

Can Sexual Sanity Be Restored?
Part 4 of "Crucial Questions the Church Needs to Answer"
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Take a look at the screen please - **LGBTQIP2SAAE** - Do any of you know what these letters stand for? Well, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersexual, pansexual, two spirit, androgynous, asexual, ecosexual. The last term is used for people who find nature, trees, flowers, streams to be sexually stimulating, or, to folks who refuse to have a sexual relationship with anyone who doesn't share their view on environmental issues. Those are thirteen of at least twenty-six different designations of sexual identity that people come up with.

When people are asked to check male, female, or "other," that is what the "other" covers. Some of you are thinking, "Pastor Dan, that is ridiculous. People are male or female, and sex is supposed to be between a man and a woman who are married to each other." I agree with that. But, some of you also would add - "and it is not something we should talk about in church."

With that I disagree. We need to talk about sex because the Bible talks about sex, and because sexual promiscuity, sexual addictions, sexual abuse, and sexual confusion are some of the biggest problems we face in our culture.

Yet, my fear is that when it comes to issues of sexuality, some of us think that people out there are so goofed up that it doesn't even pay to try to have a conversation with them.

We, however, are the ones who through Jesus, through what God has revealed in His word - we, not just pastors, but all of us - are the ones who can provide light in the darkness to those who are confused.

We are the ones who can offer hope and healing to the sexually wounded.

We need to speak to people out there and to people within our walls, including our children, in language that is clear and makes sense. We need to speak and live in ways that will motivate

them *to listen* to what we have to say about these most important topics.

This morning, as we conclude our series on crucial questions, I ask this: "**Can sexual sanity be restored?**" I believe the answer is, "Yes." And I am convinced we are the ones whom God wants to use to restore sexual sanity - maybe not in our whole society - but at least for some individuals around us. Let's pause and pray the Lord will use our time together to help us be better able to do just that.

During the past fifty years, American society has gone through a massive change in its understanding of sexual morality.

For hundreds and hundreds of years most people in the United States, and Europe before that, accepted **the Biblical/Christian view that the sexual relationship is to be between a man and a woman who are married to each other.**

During the sexual revolution of the 1960's, people began to question that standard. By about ten years ago the dominant view, at least within academic, media and entertainment circles, had become this: **People should be free to have a sexual relationship with whomever they want, whenever they want, as long as it is between consenting adults.**

In the last few years this has also been added: **People should be able to define their sexual identity and express that identity in any way they choose.**

Oh, for thousands of years people have broken the rules about sexual behavior. That is true. Today, however, many don't believe such rules even exist.

Now, to be very clear, Chisholm Baptist Church, as a Christian church, and I, as a Christian pastor, believe what the Bible teaches. We believe the sexual relationship is to be between a man and a woman who are married to each other.

We believe that God created us as male and female, two, just two different but complimentary genders.

We recognize that these views put us in the minority in American society right now. But that's OK. We are committed to what is true, right and good, not to what happens to be popular at the moment.

Much of the popular thinking on this topic has become disconnected from reality. **It is important that we articulate a biblical perspective on sexuality.** In doing so, our goal is not just to proclaim, but persuade. We don't want to just tell people what the Bible says. We want to help them see that what it says is true. We need to do this for two reasons:

First, we want to change how people think so that they will change their behaviors.

God did not give us rules about sexual behavior because he is against people having fun. The rules are there to help us experience happiness and wholeness in our lives. It is good for individuals and societies to follow the rules God has established. As a society, we all pay a price when those rules are ignored.

A second reason for beginning to clearly articulate a biblical perspective on sexuality is even more important – We need to make sure our views don't become an unnecessary barrier to people hearing and believing the gospel.

Friends, if we are to be faithful to Jesus, we must not deny or distort the biblical standards for sexual behavior. We cannot tell people that the rules God has given no longer matter.

However, we want to make it clear to the watching world that we are not "hateful bigots." We want them to know that our love and concern for people extends to everyone – that includes those involved in sexual sin and to those who choose to identify as something other than male or female.

If people reject the Bible and the great news of Jesus Christ because they refuse to consider any

"religion" that insists there are rules about sexual behavior, it is really not our problem

However, if the reason people refuse to consider Christianity is because they misunderstand what the Bible says or why it is true, then perhaps it is our problem.

When it comes to sexuality, we need to work on being able to explain what we believe and why we believe it. And we need to be able to do this graciously.

Remember, our goal is not just to proclaim truth to the world around us, but to persuade. Through the Apostle Paul, the Lord gives us some very important instructions in how to do that.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 – And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

This passage speaks of a number of important truths, but let me highlight two.

First, this is a spiritual battle.

It is because people have been blinded by the evil one that they believe his lies. And he has told a host of lies about sexuality that people in our culture have swallowed – often hook, line and sinker!

And because it is a spiritual battle, it is God, not us who can enable people to see their error and embrace the truth. It is God who ultimately changes people's minds and hearts.

