

Copyright © 2024 Kirby Wayland Ownby

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

EQUIPPING THE MEMBERS OF MT. OLIVE BAPTIST CHURCH
IN KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE, WITH A BIBLICAL
UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER
AND SEXUALITY

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Kirby Wayland Ownby
May 2024

APPROVAL SHEET

EQUIPPING THE MEMBERS OF MT. OLIVE BAPTIST CHURCH
IN KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE, WITH A BIBLICAL
UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER
AND SEXUALITY

Kirby Wayland Ownby

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: Brian J. Vickers

Second Reader: Joseph C. Harrod

Defense Date: March 19, 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	v
PREFACE	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Context	1
Rationale	4
Purpose	6
Goals	6
Research Methodology	6
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations.....	7
Conclusion	9
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR SEXUALITY AND GENDER.....	10
The Creation of Gender and Sexuality (Gen 1:26-28).....	10
God’s Clear Rejection of Homosexuality (Rom 1:24-27)	14
Hope for the Sexually Immoral (1 Cor 6:9-11).....	20
Conclusion	26
3. HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY.....	27
A New Concept of Identity	27
The Compromise of the Church on the LGBTQ+ Identity	34
The Danger of Gender Theory	41

Chapter	Page
Suggested Paths Forward	46
Conclusion	52
4. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION	53
Preparation	53
Implementation	54
Conclusion	62
5. MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION	64
Evaluation of Purpose	65
Evaluation of Goals.....	67
Strengths of the Project	71
Weaknesses of the Project.....	72
What I Would Do Differently	73
Theological Reflections	75
Personal Reflections.....	76
Conclusion	78
 Appendix	
1. GENDER AND BIBLICAL SEXUALITY SURVEY	80
2. BIBLICAL GENDER AND SEXUALITY CURRICULUM RUBRIC.....	85
BIBLIOGRAPHY	86

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. MOBC survey, part 1	68
2. MOBC survey, part 3	69
3. MOBC survey, part 1, additional questions	71
4. Pre/post analysis of gender assignment question	74

PREFACE

I would like to say thank you to my wife Libby, my sons Ethan and Kaden, and the many people in the churches where I have served for their wonderful support. Thank you all for your love and investment in me. I also would like to offer my special thanks to the members of Mt. Olive Baptist Church. I could never deserve the privilege of being your pastor. I am also indebted to the many professors and staff at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for their wonderful instruction and guidance throughout the entirety of the DMin program. It is my prayer that my project might serve to glorify God and honor all the many lessons God has taught me through each of you.

Kirby Ownby

Knoxville, Tennessee

May 2024

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Bible teaches that God created man and woman in his image for his glory. As a part of creation, the Lord created humanity in two distinct genders and set the boundaries for human sexual relationships. Yet, when sin entered the world in Genesis 3 through the actions of Adam and Eve, the depravity of men and women twisted God's design for gender and sexuality. Because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus for sin and because of the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, believers can overcome temptations involving gender and sexuality. Therefore, the members of Mt. Olive Baptist church strive to engage non-believers with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ so that people would have salvation in Christ alone and practice life with a God-honoring understanding of gender and sexuality.

Context

This ministry project occurred among the members of Mt. Olive Baptist Church (MOBC) located in Knoxville, Tennessee. MOBC possesses a history of faithfulness in laboring to see people convert to Christ. The need for this project derived from members interacting with believers and non-believers who embrace a non-biblical sexuality or gender expression. Because the church upholds the centrality of evangelism in the church's mission, learning to minister to the rising number of people identifying as LGBTQ+ or expressing gender dysphoria remains critical to the mission. By creating a discipleship curriculum focused on the Bible's teachings concerning sexuality and gender, the project sought to better equip the members of MOBC not only to know what

the Bible says about gender and sexuality, but also to engage with people who do not hold a biblical perspective.

MOBC does have some strengths to help prepare it for ministering to people in the LGBTQ+ community. First, the church hardwires a robust commitment to the biblical gospel into its identity. The first core value of the church is its desire to have a reputation for gospel proclamation.¹ The church accomplishes this strength through a variety of means, but primarily through a commitment to expository preaching and teaching. Instead of avoiding controversial topics such as sexuality, the church embraces what the Bible teaches about counter-cultural issues through a steady diet of the whole counsel of the Word. In addition, the exegetical preaching and teaching equip members with the ability to witness to others who do not know the Lord or his Word.

MOBC also has developed a strong reputation for functioning as a welcoming congregation where people feel “at home.” Since churches across the United States have become polarized due to different recent events, MOBC has recognized the power of hospitality in changing the stereotypical perception of the church as a group of harsh, judgmental, and non-welcoming people. Furthermore, the church ministers with a welcoming presence to the students who attend the University of Tennessee at Knoxville for both undergraduate and graduate school programs. Because non-biblical identity formation forces in today’s culture prey upon students and the young professional community, the church understands the importance of demonstrating hospitality to students in Knoxville.

MOBC does have weaknesses within the church which demonstrate the need for the project. First, though the church commits to expository preaching and teaching, many members still do not understand how to articulate the teaching of the Bible on the issue of sexuality and engage with a non-biblical perspective. Most members understand

¹ Mt. Olive Baptist Church, “What We Believe,” accessed September 3, 2021, <https://www.mobcknox.com/what-we-believe/>.

the Bible to oppose the LGBTQ+ lifestyle and non-biblical expressions of gender, but they do not know how to support their convictions from Scripture. This lack of knowledge leads many either to remain silent or to offer only condemnation with no hope for forgiveness. This ignorance of what the Bible teaches extends beyond understanding why the Bible condemns homosexual behavior. Parents in the congregation strongly desire to dialogue with their children about a biblical perspective on sexuality, gender, and marriage, but they need help. Adding further complexity to the issue, the rise of new terminology and concepts such as gender expression, gender identity, and sexual identity have perplexed many members of the congregation. If the members of MOBC understood the terminology, concepts, and perspective of people practicing non-biblical lifestyles, then they would have the tools not only to engage people with non-biblical identities but also to defend why the Bible defines their choices and behavior as sinful and harmful.

Many in the congregation remain ignorant of the pervasiveness of how modern culture encourages non-biblical lifestyles and expressions of identity, which comprises the other primary weakness. In a variety of ways, the entertainment-driven culture aided in the normalization of gender confusion and LGBTQ+ identities of today. Albert Mohler explains this issue well:

An effort to normalize homosexuality and same-sex relationships has driven and been driven by Hollywood for the better part of three decades. A statement made by Dustin Lance Belk, a winner of a 2009 Oscar for his screenplay in the movie *Milk*, which tells the story of San Francisco politician Harvey Milk, pinpoints Hollywood's powerful role in the moral revolution: "Storytelling is the only way to dispel myths. Hollywood has had a rather important role in that. We are the world's storytellers."²

Mohler rightly points to Hollywood as a storyteller of culture, but another storytelling venue has gained prominence in recent years. While television shows and movies have exerted sway over past and current generations, the powerful influence wielded by social

² R. Albert Mohler Jr., *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, & the Very Meaning of Right & Wrong* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 50.

media platforms to raise awareness and promote sinful lifestyle choices and identities has increased rapidly. Now children, teens, and adults can experience a virtual welcome into a community where they not only tolerate identity conflation with sexuality or gender expression, but the same groups encourage it. These factors have increased the normalization of the LGTBQ+ lifestyle so that many in the congregation fail to comprehend the number of influences pushing a non-biblical perspective.

To equip the members of MOBC to minister to the lost in the world, an overarching study on biblical sexuality and gender involved learning how to use the Bible to respond to non-biblical perspectives on identity issues. Therefore, the project involved the development of a Wednesday night discipleship class to study topics such as biblical sexuality and gender in creation, sexual sin across the canon, gender dysphoria, modern notions of sexuality, failed responses to this crisis, and biblical identity versus modern sexual identity. When each topic receives due attention from the whole counsel of God's Word, the curriculum and class should serve to increase confidence in explaining the biblical sexual ethic, as well as serve to prepare MOBC members to dialogue with and persuade others who do not hold the Bible to be authoritative.

Rationale

MOBC benefited from the study because its members desire to reach out to the LGTBQ+ community, but they do not currently have the skills to do so. To furnish them with the correct biblical knowledge, the discipleship course involved three guiding principles.

First, the Bible accurately reveals God's desire for gender and sexuality not for restrictiveness, but rather because God's order and design lead to human flourishing. Choosing non-biblical lifestyles or identities will only lead to more brokenness in the lives of non-believers. However, the Bible offers believers and non-believers hope. To demonstrate hope, the course began by walking MOBC members through God's design in creation by demonstrating God's purposes in his law on the issues of gender and

sexuality and by demonstrating the hope found in Christ's ability to transform hearts.

The class also involved attacking the rise of a critical lie undergirding the whole concept of non-biblical sexuality and gender: the conflation of identity with sexuality and gender. Carl Trueman explains the modern redefinition of sexuality: "While sex may be presented today as little more than a recreational activity, sexuality is presented as that which lies at the very heart of what it means to be an authentic person. That is a profound claim that is arguably unprecedented in history."³

Because God created sexuality and gender to operate within certain parameters, neither possesses the ability to bear the weight of human identity and promote a God-honoring life. Yet the LGBTQ+ movement has inconsistently argued sexual identity or gender expression can change, while other camps inside the same movement argue for sexual and gender expression to remain static. This project deconstructed the conflation of sexuality and gender expression with identity to explain the only identity leading to a God-honoring life is in Christ alone.

Finally, this study provided MOBC members with overall guidance in discussing their convictions with non-believers or believers who either experience same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria, or who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. Through the project, the biblical guidance encouraged members to practice good listening skills, helped members understand the importance of making the church a safe place to find help with gender and sexuality problems, and helped them state accurately what the Bible teaches about each struggle in a compassionate and redemptive way. People may experience deliverance from different temptations, attractions, or orientations, but the ultimate focus remains on the desire for sinners to come to Christ in repentance and faith.

³ Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 35.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the members of Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, with a biblical understanding of gender and sexuality through a discipleship course focused on biblical sexuality.

Goals

For the ministry project to benefit the members of MOBC, the following goals helped to guide and evaluate the implementation of the project. The stated goals reflect various stages of the curriculum, and each goal corresponded to multiple sessions of a discipleship program.

1. The first goal was to assess the congregation's understanding of biblical sexuality and gender by means of a theological survey.
2. The second goal was to develop a curriculum on biblical sexuality and gender.
3. The third goal was to increase the participants' knowledge of biblical sexuality and gender through implementing the curriculum.

To illustrate the accomplishment of the goals, a developed methodology was used to demonstrate measurable data to determine if the project accomplished its goals.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of the project depended upon the completion of three goals. The first goal involved assessing the congregation's understanding of biblical sexuality and gender by means of a survey.⁴ This goal was measured by administering a survey to reflect the congregation's level of understanding about biblical sexuality and gender. This goal was considered successfully met when twenty individuals completed the survey, and therefore conveyed an adequate representation of what the congregation understood.

⁴ See appendix 1. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

The second goal was to develop a curriculum on biblical sexuality and gender. This goal was measured by a panel of three experienced Christian Bible teachers who utilized a rubric to analyze the faithfulness and usefulness of the curriculum.⁵ This goal was considered successfully met when the panel scored the curriculum at 90 percent or better using the rubric, and once appropriate revisions took place from their evaluation.

The third goal was to increase the participants' knowledge of biblical sexuality and gender through implementing the curriculum. This goal was measured by the participants completing the survey that they took before the class again to gauge statistical change to the MOBC members' knowledge of biblical sexuality and gender. This goal was successfully met when at least half of the total participants of the class demonstrated some improvement in knowledge on their post-curriculum survey utilizing a t-test.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

LGTBQ+. LGBTQ+ will serve as an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, and the plus represents any other form of sexual identity.

Cisgender. Cisgender is defined by Ardel Haeefele-Thomas and Thatcher Combs as “a word for someone who thinks of their gender as being in line with the sex they were assigned at birth. In the 1990s the word cisgender was developed to define a person whose gender identity is in line with their assigned sex at birth. The prefix *cis*- means ‘on the same side as,’ and *trans* means ‘on the opposite side of.’”⁶

Gender dysphoria. Sharon James defines gender dysphoria:

Gender “dysphoria” means that a person is unhappy with their biological sex. They believe they would be more truly “themselves” if they were able to live as a member

⁵ See appendix 2.

⁶ Ardel Haeefele-Thomas and Thatcher Combs, *Introduction to Transgender Studies* (New York: Harrington Park, 2019), 25.

of the opposite sex—or, in some cases, as neither male nor female (or as some chosen “other” identity). This inner feeling is strong and persistent over time. It is sometimes described as “feeling trapped in the wrong body.”⁷

Gender expression. Gender expression is defined by Gregg Allison as “the set of attitudes and behaviors conveyed by people, significantly influenced by their society’s expectations for (generally speaking, male and female) persons.”⁸

Gender identity. Haefele-Thomas and Combs define gender identity: “Gender identity is someone’s deeply felt sense of their own gender—their own masculinity, femininity, a combination of the two, or something else less tied to the gender binary.”⁹

Sex. The definition for sex is defined by Allison: “Sex is the assigned biological label written on one’s birth certificate. Genetically, men are composed of XY chromosomes and women of XX chromosomes. For clarity’s sake, some people use the expression ‘biological sex’ or ‘natal male’ and ‘natal female.’ Sex is a matter of human DNA and anatomy.”¹⁰

Transgender. Transgender, sometimes also called *transexual*, is summarized well by James, “The umbrella term ‘transgender’ is often used to include everyone who feels *any* dissatisfaction with their biological sex, and also to those who want to ‘cross-dress’ (dress in the clothes of the opposite sex).”¹¹

One limitation applied to the project. The project was limited by the attendance of the participants of the discipleship class. To mitigate this limitation, a complete

⁷ Sharon James, *Gender Ideology: What Do Christians Need to Know?* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2019), 26.

⁸ Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), 40.

⁹ Haefele-Thomas and Combs, *Introduction to Transgender Studies*, 12. Believers need to understand gender identity may not correspond to the gender identified at birth.

¹⁰ Allison, *Embodied*, 40.

¹¹ James, *Gender Ideology*, 25.

handout of the notes was provided for the material for each class session. If a participant missed multiple sessions, all handouts for the sessions were made available to them.

Two delimitations applied to this project. First, the curriculum was taught on seven Wednesday nights. The Wednesday night schedule constitutes the primary discipleship training time in the church schedule excluding Sunday mornings. Second, the class had adults as the intended audience due to the sensitive nature of gender issues and sexuality.

Conclusion

The Bible has provided believers with the tools necessary to understand gender and sexuality. This project sought to teach what the Bible says about both gender and sexuality so that believers can encourage a biblical lifestyle among believers and non-believers. Chapter 2 will focus on the biblical and theological foundations for gender and sexuality. Chapter 3 will cover historical and contemporary issues involving gender and sexuality.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
FOR SEXUALITY AND GENDER

Churches across the world today struggle with understanding how the Bible should inform gender and sexuality. Some believers understand the Scriptures to have clear boundaries for gender and sexuality, while others adopt a belief that consent and self-determination constitute the only guidelines. Yet, a consistent exegesis of Old and New Testament passages dealing with gender and sexuality delineates clear limitations for both gender and sexuality.

The Creation of Gender and Sexuality (Gen 1:26-28)

In Genesis 1:26-28, God establishes binary gender in the creation of Adam and Eve. In this act, God institutes a rigid definition of gender as male and female and relates how gender intrinsically reflects an aspect of his image known as the *imago Dei*. The text reads,

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Gen 1:26-28)¹

Beginning in verse 26, through verse 27, a divine conversation occurs among the Godhead about the creation of humanity. Scholars rightfully focus on three statements from these verses. First, what is conveyed with the plural usage of “Let *us* make man in *our* image?” The interpretive options vary drastically on this question. In the early

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are come from the English Standard Version.

church, some, like Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa, detected an initial trinitarian reference to God in the plural pronouns.² Others find a reference to Yahweh speaking of himself and his heavenly court, which functions differently from another commonly held option of God using the plural of majesty. The plural of majesty operates as a rhetorical device where a single individual refers to himself in the plural out of a sense of reverential awe.³ Kenneth Mathews weighs the various options but ultimately decides on an understanding of the Trinity when he states, “Here the unity and plurality of God are in view. The plural indicates an intradivine conversation, a plurality in the Godhead, between God and his Spirit.”⁴

The second textual concern is what is meant by the phrase “made in our image, after our likeness” (1:26, 27). As Victor Hamilton notes, the phrase “image of God” is found four times in the Hebrew Scriptures, and every reference is in the book of Genesis (1:26, 27 contains two references, and 9:6).⁵ The Hebrew word for *image* is the word *selem*, and it has a lexical range that covers a more negative idolatrous history to a more positive image mentioned in 1:26-27.⁶ Although Hamilton does not provide a definition, he states, “Gen. 1:26 is simply saying that to be human is to bear the image of God. This understanding emphasizes man as a unity. No part of man, no function of man is

² Andrew Louth and Thomas C. Oden, *Genesis 1-11*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 28-30.

³ William David Reyburn and Euan Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), 50. Reyburn and Fry list the different interpretive options in this work, but they settle on a “plural of deliberation” that seems to combine the plural of majesty and Trinitarian language options.

⁴ Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, New American Commentary, vol. 1 (Nashville: B & H, 1996), 163.

⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 134.

