

Hello, hello, Church, good morning, good morning! Ah, it is a pleasure and a joy again to be together with you all today, it is so good being together. Well as Phil mentioned, we are right in the middle of our Unashamed series, where we are seeking to apply biblical direction to questions surrounding sexuality and gender.

And I did take my Invisalign out today so we are, we are good to go. Ready! Thank you, thank you!

So far we've explored how God made sex and that it's a good thing, it was His idea, His design for it is good, yet it has gone wrong in our lives and in our culture in many ways. And that we all have sexual sin and brokenness as part of our story and our struggles.

And we talk about the beauty of singleness and marriage, right? That God, that they point both point us to Jesus. And how we in our church and culture have mostly elevated and idolized marriage and devalued singleness, and how we as a church want to grow in equally valuing both of those things.

And today, we're going to be zooming in on questions surrounding same-sex sexuality.

Now to be upfront, I am a straight, cis-gendered, married man, so why do I care about this topic or even what gives me the right to talk about this? I think those are fair questions, honestly. For some reason, I have found myself really passionate about these things. I have had a number of LGBTQ friends who over the years as they've shared their stories with me, they have always moved me. Maybe it's because I can see a lot of my own story in theirs.

Growing up, I remembered being bullied at times and being made fun of mercilessly about my big goofy ears, something I could not hide about myself. I was called names like Dumbo and Satellite Dish, which will probably always stick with me. I also remember being close to a guy friend in middle school and us not having a lot of other friends and some of the other guys behind our back calling us "gay." In my gay friends' stories, I've heard tremendous pain, deep loneliness, I've heard a ton of shame, stories of being bullied, fear of being found out, and questioning why am I so different?

So about a few years ago I began a deep dive into this topic, I've lost count of the number of conversations I have had with friends who are gay, many who are part of our church. I'm about 16 books in ranging from lesbian and gay questions from all sides of the debate in the Christian world to transgender books as well. We'll talk more about that next week. I've listened to a number of sermons and podcasts on this topic. Our Elder and Minister Team has gone to a couple conferences and workshops specifically

about same-sex sexuality. And I hope to draw on that learning and share from voices and perspectives of gay Christians throughout our time today.

Saying all that, I...also please don't hear me saying that I think I have all the answers, because I don't. There is much I don't know and I want to keep learning.

Now you may think, well isn't this putting too much emphasis on this one issue? Isn't doing a sermon on it communicate that this is some special elevated area? I can, I can see that. Yet, doing this sermon is really an act of repentance of where we've failed, because there is confusion in the body and we hope this provides clarity.

And I care deeply about these questions and issues, and they're really more than questions and issues, these things are about real people, our gay brothers and sisters. And I want you to know that I see you...I see you and I want to see you. I hope this sermon speaks to you, I really do, and helps us as a church love you better. And I hope this sermon helps you all know what we believe as a church, as church leaders, about these matters and begin to develop your own convictions as well. In short, I hope today brings compassion, clarity, and conviction.

Let's pray.

Oh Lord, I feel so desperate before you, I feel like this is just sensitive ground, and holy ground in a lot of ways. And so I pray for sensitivity, I pray for words that are careful, and I pray for words that are from you, Lord. Help us to hear from you, Jesus. Would you speak to each and every one of us today, not matter where we are at, would you speak to us? We need you. In your name, amen. Amen.

I would like to start with a sobering story...

Eric Borges was raised in a conservative Christian home. At a young age, Eric realized he was different, and other kids at school let him know it. He endured relentless bullying throughout all of elementary school. "I was physically, mentally, verbally, and emotionally assaulted on a daily basis," recalls Eric. This led to chronic migraines, debilitating depression, suicidal thoughts, and many other mental and physical problems. "My name was not Eric, but Faggot. I was stalked, spit on, and ostracized." On one occasion, he was assaulted in a full classroom, and no one intervened, not even his teacher. Throughout school, Eric was treated like a monster. "I was told that the very essence of my being was unacceptable. I had nowhere safe to go"—not even church. In his sophomore year of college, Eric came out to his parents; he told them he was gay. After performing an exorcism on their son, they told him, among other things, that he was "disgusting, perverted,

unnatural, and damned to hell.” Later that year, they kicked him out of the house. Eric shared his story on YouTube in 2011. In the video, he encouraged other youth who’ve had similar experiences that “it gets better.” Having suffered tremendous ridicule and torment, Eric wanted to help others to find comfort and hope to pull them through the pain. One month later, Eric killed himself.

