



THE CITY GATES CHURCH

Love God. Love Others

Romans 1:18-32 When Sex Is God Part Five

Summary: Homosexual attraction belongs under the authority of God.

Charles Spurgeon pastored in London 150 years ago. He was internationally famous. Transcripts of his sermons were read around the world. He said this about Romans 1.

“[It is] a dreadful portion of the Word of God. I should hardly like to read it all through aloud; it is not intended to be so used. Read it at home, and be startled at the awful vices of the Gentile world.”¹

That's ironic to me because the Epistle to the Romans was written to be read aloud to the church in Rome. But Spurgeon lived at a time when the morality of the nation was different. There were no openly homosexual couples, no gay marriage, no pride month. You didn't even talk about these things in polite company.

The world has changed radically since then. Today things look much like they did in the first century – sins and vices that were common in ancient Rome are back again. So, the church needs to talk about them again. This is why we spent the past four weeks doing a deep dive on the subject of sex and sexuality.

As we begin our fifth, and final study, I want to remind you of a few things.

First, I am a pastor, not a professor. I'm sure I'm not an expert on every detail of this subject. I'm also not a licensed counselor or therapist, so I might not speak with clarity and insight regarding your personal situation. I'm not a politician, nor am I advocating for or against any particular legislation. I'm an ambassador of the Kingdom of God and I'm here to tell you what God has said about these things. I neither represent nor speak on behalf of anyone or anything else.

Second, my goal is to be both kind and clear – to help people love Jesus more and not drive anyone away. I have no desire to be provocative. I'm not trying to go viral with a hot take on the issues. But Scripture is offensive to their own self-interests.

Third, God is both intolerant of sin and in love with sinners. Jesus said harsh things about sexual sins and then died a harsh death for them. So now all sin, including sexual sin, can be forgiven. You can be cleansed. There are fresh starts and new beginnings for everyone in Christ.

¹ C.H. Spurgeon, *Inexcusable Irreverence and Ingratitude*; Romans 1:20-21. July 13, 1890.

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So, let's explore what Scripture says about this cultural hot-button.

By now you know, Romans 1 makes the case that God reveals Himself to people all over the world, all throughout time. But people tend to suppress what He reveals. They don't want to know, they would rather live life their own way without being responsible to Him. Well, God puts up with that for a while as He patiently reaches out.

But at some point, He gives them over to their desires. That leads in all kinds of directions epitomized by sexual sin in general, and homosexuality specifically. Read with me:

Romans 1:26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

This is a harsh condemnation of homosexuality. It doesn't sit well with some of your neighbors, maybe some of your friends, maybe even some of your family. But let me remind you, this isn't just addressed to America in 2024. This is what God has always said. Society has changed, but God has not. Why is He so against it? Likely because homosexuality rejects God's most fundamental design for humanity – that man and woman would complete each other and be fruitful and multiply.

Recognizing this is a sensitive subject, let's seek to understand everything involved. We begin by assessing, how big is the issue?

How big is the issue?

It turns out Americans vastly overestimate the homosexual population in the US. According to an article published by the University of Kansas, in 2013 the American public assumed 23% of the country was homosexual.² That's a pretty high estimate. It's more common to find estimates of 10% or more.

It's difficult to be precise, but the actual number is significantly lower.

- According to the UK's Office of National Statistics, a government agency, 1% of people in England self-identified as gay.³

How big is the issue?

- UK Office of National Statistics: 1%
- Gallup
 - Gay: 1.4% of US population
 - Lesbian 1.2% of US population
 - Gen Z (ages 13-27): 15% bisexual
 - Females: 20%
 - Males 6.9%

² The University of Kansas. [Majority overestimates U.S. gay population, could influence gay rights policies, researchers find](#). October 16, 2017.

³ The Guardian. [Gay Britain: what do the statistics say?](#) 3 Oct 2013. Article is more than 10 years old, but overall population numbers remain consistent with recent Gallup data for US.

