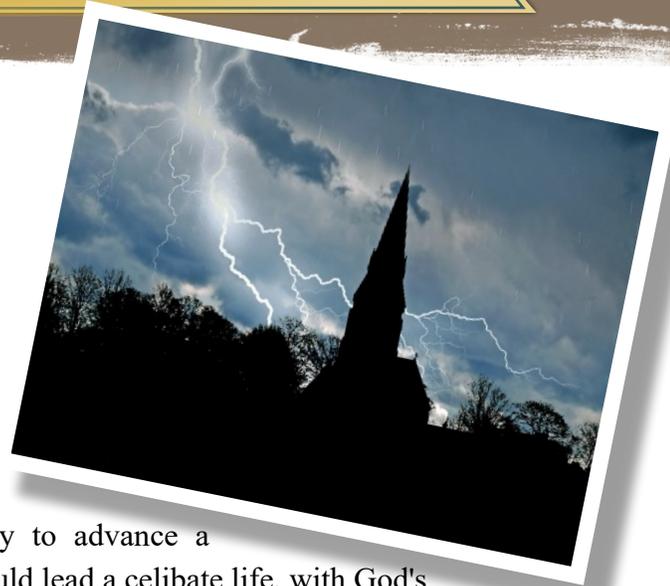


HOMOSEXUALITY

PART 2

WHERE CHRISTIANITY AND SEXUALITY MEET

“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”
Col. 4:6 NKJV



Review of Study 16

Being a homosexual is not a sin; homosexual behavior is. Since the behavior is sinful, a believing homosexual should not try to advance a homosexual agenda or justify the behavior. Instead, he or she should lead a celibate life, with God's help, just as a non-married heterosexual is asked to do. Leading a celibate life can be very difficult, failures may occur, but the Lord makes it possible. Christians must not condemn homosexuals who are trying to live for the Lord; it is a deep struggle, and support from other Christians is essential. Some homosexuals cannot change their orientation, and God oftentimes does not do it either; it is a cross they must bear. Many factors are potential contributors to the origin of homosexuality: genetics, nutrition, nurture, hormones, society, choice, and more. Understanding the various origins helps us understand why some homosexuality can be altered and some cannot. Regardless of the origin, God does not give up on homosexuals, and they are loved by the Lord.

INTRODUCTION

If an alcoholic addresses an Alcoholic Anonymous meeting, saying, “I am an alcoholic, but have not touched alcohol for many years,” he or she is accepted and belongs to that group (even while struggling with alcoholism). If a homosexual addresses Christians, saying, “I am a homosexual; but by the grace of God I am living for Christ,” he or she deserves to be accepted

and have a full sense of belonging. Acceptance and support for those struggling with homosexuality means that vulgarity and belittling of homosexuals should not be part of our conduct. If you find yourself rejoicing when something bad happens to a homosexual, or you have feelings of anger/hatred toward them, then *you* have a problem.

PERSPECTIVES

Romans

In Romans 1, God gave up on people who rejected Him, giving them over to vile affections: **"For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their woman exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 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"** (Rom. 1:26-27). These verses are referring to a time before the Age of Grace (even before the nation of Israel), when humans turned their backs on God and He finally gave up on them. However, the entire context of these verses reveals this event was not the origin of homosexuality, the end stage of decline, nor the culmination of sinful behavior, as some would like you to believe.

Romans 1 clearly teaches there can be a degradation in the human mind and society, leading to depravity. In past times, the decline of society and morality followed three major stages, with three responses by God (see below). Degradation started with suppressing the truth of God; it was not due to homosexuality (a sin God allowed to continue because of rejecting Him).

The Stages of Spiritual Decline and **God's Response**

Stage 1. Suppressing the truth, not glorifying or thanking God, changing the image of God

Response. **"Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness"** (Rom. 1:24)

Stage 2. Exchanging God's truth for the lie

Response. **"For this reason God gave them up to vile passions"** (Rom. 1:26a).