What a horribly painful story, right? And yet it communicates the importance of these matters does it not?

A few years ago I began a friendship with a young man in our church who experiences attractions to the same-sex. I remember him just point blank asking me, why doesn’t our church talk publicly about sexuality. And I tried to draw him out, maybe buy myself a little time to answer his question, but I did want to know why this was important to him. And for him, someone who was not acting on his gay attractions, who felt conviction from the bible, forbidding him from doing so, he didn’t know where our church stood, and who was safe to talk to. He felt isolated and alone, because no one in the gay community outside the church would understand his convictions and might even try to talk him out of them. And then in the church, he wasn’t sure where leadership stood, would he be ostracized, accepted, need to educate about language? I didn’t have good answers for him that day, but I did see how important it was for us to engage well on these matters as a church. So today is an attempt to do that.

As I was praying through and preparing for this message, I felt drawn to this passage in Matthew 18...So turn there with me.

Matthew 18 verse 1, it’ll be on the screen if you don’t have a bible
¹*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “So who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” [You’ve got to love these questions that the disciples ask, it’s so honest, I don’t think I’d have the guts to ask Jesus a question like that.]* ²*He called a child and had him stand among them.* ³*“Truly I tell you,” he said, “unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* ⁴*Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child—this one is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

Then in verse 6, He says,

⁶*“But whoever causes one of these little ones [and the word He uses here changes, ok, it’s different than the word for child, it’s more encompassing, all-encompassing to include children and adults, but basically anyone who is in a position of vulnerability, anyone who is powerless, anyone who causes these sort of little ones, which I think definitely applies to the LGBTQ community, ok. So remember that, and keep that lens in view]... whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to fall away—it would be*

better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea...

That's pretty strong, a millstone was this like huge round stone, that they would use to crush out the grain. Having that hung around your neck, you wouldn't stand a chance, alright. And Jesus is saying, anyone of you who has caused of these kinds of people to fall away, to stumble, it's bad, it's really bad for you. And I just think we just need to honest and upfront that

The Church has failed gay people

The church has failed gay people, have failed gay people. And that we're the ones who have tied this millstone in a lot of ways, who deserve this millstone. When I use gay people, I'm kind of using that as an encompassing term for anyone who is gay or lesbian or bi. The Church should be a safe place for those who are vulnerable, right? And instead we're in deep needs for the ways we have failed and done harm to gay people.

Our church specifically has not advocated or fought for LGBTQ people struggling with depression, or suicide, or being bullied.

I believe our church at time seen gay people and their issues as, as too complex and passed them off to others to deal with.

And we repent, we repent for our deafening silence publicly on these matters and the neglect and the pain that's caused our LGBTQ brothers and sisters.

I think it's fair to say that the universal church, the capital C Church, has dehumanized LGBTQ people in the culture wars in recent decades, in our rhetoric, name-calling, saying things, pithy sayings like pray the gay away, and worse.

And the Church, the capital C Church, has othered gay people, elevating this one area as worse than others and made them an enemy And failed to reach out to gay people well and love them with the gospel of Jesus, which is for all of us.

And in some of my reading and studying, this, this like really was like a gut punch to me, this was jarring to me and maybe it will be for you too. Many Christians in the Moral Majority and our nations leaders turned a blind eye in the 1980s when the HIV/AIDs epidemic was ravaging the gay community and labeled it "God's plague on wicked sodomites." When engagement and love and funding to a sick and hurting people group would have made all the difference in the world and saved countless lives.

We have so failed to love our neighbor!

Oh Lord Jesus, we repent! We repent as a local body, as a universal Church, please forgive us our individual and our corporate sin, forgive our church for our part in the not helping suffering men and women much much sooner. Please forgive us. Amen. Amen.

A little bit later on in our passage, we see Jesus, more of Jesus' heart:

Matthew 18 verse 10, He says,

¹⁰ "See to it that you don't despise one of these little ones, [don't despise them, oh, that one word, this one verse we could meditate on] because I tell you that in heaven their angels continually view the face of my Father in heaven. ¹²What do you think? If someone has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, won't he leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go and search for the stray?¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over that sheep more than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. ¹⁴In the same way, it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. [That one should perish.]

