Pride & The Modern Self — Delivery Transcript

2 Corinthians 10:3–5 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, June 5, 2022 · *Every Thought Captive*

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If you have a Bible, and I hope that you do, you can open it to the book of 2 Corinthians, chapter 10. We were in 2 Corinthians last week as we took a little break from a series we've been in as a church in the book of Revelation. And if you're new to Broadview, that's normally our diet of time in the Word. We preach through books of the Bible line by line, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, and we had been going through the book of Revelation. This time last year we were also in the book of Revelation.

We took a little break and we did a series called Taking Every Thought Captive, out of a little line in 2 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 5, that I want us to return to this morning, because from time to time I think it's important that Christians address some of the big ideas that are animating our culture. Certainly if you've lived in the West for any period of time you know that things have changed. The rate of the change in the culture has been at a breakneck speed. People talk about the culture wars all the time.

And my goal this morning is not to be a culture warrior necessarily and try to get points on the board for some so-called culture war, but rather to disciple us in the Word of God on what God's Word says as it relates to some of the big ideas that are animating our culture. You don't got to be a sociologist to see how big ideas can make a really big impact. Big ideas are very powerful. You can be a philosopher and sociologist and see historically how big ideas have resulted in things like World War I and II.

Big ideas have been the cause of a lot of the rate of change in our own culture over even the last 30 years. Big ideas make a big impact because they raise big questions and they give big answers. They try to solve some of life's biggest problems. And it's no surprise that if God

exists, and the absence of God would be what we call evil, and there's an embodiment of evil that we might think of as the devil, it's no surprise that person or that force, Satan the opposer, it's no surprise that he would try to sow deception and lies and little half-truths and untruths in the thinking of a culture so that it would reject God and abandon God and do its own thing.

And so you can look throughout the history of ideas, whether Western, Eastern, whichever cultures you want to look at, and see ways in which God's truth has been subverted and exchanged for something other than, something less than, something false. And it's really amazing, if you think about it for any length of time, how subtle and how careful Satan is sometimes and how he weaves little deceptions, at first very slow, very gradual, and then greater and greater as the snowball builds. And that's kind of what we've seen in our culture over the last 30 years.

And so I want us to look at one of those big ideas this morning as it relates to the sexual revolution in general and the LGBTQI plus movement in particular. And part of the reason is it's June. It's the first Sunday in June. June is, of course, Pride Month in America. It's the month where our culture, and certainly many organizations and companies in our culture, show their support and affirmation of the LGBTQ agenda. And I want us to examine the big idea that underpins it. Okay, this is not a sermon on homosexuality.

This is not a sermon on transgenderism in particular, per se. I'm not talking about the behaviors necessarily, but rather the thinking that undergirds it. And you may wonder, Well, why are you addressing this issue? And my answer is going to be the same answer that Paul gives in 2 Corinthians chapter 10. And so let's read it together first and then let's unpack this big idea. It's kind of a different sermon than normal. Usually we kind of work word by word, line by line. We're going to take the big idea of this text and then apply it to this issue that we see in our culture.

So 2 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul writing to a church in crisis. He says, "For although we live in the flesh"— in other words, a human body— "we do not wage war according to the flesh, since the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments"— as opposed to people— "and every proud thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ." So if you ask why address these issues, number one, address these issues because these issues of how our culture thinks and how we think are core and fundamental to this spiritual battle that Paul's talking about in 2 Corinthians.

In other words, there's no such thing as neutral ground, there's no such thing as neutral territory. You can't just kind of coast and be indifferent and not say anything, and, I don't want to mess with that issue, because the nature of spiritual warfare is ideological. The battleground is human hearts and minds, the war is for the way that you think. And Paul

says, even though I'm a soul in a body, even though I have flesh and blood, I don't engage in these issues according to flesh and blood. In other words, my enemy is not a particular person or something of that nature, but rather the enemy is the strongholds, the ideological strongholds that undergird the thinking of some of these flesh and blood people.

And so he comes out and he addresses the issues. Now Paul is not addressing the LGBTQ+ agenda in 2 Corinthians. What he was addressing in 2 Corinthians, as we saw last week, was a false gospel, a false Jesus— in his words, someone's giving you a spirit that you did not receive, preaching a Jesus that we did not preach, and a gospel that you had not received. Now we don't know the nature of it, whether it was kind of a prosperity gospel or a kind of a works-based gospel. We don't know all the particulars of that.

