

# Homosexuality: Pastoral and Practical Issues

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[ 0 : 00 ] Hans Gospel, chapter 8, verses 1 to 11. We're going to be thinking this evening for the second week running about the Bible's teaching on issues of sexuality and human relationships.

These are difficult subjects, difficult to speak about, sometimes difficult to hear about. And more important than anything else, I think, is that we're able to speak the truth in love.

And helping us to do that, I think, is the fact that we concentrate on our Lord Jesus Christ and how he dealt with these kind of things.

These first few verses of chapter 8 of John's Gospel, as you'll probably see in your Bible, are not included in the earliest manuscripts of John. It seems that they may not form part of the Gospel that John wrote, but they are very authentic Gospel material.

There's no doubt that they are written about things that happened and words that the Lord Jesus himself said. And they come to us as they always have been in the New Testament Scriptures.

[ 1 : 09 ] And here's how our Lord dealt with the woman who was caught in adultery. Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning, he came again to the temple.

All the people came to him. And he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. And placing her in the midst, they said to him, Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery.

Now, in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say? This they said to test him.

That they might have some charge to bring against him. Now, they were testing him, you see, because the Jewish law was not able to be enforced under Roman occupation in the same way as it had been.

And they could have caught him either way. If he said, yes, stone her, they could have said to the Romans that he was fighting their authority. If he'd said no, they could have said he's fighting Moses' authority.

[ 2 : 15 ] So this they said to test him. That they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.

And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. And when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones.

And Jesus was left all alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?

She said, No one, Lord. And Jesus said, Neither do I condemn you. Go. And from now on, sin no more. Amen.

May God bless to us this his word. Well, last week, if you were here, you'll remember that we were discussing the subject of the Bible on sex.

[ 3 : 30 ] To recap very briefly, what we were doing was presenting what the Bible teaches about the very positive theology of sex. That the Bible teaches it in an integrated way.

Telling us that there is a plan and a purpose for sex built into the very fabric of creation. The Bible knows nothing about a kind of abstract sexuality.

It knows only the concrete expression of the male-female relationship united for life. Remember we said that the Bible teaches us that man and woman together, humankind together, male and female, image the creator.

Mankind is created with man and woman side by side, equal. Thus imaging God. But also, there is a purposeful, intended complementarity.

Man and woman are created face to face, as different, as complementary. And that is part also of our imaging of God. And we spoke about the permanent unity that marriage expresses of the two into one.

[ 4 : 42 ] And sexual intercourse as being part of that, as a life-uniting act. Both expressing that union and also affecting it physically.

And therefore then, through this positive theology of sex, the Bible then prohibits all other, all other forms of sexual relationships.

To protect what God has made us good and right and true and holy and proper. So then, with the background of that supremely positive theology of sex, we went on to say that for us as Christians, as the Christian church, it's right that we, as the church, should not be squeezed into the mold of the world around us, which is obsessed with sexual expression in every and any form, and sees nothing of the sacredness, the holiness of the biblical creation.

And against that, therefore, it's important for us in the church to teach that truth unashamedly in our churches. Not allowing the world to squeeze us into its mold.

It's important, too, that we proclaim that truth to the world, outside our churches. It's part of loving our neighbor. To teach what is the truth of God about the best, and the wholesome, and the most fulfilling, and the least damaging way of life.

[ 6 : 09 ] We're not loving our neighbors unless we're willing to try and persuade them of that. Not imposing upon them, but seeking to win them, persuading them. And thirdly, we said that it's important that the Christian church exhibits this truth to the world.

That we are salt and light. That we are therefore seen to be living in a way which is counter-cultural. Head-on, in collision, against the prevailing culture of our world.

Well, if you want to hear what we said on that, I'm sure a tape will be available, or shortly it should be available on the website. But we can't go over all of that ground tonight. What I want to do tonight is to take us on from there, and deal specifically, really, with a very controversial subject today, and that is that of homosexuality.

I want to deal with it particularly in relation to practical and pastoral issues that arise. And it goes beyond just the issue of homosexuality, but obviously that's very much at the center.

I want to do three things really. Firstly, give a very brief overview of the specific biblical teaching on homosexual sex. Secondly, to speak about living with our sexuality.

