorality so I hope that just helps a little bit maybe when we're discussing these issues with friends so that's one from the Old Testament let's just take one from the New Testament this is a passage we looked at in some detail this morning and I don't want to look at it in detail now and I think that will be on the Karaglion website will it at some stage so if you want to hear a little bit more about this

[39 : 15] I just want to very briefly touch on it a couple of things firstly I want you to notice that same-sex practice here this is the ESV version and it's a paraphrase men who practice homosexuality and there's a little bit on this morning's teaching about the two words that have been translated there a paraphrase men who practice homosexuality but I want you to notice that that is listed alongside a number of other sinful practices and Paul is not highlighting men who practice homosexuality and saying it's worse he's actually listing it alongside things such as greed and drunkenness reviling or slandering they're all listed there as marks if you like this is those who continuously and consistently live in these kinds of ways these are the marks that they're going to display but the main thing I want you to notice from this passage is actually that there's a great challenge and a great message of hope in that because having listed these various sinful behaviours look what Paul says this is in verse 11 he says and such were some of you now remember he's writing here to

Christian people not to the world but to Christians another translation puts it some of you once lived this way but he says you were washed that is made clean sanctified made holy justified brought into a right relationship with God in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God so Paul is saying that actually look in the church in Corinth nearly 2,000 years ago there were Christians who had come from all of these kinds of backgrounds including some who had been practising homosexuality but they're not outside the church they're not alienated from the church they're actually inside the church they're in the church because they've had a saving life changing encounter with Jesus Christ and the implication of course of him saying such were some of you is that look you used to live these kinds of ways but you don't live those ways anymore because of what's happened to you in Christ Jesus so actually that should give great hope perhaps to those

Christians that we know or maybe those Christians here this evening who struggle in this area be encouraged because actually this is Paul is wanting to encourage you and say look you've actually been redeemed you've been rescued you're on a level with every other Christian who's come from all these other kinds of backgrounds as well but it also sends out I think a great challenge to the church that actually we shouldn't have a situation where the gay community to use that phrase is completely alienated and separated from the church if the church is being authentic and is preaching the gospel to all kinds of people then really in our churches we should have people who used to identify as gay but who don't anymore because of that encounter with Jesus Christ and it's really on that note of hope that I want to conclude this evening as we think about our final question before we move through to a break and then to your questions and it's this question what hope does the gospel then hold out to those for whom this is a personal issue is there a gospel for the person who perhaps right now is identifying as gay lesbian bi maybe is involved in a same sex relationship is there a gospel for the

Christian who is struggling in this way and wondering how on earth can God still love them they keep slipping up and falling and struggling in this area can God still love them is there a gospel for the Christian who struggles in this way I want to suggest to you absolutely yes 100% the gospel is good news for all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds with all kinds of struggles it's really sad when sometimes as Christians and we all do this we're all in danger of it we can write off can't we certain people maybe it's that person that you work with maybe it's that neighbor maybe it's even that family member who seems to be so far away from God and we just cannot envisage God possibly reaching out to that person and yet so often that is the very person that God will be touching and putting his hand on and saying I want you I want you in my kingdom so let's not ever write anybody off God is in the business of rescuing people that we might consider to be the most unlikely of all remember the whole ministry of

Jesus was focused on reaching out to the marginalized and the alienated those that other people often had rejected and written off and I want to give you three ways in which I believe the gospel is good news particularly for those who struggle in this whole area of same sex attraction firstly it is good news of a new beginning good news of a new beginning so to Corinthian Christians whereas remember we've just seen there were those some of whom had come from a background of being involved in same sex practice Paul writes if anyone is in Christ he or she is a new creation the old is gone the new has come now I need to be absolutely clear that what Paul is not promising in that verse he's not promising to the person who struggles with same sex relationship you come to Christ and miraculously overnight you're transformed into a full blooded heterosexual and you go on and get married and 2.4 children and move into a detached house get a nice car plasma

[44 : 33] TV and a dog and so on he's not promising that that may happen but it's very unlikely to happen in that way as regards myself as I said I was in a same sex relationship before I came to Christ I have not gone on to get married I've not been healed or cured of same sex relationship nor do I think that's particularly helpful language to use really in this context and pray over me went forward at one prayer meeting and a pastor prayed over me and I went forward and whispered look I'm struggling with homosexuality I'd like to be set free he said brother you have been set free from your homosexuality in rather a loud voice which was quite embarrassing you should go home now and he said just live out your straight life believe it claim it by faith that was it lasted about 20 minutes before I realised nothing had changed at all