But the basic idea was that this church, even though they weren't necessarily believing it wholesale. They were tolerating it. They were saying, look how tolerant we are. We're very tolerant of putting up with these things that we don't necessarily buy all the way into. And really their issue was being more concerned about being affirmed and liked and popular than it was promoting and knowing the truth. And Paul writes to them to essentially say, truth trumps popularity, knowing the truth and promoting the truth trumps being well liked and well thought of by these so-called super apostles, and just tolerating these falsehoods in your culture is putting you in a dangerous place spiritually.

And that's what I would say to us this morning, Why would you preach a sermon? And why would you even say LGBTQ+ when you know it's so culturally sensitive, you know you're going to get an angry email or whatever the case may be. Which by the way I got an email this last week. It wasn't an email, it was an old-fashioned letter. Nameless, no return to sender or nothing like that. And I thought, Oh boy, here it comes, you know. But it was really an encouraging and helpful letter. So if you wrote that letter and you didn't put your name on it, you should have put your name on there.

It was a very interesting letter. Good letter. Total rabbit trail. I don't know why I said that. But the reason I think we need to address this issue is because like Paul says, there's no neutral ground, there's no such thing as not taking a stance, and if we don't as the church disciple people, disciple ourselves into what God's word says about the sensitive issues, then the culture will. You've got to understand our culture is not neutral in this whole battleground of ideas. Our culture has a position and our culture is actively trying to enforce its position on everybody who lives within it.

And just by nature of living in this world, by nature of us living in the West at the time that we do, in the way that we do, whether we like it or not or acknowledge it or not, it's seeping in and so we've got to contrast what God's Word says versus what the culture says so that we're not discipled more by the culture than the Word of God. And so that's why I address it,

even though it's maybe not all that popular. And the way that we're going to address it this morning, I think, is important.

The way to address false ideas is first and foremost by understanding the ideas and why they're false. It's not enough just to say, I don't believe that or I reject that or that's, you know, I'm against that. You've got to understand what that other person believes or what this culture believes, why they believe what they believe, and then be able to show why it's not only different from what God's Word says, but why God's Word is actually a superior approach to human flourishing and to living out our design. And when you are able to do it in that way, I think you're less apt to demonize people and belittle people and insult people and much more apt to persuade because you're not addressing the flesh, but you're addressing the strongholds that kind of captivate the flesh and cause us to do some of the things that we do.

So that's what we're going to do this morning. We're going to examine the big idea that undergirds the sexual revolution in our culture, how it came to be, and how we should respond. And to do that, I think the big idea that we need to attack is not how the culture views sex but rather how the culture views the self. The self. How do we understand what it means to be human? What is our approach to becoming conscious of our own dignity and our own worth? Really the word pride is an excellent word to think about in relation to this idea.

When you think pride, a lot of you maybe think something super negative, arrogance, you know, holier than thou, whatever the case may be. But one of the definitions I came across this week, I think it was Webster's, I put it in my little Mac and I typed in pride. One of the secondary definitions is that pride is consciousness of one's own dignity— pride is consciousness of one's own dignity, associated with ideas of confidence and self-respect. So the title of the message, "Pride and the Modern Self." How does modern man and modern woman become conscious of their own dignity?

What gives us worth and dignity as human beings in the 21st century? How do we understand ourselves in relation to the rest of the world around us? And one of the things you'll see hopefully from today's message is that the way we do that today is way, way different than the way people did it even a hundred years ago, much less thousands of years ago. And those differences did not happen naturally. They didn't happen automatically. It's not in a vacuum. There were very significant changes that happened in history that paved the way for how and why we think the way that we do as it relates to the self.

And once we understand how we define the self, I think we'll be better equipped to understand why we've sexualized the self and how it's become political as it obviously has today. A lot of these ideas that I'm going to be talking about today are not necessarily original to me. In fact, the best book I think you can read on this topic, if you're really

interested in this kind of a thing, the best book you can read on this, it was written a couple of years ago, probably the most influential book of the decade in my mind, is a book by Carl Trueman called *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*.