⁶ Francis Brown et al., *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979), 853-54.

subordinated to some other, higher part or activity.”⁷ So, he takes the image as humanity possessing a unity that corresponds to God’s unity. Ryan Peterson explains the image further by tracing the relationship between God’s creation of humanity and how that relates to the image. He argues that God did not give the image to humanity in eternity past. Neither did God create humanity, and subsequently add the image. Peterson notes that God purposefully gave the image of himself to humanity at their creation, and therefore their identity should be defined by that image.⁸ Peterson understands that the image is the root of human identity, and a part of that created and embodied identity made in the image of God is gender. Some scholars attempt to separate the physical gendered body from the image. Gerhard von Rad is against this notion when he argues that the physical gendered body of a human and the spiritual component of a human together reflect God’s image as a cohesive whole.⁹ Also, when the term *man* is used in verse 26, the text is not stating that only men have been made in God’s image. Nahum Sarna agrees and states, “Hebrew *’adam* is a generic term for humankind; it never appears in Hebrew in the feminine or plural. In the first five chapters of Genesis, it is only rarely a proper name, Adam. The term encompasses both man and woman, as shown in verses 27-28 and 5:1-2, where it is construed with plural verbs and terminations.”¹⁰ Sarna’s point is that *man* is representative of both sexes of humanity, and therefore both possess the image. So, the image is the total unity of created humanity, both male and female, that reflects the unity and relationality of God. This total unity comprises human identity.

The third textual concern is the phrase “male and female he created them” in verse 27. Mathews explains the uniqueness of the terms *male* and *female* in verse 27:

⁷ Hamilton, *Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, 137.

⁸ Ryan S. Peterson, “Genesis 1,” in *Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives*, ed. R. Michael Allen (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 18-19.

⁹ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 58.

¹⁰ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis, JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001), 12.

Hebrew terms for “male” (*zakar**) and “female” (*neqeba**), as opposed to man and woman, particularly express human sexuality (and animals; e.g., Gen 5:2; 6:19; 7:3,9,16). Absence of any sexual distinction in land animals is probably so as not to detract from the privileged role of human life whereby procreation contributes to humanity’s dominion over the lower animals. Male and female human members are image-bearers who both are responsible for governing the world. . . . Although male and female hold in common the same unique God-given status as image-bearers, there is an inherent distinction within the human family by virtue of their different sexual roles, and this implies that other distinctions are present.¹¹

Mathews brings up two valid points that require reflection. First, Genesis only identifies human gender. While animals certainly have gender, the fact that verse 27 mentions the gender distinction in humans concerning being created in God’s image intensifies the connection between the two. Second, without this binary gender distinction, the fulfillment of the mandate in verse 28 to “multiply and fill the earth” is not a biological possibility. However, there are other interpretations of this account. Some scholars argue that before verse 27, man was created bisexual, but Gordon Wenham refutes that view and explains this verse:

The three clauses are in apposition. The first two are arranged chiasmically and emphasize the divine image in man, while the third specifies that women also bear the divine image (on apposition clauses cf. *SBH*, 55). The midrashic suggestion “that man as first created was bisexual and the sexes separated afterwards is far from the thought of this passage” (Skinner, 33). The expression ‘male and female’ is most frequent in legal texts, and highlights rather the sexual distinctions within mankind and foreshadows the blessing of fertility to be announced in v 28.¹²

Wenham here opposes the idea that humanity was first created as bisexual by demonstrating how the linked terms “male and female” consistently referenced sexual distinction. He also notes again that the blessing of offspring is only possible with the complementary understanding of binary gender for humanity. Thomas Schreiner also makes this connection when reflecting on Genesis 1:

We read Genesis 1:26-27 that God made man in his own image, but the image of God is reflected in two distinct genders, male and female. The distinction between man and woman is underlined in the fuller account of their creation Genesis 2:18-25. The physical differentiation of the man and the woman, and yet the amazing

¹¹ Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 173.

¹² Gordon John Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Zondervan, 2014), 33.

complementarity of such for bearing children indicates that marriage consists of the union of one woman and one man. The creation narrative, then, functions as the paradigm for males and females, and how they are to relate to one another sexually. The two different genders signify that marriage and sexual relations are restricted to the opposite sex, and that same sex relations are contrary to the created order.¹³

Schreiner, like Wenham, sees the ability of opposite-sex relationships to produce children as intentionally paradigmatic for humanity. By restricting the ability to produce offspring to opposite-sex relations, God affirms a binary concept of complementary genders.

God's Clear Rejection of Homosexuality (Rom 1:24-27)

Another text that speaks with clarity regarding human sexuality comes from the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. In this text, Paul defines homosexual behavior and orientation as sinful. Romans 1:24-27 states,

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

In these verses, Paul describes the wrath of God being revealed against a sinful humanity. Pointing to how people have actively rejected God and his truth, he notes that humanity willfully embraced idolatry due to futile thinking and the wickedness of their hearts. To punish humanity, the Lord gives people over to their sinful inclinations and imaginations. Paul specifically condemns the further sins God has given humanity over to, and one of those specific sins is homosexual behavior.

Beginning in verse 24, Paul teaches that God punishes idolatry by giving humanity over to what he calls "the lusts of their hearts to impurity." When Paul refers to "lusts" combined with "impurity," along with the surrounding context of verses 26-27, he is speaking of some form of sexual immorality. Robert Mounce explains what "lusts" or

¹³ Thomas R. Schreiner, "A New Testament Perspective on Homosexuality," *Themelios* 31, no. 3 (2006): 62.

ἐπιθυμίας conveys: “The text speaks of ‘the sinful desires of their hearts.’ Although the Greek word translated ‘desires’ (*epithumiais*) may be taken in a good sense (as in Phil 1:23; 1 Thess 2:17), it normally is used for evil desires. Scripture is clear that the human heart is fatally inclined toward evil.”¹⁴ When Paul also combines “lusts” with the concept of “impurity” in verse 24, he is intentionally referencing sexual sin.

Schreiner makes two helpful observations regarding Paul’s explanation of sexual sin. First, Schreiner argues that God gives up humanity to their illicit sexual desires as a punishment for the practice of idolatry mentioned both in verse 22 and in verse 25. Second, he believes Paul is arguing that the unnatural practice of homosexuality is like the unnatural worship of idols. God created humanity not to engage in either option.¹⁵ Frank Thielman summarizes Paul’s point here: “In a broad sense, God hands people over to the consequences of their basic sin of refusing to acknowledge him as their Creator: the human response to God’s revelation of himself as Creator has been dishonorable and irrational, and it results in the dishonorable and irrational behavior Paul is about to describe.”¹⁶ Thus, Paul describes the sexual sin as “dishonoring of their bodies among themselves” at the end of the verse. It seems best to take the clause “to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves” as exegetical to the previous clause according to Douglas Moo, who does not understand this as a purpose clause.¹⁷ Verse 25 constitutes the ground or reason for God’s giving over as a punishment. God allowing humanity to engage in sinful desires was a specific punishment for idolatry. With a sense of irony, God is handing humanity

¹⁴ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 81.

¹⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 120.

¹⁶ Frank Thielman, *Romans*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 107.

¹⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 122n100. Moo notes the common occurrence of the genitive article τοῦ plus an infinitive sixteen times in the writings of Paul, the majority of which are exegetical in nature.

over to further sinful desire because of previous sinful actions, or as Paul Achtemeier notes, “A celebration of life freed from the constraints of the Word of God is therefore a celebration of the visitation of God’s wrath upon humankind.”¹⁸ God, however, is not responsible for humanity’s sin. God turns humanity over to its desire to express their sinful imaginations. James Dunn writes, “They wanted to pursue the desires of their own hearts, and so God gave them over to what they desired; he did not, it should be noted, give them their desires, rather he gave them to what they desired and the consequences of what they desired (more explicit in vv 26-27).”¹⁹

Beginning in verse 26, Paul explicitly condemns female same-sex relations, and then condemns male same-sex relations in verse 27. In verse 26, Paul says God gave humanity over to “dishonorable passions,” similar to “lusts of their hearts to impurity” and the “dishonoring of their bodies” mentioned in verse 24. Moo notices this connection and writes, “And that to which they are handed over, ‘dishonorable passions,’ here corresponds to the ‘uncleanness’ of v. 24. Paul’s use of the word ‘Passions,’ combined with what he says in vv. 26b-27, makes clear that he refers to illicit sexual passions.”²⁰ However, illicit sexual passions are further defined by Paul. He states that “women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature.” The key to understanding what Paul means involves the meaning and contextual usage of the word for “natural” (φυσικῶν, φύσιν) and “relations or use” (χρησιν). Thielman explains the importance of these words:

The expression “sexual role” (χρησις) literally meant “use” but is commonly found in circumlocutions for sexual intercourse. Plato could speak of “the use of what belongs to Aphrodite” (ἡ τῶν ἀφροδισίων χρησις) and simply mean “sexual intercourse,” and Xenophon could refer to sexual activity (in this case male homoerotic activity) as “the use of the body” (ἡ τοῦ σώματος χρησιν). Here Paul refers to women filling a sexual role that is “contrary to nature” (παρὰ φύσιν). He does not explicitly say that this is homoerotic activity, but Plato, Ovid, Plutarch, and

¹⁸ Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1985), 40.

¹⁹ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), 73.

²⁰ Moo, *Romans*, 124.

Pseudo-Phocylides could all refer to female homoerotic activity as unnatural, and Paul's next sentence makes this meaning likely."²¹

Thielman understands "contrary to nature" as referring to same sex relationships.

Therefore, a woman practicing a sexual relationship with another woman is considered sinful because it is an expression of sexuality that contradicts God's creation.

Paul, moreover, provides further condemnation of homosexuality in verse 27 when he says, "and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error." If anything, now that Paul focuses on male homosexual behavior, he intensifies the negative language. In verse 26, women merely exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones, but Paul adds a further description of same-sex male relations in verse 27. Thielman points to the additional description and explains, "Just as women exchanged their natural sexual role for unnatural behavior, so men have done something similar. Now, however, the language is more emphatic. Instead of simply exchanging what is natural for what is unnatural, males 'abandoned' females, 'burned' with 'strong desire' for other males, and worked at 'obscene behavior.'"²²

Thielman points out two critical aspects of Paul's argument. Again, men have abandoned natural sexual relations just like women, but they have done something more. Sinful sexual desire not only causes an abandonment of natural sexual relations with members of the opposite sex, but now men's desires burn for each other. This strikes the chord of modern debate among believers. Is the simple attraction to members of the same sex sinful? The answer, though complex, is yes. The consistent witness of the church throughout history has condemned same-sex attraction. The issue of sinful sexual attraction is even addressed early in church history by the church fathers. For example, when Chrysostom examined this passage, he argued for the sinfulness of this desire:

²¹ Thielman, *Romans*, 109.

²² Thielman, *Romans*, 109.

For he does not say that they were enamored with one another but that they were consumed by lust for one another! You see that the whole of desire comes from an excess which cannot contain itself within its proper limits. For everything which transgresses God's appointed laws lusts after monstrous things which are not normal. The normal desire for sexual intercourse united the sexes to one another, but by taking this away and turning it into something else, the devil divided the sexes from each other and forced what was one to become two, in opposition to the law of God. . . . The devil was bent on destroying the human race, not only by preventing them from copulating lawfully but by stirring them up to war and subversion against each other.²³

Chrysostom understood normal sexual desire as uniting the two complementary genders. He would call this the "proper limits" of sexuality. However, when man's desire led him to pursue something other than what united the sexes in marriage according to the plan of God, it sowed division and could be used by the devil to destroy humanity. Denny Burk agrees with Chrysostom's argument of "proper limits" and defines sexual desire as sinful depending on the object of the desire. The key idea is that experiencing sexual attraction without any tether to marriage constitutes sinful lust. Burk describes his view as a theological understanding of sexuality:

Here I am arguing essentially the same principle with respect to our desires and attractions. The only sex desires that glorifies God is that desire ordered to the covenant of marriage. When sexual desire/attraction fixes on any kind of non-marital erotic activity, it falls short of the glory of God and is by definition sinful. Again, this theological principle applies to the experience of both opposite-sex and same-sex desire. The difference is that opposite-sex desire can have the covenant of marriage as its end or not, but same-sex desire can never have the covenant of marriage as its end.²⁴

Jesus himself seems to reflect this same view on sexual attraction in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus reaffirms the seventh commandment from Exodus 20:14, but expands the understanding of what constitutes adultery. In Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his own heart." Here Jesus condemns opposite-sex attraction because, in the context, at least

²³ Gerald L. Bray and Thomas C. Oden, *Romans*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, vol. 6 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 48.

²⁴ Denny Burk, "Is Homosexual Orientation Sinful?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58, no. 1 (2015): 102.

one of the two parties was married. Therefore, Jesus understands that any sexual desire or lustful intent that functions outside of God’s definition of marriage should be considered sinful. Since Jesus teaches that the intent or desire is sinful, then it follows that the passion or desires of the men and women for the same-sex relationships mentioned in verse 27 of Romans 1 are out of bounds because there is no possible link to marriage.

At the end of verse 27, Paul mentions a “due penalty,” but does not give a further explanation of what that penalty constitutes. From the context, the “due penalty” likely constitutes a further handing over to the sin of homosexuality, and subsequently judgment according to Romans 2:2. Schreiner traces Paul’s argument and explains,

The last clause in verse 27 has engendered some controversy. What is the “penalty” (ἀντιμισθίαν, *antimisthian*) that people receive in themselves? The context suggests that the “penalty” is not something in addition to homosexuality. The penalty is rather being handed over to the sin of homosexuality itself. The words ἦν ἔδει τῆς πλάνης αὐτῶν (*hên edei tês planes autôn*, which was necessary for their error) point in this direction.²⁵

The due penalty of verse 27 summarizes the sinful trajectory that runs throughout the entire passage. Idolatry led to God giving humanity over to its sinful lusts, and as a part of that giving over, humanity willfully embraced same-sex attraction and homosexual behavior. Therefore, the “due penalty” is itself a further embrace of homosexuality. Deyoung examines verse 27, and like Schreiner, sees the penalty of same-sex attraction as a punishment for the idolatry of humanity: “In Paul’s mind, same-sex sexual intimacy is an especially clear illustration of the idolatrous human impulse to turn away from God’s order and design. Those who suppress the truth about God as revealed in nature suppress the truth about themselves written in nature. Homosexual practice is an example on a horizontal plane of our vertical rebellion against God.”²⁶

²⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 97.

²⁶ Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 52.

Hope for the Sexually Immoral (1 Cor 6:9-11)

Another significant passage in the discussion of sexuality and gender comes in 1 Corinthians. After discussing the sexual immorality occurring in the church in the previous chapter, Paul continues to provide a corrective by condemning lawsuits between fellow believers. As a further correction, Paul provides a list of vices that keep people out of the kingdom. Toward the end of the passage, he demonstrates the hope of sinners by describing the actions of God on their behalf. The text says in verses 9-11,

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. 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.

To understand how this text condemns homosexual behavior and gives hope to those struggling with same-sex attraction, the focus must occur on how Paul defines unrighteous people and the transforming power of the gospel.

Verse 9 opens with a succinct statement: “The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.” This statement is meant to function as a warning for believers at Corinth. Gordon Fee explains,

Likewise, with the word *adikoi* (“wrongdoers”) Paul ties these words of warning to the “wrongdoing” that has preceded, and at the same time ties both to the question with which this all began (v. 1). In so doing he specifies the “sins” in personal terms, thus naming those who commit such sins, as over against listing the sins as such. The “wrongdoers” mentioned at the beginning (v. 1) are those in the world who are going to be judged by the Lord’s people (v. 2), a judgment now expressed in terms of their not inheriting the kingdom.²⁷

The warning in the present context is that if the Corinthians continue to look like the unrighteous world, then they will receive the same punishment. However, Paul describes this judgment further by speaking of not inheriting the kingdom of God. Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner see a probable literary connection to both Deuteronomy and Daniel in this warning when they state,

²⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 266.

In the case of Daniel we do not even have to move outside of the chapter to find as many as nine references to the *kingdom*. In fact, in the same verse, Daniel 7:22, it is stated that not only was “judgment given to the saints,” but “the saints received the kingdom.” Whereas in Deuteronomy the inheritance, though desirable and from God, is temporal and limited, namely, the land, in Daniel 7 the kingdom, as in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, is everlasting and universal (see esp. 7:27).²⁸

Therefore, Ciampa and Rosner understand that behaving like a “wrongdoer” or “the unrighteous” can lead to exclusion from God’s eternal rest in the kingdom. This leads to a controversial conclusion that all the sins listed in verses 9-10, if not repented of, will prevent entrance into heaven.

The second half of verse 9 through verse 10 constitutes a negative imperative and Paul’s specific vice list that will not inherit the kingdom. Paul uses a powerful negative imperative *μὴ πλανᾶσθε*, “do not be deceived,” to set up the idea that the works or behaviors of people can indicate whether they will inherit the kingdom. Paul Gardner explains the serious nature of this command:

Herein lies the power of Paul’s argument. *It is possible for people to be deceived about their status.* Paul’s command to these church members is brief and to the point: “Do not let yourselves be deceived!” (*μὴ πλανᾶσθε*; also 15:33). They should know that their life and works provide an important indicator to them of their community status. The holy distinctiveness of God’s people must be clearly evident to all.²⁹

Gardner understands Paul to say that people who appear in the covenant community of the church at Corinth could deceive themselves into believing they could practice the subsequent sins listed and remain a part of God’s eschatological kingdom. Therefore, Paul gives this negative imperative as a wake-up call to realize the self-deception common to sin. Then, Paul begins his vice list with the term *πόρνοι*. Though still sexual, Paul uses this term and distinguishes between sexual immorality and adultery mentioned later in the same verse. Bauer’s work, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), lists the most common meaning as “one

²⁸ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 239, emphasis original.