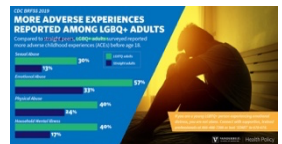
- A Gallup poll earlier this year found similar numbers for the US – 1.4% of US adults identify as gay, and 1.2% identify as lesbian.⁴ When combined with other categories, that works out to about 9 million LGBT Americans.
- The numbers are radically higher among young people though. 15% of Gen Z identifies as bisexual. That's people born between 1997-2012. They're between the ages of 13 and 27 today. And the reason the number is so high is because of young women. 20% of Gen Z women identify as bisexual, as opposed to 6.9% of Gen Z men.⁵

So, there are two takeaways here. First, we overestimate how common these things are among the general population. That's probably due to the support of allies – when you see a rainbow flag it might not be because that person is gay, but because they want to support a friend who is. If you go by what you see the numbers may seem large, but if you go by what people do, the population is very small. And yet, the second takeaway here, is something has suddenly had a radical impact on young people, especially young girls, and we'll talk about what that might be in a moment.

Before we get there though, it is crucial to understand that homosexuality is not a uniform experience. I'll give you at least four factors that contribute to same-sex attraction. The person who identifies as homosexual may experience any or all of them. And, of course, there are people who experience these factors but don't experience same-sex attraction at all.

Contributing Factors: Abuse

The first is abuse. A study led by researchers at Vanderbilt University and Medical Center found 83% of (LGBTQ) individuals “reported going through adverse childhood experiences (ACE) such as sexual and emotional abuse.”⁶



- In another study of homosexual and bisexual men, 35.5% reported being sexually abused as children.⁷
- In yet another study gay men and lesbian women reported a significantly higher rate of childhood same-sex molestation than

Abuse

- Vanderbilt: 83% of LGBTQ had “adverse childhood experiences”
- Lenderking, et. al: 35.5% of gay and bisexual men experienced sexual abuse as children
- Tomeo: same-sex molestation as children experienced by
 - 46% of gay men; 7% heterosexual men
 - 22% of lesbian women; 1% heterosexual women

⁴ Gallup. [LGBTQ+ Identification in U.S. Now at 7.6%](#). March 13, 2024.

⁵ Gallup. [LGBTQ+ Identification in U.S. Now at 7.6%](#). March 13, 2024

⁶ Vanderbilt University Medical Center. [Study finds LGBTQ people report higher rates of adverse childhood experiences than straight people, worse mental health as adults](#). February 24, 2022. The study, published Feb. 23 in the [Journal of American Medical Association Psychiatry](#), used data from a 2019 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) survey.

⁷ Lenderking WR, Wold C, Mayer KH, Goldstein R, Losina E, Seage GR 3rd. [Childhood sexual abuse among homosexual men. Prevalence and association with unsafe sex](#). J Gen Intern Med.

did heterosexual men and women. 46% of the homosexual men reported being molested by another male as compared to 7% of the heterosexual men. 22% of lesbian women reported being molested by another female compared to 1% of heterosexual women.⁸

Notice – that's not 100%. I'm not saying all homosexuals were abused as children. And I'm not saying everyone who was abused became homosexual. I am saying that the research shows childhood abuse correlates with homosexuality at a much higher rate. And that should grieve us. All abuse should grieve us. It never reflects the heart of God. But it does remind us that brokenness often breeds brokenness.

Contributing Factors: Addiction

The second factor in same-sex attraction is addiction. I shared this a few weeks ago when talking about pornography. I have had multiple experiences with men who always identified as heterosexual. Some were married, with kids. And yet their pornography addiction drove them to always seek something new, something more, and what finally helped them see how far they had fallen was when they found themselves clicking on homosexual pornography or seeking homosexual encounters because they had tried everything else.

This says nothing about the role of drug use and its contribution to sexual encounters. The world of addiction is hard and ugly – no one starts off saying this is where they want to end up. But for some, addiction takes you to places you did not intend to go. The good news is, with help, you can return to where you want to be.

Contributing Factors: Attention

The third factor in same-sex attraction is attention. The 1960's were a definite turning point in American culture. We used to expect individuals to bend themselves and their desires to institutions like the family, the church, and the community. But beginning in the 1960s people were encouraged to shake off those chains and pursue individual freedom, especially sexual freedom fueled by the widespread use of the pill.