[ 7 : 26 ] And thirdly, to speak about living with our sin. About when we fall, and about how we deal with sin within the church. And just let me say at the outset, this is not an easy subject for me to speak about.

And it may be a difficult subject for some of us particularly to hear about tonight. And my prayer is that the Lord will help me to speak the truth in love, and with sensitivity. I might just tell you that, not one, but several of those who were very close friends to me when I was at medical school, friends that were very, very good and close Christian friends throughout my years in medical school, have since then all come out as openly gay, living homosexual lifestyles, and are now rejecting entirely the faith that we share together as brothers.

Many of you will have had similar experiences. And these things are very close to home. They're painful. They're difficult. It makes the whole subject a very hard one for us to think about.

But think about it, we must. So first of all then, I want to examine the specific biblical teaching on homosexuality. Homosexuality. And you've got a handout there that gives some of the key texts about this.

Now it's very important at the outset that we see that this comes after everything we said last week about the positive theology of sex. And in one sense we don't need any of these specific teachings about homosexuality.

[ 9 : 02 ] We would come to exactly the same conclusion only looking at the positive view the Bible has about what sex is and where it's for. Because it's to be within a lifelong committed union of man and woman.

And therefore, outwith that, any other union, any other sexual expression, as we've said, is beyond what the Bible is seeking to express. And homosexuality is just one of those.

Nevertheless, there are these specific texts. Let's just pose the key question. The key question is this. Can there ever be a right kind of homosexual relationship akin to heterosexual marriage?

I think surely, at least within the Christian church, we're not really finding many people seeking to justify a flagrantly promiscuous homosexual lifestyle. But people are seeking to justify relationships, relationships that they would want to say are akin to the marriage relationship between a man and a woman.

So that's the key question. Let's just very briefly look at some of these texts. First of all, there's the whole story of Sodom and Gomorrah, which we read in Genesis 18 and 19. You all know the story. [10:16] And it's got something to say about this whole issue. Now, it is argued by many who want to argue against the traditional position that the reason that Sodom is judged in the Bible, the reason that God was against Sodom, was nothing to do with sexual misbehavior.

You'll read in some of the books that it's argued that Sodom and the people of Sodom were evil in God's eyes because of their lack of hospitality, because of the way they treated the strangers. Do you remember the angels of God came to visit Lot and they tried to take these men and rape them? But part of that is that it was seen to be an abuse of hospitality. And that's very cogently argued in some books. But I think we have to admit, and when we look at the New Testament and we see what Jude says about it there in Jude verse 7, that whatever else was going on in Sodom, there's no doubt that sexual immorality and perversion, as the Apostle puts it, was one of the things going on.

Sodom is described in the Bible as wicked, as vile, as disgraceful. Now, certainly the story in Genesis 19 is a story about gang rape.

And so we can't take our arguments entirely from that. Then to answer the question that we posed, can there ever be a right homosexual relationship? What we see going on in Sodom is, by any stretch of the imagination, a wrong and a wicked and a horrible thing.

[11:49] So, it has something to say, but it's not the only story. It's not as clear-cut, perhaps, as we might think. But homosexual sex was certainly one of the things that was going on there, that God judged.

Then you've got the text there from the law in Leviticus. And these texts here, I think, are very significant indeed. The writer says, Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman.

That is detestable. Do not have sexual relationships with an animal and defy yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal. And so on. Then Leviticus 20, the same language, a man lying with a man.

Again, this is detestable. The thing to notice here is that the words used are very general words for homosexuality. They're not words that are used specifically for ritual or cultic worship or prostitution to do with that.

It's often argued that what's going on in Leviticus here is that God is just wanting to make his people distinctive from the Canaanites, from the Canaanite religion. And Canaanite religion involved an awful lot of temple prostitution, both of males and females.

[13:07] And the argument then says, Well, this is a matter of religious purity. And therefore, it's to do with setting apart the Old Testament people of God racially and distinctively from the nations round about.

And therefore, in the New Testament era, well, that's all past. There's nothing to divide Jew and Gentile, Israelite and non. And therefore, that's something we can leave behind. Well, the answer to that lies in two places.

First is that in the context itself, it's not really in the context there of ritual purity. It's in the context of sexual relationships with animals. And if you read on in that chapter with other things that are said to be equally detestable.