I think I remember watching a film with Matt Damon and he was still looking as he was before so clearly God hasn't taken it away at all but that's very dangerous isn't it when people are making those kinds of promises God does not normally intervene in that kind of way not to say that he can't but he doesn't normally same sex practice or you have gay relationship whatever it may be if you come to Christ you are guaranteed a new beginning in fact he's saying to anybody who's strayed in whatever way from God's purposes for sex and marriage whether that be homosexually or heterosexually come to Christ the slate is wiped completely clean full and free forgiveness in Christ that means that the person who has struggled in this way being involved in the same sex race doesn't need to carry guilt or shame there is often an awful lot of guilt and shame wrapped up in this whole era of homosexuality but Paul is saying look you have a new beginning you have been forgiven you have been freed from the consequences of that past life and over time of course

God by his Holy Spirit as he dwells within a new believer does bring about transformation in terms of behaviour so I can't have taken away my same sex attraction but what he has done is over the years he has been at work transforming me so he's taught me that it's possible to be self controlled I haven't done that perfectly in all the years I've been a Christian but little by little God has been teaching me that it's not essential to life to be in a sexual relationship and I think that's quite shocking for our culture we're in a very sexualised culture and I feel for young people particularly there's a real pressure to be in a sexual relationship at a very young age and actually it is not essential to life and I think we need to be shouting that in a sense as Christians remember the Lord Jesus he was the perfect man the most fulfilled man you could ever meet yet he was never married he wasn't in a sexual relationship so it's good news of a what do

I mean by that when we become Christians from whatever background we are of course adopted into God's family we become sons and daughters of God well in fact we all become sons of God but I'm not going to go there this evening you can ask Johnny about that he can do a series on why we're all sons of God if he hasn't already but we all are adopted into God's family we all are given the benefits of being a son of God an adopted son of God and really this new community ought to be marked out by love and acceptance and burden bearing and deep friendship and support so that when somebody comes into the church from whatever background they are received with love and accepted now when we talk about acceptance I don't mean accepting sinful behaviour but actually at the beginning if you think about it a Christian who comes from one of these kinds of backgrounds is going to have an ongoing struggle they're not going to have a perfect Christian life they are going to have battles and they're going to slip up and they're going to fall and they're going to fail and they're going to need an awful lot of love and patience and encouragement and friendship it's going to be really important if you think about it particularly the Christian who has come from a background of same sex attraction who finds that God doesn't take that away that they don't develop opposite sex attraction they potentially then are facing a life of being single that's the reality let's not hold back about that that is the potential reality for many

Christians who struggle in this way they may not be able to get married they may then be facing a life of singleness and they need support and encouragement I think it's really important in fact that the church is very positive about singleness I consider my singleness now to be a gift from God the Bible talks about it in terms of it being a gift I haven't always thought that way it's taken time for me to learn to accept that this is actually a gift it gives me freedom that other Christians don't have freedom in ministry freedom in lots of different ways and I think the church needs to be very positive about singleness and not putting pressure on people who are single to get married I lost count really the number of times when I first went into Christian ministry in a church and I was a sort of assistant minister and I was in my twenties and people were forever trying to set me up with somebody of the opposite sex and you know if you're single here you know how this works you get invited out to Sunday lunch and there they are they're all lined up aren't they on the opposite side of the table all the eligible people of the opposite sex and it's just the sort of mint sauce and the salt and pepper separating you from this life of bliss and commitment or as a pastor of course one of the many duties you have as a pastor is you know conducting funerals and weddings and baby dedications thanksgivings whatever you may call them or as one of my colleagues calls it hatch match and dispatch which I think is not a very nice way to shorthand for it but I remember getting to the stage where as a minister

