

**If gay people are born that way,
how can homosexuality be wrong? Part 2** **PHBF 08.25.13**
TEXT: John 4:1-27 **Scr. Reading: John 4:1-27**
Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask

On August 28, 1963, between 2 and 300,000 people marched on Washington, DC, as part of one of the largest political rallies for human rights in US history. That event culminated with Martin Luther King's famous speech "I Have a Dream." Wednesday, President Obama will mark the fifty-year anniversary of that event with a speech of his own from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

Yesterday, tens of thousands gathered again on the National Mall to commemorate that event, to celebrate civil rights gains in the last 50 years, and to make a statement that, in their view, the work is not done. Some of their grievances related to racial issues like the Trayvon Martin verdict and the SCOTUS's decision on the Voting Rights Act. But a whole new form of supposed human rights concern has emerged in the last 50 years which is not racial at all—it's relational. It's not about skin color but about love. It's not about where you can sit in the bus but about whom you can marry. It's about equal rights for gays and lesbians.

Just a few days ago, the New Mexico Supreme Court ruled that professional photographers cannot refuse to shoot a gay wedding. In a unanimous verdict, the court wrote: "When Elane Photography refused to photograph a same-sex commitment ceremony, it violated the [New Mexico Human Rights Act] in the same way as if it had refused to photograph a wedding between people of different races."

As I said last week, homosexuality is the most important issue facing the American church today. How will we respond? With anger, panic and fear? Or with courage, wisdom, and grace?

I want to suggest to you that we ought to view homosexuality as a great opportunity for the church rather than a threat. Why? Last week I suggested that it forces us to answer the question of whether we truly accept the word of God as our authority. Here are a few other ways this crisis is actually an opportunity:

- To awaken us to our need for God's power and wisdom and love
- To clarify our main message (the gospel), our self-understanding (sinners with hearts just like everyone else), and our mission

(spread Christ's kingdom)

- To point thirsty souls to the water of life, the only water that truly satisfies. Some who try same-sex marriage will find that it doesn't satisfy like they thought it would. When that happens, will we be ready to step in and offer real living water?

Our question for today is "If people are born gay, how can homosexuality be wrong?" Last week I tried to provide the biblical foundation; this week I'll attempt to present a pattern for how to present that foundation to outsiders. In John 4, Jesus engages with a woman who is on a quest for personal fulfillment, and her chosen path has taken her down a road of deep sexual sin. How he handles this situation gives us a helpful model for how we should answer questions of homosexuality and engage with homosexuals themselves:

- Pursue them in love
- Pique their interest
- Answer their objections
- Expose their real need

Our goal is to find the balance between grace and truth, love and correction, being a voice of hope and a voice of prophetic warning.

Pursue in Love

Notice in our text that Jesus initiated the discussion: "Give me a drink" (v 7). His initiative might not seem remarkable to us, but she was certainly surprised by it (v 9 "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?"). And so were the disciples (v 27 "They marveled that he was talking with a woman"). Don't miss the significance of this. He's not just getting help for himself. He's committing a major social taboo and calling His own reputation into question. But none of that matters to Jesus as much as this woman, so He pursues her.

It's similar to the way He pursued Zacchaeus, another great sinner and social outcast. But Jesus went directly to the tree, called him down, and invited Himself over for lunch (Lk 19:5). One of Jesus' critics' most harsh accusations was that Jesus was a "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Mt 11:19). Why?

Note verse 23:

John 4:23 *The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.*

God is seeking worshipers. That's why Jesus pursues sinners. It's the seeking heart of God on full display, even toward this adulterous, Samaritan woman.

Would you do that? Christians, like Jesus, should actively pursue outcasts, rebels, and the worst of sinners. In fact, Jesus used people's relationship with outcasts as a litmus test of true spirituality much more than their doctrinal orthodoxy. The Pharisees were thoroughly conscientious about doing right and pleasing God, and Jesus excoriated them! So how do you know if your spiritual life would meet with Jesus' approval or His censure? Do you pursue the outcasts?

