

Same Sex Relationships in the Revolution

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- [0 : 00] the notice sheet so you can see where we're going in terms of points for this morning. Let's pray and ask for God's help as we look at his word together. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us.
- Heavenly Father, we thank you that you made us and you've made yourself known to us. Lord, we pray that you will speak to us in the power of your spirit in our time together now.
- You give us ears to hear your word, heads to understand, and hearts that are willing to change and follow your will. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.
- So we're in the third of a series of sermons. This is the last one in a series of sermons on God, sex, and marriage. So please don't hear this sermon on its own. We've seen in the last couple of weeks God's incredible purposes for marriage.
- That marriage was his idea. And as we were reminded in the video just now that we watched, the marriage union of one man and one woman displays the good news about Jesus to the world.
- [1 : 12] And we then thought last week about singleness. That there are costs to being single, of course. But the Bible says that marriage isn't for everyone. And describes singleness as a gift.
- That there are good things about being single. But now we're turning to what that means for same-sex relationships. We're not doing that because same-sex sex is in some way a particularly bad sin.
- I don't think it is. It's just one where God's word is under fire today in the world, but also in the church. And at St. Silas, we're part of a network of churches, the Scottish Episcopal Church, that has now voted to allow its churches to conduct same-sex weddings.
- So that's why we're looking to see, well, what does God say on this issue? What we've seen in Scotland, of course, and across the Western world in recent years, is a fast, very fast, and radical shift in our culture's values on sex.
- And it's a very hot topic. Same-sex marriage has actually only been allowed in Scotland since 2014. And when it was voted on, there were people who voted against it in the Scottish Parliament.
- [2 : 25] And yet today, it looks as though in the public square, there's no place for people to disagree anymore about that. So that when Tim Farron, leader of the Liberal Democrats, was asked a couple of years ago about whether he thought, as a Christian, that homosexuality was a sin, he responded, well, we're all sinners.
- And he was smashed for that in the recent election campaign. He was branded an absolute disgrace, a bigot, and he was asked in the House of Commons before other MPs, did he think that gay sex was a sin?
- Ten days ago, he resigned as Liberal Democrat leader, saying that he felt he was being forced to choose between his faith and his political career. Now, even since then, it's the Conservative Party under fire as a minority government for looking to the DUP, as their allies.

It's not a coalition, allies. And the DUP still says that marriage should be one man and one woman, as is the law in Northern Ireland, where the DUP is based.

But people are outraged by that, that the Conservative Party would be in an alliance with them. It just shows how enormously the morality of our culture has shifted and is shifting on an issue like this.

[3 : 45] Now, why is that? Often, when you see morality shifting like that on the ground, it's because of philosophy that is infiltrating our culture.

And the philosophy that we are being influenced by and shaped by is radical individualism in our society, in the Western world. So that we say, I have the right to do whatever I want with my body and my life, as long as it doesn't hurt anybody else.

That's the kind of individualism that we live by. Although how we define what hurts other people is actually very dodgy, and lots of people disagree on that. Alongside that kind of cultural, philosophical influence, we are deeply affected by our experiences today of apparently loving, faithful, lifelong, committed sexual relationships between two men and between two women.

Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, said this, you see gay relationships that are just stunning in the quality of the relationships. I have particular friends where I recognize that and am deeply challenged by it.

I don't know what you think about that, but for my money, I can relate to that. I'm sure many of us can relate to that. And experience is very powerful, isn't it? We tend to look at things on quite an atomized scale so that if we see two nice men together in a relationship or two nice women who are in love with each other, that can change our whole view about sex and sexuality.

[5 : 23] Whereas in lots of other cultures, people wouldn't think like that. They would think much more about how this affects society as a whole. What is actually best for children? What's best for the public good?

So they would ask much bigger questions about the place of this one relationship in the whole culture. Whereas we tend to be shaped by the individual and what is right or wrong for them.

But I hope we can agree that feelings are not a good way to do theology. If you just think, do you think there is anyone anywhere in the world who feels things about God very strongly that you would say are wrong?

Of course there is. Of course there are people feeling very strong things. I mean in this building, there are people feeling very strong things about God that when we turn to God's word, we'd say actually are not right.