²⁹ Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 259, emphasis original.

who practices sexual immorality, fornicator.³⁰ Of importance here is the idea that Paul remains consistent with his condemnation of non-biblical sexual ethics. Sex outside of marriage was considered just as capable of disqualifying a person from heaven as any of the other manifestations of sin. The next sin mentioned in the vice list is the term “idolaters.” As in the context of Romans 1, there is a link between sexual sin and idolatry. Leon Morris surmises the link is the common practice of temple prostitution ubiquitous to certain religious cults of the first century: “The inclusion of *idolaters* in a part of the list stressing sexual vice may point to the immorality of much of the heathen worship of the day.”³¹ In addition to idolaters, Paul condemns the act of adultery in this vice list. This should come as no surprise because of adultery’s strong condemnation in the Decalogue.

Verse 9 contains one of the most debated texts related to homosexuality. The ESV translates the controversial phrase as “nor men who practice homosexuality” (οὔτε μαλακοὶ οὔτε ἀρσενοκοῖται). The controversy surrounding the translation of this phrase has resurfaced again recently. Mark Ward explains the issue from his point of view:

The NRSVue doesn’t just punt at 1 Corinthians 6:9; it lies on the field and forfeits the game. Here is its rendering of the passage: Do you know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, *male prostitutes*, *men who engage in illicit sex*. . . . Paul says that active and passive partners in a homosexual pairing will not inherit the kingdom of God. The NRSVue does not say this. It first, in my judgment, obfuscates matters by including a footnote on *malakoi* and on *arsenokoitai*: “Meaning of Greek uncertain.” Then, despite their admitted uncertainty, the NRSVue translates *malakoi* as something too specific (“male prostitutes”) and *arsenokoitai* as something too general (“men who engage in illicit sex”).³²

³⁰ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. and trans. Fredrick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich [BDAG], 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), s.v. “πόρνος.” Bauer also notes that the same term is used in 1 Cor 5:9, 11. Since that context is regarding a man sleeping with his father’s wife, this is a more general condemnation of non-biblical sexuality.

³¹ Leon L. Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1985), 96.

³² Mark Ward, “Does the NRSV Compromise on Homosexuality?,” The Gospel Coalition, July 7, 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/nrsv-compromise-homosexuality/>, emphasis original. Ward also notes that they employ the same translation for the occurrence of *arsenokoitai* in 1 Tim 1:10. The -ue after NRSV indicates this is an updated edition of this translation.

As Ward makes clear, the appropriate translation of this phrase is key to understanding what Paul meant. Is Paul condemning homosexuality, or is he merely condemning male prostitution and the nebulous term “illicit sex?” The issue comes down to the two words, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. Beginning with *malakoi*, the most basic translations seem close to the concept of “soft.” However, while BDAG notes the possibility of “soft” as part of its semantic range, it also relates that the range includes being the more passive partner in a homosexual relationship and a passive boy in a pederastic relationship.³³

Robert Gagnon has studied this passage extensively, and argues for his understanding of *malakoi* as referencing homosexuality:

If then *malakoi* refers to a general critique of effeminacy in men, what kind of effeminacy would generate such a serious penalty for a Jew? In 1 Cor 6:9 *malakoi* are sandwiched in between adulterers, people who commit an act of immoral sexual intercourse, and *arsenokoitai*, people who have something to do with an immoral act of same-sex intercourse. Immoral sexual intercourse, then, would appear to be an identifying mark of the *malakoi*.³⁴

Gagnon understands well the semantic range of *malakoi* in Greek literature, but here he explains that because of where Paul places this term in the vice list, as well as factoring in the various usages, *malakoi* must refer to the passive or more feminine partner in a same-sex relationship. However, the use of *arsenokoitai* in proximity to *malakoi* strengthens Paul’s point about homosexuality. In this instance, BDAG lists only two understandings of this word: “A male who engages in sexual activity w. a pers. of his own sex, *pederast* 1 Cor 6:9.”³⁵ So, in 1 Corinthians 6, ἀρσενοκοίτης either refers to a man engaged in same-sex intercourse, or a pederast, a male who has exploitive sex with a boy. However, the expanded meaning of pederast does not satisfy Gagnon, who explains why illicit sex or pederast is incorrect:

³³ BDAG, s.v. “μαλακος.” Bauer also notes in this entry that he feels the lexeme “male prostitutes” is too narrowly defined in the NRSV, but the translation of “sexual pervert” in the REB is too wide.

³⁴ Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 308.

³⁵ BDAG, s.v. “ἀρσενοκοίτης.”

A broadening of the work *arsenokoitês* to include exploitative heterosexual intercourse or even a restriction to exclude non-exploitative homosexual intercourse appears unlikely in view of the unqualified nature of the Levitical prohibitions. As David F. Wright has persuasively argued, *arsenokoitês* was probably coined by Hellenistic Jews from a conflation of two Greek words appearing in the Septuagint's rendering of Lev 18:22 and 20:13: *meta arsenos ou koimêthêsê, koitên gynakikeian* (18:22); *hos an koimêthê meta arsenos koitên gynaikos* (20:13). The Greek word for "male" is *arsên* and the word for "bed" or "lying" is *koitê* (related to the verb *keisthai*, "to lie"), to which has been attached a masculine personal suffix—(t)ês denoting the agent or doer of the action ("a man / one who . . .").³⁶

As Gagnon points out, Paul may have picked up a term from the Septuagint's prohibition of same-sex intercourse, and therefore the idea of pederasty or exploitive homosexual sex does not fit the context. Furthermore, Schreiner critiques the idea that Paul is only condemning pederasty here: "Some think Paul criticizes pederasty (which refers to a man having sex with a young boy), but this is unconvincing, for then Paul would have almost certainly used the word 'pederasty' (*paiderastês*). Both the passive and the active partner are condemned, showing that Paul isn't discussing cases of abuse or pederasty."³⁷ Paul is condemning both partners in a same-sex relationship, regardless of role.

First Corinthians 6:11 contains the hope that Paul taught for any individual trapped in sin. The verse contains four phrases of hope for those who struggle with same-sex attraction (SSA) or gender issues. First, Paul points out to the Corinthians that they once had these struggles when he says, "And such were some of you." Paul is reminding the Corinthians that their conversion shifted their identity and behaviors. Schreiner succinctly states, "Paul has warned the Corinthians in verses 9-10, but he now reminds them of who they are in Christ Jesus. In saying *that is what some of you were*, Paul reminds the Corinthians of their pre-conversion past. The sins listed in verses 9-10 characterized their lives, but Paul's point is that such is no longer the case."³⁸ Thus, Paul

³⁶ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 315.

³⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters*, Handbooks on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 140.

³⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove: IVP, 2018), 123, emphasis original.

is calling on the Corinthian believers to reflect on who they were before Christ, but also remember how their current identity in Christ is not congruent with the sins of their past. This implies that those who struggle with LGBTQ+ issues can be forgiven their sins, and even have the hope of the transformation of their desires.

The next three phrases all likely refer to the same event of conversion but from slightly different perspectives. When Paul states, “But you were washed,” he is not referencing baptism, but rather the cleansing from sin that comes from faith in Jesus Christ. Gardner gives the right perspective:

First, “you were washed” (ἀπελούσασθε). Paul is referring here to the event of repentance and faith that results in sin being “washed” away. While baptism points to this, baptism is not in mind here. Rather, in mind is the work achieved by Christ in the life of the believer and the church, as with the two following passives. Ephesians 5:25b-27 offers a useful parallel. There Paul refers to Christ giving himself for the church to sanctify her, “having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word . . . that she might be holy” (καθαρίσας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι). See also Titus 3:5; cf. John 15:3. As they heard the word of Christ and received it in conversion, they were “washed” clean of their evil of their former lives that were lived away from the lordship of Christ. *This is their status: a washed people.*³⁹

As a part of coming to Christ in repentance and faith, Paul emphasizes that they were washed or cleansed from the power sin had over their lives at conversion. This would suggest that a person struggling with gender dysphoria or SSA could be forgiven of their sins in just the same way a heterosexual adulterer could.

The second phrase Paul uses to describe and give hope to the believers at Corinth is, “You were sanctified.” Morris explains Paul’s meaning in this phrase when he succinctly says, “*You were sanctified* is in the same tense and will here indicate God’s act in setting them apart to be his.”⁴⁰ Paul’s idea here is that God declared the Corinthian believers holy at the moment of conversion. Morris uses the concept of “set apart” to describe their new standing before God due to their faith in Christ. The final hopeful phrase used by Paul here is, “You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and

³⁹ Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, 263, emphasis original.

⁴⁰ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 97, emphasis original.

by the Spirit of our God.” Again, Morris explains Paul’s understanding of justification as it is applied to the Corinthian problems:

You were justified is another aorist; it looks back to the time when they were accepted as just before God. It is a legal term used of acquittal, “reckon as righteous,” “declare righteous,” “acquit.” Paul uses it for the act of God whereby, on the basis of Christ’s atoning death, he declares believers to be just, and accepts them as his own. It is unusual to have a reference to justification following one to sanctification. There may be a certain emphasis on the character involved in sanctification. Or, as Calvin held, all three verbs may refer to the same thing, though from different angles.⁴¹

Morris believes Paul desires for the believers at Corinth to remember their past conversion, which comprised their washing from sin, their sanctification, and their moment when God declared them legally righteous. Therefore, individual sinners struggling not just with SSA, but also with embracing an LGBTQ+ concept of identity, have the hope of knowing they can be forgiven of these specific sins.

Conclusion

While Christians will likely debate issues relating to gender and sexuality for many decades to come, the Bible’s teaching on gender and sexuality remains clear. God’s Word attests that humanity only has binary gender. Furthermore, the Bible’s sexual ethic does not permit same-sex relationships. While the Bible does not approve of same-sex relationships, it does offer clear hope for anyone entrapped by sexual sin. The hope is found in a washing away of sin that comes from repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴¹ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 97, emphasis original.

CHAPTER 3
HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES
IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Since believers and non-believers have rejected God’s definition of gender and sexuality, the current culture has invented new ways of expressing both concepts that bring damage to the body and the soul. For example, a rejection of biblical truth on gender and sexuality has given rise to the introduction of puberty blockers as medical treatments for minors. The same rejection has led to the adoption of gender-neutral pronouns as a means of expressing identity. Furthermore, a rejection of biblical truth has elevated gender and sexuality as the defining characteristics of identity. LGBTQ+ sexual identities and non-binary gender identities stem from the rejection of biblical authority, but the church can reach LGBTQ+ individuals by pursuing friendships, practicing hospitality, and sharing biblical truth.

A New Concept of Identity

A philosophical shift that empowered the LGBTQ+ movement involves expressive individualism. The adoption of expressive individualism derives from a definition of identity shaped by the ideas of an innately positive human nature, sexuality, and societal pressure. This new concept of identity stands in direct contradiction to God’s authority, or any external authority being imposed on the will because the self is the new authority standard.¹ With the influence of philosophers like Rousseau, Freud, Nietzsche, and others, an authentic identity is defined as one that has a morally good nature and is unrestricted in its ability to express feelings. For example, Rousseau describes his beliefs

¹ Carl Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 22-24.

about human nature being morally good when he relates the story of stealing asparagus in his work *Confessions*. Mr. Verrat encouraged him to commit the theft through flattery when he was an apprentice. Describing his behavior, Rousseau stated, “I went about pilfering with utmost fidelity; my only motive was to oblige the person who was making me do it.”² Rousseau did not consider this an evil action since he had a pure motive. Like the other philosophers mentioned, Rousseau would argue that society had a corrupting influence on human nature. The influence caused by society enforced conformity to certain rules that led to inauthentic identities. Carl Trueman summarizes Rousseau’s contribution to radical individualism when he notes, “The one who is truly free is the one who is free to be himself.”³ Freud’s contribution to the radical individualism of modern culture involves his elevation of sexuality as the key to human happiness. Freud defined happiness and the purpose of humanity,

We said there that man’s discovery that sexual (genital) love afforded him the strongest experiences of satisfaction, and in fact provided him with the prototype of all happiness, must have suggested to him that he should continue to seek the satisfaction of happiness in his life along the path of sexual relations and that he should make genital eroticism the central point of his life.⁴

Since Rousseau argued for good human nature, then Freud pushed the concept that expressing unrestrained sexuality constituted the high point of human authentic existence. Nietzsche’s contribution to this radical individualism is the way he elevates humanity to the point that it redefines morality as a matter of personal taste. In Nietzsche’s work *The Gay Science*, he states,

² Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, ed. Patrick Coleman, trans. Angela Scholar (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000), 32. For further analysis of how Rousseau led to radical individualism, see Carl Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 34-42.

³ Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 124.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 56, quoted in Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 205.

Let us therefore limit ourselves to the purification of our opinions and value judgements and to the creation of tables of what is good that are new and all our own: let us stop brooding over the “moral value of our actions!” Yes, my friends, it is time to feel nauseous about some people’s moral chatter about others. Sitting in moral judgement should offend our taste. Let us leave such chatter and such bad taste to those who have nothing to do but drag the past a few steps further through time and who never live in the present—that is, to the many, the great majority! We, however, want to become who we are—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves!⁵

Nietzsche reduces morality to a “moral chatter” of the past. Instead of an outdated morality informed by the teaching of the Bible, he explains that humanity can define good and evil for itself. In his view, the objective standard for determining morality functions solely on a subjective and individual level. His self-determination of morality is why Nietzsche speaks of it as “taste.” Trueman summarizes how Nietzsche’s perspective on morality reinforces a subjective understanding of identity:

Nietzsche’s notion that morality is really about taste is very helpful in thinking about our current moral climate. So often the language we use confirms Nietzsche’s perspective is now a cultural intuition. So often we will speak of morality in terms of taste or aesthetics: “That remark was hurtful;” “That idea is offensive;” “That viewpoint makes me feel unsafe.” Notice that such expressions do not make a statement about whether the matters in hand are right or wrong.”⁶

Because Nietzsche’s idea of self-created morality makes the standard the internal feelings of the individual, challenges to that identity become “unsafe” personal attacks in the modern era.

By throwing off other definitions of identity and morality, philosophers have redefined the concept of identity. For example, the modern understanding of identity has adopted the concept of “expressive individualism.” This concept was defined by Robert Bellah, “Expressive individualism holds that each person has a unique core of feeling and

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (New York: Cambridge University, 2001), 189. For further discussion on Nietzsche’s view of self-creation by ignoring morality, see Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 164-176.

⁶ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 64.

intuition that should unfold or be expressed if individuality is to be realized.”⁷ Trueman recognizes how widespread expressive individualism has become today. He summarizes this new view of identity in modern culture by noting that an authentic existence can only occur when internal feelings match what an individual expresses outwardly.⁸ This concept lays the groundwork for those experiencing gender dysphoria or same-sex attraction to rebel against God’s definition of sex and gender as revealed in creation. The physically created body made in the image of God is not the authority. The authority, instead, is the internal feelings of the individual. Any attack on this identity rooted in internal feelings constitutes trauma or danger. Take for example the experience of Grace, a girl who experienced gender dysphoria while in middle school and formerly identified as a trans boy. Speaking of the ability to rebel against authority to protect her trans identity, Sarah Zylstra records what Grace and her mother, Eva, experienced:

When you claim a transgender identity, “you’re untouchable,” Eva said. “Nobody can question you. You can get teachers fired. Adults have to kowtow to you.” Even your parents. “One of the biggest themes is, if your parent agrees with you, you need to be kind and loving,” Grace said. “But if your parents are opposed, hurt them as much as you like. They aren’t even human beings.”⁹

Grace articulates that this new concept of identity in today’s world of cancel culture is sacrosanct. There is no room for the authority of parents, no room for the authority of educators, and no room for the authority of God to argue for a binary concept of gender rooted in the image of God or monogamous heterosexual marriage.

As Grace’s story makes clear, rebellion against authorities that disagree with gender or sexuality choices is encouraged. However, the concept of expressive individualism has not only affected individual identities. This new definition of identity

⁷ Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California, 2007), 333-34, as quoted in Carl Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 22.

⁸ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 23.

⁹ Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, “Transformation of a Transgender Teen,” The Gospel Coalition, July 6, 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/transformation-transgender-teen/>.

has even begun to shape nations and laws globally. In 2006, a group of human rights experts met in Indonesia to develop policies and recommendations to fight against any discrimination against LGBTQ+ identities. In the preamble of their document, the group defined gender identity in a way that highlights the internal feelings of expressive individualism when they stated, “Gender identity is understood to refer to each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth.”¹⁰ Since gender identity and sexual orientation are based on internal “feelings,” both are beyond question. Yet now this issue has become so politicized that anti-discrimination laws on the local, state, federal, and international levels are being proposed for a variety of institutions.