How? Treat them as you would anyone else. Build real relationships of healthy intimacy. Invite them into your home. Make them part of your community. Rosaria Butterfield converted to Christ from a lesbian lifestyle through the friendship and witness of an older pastor and his wife, and in her account of her conversion (*The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*) she says one of the things that initially most touched her was their hospitality, particularly because, she says, the gay and lesbian community is very much given to hospitality. (p 9)

Later, when she "came out" as a Christian and no longer a lesbian at a very prominent lecture, the president of the LGBT student collective confronted her: "How do you know that you are no longer a lesbian? How do you know?" She replied: "How do you know you are a gay man?" She recounts his answer:

"Like a birthday balloon deflated by a pinprick, B staggered and collapsed into my office chair. Slumped over and with tears in his eyes, he fell silent for what seemed like a long time. Then he said, 'Rosaria, I'm a gay man because the LGBT community is the only safe home I have...' (49-50)

Friends, I'm not suggesting we change our message and offer approval of sinful behavior. But we can and ought to convey our acceptance of them as people made in the image of God and thoroughly loved by God. Butterfield writes about the couple who befriended her:

"Ken and Floy did something at the meal that has a long Christian history

but has been functionally lost in too many Christian homes. Ken and Floy invited the stranger in—not to scapegoat me, but to listen and to learn and to dialogue. Ken and Floy have a vulnerable and transparent faith. We didn't debate worldview; we talked about our personal truth and what 'made us tick.' Ken and Floy didn't identify with me. They listened to me and identified with Christ. They were willing to walk the long journey to me in Christian compassion." (Butterfield, 14)

So, friends, let's seek out people of SSA. Befriend them. Invite them in. Ask lots of questions. Dialogue. Pursue, pursue, pursue!

And above all, love. Love is the key, and we're not going to cure our lovelessness problem by pasting on a smile and trying to be more friendly. We need genuine heart engagement from within. So consider this: imagine the trauma of believing that your sin was unlike any other sin. Imagine the fear you'd feel toward Christians and the despair you might feel toward life. God will use thoughts and prayers like this to change your heart.

Pique Interest

Notice next that Jesus took the discussion immediately in a spiritual direction:

v 10 *"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."*

Jesus is friendly, but friendliness won't win anyone to Jesus. No "Hey, just being nice. Have a good day!" Instead it's: "If you knew what God had available, you'd be asking me for help."

Now this isn't to say that we ought to cram the gospel into every conversation immediately upon meeting someone. The NT model of evangelism calls for patience, wisdom, building genuine friendship, and earning the right to speak into people's most personal concerns. (cf. Col 4:2-6)

Two key passages exemplify how this works:

1 Peter 3:15 *In your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you*

Christian witness emerges from hope that begs for an explanation. Hope, not flippancy or ease or good fortune in life.

Colossians 4:6 *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

We want to give remarks that are salty—i.e., that leave people thirsty for more. So pray for wisdom and skill. Imagine remarks or questions that would engage people and make them thirsty to hear more.

One of the key ways we can pique interest and create thirst is through the nonverbal witness of our own relationships and sexual lives. It's very possible for us to speak the truth with intellectual precision and power and yet have our message meet with utter disinterest from those around us, if they are turned off by what they see in us. To paraphrase C. S. Lewis, people are unlikely to abandon their mud puddles in the slums if our own marriages don't give a clear and compelling picture of a joy-giving holiday at the sea. When the church criticizes gay marriage and then mocks traditional marriage through divorce, adultery, and loveless coexistence, we are hypocrites.

Answer Objections

Jesus carefully zeroes in on her need: thirst. And one of the places thirst shows up most prominently in her life (and in the lives of many others) is her disordered sexuality:

John 4:15-18 *The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."*

Later Jesus explains that her thirst is a worship disorder (vv 21-24), but as soon as He mentions her personal issues, she moves the conversation in another direction (vv 19-20). And so Jesus patiently answers her question, but all the while keeps His finger on the need of her heart.

This happens all the time in discussions about homosexuality. How can it be wrong if it doesn't hurt anyone? How can it be wrong if they are born that way? What can we say in response?

We might begin by answering the question with a question. Get people thinking. Invite more dialogue.

- Can you tell me why you think, if something is genetic, it must be right? Do you think *any* behavior is morally appropriate simply because it has a genetic link?
- Why, if something feels natural, must it be OK? Lots of desires that feel natural aren't helpful or moral. If so, what about the guy who says gay-bashing or racial slurs come naturally for him?

We might also bring arguments from the public welfare, the common good. For example:

- **Health risk:** Homosexual behavior, especially among men, carries with it inherent health risks that can be reduced but not eliminated altogether. Gay (practicing) men get AIDS at a rate 50x higher than non-gay men and women. (NOTE: People who smoke develop lung cancer 23x more often than non-smokers.) This activity also poses a health risk to others. The CDC released a report in 2010 based on a study in 21 cities that 1 in 5 gay men are HIV positive and nearly half don't know it. The obvious question here is isn't it appropriate for us to caution our community against known health dangers?
- **Social order and rule of law:** Once we start redefining marriage, how does a government define and enforce marital rights? How can they determine marriage benefits like insurance coverage, legal protections, inheritance issues, tax issues, immigration issues? How do they regulate parenting rights when marriages split up? According to the Human Rights Campaign (an LGBT advocacy group), there are 1,138 benefits, rights and protections provided on the basis of marital status. If marriage has no particular essence, no restrictive definition, we can do with it whatever we'd like. If marriage should be open to homosexuals, why not to bisexuals—someone who might want to marry a man and a woman?
- **Impact on children**
 - Ritch C. Savin-Williams, dev. psych. professor at Cornell University, points out in his 2006 book *The New Gay Teenager* that studies have produced overwhelming evidence that homosexual young people experience "alarmingly high levels of depression, substance abuse,

