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Teaching Notes

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Gender and Sexual Identity

Lesson #4: Addressing Homosexuality Biblically

I. Old Testament Teaching on Homosexuality

A. The Account of Sodom and Gomorrah... and of Judges 19

Genesis 19:4-7 *Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom-- both young and old-- surrounded the house. ⁵ They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them." ⁶ Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him ⁷ and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing.*

Judges 19:22-23 *While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him." ²³ The owner of the house went outside and said to them, "No, my friends, don't be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don't do this disgraceful thing.*

B. Two Key Passages in the Mosaic Law

Leviticus 18:22-23 *"Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable. ²³ "Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion.*

Leviticus 20:13 *"If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.*

1. Leviticus 17-26 generally called the "Holiness Code" for Israel... defining a life separate from the pagans and pure from wickedness
2. Leviticus 18:22 occurs in a larger context of forbidden sexual relations that primarily outlaws incest, but also adultery, child sacrifice, and bestiality
3. The degree of revulsion associated with the homosexual act is suggested by the Hebrew word translated "abomination," "an abhorrent thing," "something

detestable, loathsome, utterly repugnant, disgusting” indicating a conspicuous violation of boundaries set up by God

4. The penalty is extreme: death (Leviticus 20:13)
5. The laws are unqualified and absolute; they neither penalize only oppressive forms of homosexuality, nor excuse either party to the act

C. The Modern Relevance of Mosaic Law

1. “Aren’t Christians being inconsistent when they quote part of Leviticus as though it were still binding, but leave out other parts?”

Ben Cohen, “The Banter Blog”: April 29, 2013

Article title: “ESPN’s Chris Broussard is a Homophobe and a Bigot Whether He Likes it Or Not”

“It is almost certain Broussard ignores 90% of the gibberish in Leviticus, and for good reason. It has absolutely nothing to do with the way we live our lives now. We eat juicy steaks. People who cheat on their spouses aren’t condemned to die. As a society, most of us have progressed as we learn more about ourselves and our natural world. We now know that homosexuality is not unnatural – it has existed in every human society on the planet throughout history, and within other species. It does not harm anyone and we know it doesn’t encourage others ‘to become gay’. So we move on. Unless that is, you harbor your own prejudices that lead you to pick and choose biblical laws according to your particular tastes.

And that is exactly what Broussard is doing. Although he may not understand it, he is a homophobe and a bigot. Why? Because he has been highly selective in his Biblical beliefs. Should he take to the airwaves and denounce ribeye steaks, he’d have a leg to stand on. But he hasn’t, and we can only conclude he opposes Jason Collins’s lifestyle because deep down, it is something his own masculinity is incapable of coming to terms with.”

2. Example: eating shrimp!!

Leviticus 11:9, 12 ***“Of all the creatures living in the water of the seas and the streams, you may eat any that have fins and scales....¹² Anything living in the water that does not have fins and scales is to be detestable to you.***

3. The relationship between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant is complex, with a great deal of discussion in the NT

4. Jesus upheld the Mosaic law completely, but also said he came to fulfill it

Matthew 5:17-19 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

5. The central teaching of the Law of Moses is eternally binding on Christians and fulfilled by the work of the Spirit in our lives

Matthew 22:36-40 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Romans 8:4 ...in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

6. Some laws have been called “ceremonial”, mostly centered around the animal sacrificial system... the Book of Hebrews makes it plain that these have been fulfilled in Christ and are now obsolete

Hebrews 8:13 By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

7. The “circumcision question” is addressed clearly in Acts 15 and Galatians; Gentile converts no longer need to be circumcised and required to obey the laws of Moses generally in order to be saved

Galatians 6:15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.

8. Jesus declared all foods clean... so the dietary laws have been fulfilled

Mark 7:18-19 "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? ¹⁹ For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")

9. All the unusual requirements of dress and hair etc. were intended to set the Jews apart until the Messiah came... they've been fulfilled

10. But the “moral laws” (so-called) including murder, adultery, fornication, idolatry, and many others are clearly still binding on us

11. We are called on to be discerning as we read the OT, and especially the Mosaic Law

II. The Most Important Passage: Romans 1:24-27

Robert Gagnon: “With good reason, Romans 1:24-27 is commonly seen as the central text for the issue of homosexual conduct on which Christians must base their moral doctrine. This is true for several reasons. It is the most substantial and explicit discussion of the issue in the Bible. It is located in the New Testament. It makes an explicit statement not only about same-sex intercourse among men, but also about lesbianism. And it occurs within a substantial corpus of material from a single writer, which allows the interpreter to properly contextualize the writer’s stance on homosexuality. Romans 1:24-27 is also the most difficult text for proponents of homosexual behavior to overturn.” [*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, p. 229-230]

A. Key Question: Is Homosexuality Like Any Other Sin?

1. Yes, in two significant ways
 - a. Like any other sin, it has the power to condemn the soul to hell
 - b. Like any other sin, it is completely atoned for by faith in the blood of Christ
2. No, in two significant ways
 - a. Unlike all other sins, it is afforded special treatment by God (along with idolatry) as a central example of depravity in Romans 1
 - b. Unlike all other sins, it is afforded special treatment by our culture to be excused and redefined as no longer sinful but as something to be celebrated