If you want to write that down, I would commend that to you. If you're taking notes, you can put that on your note sheet. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* by Carl Trueman. And the whole book really revolves around this statement. I am a man trapped in a woman's body. Or maybe, I am a woman trapped in a man's body. And a lot of people, of course, feel that way today. It's a thing called gender dysphoria.[1] It is a sense that someone believes they are the wrong biological sex, that they are really supposed to be a man, even though they have the body of a female.

And what the book basically explores is that 30 years ago, if someone was to come to you and say that, that statement itself would have been kind of laughed at as nonsensical. Oh, that's gibberish. You're being silly. You're playing a joke on me. But yet today, 30 years later, the statement is accepted unquestioningly as something that is absolutely meaningful and significant. Right or wrong, whether you agree or disagree with that statement as being meaningful and significant, I think everyone could acknowledge a transformation took place, where it shifted in our culture from being something that was kind of nonsense to being something that is not nonsense at all.

In fact, it should be taken absolutely seriously. How did that happen? What are the cultural forces at play and what are the historical influences that put us in a position as a culture to see that transformation happen? That's what the book addresses and that's what I want us to talk about today, and then contrast it with what Paul's talking about in 2 Corinthians chapter 10. The popular phrase that probably captures this worldview better than anything else is the phrase, you do you. You do you, man. Be true to yourself. Follow your heart.

It's the moral philosophy of every modern Disney movie, right? Discover who you really are and express that to the world. Regardless of the consequences, irrespective of what anybody else may say— Mom, Dad, church, God, culture, who cares? You do you. Philosophers and sociologists have dubbed that way of thinking expressive individualism. And it's a big fancy word, but all it means is, I am the authority of defining my identity. Not God, not culture, not any external influences whatsoever. I— the true self is the inner self. I do me. I define who I am.

Expressive individualism. And there was a book, it was actually a Christian book. I tried to find some secular authors that would define this and wasn't able to get any real consensus, but I think these seven pillars really paint a picture and it may sound pejorative. I'm not trying to be pejorative, but I think if someone was really bought into this way of thinking, these are the things that they would say. Number one, the highest good is individual

freedom, happiness, self-definition, and expression. Like I said, the moral of every modern Disney movie.

Figure out who you are, yourself, find whatever that is and define it. Settle it. This is who I am, and then express it to the world. Is it Moana, the island princess? Moana. Come on now. That was her goal, right? She had mama and papa and grandma. They were kind of messing with her flow. And so she had to discover her real self and go and conquer the world. The most recent one, *Turning Red*, same kind of idea. I got to discover the real me. Even if I have to reject my parents, my highest purpose is to discover myself.

So parents, watch out what your kids are watching on TV. Number two, any restrictions against this end must be reshaped, deconstructed, or destroyed. It's not only that you are the authority of defining yourself, but also that anything outside of you that tries to tweak it, influence it, change it— let's tear that down, let's deconstruct it, let's remove its power. And then number three, the more individuals are able to express themselves, the better the world will get. Certainly technology is attached to this. Things like social media, things like surgeries, biological hacks— all of these things will help us express ourselves more and more and more.

And the more we're able to express ourselves, the better the world will get. Number four, tolerance of everyone's quest for self-discovery and expression is the highest and chief virtue. That is our ethical code. You do you, man. If it's true for you, it's true for you. If it works for you, who am I to say? Anyone who doesn't affirm and tolerate will not themselves be tolerated. They will be resisted and excised from polite society. And then number five, humans are inherently good. There's nothing wrong with us. Vive le noble savage.

We come out of the womb without any real issues. The problem is all of these external influences that jack us up. So at root, we're okay. External structures and institutions are suspicious at best and evil at worst. Things like church, religious authority, cultural expectations. And then number seven, external authority should be rejected and personal authenticity embraced. In fact, the whole emphasis today on authenticity, which I think is a good emphasis, you should be authentic, you shouldn't be hypocritical. But the idea that you should embrace authenticity at the expense of any external authority whatsoever, any kind of external influences, those should be rejected and you just embrace the truth of who you are by yourself without interference of any outside thing.