At first this meant throwing off the chains of theology. We were told science had liberated us from the myths of religion. We didn't need it anymore; it was too restrictive.

The revolution didn't last long. Today even hard sciences like anatomy, biology, and physiology are being told to step aside because they oppress the individual who doesn't identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. Today psychology and the

1997 Apr;12(4):250-3. doi: 10.1046/j.1525-1497.1997.012004250.x. PMID: 9127231; PMCID: PMC1497098.

⁸ Tomeo ME, Templer DI, Anderson S, Kotler D. [Comparative data of childhood and adolescence molestation in heterosexual and homosexual persons.](#) Arch Sex Behav. 2001 Oct;30(5):535-41. doi: 10.1023/a:1010243318426. PMID: 11501300.

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self are king and all institutions, from the family, to the church, to the state, and even science are told to bow down to the self-constructed identity of the individual.

So, in a culture that says being LGBTQ+ is something to be celebrated, and those who declare their identity are championed and seen as heroes, it should not be surprising that a young girl who experiences the kind of special connection that women have always had with one another, now wonders if what she has is same-sex attraction and not just friendship. In other words, if it's cool to be LGBT, and a young girl really like her bestie, but still wants Marcus to ask her to Homecoming, now she wonders if maybe she's bi.

Cultural forces press young girls to embrace an identify that is driven more by confusion and a desire for social approval than by conviction and certainty. Young people today need to know, it's OK to have really good, really close friends, and to love them – I hope you do have that kind of friendship, it's a special gift - but it doesn't have to be anything sexual.

Tim Keller once gave a helpful example of how culture can shape our self-perception. He said, go back 1000 years and imagine you're a Viking. The pressure of your culture tells you to be adventurous, and violent - conquering, pillaging and destroying other villages, taking what you want. Your parents and your peers say yes, do more of that. We'll sing songs about you doing that. That is what we celebrate. And if you feel same-sex attraction, your culture tells you to repress that – that's not who we are, that's not authentic, that should not be nurtured.

Today you're told exactly the opposite – suppress your impulse toward violence and nurture your same-sex attraction. Which culture is right?

Because, 1000 years from now, the culture will say something else. So, is there something outside of culture, something that transcends culture, something that defines a sexual ethic that is global, historical, and permanent? And the answer of course, is yes. God has a good plan for your sexuality - if you will receive it instead of suppressing what He reveals.

Contributing Factors: Attraction

Finally, we come to our fourth contributing factor, attraction. Some people experience same-sex attraction, even if they have never sought to cultivate it. It's just there, and it's always been there. Rebecca McLaughlin, is a brilliant Christian author and speaker, she has a PhD in Renaissance Literature from Cambridge. She is a wife and mother who has also experienced bisexual attraction her entire life.

McLaughlin shares studies from Lisa Diamond, a lesbian activist, noting that while 1% of women are exclusively same-sex-oriented, 14% have experienced attraction to both men and women at some point in their lives. Meanwhile, less than 2% of men are

exclusively same sex attracted but 7 percent have experienced attraction to both men and women.⁹

McLaughlin shares her story with kindness and clarity in several of her books. She has the kindness that comes from someone who identifies with the struggle and the clarity of someone believes that Scripture says we must not follow every attraction that captures our attention.

She agrees with one of the points we have made time and again in this study: that sexual ethics are never primarily about attraction. They are always, first and foremost, about authority.

The question is not who or what are you attracted by, the question is: whose authority are you under? Who gets to determine which sexual attractions should be encouraged and which should be discouraged? Because it doesn't matter who you are, everyone will draw a line somewhere. Even the most radical progressive will say at some point, you shouldn't do *that*.

Authority
Attraction
Goal: Sexuality Submitted to Jesus

Well, who gets to draw the line? Who gets to say what people should and shouldn't do? I'm here to say, it should be the God who created people and gave us gender, sexuality, and sexual activity for a purpose.

So these are the four factors influencing sexuality – abuse, addiction, attention, and attraction. It's important to recognize them because, again, homosexuality is not a uniform experience. We need to understand that especially if we're going to care about the people around us who identify this way. It's helpful to understand, how did they get there, because we want to be compassionate and kind.