Jonathan Parnell: “Sexual immorality is no longer the tip of the spear for the progressive push. Adultery is still frowned upon by many. Accusations of greed will still smear a candidate’s political campaign. Thievery is still not openly embraced, and there are no official initiatives saying it’s okay to go steal things that don’t belong to you. There’s no such thing as a drunk agenda yet. Most aren’t proud to choose a beverage over stability, and there aren’t any petitions that the government should abolish the driving restrictions of inebriated individuals. Reviling others still isn’t seen as the best way to win friends and influence people. Swindling, especially on a corporate level, usually gets someone thrown into jail. In fact, the infrastructure

of the American economy depends upon, in some measure, our shared disdain for conniving scammers." [Desiring God blog, April 21, 2014]

B. Understanding Romans 1, Big Picture

1. The flow of the chapter

The Gospel God's Power of Salvation

Romans 1:16-17 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

God's Wrath Revealed Against All Wickedness

Romans 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

The First Dark Exchange: Idolatry

Romans 1:21-23 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

The Second Dark Exchange: Homosexuality

Romans 1:24-27 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-- who is forever praised. Amen. ²⁶ ¶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

A Depraved Mind Leading to a River of Sins

Romans 1:28-32 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰

slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

2. Beginning and end of the section point to the deadly danger of sin: wrath and the death penalty from God

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men

Romans 1:32 they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death

No matter what our society asserts, or votes in, or talks itself into believing... no matter what Constitutional Amendments are voted in or defeated, no matter what the Supreme Court decides... God has made it clear that He will judge this sin as He will judge all the sins mentioned in this chapter.

This theme is unfolded more plainly in Romans 2:

Romans 2:4-8 do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? ⁵ But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God "will give to each person according to what he has done." ⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

Homosexuality, like all sin, is a spiritual poison that people are drinking, to their eternal destruction. It is loving to warn them to stop... it is unloving to be silent or to tolerate or to celebrate it

3. Romans 1: Five stages of “exchanges” and “God gave them over...”
- a. Stage 1: God’s invisible transcendence and majesty is visibly manifested in creation (Romans 1:19-20)
 - b. Stage 2: Humans knowingly and foolishly “*exchange*” the true God for idols (1:21-23, recapitulated in 1:25 and 1:28a)

- c. Stage 3: God “***gives over***” humans to their desires/passions and to an “unfit mind” which aim at self-degrading and self-destructive forms of conduct (1:24, 26, 28)
- d. Stage 4: Many humans then dishonored themselves by “***exchanging***” natural intercourse for manifestly self-degrading and unnatural intercourse (1:26-27); all engaged in some form of “improper” and evil conduct (1:28-31)
- e. Stage 5: The self-degrading evil behavior to which God “***gives over***” humans ends in the ultimate recompense of “death” (1:32)

Gagnon: “Quite appropriately, an absurd exchange of God for idols (contrary to all the obvious evidence of the Creator in creation) leads to an absurd exchange of heterosexual intercourse for homosexual intercourse (contrary to all the obvious evidence of the Creator’s intent in creation).” [p. 252-253]

- C. Amazing that People Celebrating their “Liberation” from the Old Taboos that Came from “God” are Actually Displaying God’s Wrath Against Them in their Freedoms!

Romans 1:18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness

Romans 1:24 God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

Romans 1:26-27 God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another.

Paul Achtemeier: “So here we are, we rebellious peoples, glorying in the freedom we think to be grace, only to be told by Paul it is instead the fearful punishment of sin and a manifestation of God’s wrath. The permissiveness we celebrated as a world ‘come of age’ we now find to be nothing more than the permission to fall deeper into sin... Divine discipline is the measure of grace, as divine permissiveness is the measure of wrath.”

- “You may drown in whatever swamp you choose...”
- IMAGE: strong current, boat straining to pull away, inhabitants of boat cursing God who is holding them to shore... God lets go, and even gives the boat a shove out into the whitewater

- One major difference in the way God treats His children: He fights sin in you with FIERCE DETERMINATION, and causes you to fight it too
- He will never GIVE YOU OVER to what your sin nature wants

Hebrews 12:6 “The Lord disciplines those He loves and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son...”

D. Careful Exegetical Notes on Romans 1:24-27

1. Verse 24

ESV Romans 1:24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves

- “Therefore” = because of human preference for idols over the living God
- “in the lusts of their hearts” = desires, yearnings, sexual lusts, cravings... the heart drawn out after something illicit or evil
- “God gave them over” = delivered, handed over, surrendered, abandoned
- “uncleanness” = impurity, foulness as in a wound or sore, dirt, filth; in context, filthy conduct sexually
- “consisting of their bodies being dishonored among themselves” = this is the result of the giving over by God
 - “dishonoring” = to be held in no honor, lightly esteem, bring dishonor upon, degrade, treat shamefully, insult...
 - “their bodies” ... this is what they do to their bodies... they degrade/insult/treat shamefully their own bodies

God intended the human body to be a temple for His glory, and thus He made it fearfully and wonderfully complex... it glorified God, apart from sin... but this sin greatly degrades/dishonors the body

- “among themselves” = this is a community thing, done in a group

2. Verse 25

ESV Romans 1:25 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.