Another factor in the recent rise of the LGBTQ+ movement has been the merging of identity with sexuality. Though others have contributed, Freud widely influenced scholars to reduce humanity’s identity down to a set of sexual impulses that have been suppressed by the social and religious norms of the culture. Examining the sexual suppression of humanity during his day, Freud stated, “The sexual life of civilized man is notwithstanding severely impaired; it sometimes gives the impression of being in process of involution as a function, just as our teeth and hair seem to be as organs.”¹¹ He would go on to argue that man’s basic purpose was to achieve happiness, or what he termed as “the pleasure principle.” Since Freud viewed the sublimation of sexual desires as repressive, he left no room for God or his laws to play a role in humanity’s happiness or satisfaction. Commenting on this usefulness of religion in finding satisfaction, Freud delivers this critique: “At this price, by forcibly fixing them into a state of psychical

¹⁰ The Yogyakarta Principles, “Introduction to the Yogyakarta Principles,” accessed February 7, 2023, <https://yogyakartaprinciples.org/introduction/>. For further discussion of this international document, see Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 366-70.

¹¹ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 61. In this argument, Freud assumes there is no major distinction between man and animals, and furthermore all humans are bisexual and perhaps even what modern terminology would deem “gender fluid” (61n7).

infantilism and by drawing them into mass-delusion, religion succeeds in sparing many people an individual neurosis. But hardly anything more.”¹² In other words, from the outset, Freud views God as a delusional stress-reducer for the people. Freud believes religion seeks to restrict sexual impulses, and therefore modern man should leave religion in order to find unrestricted happiness.

This conflation of identity with sexuality has grown from Freud and reproduced itself everywhere in modern culture. Freud’s ideas have advanced in society to the point that sexuality is the primary concept of identity, especially among young people in the United States. For example, *Newsweek* reported the results of a recent poll that stated, “Among Millennials, 30 percent identify as LGBTQ, more than three times that of the rest of the adult population, and when researchers broke out the youngest of the group, ages 18-24 (which some call Gen Z), they found 39 percent called themselves LGBTQ.”¹³ However, the rise of LGBTQ+ identities among Gen Z is only one symptom of culture’s redefinition of identity as sexuality. The rise of “hookup” culture in secondary schools and college campuses across the country also points to the spread of the new all-encompassing sexual identity. The American Psychological Association has chosen to define this term on its website in the following manner: “A type of sexual encounter in which the participants have no expectation of continuing or developing their relationship beyond the sexual encounter.”¹⁴ Notably absent from this definition is even the limiting expectation of consent. Going back to Freud and expressive individualism, if the driving

¹² Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 36. For a more in-depth analysis of Freud’s argument on the childish nature of religion, see Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 214-221.

¹³ Paul Bond, “Nearly 40% Of U.S. Gen Zs, 30% Of Christians Identify as LGBTQ, Poll Shows,” *Newsweek*, October 20, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/nearly-40-percent-us-gen-zs-30-percent-christians-identify-lgbtq-poll-shows-1641085>.

¹⁴ APA Dictionary of Psychology, “Hookup” accessed February 14, 2023, <https://dictionary.apa.org/hookup>.

force behind humanity is pleasure and expression of inner desires, then this type of non-comital view of sex with any gender or person makes sense. Sex does not insinuate a relationship, but rather is only an act of pleasure for the benefit of the individual.

Another powerful force in reshaping the concept of identity is the power of societal pressure, which is evidenced in everything from education to entertainment. A prime example of societal pressure occurs through social media. Early in its development, social media offered a way for typically younger individuals to connect in a virtual community. With the combination of sexuality and identity, however, social media functioned to connect teens struggling with SSA to others for help and encouragement. For example, Danah Boyd summarizes an online interaction with a teenage girl struggling with SSA:

She had found a community of other queer girls in a chatroom, and even though she believed that some of them weren't who they said they were, she found their anonymous advice to be helpful. They gave her pointers to useful websites about coming out, offered stories from their own experiences, and gave her the number of an LGBT—oriented hotline if she ran into any difficulty coming out to her conservative parents.¹⁵

Social media offers teens a replacement virtual community that will affirm their sexual identity and support them with friendship and resources as they announce their new orientation or identity.

Another vehicle pushing the new sexual identities is the influence of celebrity culture. Among the celebrities that support the LGBTQ+, Bruce Jenner, now known as Caitlyn Jenner, initially held significant influence in the list of celebrities claiming an LGBTQ+ identity. Explaining what he felt was the gender of his soul in a Diane Sawyer interview, Jenner stated, “The female side is part of me. It’s who I am. I was not genetically born that way. And as of now, I have all the male parts, and all that kind of stuff, so in a lot of ways we’re different. But we still identify as female. And that’s very

¹⁵ Danah Boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2014), 52.

hard for Bruce Jenner to say. Cuz [sic] why? I don't want to disappoint people.”¹⁶ In Jenner's case, it appears the authority of the culture and those in the LGBTQ+ community inspire a fear of disappointing that community. Yet no matter what Jenner does, whether hormone replacement or gender reassignment surgery, he cannot shift the nature of his biology and cannot ultimately redefine his gender. Klyne Snodgrass explains the futility here: “We assume that we define ourselves, but that is a delusion. Every day we are bombarded by messages attempting to tell us who we are. Being ourselves in a world that constantly seeks to make us someone else is a never-ending and arduous task.”¹⁷ Perhaps the bombardment of social media, celebrity influence, and sexual promiscuity exert so much pressure that teenagers and young people are embracing an LGBTQ+ identity out of a desire to fit into mainstream culture.

The Compromise of the Church on the LGBTQ+ Identity

Many denominations, churches, and individual believers have compromised on what the Bible teaches about gender and sexuality. Dean Inserra laments the theological compromise taking place in churches and relates it to the new concept of identity: “We have begun to believe the world's rhetoric that sexual desires define a person's identity and that the individuals have sole authority to determine their own sexual identity based on the desires they experience.”¹⁸ This happens through individuals, groups, and even entire denominations compromising on the historical interpretation of the Bible on these issues. This compromise manifests itself in many ways.

¹⁶ Kate Ward, “Bruce Jenner Comes Out as Transgender Jenner,” *Bustle*, April 25, 2015, <https://www.bustle.com/articles/78832-transcript-of-bruce-jenner-coming-out-as-transgender-will-only-make-you-respect-jenner-more>. Since the time of this interview, Jenner has undergone sex reassignment surgery.

¹⁷ Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Who God Says You Are: A Christian Understanding of Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 6-7.

¹⁸ Dean Inserra, *Pure: Why the Bible's Plan for Sexuality Isn't Outdated, Irrelevant, or Oppressive* (Chicago: Moody, 2022,) 84.

One of the ways that more affirming people embrace the LGBTQ+ identity is through subjectively ignoring passages in the Bible that introduce boundaries for sexuality and gender. For example, in a dialogue with a gay pastor in Chicago, Andrew Marin witnessed the rejection of biblical authority firsthand: “Although I know this pastor does not speak for all gay pastors, he interrupted me and flat-out told me that he intentionally disregards entire sections of the Bible because he believes that they are not correct, not inspired and do nothing but harm the GLBT community.”¹⁹ This pastor openly admits that his hermeneutic is to avoid anything he perceives as harmful to the LGBTQ+ community, regardless of what the actual text of the Bible teaches. Sadly, he is not alone in this approach to the Bible. In 2012, *NPR* aired an interview with four different pastors across different denominations. Carmen Laberge, a pastor in the PCUSA, was forced to resign from her role when her denomination voted to ordain gay ministers. Recognizing the tendency to ignore certain passages of Scripture, Laberge offers this observation: “There’s a stream of faith that would recognize that the Bible continues to have authority, and that we are obligated to submit ourselves, our wills and our desires to it,’ she says. ‘And there’s a stream of faith that would say that human experience actually trumps—or is an authority over—the Bible at this point.’”²⁰ In the same interview, Graylan Hagler, the pastor of Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ, points to Galatians 3 as the one overarching Scripture that dominates every other biblical text that addresses sexuality. He is quoted as saying, “I just think of the words from Galatians where it says, “There is neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female, slave nor free,” he says. ‘And what is happening there is that they’re pointing to what the kingdom of God looks like . . . it’s

¹⁹ Andrew P. Marin, *Love Is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 67. GLBT is a reordering of the common acronym LGBT.

²⁰ Barbara Bradley Hagerty, “Same Bible, Different Verdict on Gay Marriage,” *NPR*, May 11, 2012, <https://www.npr.org/2012/05/11/152466134/same-bible-different-verdict-on-gay-marriage>.

open to everybody and everybody has equal status.”²¹ Hagler rips Galatians 3:28 from its original context of discussing unity that comes through faith in Christ and takes it to mean that any sexual identity should be recognized and affirmed. Yet, Hagler makes no mention of sin, or how it causes a need for justification mentioned in the previous verses of the same chapter.

Rosaria Butterfield, a former lesbian and professor of literature who specializes in queer theory, provides another example of experience trumping the authority of the Bible. When she was curious about church, at one point she turned to a Methodist minister for advice. She states this about their conversation, “A Methodist pastor and the Dean of the Chapel at Syracuse University believed that I did not have to give up everything to honor God. Indeed, he told me, since God made me a lesbian, I gave God honor by living an honorable lesbian life. He told me that I could have Jesus and my lesbian lover. This was a very appealing prospect.”²² Of course, the issue is that no Scripture supports the category of an “honorable lesbian life” in the same way that Scripture does not support the category of an honorable adulterer or honorable murderer.

Another tactic that muddles the biblical truth about the LGBTQ+ identity involves how the question is posed to the Scriptures. To affirm LGBTQ+ identities, some scholars and denominations choose to argue that the Bible never actually addresses the concept of sexual orientation. On a denominational level, this argument is currently advocated by some inside the United Methodist Church. For example, Victor Paul Furnish, in an attempt to answer the question, “Is it possible to dissent from the statement that ‘the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching’ and still be faithful to the witness of Scripture?” states, “There are a few passages that refer or allude to sex between males, and one that refers to sex between females. But these passages

²¹ Hagerty, “Same Bible, Different Verdict on Gay Marriage.”

²² Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor’s Journey into Christian Faith* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant, 2012),16.

have nothing to say about ‘homosexual orientation,’ of which the ancient world had no notion, and for which, therefore, it had no equivalent expression.”²³ Gay-affirming ministers who hold the view of Furnish look back into documents from antiquity and point out that homosexuality was rooted in excessive heterosexual lust, and not specifically condemned. Matthew Vines espouses this view:

For the overwhelming majority of human history, homosexuality was not seen as a different sexual *orientation* that distinguished a minority of people from the heterosexual majority. It was considered instead to be a manifestation of normal sexual desire pursued *to excess*—a behavior anyone might engage in if he didn’t keep his passions in check.²⁴

In Furnish and Vines’s understanding of antiquity, homosexual attraction and behavior were seen as an excess of heterosexual behavior, and therefore what the Bible condemns is unrestrained lust.

Robert Gagnon refutes this view with five observations. First, not all moralists from antiquity understood homosexual behavior as unrestrained heterosexual lust. He points to Plato’s *Symposium* and to Aristotle, who argued that this behavior came from the gods or nature. He also found sources from ancient medical doctors that blamed lesbianism on mental disease or overly large female sex organs. Clearly, antiquity did not hold a consensus view on the origin of homosexuality.²⁵ Second, Gagnon points out that the argument that authors from antiquity opposed homosexuality primarily because it was uncontrolled heterosexual lust is a non sequitur. Here Gagnon points to the writings of Philo, who stated that gluttons could develop sexual attraction to animals. His point is simply that the excessive lust argument makes no sense in a culture where that conduct was

²³ Victor Paul Furnish, “The Loyal Opposition and Scripture,” in *The Loyal Opposition: Struggling with the Church on Homosexuality*, ed. Tex Sample and Amy E. DeLong (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 33-34.

²⁴ Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent, 2014), 31, emphasis original.

²⁵ Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 384-85.

already condemned.²⁶ Third, Gagnon points out in Romans 1 that the argument that homosexual behavior is not “against nature” is incorrect. The argument makes too much of a distinction between desire and action. Instead of arguing that Paul only condemned the desire to assume the passive sexual role appropriate for women, Gagnon points to Philo, arguing for heterosexual desire functioning according to nature. Philo differentiates that heterosexual desire from the desire of males for males.²⁷ Thus, even ancient philosophers recognized homosexual behavior as contrary to nature. Fourth, the language of Paul in Romans 1:27 about men burning with passion for one another does not provide conclusive evidence in favor of Furnish and Vines’s view. If anything, it may not speculate on how the behavior develops, but Paul does clearly define the attraction and the action as sinful.²⁸ Lastly, the translation of the phrase *παρὰ φύσιν* from Romans 1 places too much of a distinction between “beyond nature” and “contrary to nature” to be conclusive.²⁹ How more affirming LGBTQ+ scholars argue for biblical acceptance involves this relegating of orientation to a non-issue so that all the Bible condemns is lust, not particular forms of sexual expression.

For those who embrace the LGBTQ+ identity, the most deceptive practice is to critically examine biblical texts that speak concerning homosexuality and twist their meaning and application. Summarizing the general view of those who affirm the LGBTQ+ identities, Marin explains their view of these passages: “Gay Christians believe that the passages in the Bible that condemn same-sex relationships are not referencing long-term, committed, monogamous relationships. Rather, the Bible is talking about inhospitality, heterosexual rape, pagan ritual sex and orgies, and pederasty (men having sex with

²⁶ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 386.

²⁷ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 386-88.

²⁸ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 388-89.

²⁹ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 389-92.

boys).”³⁰ While Marin provides the basic interpretations of Christians who affirm the LGBTQ+ identity from the Scriptures, the problems with those interpretations are numerous. For example, in the arguments Marin points out, the concept of exploitation is critical. Yet, exploitation does not seem to factor into any passage in the Old or New Testament. For example, Gagnon points out this missing characteristic in Leviticus 18 and 20:

There are no exceptions. One finds no specifications regarding age of either participant. Neither is there any mention of the exploitive character of the relationship. If homosexual actions were wrong primarily because they were exploitative, why would Lev 20:13 specify a penalty of death for both participants, the exploited as well as the exploiter?³¹

As Gagnon explains, exploitation is not a factor in the text. Ministers and theologians who hold this view are simply dodging the issue. By reading back on the biblical text the idea of exploitation, they try to make exploitation the issue instead of the sexual acts themselves that are overwhelmingly condemned by the Old and New Testaments. Exploitive sexual relationships in antiquity did take place, but the Bible does not address those relationships in Leviticus or Romans. The language of Romans 1:26-27, however, mutually condemns both male and female same-sex sexual behavior. The fact that Paul condemns specifically female same-sex sexual relationships in parallel with male same-sex sexual relationships refutes the exploitive sex view because exploitive female same-sex relationships were unheard of in the ancient world.³²

Another example of twisting the Scriptures is the way Vines approaches the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah from the New Testament perspective. For example, Vines does correctly assert that 2 Peter 2:7 and Jude 7 both mention Sodom, but he states, “Second Peter 2:7 says Lot was ‘greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked’ (ESV) in

³⁰ Marin, *Love Is an Orientation*, 73.

³¹ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 347.

³² Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 91.

Sodom and Gomorrah, but doesn't specify same-sex behavior.”³³ The key phrase is ἀσελγεία ἀναστροφῆς, which the ESV translates as “sensual conduct.” The type of conduct is sexual, and the only sexual conduct recorded in Genesis 19 that did not involve Lot was the failed rape of the angels. BDAG translates this specific occurrence of ἀσελγεία as “indecent conduct,” and every other occurrence in the New Testament involves some form of licentiousness.³⁴ The only contextual reference for the sensual conduct was the action of the men of the city. Furthermore, according to Genesis 19:4-5, the men of the city mistakenly assume the two angels were men when they called out to Lot in verse 5 and said, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them.” Since the men of the city thought the angels were men, this does constitute same-sex behavior. Gagnon does acknowledge that some scholars argue that the Hebrew verb for “know” used in this passage is only used in a sexual way fifteen other times out of a total of 943 occurrences in the Old Testament. However, the close context of Lot’s offer to give his two daughters who had “not known a man,” along with the strong parallel of the Levite’s concubine in Judges 19:22, argues for the sexual meaning.³⁵ Referencing Jude 7, Vines builds a case for a different understanding of “strange” or “different” flesh. He explains, “But the Greek phrase used in Jude 7 is *sarkos heteras*—literally, *other* or ‘different flesh.’ *Hetero*, of course is the prefix for words like *heterosexuality*, not homosexuality. Far from arguing that the men of Sodom pursued flesh too similar to their own, Jude indicts them for pursuing flesh that was too different.”³⁶ Again, Gagnon is correct that the crowd seems ignorant of the identity of the angels. He

³³ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 68.

³⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* ed. and trans. Fredrick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich [BDAG], 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), s.v. “ἀσελγεία.”

³⁵ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 73-74.

³⁶ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 69, emphasis original.

refutes Vines's view:

Since Gen 19:1-11 nowhere intimates that the men of Sodom were aware that the visitors were angels, or that the men desired to have sex with angels, this interpretation appears strained. A better understanding is that in their lust for sexual intercourse with other men, the men of Sodom inadvertently put themselves in the sacrilegious position of pursuing sexual intercourse with angels.³⁷

The text of Genesis 19 demonstrates that the men of the city of Sodom desired to have sexual relations with those they mistakenly identified as men.