However, that doesn't mean our words and actions are not important. Paul gives the instructions he does because God uses our avoidance of quarrels, our kindness, our clear teaching, and our gentle instruction to change people's hearts and minds.

When it comes to all the controversial issues involving sexuality, it is so important, so important that we gently and clearly explain what we believe and why we believe it.

How do we do that? **Well, let me tell you about a conversation with my friend Joe.**

Joe says he believes in God, reads the Bible sometimes and comes to church once in a while, but he is not really a Christian.

His sister Joan, a lesbian, just got “married” to her same-sex partner. Joe is upset because his co-worker Bob, a devout Christian, told Joe he should not have gone to Joan’s wedding.

JOE: *Dan, I cannot believe how judgmental and bigoted you Christians are! So I am not supposed to go to my own sister’s wedding? You guys talk “love, love,” but I see a lot more hate when it comes to gays and lesbians.*

DAN: Wait a minute, Joe. You know I don’t hate Joan. I think she is a nice person. **I don’t approve of some of her choices, including her same-sex relationship, but that doesn’t mean I don’t love her.** Why is that so hard for people to figure out? I don’t approve of a lot of choices my four sons make, but that certainly doesn’t mean I don’t love them. Let me be real clear. If I say something that makes you think, “Oh, Dan doesn’t care about Joan,” you are mistaken. I do care about her and love her. And, if I say something that makes you think, “Well, Dan really cares about Joan – He must approve of her lesbian lifestyle” – you are mistaken. I do not.

JOE: *But, Dan, that’s what I don’t get. Why don’t you approve of her lifestyle? That’s her choice. I have been doing some reading lately. Do you know some pastors don’t think the Bible really teaches that homosexuality is a sin?*

DAN: Oh, I know that, Joe. But I am pretty sure those pastors are wrong. **For almost 2,000 years there was almost unanimous agreement within the Christian Church that homosexual behavior was sinful. That is because of prohibitions in both the Old and**

New Testaments. The clearest is in Romans 1:26-28.

Romans 1:26-28 – God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved.

Joe, I really don’t know how someone can say the Bible teaches that God approves of homosexual behavior.

JOE: *But Dan, I was reading an article that said that homosexuality was something different in the first century than it is today. Back then, it was often coercive pederasty, not the loving, consensual relationships that exist today.*

DAN: Joe, that is pure speculation. And nothing in the text indicates Paul was referring to coercive relationships. That clearly seems like a 21st century attempt to twist the meaning of Scripture in order to rationalize behavior.

JOE: *Well maybe, Dan, but I don’t know why people make such a big deal about this. Jesus never condemned homosexuality. You Christians are supposed to follow him, not Paul.*

DAN: Well Joe, when it comes to what the Bible says, Jesus and Paul speak with one voice – but that is a topic for another day. **It is true that Jesus never specifically addressed the topic of homosexuality, but he clearly affirmed the authority of the Old Testament, which is very explicit in its disapproval of homosexual behavior.** And when it comes to same-sex marriage, Jesus said this:

Mark 10:6-8a – But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’

This is a pretty clear affirmation of traditional marriage. It is why I believe that even though a same-sex couple may be married in the eyes of the State of Minnesota, they are not really married in the eyes of God.

JOE: *Well, I don't know, Dan. You know the Bible better than I do. Maybe it does say homosexuality is a sin. But Joan cannot help it. She was born that way. How can God be angry with her for that?*

DAN: OK Joe, hang on for a second. The Bible is clear that homosexual behavior is sinful. But, I am not sure exactly what you mean by "homosexuality." **If you are talking about same-sex attraction, you know, being attracted to someone of the same sex, that seems more like temptation rather than a sin. There is a big difference between being tempted and giving in to that temptation.** Now, when it comes to sex – heterosexual or homosexual – there is that area in between temptation and acting on that temptation called lust. Jesus made it very clear that lustful thoughts – heterosexual or homosexual – are sinful too. When does a sexual thought become lust? When we start to enjoy it. When we try to prolong the thought – instead of getting it out of our mind. Now, I don't know if Joan was born with something that inclined her to be attracted to other women. There is no proof that sexual orientation is genetically determined or even influenced. Yet, even if it is, that really isn't the issue. Joe, I don't think it is a sin for your sister to have feelings that she may not be able to avoid having. But, she has choices about what she will do with those feelings. She decides whether she will act on them or not.

JOE: *So Dan, you are not one of those Christians who thinks you can just "pray the gay away?" You don't think Joan can become straight?*

DAN: Oh, I believe by God's grace that anyone can change. There are numerous Christians who were once living a homosexual lifestyle who will testify that they no longer struggle with same-sex attraction. But, I also know they are a minority. Many folks have spent countless hours praying – begging God to change their desires – but nothing happened. The gay didn't

go away. In my opinion, it probably makes more sense for someone dealing with same-sex attraction to focus on being celibate, rather than trying to change their sexual orientation.