We're constantly having to correct our picture of God. And if we do theology by feelings, what we basically end up with is a God who never disagrees with us.

[6 : 26] Basically a God that each of us is worshiping a God that's just a bigger version of ourselves. So if we are going to worship the true and living God, we have to be humble enough to accept that if his word really is a word for every culture and every age, it is going to say things to any culture at any time that we would profoundly disagree with and be willing to submit to his word because we say ultimately, he's God, he made us.

He knows what's best. I don't know what's best. And when we're willing to do that, we find that God's word is very clear and he's been very kind in giving us a clear word.

So we're going to look at that together now under two headings, something that's being revealed and some people who are being deceived. So first of all, something that's being revealed and for that, we're going to look at this Romans 1 passage.

Now Paul points us back to the power and nature of God in Romans 1. If you just have a look with me again at verse 19. He says, Now what's Paul not saying here?

He's not saying that it's obvious to everybody from looking at the world around us that there's a God. He's not saying that. What he's saying is it should be obvious that if we were in our right minds, without sin, able to feel and think with purity, we'd be able to look at the world and look at ourselves and say, of course there's a God.

[8 : 21] How can you have something rather than when before there was nothing? How do we get something when once there was nothing? If we were without sin, we would all know deep down that you can't just start with nothing and then get something without a creator.

Get what we have today. The creation that we inhabit. Now Paul points us back to that there very clearly, but he also is doing a bit more than that. You see, there are echoes right through what he's saying here to how the Bible describes God's creation.

He's pointing us back to that. So I've got a subheading on the sheets, the signs of God's goodness. Paul uses language that says he clearly wants us to think about Genesis chapters 1 to 3.

So for example, I don't know whether you noticed, it seems quite strange really in verse 23 that he mentions birds and animals and reptiles, creeping things. But it's because it's an echo of Genesis chapter 1 verse 24.

He mentions lies and shame because they're such prominent themes in Genesis chapter 3 and reminds us that before the first human beings sinned, there was no shame. So he's pointing us back to God's good design in Genesis.

[9 : 37] Genesis chapter 1 verse 27, God created man in his own image, that is mankind. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them.

And the Lord then brings them together so that they match each other physically. All through Genesis 1, there are things that match. The sun and the moon, the day and the night, different things that match in God's design.

And he brings men and women together physically. So we read in Genesis 2 verse 24, For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

The ultimate expression of that is sexual intimacy. And of course, the most basic anatomy lesson shows us that the male sexual organs and the female sexual organs match each other.

Physically, in God's good design, the male body is designed for the female body and the female for the male. And for the majority of married couples, that compatibility makes it possible to bear children in the majority of cases.

[10 : 43] And Jesus confirmed for us that this blueprint in Genesis 1 to 3 remains God's good design for marriage, even now sin has entered the world. People today are campaigning, a small number of people, for marriage to be a fixed-term commitment, maybe of 10 years.

But Jesus said marriage is lifelong. People are starting to campaign in our culture today for polyamorous relationships to be acknowledged as marriage. But Jesus said it's two people.

And Jesus said it's one man and one woman, pointing us back to God's good design. So that's the first sign in Romans 1, the signs of God's goodness. But in Romans 1, we do a bit of work here.

There's something else being revealed as well. In verse 18, Paul starts with that phrase, the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

Now, when we talk about God's wrath, God's anger, what we're describing there is not God flying off the handle and losing control. God's wrath is his settled, controlled hostility to all that goes against God's good design for humanity and the world that he's made.

[12 : 05] Now, what Paul says here as the passage goes on is that when you look at the behavior of humanity all around us, it's evidence that God is angry. He's not first and foremost angry at the behavior.

The behavior is evidence because what we've done is we've turned away from God. His wrath is against that way we've treated him and he therefore hands us over to live out our own desires away from him.

So that's our second subheading, the signs of God's judgment. Paul describes what we've done three times. If you look at verse 21, for although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Makes the same point again in verse 22. And then the exchange again in verse 25. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the creator who is forever praised.

That's what we've done in our hearts. What happens next is that God hands us over to our own desires without him. Three times we get that phrase in the passage.