That is the mode of operation for most people in our culture. Even if we don't say it, that's how we think and that's how we live, and it actually has some pretty dangerous consequences. At the risk of oversimplifying it, I think what I would say is that expressive individualism defines the self first and foremost by looking in, secondly by looking around, and then finally, if necessary, by looking up. Christian doctrine, theistic religions, no matter if you're Christian or not, the process begins by looking up, then maybe look in, then maybe

around, but it's centered, it's defined on a capital T truth, God and his existence in the world, his self-disclosure through revelation.

But in culture, you don't look up first, you look in first. You look in to define yourself, then you look around for affirmation, comfort, platforms through which you can express yourself and then after you've looked in and then around, then maybe you look up for divine approval. Then maybe you find a church that will affirm what you already believe. Then you find some kind of religious or some kind of spiritual code to inspire you to express yourself better. But it begins by looking in. This is not the way it used to be.

Okay? Good, bad, indifferent. It was just not this way. Historically, before this change in the West, most cultures didn't define themselves first by looking in, they defined themselves first by looking around. Culture defined you. Your identity was based in your responsibilities to other people. In fact, a lot of our last names came from the trades that your ancestors engaged in the community, whether they were a blacksmith or, you know, whatever the case may be, I can't go through all the last names, but your identity was defined not by what you thought it was, but by what you were supposed to do for the collective.

Your responsibility to the world. This is where things like arranged marriage comes from, because who cares how you feel or what you think? You have an obligation to this family, and you'll marry this person so that our family can advance. And it was just different. And maybe the cultural worldview today is a reaction against that approach where we look around instead of in. Whatever the motivations, the point is, it is absolutely different. The authority to define the self is located in the individual. The essence of your identity is located in your desires.

The purpose of your life is to express yourself. Express yourself. Who do you think you are? You express yourself as your purpose, and then if at any point you become unhappy or disenchanted, you're free to reinvent yourself until you're happy with who you are. Now, again, I'm not trying to be pejorative. I'm just saying by and large, this is how our culture thinks. Am I wrong? Think about the movies you watch, the music you listen to. This is the way we go about finding the self, discovering happiness. And it didn't happen in a vacuum.

I want to show you where this comes from. It's fascinating. And again, I'd commend the book to you and this is not a normal sermon where we really drill down into the text. And so if you're really into that, I apologize for that. That's normally how these things go, but I really want to help you see why our culture came to think this way, because there are reasons. And until you understand those reasons, you really won't understand how to persuade people out of this way of thinking. I want to show you four, five people in particular, historical figures, all the way back in the 18th century, who really helped pave the way for this way of thinking.

This whole concept that the self is the highest authority, that human beings are inherently noble, that our sin, our brokenness doesn't come from within, it comes from without. That concept came from this wigged fellow right here, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He was one thinker in a line of thinkers called the Romantics who basically said these external structures are the problem: capital-T truth, religious authority, cultural expectations, the institutions, the power brokers. They're the issue. And if we could just create a world where you could be true to yourself, where you could turn down the noise that those other people have and turn up the volume on your inner consciousness, if you could discover yourself in that way— the true self is the inner self— and if the inner self could only be expressed, then we could create a real utopia.

We could get rid of all this nonsense and we could express what's really there. The true self is the inner self. That was followed by another thinker around the same time, a little bit after— actually a lot after, about a hundred years after. This guy kind of paves the way. But then Marx comes along, and I think what Marx does is he provides a mechanism for tearing down those external structures. He uses economics to do so. His materialism basically taught him that in order for human beings to be really happy, we've got to dethrone those external authorities, take their capital and their wealth, and redistribute it to the poor and liberate the oppressed, so that those true inner selves could be expressed.

The true self can't be expressed in a world where the powerful people keep their power. So let's take their power away and liberate them. Of course Marx was not a Christian, he didn't believe in God, he believed that was just carryover from authoritarian power structures that were being used to keep poor people poor and powerless people powerless. And so let's get rid of God, Or the concept of God as it relates to how we do things together in society. And then of course Darwin comes along and puts the death knell in that whole idea by removing God from the picture entirely.