I think it is more than fair to say that

God deeply loves and pursues LGBTQ people. Ok, and I'm going to just use that that acronym, stand for lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, queer or questioning that the q can stand, there's more you know AIA, you can go on, LGBTQ is generally how LGBTQ people prefer to refer to themselves, the GLAAD media guide uses that moniker so I've kind of adopted it.

He deeply loves and pursues them. And catch this. Some of these statistics were just mind-blowing to me.

86% of LGBTQ people come from a church background, that's 86% of all LGBTQ people come from a church background, compared to 75% of the general American population that comes from a church background.

Now catch this different: 76% of the LGBTQ community are open to returning to the church, are open to it, desire, desire to be part of church community, verse 9% of the general population! So of the ones that have left, 3/4s want to come back, verse the rest of the population where 1/10 want to come back.

And this was also just crazy to me: 92% of LGBTQ people would not require their church to change its view to return. Wouldn't necessarily require a doctrinal shift, I thought that was crazy too.

[from: Andrew Marin, *Us Versus Us: The Untold Story of Religion and the LGBT Community*]

You see I think this is much more about our heart posture, do we have the same heart posture as Jesus, of love and pursuit? Or or not, is it different? Don't get me wrong, I think position is important, we're going to talk about that. But I want us to meditate on our posture, is our posture like Jesus, first and foremost? Cause we've seen the compassion that He has for anyone who's in that position of vulnerability and how the Church has failed.

So I'd love to just share some practical ways to live a compassionate way and pursue gay people.

And really my dream for our church, and our our leadership dream, our elder and minister team is that our church would be safe place to share your story no matter what it is and in any setting. That you can come out and be received with love, met where you're at. That you can talk about your sexuality.

So my first practical is simply to listen, to try your best to listen well, ok? You may feel like you don't know what you'd respond if someone came out to you, or just starting talking about their sexuality. But you don't actually have to respond, you can just listen. You can just listen and that's so important. You can ask open-ended questions with gratitude like,

Hey thank you much for sharing that part of your story or sharing that with me, I'd love to know more if you're willing.

What was growing up gay like for you? or

How does your faith play into your sexuality? or

How can I support you as a friend?

Oh those questions go such a long way. And let's be careful to never speak derisively about LGBTQ people. Name-calling, telling stories at a gay person's expense, pretending to be gay for a joke, let's not do that. An LGBTQ person picks up on these things and it communicates you're not a safe person to talk to.

Now parents, I want to share a few words for you ok, and this applies to current parents and many of you will be future parents, so maybe try to remember to file these things away, for future reference. You are your child's biggest advocate and source of love. You are an example of the heavenly Father to them. So listen as well, listen and don't try to fix, listen, come alongside, be patient, and get help, please get help, there are some great resources out there for you and we can help point you to them if you don't know where to start. And no matter what you do, please don't kick your child out of your home. LGBTQ youth in highly rejecting families are 8 times more likely to commit suicide, 8 times. We need to teach our children not bully and name call as well, anyone who's different than them, and to call it

out when it happens, because more than likely they're going to be around it more than we are. To stand in the gap for any classmate who is being harassed no matter the reason, whether it's their sexuality, some physical part of them, or their race, or whatever it might be, to not stand for that.

We want to let you know that we as a church we don't subscribe to reparative therapy (ex-gay ministry as it's referred to sometimes), that you can go from being gay to being straight. If you're an adult and want to pursue such a ministry, I...you know, please do so as the Lord leads you. But as a parent with minors, don't push this upon your child, it's more likely to do more harm than good.

And when having conversations about sex with your children (and notice I didn't say like the talk, because these should be a series of multiple conversations, even though we want it to be one conversation or less sometimes). Consider age appropriate ways to talk about sexuality and attractions to the same sex. To our eleven year old, we've been having some of these conversations for a couple of years now. And we started with talking about puberty, I bought a book and we've been kind of reading through it together for a little while. And more recently I talked to him about sex and what that is and how that works and that was great, it was a great conversation. And then with some coaching and doing some reading and studying has influenced this and decided it was important to talk about this topic too. Basically shared with him that about 11% of people, about 1 out 10 people in our country have experienced attraction to the same-sex, in some way, shape, or form, at some part in their life, boys feeling attracted to boys, girls to girls, or to both sexes. So if you do feel a draw to the same sex, I want you to know you can talk to me about that , ok? There is nothing off limits for us. And I'd love to walk with you together in that. It won't change how much I love you or how crazy I am about you, nothing can do that. We got to communicate things like that to our children, I think.