And secondly, if you look across to number four there, when Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 6, 9, and 1 Timothy 1, 8, you'll see that in fact Paul very explicitly seems to be reaffirming the teaching of Leviticus.

Do you see the words there that he uses for homosexual offenders? The Greek word there, arsenokoitas, that I've highlighted for you, is a new word that seems to have been invented by Paul.

[14:18] It's a word that's put together these two words out of Leviticus. Do not lie, coitas, with a man, arsen. Same in Leviticus 20. He does the same thing in 1 Timothy 1, 8, where he talks about murderers, adulterers, perverts, or homosexual offenders, arsenokoitas.

He puts that in a list of these sins that the law of God is very clearly against. So for Paul, it seems to be very clear that this teaching of Leviticus has not been superseded for Christians.

Things like beard clipping and ritual sacrifices and particular foods has clearly been superseded. He tells us that. But just as child sacrifice is still wrong, just as bestiality is still wrong, Paul is saying to us here in the same words that so these sexual relationships are still wrong in the eyes of God. It's just like Jesus with adultery, as we read in John chapter 8. Our Lord is not for a minute suggesting that somehow adultery is no longer wrong when he deals with this woman. Just because the penalty may have changed and stoning is not now going to be done, he still says to her, go and sin no more. He names it as sin. And then if you look there under number 3 at Romans 1, verse 25 and following.

[15:52] In that chapter, Paul is outlining his case against humankind of the reason why the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against mankind. And here he puts sexual perversion, deviation, into the realm of human rebellion.

It's one of the consequences of mankind's rebellion against God, against God's created order. They've exchanged the truth of God for a lie. They've worshipped and served created things. And because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men abandoned natural relations and were inflamed with lust for one another.

He goes on quite clearly in his language to show that this is an abomination against God. It's sometimes argued that what Paul is speaking against is the Greek practice of what's called pederasty.

That is, when an older man would get for himself a young boy and use him as a partner and use him for sex. But once again, we have to notice that Paul doesn't use specific language here.

[17:01] He uses very definite and ordinary language about natural relations and unnatural ones. He speaks about women as well as men. He even puts women first in the list, which is rather unusual.

And he includes women having homosexual relationships and men. So it's quite clear that what he's talking about here is general sexual behavior. It just doesn't wash exegetically to try and push this aside and say, well, it's just a few specific evidences that he's talking about.

That's often done and it's tried to be argued that, in fact, this is not talking about ordinary, normal homosexual relationships. It's talking about particular aspects that he's disapproving.

But no, I think if we read the scriptures honestly, it's almost impossible to even entertain that as a valid way of looking at things. So just from that very brief sketch, and it is a very brief and inadequate sketch of these matters, but just from that very brief sketch, I think it's very, very conclusive.

There is no biblical case to answer at all. If we take on the one hand the Bible's clear, positive theology of the place of sex and the right place only within marriage, we don't need anything else.

[18:22] But when we do look for specific texts about homosexuality, we find that every single one of them is negative. Every single one of them expresses at the very least the severe disapproval of God, the Old Testament and the New Testament.

And the biblical teaching is quite, quite consistent. Well, let me just deal with three objections, nevertheless. The first is the appeal to homosexual orientation.

It's often said that, of course, the Bible doesn't allow for this. It only is speaking about perversion.

And because the Bible writers didn't know anything about what we now know in the modern world about homosexual orientation, Paul isn't really condemning those who are only acting in a way that seems to be natural for them.

He's condemning those who are acting contrary to what they know. to be their own sexuality. So really, he's condemning heterosexual men who go and dabble in homosexual sex.

Well, the first thing to say is that that argument isn't really relevant even if we can make it a given that there is such a thing as an easily definable homosexual orientation.

[19:42] And I think that's far from easy to say. It's far from clear. At the very, very least, a very great deal of practice of homosexual erotic behavior today must be said to be voluntary.

I mean, if you open any newspaper, you'll find in the dating columns now men seeking men, women seeking women, and you'll find large columns of those who are bisexuality curious. They want to find out.

They want to experiment. It's impossible to say that such a person is irretrievably oriented in a homosexual direction. May very well be, and it probably is the case, that for some that is the way

that they have been and have always been and there's nothing they can do about it. But even if that is the case, and even for those people, the argument doesn't hold water because whether it's genetic or not or however it comes about, that doesn't justify one's right to express a particular behavior.