It's not just that God has no place in our politics. Darwin said God has no place anywhere. There is no God. There is no designer. Therefore there's no design. There is no such thing as a human nature. There's just nature; it's blind, pitiless indifference. And so really God was excised from culture. And it took a while, but eventually those Darwinian ideas, those naturalistic ideas seeped into people's thinking. And so the truest self is the highest self. Well, of course it's the highest self because there is no higher power. I am my own highest power.

And these external power structures are not just influencing me. They're abusing me. They're oppressing me. And I've got to tear them down and get rid of them. And there is no true truth, there is no one standard way, all of that's just nonsense. I get to define myself for who I really am. And that's where Nietzsche comes in. He's the father of postmodernism. Nietzsche basically recognizes what Rousseau and co did in killing God from the culture.

And he basically says, if you're going to do that, you better live consistently. If God is dead in a culture, there are consequences.

You can't have a standard morality. You can't have a standard approach to truth or knowing truth. Really self-discovery is a competition of wills and the strongest will survive. The strongest will— he called it the Ubermann, or however you pronounce it[2]— he gets to impose his morality on everybody else. Marx, maybe you were right, but it's not because they had the most money or the material gain. It's because they had a stronger heart, a stronger will. And that's what we should all aim to be. We should aim to be that person, that Übermensch, who defines ourself and imposes ourself on everyone else, culture, authority, no matter what, and that's what true happiness is.

That's what true happiness consists of. So Rousseau exalted personal autonomy. Marx and Darwin got rid of external authorities, and then Nietzsche provided a roadmap for how to live in a world where God is dead. That is how we got to this notion that the inner self is the highest self and that the inner self is the authority. That came from these guys. Now where did the sex come in? Because the sexual revolution is more than that. It's not just that I get to define who I am, it's that who I am is inextricably linked with my sexual orientation or my sexuality.

That came from another guy and his name is Sigmund Freud. And a lot of Freud's ideas are rejected now. A lot of people, you know, this whole idea of you want to kill your father and have sex with your mother, whatever he said. Most people don't buy that today. And even in his own day a lot of his ideas were considered kind of crazy. But there was one contribution he made that did stick, and it's incredibly influential, and that is this idea that human beings' sex is foundational to their identity.

In other words, sex is not just an activity in which you engage. Sex is absolutely central to your identity. You cannot understand yourself without understanding your sexuality. Your sexuality is inextricably linked with who you are. That's new. In fact, in the first century, when you talk about homosexuality in the Scripture, a lot of LGBTQ-affirming Christians will say, Well, the Scripture's version of homosexuality was not what we have today with the idea of sexual orientation and all that stuff. They're not completely true in saying that, but they aren't completely wrong either.

This idea of sexual orientation being inextricably linked with my identity, that's pretty new. That's from a guy named Freud. Now, inevitably when you have big ideas like this, raising big questions and giving big answers, it's going to seep down into the culture. Not everybody read Rousseau, not everybody read Freud, even though Freud kind of leveled his assumptions with the authority of science. That gave it a lot of traction. But not everybody believed Freud, not everybody agreed with Freud. But what happened is those assumptions began to seep down over time and eventually took root in the cultural institutions of our day.

They found their way into the educational system. They found their way into schools of economics. They found their way into churches and religious traditions. They kind of seeped down slowly but surely and now it's everywhere. It's in our arts, it's in our movies, it's in academia, it's all over the place. The self is the highest authority. Self-discovery begins and ends here. Once you discover the true you, which is inextricably linked with your sexuality, your job is to express that individuality to the rest of the world, irrespective of any opposition, in defiance of anyone who would disagree.

To the degree that you're able to express yourself, it is to that degree that you will be happy. To the degree that you are not inhibited in expressing that self is the degree to which you have freedom. And if you doubt me on this, there was the perfect tweet that I think illustrated all of what I'm talking about from the most powerful man in the world. The United States president, on June 1, the beginning of Pride Month. Notice what he says in this tweet and notice the themes that we've been talking about from these deep philosophical thinkers and the practical outworkings of those ideas in this tweet from the president.

"During Pride Month, we honor the resilience of LGBTQI+ people who are fighting to live authentically and freely." That's rooted in this concept that my striving is life and not becoming a better person according to some external standard. My striving, my purpose is knowing who I am and expressing it to the world. I want to live authentically. I want to live free. And then he follows that with the phrase, "We [re]affirm that LGBTQI+ rights are human rights." In other words, their pursuit to express their sexual identity is core to the human project.