Pieter Volk from Equip Ministries says the reason this is so important is because statistics show there is an average gap of 5 years between the time a young person realizes their orientation and then says anything to a trusted adult like a parent about it. Those are 5 long and lonely years...to imagine being by yourself in this and having lies just just seeping over time. That many times a lot of them don't believe in God on the other side of that 5 years cause it's so hard, so hard.

Language is very important, we've been kind of touching on this a little bit as we've gone.

I want to encourage you to not use the the word homosexuals it's just very clinical, and the gay community doesn't use that phrase at all anymore to describe themselves anymore, it's a little out of date. You can use LGBTQ or someone who experiences attractions to the same-sex

Similarly, I wouldn't use gay lifestyle or gay agenda, just to cut those out of our vernacular. I mean if you stop and think about it, we all have very similar lifestyles, get up brush our teeth, go to work, you know are with friends, all those sorts of things. What even is a gay lifestyle, it's kind of silly. You can say things like, yeah, I think yeah that friend is out and they're public about it. Or they're in a same-sex relationship or identify as and use language they'd prefer.

Let's also please stop saying, love the sinner, hate the sin, alright? We can... it's good to hate your own sin. But that phrase is just something that Christians say about gay marriage, if we're honest...and it's pretty shallow I think. Um, elevates this area as worse than others.

Language matters! How we talk about these things matters so much! Are our words loving? Are our words invitations to deeper relationships? Oh, that's applicable in so many ways, right?

I'm going to talk a little bit more about other ways to support our gay brothers and sisters a little bit later. But now I want to turn our attention now from posture to position. And I want to ask you at the same time to hold this posture of compassion as we talk about position. Cause I think it's so important.

Clarity in in what we believe about these things matters as well. A number of people over the years have expressed to our church, to us in leadership, that um we have not been upfront about your beliefs in a public way and they've experienced a bait and switch, appearing one way and finding out that things are later different. And I believe they're are right, I think that's accurate, an accurate assessment. And I want to say we're sorry, we're sorry for that, if that has had an effect on you, our public silence and you've been hurt by that or misled by that.

Let me begin by defining kind of the two main positions in this debate surrounding marriage and gay marriage. Ok.

The first position is generally what's called affirming, ok, or progressive I've also heard it called. And affirming it just means a Christian, who is gay or straight and believes two men or two women can date, fall in love, remain sexually pure before the wedding day and commit to a life-long, consensual, Christ-centered, self-giving, monogamous union. Ok. So that's kind of the affirming, the affirming side or position.

The other side has been referred to as non-affirming a lot of times, I think that's how we've heard it in recent years. I don't really love the phrase non-affirming because it's negative to begin with and I also think this side affirms

a lot of things, so I prefer the term traditional to describe this position. That's kind of the two phrases I'll use for the rest of our time, generally speaking.

Traditional is a Christian who believes the historically Christian view of marriage and sexual expression; namely, that marriage is a life-long, one-flesh covenant union between two sexually different persons (male and female) from different families, and that any pursuit of sexual relationships outside of marriage is sin. And that God blesses such a marriage.

And in this view, simply experiencing gay attractions, attractions in and of themselves is not considered sin. And we'll talk a little bit more about that later.

And just to be upfront, the traditional view is the one that our church holds. I'll share more why now.

I just want to point, you can see the debate is not really about gay sex outside of marriage or going from one partner to another. The debate is really about the nature of marriage itself. Ok. What is marriage? Where do you get your definition of marriage from? And I think that's an important question for us all to wrestle with and us all to think about.

Where does your definition of marriage come from?

I want to share where we kind of get our definition from Scripture. I want to first go back to the book of Matthew to see what Jesus says that can help us with this question. So just one chapter later of what we were looking at earlier.