But we also want to be clear. Homosexuality is undeniably a sin according to Scripture. Any attempt to define it otherwise is not honest. You might say: well, I read this one Christian author, or I heard this one pastor, or I heard this podcast with this Christian and they said it was OK.

I don't doubt it. They're out there. And some of them are really, really smart and sometimes they make what sound like compelling arguments. But here's the problem, they're not being honest. They start with the end in mind, they know the conclusion they want to reach and then they go looking for a way to do it.

They remind me of Paul warning Timothy to keep preaching Scripture, because:

2 Tim 4:3 ...the time will come when [people] will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth,

⁹ Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, 168.

and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

People will find someone to say what they want to hear. You probably passed a few churches on your way here this morning that do that. But those churches aren't known for their solid understanding and proclamation of Scripture, or their high view of the Bible, nor are they seeing any growth.

No one has ever been able to say, I just set out to read and understand the Bible and came to the conclusion that it permits homosexuality, much less that it encourages the behavior. No one is led into homosexuality by attempting to follow Jesus with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. God does not lead us into temptation. Instead, people experience an internal impulse or desire and attempt to reconcile that with following Jesus – they want a way to do both. The same is true of most other sexual sins.

So, how did we get to the place where people, including some pastors and churches, are affirming of homosexuality if God's view is so clear? And the answer is *our convictions tend to collapse in the face of relationships.*

It's hard to be against something when you know someone who does it. As Michelle Obama said, "it's hard to hate up close." And the truth is, many Christians are just one gay child or grandchild away from completely changing their theology on this subject. The Bible doesn't change. But if your circumstances do, you'll try to find a way for this to be OK.

Now, I want to say, *that's a good instinct, but a bad conclusion.* It's a good instinct to love people. Not all sinners are moral monsters. They might be really nice. They might be fun and funny. They might have tried really, really, hard. And so, you feel bad for them or feel bad saying you can't support them. So, instead of saying they're wrong, you say God is.

Let me draw your attention back to Romans 1 and point out something really, really hard at the end of the chapter. Remember, each week we have said sexual sin is emphasized as the epitome of being given over to selfish desires, but it's not the only way we go wrong. There are many others. Read with me,

Romans 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, 30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

That last verse is going to make you very, very uncomfortable if you're trying to find a way to affirm someone else's sexual sin.

If you find your loyalty to this person pulling you away from your loyalty to God, I want you to know *I'm sympathetic to your dilemma* – it's real, but as a pastor charged with caring for your soul, I must warn you, you *cannot* lend your approval to a sinner and still be pleasing to God.

My friend, I understand that you are struggling, but Jesus says really hard things like:

Matt 10:34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. 35 For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; 36 and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' 37 He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

When it comes to approving homosexuality and transgenderism, I think I understand what you want to do – show love to people, and I want to be sympathetic and agree with that impulse. The sinner is still a human being made in the image of God. And, we should not hate nor harm people, but that does not mean we should affirm every impulse people experience. Our affirmation of a momentary impulse may actually cause long-term harm if someone determines to remain in their sinful condition.

Rosaria Butterfield was a practicing lesbian and professor at Syracuse University when she first heard the gospel. Today she is a mother and pastor's wife. She says the issue is not really a person's sexuality, it's their pride. No one wants to be told they're wrong and need to repent.

JD Greer captures this point well when he writes:

The call to repentance isn't just offensive to gay people. It's offensive to us all. Perhaps the pressing question for this generation of Christians isn't "Will we be faithful to the biblical teachings on homosexuality?" There's a more fundamental question: "Are we actually preaching repentance?" Once you've accepted you must "deny yourself" and "take up a cross" to follow Jesus, the specific things you have to give up become less significant.¹⁰

Christian, we must call *all* people who are entangled in sexual sin to repent. And we must provide the example for what that looks like by repenting ourselves. It's the most loving thing we can do.

¹⁰ J. D. Greear. [Downplaying the Sin of Homosexuality Won't Win the Next Generation](#). February 9, 2023.