Stage 3. Not retaining God in their knowledge

Response. **"God gave them over to a debased mind"** (Rom. 1:28b)

In time past, God did give up on people and let sin take its natural course. The final response by God, stage 3, came when God gave them over to a debased mind. Thankfully, the text defines a debased mind as **"being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful..."** (Rom. 1:29-31). Homosexuality is not specifically mentioned in the final stage (though obviously present). In perspective, there is not a human alive today who does not have some of these latter sins, which is Paul's point, that is, we are all sinners and of the worst sort.

The consequence of rejecting God is debasing sin, which was true in the past and is today. The debasing types of sins that will characterize the end of our Age are found in 1 Timothy 4:1-3 and 2 Timothy 3:1-5. Interestingly, homosexuality is not specifically mentioned in the Timothy texts (it will still exist) because it does not specifically define the end of our Age. Thus, the old fear of homosexuality taking over, as in Sodom and Gomorrah, is not well founded.

In Romans, the Apostle Paul is establishing a historical fact, that is, those living before the Mosaic Law were disobedient and those living after the Law was given were also disobedient. This fact allowed God to conclude that all people, in all ages, have been disobedient to God: **"For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all"** (Rom. 11:32). It is the disobedience of all mankind that Paul uses as evidence of God's wisdom and foreknowledge in devising a plan of redemption for anyone who would believe: **"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"** (Rom. 11:33a).

First Corinthians

God gives us a list of sinners for our Age: **"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, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God"** (1 Cor. 6:9-10). This list of sinners includes us all. After the list of sinners, Paul makes it clear, **"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"** (1 Cor. 6:11).

The phrase, "And such were some of you," means the Corinthians at one time had the sins noted, but became believers. As believers, they were set apart as holy and justified by God. Paul's main point is this: God declares believers *righteous* through faith in Christ; therefore, we are no longer part of "the unrighteous." This verse is not saying God will take away temptation or the old sin nature; instead, He will put a person in Christ and provide the power from within to change the desires of the mind (Phil. 2:13). The old nature is always warring against the Spirit within us, but the Spirit is there to renew our minds and guide us. Paul does not imply a sexual sinner's orientation is changed upon belief; if so, what would have happened to the heterosexuals who had committed adultery? He wants us to know that the penalty for our sins has been paid, we now have the

provision to abstain from sinful behavior, and we will inherit the kingdom.

Galatians

In Galatians, a list of sins is given that disqualifies a person from inheriting the kingdom of God: **"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like: ... that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"** (Gal. 5:19-21). Notice that homosexuality is not specifically mentioned, but the list does **include wrath, envy, contention....** God gives us lists in the Bible (spiritual gifts, sins, fruit of the Spirit, etc.), but no one list is complete. The lists are intended to give examples of items the readers would know, so that they can better understand the text. The lists of "disinheriting" sins may best be described as those sins that were well known in that city—for example, idolatry in Galatia. Even today, when anyone reads the list, clearly he or she is included, no exceptions. The text speaks to us, making the point we, too, were once dead in sin.

For believers, our old, fleshly minds still lust against the Spirit, and vice versa, so that we cannot do the things that we wish (Gal. 5:17). In spite of this internal warfare, the believer is considered by God to be *spiritually minded*, and that brings life and peace (Rom. 8:6). Paul does not suggest a believer never again commits any of the sins noted. He is stating the profound truth that believers have the Spirit of God within them; thus, *they are spiritually minded*. Believers are delivered from spiritual death and declared righteous by God; as such, we are already given a position in Heaven. We do not need to worry about inheriting heaven because it is guaranteed by God.

The Christian's Responsibility

How are we to deal with a saved person living in unrepentant sin that even general society finds repugnant? **The believers in Corinth were instructed to "...not keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person....Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person"** (I Cor. 5:9-13). The specific problem Paul mentions was a case of heterosexual fornication (incest with a stepmother). The rest of this passage is sometimes used as a reason to break fellowship with homosexuals, but observe the list of sins and note that sexual sin is only one of many that could result in not having fellowship with other believers.

