**Victorious Life Church Bible Study “Ask the Pastor” Session 6: Homosexuality, Transgenderism and Common Arguments, Pastor William A. Lee, Jr.**

On June 26, 2015 the United States Supreme court issued the Obergefell decision which legalized same-sex marriage throughout the United States and its jurisdictions.  Before the landmark case ***Obergefell v. Hodges,*576 U.S. (2015)** was decided, over 70% of states and the District of Columbia already recognized same-sex marriage, and only 13 states had bans. Efforts to quantify the impact of *Obergefell* include a [June 2016 report](http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/estimating-the-economic-impact-of-marriage-for-same-sex-couples-one-year-after-obergefell/) drafted by the Williams Institute: UCLA School of Law.  According to the report, "weddings by same-sex couples have generated an estimated $1.58 billion boost to the national economy, and $102 million in state and local sales tax revenue since the U.S. Supreme Court's decision extending marriage equality nationwide in June 2015."  Over 130,000 same-sex couples married, bringing the total of same-sex couples in the U.S. to nearly 500,000.

Although this is a recent legal decision, the issue of same-sex behavior is one that is ancient. Historians have uncovered ancient images depicting homosexual acts date as early as 8000 BCE. Same-sex male lovers are recorded in Egypt as early as 2400 BCE. During the time of Abraham (about 2000 BCE) there is extra-biblical evidence of same-sex male lovers in Mari (modern Syria). Biblically speaking, the first recorded examples of same-sex intercourse in the Bible in found in Genesis 19 where the men of Sodom attempted same-sex gang rape

**Genesis 19:1-11**

**And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; 2 And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. 3 And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat. 4 But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: 5 And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them. 6 And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, 7 And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. 8 Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof. 9 And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door. 10 But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door. 11 And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door.**

In the Greco-Roman world of the first century bisexuality was assumed. Homosexuality was viewed as being natural, socially acceptable, even idealized, and was known as “Greek love.” Passive partners (males who took the position of females), typically slaves, were socially despised. Pederasty (sex with boys) was a particular privilege of the powerful and the wealthy. Men of Power and Position were known to gather “herds of boys.” mostly who were financially disadvantaged and orphans. They would have sex with them and then toss them to their death off of cliffs. The point here is that it appears that human civilizations have long blurred the distinction between male and female heterosexual behavior. This makes the teaching of Scripture even more pronounced.

The Holiness Code prohibited same-sex intercourse:

**“You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination” (Lev 18:22).**

The apostle Paul declared that same-sex acts are “degrading passions” and “indecent acts” that lead to “a depraved mind”

**Romans 1:26-28**

**26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: 27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;**

Furthermore, he insists that neither “effeminate nor homosexuals” will inherit the kingdom of God

**1 Corinthians 6:9-10**

**9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.**

and that homosexuality is “contrary to sound teaching”

**1 Timothy 1:10**

**10 For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine;**

When referencing homosexuality, the apostle Paul uses two Greek words: ***malakoi***and ***arsenokoitai*.**

***Malakoi*** – translated as “effeminate” (NASB)”, and “male prostitutes” (NIV, NLT) is a term used to speak of contempt and disapproval to describe passive partners in homosexual relationships. It is from the root which means “smooth”, referring to the anus being penetrated; or effeminate in reference to cross- gendering (men taking the female role in sex).

*Arsenokoitai* is a compound word constructed from two Greek words: “men” and *kotiai*, and is a vulgar word for intercourse. Paul is the first person in preserved literature to use this term, a term so vulgar that it was rarely used subsequently. The consensus among scholars is that Paul constructed the term to emphasize the vulgarity of the act. The polite translation of *arsenokoitai* is male sexual intercourse, referring to the penetrating partner in the homosexual act. The use of both words together – *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* – clearly indicates that any type of homosexual activity – penetrating or penetrated is irregular, unnatural and immoral.

**Transgenderism** is expressed in a variety of ways. Most often it signifies that an individual’s gender identity is different from their birth sex. A person might have a male body but have female psyche. **Gender dysphoria** speaks to those who suffer distress because of their condition. Some transgendered persons seek sex reassignment therapy. Others cross-dress. Like homosexuality, transgenderism is an ancient problem. Dual-sexed humans are commonly portrayed in ancient Greece and Cyprus as early as 2000 BCE. The prohibition against men and women cross-dressing

**The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God. (Deuteronomy 22:5)**

This scripture over the years has been misinterpreted but is likely an early Biblical reference to cross- gendering that was common in Mesopotamia.

In our time, homosexuality and transgenderism are considered psychological orientations that are most likely caused by genetics or environment. The causes are still somewhat uncertain. In other words, homosexuality and transgenderism are not simply matters of choice. Here we need to make a clear distinction. **When the Bible prohibits homosexuality and transgenderism, it is speaking to *behavior*, not orientation.** According to the doctrine of original sin, all humans have sinful proclivities and are oriented towards sinful behavior. Unregenerate humans are enslaved by the power of sin. The remedy for human sinfulness is the blood of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. In Christ and Spirit, those with homosexual and transgender proclivities can be saved, sanctified, and filled with the Holy Spirit. Like all of us they will still struggle with their sinful nature, but their choice to resist their sinful nature demonstrates the work of sanctification in their lives.