You really can't know who you are outside of your sexual identity. Those rights are human rights because we're all sexual. "And we recommit to delivering protections, safety, and equality so everyone can realize the full promise of America." This phrase here shows how sex has now become politicized. And why would it not be politicized? If we take the self and we psychologize it, in other words, you can't understand your dignity and worth outside of your inner being. We psychologized the self and then we sexualized psychology. So your sexuality is inherently tied up in your identity.

Well, if our self is psychologized and we sexualized our psychology, the natural inevitable result is that we're going to politicize our sexuality. Because all politics is, is how we do things together. It's our agreed upon rules for how we live with one another. And if sex is fundamentally tied up in who I am, then we've got to have rules around me getting to express that, therefore the politics need to represent these changes in how we think about sex. And that's what this is about. We will deliver protections, safety, and equality so everyone can realize the full promise of America.

He's not just saying by that legal protection, so that the law is equal in how it treats transgender people versus non-transgendered people, but rather I think he's talking about a

deeper level culturally, we will not tolerate any criticism, contradiction, or opposition to people being able to express who they are without any kind of barrier. And that's the politicizing of sex. And my point in the sermon is not to demonize that or mock it or belittle it, but to rather show the historical roots of what would enable the most powerful man in the world to toe the cultural line, which is exactly what he's doing in that.

Now, what happens when you kill God in a culture? It's not without its consequences, when you kill God in a culture. We were made for God. We can't live without God. So what human beings do is we find some God alternative and we make that God. And in this case, we make ourselves the God alternative. So we become God, and that works for a while, insofar as your life works okay and goes according to plan. But what do you do when life doesn't go according to plan? What do you do with your failure?

What do you do with your shame? What do you do with your regrets? Well, if you are the highest authority, you're not only the solution, you're also the problem. And if you're the problem and you have no solution, it leads to incredible despair, crippling anxiety. That's why so many of the young people today are just absolutely eaten up with their anxieties and things of this nature because we've taken God and killed him and we've put ourselves in his place and we're not very good at being God. And so the result is one of cultural chaos and sexual brokenness.

It's on so many fronts. We don't have time to go through all of these, but the death of God results in cultural chaos and sexual brokenness. In particular, you see this with transgenderism, but these things I'm about to show you could really apply to anything. When you buy into this way of thinking, your body becomes a canvas. And maybe you would say, I've kind of even bought into this because I kind of think of the body as a canvas. My body is not central to the *imago Dei*. My body doesn't have anything really spiritual or sacred about it.

It's just a meat puppet. It's just my canvas for my art. And so I can do whatever I want to do to my body so long as it helps me express my inner self. And there's some crazy self-expression with people's bodies these days. I'm not just talking about transgender surgeries and things of that nature, which do permanent, irreversible changes to the human body. But even things like some of the more outlandish cases of people turning themselves into dragons or snakes or reptiles and things of this nature. It really is pretty nonsensical, but that comes from this worldview.

Well, if I am my highest authority and my purpose is to express what I feel, well, my body's a canvas for that artistic expression, and it's really damaging some of the implications. Not only that, the body's a canvas, secondly, the world is a stage. If my purpose is to express myself, then the world is my stage for doing so. My happiness is attached to discovering the true me, expressing that, and people affirming me and celebrating me. This is why social

media is so influential in my thinking, because social media gives you the tools technologically to express the true you, not the real you.

Not the you that people see and people think, but the you you want people to see, the you that you feel deep down inside, your avatar, and you know, with the idea of the metaverse and all this coming, it's even more outlandish some of the possibilities that people will have to express themselves externally, but the world becomes a stage. When the world becomes your stage, your relationships cease to be about you serving people in love. Your relationships instead become about them celebrating you and affirming you. My friendships are for me, my marriage is for me, my church is for me.

Everything is for me because the world is my stage for expressing who I really am. The implications are absolutely profound. Thirdly, sexual ethics or sexual morality amounts to taste. I say this because if you are your highest authority, there is no external standard. What's to distinguish one person's sexual taboo from another person's sexual taboo? In our culture, at least right now, it's consent. So long as it's consensual, it is permissible. And I'm all for consensual sex. Anything that's not consensual is violative of God's design, but consent itself is not sufficient as a standard.

