

# Isn't Christianity Homophobic?

## Genesis 2:24-25

**Series:** Confronting Christianity – Summer 2021

**Preaching Date:** August 8, 2021

**Worship:** A Compassionate God

**Chapter in *Confronting Christianity*:** 9

**Key Sentence:** God's call to his design for sexuality is a call to intimate community

**Outline:**

I. God's Design for Sexuality (Genesis 2:24-25, Matthew 19:3-6)

II. God's Compassion for Sinners (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

III. God's Call to Community (Colossian 3:12-17)

**Genesis 2:24–25** Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. <sup>25</sup>And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

**Matthew 19:3–6** And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” <sup>4</sup>He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup>and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? <sup>6</sup>So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

**1 Corinthians 6:9–11** 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, <sup>10</sup>nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup>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.

**Colossians 3:12–17** Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup>bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

## Isn't Christianity Homophobic? Genesis 2:24-25

Gail and I had a great vacation the last two weeks of July. We saw a lot of family, including siblings we hardly ever see. At the end of the trip we went into North Carolina and visited Gail's family at her nephew's place in the mountains. Google wanted to take us in, with our big car and small camper, on a road called US 129. But Gail's sister warned against it. It turns out US 129 is a narrow, curvy two-lane road. It's all challenging, but for eleven miles, as it goes from Tennessee to North Carolina, it's called the Tail of the Dragon. There are 318 sharp curves in the eleven miles. It's deeply loved by sports car owners and motorcyclists, who can average sixty miles an hour or more, though the speed limit is thirty. One engineer worked out averages and found the average radius of the turns is 29 feet. Considering the turning circle of my vehicle is about 20 feet without the trailer, that's tight. It's really tight for a tractor-trailer. In fact, vehicles with a length of more than 30 feet are banned. That doesn't stop 18 wheelers from trying, on purpose or by mistake. The results are often catastrophic. Jack-knifed, overturned and just stuck tractor-trailers are a major hazard, especially to a motorcycle zipping around a corner at 60 miles an hour or more. The road was never designed for big trucks, and any attempt to use it in a way it's not intended is dangerous at best and deadly at worst. On average fifteen people die on this stretch of road every year.

“Isn't Christianity Homophobic?” That's the question we'll ask from *Confronting Christianity* and it's one of the hardest questions being asked of Christianity. Our culture says that Christians hate or fear those who identify as LGBTQ+, and it's true in the case of churches like Westboro Baptist. There may be some here who've seen that hatred or fear in the church while struggling with their own identity or that of their children or friends. A legacy of hatred or fear makes it hard to hear a Biblical position that does identify these behaviors as sin while still offering love and compassion to those drawn to them.

So the Tail of the Dragon shows one of the key reasons Christians might love people drawn to a particular behavior but oppose the pursuit of that behavior. Just as our car and trailer would have been headed for harm if we drove on the Tail of the Dragon, so people are headed for harm if driven to these behaviors that violate God's design for sexuality. One specific example is the impact of sex-change hormones and surgeries on children who are drawn to transgender choices. These treatments are often premature, and the physical and emotional effects of these medical interventions are showing up as extremely negative.

So the first point we're going to make from Scripture today is that God has a good design for sexuality and that standing silent while people violate it is not in their best interest, is not the way of love. The second point follows, and is crucially important: God has tremendous compassion for those with desires outside his design for sexual identity. He loves and cares for all of us who are sexual sinners, LGBTQ or any other kind. God has compassion for sinners and a loving plan for our rescue and transformation. Finally, our third point today, is that God does not consider people with attractions outside his design as second-class citizens in his kingdom. He offers a better community that can be and often is wonderfully fulfilling. I've summarized all this by saying that God's call to his design for sexuality is a call to intimate community.

Let's begin with God's design. Our first text is Genesis 2:24-25, but we start even further back in Genesis 1:27 "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." The original design of humanity was male and female. If you look at Genesis 1, there are many distinct pairings in creation: day and night, heaven and earth, sea and dry land, etc. The culminating pair is male and female. This is God's design, written into our genetic code. With few exceptions, every person on the planet is born with either an XX chromosome pair, which is biologically female, or with an XY chromosome pair, which is biologically male. This difference extends all the way down to the nucleus of every cell in your body. On this level, to claim that gender is a continuum of choices is simply not science.