Others could argue equally that they are, by orientation, interested in animals, or in children. And we wouldn't be saying, well, therefore they're just doing what's natural to them.

[ 20 : 59 ] If somebody said, well, by nature I'm a kleptomaniac, or an alcoholic, we don't justify the practice of that behavior on that basis, do we?

Secondly, natural heterosexual urges. Well, those who have those, naturally are tempted to sin. That doesn't mean that we say promiscuity is alright. Just because you have strong heterosexual urges in a particular direction. No, of course not. We say that's part of the general taint of sinfulness in the world and in our lives.

It doesn't justify us exercising that behavior. The third thing to say about orientation is that we do not get our identity by a sexual orientation.

Sexuality does not define us. We are defined by our humanity, by the fact that we're made in the image of God. And therefore to appeal to a sexual identity, a homosexual identity or any other as that which gives me my meaning and value in the sight of God, in the sight of others, in the sight of society, is quite false and quite wrong.

[ 22 : 14 ] So the homosexual orientation argument, I don't think, is a really valid objection to what the Bible says about homosexual practice. Secondly, another appeal is often made to love.

Well, love is the only important thing. Love is all you need. Love supersedes any rules and regulations. And therefore, if we're truly in love, this must be right. Very powerful argument. But of course, again, that would be licensed to almost anything. If love is all you need, then polygamy is fine. Have as many wives and partners as you want, as long as you love them all. Adultery is all right.

Isn't that often the great excuse, why we're so much in love? It must be right. It must be right for me to leave my wife and go away with another one, because we're in love. The problem is that in scripture, you see, love is defined.

Those who want to use love as an appeal fall down, because we can't say on the one hand, well, specific biblical prohibitions could be wiped out of the way because they're just specific and in that context.

[ 23 : 20 ] We can't do that and at the same time say, well, love is a kind of all transcending category that we can appeal to. No. The Bible defines love. What does 1 John 5 and 3 say?

This is love to keep my commandments. That's what love is in the Bible. Sin, John says, is lovelessness, not lovelessness.

So an appeal to love just doesn't wash. Thirdly, often people will appeal to Jesus. Jesus is our example, they say, not Paul. He taught love and acceptance of everybody.

He said, we have to love God and love our neighbor and that's all there is to it. It's the apostle Paul that has these horrible homophobic comments. Well, two things to say about that and the first is that Jesus was the one who strengthened the moral law.

You've heard it was said this, but I say to you, he strengthened the teaching of the Old Testament on divorce. He strengthened the Old Testament teaching on adultery and said anyone who's looked at a woman lustfully has committed adultery.

[ 24 : 32 ] We want to appeal to Jesus, we want to appeal to the real Jesus, not the pretend one. And secondly, Jesus' way was never, ever to affirm and accept people in their sin and demand no change.

Jesus' way was to give forgiveness, of course, yes. but he demanded repentance and changed life and he offered renewal, go and sin no more.

Jesus was truly, yes, interested in loving the sinner but hating the sin, but he was also very, very interested in separating the sinner from their sin. Otherwise, we'd be denying the power of the Spirit to change people.

we'd be saying that homosexual people somehow don't need repentance. Or else, even worse, that there's no hope of repentance or change for them, if we were to appeal like that.

So now, the scriptures are very, very clear. None of these objections will stand the test, none of them will allow us to wriggle out of what is absolutely plain in scripture.

[ 25 : 50 ] That the place of sex is within marriage, everything outside of that is wrong, and that in very particular ways, the Bible does make it very clear that homosexual practice is something that is very evil and wicked in the sight of God.

Well, that's a brief outline of the biblical position and the biblical teaching. I want to major tonight, really, on the issues that arise from that.

So I want to secondly go on to talking about living with our sexuality. There's two spheres of that. The first is within marriage, the sphere of legitimate expression of sexuality.

That's a subject all of its own. It's certainly not one without problems. There is specific teaching in the New Testament about it. 1 Corinthians 7, so on Paul speaks about that. In Ephesians 5, in 1 Peter 3, he speaks very generally about the marriage relationship and so on.