Your children don't consent to eating their vegetables, but you make them do so. You shouldn't, but you do. I'm just kidding. But some people can get children to consent to sexual acts they probably shouldn't consent to. So consent is not sufficient. There's got to be something extra, but in our culture there can't be any extra because those external extras are oppressive. They're wrong. We define it. Well, you've got a very slippery slope to all kinds of sexual chaos and brokenness when you make the self the highest authority. Sexual ethics amount to taste.

Identity must remain fluid. It's in a constant state of flux. It's never fixed. It's always fluid. You've got to always be reinventing yourself. This is why sex change surgeries are so damaging. That's why so many transgender people after getting sex surgeries commit suicide. Because my inner me changed, but my outer me can't. It's fixed. I can't reverse the surgery. Well, when you make your body a canvas, the implications are significant. You've got lots of people in absolute despair: because I can't reinvent myself, because my tribe won't let me or because my physical body won't let me.

And then finally, opposition equals violence. All forms of resistance, disagreement, or criticism are received as acts of aggression. The social and political implications are disturbing, particularly for those who hold to traditional views on sex and human flourishing. People like Christians, especially those mean fundamentalist evangelical types, we got to get rid of them. They can't hold political office. They can't exert their morality on us; anything that's not affirming and celebratory is unacceptable. And you sense that in our culture. And it's only going to get worse because this is the air we breathe.

These are the convictions we have adopted as a culture. And so any outside influence, any Christian who would say, No, there is a God, and he has revealed himself, and there is a capital-T truth and it does violate what you're doing. That is now perceived as violence. That Bible is a weapon; that conviction is harmful and it's got to be excised from polite society. So let's get God out of the schools, let's get him out of the textbooks, let's get him out of popular culture. We can't have that. Otherwise we won't be able to express ourselves without inhibitions.

And I mean, you don't have to think very imaginatively to think about where that goes next. Tolerance is not sufficient. Affirmation and celebration is required. And so Christians are going to be asked to affirm as true what we believe to be false. We're going to be asked to celebrate as helpful that which we believe to be harmful. And if we refuse to do either, it will be interpreted as violence because we're hindering self-expression, which is the highest and most noble goal of Western culture. If your identity is rooted in your psychology, then anything that negatively impacts your self-esteem will be deemed as a weapon.

And it's not just Christians, by the way. You even see the civil war happening in the LGBTQ camps. The gay, lesbian, bisexual tribe is now in opposition to the transgender, queer, intersex tribe because transgenderism has kind of removed their gayness from being what it used to be. Now they're straight, but they're just in a wrong body or something along those lines. So you already see the identities colliding and the absolute chaos that's going to come as a result. And that leads me to the response that we should make knowing that the death of God in a culture is going to bring brokenness and cultural chaos, the response of Christians should not be one of mockery or belittling or meanness or insults, any of those things.

In fact, a lot of young people who are maybe ideologically traditional Christian, believe in God, they identify with this other tribe because they feel like Christians are just mean and they're angry and they hate gay people or transgender people and I'm not speaking for every Christian and I'm sure every one of us would say, well I'm not mean, I'm not hateful, I'm not any of those things. But that's the reputation. We've got to find a way, as Paul said, to tear down the arguments, to tear down the strongholds without destroying the people.

So how do we do that? Well, first you've got to have a source of authority that's not the self. We've got to return to putting God and His Word at the center. There is a God, He really exists. He has disclosed Himself in Scripture. Scripture is how we come to know and discover not just who God is, but His design for the world, namely our sexuality and our identity. So put God back at the center, put his word back at the center. That won't be popular. It will make people mock you and make fun of you.

But there has to be a guiding compass. There has to be an established authority. So that's number one. And then secondly, I think what we should do as Christians is to cultivate Christ-centered community. People's purpose in life in our culture is to express themselves

and to look around to find people who will affirm and comfort and support their expression. We may not as the church be able to celebrate and affirm sinful expressions of sexuality or self-identity or any of those things, but that does not mean we cannot give love and support to true human flourishing, to true self-identity, and so we can invite wanderers in our culture who are confused, who are really enslaved to a false ideology that maybe they don't even think about.