Given this fundamental pairing, God's design for marriage is unsurprising. Genesis 2:24-25 *Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.* <sup>25</sup>*And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.* One man and one woman expressing their sexuality in a committed relationship for life. In marriage sexuality can be expressed in an unashamed, innocent way, guarded by bonds of commitment, by leaving, cleaving and becoming one flesh. The leaving is where you step away from your original family, the cleaving is the wedding, where you stand before God, each other and witnesses to commit until death do you part. Becoming one flesh is the marriage itself: mental, emotional, spiritual oneness, culminating in the physical oneness and bond of the sexual relationship. This is God's design. Just as a cell phone was not made to be a hammer, nor a tractor-trailer for the Tail of the Dragon, neither were people made for some other sexual identity than this.

Jesus strongly affirms this design. Matthew 19:3–6 *And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"*

<sup>4</sup>He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup>and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? <sup>6</sup>So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” Jesus looks to Genesis and affirms all we’ve said. People were created male and female and were intended for a one flesh relationship as husband and wife. They are bonded, joined together in this relationship in a permanent way, not to be broken by divorce, but also not to be broken, Matthew 5:32, by any other sexual relationship or allegiance.

Some critics of the design argument point to how few verses there are that explicitly state it. While few, they are clear and should not be dismissed, just as we do not dismiss the clearest verses on the doctrine of the Trinity or salvation by faith simply because they are few. Moreover there is a huge amount of implicit support for the male-female, marriage-only understanding of God’s design. I count 534 references in the ESV translation of the Bible that refer to marriage between a man and a woman, leaving out most of the begats, but including all references to wife or wives or married. Examples: in the wisdom literature, God chose to include an entire book about explicitly heterosexual love (Song of Solomon). In Proverbs the father offers counsel on sexual choices, emphasizing both negative and positive exclusively heterosexual choices. In the New Testament the elders, models of faith, must be husband of one wife.

Finally, the entire relationship between Christ and the church is modeled by the relationship between an husband and a wife, as we saw several weeks ago, so that, as Tim Keller says, the Bible not only begins with a wedding, but ends with one. Ron Sider wrote that “The primary biblical case against homosexual practice is not the few texts that explicitly mention it. Rather, it is the fact that again and again the Bible affirms the goodness and beauty of sexual love, and everywhere, without exception, the norm is sexual intercourse between a man and a woman committed to each other for life.” So if we are going to address this question, “Is Christianity Homophobic,” we going to have to start with God’s design which is plain and clear and given for goodness and beauty.

What we can infer from this, fully supported by Scripture, is that any other sexual expression, whether heterosexual or some other variation, violates God’s design and decree and is, therefore sinful. Adultery is the sexual sin mentioned in the Ten Commandments. When we studied the Sermon on the Mount we saw how Jesus elevated lust as equivalent to adultery. This is what makes use of pornography sinful. Other sexual sins too numerous and too explicit to be mentioned here are named in the Bible, and are opposed to God’s design.

So, we cannot fall into the trap of saying that LGBTQ+ behaviors are any more sinful than other sexual sins. They aren't. Too many people have made them a special category. But we also can't say these behaviors are not sinful. What we can say is that many of us, and I include myself, are or have been sexual sinners. And that all of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and need mercy and compassion. Paul shows this in several places, using lists of sins that include but are not limited to homosexual behavior.

“Is Christianity Homophobic?” No. But Scripture lists homosexual sin with other sins as it shows the love of God. We see this in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:9-11. *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,<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> 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.*

Paul says that practicing homosexuality is a sinful form of sexual behavior. He also says other forms of sexual behavior, including sexual fulfillment outside of marriage are sin. The only form of sexual identity affirmed by the Bible is that of a husband and wife inside marriage. All other expressions of attraction are sinful. Theft is also sinful. Idolatry is also sinful. Greed is also sinful. Drunkenness is also sinful. Reviling, which means insulting, reproaching, mocking or speaking false evil about someone, this also is sinful. Swindling, or deceptively depriving others of money or goods, this is sinful. To this list we could add from other Scriptures self-righteousness, arrogance, hypocrisy, bitterness, anger, wrath, malice, lying, cheating, and many more such sins. As a result of any of these sins, Paul says, the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. All of you sinned, but some of you had this one, or this one, or this one as your characteristic sin.