But that really is a topic on its own for another night, and it's not one that I'm going to deal with tonight. But it is one that needs to be dealt with. But I want to major tonight on living with our sexuality in the context outside marriage.

[ 27 : 07 ] And that holds for all of those who, for whatever reason, find themselves out with a sexual relationship in marriage. It might be not just the homosexual person who is seeking to live a godly life, but it applies in many ways also to single people, to people who have never been married, or have been married and are divorced, or have been widowed.

In some respects, these things face all of us in those categories. I want to say a few things about that. First is this, that we've got to think in terms of our broader Christian life as a whole, when we think about the issues of sex.

Loving the sinner and hating the sin, and separating the sinner from his sin, is the basis and the issue of the Christian life, isn't it? That's what we're all about, in every aspect of our life.

We're our new creation in Christ, we have the indwelling spirit, and in so many respects of our sinful natures, we're not totally helpless. We're not helpless in the face of the world, the flesh and the devil that all assault us and seek to help us sin, no.

We're not therefore allowed to acquiesce in the old self as though nothing had changed because Christ has put his spirit in our heart. And that is a cause for great rejoicing and great hope and great joy.

[ 28 : 36 ] And the Bible tells us that we're to keep on walking in the light, we're to live sowing to the spirit, not to the flesh. We're to keep in step with the spirit in every aspect of our life and our sexual life is just a part of that, it's one aspect of it.

And it's important to remember that sexual sin is not the only sin. And very often it's not even the greatest sin at all. Sometimes perhaps we are taken up with sexual sin more than we ought to be. It is important that we realize that there are many, many other things the scripture are interested in. And if sexual sin is not something that is a particular problem in your life, beware, beware of becoming judgmental, beware of looking down on others at the problems they might have because the Lord is no doubt asking you to look at the bolt in your eye as well.

So let's remember that. Sexual sin isn't the only thing, it's part of our whole Christian life.

Nevertheless, it is no help to sinners to avoid the truth of God's law and to avoid the promises that he gives us of his renewing help by the Spirit.

We must face the biblical truth about all areas of our life, whatever that may be, and that includes our sexuality. And at the same time we mustn't ever underplay the grace and the mercy and the forgiveness and the transformation that is ours in Christ.

[ 30 : 08 ] The power available for our radical new life in Christ. Remember we read at the end of last Sunday evening service Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 6 about those who are offenders in various ways.

And such were some of you, he said. You are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified. It's no help to sinners to not tell them about that, about God's truth and about his grace.

Let me read to you something written by a homosexual believer from this book Truth and Love in a Sexually Disordered World. He writes this, In 1 Corinthians 6, 11 a pivotal statement is made, and such were some of you.

Evidently, radical change had taken place on his plane for all to see. Whether living in 55 AD or 2005 AD, we homosexuals who have repented and believed the good news have abandoned our futile, godless way of life.

What's more, the miraculous has happened, we are in Christ, and having the status we now are new creatures, the old has gone, the new has come. Something of the life of God has entered us, carrying with it a far reaching implication, not least in how we perceive with and cope with our particular sexual tendency, and in how we relate to those in similar situation.

[ 31 : 29 ] In all the deliberations involving the homosexual question, one important fact should be borne in mind. Certain brothers and sisters now seeking to walk in that newness of life and experiencing true freedom for the first time have been rescued from backgrounds of appalling homosexual degradation, and very likely premature deaths.

Some of them will undoubtedly carry deep psychological scars for a long time to come. because of that it causes many of us profound distress and hurt to witness the extraordinary spectacle of spiritual leaders apparently encouraging same-sex practices, however sophisticated and refined they may appear to be.

The last advice any of us needed is to hear that in our daily battles, in certain circumstances, the deeds are natural to us and permissible after all.

must also be recognized that at the other extreme there are those often young Christians who have same-sex bias and thus far have led exemplary lives and wish to continue to do so despite pressure to live to the contrary.

Surely any pastoral counsel given to them must be aimed at lovingly strengthening their resolve rather than undermining it by suggesting that a genital homosexual relationship can ever be God-given and God-sustained.

[ 32 : 48 ] In this delicate area there is a real danger that little ones who believe in Jesus are being caused to sin. It's no help to sinners to avoid the truth of God's law and to avoid the promise of transformation and renewal.