Another example of twisting the Scriptures to argue that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality comes from John Boswell. The core of his argument involves Paul's use of the term ἀρσενοκοίτης in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. The ESV translates the term in both usages as "men who practice homosexuality." Boswell disagrees with this translation:

The second word, "ἀρσενοκοίται," is quite rare, and its application to homosexuality in particular is more understandable. The best evidence, however, suggests very strongly that it did not connote homosexuality to Paul or his contemporaries but meant "male prostitute" until well into the fourth century, after which it became confused with a variety of words for disapproved sexual activity and was often equated with homosexuality.³⁸

While Boswell is correct that occurrences of ἀρσενοκοίται are rare in the biblical text, the point is that the term is used in the biblical text and its context does inform meaning. For example, Gagnon detects that the meaning "men who practice homosexuality" in 1 Corinthians 6:9 is more likely due to its usage with μαλακοί. He argues that the vices in 1 Corinthians 6 are listed in pairs to form a chiasmatic structure.³⁹ Gagnon explains the effect of this pairing upon the meaning of ἀρσενοκοίται: "If adultery is paired with idolatry, then *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* constitute a pair of sexual sins distinct from adultery. Given such a pairing, our identification of *malakoi* with passive homosexual partners

³⁷ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 87-88.

³⁸ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), 107.

³⁹ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 316.

confirms the supposition that the term *arsenokoitai* refers to the active partners in homosexual intercourse.”⁴⁰ Boswell ignores the contextual pairing to offer alternative meanings more related to exploitative prostitution than to homosexual behavior.

The Danger of Gender Theory

Another component of the argument supporting the LGBTQ+ perspective on identity is the rise and spread of gender theory. This theory reaches into a variety of academic fields. Judith Butler, a professor of Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley, adopted this theory in her writings on literature, philosophy, and ethics. Instead of a binary concept of gender, Butler and the LGBTQ+ community argue that gender functions as a social construct that is chosen and performed by the individual regardless of biology. Butler describes this new concept of gender:

As a consequence, gender cannot be understood as a role which either expresses or disguises an interior “self,” whether that “self” is conceived as sexed or not. As performance which is performative, gender is an “act,” broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority. . . . Genders, then can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent.⁴¹

In this relativistic understanding of gender, gender can only be determined by the interior desires of the individual. It is only a “social fiction” projected or performed in society, and therefore has no evidential basis that can be detected externally. Furthermore, since gender theory is connected to other critical theories such as Queer Theory or Critical Race Theory, it creates a closed loop of argumentation that cannot be critiqued since any critique is automatically rejected as further evidence of oppression. Trueman analyzes the difficulty in critiquing this theory: “This is a wonderful idea. It allows every piece of evidence that might refute one’s theory to be transformed into further evidence of how deep and

⁴⁰ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 316.

⁴¹ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 528.

comprehensive the problem of oppression is.”⁴² Since many academic fields, such as linguistics, medicine, and education, have adopted this theory, the way language expresses gender has changed in two ways. First, when discussing gender, instead of being considered male or female at birth from chromosomes or genitalia, babies are now “assigned” gender at birth. However, this seems to only function as a placeholder until they can decide about their gender expression. Second, this theory has the potential to alter the common vernacular of the English language in a way that makes communication confusing. For example, two undergraduate students studying linguistics at the University of Tennessee summarize the history of what are called “gender-neutral pronouns.” They point out that “zie” and “hir” were at first accepted gender-neutral pronouns. However, the students found that these replacement pronouns derive from gendered pronouns. Therefore, some now recommend using Ne/nem/nir/ners/nemself where the “n” represents the concept of neutral.⁴³ Therefore, if people choose to identify as non-binary, they can also select a set of gender-neutral pronouns to express their gender identity. Once more, gender theory is nothing more than a development of expressive individualism’s idea that a person can invent, perform, or express their gender and sexuality apart from biology and the authority of God’s Word.

Because gender theory has influenced the academic disciplines involving language and education, the training of teachers and school administrators in American Universities has also experienced its influence. This influence in academic institutions explains how secondary schools have embraced gender theory. To shape the culture, advocates for gender theory and the new LGBTQ+ identities are pushing it at every level of education, from curricula content to administrative policies. Albert Mohler points to an

⁴² Carl R. Trueman, “Evangelicals and Race Theory,” *First Things*, February 1, 2021, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/02/evangelicals-and-race-theory>.

⁴³ Brandon Darr and Tyler Kibbey, “Pronouns and Thoughts on Neutrality: Gender Concerns in Modern Grammar,” *Pursuit* 7, no. 1 (March 2016): 75.

incident at a public elementary school in Washington, DC as an example. When a teacher employed by the school transitioned from male to female, the school e-mailed parents informing them that their children could address the teacher as Ms. and not Mr., as well as how to educate themselves and their children on this worldview.⁴⁴ Capturing the minds of the young and treating these identities as normative in this way will further aid in reinforcing the concept that sexuality and identity are one. However, expressive individualism's push for a new concept of identity impacts more than the understanding of gender and the education of children.

Another area of concern for evangelicals is that the LGBTQ+ community advocates for fewer restrictions on puberty-blocking hormones and gender reassignment surgery in teenagers and children. Where linguistics and the medical community overlap over gender theory involves the definition of "gender-affirming care." Two major medical associative bodies that have fully embraced gender theory are the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and the American Medical Association (AMA). In 2020, the APA posted its stance on gender theory and trans ideology on its website. The post was titled, "Position Statement on Treatment of Transgender (Trans) and Gender Diverse Youth."⁴⁵ Their position states that the APA "supports access to affirming and supportive treatment for trans and gender diverse youth and their families, including appropriate mental health services, and when indicated puberty suppression and medical transition

⁴⁴ R. Albert Mohler Jr., *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, & the Very Meaning of Right & Wrong* (Nashville: Nelson, 2015), 88-89. I use a different ordering of the acronym GLBT to stand for the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender identities.

⁴⁵ The American Psychiatric Association further defines "gender-affirming treatment": Gender-affirming treatment of trans and gender diverse youth who experience gender dysphoria due to the physical changes of puberty, may include suppression of puberty development with GnRH (gonadotropin releasing hormone) agonists, commonly referred to as 'puberty blockers.' Use of GnRH agonists, despite potential side effects (e.g., hot flashes, depression) can allow the adolescent a period of time, often several years, in which to further explore their gender identity and benefit from additional cognitive and emotional development. (The American Psychiatric Association, "Position Statement on Treatment of Transgender [Trans] and Gender Diverse Youth," July 2020, <https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/About-APA/Organization-Documents-Policies/Policies/Position-Transgender-Gender-Diverse-Youth.pdf>)

support.” The AMA has lobbied strongly against states that are passing restrictions on gender-affirming care, where that care can mean anything from hormone replacement therapy (puberty blockers) to gender reassignment surgery. In 2021, the AMA made their opposition to this type of legislation clear:

Unfortunately, if enacted, legislation of this kind could have tragic consequences. Transgender individuals are up to three times more likely than the general population to report or be diagnosed with mental health disorders, with as many as 41.5% reporting at least one diagnosis of a mental health or substance use disorder. Transgender minors also face a significantly heightened risk of suicide. But research has demonstrated that improved body satisfaction and self-esteem following the receipt of gender-affirming care is protective against poorer mental health and supports healthy relationships with parents and peers.⁴⁶

The AMA states that with improved body satisfaction from gender-affirming care, the risk of poor mental health goes down. There is, however, evidence that gender-affirming care does not help children and teens experiencing gender dysphoria. For example, England’s cutting-edge gender-affirming clinic for children known colloquially as Tavistock, is preparing to close. According to the Society for Evidence Based Gender Medicine (SEGM) and the National Health Service (NHS) of the UK, evidence of better outcomes for youth suffering from gender dysphoria post-sex reassignment surgery is debated and potentially dangerous. Despite many online articles touting the contrary, the SEGM states this about the NHS’s decision to close Tavistock and replace it with other smaller clinics:

NHS England stated that going forward, most English gender-dysphoric youth under age 18 will be treated in regular children’s hospitals by staff who take a whole-person, developmental approach to gender dysphoria, rather than treating it with invasive, risky, and often irreversible “gender-affirming” hormones and therapy. This came about following the UK’s systematic reviews of evidence that found that puberty blocking medications do not improve mental health of youth, while mental

⁴⁶ This is a state advocacy update of the AMA. The American Psychiatric Association, “AMA Fights to Protect Health Care for Transgender Patients,” March 26, 2021, <https://www.ama-assn.org/print/pdf/node/66096>.

health benefits of cross-sex hormones are highly uncertain and come with significant risks.⁴⁷

There are two possible explanations for the closing of Tavistock and this change in policy. First, good evidence suggests that “gender-affirming care” is harmful to children and teens. Second, since the effects of some forms of “gender-affirming care” are permanent, and if those procedures take place on children who cannot give informed consent, then those institutions that performed the procedures will be open to massive legal entanglements when post-op adults experience regret. Furthermore, studies now show results on those who chose to detransition from their non-biological gender. In 2021, Elie Vandebussche surveyed 237 people who had transitioned medically or socially and then detransitioned. Her study showed results that do not fit the narrative of the LGBTQ+ community or those influenced by gender theory:

The most common reported reason for detransitioning was realized that my gender dysphoria was related to other issues (70%). The second one was health concerns (62%), followed by transition did not help my dysphoria (50%), found alternatives to deal with my dysphoria (45%), unhappy with social changes (44%), and change in political views (43%). At the very bottom of the list are: lack of support from social surroundings (13%), financial concerns (12%) and discrimination (10%).⁴⁸

The results of this survey demonstrate that, at least for this group sample, gender dysphoria did not subside after transitioning, and that dysphoria has a variety of causes. Gender theory, therefore, has pushed the medical community to recommend “gender-affirming treatment” that is arguably harmful to kids, teens, and adults.

Suggested Paths Forward

Since the LGBTQ+ community has successfully influenced culture to adopt an antibiblical view of sexuality and gender, the church must minister, share the gospel, and

⁴⁷ Society for Evidence Based Gender Medicine, “2022 Year-End-Summary: A Remarkable Year for Safeguarding of Vulnerable Youth,” January 1, 2023, <https://segm.org/gender-medicine-developments-2022-summary>

⁴⁸ Elie Vandebussche, “Detransition-Related Needs and Support: A Cross-Sectional Online Survey,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 69, no. 9 (July 29, 2022): 1606. In addition to the above-mentioned findings, 45 percent of the respondents reported that they felt they were not adequately informed about the risks and effects of gender-affirming treatments.

push them toward the counter-cultural truth in God’s Word. However, in a world where animosity and outrage are high, how can the church begin to make more progress than in the past? At least three steps, if done consistently by churches and individual Christians, will cost the church in many ways and will also make a difference in witnessing to the LGBTQ+ community.

The first step is seeking to form true friendships with the LGBTQ+ community through asking questions and listening. This type of engagement through questions and listening is the way that Ken and Floy Smith reached out to Rosaria Butterfield. Initially, Ken simply responded via letter to an article Rosaria had written critiquing the Promise Keepers organization. He invited her to call him. Ken and his wife invited her to dinner, and it led to a genuine time of dialogue without a scripted gospel presentation or cursory invitation to church.⁴⁹ Pastor Ken did want these things for Rosaria, but he demonstrated the much-needed skill of understanding how timing shapes the authenticity of a friendship. Denny Burk and Heath Lambert articulate this step clearly, “We should befriend our same-sex-attracted neighbors even if they are not Christians.”⁵⁰

The next logical step to engaging this community after seeking friendships is that believers must rediscover their call to love their neighbors through practicing counter-cultural hospitality. In today’s polarized world, inviting others into a home to share in table fellowship can have a massive influence. Several aspects of fellowship help believers minister to those in LGBTQ+ contexts. First, it is constantly portrayed in the media that anyone who opposes the LGBTQ+ lifestyle must hate that community. It does not help that thoughtless Christians have reinforced this idea with careless words. In 2022, NBC News reported that a pastor of a Texas Baptist church made startling remarks in a sermon about LGBTQ+ people. Even though organizations such as NBC News and

⁴⁹ Butterfield, *Secret Thoughts*, 8-11.

⁵⁰ Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible Says about Sexual Orientation and Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 113.

the Southern Poverty Law Center have their own biases, the article states this as their primary evidence of hatred: “A Texas Baptist church—labeled an ‘anti-LGBT hate group’ by the Southern Poverty Law Center—has caused outrage after a pastor said that gay people should be ‘lined up against the wall and shot in the back of the head.’”⁵¹ It will be difficult to gain a hearing to share the gospel with people in the LGBTQ+ community if they think believers would just as soon see them dead. Through hospitality, however, believers can prove that an execution type of attitude is not prevalent among Christians. This crucial practice of hospitality proves that the gospel is available to all types of sinners, not just those who think or vote like evangelicals. If believers desire to minister to the LGBTQ+ community in such a way that people transition out of that lifestyle, then they will have to become comfortable with interacting with people who are different from them. Joon-Sik Park explains how the gospel witness of evangelicals must cross these different barriers of comfort and can be used powerfully for evangelism:

The very credibility of our witness to the gospel is at risk when our ministry of evangelism fails to be boundary-crossing, when it is limited to those who are culturally or racially similar to ourselves. The true nature of the gospel is contradicted when our witness becomes selective and does not reach past racial, ethnic, and other boundaries established by society.⁵²

Hospitality of the sort mentioned by Park evokes a different response rather than calling for summary executions of LGBTQ+ people. Believers who demonstrate hospitality show that the gospel can cross any socio-economic, political, or even theological barrier, assuming evangelism takes place. How each family or church practices hospitality varies greatly. Sometimes it involves making people feel welcome at a corporate service, but an even more effective approach is inviting them into homes. Rosaria Butterfield talks about this transformation of the home into a place of evangelism and hospitality in her journey when

⁵¹ Miniyvonne Burke, “Texas Pastor Says Gay People Should Be ‘Shot in the Back of the Head’ in Shocking Sermon,” *NBC News*, June 9, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-news/texas-pastor-says-gay-people-shot-back-head-shocking-sermon-rcna32748>.

⁵² Joon-Sik Park, “Hospitality as Context for Evangelism,” *Missiology* 30 (July 2002): 387.

she states, “Those who live out radically ordinary hospitality see their homes not as theirs at all but as God’s gift to use for the furtherance of his kingdom. They open doors; they seek out the underprivileged. They know the gospel comes with a house key.”⁵³ She demonstrates that if evangelism is going to happen, it will involve looking at the homes of believers as welcoming kingdom outposts. It is messy because hospitality is not just about being welcoming to those in society with similar opinions to the views of typical believers. Hospitality involves seeking out and welcoming those on the fringes of society. Jesus himself emphasized that the marginalized needed hospitality because it was a way of serving him. After telling two parables about the final judgment, Matthew 25:31-39 records Jesus teaching again about his return in judgment. After separating the sheep from the goats, Jesus mentions those on his right gaining entrance into the kingdom because they fed the hungry, gave water to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, and visited those who were sick or in prison.⁵⁴ When those gaining entrance into the kingdom ask the king when they performed these actions, he answers their question in verse 40: “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’” Christopher Smith and John Pattison capture a secondary application of this passage by pointing to the nature of this moment of hospitality: “‘You did it unto me’ is a stunning picture of the upside-down kingdom. The world is God’s and everything in it. We live by divine hospitality. And yet we are given the opportunity—even the command—to offer hospitality to God by caring for the people who are the most vulnerable.”⁵⁵ Given the vulnerability of individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ to the negative discipleship of the world, believers must engage

⁵³ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 11.

⁵⁴ Crossway Bibles, *ESV: Study Bible: English Standard Version*, 15353-54.

⁵⁵ C. Christopher Smith and John Pattison, *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 198.

them with their hearts, their homes, and the truth of God's Word.

The second step that remains critical in the church's ability to reach people in the LGBTQ+ community involves the ability to listen well and respond with convictional kindness from the Word of God. Admittedly, in the current climate in the United States, this is a difficult task. Believers, however, can practice hospitality and listen to others with a view drastically from their own. Believers can also respond and persuade in Christ-like ways. Russell Moore put it this way,

Convictional kindness means loving people enough to tell them the truth, and to tell ourselves the truth about them. Those who oppose us aren't (necessarily) stupid. They're not any more hell-deserving than we are, apart from our rescue by the grace of God in Christ. So we don't just talk about them; we talk to them. And we don't just talk to them; we plead with them. We seek to persuade. Preachiness never changed anybody's mind. Preaching, on the other hand, can change everything.⁵⁶

Three implications of Moore's statement provide even further hope for the evangelical future in reaching the LGBTQ community with the gospel.

The first implication for the church from Moore's statement is that the church cannot afford to take the approach of many mainline denominations in updating the faith to accommodate, bless, and perform same-sex unions. The church also cannot afford to ignore the Bible's teaching on gender. Part of witnessing for Christ means telling inconvenient truths. Like any relationship, this will take time; it takes commitment. Butterfield provides key insight from her own conversion story out of a lesbian and atheistic lifestyle. She relates that Pastor Ken and his wife, Floy, did not just stick to a gospel script with her. They did not even confront her with the gospel on her first visit. Instead, they listened and conversed. They got to know her as a person.⁵⁷ At the end of her first visit to a Christian pastor's house, who challenged an article she composed critiquing a Christian men's gathering, she felt different than what she expected. She

⁵⁶ Russell Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 200.