These sins can become our identity. I'm a thief. I've stolen since childhood, stolen from my parents, stolen to support a habit, swindled the poor and the innocent. I'm a liar. I've spent all my life lying to get out of trouble or to glorify myself. I'm an angry person. I lash out verbally or even physically when I think others have done me wrong or gotten in my way. I'm a sexual sinner. I am. I speak plainly of myself now. I've been attracted to pornography since I was twelve years old. I'm still attracted to it, though by the grace of God and the prayers of others, I've long since turned from it, and I continue to turn from it. We are all sinners, including those who practice LGBTQ+ behaviors and take their identity from those rather than from God's design for sexuality.

But, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:11, you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. God has compassion and offers forgiveness to every kind of sinner. A thief can be saved on the cross. A swindling tax collector can be saved in a sycamore tree. An immoral woman can be saved at Jesus' feet. I've always kind of liked the little quip that asks "Do you think God can't use you? Jacob was a liar, Peter had a temper, David had an affair, Noah got drunk, Jonah ran from God, Paul was a murderer, Gideon was insecure, Miriam was a gossip, Mary was a worrier, Thomas was a doubter, Sarah was impatient, Elijah was depressive, Moses stuttered, Zacchaeus was short, Abraham was old and Lazarus was dead." The point is that God in his mercy washes and cleanses all kinds of sinners. He sanctifies all kinds of sinners, that is makes them progressively more holy. And the very heart of what he does is to justify sinners through the Lord Jesus Christ, not through good works they have done, not even through their repentance from sin, but through the merit of Jesus sacrificed on the cross.

Paul explicitly includes sexual sinners, explicitly includes homosexual sinners, and implicitly includes every identity in the LGBTQ+ spectrum as those who can receive God's rescue. Jesus moves with mercy toward all who will admit their sin. Paul says this more than once. In 1 Timothy he gives another list and explicitly names himself as the chief of sinners. 1 Timothy 1:9 *Understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, <sup>10</sup>the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.* In verse 13 Paul points this at himself. *I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief, <sup>14</sup>and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup>The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. <sup>16</sup>But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.*

I received mercy, grace overflowed toward me so you would know there is no sin so bad Jesus can't save you from it. This is the Gospel. Every sinner, every sexual identity is beloved by the Father, the Son and the Spirit, who long to pour out their love and overflowing grace on anyone who will come to Christ in faith. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

Is Christianity homophobic? No Christianity is homophilic. Okay I made up a word. But it makes an important point. God loves homosexual sinners. God loves adulterers like King David. God loves hypocrites. God loves persecutors like the Apostle Paul. God loves all sinners and rescues us through Christ. He gives a new identity, not liar or lesbian or any kind of sinner anymore, but Christian. If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old is gone, the new is come.

But this raises two issues of fairness. First, is it fair for God to call sin something that feels like identity? “This is who I am and I can’t help it.” Friends, it is fair. This recognition is central to the Gospel. I am a sinner and I can’t help it. Apart from Christ ‘sinner’ is my identity. Some specific form of attraction or sin may be so much a part of me that it really feels like who I am. At times I will say that despite long years of substantial victory I’m still addicted to porn. We don’t have a word like ‘alcoholic’ for that. If we did I’d say I’m a ‘pornoholic’ because just as a recovered alcoholic needs to be very careful what they expose themselves to, so also a recovered pornoholic needs to be careful what he exposes himself to. On some level it is my identity. LGBTQ+ behaviors feel like identity. Same sex attraction feels immutable. But sinful behaviors, even if they feel like my identity, need to be turned from.

But that leads to a second question. Is it fair that opposite sex attracted believers get this provision of marriage but same sex attracted believers and those with gender dysphoria get nothing? This is a subject Rebecca McLaughlin takes up at length, and I just want to summarize her powerful narrative. “I write this chapter not because I want to believe that following Jesus precludes same-sex marriage. That is, for me, an inconvenient truth. I write because I believe in a greater truth than my small mind can fathom, a deeper desire than my weak heart can muster, and a closer relationship than the best human marriage can attain. People sometimes say that the Bible condemns same-sex relationships. It does not. The Bible commands same-sex relationships at a level of intimacy Christians seldom reach. Jesus preached a gospel of radical intimacy: with him first and foremost, but through him also with each other. Building on Jesus's words at his Last Supper with his disciples, Paul argues that Christians are inextricably bound to together: "The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread"

One-body unity is not just for husbands and wives: it's for everyone. Christians are not designed to work alone any more than lungs can work without a heart. “Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body,” Paul explains, “so it is with Christ.”