Third, we must show the balance and compassion of Christ in all of this. Our identity is not in our sexuality. Many homosexuals though feel that it is and they feel that they need that to get recognition.

But the truth is it's often because they feel they can't be accepted any other way. For many homosexual people, even somebody talking about this tonight as I'm doing is deeply difficult and deeply painful.

And the challenge for us in the Christian church is to exhibit the love and the compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's something I fear that we've not always done.

Let me read to you again from this book quoting William Still. We must return to the basic fact that God hates what is unnatural and nothing can make him change his mind about the abuse of the natural functions he has ordained for man as for his other creatures.

[ 34 : 08 ] But, I want to appeal for a new degree of understanding. I have in view those who through no fault of their own are afflicted with perverse desires and may be cruelly hounded to the point of suicide by a misguided use of the name of God and Christ.

On their behalf one must register a protest and complete condemnation of the judgmentalism which utterly ignores the infinite understanding of the holy Jesus who although he never excuses sin but must ever condemn it always loves the sinner.

Neither do I condemn you go and sin no more shows the perfect balance of Christ's attitude towards all sin but with particular reference to sexual sin.

In the interest and the compassion of Jesus there needs to be a far greater degree of understanding of why people do these things however rightly disapproving we must be of their acts. Jesus' understanding of the women of Samaria, the women taking in adultery and Zacchaeus, a very different case, shows us how sad it is that in biblical, Christian and evangelical circles there can be so much harsh, cruel and ruthless dismissal of problem people.

Too often not the slightest attempt is made to understand why they behave as they do or to bring them our Lord's blessed touchstone. neither do I condemn you go and sin no more.

[ 35 : 38 ] We must show the balance and the compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ in everything that we do in this realm. And so it follows that our fellowships must be places where people can find an identity, where they can find that they truly belong, quite apart from any questions of sexuality.

It sounds obvious, but it's often not the case. It's often very difficult. It's often very difficult for single people in churches which are so family oriented.

Jesus, you know, when he talks about people who are unmarried, says there are three reasons for this. Some, he says, were born incapable of such a relationship. Others have become like that through whatever it may be in their lives.

And others are called to it for the sake of the kingdom of God. And we need to have that positive attitude that Jesus has to people in these circumstances.

To show them that they have a part to play in a Christian family, the Christian fellowship of God's people. To give them the need that they have, like every single one of us has, for intimacy.

[ 36 : 48 ] But not to confuse intimacy with sexual intercourse, as our society totally confuses today. Here's something John Stott wrote specifically about homosexuality.

At the heart of the homosexual condition is a deep loneliness, the natural human hunger for mutual love, a search for identity and a longing for completeness.

If homosexual people cannot find these things in the local church family, we've no business to go on using that expression. The alternative is not between the warm physical relationship of homosexual intercourse and the pain of isolation in the cold.

There is a third option, namely a Christian environment of love, understanding, acceptance and support. Our churches must be fellowships, families, where people can belong, people can find identity in Christ.

And fifthly, in all of this, our goal is for the godly transformation of all weakness, of all thorns in our flesh.

[ 38 : 06 ] That they might become instruments of God's purpose of grace and blessing. Sometimes these things, Jesus says, may all be so that the glory of Christ may be displayed in that life.

Remember what he said to the man born blind? And that's what we should be praying towards and believing for and helping one another towards. Let me read again, quoting from William Stowe.

I have known those who were faced with extreme temptation to unnatural sin, who so resolutely refused to succumb to what fatally attracted them, but which they knew was wrong, but I was utterly astonished.

But on reflection, I knew why their aesthetic, pastoral and preaching gifts were signally used of God. That very drive which could have ruined them was used when transformed into an instrument of God as the means of saving and blessing many.

But let me emphasize again that all such godly sublimation of seemingly innate sexual abnormality must be accepted and given over to God for death and transformation. This can only be done when the tendency has been recognized as a fault and a flaw and not as another kind of normality.

[ 39 : 24 ] It is therefore to be mortified with a view to seeing how the Lord will re-channel its drive, if intractable, towards something to be used by God. It could then become as beautiful as the fruit of those to whom the gift of natural union is given.

God has used people, he said, who endure agonizingly painful deviant tendencies, but who have given their maladjustment to him for transformation. This is true of far more than many who are rigidly moralistic in the Christian world would believe.