⁵⁷ Butterfield, *Secret Thoughts*, 11.

states, “They were willing to walk the long journey to me in Christian compassion.”⁵⁸

The second aspect of Moore’s statement that gives evangelicals hope is the highlighting of how believers engage in conversation. Believers must walk a fine line when engaging with LGBTQ+ people. On the one hand, believers need to be patient in addressing these issues. Confronting LGBTQ+ people on their non-biblical gender or sexuality when first introduced to them is not going to foster the kind of relationship that could lead to change. Allberry points to this type of blunder of some believers:

“Sometimes there is the danger of Christians thinking that a gay couple needs to be confronted with their sexuality almost the moment they walk through the door; that this needs to be talked about immediately and the couple told what the Bible’s teaching is on the whole issue. That is simply not the case.”⁵⁹ While Allberry is correct that believers should not immediately confront non-biblical identities when meeting someone, there is an equal temptation to simply not bring up the issue at all. If not discussed, then the church has simply sold out to the new sexual identity and a non-biblical definition of morality. Mohler comments on this shift: “Such a shift would mean a turn from the authority of Scripture to a new authority—the authority of the new morality. Moreover, it would mean declaring to our friends and neighbors that their sin is not actually sin. It would mean disregarding their need for a Savior.”⁶⁰ Therefore, for the LGBTQ+ community to know their sin and their need for Christ, they do need the biblical truth about sexuality and gender. Furthermore, Allberry warns that churches must be open to talking about these issues while simultaneously not talking about them constantly out of concern for reinforcing the concept that a person’s identity and sexuality are one.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Butterfield, *Secret Thoughts*, 11.

⁵⁹ Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, Questions Christians Ask (Purcellville, VA: Good Book, 2013), 64.

⁶⁰ Mohler, *We Cannot Be Silent*, 169.

⁶¹ Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, 67.

Bringing up these issues with the right timing leads to the third aspect of Moore's original statement that helps to chart a path forward. Believers must engage LGBTQ+ people with a spirit of humility. Whether intentional or not, straight Christians often give the impression that their sins are less egregious than those who struggle with same-sex attraction or gender issues. Sam Allberry recognizes the need for humility as he has dialogued with many LGBTQ+ students on college campuses around the world. Describing the way he speaks about the gospel to LGBTQ+ college students, Allberry states, "Again, I'm not going to say to someone what I can't say to everyone. I'm trying to show them the gospel isn't unfair. It has the same humbling, challenging message to all of us that will work its way out in slightly different ways. But I wanted them to know that actually, the ground around the cross is level ground."⁶² Allberry's view reflects Moore's concern that when believers plead with LGBTQ+ people, it should not come with an air of spiritual superiority.

Conclusion

By embracing several new concepts of identity, sexuality, and gender, many today have rejected God's authority in such a way that they harm their physical bodies and their souls. A new concept of identity, the compromise of many churches and denominations on these issues, and the spread of gender theory have continued to accelerate the impact of the ongoing sexual revolution. With the right balance of grace, biblical truth, and humility, believers can prayerfully and thoughtfully seek out opportunities to engage LGBTQ+ people. Engaging LGBTQ+ people will require patience and humility on behalf of believers, but also it will require not compromising on what Scripture teaches about sexuality and gender.

⁶² Sam Allberry, "How to Navigate Conversations about Sexual Identity," *Desiring God*, July 18, 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-to-navigate-conversations-about-sexual-identity>.

CHAPTER 4

MINISTRY PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter will describe how I implemented my project in my specific ministry context. I will provide an overview of the preparation necessary and an overview of the content from each of the seven sessions of lecture. The purpose of the project was to equip the members of Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, with a biblical understanding of gender and sexuality through a discipleship course focused on biblical sexuality. The first goal was to assess the congregation's understanding of biblical sexuality and gender by means of a theological survey. The second goal was to develop a curriculum on biblical sexuality and gender. The third goal was to increase the participants' knowledge of biblical sexuality and gender through implementing the curriculum. I began teaching the curriculum on Wednesday, June 7, 2023, and the study concluded on Wednesday, August 16, 2023. Even though the curriculum only had seven sessions, implementation to longer due to church-wide events already on the calendar.

Preparation

Preparation for the project involved three steps. The first step focused on the promotion of the seven-week study to the congregation. I entitled the study "Navigating the Ongoing Sexual Revolution," and posted flyers around the church buildings in high-traffic areas. I also advertised the upcoming study via the church's social media accounts. Additional reminders about the upcoming class were made through the printing and emailing of the church's weekly newsletter and prayer sheet. The other primary avenue for promoting the study involved a personal invitation from the pulpit on Sunday mornings at the conclusion of corporate worship services.

The second step of preparation included reading and researching LGBTQ+ issues and biblical views of gender and sexuality. My research consisted of four phases. In the first phase, I traced the philosophical underpinnings that led to the modern conception of sexual identity that is championed by LGBTQ+ people. This research spanned a large period in history, all the way from Enlightenment philosophers to the college faculties of today. In the second phase, I wanted to examine what the Bible teaches about gender and sexuality. Examining these subjects in Scripture required careful and balanced exegesis from different passages in the Old and the New Testaments. I benefited greatly from online remote access to Southern Seminary's library, specifically with its reference works and commentaries. For the third phase, I needed to research topics such as gender identity, gender expression, lesbianism, gay sexual identity, bisexuality, and the idea of sexual identity in general. For these more specialized LGBTQ+ issues, and to obtain physical access to specific works, I utilized the library at Johnson University. Johnson is a multi-campus Christian University with a location in South Knoxville, Tennessee. They graciously allowed me to obtain checkout privileges, as well as use their reference section. My fourth phase of research focused heavily on transgenderism because I was not familiar with it. I used these different resources to structure seven lectures around 50-55 minutes in length, which allowed for time for questions and answers at the end.

The third step of preparation for the project was to further recruit participants. Since I am the primary teaching pastor of Mt. Olive, I made this class the sole study that the church offered to adults on Wednesday evenings. This aided me in securing a large enough group of voluntary participants to survey and compare the data both before and after the course.

Implementation

Goal 1: Assessing Understanding

The first goal of the project was to assess the congregation's understanding of

biblical sexuality and gender by means of a theological survey. My survey had three parts. Part 1 assessed the spiritual background and general theological beliefs of the participants. For example, I asked participants if they considered themselves Christians in the first question. I also asked participants in the first section if they felt comfortable engaging in gender identity issues, as well as if they understood the cornucopia of new terms related to LGBTQ+ identities.¹

The second part of the survey served a dual purpose. First, the survey utilized a six-point Likert model of thirteen statements to assess the understanding of the congregation on gender and sex. The second purpose was that statements were meant to capture the congregation's views on what influenced their thoughts on sexuality and gender, as well as their views on specific issues such as sex reassignment surgery and transgenderism. For example, using a six-point scale indicating a range of agreement from strongly disagree to strongly agree, I asked participants their level of agreement on statements such as, "Social media has exerted some influence on my sexuality," and "Gender is a fluid concept."

The third part of the survey assesses the congregation's views on what the Bible teaches on gender, sexuality, marriage, and sin. In this section, the statements focused on the specific teachings of Scripture. For example, question 4 of part 3 said, "The Bible teaches that people are born gay." Individuals could check, yes, no, or unsure. While I made statements about homosexuality and gender, I also assessed their views through statements regarding cohabitation, the ability of sexual desires to change, and the nature of Scripture.

Goal 2: Curriculum Development

The second goal of the project was to develop a curriculum on biblical sexuality and gender. I broke down the material into seven lectures and included time for questions

¹ See appendix 1.

at the end. My first lecture explained the rise of the LGBTQ+ movement by pointing to the theological, philosophical, and cultural decisions that served as a foundation for the beliefs of the LGBTQ+-affirming community. I found this lecture the most difficult to prepare because of the heavy nature of the material. I did not want to lose my audience by delving too deeply into the philosophy behind the sexual revolution, but at the same time, it is important enough to at least get an overview.

The next two lectures involved highlighting what Scripture teaches about gender and sexuality respectively. These lectures relied heavily upon the Old Testament, especially Genesis 1:26-28 and Genesis 2:5-25. These two passages were widely more contested by scholars in biblical studies than I had realized. They also contained more teaching on gender than what I previously understood. When it came to explaining biblical sexuality, I relied upon passages across the canon, including the Pentateuch, the Gospels, and the Epistles. One difficulty I encountered in this lecture was simply trying to deselect enough material to fit the timetable of the class. The amount of information was difficult to cut down to a manageable level.

The fourth lecture involved explaining the modern concept of sexual orientation, and how believers should understand lesbian and gay sexual identities. Throughout the curriculum, I knew I needed to focus not only on presenting information that demonstrated how sexual identity conflicted with the Bible, but also on explaining the opposing view. The more I prepared for these lectures, the more I became convinced that I needed to devote more time to two aspects. First, I wanted to understand the origin of the identities, and second, I wanted to argue that the concept of sexual orientation was not helpful.

The fifth lecture focused on bisexuality and transgenderism. This lecture proved difficult to keep within the appropriate class length as well. Critical to this lecture was a discussion on gender dysphoria, its different types, and its potential relationship to transgenderism. Though not all trans-identifying people state they suffer from gender dysphoria, a significant number do report suffering from this condition. Before my

research, I had no idea how many teens, especially teenage girls, suffer from rapid-onset gender dysphoria (ROGD). This lecture also described the ways that gender-affirming care can irreversibly alter the physical body.

The sixth lecture involved explaining the term ally, and the power that culture has given to the LGBTQ+ community to exclude those in the corporate world who oppose their agenda. I gave specific examples of instances where individuals had lost their jobs for failing to platform or agree with an LGBTQ+-affirming position.

The final lecture was the most difficult to structure in the total project. Finding and discussing examples of where the church had done poorly in trying to reach LGBTQ+ communities was straightforward. The examples were numerous. Pointing to where the church had done well was also straightforward. The church continues to hold out biblical hope for those struggling with SSA or transgenderism involving real testimonies from those who have experienced salvation and have rejected the LGBTQ+ narrative on identity. By far the most difficult question I asked and discussed was what the church needed to do to prepare to reach out to the LGBTQ+ community in the future.

Once I finalized the curriculum, I gave it to a panel of three men who have significant experience in teaching the Bible at our church. I let them examine the curriculum and provide constructive feedback. I also asked for feedback throughout the teaching of the course. One member did offer some constructive criticism in some personal comments after the first teaching session. He suggested that I make some fill-in-the-blank sections in my handouts shorter to make the handouts easier to use. Since many of the participants felt overwhelmed by the sheer amount of new terms, I completely agreed with his criticism and made the appropriate adjustment in the subsequent sessions.

Goal 3: Increase Participant Knowledge

The third goal of the project was to increase the participants' knowledge of biblical sexuality and gender through implementing the curriculum. The class met every Wednesday evening from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. with 20 to 25 people in attendance. On some

occasions, the class was moved back one week due to church-wide events or mission trips. Because of the number of participants, I determined the best location that allowed for appropriate space and the use of tables was the fellowship hall of the church. I began each session with general church-wide announcements and highlighted any major prayer needs listed on our prayer sheet. After each lecture, I budgeted 5 to 7 minutes to answer questions related to the lecture material. Furthermore, if needed, I had the previous week's lecture guide available as a hard copy or a digital copy for those who may have missed a session.

Lecture 1. On Wednesday, June 7, I began this teaching series by surveying participants regarding their thoughts on gender and sexuality. After collecting the surveys, I delivered the first lecture entitled “How Did We Get Here? The Rise of the LGBTQ+ Identity.” I demonstrated the philosophical and cultural influences that have led to the prominence of LGBTQ+ identities. In this first lecture, I had four major emphases. First, the rise of the LGBTQ+ identity and new theories on gender derives from a new and anti-biblical definition of self. Second, the way culture and technology have shaped sexuality today has enhanced the spread of these new identities. This section involved a significant discussion on the influence of social media on identity and sexuality. Third, LGBTQ+ identities and new theories on gender have become culturally normative by standing against the institution of the family. Fourth, a widespread rejection of biblical authority to regulate gender and sexuality continues to promote these sinful identities. As a part of this lecture, I also explained how even some churches and believers compromise or reject biblical authority on gender and sexuality.

Lecture 2. On Wednesday, June 14, I gave the second lecture entitled “Biblical Gender: What the Bible Teaches and What We Can't Assume.” In this lecture, I sought to explain what the Bible teaches about gender. I again held to four primary ideas with various secondary applications. First, I examined Genesis 1:26-28 and noted that the first principle about gender must include that God, as our sovereign Creator, has the right

to define and restrict gender. Second, I demonstrated how Genesis 2:5-8, 18-25 teaches that God created only binary gender and subsequently defined the institution of marriage as existing only between those two complementary and opposite genders. Third, I examined three texts with one common theme: Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, and Deuteronomy 22:5. These specific laws from the Pentateuch dealt with God's prohibition of homosexuality, as well as a law that rejects transvestitism. Fourth, I lectured on Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7. I argued in these passages for a biblical understanding of gender roles inside the home that involves submission of wives to husbands and husbands treating their wives with gentility, but in no way that supports any form of abuse.

Lecture 3. Because of the church-wide emphasis on VBS during the week of June 21, a family-focused mission trip the week of June 28, and the proximity of Wednesday, July 5, to a major holiday, I resumed my third lecture on Wednesday, July 12. I entitled the lecture given that evening "Biblical Sexuality: Sex Is a Gift, but Not an Identity." To describe a biblical understanding of sexuality, I focused on three major ideas from various Scriptures. First, sexuality is intrinsically a creation issue. For this idea, I walked through Genesis 2:18-24 again and examined God's creation of the complementary sexual relationship between Adam and Eve. Second, sexuality is clearly defined, and its boundaries are delineated in the Bible for our good. For my point on the boundaries of sexuality, I taught about God's prohibition of adultery in Exodus 20:14, as well as Jesus's expansion of the Decalogue and this prohibition from Matthew 5:27-30. From this passage, I also discussed why the inability to control sexual attraction does not excuse a sinful desire. Third, sexuality does not comprise the whole of one's identity. To explain the complex nature of identity, I gave the congregation nine factors that comprise

identity, which are altered when a person comes to faith in Christ.²

Lecture 4. On Wednesday, July 19, I delivered the fourth lecture, entitled “Lesbian/Gay Sexual Identity: Why the Current Conversation on Sexuality Reminds Me of Ricky Bobby.” I focused the content on two questions. The first question had two parts: what is sexual orientation, and is it a helpful category? Under the first question, I spent a significant amount of time defining terms such as sexual orientation, cisgender, non-binary gender, gender dysphoria, and others. Though I in no way endorse the curriculum as it is marketed for children and teaches contrary to the Bible, a helpful resource to explain the concepts of gender identity versus gender expression was “The Genderbread Person.”³ The second major question I discussed in the curriculum was what do people who identify as gay or lesbian do with passages that speak about homosexuality in the Bible? To answer, I pointed to three different strategies. First, many affirming believers and even non-believers begin by rejecting the authority of God’s Word. Second, another common strategy is to frame the question to the Scriptures in a way that makes it sound like the Bible does not address these issues. For example, some argue that since antiquity did not conceive of the modern concept of sexual orientation, perhaps excessive desire or exploitative relationships are what the Bible condemns. While a part of this argument is true — the Bible does not speak of sexual orientation or transgenderism in the way current culture does—it does not follow that the Bible has nothing to say about gender and sexuality. Third, more affirming scholars twist the meaning and interpretation of texts that typically deal with homosexuality. One of the most common is to argue that Sodom and Gomorrah were not punished for

² Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Who God Says You Are: A Christian Understanding of Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 36-41.

³ To access this resource, the website for this curriculum is Sam Killermann, “The Genderbread Person, version 3,” accessed July 24, 2023, <https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2015/03/the-genderbread-person-v3/>.

homosexuality, but rather for inhospitality and gang rape. Again, while a lack of hospitality and gang rape are condemned by the Bible, I noted that Jude argues that the sinful homosexual behavior of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah was a primary reason the towns were punished.

Lecture 5. I delivered the fifth session on Wednesday, July 26, entitled “Bisexual and Transgender Identity.” I arranged the content into three main ideas. First, I defined and described bisexuality and transgenderism. As a part of defining transgenderism, I discussed the definition from the American Psychological Association. This definition connected back to the first lecture on philosophical influences because it uses the language of “sex assigned at birth.” A common theme that ran throughout my lectures that also surfaced at this moment is how much the new concepts of LGBTQ+ identities have shaped modern language. Second, I attempted to describe the possible origins and consequences of bisexuality and transgenderism. As a part of this discussion, I explored the different types of gender dysphoria that plague some individuals. Another major area of discussion was how gender-affirming care could include everything from cross-sex hormone therapy to sex reassignment surgery. I noted the potential legal ramifications of these treatments occurring on minors, as well as the painful and potentially irreversible consequences of the treatments. Third, I also strived to offer thoughts on how believers can better engage this community for Christ. Critical to that discussion was pushing participants to take their time and get to know someone who identifies as bi or transgender. I also pointed out how believers can quickly lose any chance of a relationship by using thoughtless or cruel comments. As a part of examining offensive statements, I also discussed the ethical ramifications of using a person’s preferred pronouns. Furthermore, to apply the discussion on reaching the bi and trans community to a practical ministry scenario, we looked at complex questions around detransitioning from a trans identity. To conclude the lecture, I focused on the hope for someone who identifies as bisexual or transgender.

Lecture 6. On Wednesday, August 2, I gave the sixth lecture of the series, entitled “LGBTQ+ Cultural Influence: The Powers of the Ally and Cultural Exclusion.” I opened this session by discussing the definition of an ally. My second focus involved examples of their influence on the culture. I mentioned organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign, The American Civil Liberties Union, and others. I noted their influence not just in the corporate world but also in the realm of legislation. I pointed to the consequences of cancel culture when the ideals of the LGBTQ+ agenda are opposed. Part of this agenda involved explaining the concept of microaggression and how its definition seemed based solely upon the changing feelings of the individual offended.