So, what should be the church’s posture towards homosexuals and transgendered persons? They are broken people who need soul care. Just like the single parent, the divorcee, the mother who recently aborted her child, or the adulterous couple; homosexuals and transgendered persons need to find grace in the church – the grace of forgiveness and the grace of sanctification. We should be reminded that Abraham fervently interceded in behalf of Sodom – a city whose men attempted to gang rape two messengers of God (Genesis 18). The church should maintain its public witness and promote the sexual ethic of the Christian faith. But we must never forget the mission of God:

**“It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all” (1 Timothy 1:15).**

**COMMON ARGUMENTS FOR AFFIRMING HOMOSEXUALITY**

**ARGUMENT NUMBER 1: Jesus Never Mentioned Homosexuality**

This is true. Jesus never explicitly mentions homosexuality. And some people have understood this silence to mean he either doesn’t care about it or he probably would have affirmed same-sex relations. But this is reading way too much into Jesus’s silence. Here’s why:

**First,** Jesus was a Jew, and first-century Judaism was the context of his life and teaching. The topics debated with other Jews were always ones that were disputed within Judaism (like divorce or how to keep the Sabbath). But same-sex relations were never disputed within Judaism. Every Jew in and around Jesus’s day believed that same-sex relations were against God’s will. And this is probably why Jesus never mentions it. It wasn’t relevant for his specific, Jewish context.

**Second,** although he doesn’t mention same-sex relations, Jesus does mention “sexual immorality” more broadly. In Matt. 15:19, for example, he says, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.” Again, every Jew in Jesus’s day considered same-sex relations to be immoral based on the sexual laws in Leviticus 18. Even though Jesus doesn’t directly mention same-sex sexual behavior, he does so indirectly.

**Third,** when Jesus does depart from a traditional Jewish sexual ethic, he doesn’t expand that ethic but tightens it. For instance, divorce was debated within Judaism. Some Jews were strict about appropriate grounds for divorce, while others were more lenient. Jesus holds to a stricter view. The same is true with adultery. Many Jews believed that you hadn’t committed adultery unless you actually slept with another person’s spouse. But Jesus tightens the Jewish ethic: “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28). Again, when Jesus does depart from a Jewish sexual ethic, he moves towards a stricter ethic, not a more lenient one. Based on what Jesus does say about sexual ethics, there’s no evidence that he

**ARGUMENT NUMBER 2 DAVID AND JOHNATHAN**

It has become common among advocates of homosexuality to search for an example in the Bible where homosexuality is favored. In the Holy Scripture we are told that

**“the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself” (1 Samuel 18:1)**.

Later, after Jonathan was killed in battle, David lamented the death of his dear friend:

**“I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me. *Your love to me was more wonderful than the love of women*” (2 Samuel 1:26).**

So, does the biblical narrative suggest that David and Jonathan were homosexual lovers? No! The relationship between David and Jonathan is best described as heroic friendship, a friendship that was forged out of deep respect, a friendship earned in the heat of battle. David and Jonathan trusted each other with their lives. This is a love that transcends sexual expression (i.e., the love of women). Their mutual love and trust went beyond being brothers-in-law who were natural rivals for the throne of Israel. They forged a relationship in which they were brothers. The common euphemisms for sexual intimacy in the Bible – *knew*, or *uncover the nakedness* – is never used of David and Jonathan (cf. Gen. 4:1 NKJV, NRSV, et al). Also, both David and Jonathan had wives and children. Even if this is indeed a reference to homosexual love, it no more legitimizes homosexuality than David’s affair with Bathsheba legitimizes adultery. There is no suggestion anywhere in Holy Scripture that homosexual behavior is blessed or sanctified.

Regarding the sexuality of David, it is clear that he was a healthy, active and sometimes overly active heterosexual male. This was widely known by those serving close to him and was used to confirm other he should continue to sit on the throne over Israel in his dying days.

**1 Kings 1-11**

**1-4 King David grew old. The years had caught up with him. Even though they piled blankets on him, he couldn’t keep warm. So his servants said to him, “We’re going to get a young virgin for our master the king to be at his side and look after him; she’ll get in bed with you and arouse our master the king.” So they searched the country of Israel for the most ravishing girl they could find; they found Abishag the Shunammite and brought her to the king. The girl was stunningly beautiful; she stayed at his side and looked after the king, but the king did not have sex with her.5-6 At this time Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, puffed himself up saying, “I’m the next king!” He made quite a splash, with chariots and riders and fifty men to run ahead of him. His father had spoiled him rotten as a child, never once reprimanding him. Besides that, he was very good-looking and the next in line after Absalom.**

**ARGUMENT NUMBER 3” I Was “Born this Way,” How Could it Be Wrong?**

This argument is often invoked on blogs and in popular media, even though scholars realize that it’s not scientifically accurate. Some affirming Christians argue that gay people are “born gay” and should therefore be allowed to express their love within the context of a consensual, monogamous relationship. Put differently, since God made some people gay, he shouldn’t punish them for engaging in same-sex relations. There are several things wrong with this line of reasoning.