Matthew 19 verse 4, the religious leaders of the day had just asked Jesus about divorce and he responds this way (and we actually looked at some of this passage last week too):

⁴“Haven't you read,” he replied, “that he who created them in the beginning made them male and female, ⁵and he also said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? ⁶So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

And those two parts that are, that are, oh they are not actually bold up there, but that first quote there is from Gen. 1:27 and then the second part, for the man this reason a man will leave his wife is Gen 2:24. And to be perfectly clear this passage is about divorce, that is the context, we have to remember that whenever we are looking at interpreting Scripture. But that's important because we want to have a high view of marriage and not be flippant about divorce, otherwise we may be inconsistent and hypocritical.

But I think we can learn some very important things about this question about the definition of marriage since Jesus quotes Gen 1:27 and Gen 2:24.

This is what Preston Sprinkle writes in *People to be Loved*, a traditional resource, and I'm going to share a resource list with you a little bit later if you want to look at both sides of these question, of this question.

"If Jesus didn't think that sexual difference is essential for marriage, then his quotation of Genesis 1:27, [the part that says male and female] which talks about sexual difference, [he says it] is unnecessary and superfluous. [You didn't have to mention it really]But Jesus does quote it, so it would seem that male-female pairing is part of what marriage is according to Jesus."

Ok you catch that? Now kind of try to hold on to that and remember that. Now if we go to another part of Gen 2, Gen 2:18. When you know the creation account, in the creation account, He says this,

¹⁸Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him."

And I want to look at that phrase, helper corresponding or helper suitable to him is how other translations put it. And in the Hebrew is *kenegdo ezer* and we're going to get a little technical here so stay with me. *Kenegdo ezer*. Alright.

I want to first let look at that word for helper, *ezer*...it's a really challenging word to translate, ok, because we don't have a good English equivalent. I don't love helper, but it seems to be the best we have right now according to translators. But that word it doesn't mean, does NOT mean that women were created to just serve men in all their wants and needs. Ok. It does not mean that.

It's translated "helper" in the rest of the OT almost always of God Himself with the nation of Israel being a support to them, coming to them to help them in a battle.

Ps 33:20 is an example, it says "We wait for the Lord; he is our help [our *ezer*] and our shield."

So since God is called Israel's helper, it doesn't imply any sort of inferiority or weakness. But a needed support and help in a time of need.

Now I want to kind of focus our attention on that other the word "*Kenegdo*" which translated as suitable or corresponding. It is a compound word made up of "ke" which, I think some of this should be coming up, which means as or like and "neged" which means opposite or against. You can see why this is

a hard word to translate. Put together means something like opposite him or like against him. Can convey a similarity and dissimilarity. So yeah I wouldn't want to be a bible translator, these are hard words to translate. We again don't have a good English equivalent.

But I think when you look at this in the context, you see how God created a perfect partner for Adam, to help in a time of need, but one who is similar to him as human, but dissimilar as not as an animal or not as a male, but as female.

So it appears from Genesis 1 and 2, which Jesus quotes and strongly affirms, that sexual difference is a large part of how marriage is defined in the bible.

Now if we kind of zoom out from just this creation account in Gen 1 and 2 and what Jesus says in Matthew 19, there are six main passages that we can look that talk about that in some way shape or form directly address this question about same-sex unions or relationships. There's 3 in the O.T. and 3 in the N.T.

The Sodom and Gomorrah passage that you may have heard of or read yourself in Gen 19, I think has a lot of issues with it, honestly, and may not be explicitly calling out same-sex intercourse, but more the inhospitality, inhospitality and the violence that the people in those cities had given themselves to. And it's really not addressing our question about the definition about marriage. Affirming scholars would say that this passage is not condemning committed monogamous, gay relationships, and given the context, I would agree, so we're not going to focus on it today.

Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 and 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10 I actually want to all of those address together. And you'll see why.

Lev 18:22 says

You are not to sleep with a man as with a woman; it is detestable.

And Lev 20:9-10 communicates a similar thing, but I want to give a little bit more of the context here. You see there's actually a list of things that are communicated with the same sort of strength of language and I think some of these verses get cherry picked and just pointed out and saying like look how insensitive the bible is, but it actually calls out a lot of things.

Starting in verse 9,

⁹ *"If anyone curses his father or mother, he must be put to death. [I don't know if any of you have felt that way when you were a teenager] He has cursed his father or mother; his death is his own fault.*

¹⁰ *“If a man commits adultery with a married woman—if he commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife—both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.*

That should sound familiar because we talked about that verse specifically two weeks ago, with the story of Jesus and the adulteress who was brought before Him. The next couple of verses are about incest and again similar language is used, it’s also condemned.