OK, so here's the big question, can someone experience same-sex attraction and still be saved? Yes. I experience opposite sex attraction and God still lets me pastor a church. But I can't take action on the attraction, and neither can you.

Over sixteen years of ministry here in DC, I have had several people that I know of in the church who experienced this. We talked about it. And I told them, "You're welcome here. You can serve in ministry here. I'm not as concerned about *who* you're attracted to as I am about whose *authority* you're under."

Homosexuality is not the unforgiveable sin. And this is where we come back to an important principle I have highlighted throughout this series. There is a difference between temptation and sin. You may experience an attraction. You didn't ask for it. You didn't seek it. But it's there. OK, it's a source of temptation to you. But if you don't act on it, or define yourself by it, if you don't feed it and nurture it, *you have not sinned*.

Continue to seek God. He may change you. He may take that desire away. He may lead you into a heterosexual relationship. But even if He does not you can still live a life with your sexuality submitted to Jesus, just like all the rest of us. It may be hard, it's hard for other people too, but you can still live a complete and fulfilling life, even if you're single.

Jesus was single. Paul was single. John the Baptist was single. Those are some pretty heavy hitters. I don't think they looked back on their life and felt like they missed out on something because they didn't have a partner or were not married.

Contrary to whatever Abraham Maslow may say, you do not need sex for survival or fulfillment. What you need, more than anything, is to receive what God says instead of suppressing the truth, and then to lean on Him for strength when that makes things hard.

You shouldn't lust after that person of the same sex and I shouldn't lust after this person of the opposite sex. It's wrong for you to linger in your desires and it's wrong for me too. As Rebecca McLaughlin notes, "while we do not get to choose our *sexual attractions*, we do choose our *sexual actions*."¹¹ And, I would add, we do choose to either feed or starve those attractions. So, cut out the things that make you stumble and nurture the things that make you strong in the Lord.

Remember, this was written to some of the first Christians:

1 Corinthians 6:9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, [notice this list includes both hetero and homosexual sins] **10** nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor

¹¹ Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, 171.

extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such **were** some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Some of the very first Christians entered the church with homosexual histories and desires.¹² You're not the first and you won't be the last to have your life radically changed by God's amazing grace.

There is so much more we could say, but again, this was never meant to be exhaustive study. It was meant to explore some very difficult issues in light of the what the Bible says.

Here's what I hope we have learned – God has a good plan for us when it comes to sex and sexuality, it's about living *under His authority* instead of living *by our attractions*. Our goal is sexuality submitted to Jesus. Something is going to make that hard for almost everyone. But,

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Let's pray.

¹² Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, 166.



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Love God. Love Others

Romans 1:18-32
When Sex Is God
Part Five

Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Summary: Homosexual attraction belongs under the authority of God.

- **Personal Reflection on Sin and Grace** - God is both intolerant of sin and in love with sinners. How do you personally reconcile the idea of God's hatred of sin with His deep love for those who struggle with sin? How can understanding this dual aspect of God's character impact your view of your own struggles and the struggles of others?
- **Cultural Influences on Sexual Identity** - The sermon discussed how cultural influences can shape our understanding of sexuality and identity. How have you seen cultural values influence perceptions of sexuality in your own life or in society? How can Christians navigate these cultural pressures while remaining true to biblical teachings?
- **The Role of Compassion and Clarity** - How can you balance compassion and clarity when discussing sensitive issues like homosexuality with others? What are some practical ways to approach these conversations with both kindness and conviction, ensuring that you uphold biblical truth while showing love and respect?
- **Dealing with Attraction and Action** – There is a difference between experiencing attraction and taking action. How can understanding this distinction help you deal with your own temptations and desires?
- **The Impact of Personal Relationships** - The sermon touched on how personal relationships can influence our theology and convictions. Have you experienced a situation where your personal relationships affected your views on a particular issue? How did you navigate that situation, and what did you learn about maintaining your biblical convictions amidst personal connections?
- **Responding to the Call of Repentance** - JD Greer's quote suggests that the call to repentance is central to the Christian life. How do you understand the concept of repentance in the context of sexual sin? What does true repentance look like, and how can you encourage yourself and others to embrace it in light of the sermon's teachings?

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

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