- a. Romans 1:25 is parenthetical in the flow of the thought... it reminds readers that God's "giving over" was not an arbitrary action on the part of a hateful god, but the righteous response of a holy Creator
- b. "they exchanged the truth of God for a lie" = going back to the earlier exchange in idolatry... by worshipping and serving the creation rather than the Creator, the further exchange of normal sexuality for homosexuality is more of the same... an extension of the basic exchange of God's truth for a lie
- c. Therefore, homosexuality, like idolatry, is a lie

3. Verse 26

ESV Romans 1:26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature

- a. "for this reason" = because of this, therefore, this is the reason why
- b. "dishonorable passions" = disgraceful, shameful, ought to produce shame; the Greek word for "passions" is something more than emotion, but rather an overpowering inner force, often sexual, like lust; some Greek writers used this word to talk about a "madness" that comes on a human mind
- c. "for even" = Paul explains a specific case of what he means, and includes the word "even" to show a measure of surprise; women involving themselves in same-sex intercourse is an example of this dishonorable passion
- d. Question: why did Paul address lesbianism first??
- e. "their females" = Paul uses a different word than he usually does for women; in verse 27 also "males" is a different word than the common... some commentators think Paul was going back to the creation account: Genesis 1:27 "the Creator made them male and female"... same Greek words in the Greek translation of the OT
- f. "exchanged" = same as the exchange of idolatry; you had this, rejected it, and traded it for this
- g. "natural relations" = the natural use... what is clearly established in nature, by biology; the idea is that it should be as obvious that females mate with males biologically as that all this complex creation came from a wise, loving, and powerful Creator; this is what is OBVIOUS in nature
- h. "contrary to nature" = this is a key argument in Paul's assertion; homosexuality clearly violates the intended function of our bodies, specifically in procreation

- i. Illustration: suppose you saw someone try to put food in their ear; you would say they are using their ear for what is contrary to nature; the ear is for hearing. Similarly, if you saw a person pick up a CD (back when people still used CDs) and stare at it for a long time, trying to enjoy the music... the eye doesn't hear. The body is set up with organs that clearly have a function, a purpose. Homosexuality violates the clear purpose of organs

Proverbs 20:12 The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the LORD has made them both.

1 Corinthians 6:13 "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"

- j. So... same-sex intercourse is contrary to nature, unnatural

4. Romans 1:27

ESV Romans 1:27 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.

- a. "The men" = as noted above; the same unusual Greek word, "males" pointing back to Genesis 1:27 and creation
- b. "likewise" = in the same pattern as that just described about the females
- c. "gave up" = "having left behind"... give up, abandon, neglect... this was part of the process for the males... they gave up normal relations with women
- d. "natural relations with women" = again, as just described... the sexual relationship that God clearly established in nature, in biology... the procreative process is part of being "fearfully and wonderfully made"; God "blessed them, and said 'Be fruitful and multiply'" and established in their bodies the ability to do this; the men abandoned this clear intention in nature
- e. "were consumed with passion for one another" = inflamed, burning, on fire, the heat of sexual passion, desire for other men
- f. "men committing" = effecting by labor, achieving, working at, practicing; a bit of an ironic word, since it is usually used for productive labor resulting in some achievement
- g. "indecent" = complex Greek word; basic word ("form, appearance, bearing, dignity") is negated... so "misshapen, ugly, unseemly, shameful, indecorous, indecent... obscene

- h. “and in return receiving” = to take or receive or get what is due, what is fitting, what lines up, what is just...
- i. “due penalty” = wages, reward, recompense... something corresponding... “payback”
- j. “which is necessitated” = this phrase is in the Greek, but often not translated... literally “what is necessitated by their straying”
- k. “perversion” = straying, wandering from the clear path; Greek word related to deception, delusion, error

III. The Grace of God in the Rest of Romans

- A. Romans 1:24-27 makes it plain that homosexuality is a sin, and like all sins, worthy of death
- B. The Sin List at the end of Romans 1 is broad enough to capture every human being on earth
- C. But in case we miss it, Romans 3:10-11, 3:23 captures everyone plainly:

Romans 3:9-11 What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. ¹⁰ As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

Romans 3:23 all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

- 1. Everyone on earth is a sinner in need of a Savior
- 2. Even more specifically, all adults are sexual sinners... no one is clear in this matter

D. The Awesome Gospel Message of Salvation!!

Romans 3:23-25 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

E. All Sinners Justified by Faith

Romans 3:28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

F. All Justified People Called on to Live Holy Lives by the Spirit

Romans 6:1-2 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Romans 8:13-14 if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

IV. Heaven will Be Full of People Saved from Satan's Chains!!

- A. Homosexuality is just one of Satan's powerful chains
- B. So are Islam, Hinduism, materialism, atheism, Darwinism, cults... etc.
- C. God Will Win! All the Elect will be Rescued!

John 6:37-40 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."