And then in verse 13, it says,

¹³*If a man sleeps with a man as with a woman, they have both committed a detestable act. They must be put to death; their death is their own fault.*

Speaking about two men sleeping together. Now again, strong language, but I want to point out and remind you what we talked about two weeks ago. That Jesus with the adulteress women, I think he would ask this way if it was two men who were brought before him. He wasn’t worried about the punishment from the Levitical law, remember that? Because He knew He was going to die for that women soon. Just like He dies for all of us, and all of our sin causes us to deserve death. He dies for us in our place. I want us to remember that and keep the gospel in view when we talk about these things.

Now 1 Cor 6:9-10, our New Testament passages can give some light as well and kind of speak to one another and reinforce one another and what they are communicating. That passages says,

⁹*Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God’s kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, [we could probably see ourselves in a lot of these things, all of us in some shape or form] adulterers, or males who have sex with males, [that’s obviously applicable to our discussion] ¹⁰no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God’s kingdom.*

And I actually kind of like how this translation puts it, a lot of our translations use the word homosexual or homosexuality. But that can be a little too all encompassing, because the issue is not about attraction actually , it’s about our actions. So I like that it says “males who have sex with males.” Because we don’t have control over our attractions do we? We don’t choose who we’re attracted to, but we do our actions. Though not part of God’s original design, experiencing attraction to the same sex is not a sin. Think about it, married people still experience attraction to people they are not married to, is that sin? No, but lusting or acting on those attractions would be.

But the words, are the words in these passages translated correctly or interpreted correctly? It’s a questions that affirming and traditional sides, both debate. Now here in 1 Cor 6 and 1 Tim 1, there’s a couple of Greek words, but I want to focus on on one Greek word, which is arsenokoites,

arsenkoites, ok. This is a challenging word, appears in both those passages, to interpret because it's the only two places it appears in our bible as a word like that. It doesn't appear much in Greek writings. So some scholars and biblical critics on the affirming side will say that Paul (who's the author of both these books) you know we're not actually sure what he means and he just made up this word. <Laughter> I didn't mean that as a joke. I see why that's a little funny. But that but that, but that we kind of lost the translation, we're not sure. And it could be referring to a number of things.

If we try to break apart the word, and we have to do a little more work than this, but it's a starting point. It's a compound word made up of "Arsen" which simply means "male", referring to the male gender irrespective of age. And "Koite" which simply means "bed" or it can have the verbal force of "to sleep with." Which is where we get our word coitus from.

And then when we go back to Lev 18:22 and look at it in the Greek, original Greek, not in the original Greek, it was originally in Hebrew, but when we look at it in the Greek translation, the Septuagint is what it was called, which was the Greek translation of the Bible at Paul's time of the Old Testament, which he would have been very familiar with as a Pharisee and a teacher of the religious law cause that was the more international language, Greek was, with the greater ancient world. And I think this points to some of the, gives us great clue.

You see it here, I think it should be up [Kai meta **arsenos** ou koimethese **koiten** gunaikeian], I'm going to read the whole thing, but you see the words arsenos and koite, that's in Lev 18:22 in the Septuagint. And then our English translation:

You are not to sleep (koite) with a man (arsenos) as with a woman; it is detestable.

So even though we don't have the compound word "arsenkoites" anywhere except those two times Paul uses it, I think it's very plausible that Paul had in view Lev 18:22 and we see in our New Testament him upholding this old testament command, for men not to sleep with men as they would a woman.

Now some of the modern day progressive critique of this on the affirming side, is Paul and these passages are referring to pederasty, which is men sleeping with boys, which was a common Greek rite of passage action actually in the ancient world. But there are specific Greek words that Paul could have chosen that communicate pederasty itself. And Lev 20:13 says both parties are accountable for their actions actually, which would not be the case if this was calling out any sort of exploitive action, rape or pederasty.

And I think another affirming argument that I think is a valid question that we have to wrestle with is that there is not clear examples in the ancient world that are equivalent in our modern example of two people in a committed, monogamous, committed, gay relationship. But Preston Sprinkle in *People to be Loved* goes into some detail about this and just did some great research on this. He points to a first-century book called the *Satyricon*, which discusses same-sex relationships at great length. This would be at the same time that Paul was writing. In it, the author portrays two male lovers who are equal in age and status. A second-century writer talks about marriage between two women as well.