Biblically, then, community is not a consolation prize for those who fail to gain sexual love. It is the prize. Christians are brothers and sisters, Matthew 12:50, “knit together in love”, Colossians 2:2, comrades in arms, Philippians 2:25. Christians are seen sharing their resources, living communally, bearing one another's burdens, loving each other deeply. The command “Greet one another with a holy kiss” appears in the New Testament five times. This relational payoff of our redemption is part of our ultimate satisfaction in Christ.

There are a dozen places in the New Testament we could go to observe this truth. One of my favorites is Colossians 3:12–17 *Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup>bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Do you see this? The community of the Body of Christ is supposed to be primary for believers. Christian friendship, far from being a second-class outlet for our needs, is primary fulfillment of our need for relationship and companionship and mutual help. As McLaughlin says “sexual intimacy belongs exclusively to heterosexual marriage. But the one-body reality of Christian community is not a lesser thing. We have this on the authority of Jesus himself, who never married, invested deeply in friendship, and declared, ‘Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends’”

What is this supposed to look like? Colossians 3 tells us. Verses 5 to 10 are a list of sins, like 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6 and 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1. As believers we are to put off the sins that characterized us before Christ. We are to put on, verse 12 compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, toward one another. I think these are our deepest relational needs. We want, verse 13, people to bear with us as we struggle through life, people to forgive when we struggle with sin. We want to be people who bear with others and forgive. Mere sexual identity does not buy us these things. But do we find these things in the community of the church? Are we offering these to others, to people who struggle, showing a community that is better than what they’re pursuing?

Verse 14 “Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” These commands, given to the whole community of the church are the key to being a place where people can find the true intimacy that the world thinks can be achieved by all these kinds of sexual intimacy. Verse 15 “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.” The one-bodiness of the church is more significant and fulfilling even than the one-bodiness of marriage. It is not only intimate with others, but with God. Verse 16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

I think we are designed for sexual relationship only in marriage and what I would call supra-sexual friendships in the church. I made up that word too. It means relationships that go beyond any barrier of sexual identity. I’ve been thinking about this for years, because apart from my wife, my closest friendships are with people in this church. They are mostly male friendships, people I’ve been meeting with and sharing meals with and doing life with. But not exclusively male. I have friendships with women too, though there are some cautions and boundaries that Gail and I have decided are appropriate for those relationships.

McLaughlin says it this way “rather than seeing sexual and romantic love as the high point on a scale where friendship laps at the low-water mark, the Bible invites us to pursue human love in different ways. The same Scriptures that say no to same-sex sexual intimacy say a massive yes to intimacy of other kinds. Indeed, deep, Jesus-centered intimacy should leave any cheap versions of sexual intimacy in the dust.” “Last summer,” McLaughlin says, “I talked with a friend who was considering dating women. She'd had bad experiences with men. She was finding herself attracted to women. I brought up Jesus's call on Christians to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him irrespective of the cost. She said it seemed unfair that same-sex-attracted Christians should be sentenced to loneliness. I was reading the book of Acts at the time. I observed that, while the first Christians faced every kind of suffering, even being stoned to death, there was one struggle they did not face: loneliness.”

Part of the goal here is to recognize singleness as a not-second class status. Jesus himself never married. While Paul commends marriage, he values singleness more. Single people are vital to the church family which is the primary family unit in Christian terms. If the church overemphasizes marriage and parenting, we need to correct that by embodying the reality that the local church is truly our family. “Enabling Christians who choose to remain single to thrive in church means becoming more biblical, not less,” McLaughlin says.

So what have we said? God's call to his design for sexuality is a call to his intimate community. His design for sexuality is a model of Christ and the church, a lifelong commitment to a one flesh relationship between a man and a woman. All other sexual behaviors and identities are sinful. But God is God of compassion and kindness who pours out mercy and grace to all sinners who call on him. Having sexual and gender desires across the spectrum of LGBTQ and plus does not disqualify you from salvation, and acting on those desires does not disqualify you from turning and being saved. Finally, choosing to live without expressing sinful sexual desires is not a second class life. Our vertical relationship with Christ and our horizontal relationships with others in the body of Christ is the fulfillment of the intimacy that God has planned for us from eternity past and for eternity future. It's what we really want. It's what we really need to offer to a world harmed by the celebration of sexual identity. Is Christianity homophobic? No. Christianity is the refuge for the lost, and Jesus the friend of sinners.