dangerous sexual activities, and suicidality” (204). Previously, these problems were attributed to social attitudes about homosexuality and sexual repression within homosexuals themselves; but today it’s becoming clear that even social acceptance and sexual expression don’t always change those levels of depression, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts. (Hubbard, 46-7) Savin-Williams’ conclusion is that perhaps we should discourage people from self-identifying as gay or lesbian until they are older and can handle some of the emotional effects.

- Mark Regnerus, associate professor of sociology at UT Austin, published a study last summer in highly respected journal called *Social Science Research*. Title: “How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study.” According to his findings, children raised by homosexual parents are more likely than those raised by married heterosexual parents to suffer from poor impulse control, depression and suicidal thoughts; require mental health therapy; be unfaithful to partners; contract STDs; have lower income levels; drink to get drunk; and smoke tobacco and marijuana.

One of the responsibilities of Christians is to be salt and light in society—not exclusively in terms of gospel witness but in terms of minimizing the forces of decay and increasing the moral health and stability of society. Part of our calling is to help people see the long-term consequences of ideas.

We might make arguments from natural law – i.e., moral standards are derived from the given nature of things. In other words, rules are based on how things are made, their purpose. According to evolution, sex is for reproduction – preserving your genetic material in the next generation. Homosexuals don’t reproduce; thus, homosexual behavior cannot be natural from an evolutionary perspective. Furthermore, studies demonstrate that from 1-4% of the population are homosexual—clearly, not the norm or the natural state of things.

As Christians, we’d want to say that homosexual behavior ultimately will not satisfy. Like all sin, it can’t deliver on its promises. This helps explain the higher rates of despair and self-destructive behavior among people living a homosexual lifestyle.

1 Peter 2:11 *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.*

Homosexual behavior dishonors God and simultaneously destroys people made in His image. And so we speak up against it ultimately because we love God and love our neighbors.

Expose the Real Need

It would be foolish to assume that if only we tell the truth more winsomely, more compellingly, find the “silver bullet argument,” everyone will accept it. But the problem is bigger than our arguments. It’s even bigger than our sometimes faulty presentation. In reality, the problem is that rebel hearts do not want to submit to God. This is why homosexuals (and their allies) often regard any expression of disapproval for their sin as “hate”, “intolerance”, “bigotry”, and homophobia, no matter how kind we are and how gently we put our answers.

This is why Jesus’ example here is so helpful. He doesn’t just talk theology or ethics with this woman. In fact, Jesus doesn’t even address her moral problem. Instead, he focuses on her deepest spiritual need.

He refuses to be distracted by peripheral concerns, keeping the conversation on her relationship with God and Jesus’ own identity (vv 19-26). Notice how Jesus brings the conversation back to thirst. Here now, He calls it “worship.” Different term, same basic point. Our hearts crave, and we show what we worship by how we try to satisfy those cravings. This story is a walking, breathing illustration of Romans 1 – the desires of our hearts leading us away from God and into deviant sexual practices.

Keep your eye on the ball, friends. Our goal for people is not morality but conversion! Our message isn’t the gospel of heterosexuality but rather the gospel of salvation from all sin by grace through faith in Jesus Christ our Savior.

Homosexuality presents the church with a great challenge, no doubt about it. These answers are not easy to find or easy to explain. But wrapped up in that challenge is an even greater opportunity to spread the gospel. How?

First, through conspicuous and lavish love. Gay marriage is not going away. It's coming to our state, our town, even our own neighborhood. No question about that. The question is, will you love your gay neighbors the way God loves even you with all your sin, or will you effectively renounce the gospel by reserving love for those whom you perceive to be good enough?

Second, through marriages that truly reflect Christ's faithful, self-sacrificing love for His church. God gave marriage as an image, a shadow of His covenantal love for His people. The more marriage languishes in the secular culture, the more opportunity Christian marriages have to stand out and silently preach that good news.

And third, through faithful, compassionate Christian witness. All gay marriage does is offer people one more opportunity to try to slake their soul's thirst with something other than God. Some who try it will find it doesn't satisfy. Will we be ready to help when that happens?

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