**First**, it misunderstands God’s involvement in human birth. While God is Creator and He gives life to the womb, every human since Adam is born into a fallen world where things “aren’t the way they’re supposed to be.” People are born with all sorts of biological, mental, and emotional traits that aren’t naturally aligned with God’s will. Simply because a person experiences a desire that appears to be inborn doesn’t mean they should act on that desire—no matter how strong or seemingly fixed that desire is. So even if some people were born with a fixed same-sex orientation, this wouldn’t in itself mean they should engage in same-sex behavior. Even Justin Lee, founder of the Gay Christian Network, doesn’t buy into this argument. He says:

**Just because an attraction or drive is biological doesn’t mean it’s okay to act on... We all have inborn tendencies to sin in any number of ways. If gay people’s same-sex attractions were inborn, that wouldn’t necessarily mean it’s okay to act on them, and if we all agreed that gay sex is sinful, that wouldn’t necessarily mean that same-sex attractions aren’t inborn. “Is it a sin?” and “Does it have biological roots?” are two completely separate questions.**

*And Justin is an affirming gay Christian*. Still, he believes that the “born this way” argument isn’t a good way to construct a Christian sexual ethic. But are people “born gay?” Without getting caught in the weeds of research, the best scientists who have studied the question of orientation say that it’s not that simple. There’s most likely a complex blend of nature (biology) and nurture (environmental influences) that shapes same-sex desires. According to the

American Psychological Association,

**“No findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles.18**

A recent major study on sexual orientation by Johns Hopkins University comes to similar conclusions.19 Keep in mind, these aren’t fundamentalist Christians trying hard to prove the “born this way” argument wrong. These are just scientists doing good scientific research. So whether the cause of same-sex attraction is nature or nurture (or both), the Bible still prohibits same-sex sexual behavior.

ARGUMENT NUMBER 4: Shouldn’t Christians Just Love Everyone?

Many people say that the non-affirming view is inherently unloving. It’s unloving, they say, to “deny a person’s right” to pursue the romantic relationship they desire. After all, a same-sex relationship isn’t harming anyone. Why do Christians care about what two people do in the bedroom? And didn’t Jesus teach his followers to love people—all people—especially those have been marginalized? Before wrestling with this argument, we must all check our hearts and ask: Have we been unloving towards gay people? Have you told a gay joke, laughed at a gay joke, looked down upon a gay person, or ignored someone who’s wrestling with same-sex attraction? There are many ways in which straight Christians have not been loving towards gay people. When we hear the “What about Love?” argument, we need to first repent from any unloving thing we’ve said or done. We also need to make a clear distinction between a societal ethic and an ethic for the church. I don’t think it’s the church’s job to project a Christian ethic on the rest of society. When we talk about same-sex sexual relations or same-sex marriage, we are embodying and articulating a distinctive *Christian* ethic for the church—one that’s based on Scripture and confirmed by tradition. Christians should be able to love people without forcing them to adhere to a Christian ethic. As for the argument itself—that we should just love everyone—it rightly prioritizes love but wrongly defines it. Jesus tells us to “love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12), and that last part is important. When Jesus loved his disciples, he didn’t always (or usually) affirm their behavior or desires. It’s worldly love, not Christian love, that says: if you love me, you’ll affirm everything I desire to do and everything I believe to be true about myself. When Jesus loved people, He loved them towards holiness, not away from it. And this includes sexual holiness—as defined by Scripture. Christian ethics can’t be reduced to the secular code of “do whatever you want as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone.” It’s true, most sins end up hurting other people. But some don’t. If I bow down to an idol in the secrecy of my basement, I’m not hurting anyone. If my wife and I “fall out of love with each other,” we wouldn’t hurt anyone by getting a divorce. But the Bible never uses the “do whatever you want as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone” logic for determining what is right and **Conclusion**: Here’s the thing about these arguments—they’re not the real issue. Logically and biblically, the traditional view of marriage makes the most sense of the Bible and Christian tradition. It’s not primarily because of these arguments that so many Christians are changing their view about the historic Christian sexual ethic. Most often, Christians are changing their view because they want to show compassion toward LGBT+ people. Most affirming Christians think that the traditional view of marriage is incompatible with compassion, and they think that the only way to love LGBT+ people is to redefine the Christian view of marriage. The arguments discussed in this study are important, but refuting these arguments won’t usually change people’s hearts. Love, not logic, contains more power in demonstrating the credibility of your view. Until Christians can show compassion and empathy toward people LGBT+ people, our views will not carry much weight. Our ethics will feel cold and depersonalized—detached from the lives of real people. Compassion without truth is empty sentimentality; truth without compassion is lifeless and powerless in an age of justice. What we need is both. The gospel demands both: faithful allegiance to God’s intention for human sexuality, and radical love extended to the marginalized.