[50 : 37] I almost and you may find this a bit warped but bear with me I almost began to prefer taking the funerals and you think what how could any minister prefer to take a funeral well generally because what I used to find at a funeral is that people didn't sidle up to me at the end and say oh Jonathan you could be next have you ever noticed that people don't tend to say that at funerals and ever wondered why could it be that it would be a little bit insensitive to do that at a funeral well I want to suggest in all seriousness actually it's really insensitive to do it at a wedding too because it actually puts people under pressure and there are lots of I know lots of Christians who are single and they're sort of moving into their twenties and thirties and feeling a real pressure some of them want to be married some of them just haven't found the right person there can be a whole number of reasons why people are not married or why a young person isn't in a relationship and I think if we're constantly putting people under pressure in that way it actually really doesn't help and I think you know

I try to encourage younger people look while you're not in a relationship enjoy being single it's an enjoyable time of life it should be an enjoyable time of life so we need to be really positive about singleness if we're going to have this new community we need to recognise that some people within that community and it won't necessarily because they're struggling with same sex attraction could be for a whole host of reasons won't be married some of course will be divorced some will be widowed and we need to be as welcoming to the single person as we are to the married person so the gospel is good news of a new beginning good news of a new community and finally and very briefly it is good news of a new world when somebody comes to faith in Christ the reality is that we don't know what God may choose to do in that individual's life some people do want to get married they come out of this background of a same sex practice or they may be as a Christian have grown up with a same sex struggle and actually they're longing to be married and I've had the joy of supporting a number of people in fact attending the marriages of a number of people who have had this struggle but have gone on to get married and when I see that happening for me that's fantastic absolutely rejoice when that happens I think of a good friend of mine at Bible college who once vowed to me that he would never be able to get married because of his own so I remember him saying don't worry I'm not going to abandon you I'll always be here for you as a friend I'm never going to be able to get married and he is now married and we are still good friends so that's good as well but I just rejoice with him you know he has had that experience of God transforming his attractions to such an extent that he's been able to go on and get married he has a lovely godly wife knows about his struggle two beautiful children that's absolutely wonderful but that isn't going to be the reality for many people in fact I have to say in my experience it's not the reality for most people who struggle in this way most people are not going to have that experience of finding their sexual attractions changing to such an extent that they'll be able to get married some do and certainly we can pray for people and we can support people but we need to be realistic with people and we certainly need to be careful not to make false promises we cannot promise someone don't worry

God will know God will lead you to someone the opposite sense God will take away those desires we simply don't know that is not a gospel promise and I've sadly had to work with a number of people who are kind of casualties at the side of the Christian road and this is in all kinds of areas actually not just in the area of sexuality where they've been promised that if they have enough faith God will do this or God will take this away and it's very dangerous teaching because that isn't a gospel promise what the gospel does promise and this is the hope that I have and it's the hope that a number of people who struggle in this area have what the gospel does promise is that a day is coming when God is going to rise from his throne and in great glory he's going to say behold I make everything new and on that day we're assured that will all of us if we're trusting in Jesus Christ be new people in a new world and it's a world where there'll be no more sin no more mourning no more death no more crying no more pain for the old order of things will be taken away and on that day every single one of us whatever our particular struggle let's be honest as Christians we all have our struggles here tonight may not be in the area of sexuality it may be in a whole number of different areas but whatever our struggle we will be able to say that my past struggles are simply not worth comparing to the glory now revealed in me and I suggest you that is the great hope of the gospel that is the greatest hope we can have in walking alongside someone who struggles in this way we can be a friend to them now we can reassure them of that new beginning we can welcome them into the new community but ultimately we're assuring them that there is a new world to come when there will be no more struggle of any kind and that I suggest to you is the great hope of the gospel I have gone beyond my time so I'm going to be quiet now and

Johnny you going to come talk about the questions thanks Jonathan we're going to have tea and coffee now served from the hatch and we have gone over time a little bit so if you want a cup of tea and coffee please go and get that quickly if you need the bathrooms use the bathrooms as well but during this break for 10 minutes and if you do have a question and then just simply write it on the piece of paper there are the yellow sticky powder they around there Rob has them at the back and so they'll be at the back there if you have a question just write it on one of those yellow sticky labels and give it to me and then we will put those because some of you might not want to ask questions publicly if you're happy to ask them publicly that's fine but if you have a question just write it on that pad and pass them on to me and we'll go from there so quickly tea and coffee just 10 minute break and I'm going to bring you back prompt to on that thanks thank you thank you thank you thank you

Mike thank you Thank you.

[57 : 31] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.