And Sprinkle says this:

“I don’t think these examples of consensual love should be overplayed [I love his honesty here, his writing is very honest and humble I think]. Again, the most dominant forms of same-sex relations were pederastic or driven by unhealthy power structures (masters and slaves for example). However, it does seem that there was a spectrum of same-sex relations and even some examples of consensual same-sex relations—especially among women...We cannot assume therefore that Paul only had nonconsensual, unhealthy, exploitative same-sex relations in view when he wrote about same-sex relations.

Which I think is just yeah really good and applies very much to this conversation. The last passage we could look at is Romans 1:26-27, but for the sake of time, we’re not going to look at it. Don’t get me wrong it’s a very important passage to our discussion, actually it does call out both women and men involved in intimate acts with the same-sex. So I actually encourage you to look at it on your own and study it and see it as some homework.

Here’s some resources for further study if you want to look at some of these things more on your own. *People to be Loved* I’ve mentioned already and drawn from, I think it’s the top resource, traditional resource I would highly recommend.

God and the Gay Christian by Matthew Vines is similar where they kind of take at both sides of the argument and address one another. It’s from the affirming perspective. I found it challenging though I ended up in a different place with a different view.

Here some testimonials that are people kind of writing from their own perspective that I’ve also just found helpful in understanding people in this situation. *Washed and Waiting* by Wesley Hill, *Torn* by Jason Lee, *Gay Girl, Good God* by Jackie Hill Perry. All of them are gay Christians and experiencing these things themselves. That last one I would just be careful, I wouldn’t just

hand that to someone else or to friend, there's some strong tone, she's got a prophetic voice at times so keep that in mind.

So while the bible does say anything explicitly about gay marriage, it doesn't talk about and use the phrase gay marriage, it does have a lot to say about marriage and sexuality. It's because of these arguments and interpretation of these passages that our church believes that God calls all Christians to celibate singleness, to abstinent singleness or Christian marriage with someone of the opposite sex.

So where does this all leave us? Maybe it's a good time to take a deep breath. Ask yourself how are you feeling right now? How is this all sitting with you? I know I gave you a lot.

These are important matters. And they are important for all of us. And it's important for us not be flippant about them, but to take them seriously, and our study and application of Scripture seriously.

I want to acknowledge there are may be some of you who have not yet thought or started to study these things. I hope you do, I really hope you do, and that today was just a start and that you develop your own convictions. And I encourage you do so in community as well. Maybe you've begun to look at these things and you're wrestling with, you're not sure what you believe. And you've gone back and forth. That's ok. I get that, these are complicated matters. I felt some of that when I was reading and going through some of those books. And we want to be a community where these conversations can happen.

If you have studied these matters and you are really firm about interpreting these passages through an affirming position, whether you are gay or straight, we will respect and yet I just want to upfront that our church could be a challenging place for you to flourish. It could be. And it's ok if you need to find a different church with views that align with yours to flourish. That's ok. All of our elders and ministers, we do all hold a traditional position and it's not likely to change, and so it will affect how you are disciplined here, it just will. We feel Scripture calls us to call out sin. And so we will talk about these things. So you may be frustrated at times here. It does not mean you are not welcome, you are welcome, you just you may not feel welcome.

But if want to be here, we will treat you with honor and dignity. We will. Maybe you're gay and affirming and really struggling and alone. We will meet you where you're at, and listen to you and will love and respect you. I believe you can make some great friends here. I really do. I have got a number of affirming gay friends who I really treasure and cherish. I've learned a lot from.

If you are gay yourself and hold a traditional definition of marriage, we really want our church to be family for you. We really do. And we're so thankful for you and your story. We see you and there is space for you here.

You might be asking well then if that is me, what are my options?

Singleness is an option for you. Kyle talked about this last week, and singleness is not a death sentence, ok. If we have a more biblical and balanced view of singleness and marriage and strip away a lot of cultural lies and pressures, then a life of singleness for the kingdom of God has so many advantages and blessings to offer others. It is a real and viable option. That our church hopes to support more and more. Whether you are gay or straight.