Maybe they haven't gotten underneath their assumptions. And so what we can do is we can expose those false assumptions with the Word of God and then invite them into a loving, affirming community that is not going to reject you just because you change your identity, or it's not going to discard you just because you no longer are who you used to be, but rather we will love and support and encourage you to become who God has meant you to be, that there is a standard and we're together pursuing it. And in that community of faith you will find real happiness and real purpose.

And so cultivating real Christ-centered community, I think, is a powerful weapon in our culture because people need to be known, they need to be loved. They need that from God Himself, but then God has given those people on earth a community of people who are pursuing together God's design for their life. And then finally, we need to take a stand for the truth. We need to stop apologizing for what the Bible says. We need to disagree with our culture, but we need to do so with conviction and grace. You can disagree in a non-disagreeable way.

He says in chapter 10, verse 1, I'm coming at you, I disagree with you strongly, but I'm coming at you in the meekness and the gentleness of Christ. I'm humble in person, but bold when absent. I think what he's getting at is this idea that people are people, they're individuals, they're taken captive by the devil to do his will. They're not the source of the problem; the devil is. The false ideologies are. And so I want to approach this problem in light of that. And so I'm not going to destroy the person, I'm going to destroy the idea.

And the way to do that is not to be mean or critical or belittling or mocking, but to rather treat them as people who are created in the image of God, who are captive to a lie. And my job is to try to help you see the deception behind what you believe to be true, but I'm going to do it in a way that's honorable and kind, with the Spirit of Christ. Now, do we always get that right? No. Do most Christians probably try to do that? I think probably so.

But it's all the more important in our culture that we do it well, that we not just have a political voice— I disagree, that's wrong— but we have a pastoral voice, the voice of a shepherd, the voice of Christ Himself who comes along and says, You are meant for more than this. There's actually a better way. This won't give you what you want. This is not the path to flourishing. This is the truth. The truth is what will set you free. And so as we enter

into a time of response as Taylor comes or whoever's going to come, I want to encourage us to do two things.

Number one, I want us to examine our own hearts for any of this expressive individualism that's in us. Because we live in this culture. It's maybe showing up right now in your life in the way that you think about your own views, maybe the reason you join this church, maybe the reason you don't like this church anymore. The reasons we join and leave and criticize, a lot of that finds its roots in some of this expressive individualism. So examine it in your own heart. Number one. And then secondly, I want us to ask the Lord for wisdom and discernment to know how to take his capital-T truth and plead with people to believe it, to not use it as a hammer— or not use it only as a hammer— to tear down wrong ideas, but to also use it as a lamp and a light to show a better way.

A light in the darkness that can break chains and speak a better word and liberate, literally liberate the oppressed, not with materialism but with capital-T truth. That won't just happen. We've got to ask the Lord for wisdom and He's the source of it. He'll give it to us if we'll ask. And so let's spend some time asking the Lord to do that. If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian and you've been captivated by some of these ideas, and you feel like, My sexuality is core to who I am, there is no better way.

The gospel speaks a better word. You are not who your culture says you are. That's true. But you're also not just who you say you are. You're not who Freud said you are. You are who God says you are. And you're so much more than your sexual temptations, your sexual preferences, so much more than your past, your regrets, your shames. You are loved by God, you are created by God, He can give you a new hope and a new future. But it begins with repentance. It begins with a change of mind.

It leads to a change of direction, and that opportunity is open to anyone who will take it. Father, we thank you for this time. We thank you for your word. And we ask now, as we respond, that you would give us wisdom and discernment. Discernment to know if any of these lies from Satan are in us, to what degree they're animating our thoughts and our actions and attitudes, but also to give us wisdom to know how to lead the world into the truth, how to persuade and plead with people to be reconciled to God.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "gender dysmorphia"; the term for distress over a mismatch between one's felt gender and biological sex is gender dysphoria (body dysmorphia is a different condition). Source: American Psychiatric Association, "What is Gender Dysphoria?" (psychiatry.org). ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as "the Ubermann" (later "Uberman"); Nietzsche's term is *Übermensch* ("overman" or "superman"), from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Source: Wikipedia, "Übermensch." ↩