If a homosexual tries to be celibate, he or she is not living in unrepentant sin. Christians must accept and love him or her, even though the person remains a homosexual—remember to separate the behavior from the person. If a saved homosexual purposely lives in sin, without any attempt to be chaste, that may be cause for not having fellowship with that person; but, make sure you apply similar actions to all people who are living in the sins noted. Then recall that one purpose of our actions is to restore such a person, not to destroy him or her with excessive rebuke (2 Cor. 2:6-8). The incestuous man in Corinth was punished for a time, repented of his actions, and then Paul instructed the believers to forgive, comfort, and love him.

With the commonality of sin in us all, there is no room to look down upon others or consider ourselves better than another. The wisdom from above is very clear:

1. "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another" (Rom. 12:10). This injunction applies to homosexuals, and vice versa.

2. "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). Living peacefully includes not making fun of others, condemning them, or finding ways to avoid them. Peace comes through acceptance and belonging; however, this is a two-way street. Living peacefully with others means not expecting others to accept your sin. Thus, homosexuals should not seek out churches that believe homosexual behavior is wrong and then expect those churches to change to accommodate them. Neither should gays create trouble for religious organizations based upon the organization's position on gay marriage.

3. "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Phil. 2:3). Jesus had this mind while on earth; remember, He interacted with the despised tax collectors (generally dishonest) and prostitutes.

For those who are outside the body of Christ (unbelievers) we are admonished, **"Walk in wisdom toward those who *are* outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you may know how you ought to answer each one"** (Col. 4:5-6). We are to interact with wisdom, as though we were buying back time, knowing that time is short; thus, we must do our best to help others come to know the Lord. Our speech (to those in or out) must be with grace, salt, and knowledge:

- *Grace speech* serves others and is kind; it flows from the generosity of the heart with no thought of repayment, only an honest desire to build others up and encourage them.

- *Salt* provides flavor and preserves. We are to speak in a way that tastes good to the hearer and flavors their lives. By flavoring the lives of others, we enrich them

and help them in their lives. Our speech should be aimed at preserving fellowship and relationships, not setting other straight so that we appear more righteous.

- *Knowledge* refers to thinking about how to best respond to others. We are not to respond with rote phrases or off the cuff responses. We are to prepare and think about how to best encourage, uplift, and correct others in a godly manner.

A godly person should speak in a way that is helpful to the hearer, offering speech that tends to comfort and encourage. Put yourself in the other person's shoes, even if you do not agree with him or her, so that you can offer thoughtful and considerate responses. Recall people you know who have the knack of building others up and praising them; try to develop that pattern of speech.

Many homosexuals wish they did not have their sexual orientation; some hate their plight in life. They struggle and pray for God to help them with temptation. God does help them, but may not change them into heterosexuals. A person can be on the cusp of indulging in wrong behavior or living for the Lord; in such cases, it can make a big difference if a person receives some flesh and blood support. If a homosexual wants to live for the Lord and is rejected by Christians, he or she may become embittered and give up trying. Acceptance by others and belonging to a body of believers (Eph. 1:6) are huge items in this life, which is why God unconditionally assures them to us. We must accept others and make them feel part of the body of Christ; if we do not, they will feel alone and abandoned by Christianity. Showing kindness and helping another may be just what a struggling person needs to get right with the Lord. Needless to say, acceptance goes both ways; thus, homosexuals must accept other Christians' belief concerning homosexual behavior and their position on gay marriage.

Our Sexual Responsibilities

In Study 16, it was noted the Greek word for fornication is *porneia*, which carries the idea of being utterly unchaste. Such a person will be dominated and

controlled by sexually immoral thoughts, since the mind is in bondage to sin. Our thoughts can be as sinful as the behavior: **"But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart"** (Matt. 5:28). When sexual thought patterns have gained a stronghold in the mind, that stronghold is very hard to break; but it is possible, and the Bible explains how. Sexual desires are primal, part of God's design, and very powerful; so, what is in the mind generally becomes part of one's behavior. We all have hidden, sinful thoughts, so we must be careful casting stones at others.