A mixed Orientation Marriage. We have a number of happily married couples in our church or who have been part of our church where one partner is gay, that's their orientation and that's their feel like their draw, and the other is straight. And both of them have known going into their marriages their respective stories and felt God's call to a traditional sexual ethic and to get to married in faith. Most of the recent studies and publications show that most likely and very few gay people ever experience a full orientation change, but some may develop a closeness, a bond or an attraction for one other person of the opposite sex who they have connected with. This too is a real and viable option.

Jackie Hill Perry, who is gay herself, and in a mixed orientation marriage says,

"For some, loving God will lead them down a path of God-honoring marriage. For others, a life of God-exalting singleness. The same-sex attracted Christian that is called to marriage is no more of an apologetic for the power of God than the same-sex attracted Christian that is called to singleness. In both, God is glorified."

Both of these paths are difficult and gay people often have to work twice as hard to thrive according to a traditional sexual ethic due to a lack of support from the church. As a step to support you we have formed an LGBTQ Education and Care Team. All are welcome to email us, this is our email list [lgbtqect@nlcweb.org] if you could use support and resources, if you are gay or straight.

My gay brothers and sisters, there is room for you in God's kingdom and you are so needed! You are so needed. Remember where we started our day? Talking about greatness in the kingdom of God and how we have to become like a child in order to be great. And man I am just so blown away by some of yours example to trust your heavenly Father like a child with this area and lay it down at His feet in humble obedience, what an example to us, to us all!

What suffering, to follow God in ways that are so hard and unpopular in our present times. I have learned so much from you.

Johanna Finnegan, another gay Christian, a traditional gay Christian, says, "We obey when it is hard, we struggle, we fight our own flesh we put to death what is immoral and impure in us. We do what it takes, lose the hand or the eye, we do not shrink back from difficulty. We choose obedience even when it is hard...We offend and trouble because our lives hold up the truth that Christianity is a costly thing...and that it may take painful and extreme measures to live the Christian life, to follow Jesus, that it may not fit neatly into our plans and dreams. That the entering into life that Jesus calls us to is an eternal, infinite goal that relativizes and demotes all of our earthly agendas and projects."

Oh isn't that so good? What a gift to the Church that one quote is and perspective. Church, our gay brothers and sisters have much to offer us! And they need our support for intimacy and family, like we all do. I want to challenge you all, all you families to have singles, gay and straight over and to invite them to your dinner tables and into your lives. You know invite them so consider living together, there's a few families who have done that with singles and I just think that's awesome. And singles live together and support and be together with one another On the city side of the church, our home groups have often just been married couples over the years and in recent years we've seen the wisdom of incorporating singles with our groups. Which has blessed me, I have loved having singles part of my home group!

Singles, would you consider helping and supporting families as well? We're kind of barely keeping our heads above water with our kids most days, honestly. Even just spending time with our us and kids is such a gift and a blessing, playing with them, maybe babysitting them at times too, mentoring our teenagers when they get older is huge, even just reminding us of our zeal for the Lord through your commitment to Him bless us.

You see church, we all need one another do we not? We need one another, we need intimacy and connection and family. I believe in you church, I believe in you.

I know I shared a lot with you today, ok. I hope you can leave here with more compassion for our gay brothers and sisters, with clarity about what we believe as a church, and with and with conviction about what you believe.

My hope is that this is really the beginning of a conversation, I encourage you to consider coming to our conversational spaces after service today and next week. And that no matter your story or struggle, we can talk about who we are, our strengths, our weaknesses, our dignity, our depravity, because we all are free from shame because of Jesus.

Every single passage in the New Testament that touches on this topic in some way, shape, or form comes back to the gospel, comes back to grace. You see it in the 1 Cor 6:9-11 verse. You know we went through this the list of things, the list of sins, and all of us can see ourselves in some, way, shape or form on the list. But then in verse 11 he say,

“And some of you used to be like this. [And that’s not necessarily like a gay person becoming straight, but it’s people who have put our hope in the power of Jesus for transformed lives. It says] some of you used to be like this. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

The gospel is what we all need, let our sin and our shortcomings continually point us back to Jesus, He is our message, He is the best thing we have to cling to, the best thing we have to offer one another and to the world. He is good, He has rescued us, and it’s upon Him that we build our lives, build a life that is worth living.

Let’s pray. Jesus, thank you so much for all that you’ve done in our lives, we need you, Lord, we need your Word, we need your truth, we need grace and truth. Lord, help us to walk in those things. We pray these things by the power of your name. Amen.