Lecture 7. I was unable to have class on Wednesday, August 9, due to a churchwide mini-golf event, so the final lecture and participant survey occurred on Wednesday, August 16. I focused on where the church had made mistakes in dealing with LGBTQ+ people, where the church is striving to respond well, and some ideas that should shape the response of the church in the future. In terms of mistakes made, I explored thoughtless and compassionless statements made by churches and individuals. I also looked at the controversial nature of reparative/conversion therapy. Furthermore, I included a discussion on how the reinforcement of non-biblical gender stereotypes could further push people toward transgenderism. Where the church has responded well involved platforming people who can give testimony from personal experience that Christ met them in their struggles. Notably, not all who reject LGBTQ+ identities experienced a change in their sexual desires. I ended with an open-ended question about what changes the church needs to make to minister well to people in the ongoing sexual revolution. My final step of the project was to resurvey participants using the same diagnostic survey utilized at the beginning of the course.

Conclusion

Implementing this ministry project to teach the members of Mt. Olive a biblical perspective on gender and sexuality was a challenging process. Creating a survey to capture the understanding and views of the congregation took time and effort. Creating the survey, while intense, paled in comparison to designing a curriculum on such a broad subject matter. Several sessions proved personal for some members as they had friends or family who identified as LGBTQ+. Teaching the curriculum and responding to the questions it sparked provided the greatest sense of fulfillment because I desired to help members both understand and pursue LGBTQ+ people for the cause of Christ.

CHAPTER 5

MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION

In every evangelical church around the globe, issues of gender and sexuality will require biblical teaching and intentional relationship-building to reach LGBTQ+ people for the glory of God. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Paul states the serious nature of these issues: “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” A person giving themselves over to heterosexual sin, homosexual sin, greed, or anything that God declares as sinful creates separation from God. Paul, however, goes on to share that people do not have to remain in their sin: “And such were some of you. 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” (6:11). In many churches, parents and others are struggling with how to respond when family or friends share that they are adopting a non-biblical concept of gender identity or sexual identity. Yet Paul describes the hope for churches, parents, and friends seeking to witness to those in the LGBTQ+ community, which was the driving impulse behind this project.

The members of Mt. Olive Baptist church have not only experienced their children, teens, and friends struggling with gender and sexual issues, but they also needed to feel equipped to teach and defend what the Bible says. I wanted the members to have a biblical understanding of these issues not for harsh condemnation, but in order to help those who are struggling. Because many parents, grandparents, and friends feel discouraged or helpless about how to engage their families and friends, I developed a discipleship curriculum that covered what the Bible teaches on gender and sexuality. I

hoped that the curriculum would help members feel confident about what the Bible says and prepared to engage people who hold views contrary to what the Bible teaches.

I will begin this chapter by evaluating whether the ministry project fulfilled its stated purpose. To accomplish this evaluation, I will examine each of the project goals to see if they were met. After examining the goals, I will highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the project. To conclude, I will state what I would do differently and make some theological and personal reflections about what I learned throughout the development and implementation of the project.

Evaluation of Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the members of Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, with a biblical understanding of gender and sexuality through a discipleship course focused on biblical sexuality. The project's purpose derived from the anxiety and experience of parents and other adults whose children, other relatives, or friends identified as LGBTQ+. Three passages of Scripture informed my purpose: Genesis 1:26-28, Matthew 22:34-40, and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

Equipping the believers at Mt. Olive Baptist Church to engage with LGBTQ+ people began with Genesis 1:26-28 because gender and sexuality are intrinsically creation issues. A faithful exegesis of this passage demonstrates that God created humanity with binary gender. After the fall, the concept of identity, gender, and humanity's understanding of sexuality, as well as our physical bodies, became influenced by sin. This explains the ultimate source of same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria as consequences of the fall. Furthermore, Genesis 1 links the physically created body to the image of God. To embrace same-sex attraction or genderfluid identities is to reject God's authority in the way he created humanity. By adopting same-sex relationships or transgender ideologies people harm their souls and bodies by embracing sin and physically altering their bodies in ways that sometimes cannot be reversed. In addition, the creation mandate to fill and subdue the earth is impossible for any other relationship configuration apart

from heterosexuality. For believers to represent what the Bible teaches about gender and sexuality, they must connect gender and sexuality with creation.

Because Mt. Olive members strive to obey the Lord, another text that informed my purpose was Matthew 22:34-40. In this example, the Sadducees failed to trip Jesus up in his words and so the Pharisees made their attempt. They fail when Jesus summarizes the law by saying they should love God with their entire being. Then, in verse 39, he says, “And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

One of the most important realities that believers at Mt. Olive or any church can discover is that LGBTQ+ people or people who struggle with SSA are already in their lives. They may not have told anyone, or they may flaunt their gender/sexual identity, but most individuals know of someone in the LGBTQ+ community. The idea of having LGBTQ+ neighbors makes sense given that the most recent Gallup poll states that the rate of adults in the US identifying as LGBT remained the same as in 2021, at 7.2 percent.¹ This project was meant not only to determine how the Bible applies to these issues but also to examine ways Christians can better love and serve their LGBTQ+ neighbors. By educating themselves on what the Bible says about gender and sexuality, and by learning what LGBTQ+ people believe about these subjects, Mt. Olive members can compassionately engage them for the purpose of seeing them come to Christ.

The final Scripture that influenced the purpose of this project came from the apostle Paul. First Corinthians 6:11, though considered a “clobber passage” meant to harm LGBTQ+ individuals by some, contains the greatest hope for any sinner: “And such were some of you. 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.” In this text, Paul holds out a certain hope for any type of sexual sin or sin of any category. Transformation is not just possible but certain for those who are justified in Christ. Granted, the text does not delve

¹ Gallup Inc, “U.S. LGBT Identification Steady at 7.2%,” Gallup.com, February 22, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/470708/lgbt-identification-steady.aspx>.

into all the effects that justification and sanctification may bring, but some of the Corinthians have been transformed by the power of the gospel. Change in the life of someone who identifies as LGBTQ+ is not just possible, but change is sure for those who come to Christ. Because I partially met my goals, I feel that my project accomplished its purpose.

Evaluation of Goals

I aimed to equip members with a biblical understanding so that they would feel more prepared to engage their LGBTQ+ neighbors in South Knoxville. The project included three goals: (1) assess the congregation's understanding of biblical sexuality and gender by means of a theological survey, (2) develop a curriculum on biblical sexuality and gender, and (3) increase the participants' knowledge of biblical sexuality and gender through implementing the curriculum.

Goal 1: Assess the Congregation

The first goal intended to assess the congregation's understanding of biblical sexuality and gender by means of a survey taken by the participants before the implementation of the project.² To fulfill this goal successfully, I determined that twenty completed surveys would provide an accurate cross-section of the congregation's beliefs because that was the approximate average attendance of a Wednesday night class. Before the first session of the curriculum, I collected twenty-one completed surveys. The data gleaned from the pre-survey indicated some confusion and a lack of comfort in engaging LGBTQ+ identities. From the first part of the survey, 100 percent of the participants considered themselves Christians, but only 42.8 percent of those surveyed indicated that they felt well-equipped to engage in gender identity issues (see Table 1). Another 28.5 percent answered that they were unsure. Ironically, not long after this survey was taken

² See appendix 1.

and the study began, Mt. Olive experienced its first transgender student attending Vacation Bible School. If the congregation indicated that they felt uncomfortable dealing with gender identity issues, then reaching that particular student who identified as transgender may prove difficult. Another question from part 1 of the survey that yielded significant data was a question about the terms gender dysphoria, cisgender, transgender, LGBTQ+, and non-binary. Of those surveyed before the course, 47.6 percent indicated that they understood the terms. The final question in part 1 that produced telling results came when I asked if the participants felt equipped to defend a biblical perspective on gender and sexuality. Only 67 percent of participants indicated “yes.” Uncertainty about engaging in gender identity discussions, confusion surrounding language in those discussions, and lack of confidence in defending a biblical perspective on gender and sexuality validated the need for a study on these issues.

Table 1. MOBC survey, part 1

Survey Question	Yes	No	Unsure
1. Do you consider yourself a Christian?	21	0	0
4. Do you feel that your are well equipped to engage gender identity issues?	9	6	6
5. Do you understand the terms gender dysphoria, cisgender, transgender, LGBTQ+, and non- binary?	10	8	3

For part 2 of the survey, I utilized a six-point Likert model of statements with the dual purposes of understanding the congregation’s perspectives on gender and sex, as well as highlighting what influenced their thoughts on these issues. Statements from this section included, “Sex reassignment surgery is an attack on the image of God within the individual,” and “Gender is assigned at birth.”

The third part of the survey yielded results consistent with what I expected, except for the final statement on the Bible teaching that sexual desires do not change. Of the participants, 57 percent answered “yes,” 28.5 percent answered “no,” and 14 percent remained unsure. Since more than half of the participants answered “yes” to this statement,

I argued that Scripture does teach the possibility of a change in sexual desires, but it does not guarantee it (see Table 2). Since I collected 21 pre-class surveys and 21 post-class surveys, I concluded that I successfully met the first goal, which was to assess the congregation’s understanding of biblical sexuality and gender by means of a survey.

Table 2. MOBC survey, part 3

Survey Question	Yes	No	Unsure
15. The Bible teaches that sexual desires do not change.	12	6	3

Goal 2: Develop a Curriculum

Developing the curriculum proved a good challenge. After structuring all seven lectures and teaching the course itself, I asked my three-member panel of Bible teachers from our church to evaluate both the curriculum and the course as a whole. On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 indicated insufficient and 4 indicated exemplary, I asked the panel to evaluate the course and curriculum in four categories: biblical accuracy, scope, pedagogy, and practicality.³ I also considered the 1 to 4 scale to have the following numerical values:

4 = 100 percent, 3 = 90 percent, 2 = 80 percent, 1 = 70 percent. For this goal to have been considered met, I stated that the panel would need to rate the curriculum at 90 percent or better. Every member of the panel marked the curriculum and course exemplary in every category, for a total of 100 percent. Two panelists added additional notes to the rubric indicating they found the course informative, helpful, and faithful to the Bible. As previously stated, I did have one panelist offer constructive criticism on the structuring of the handout that I used in class. Because of the large number of terms, he suggested small wording for some of the fill-in-the-blank sections. I took his advice and shortened the phrases needed in the handout.

³ See appendix 2.

Goal 3: Increase Participant Knowledge

After I taught through all seven sessions of the curriculum, I resurveyed participants with the same theological survey I used before the course. Once I compared the data from the second part of the pre-course survey that utilized the Likert model of questions to the same part in the post-course survey, there was a statically notable positive difference ($t_{(20)} = 2.105, p = .024$) in the level of understanding that the congregation demonstrated on gender and sexuality. The same data analysis also demonstrated that no statistically significant difference occurred ($t_{(20)} = 0.476, p = 0.319$) for the influences and specific views related to LGBTQ+ issues. The lack of significant difference occurred for a variety of reasons. The wording of my survey questions and the composition of the participants in terms of age may have led to this outcome. Because only one part of the survey showed some change, I partially met goal 3, which was increasing the participants' knowledge of biblical sexuality and gender through implementing the curriculum.

Additional data did show a relative percentage change in understanding from part 1 of the pre-and post-surveys (see table 3). The data in the answers to three questions showed some change. First, on the question of feeling well-equipped to engage in gender identity issues, there was a 23.8 percent increase in the participants who indicated “yes” after they were resurveyed after the course. Second, when asked on the same survey if they understood the terms gender dysphoria, cisgender, transgender, LGBTQ+, and non-binary, there was a 38.1 percent increase in the participants who checked “yes.” Third, when asked the broader question of whether they felt prepared to defend a biblical perspective on gender and sexuality, there was a 23.8 percent increase in those who selected “yes.” For part 3 of the survey, no significant change occurred in the answers from the pre-and post-surveys.

Table 3. MOBC survey, part 1, additional questions

Survey Question	Pre-	Pre-	Pre-	Post-	Post-	Post-	Relative
-----------------	------	------	------	-------	-------	-------	----------

	survey Yes	survey No	survey Unsure	survey Yes	survey No	Survey Unsure	Percentage Change
4. Do you feel that you are well equipped to engage gender identity issues?	9	6	6	14	4	8	23.8 % increase in yes after the course.
5. Do you understand the terms gender dysphoria, cisgender, transgender, LGBTQ+, non-binary?	10	8	3	18	2	1	38.1 % increase in yes after the course.
6. Do you feel equipped to defend a biblical perspective on gender and sexuality?	14	2	5	19	0	2	23.8 % increase in yes after the course.

Strengths of Project

I believe my project had at least three strengths. Though there is always room for improvement, I did adequately convey what the Bible says about gender and sexuality. While I did not arrive at an LGBTQ+-affirming position, I did attempt to represent what I believe the Bible teaches versus the perspective of more affirming individuals. I aided the congregation in gaining an understanding of both the plethora of new terms related to LGBTQ+ identities as well as the arguments that affirming Christians and denominations use. Furthermore, I showed the interconnectedness and sheer influence of LGBTQ+ sexual identities on everything from parenting to education.

Another strength of my project was that I helped the congregation understand the perspectives of gay affirming scholars on what some believers label as “clobber passages.” Matthew Vines, in his work *God and the Gay Christian*, makes cogent arguments involving several of these passages. Though I disagreed with his interpretations, his work served as an example of how affirming people view passages in the Old and New Testaments. I found this step personally important because, in the current discussion on gender and sexuality, feelings have become the new and widespread truth standard. Believers, on the other hand, find themselves compelled to conform their understandings of gender and sexuality to what the Bible teaches.

Both through my research and interactions with the congregation, my final strength was that the congregation sought better ways to reach the LGBTQ+ community for Christ. Oftentimes, throughout the teaching of the course, I had to remind the class of two pertinent facts. The first fact was that LGBTQ+ identities were an extremely personal issue for some. For a few families in our church, the parents with grown children who identify as LGBTQ+ found this study difficult because it was representative of something occurring in their immediate family. The second fact I reminded the participants of was that almost every participant knew someone for whom LGBTQ+ identities were intensely personal. Once I demonstrated just how many participants knew someone who had family dealing with LGBTQ+ identities, we spent time exploring options on how to reach the LGBTQ+ people around us. Though we thought of a few different options, including handing out water during a Pride Month parade, we ultimately concluded that our best course of action was to get to know and develop friendships with LGBTQ+ people.

Weaknesses of Project

In retrospect, I have identified three weaknesses in the course. First, the greatest weakness of the project was the breadth of the material examined. Attempting to cover lesbian sexual identity, gay sexual identity, bisexuality, and transgenderism did not lend itself to a more thorough examination of these concepts. Though I covered each concept to the best of my ability, if I had a smaller focus I would have been able to go into greater detail. Furthermore, I could only speak to the different sexual identities from a limited standpoint of reported experiences. Because of the sheer amount of information, my course ideally needed in-person testimonies of LGBTQ+ people to humanize the concepts and limit straw-man arguments and responses.

The second weakness I noted was the interruptions in the course due to other events on the church calendar. A mission trip, the July 4th holiday, and some church-wide events led to the class taking longer than I expected. For the sake of consistency, I would have preferred to have seven straight weeks. The church's schedule, however,

makes finding seven uninterrupted weeks difficult.

The third notable weakness of my project was the composition of my pre- and post-survey. While I am thankful that the section that measured the congregation’s understanding of gender and sexuality detected significant statistical change, the section related to influences and specific views did not. For some sections of the survey, the wording of my questions did not lend itself to measuring change.

What I Would Do Differently

Reflecting on the project, I would like to have made three significant changes. First, regarding the survey I used both before and after the course, I would change the wording of some questions and statements. A change in wording would not only bring clarity but also better measure the change in the participants. For example, in the survey, I wanted to make an intentional statement involving gender. As I pointed out in the study, language regarding gender has changed. So, statement 17 was, “Gender is assigned at birth.” I anticipated many strongly disagree responses, especially after the course was taught. The results, however, were mixed in a way that I had not anticipated, and I do not think they accurately explain the perspective of the congregation (see Table 4). From these results, I believe participants interpreted the wording of my statement to mean that gender is determined via biology at birth. Instead, the wording was confusing and skewed the data. To gain a greater understanding of the congregation’s view, I could reword this item in one of two ways: gender is determined by society, or the gender of babies is defined by a medical doctor and parents, not by chromosomes. In addition, I could have phrased other statements in a more detailed way so that a change in views would be easier to measure.

Table 4. Pre/post analysis of gender assignment question

Question Wording: Gender is assigned at birth.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Agree somewhat	Agree	Strongly agree
--	----------------------	----------	----------------------	-------------------	-------	-------------------

Pre-test Results of participants	3	1	0	0	2	15
Post-test Results of participants	0	1	0	1	4	15

Another way I would have changed the course would have been to find a better time to hold the class during the church calendar year. As I mentioned, the class experienced a few interruptions due to holidays and church-wide events. For the sake of continuity and the retention of information from the course, finding seven uninterrupted weeks of Wednesday nights would improve the class. Examining the schedule, perhaps all the Wednesdays in January and a few in February would have allowed for a more consistent set of meetings. That is normally a downtime for our church, but I also understand that finding seven uninterrupted Wednesday nights is difficult.