JOE: *But Dan, you make it sound like celibacy is some easy path to follow. A lot of people are not willing to do that.*

DAN: Oh Joe, I know celibacy is often not easy. But, I also know many single and celibate people living happy, fulfilled lives. Unfulfilled sexual desires may seem painful, but they are often part of our lives. Why? Because most of us are a bit messed up when it comes to our sexual desires. Our desires are not pleasing to God. They flow from our fallen nature, the indwelling sin with which we struggle. We usually think acting to fulfill those desires will make us happy. But, we are often very wrong. Those actions can get us into trouble.

For example, Joe, you and Sue have been married for over twenty years. You have told me that you have been sexually faithful to her. That's great! But, you have also told me that it has not been easy. Like 90% of men, you are tempted to lust. It happens frequently. **But the Lord expects you to fight that temptation. He expects you to not give in to those sexual desires.** You have probably had the desire to sleep with another woman on numerous occasions during the past twenty years, but it is a very good thing that you didn't fulfill that desire. **The Bible is pretty clear – the Lord expects either monogamy or celibacy from each of us. If you are married, monogamy; if you are single, celibacy.** Neither is usually very easy. Yet, that is the path one must follow if he/she is to have a life pleasing to the Lord.

JOE: *Oh Dan, I don't know. I just don't think that some people should get to decide what is right for other people.*

DAN: OK Joe, let me ask you this question: **Do you think there should be any rules about sexual behavior at all?**

JOE: *Well, I don't know. Maybe.*

DAN: Well, do you think sexual relationships should be consensual or is rape okay?

JOE: *Of course not!*

DAN: How about adults and children?

JOE: *No! Dan, sex should be between consenting adults and nobody should try to tell two consenting adults what they can or cannot do.*

DAN: So Joe, that means that if Sue decides to have an affair with the guy across the street, you are okay with that? After all, they are consenting adults.

JOE: *But, that would be wrong. She would be cheating on me.*

DAN: I know, Joe. But why is it wrong? Just because you think it is? I find there are a lot of people who think adultery is no big deal unless their spouse is the one having the affair. Then it becomes a very big deal. You know, Joe, I don't believe any one of us has the right to decide what choices another person should make. **I do believe, however, that God has the right to decide what choices all of us should make.**

He is, after all, the Creator and Sovereign of the universe. And if he doesn't decide what is right and wrong, then it is total moral anarchy and confusion. The bottom line is that rape is wrong – because God says it is. Pedophilia and incest are wrong – because God says they are. Adultery – Sue's or yours or mine or anyone else's – is wrong because God says it is. Homosexual behavior? Well, if God says it is wrong, then it is – no matter how you or I or anyone else thinks. The fact I don't approve of same-sex marriage is no big deal. But if God doesn't approve, that is a very big deal!

JOE: *OK Dan, you have given me a lot to think about. But I am still not sure homosexuality is always wrong. I just want to be able to support Joan in the choice she is making.*

DAN: I know, Joe, but will you at least acknowledge this? **In discussions about all the LGBT+ issues, the Christian view – what the Bible teaches and what people have believed for thousands of years – should at**

least be considered. For example, just because someone doesn't believe in same-sex marriage, it doesn't mean that person is a hater or a bigot. It doesn't mean he/she is homophobic – afraid of LGBT people. It probably just means that person has sincere moral convictions based on what God has revealed in the Bible. And that is a much more solid basis for moral convictions than anything else to which people are appealing. Oh, I know some Christians (or at least they call themselves Christians) say some pretty hateful things on this topic. That is wrong! It is sinful! **God has given instructions, not only about sexual behavior, but about how we treat and speak to one another.**

And Joe, the most important thing I want you or anyone who has been listening to our conversation to realize is that **all of us fall short of the standards God has set** – whether it is sexually immoral behavior, lustful thoughts, harsh words, hateful attitudes or maybe even driving too slow in the fast lane. Every single one of us has, as the Bible says, “sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

None of us is perfect. We are all sinners. Now, the common thinking is – well if that is the case, if we are all in the same boat – then being a sinner is really not that big of a deal. But it is!

Romans 6:23a – For the wages of sin is death.

Physical death and spiritual death. That means eternal death – hell. That is a really big deal! That is what all of us – heterosexual sinners and homosexual sinners, people who do horrible things and people who just have nasty thoughts – face! However, there is some great news in the second part of that verse:

Romans 6:23b - ...but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Joe (and the rest of you listening), that is the best news in the world! Through his death on the cross, Jesus paid the penalty we as sinners deserve. He offers forgiveness, freedom and eternal life to all who will turn to him.

This means you need to stop trusting in yourself, stop thinking you are good enough and can make it on your own and instead, as God enables, place your trust, your faith in Jesus Christ. That is the first step to sexual sanity and more important to spiritual sanity.

Trusting in Jesus frees us from the penalty of sins we have and will commit and is what will bring us to heaven, the time and place where we will be free from sin, sinful behaviors and even sinful desires.