Some people hold up their hands in holy horror, even hearing that so and so has such a problem.

But if they knew how sympathetic the Lord is to the affliction, and how ready he stands to use it when it's given to him, they might be shocked out of their self-righteousness.

Jesus is far more daring in what he does and whom he employs than many exceedingly pious souls dare to believe. Perhaps why the hypocrites don't like to get too near him.

He's a shocker. Friends, that is very true. I testify in my own life that I have received some of the most important and helpful and life-transforming teaching from those for whom those words could apply to.

[ 40 : 44 ] In all of this, the goal is that the Lord Jesus Christ may take and transform something that in itself is twisted, maybe a terrible and a bitter thorn in the flesh.

He might use it for his glory. We need to help one another to that. And we need to realize that God can do much, much more than sometimes our own sanctimonious natures would like to believe.

Finally, then, living with our sin when we fall, dealing with sin in the church. We've got to distinguish here between two things. There is, on the one hand, flagrant and deliberate flouting of God's law.

And there is, on the other hand, the struggling sinner who falls prey to his temptations. The first is unrepentant sinning. It's refusing utterly to accept God's truth.

And I think we have to be very frank here and say that God takes that very, very seriously. Or through the Old Testament, there are examples of this. And Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10 that they're written for us.

[ 41 : 54 ] So that we should not be like them. He says, do not be sexually immoral. Like those when 23,000 died in one day of judgment.

That's the story in Numbers 25. You can read it later. It was open and blatant and provocative sin in the sight of Moses, in the sight of the people of God. And that could only come under condemnation and punishment.

Purge the evil wickedness from among you, says the Lord. And that very same attitude is affirmed in the New Testament church in 1 Corinthians 5 when Paul addresses open immorality.

It was worse, he said, than the pagans. And worse than that, you're proud of it. You're boasting about it. You're saying sin is righteousness. You're fighting God's clear teaching in Scripture.

And Paul quotes those very words from Deuteronomy. Expel the immoral brother. There can only be condemnation and punishment for open, unrepentant, proud, scornful flighting of the teaching of Scripture.

[ 43 : 02 ] And we today can do no other. And it is precisely because church leaders and churches have been weak and feeble in speaking up in these matters that we're in the situation we're in today.

No. Flagrant, deliberate sin must be fronted up to. There must be discipline within the church of God. But it's very, very different, isn't it, in that second category when we're speaking about the struggling sinner who falls in his temptation.

Here we need great, great humility and sensitivity. And I have to say that many in this second category have been turned into those in the first category because of the reaction and the treatment that they've received from other Christians at times.

And that, friends, is a terrible tragedy. There is no warrant for us to be sanctimonious and judgmental and harsh with the bruised reed.

Paul tells us in Galatians 6 and 1 that that one who is caught in a sin, and the word there means overtaken, tripped up, that we are to restore gently.

[ 44 : 24 ] And then he adds in, but watch unless you are tempted. Implies a willingness to take risks with people, to give ourselves to help them, but to be humble enough to know that there but by the grace of God go we.

We too can fall, even if not in that specific way, in many, many other ways. We've got to be humble, we've got to be realistic, we've got to be wise.

The one who stumbles and falls in sin, you who are spiritual, and it's a mark of your spirituality that you can restore them and help them gently. Secondly, we must give much more thought than we often do to the cost of the struggle that that person may be enduring.

We spoke of the deep loneliness, the misery, the hunger for love that often such people experience. And we have no conception of the desolation of their circumstances, the misery, the loneliness, the lack of help, and the lack of support.

And when we see them fall, we see that, but we see nothing of perhaps years, decades, of terrible struggle of resisting. I'm not a great fan of the theology of Robert Burns.

[ 45 : 48 ] I don't suppose you are either. But sometimes he has some very penetrating things to say. And here's a poem he wrote called An Address to the Uncle Good, or the Rigidly Righteous.

Just listen to what he says. I'll add a few translations for our non-Scottish tongues. For ye who have said good yourselves, said pious, and said holy, ye've not to do, but mark and tell, ye know those faults and folly, whose life is like a well-grown mill, supplied with store and water, the heap of apples have been still, and still the clad plays clatter, still you idly chatter.