God asks us to keep our bodies and thought-lives pure, which requires avoiding pornography and fantasizing. Purity pertains to heterosexual and homosexual alike, which means abstaining from sexual relations, unless married. Marriage between homosexuals is not biblical (even if recognized by society), so God is asking them to do the same thing He requires of *all* single people. Living celibate for the Lord is a tough road, no mistake about it. However, everyone has a propensity to sin in some area of his or her life—a burden to bear. There is no way to rationalize sin by saying, "God made me this way." Learning how to deal with sin and how the Lord works in the transformation process to remove strongholds is a lifelong process of growing spiritually.

As our minds are renewed, our lives are transformed. Transformation enables us to become the living sacrifice that God seeks: **"I beseech you ... that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God"** (Rom. 12:1-2). As transformed beings, the following verses help us know God's provisions and His perfect will.

1. **"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of**

escape, that you may be able to bear it.” (I Cor. 10:13). Resisting temptation is not easy. As you start the path of transformation, the Spirit will start changing your values and desires, and enable you to escape the temptation.

2. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty to God for pulling down stronghold, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4-5). As strongholds in the mind are broken down, obedience to the Lord becomes easier. When strongholds crumble, there is a new-found release and freedom from bondage; you will experience the ability to live in a way that will surprise you and honor God.

3. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor” (1 Thes 4:4-5). Controlling immoral desires applies to us all.

For practical help concerning mental strongholds and being transformed, get the eBook, *Biblical Transformation—The Renewed Mind*, by Steve Shober, from Amazon or www.grace4you.com.

Abstain from Every Form of Evil

Abstaining from every form of evil (1 Thes. 5:22) includes avoiding the appearance of evil. In order to avoid being tempted and the appearance of evil, a person with any sexual improprieties must be careful about what he or she asks to do in the church, family, or society. Yes, God forgives our sins, but sometimes there are lingering consequences in this life. If a heterosexual had pedophilia problems in the past, but is now saved and living a pure life, that person should not think or ask to be involved in youth ministries or to babysit. The same is true for a homosexual; do not suggest, think, or offer to take the youth on overnight camping trips. These individuals should perform other services; thus, they are not tempted and no one in the church or family will have cause to worry. This is just common sense, not a direct command from God. We believe in second chances, but avoid the appearance of evil or surely there will be trouble.

TAKE TO HEART

Summary

After being saved, a person is *in Christ* and declared righteous by God, but there will be struggles with the old sin nature. So God provides the Holy Spirit, empowering us from within and changing the desires of our mind; this enables us to overcome temptation. Learning how to deal with sin and how the Lord works in the transformation process to remove strongholds is a lifelong process of growing spiritually. Marriage between homosexuals is not biblical, so God asks homosexuals to do the same thing He requires of *all* single people. Whether homosexual or heterosexual, we all need to keep a pure mind, avoiding the things that harm a clean thought-life. As for believers, we are **instructed, “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one”** (Col.

4:6). This verse applies to our interactions with all people, and requires we assure our **speech comes from a heart of grace, seasoned with salt, and spoken with wisdom and knowledge.**

Gospel

God does not give up on anyone today in the Age of Grace. We are all sinners, but God declares any believer *righteous* through faith in Christ: **“For He (God) made Him (Christ) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”** (2 Cor. 5:21, parentheses added). Upon being declared righteous, we are taken off the list of carnally minded and placed among the spiritually minded. The believer is given a position in Heaven, so there is no need to worry

about inheriting the kingdom of heaven because you are already a citizen.

Encouragement

May we each seek the Lord's wisdom for how to interact with those with a different sexual orientation. For those who are homosexuals, we pray you will realize that faith

in Christ will provide true peace and joy. Upon faith, your sexual orientation may change, or it may not, but the one constant truth is that God will enable you to live a life pleasing in His sight. The homosexual issue is very complex, so we encourage fellow believers not to shut out homosexuals; instead, have compassion for them and extend God's grace to them.