[13 : 23] Verse 24. Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

Verse 28. God gave them over to a depraved mind so that they do what ought not to be done. And then he lists a whole variety of fruits from that root problem.

There's a bad root and it leads to these fruits. If you just look at what's listed in verses 29 and 30, there might be some that are not surprising. Murder is there. God hating.

But then what about infidelity? Not keeping your promises. Envy. Wanting what other people have. Gossip.

These are the characteristics of a culture that's rejected God and is under his judgment. So then look at verses 26 and 27 with me.

[14 : 23] Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another.

Men committed shameful acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. Again, we're many of you thinking about Genesis 1 here.

So when it talks about natural, what's natural, it's talking about God's design in Genesis 1. Not necessarily what someone feels, but how God designed things before sin entered the world.

God's design of one man, one woman, sexual intimacy in marriage. What he says in verse 26 is that women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

There's a kind of parallel, isn't there, as well with what he says about men. So it's not about prostitution. It's not about coercive sex or promiscuity. Romans 1 says nothing about these relationships being uncommitted or unconsensual or unfaithful.

[15 : 31] Rather, it's the exchange of God's good design for sexual activity between people of different sexes in marriage, the exchange of that for something else, for sexual activity between people of the same sex.

It turns God's good design upside down. So that when we see homosexual practice in a culture, it's evidence that we've rejected God as a culture and we've been handed over by him to sinful desires.

There's a parallel here with suffering. So that when you see suffering in a world, in the world, which obviously we do see, you could never say of somebody suffering, well, it's because they've sinned particularly badly and God is judging them for that.

You could never say that. But the presence of suffering generally in a culture is evidence that our world is broken and under a curse because of the way we've treated God.

In the same way, the presence of homosexuality should remind us that our desires, all of us, our desires are not right because the world isn't right.

[16 : 46] Together we've all turned from God and together we've all been handed over to sin. In fact, in verse 32, he says that one of the marks of a culture that's under God's judgment is that verse 32, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

So if we find that things like, all the things Paul lists here, things like envy, children disobeying their parents, gossip, heterosexual sex, outside marriage, homosexual practice, if these things aren't seen by us as such a bad thing anymore, therefore, it's a sign to reveal to us that our relationship with God has been broken.

So that's our first point, something that's being revealed. Secondly, we're going to look at some people who are being deceived and to do that, we're going to look at our next Bible reading.

It's in 1 Corinthians chapter 6. So if we just go over to page 1148 at the top there, page 1148.

My first subheading is A Command for All. It's good to think as we read this, I'm going to read 1 Corinthians 6 verses 9 to 11, what are we actually being commanded to do? What's the imperative? Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God?

[18 : 16] It goes on in verse 9. Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who have sex with men, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

The command is not to be deceived. Why? I take it that it's because this is an issue on which we are easily deceived.

by our culture, perhaps by the Corinthian culture for those original hearers, by our bishops, by our denomination. Paul uses two Greek words here to describe what's translated for us as men who have sex with men.

The two words seem to describe the active and the passive partners in homosexual sex. That's why the NIV, our translation, says men who have sex with men.

[19 : 32] Some people argue that the Greek words are about male prostitution or male rape or relationships between men and boys, which were more common in the first century. The best thing we can do on that is just go, just trust the translations.

Trust the English translations. The English Standard Version, the New International Version, the King James, the New King James, the New Living Translation. These translations are put together by some of the best Greek scholars in the world today.

And universally, they confirm again and again that these words are general words to describe homosexual sex. Paul seems to be combining two words that are used in Leviticus to describe homosexual sex.

So what does Paul say are the consequences of an unrepentant lifestyle like this? Well, that's my second subheading, a major issue. Please notice that homosexual practice is not singled out here.

It's listed alongside lots of other sins, like greed and getting drunk that are often tolerated in churches today.

[20 : 46] It's quite disturbing when you find churches in the West that are very tolerant, it seems, of other forms of immorality listed here that never seem to go challenged in their churches and then they thunder away about same-sex practice.