The final way I would improve the course would be to involve hosting some LGBTQ+ guest speakers and even a panel of LGBTQ+ people. The participants would have benefited greatly by hearing their testimony as to how they arrived at their LGBTQ+ identity. I also feel that the entire church would have learned a great deal from learning how these individuals have interacted with believers and with churches. When discussing churches, I would hope to hear testimony of two types. First, I am certain that some LGBTQ+ people have experienced great hurt at the hands of the church. I would hope this panel could inform our church on approaches and comments to avoid. Second, I would hope that at least one individual on the panel could speak about a church that strived to reach them with the appropriate balance of love and biblical truth. Ideally, one panel participant could even give testimony of what it is like to struggle with SSA or have a trans identity, but also how the Lord met them in their struggles.

Theological Reflections

This project highlighted two theological emphases from gender and sexuality that will continue to shape my thinking. A major theme that surfaced in my research is

that the majority of people react to LGBTQ+ issues in the extremes of grace and truth. For the more LGBTQ+-affirming people, they over emphasize the grace of God to the point that what the Bible says about gender and sexuality is obscured or ignored. To give the affirming groups the benefit of the doubt, they would argue this is because of the radical love of God for sinful people. The opposite extreme is to quote the passages where the Bible condemns sexual sin and act as though the issue is settled. Quoting the Bible and responding with a tone of disgust and condemnation when LGBTQ+ people disclose their struggles does not advance the cause of seeing sinners come to Jesus. The appropriate response is somewhere between these two extremes. It is a balance between extending forgiveness in grace and upholding the truth without compromise. Though there are many ways to practically live in the middle of this grace and truth dichotomy while engaging LGBTQ+ people, Preston Sprinkle describes a balanced truth and grace approach with one word: love. He writes, “Love means accepting one’s humanity without affirming everything they do. Love confronts as much as it forgives. The same Jesus who loved Matthew also preached the Sermon on the Mount, and I don’t think Jesus was schizophrenic. Loving people despite their behavior doesn’t mean affirming their behavior.”⁴

Another theme that emerged throughout the project involved the intersection of harmatology with evangelism. While teaching about LGBTQ+ people and reaching them for Christ, I uncovered a glaring hole in my approach and the approach of many members: many of us either do not know or have failed to befriend LGBTQ+ people. It is not hard to understand why. For some, the LGBTQ+ identities are easy to demonize because it is not a personal struggle. While teaching the course, when certain unloving comments were made, I had to remind myself and our church that every single person in attendance was a sexual sinner, even if we had never struggled with SSA. Until the church views LGBTQ+

⁴ Preston M. Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 84.

people as individuals made in the image of God, reaching them with the gospel will be difficult. Until churches are willing to be open and honest communities where people feel comfortable sharing their struggles, then friendships with LGBTQ+ people will be difficult. Yet, if we believe God can bring change to the heart of someone who identifies as LGBTQ+, then we also must believe that God can change the hearts of his people. He can change them to the extent that their burden to reach those the church may have excluded in the past is possible. This is not a shallow “notch on the belt” friendship evangelism, but an abiding friendship that is committed to loving others as Christ loves us, regardless of the outcome.

Personal Reflections

Looking back on the entirety of my project I believe the Lord taught me three major lessons. The first change the Lord worked in me involves my motivation for this project. From the start, I sincerely desired to help people address LGBTQ+ issues. My motivation, however, was focused on helping hurting parents and friends. The more I researched those who live as LGBTQ+, the more I also realized that I needed to extend grace and compassion to them. Initially, I thought the bulk of the project would focus on outlining arguments against the LGBTQ+-affirming theology and agenda. However, once I completed a biblical response to the affirming theology, I realized that my task was not done. Many LGBTQ+ people are living in pain and rebellion against Jesus. Rather than feeling anger toward their anti-biblical views, the Lord has shown me that I am called to approach them with an openness to conversation, with grace, and with humility that I should have as someone who has experienced God’s saving grace. I am called to minister to LGBTQ+ individuals just as much as I am any other person. It is true that to love them well I cannot compromise on what the Bible teaches on gender and sexuality. Without compromising on biblical truth, however, I can strive to engage members of the LGBTQ+ community in spiritual conversations. I can strive to get to know their stories. I can work harder at getting to know them as people, and hopefully see them come to know

Jesus in such a way that they love him more than the sin in their lives. That is my prayer for LGBTQ+ individuals and my prayer for sinners like me.

The second lesson this project taught me involved my perspective on LGBTQ+ people. This project not only opened my eyes but also the eyes of our members to see LGBTQ+ people in a different light. Before the project, whether I would have admitted it or not, I had a bias that pushed me to think that all anti-biblical sexual identities were the choice of people dead set against obeying God. In my mind, it was pure rebellion, and that settled the matter. Now, on the other side of the project, I know that many people give testimony to not desiring to be the way they are in terms of their sexual or gender identity. The more I have studied, the more I gained empathy and understanding for those who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, but I was also surprised to read about the way some trans-identifying people struggle. Even though not all trans individuals report suffering from gender dysphoria, the ones that do paint a horrifyingly painful picture. I also had a chance to think about how I have interacted with people who struggle with SSA. As a pastor, I want to walk the line between grace and truth well. I cannot go so far as to affirm these gender and sexual identities, but simultaneously I do not want thoughtless words to embitter LGBTQ+ people toward the church. I want them to know that at Mt. Olive they will be seen, heard, and respected, even if we cannot agree on their identity.

Another lesson the Lord taught me involved a trans-identifying individual. Not long before teaching about transgenderism, Mt. Olive had its Vacation Bible School. About two years ago, we began having a class in our VBS that involved worship, Bible teaching, and games for middle schoolers. To my knowledge, for the first time in Mt. Olive's history, we had a transgender middle school student attend VBS. I am so proud that my church treated the transgender student with grace. I remember two encouraging moments. First, this student was informed and welcomed to use one of our two single-use restrooms. While that may not seem like a major issue, having a single-use restroom puts

parents at ease while respecting a student's perspective on their gender identity. We did not affirm their identity, but we did strive to make that individual feel welcome, and they returned on multiple nights. The second encouraging moment came when I met with the parents of our students after we realized this student attended. In the meeting, I went over our policy and procedures for how we would handle ministry to this student in such a way that promoted learning about the Lord while maintaining the safety of every student. I told the parents this student would not be affirmed in their identity, but that they were made in the image of God and that our church would strive to make them feel loved by Jesus and his people. I also emphasized that no bullying of this student would be tolerated. The parents of the students who regularly attend our youth group appreciated the honesty and the approach toward the trans-identifying student.

Conclusion

The purpose of my project was to equip the members of Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, with a biblical understanding of gender and sexuality through a discipleship course focused on biblical sexuality. I believe I accomplished that purpose, but I have also learned so much more about gender and sexuality. I have also seen areas where I could have improved. Though I am aware that this project is by no means the final word about gender and sexuality, I pray that it was helpful to our church members. It is also my hope that our members feel more equipped and knowledgeable to reach out to and befriend LGBTQ+ people because of my project. Most of all, I hope that Christ was honored and that our people learned in some small way how to walk that balanced line between grace and truth when trying to reach any sinner with the truth of the gospel.

APPENDIX 1

GENDER AND BIBLICAL SEXUALITY SURVEY

This survey assessed the perspectives of the participants regarding issues of gender, sexuality, and responding to non-biblical perspectives.¹

¹ My pre- and post-surveys are modified versions of the research instruments in Benjamin Addison Francis, "Equipping Young Adults at Parkwood Baptist Church, Gastonia, North Carolina, through Christian Ethics" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 92-95.

Gender and Biblical Sexuality Survey

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess the understanding of gender and sexual identity issues among the members of MOBC. This research is being conducted by Kirby W. Ownby for the purpose of completing a doctoral ministry project. In this research, you will complete the same surveys before and after the project is completed. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By your completion of this survey, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

Part 1

Directions: Answer the following questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

1. Do you consider yourself a Christian?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
2. Do you believe faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to be saved?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
3. Do you believe God made humanity male and female?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
4. Do you feel that you are well-equipped to engage with gender identity issues?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
5. Do you understand the terms gender dysphoria, cisgender, transgender, LGBTQ+, non-binary?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure

6. Do you feel equipped to defend a biblical perspective on gender and sexuality?
- Yes
 - No
 - Unsure

Part 2

Directions: Respond to the following statements by circling your opinion using the following scale:

SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS= disagree somewhat,

AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree;

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 7. I am well-informed on the cultural issues of gender. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. I understand the concepts related to sexual identity. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. I am well equipped in my application of the gospel as it concerns gender issues. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. I am well equipped to show how the Bible speaks concerning sexual identity. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. The Bible forms my worldview concerning gender. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. Social media has exerted some influence on my sexuality. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. Heterosexual sin is not as bad as homosexual sin. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. Transgenderism is prohibited by the Bible. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. Sex reassignment surgery is an attack on the image of God within the individual. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 16. Gender is a fluid concept. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 17. Gender is assigned at birth. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 18. People can experience a change in their sexual desires or attractions. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 19. The Bible offers hope for those who experience same-sex attraction. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

Part 3:

Directions: Respond the following statements by placing a check next to your answer.

20. The Bible is more concerned with love than truth.

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

21. The Bible teaches that living together before marriage is sinful.

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

22. The Bible teaches that the genders of male and female are complementary.

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

23. The Bible teaches that people are born gay.

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

24. The Bible teaches that homosexuality is not a problem if the relationship is monogamous.

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

25. The Bible teaches that marriage is a covenant relationship.

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

26. The Bible teaches that people can be delivered from sexual sin.

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

27. The Bible teaches that sexual sin is worse than other kinds of sin.

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

28. The Bible teaches that monogamous same sex sexual relationships are sinful.

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

29. The Bible teaches that we can choose our gender.
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
30. The Bible teaches that all people are born either male or female.
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
31. The Bible teaches that there is no difference in gender roles.
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
32. The Bible teaches that heterosexual sin is not as bad as homosexual sin.
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
33. The Bible teaches that identity is grounded in the image of God.
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
34. The Bible teaches that sexual desires do not change.
- a. Yes
 - b. No

APPENDIX 2

BIBLICAL GENDER AND SEXUALITY
CURRICULUM RUBRIC

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical pedagogical methodology.					
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly details how to develop a lesson to teach the Bible.					
At the end of the course, participants will be able to better teach others the Bible.					

Other Comments

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Achtemeier, Paul J. *Romans*. Interpretation. Louisville: John Knox, 1985.
- Allberry, Sam. *Is God Anti-Gay? Questions Christians Ask*. Purcellville, VA: Good Book, 2013.
- Allen, R. Michael. *Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury, 2011.
- Allison, Gregg R. *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021.
- American Psychological Association. "Position Statement on Treatment of Transgender (Trans) and Gender Diverse Youth." July 2020. <https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/About-APA/Organization-Documents-Policies/Policies/Position-Transgender-Gender-Diverse-Youth.pdf>.
- APA Dictionary of Psychology*. "Hookup" Accessed February 14, 2023. <https://dictionary.apa.org/hookup>.
- Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley University: California Press, 2007.
- Bond, Paul. "Nearly 40% Of U.S. Gen Zs, 30% Of Christians Identify as LGBTQ, Poll Shows." *Newsweek*, October 20, 2021. <https://www.newsweek.com/nearly-40-percent-us-gen-zs-30-percent-christians-identify-lgbtq-poll-shows-1641085>.
- Boyd, Danah. *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2014.
- Bray, Gerald L., and Thomas C. Oden. *Romans*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005.
- Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, Edward Robinson, Wilhelm Gesenius, and Maurice A. Robinson. *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979.
- Burk, Denny. "Is Homosexual Orientation Sinful?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58, no. 1 (2015): 95-115.
- Burke, Minyvonne. "Texas Pastor Says Gay People Should Be 'Shot in the Back of the Head' in Shocking Sermon." *NBC News*, June 9, 2022. <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-news/texas-pastor-says-gay-people-shot-back-head-shocking-sermon-rcna32748>.

- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519-31.
- Butterfield, Rosaria Champagne. *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.
- _____. *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith*. Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant, 2012.
- Ciampa, Roy E., and Brian S. Rosner. *The First Letter to the Corinthians*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010.
- Darr, Brandon, and Tyler Kibbey. "Pronouns and Thoughts on Neutrality: Gender Concerns in Modern Grammar." *Pursuit* 7, no. 1 (March 2016): 71-84.
- DeYoung, Kevin. *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.
- Dunn, James D. G. *Romans 1-8*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38A. Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 2015.
- Fee, Gordon D. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Edited and translated by James Strachey and Peter Gay. New York: W. W. Norton, 1989.
- Furnish, Victor Paul. "The Loyal Opposition and Scripture." In *The Loyal Opposition: Struggling with the Church on Homosexuality*, edited by Tex Sample and Amy E. DeLong, 33-42. Nashville: Abingdon, 2000.
- Gagnon, Robert A. J. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2001.
- Gardner, Paul. *1 Corinthians*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 7. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.
- Haefele-Thomas, Ardel, and Thatcher Combs. *Introduction to Transgender Studies*. New York: Harrington Park, 2019.
- Hagerty, Barbara Bradley. "Same Bible, Different Verdict on Gay Marriage." *NPR*, May 11, 2012. <https://www.npr.org/2012/05/11/152466134/same-bible-different-verdict-on-gay-marriage>.
- Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.
- Inserra, Dean. *Pure: Why the Bible's Plan for Sexuality Isn't Outdated, Irrelevant, or Oppressive*. Chicago: Moody, 2022.
- "Introduction to the Yogyakarta Principles." Yogyakartaprinciples.Org. Accessed February 7, 2023. <https://yogyakartapinciples.org/introduction/>.

- James, Sharon. *Gender Ideology: What Do Christians Need to Know?* Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2019.
- Jones, Jeffrey M. "U.S. LGBT Identification Steady at 7.2%." Gallup.com, February 22, 2023. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/470708/lgbt-identification-steady.aspx>.
- Killermann, Sam. "The Genderbread Person, version 3." Accessed July 24, 2023. <https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2015/03/the-genderbread-person-v3/>.
- Louth, Andrew, and Thomas C. Oden. *Genesis 1-11*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016.
- Marin, Andrew P. *Love Is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009.
- Mathews, Kenneth. *Genesis 1-11*. New American Commentary, vol. 1. Nashville: B & H, 1996.
- Mohler, R. Albert, Jr. *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, & the Very Meaning of Right & Wrong*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015.
- Moo, Douglas J. *The Letter to the Romans*. 2nd ed. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2018.
- Moore, Russell. *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel*. Nashville: B & H, 2015.
- Morris, Leon L. *1 Corinthians*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008.
- Mounce, Robert H. *Romans*. New American Commentary, vol. 27. Nashville: B & H, 1995.
- Park, Joon-Sik. "Hospitality as Context for Evangelism." *Missiology* 30 (July 2002): 385-95.
- Reyburn, William David, and Euan McG Fry. *A Handbook on Genesis*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 1997.
- Sample, Tex, and Amy E. DeLong, eds. *The Loyal Opposition: Struggling with the Church on Homosexuality*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2000.
- Sarna, Nahum M. *Genesis*. JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *1 Corinthians*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018.
- _____. *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters*. Handbooks on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019.
- _____. "A New Testament Perspective on Homosexuality." *Themelios* 31, no. 3 (2006): 62-75.

- _____. *Romans*. 2nd ed. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018.
- Smith, C. Christopher, and John Pattison. *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014.
- Snodgrass, Klyne R. *Who God Says You Are: A Christian Understanding of Identity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.
- Sprinkle, Preston M. *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015.
- Thielman, Frank. *Romans*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.
- Trueman, Carl. "Evangelicals and Race Theory." *First Things*, February 2021. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/02/evangelicals-and-race-theory>.
- _____. *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022.
- Trueman, Carl R. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020.
- Vandenbussche, Elie. "Detransition-Related Needs and Support: A Cross-Sectional Online Survey." *Journal of Homosexuality* 69, no. 9 (July 29, 2022): 1602-20.
- Vines, Matthew. *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships*. New York: Convergent, 2014.
- Von Rad, Gerhard. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1973.
- Ward, Kate. "Transcript of Bruce Jenner Coming Out as Transgender Will Only Make You Respect Jenner More." *Bustle*, April 25, 2015. <https://www.bustle.com/articles/78832-transcript-of-bruce-jenner-coming-out-as-transgender-will-only-make-you-respect-jenner-more>.
- Wenham, Gordon John. *Genesis 1-15*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1. Waco, TX: Zondervan, 2014.

ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING THE MEMBERS OF MT. OLIVE BAPTIST CHURCH IN KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE, WITH A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Kirby Wayland Ownby, DMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Brian J. Vickers

This project seeks to equip the members of Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, with a biblical understanding of gender and sexuality so they may reach non-believers with the gospel. Chapter 1 explains the ministry context, goals, and research methodology for the project. Chapter 2 unpacks an exegesis of three Bible passages (Gen 1:26-28; Rom 1:24-32; 1 Cor 6:9-11) to demonstrate the biblical and theological basis for the project. Chapter 3 explains the historical and contemporary issues relating to gender and sexuality. Chapter 4 lays out a description of the project itself, which involves the teaching of the discipleship curriculum. Chapter 5 examines the results of the project, which includes evaluating the purpose, goals, and process of the project. The project's chief aim involves equipping ordinary believers to witness effectively to people struggling with gender identity issues and non-biblical sexualities.

VITA

Kirby Wayland Ownby

EDUCATION

BA, Samford University, 2005

MDiv, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Youth/Children's Ministry, First Baptist Church, Carterville, Illinois, 2012-2014

Pastor, First Baptist Church, Royalton, Illinois, 2014-2017

Lead Pastor, Mount Olive Baptist Church, Knoxville, Tennessee, 2017-