Hear me, ye venerable core, as counsel for poor mortals, that frequent pass, grave wisdom's door for glaket folly's portals.

Aye, for their thoughtless, careless sakes, would hear propone defences, their stupid tricks, their black mistakes, their failings and mischances. You see your state with theirs compared, and shudder at the niffer they exchange.

But cast a moment's fair regard, what makes the mighty differ? Discount what scant occasion gave, the purity you pride in, and what's aft mere, what's aft mere than all the rest, you're better out of hiding.

[ 47 : 14 ] Think, when your castigated polskies now and then a wallop, what ragings must his veins convulse, the still eternal gallop, the wind and tide fair in your tail, right on you scud your seaway, but in the teeth are both to sail, makes an uncle leeway.

Ye high exalted, virtuous dames, tied up in godly laces, before you give poor frailty names, suppose, suppose a change of cases, a dear loved lad, convenient, snug, a treacherous inclination. But let me whisper in your lug, you're perhaps in a temptation. Then gently scan your brother man, still gentler sister woman, that they may gang a wee bit round to step aside as human. One point must still be greatly dark, the moving why they do it. And just as lamely can you mark how far perhaps they rue it.

Who made the heart? Tis he alone decidedly can try us. He knows each chord, its various tone, each spring, its various bias.

[ 48 : 35 ] Then at the balance, let's be mute. We never can adjust it. What's done, we partly may compute. But know not what's resisted.

Who can stand when the spotlight shines on our heart? When Jesus was dealing with that woman in John 8, he wasn't saying to her, adultery is fine, it doesn't matter anymore.

What he was saying to all of those people was there but by the grace of God go you. And friends, if you're honest, you know that. I know that about my heart and you know it about yours.

Every single one of us is in desperate need of the grace and the mercy and the forgiveness of God. Every single one of us needs a Jesus more full of pardoning grace and we are of sin.

Every one of us needs to see the eyes of Jesus as that woman saw them as he got up from the ground. Who can stand?

[ 49 : 55 ] Who can stand before him when our hearts are laid bare? We're all beset with struggles, we're all beset with afflictions, with weaknesses.

Whether in the sexual realm or in another realm, whatever it is, we all are standing alike before him at the balance. We can perhaps partly compute the struggles that somebody else has.

but only he can know what really it costs to be holy. So in our attitude to all of these things, let's look long and deep into our own hearts, shouldn't we?

And then let's look long at the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ and his kindness to us. And surely when we do that, we'll cherish the truth in love.

Surely when we do that, we'll listen to the Lord Jesus Christ. We'll keep him in our view and we'll keep his balance in our view in the way that we deal with one another, in the way we seek to help and encourage one another, in the way we seek to restore one another gently when we fall and are tripped up by our own sin.

[ 51 : 17 ] And let's pray that his perfect balance of truth and of love may be ours. And I want to say very particular to anybody in this church tonight who, for whatever reason, has felt or maybe does feel that they can't belong because of something deep in your heart that you can't share with anybody else.

I want to say to you tonight that if you are a sinner coming to the Lord Jesus Christ and seeking forgiveness and seeking to live by his spirit walking with him day by day, nothing that you could ever imagine that could keep you from fellowship with God's people here, nothing that you could ever imagine will keep you and nothing shall keep you because what Christ has pronounced clean is clean indeed.

I want you to know that. And I want us all to think that way. Let's just listen to the words of Jesus again.

Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? No one, Lord. Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on sin no more.

That's the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to every one of us tonight. Let's pray. When we look at our hearts in truth, O God, we can only rejoice that you are more full of pardoning grace than ever we could be of sin.

[ 53 : 14 ] Save us, we pray, from being hypocrites. Save us from being sanctimonious. Save us from being people who have scant regard for the struggles and the pain and the distress of our brothers and sisters.

Help us, we pray, to cherish the truth of your word, but to cherish it with the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for sinners.

And may we in this place, who name your name, be a family where any sinner who loves the Lord Jesus and seeks to repent can feel at home and find a home and thrive in this home.  
may we help one another to be transformed by your grace, through your Holy Spirit, that even the deepest, most painful thorns which we bear and cannot seem to get rid of, even they will become weapons of glory in the hands of the Lord Jesus himself.  
help us, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.