That doesn't seem to reflect the balance of the Bible at all. But on the other hand, anything listed here is very serious, isn't it? Sexual immorality of any kind is very serious.

And the reason that sexual immorality is serious is because God tells us our bodies matter. We get that in just the next paragraph in 1 Corinthians.

You see, in our culture, often we downgrade the importance of the body. And when we describe someone as spiritual, we usually describe something on the inside. But in Corinth, where that was happening, Paul corrects that.

If you look at verse 13, halfway through, he says, the body is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord. And the Lord for the body. By his power, God raised the Lord from the dead.

[21 : 51] And he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? For Christians, our bodies, our physicality, really matters.

We will be raised physically from the dead unless Jesus comes first to transform our bodies. So it matters what we do with them. So what are the consequences?

Well, they're very serious. And the phrase that Paul uses in verse 10 is that people who display these kind of characteristics unrepentantly as a pattern of life, they will not inherit the kingdom of God.

We might say they won't go to heaven. In other words, it's a salvation issue. So as Christians at St. Silas, we must be gracious. We must be gracious.

But we need to be willing to distance ourselves from churches and church leaders that compromise about this issue. Because people's eternal destiny is at stake.

[23 : 00] There are church leaders today who are saying things like, well, I still think that homosexual relationships are not God's best. But we need to make this less of an issue and be willing just to disagree on it and get on with ministry and mission together.

They're describing it sometimes, to use the language of a disputable matter, a bit like we might think of baptism today, that there are different views about what we do with children, whether to baptize them. But we wouldn't let that stop us from doing mission together as different churches and Christians.

Christians can disagree on this one. But the Bible never puts sexual immorality in that kind of category. It says in 1 Corinthians 6, it's a way of life that you have to be washed from.

So if a church teaches that homosexual practice of any kind is okay, if a church celebrates a same-sex relationship and implies that God approves of it, then 1 Corinthians 6, what's it saying?

It's saying that a church that's saying that is in real danger of leading people to hell. Isn't it? So we can't unite with a church like that.

[24 : 19] You shouldn't go to a church like that. It's a major issue. Third subheading from 1 Corinthians 6. For all of us who are caught by the sinful practices listed there, and I certainly am, let's remember verse 11, a stunning hope.

And that is what some of you were, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. God's faith in the name of the Lord.

So the reason Paul is saying these forms of behavior are not appropriate anymore for the church that he's writing to is because having put their faith in Jesus, this is not who they are anymore.

They're not defined by these ways they used to live. So that no matter how, no matter what our lifestyle has been, however far from God's commands we've lived, however damaging to us and to others our lifestyle has been, from the moment any of us puts our faith in Jesus, his precious death means we have been washed, made holy in God's sight, completely cleansed, set apart for God.

We have a new name, we have a new identity before God. So no matter how deeply somebody is involved in homosexual practice or any sexual immorality, it's never inescapable.

[25 : 46] Any of us can be made new by God. Of course, temptations and feelings will linger on, but in Christ we're not who we were anymore. Let me just mention a few implications.

First of all, temptation is not the same as sin. Paul is assuming here, isn't he, in 1 Corinthians 6 that Christians are still being tempted in these different ways.

Jesus was tempted. We're told he was tempted in every way. We mustn't feel guilty about temptation, and so we mustn't ever feel ashamed for feeling homosexual desire.

Temptation is not sin. Secondly, we need to foster a church culture of being radically inclusive in the way we welcome anybody. we welcome anyone.

So if a same-sex couple who are married walk into our church one day with children, we welcome them. We love them. We want to introduce them to Jesus together.

[26 : 54] We don't treat them any differently from a family that arrives at St. Silas who we realize are very materialistic or a heterosexual couple who are living together and not married yet.

we love people and we point them to Jesus. We also need to foster a church culture where we are all serious about our godliness, about being like Jesus.

One of the most powerful moments in Ed Shaw's book *The Plausibility Problem* which is on our book so I commend it to you as a book. It's written for churches by a guy who's same-sex attracted, who's living a celibate life.

It's a very powerful book. But he says that he sometimes looks at guys at church and thinks this is what it's costing me to live for Jesus. Show me what it's costing you to live for him.

Let's repent of the ways that we kind of put on a veneer of respectability and deny how sinful we are and seek deep friendships where we're honest about our sin so that we're a safe place for people to admit that they've got same-sex attraction without any sense of isolation or condemnation for that because we're all sinners in need of a savior.

[28 : 09] And at St. Silas we need to continue to offer help and support in prayer and love and grace and security to people who are same-sex attracted and seeking to live celibate lives for Christ.

I know that there are several people in our church who have told me that that's one of their struggles. I'm sure there are more. We need to be a place where we support people like that.

Now as you know as I said at the beginning the Scottish Episcopal Church that we're part of has now voted to allow same-sex weddings. We're part of the Global Anglican Communion and that means that in England it's the Church of England.

Now the Church of England had a report earlier this year by their bishops in which it committed that marriage is one man and one woman. And it was discussed at their general synod and there was a debate by the synod about whether they were willing to accept that report.

Lots of people in the Church of England who were supportive of gay relationships of practicing same-sex relationships were against the report and were very strongly speaking about that. I'm just going to play a video now about what Sam Albury said about that at General Synod.

[29 : 17] So he's in front of the Church of England kind of houses of parliament if you like speaking about that. Sam Albury Oxford 183 thank you Chair.

Thank you to the bishops for their hard work I'm sure it was painful for them but I think you don't become a bishop for an easy life. I am same-sex attracted and have been my entire life.

By that I mean that I have sexual romantic and deep emotional attractions to people of the same sex. I choose to describe myself this way because sexuality is not a...

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I am same-sex attracted and have been my entire life. By that I mean that I have sexual, romantic and deep emotional attractions to people of the same sex.

[30 : 30] I choose to describe myself this way because sexuality is not a matter of identity for me and that has become good news. My primary sense of worth and fulfilment as a human being is not contingent on being romantically or sexually fulfilled and this is liberating.

The most fully human and complete person who ever lived was Jesus Christ. He never married, he was never in a romantic relationship and never had sex.

If we say these things are intrinsic to human fulfilment, we are calling our saviour subhuman. I have met literally hundreds of Christians in my situation and know thousands more who are same sex attracted and who joyfully affirm the traditional understanding of marriage being between a man and a woman and the only godly context for sex.

If you don't hear from more of us, it is because it is very hard to stand up and describe ourselves in this way. As someone who uses the language of same sex attraction, I have to say that my church has not become a safe place for me.

And by church, I don't mean my congregation, I mean this synod. Not because of what the report says, but because of what has happened since. I was bullied at school for being gay.

[32 : 00] I now feel I'm being bullied at synod for being same-sex attracted and faithful to the teaching of Jesus on marriage. I'm grateful the report reaffirms the traditional doctrine of marriage.

I'm concerned that we're already preparing to pastorally undermine it. So my question to the bishops is not will you preserve this doctrine, it's do you really believe in it? Is it good news for the world?

Many of us have found it to be life-giving as the message and teaching of Jesus always is. Thank you. So the Scottish Episcopal Church has abandoned really Jesus' words about this issue.

It's also abandoned people like Sam. And at St. Silas we need to commit to be welcoming and loving, to be serious about our own godliness, whatever our struggles are, and committed as a church to Jesus' words about marriage, and doing all that we can so that we can be a spiritual home for spiritual heroes like Sam.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we trust that you are good. Lord, we believe that you keep your promises, that you made us, that you rescued us, that you demonstrate your love for us, and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

[33 : 37] In a world and even in a denomination that is moving further from your word, in your mercy, give us wisdom to know how to live obediently, to welcome lovingly, to contend for your truth faithfully, and to hold out the wonderful saving news of Jesus with great passion and confidence.

For those of us who are struggling with your clearly revealed will, we pray, Lord, we believe, help our unbelief. And for all of us struggling with many temptations sexually of various kinds, Holy Spirit, breathe on us afresh, fill us, change our hearts that we might think and speak and act in ways that speak of your purity and goodness to a lost world.

For we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing together, and the children will come back through as we sing. Amen.

We're going to singifiers, you allow us to certainly make sa connected among our champion in ways we've made aboutdog and our efect and