

Practicing Truth and Love (Part 2)

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[0 : 0 0] Well, like last week, most of the Bible verses will be on the screen, though if you do want it to turn in your Bible somewhere, Genesis chapter 2 would be the place, which we'll get to shortly.

Again, for those who are visiting, our standard practice is just to work our way through books of the Bible so that we can see God's Word in context. But from time to time, we do have topicals where we're required to kind of skip around the Bible to see what the Bible says on that topic.

And can I start by saying I think today's topic is actually more difficult than last week's. Last week's on transgenderism is still difficult, but it hasn't been around for as long as homosexuality.

And so my guess is we will know more people who are gay than those who are trans, for example. And in fact, for some of us, we may have family members, whether it's children or grandchildren, nieces or nephews, who are same-sex attracted.

And so it's likely to be more difficult because it's more real for us. But we also need to remember we're talking about real people whom God loves and whom Christ died for.

[1 : 1 4] And some of whom, despite their own same-sex attraction, have refused to engage in same-sex activity because they genuinely want to follow Jesus.

And so to help us realise that these are real people, I thought we'd hear from one to start with. So here's Sam. I'm a Christian because I know that Jesus died for me, that he rose again from the dead, that there's good reasons for believing those things.

I'm a Christian because the message of Jesus makes far more sense of who we are as people and the way the world is than anything else I've ever come across.

Being single actually has been a real blessing. It's given me opportunities to do things I wouldn't have probably got round to doing if I was married or had children. And it's given me a capacity for friendship that I don't think I would otherwise have.

And it means a lot to me to be able to have a wide range of friends and to be able to, I hope, be a good friend to others. Having same-sex attraction isn't always easy. Obviously, I'm experiencing desires that I don't want to have.

[2 : 2 5] And that is, at times, it can be very, very painful. It can be quite frustrating. There are times when it's made some friendships a bit tricky.

And there are times, obviously, when singleness isn't much fun either. All the sort of opportunities and advantages of it, there are times when it would be nice to have my own family. There are things God calls all of us to turn away from.

There are things in all of our lives that we need to rethink and to kind of give over to God. But actually, knowing Jesus is what it is all about. And that is the greatest gift God can give us.

And as long as that gift is being offered, and it is, God cannot truly be said to be anti-anyone. One of the things Jesus says that most, I guess, encourages me in this whole area, and I hope it would encourage others in other areas too, is that Jesus said on one occasion that anyone who leaves fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters and homes and other things for him and for the sake of the gospel, even in this life, will receive a hundredfold in return.

So, although we have to give things up to be Christian, although we have to turn away from certain things, leave certain things behind, actually, we always, even in this life, receive far more back from Jesus than we ever give for him.

[3 : 50] And so, although there will be certain kinds of relationships I'm not going to enter into as a Christian, I've received back from Jesus a whole wonderful other set of relationships, being part of a Christian community, being part of a church family.

And so, it's never a bad deal to follow Jesus. Now, there are lots of things that Sam said that are worth taking note of, like how there are good reasons to follow Jesus, good evidence.

And so, if you're not a Christian online or here today, there are good reasons to believe. But also, it was great hearing how Sam said it's never a bad deal to follow Jesus either, even if it means for him that he'll deny his desires and remain single.

Why will he do that? Well, because he knows the Bible, where it speaks of God's design, which is point one on your outlines.

In our first reading from Genesis chapter 2, it should say, not chapter 1 on the screen, chapter 2, we heard how God took Adam and put him in the garden to work it and take care of it.

[5 : 11] But it was too big a job for him. And so, God said, it's not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him. And so, he made Eve.

Please note that the word helper is not a term of inferiority. God himself is called helper in the Bible. And as the old saying goes, behind every great man is an even greater woman.

I think I just saw a wife elbow her husband then. But anyway. But the idea is they are to lovingly rule the world together. That's why they are both made in God's image, to rule over the world like God in a loving way.

But they are to do that as equal in worth and different in biology and role. So, only the woman can give birth.

The man cannot. And in marriage, the husband will be held more responsible before God on that last day than the wife. I don't know if you realize this, but in the Bible, it speaks about death coming into the world because of Adam's sin.

[6 : 18] It never says because of Eve's sin. And so, the husband will be held more accountable. But this equal and different or this oneness and difference is then seen at the end of the passage where Adam sees Eve and says, this is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. Notice there's a oneness and equality here. You know, bone of bone, flesh of flesh. We are made of the same one stuff.

And so, we're both equally human. Yet, there's also a difference. She is woman. He is man. This oneness and difference is again seen in the very next verse, in verse 24, where it says, this is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife and they become one flesh.

Different man and woman united together as one. And both in the act of sex and the state of marriage, we see this, this oneness and difference.

Indeed, sex is only meant for marriage because it is an act of oneness and difference. You know, two different people coming together as one. And so, it matches the state of marriage, which is oneness and difference.

[7 : 41] And so, if you have sex outside of marriage, then it's kind of like playing basketball on a golf course, I guess. It's possible to do and people do it all the time, but it doesn't actually match.

The act doesn't match the state. Indeed, as one psychologist put it, sex is a bit like superglue that helps the marriage stick together. And so, sex outside of marriage is like supergluing your skin and then ripping it apart, which hurts, right?

And we see that hurt with broken relationships all around our society, don't we? And the point is, this oneness but difference is part of God's design and it's good.

Because, firstly, it enables Adam and Eve to have kids to help them rule over the world. Just as we saw last week in chapter one, God created them, male and female. He created them, then said, be fruitful and increase in number.

But it also reflects something of God's own character, where God himself is one, but also Father, Son, Spirit. Oneness difference. And it is also a picture of the oneness and difference between Christ and the church.

[8 : 53] So, later on in the Bible, the Apostle Paul uses that verse from our reading from Genesis chapter 2 and quotes it at the top of the screen there. But then he says in verse 32, this is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Marriage is a picture of the oneness and difference we have as members of Christ's body. We are different and different to Christ and to each other, but we are one body of Christ, says the Bible.

United together as one family, if you like. It even points to the marriage that we'll all be part of on the last day, whether we are single or married.

And so, in Revelation chapter 21, it talks about John sees the new Jerusalem, which is the people of God, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband, which in Revelation is Jesus.

And on this day, on that wedding day, on the last day, this marriage will be happily ever after. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, as it says at the bottom of the screen.

[10 : 06] We'll all live happily ever after. The point is, God's design for sex and marriage is for male and female, for only in this way can there be oneness and difference, which is for our good.

But it doesn't exist in homosexuality. It's oneness and sameness, isn't it? Male and male, or female and female. And so, they cannot have children on their own.

Yes, they can adopt and so on, but not on their own. Nor can they reflect God's character, nor be a picture of Christ and the church, nor point to the greater marriage on the last day.

And Sam knows this. And it's why the Bible goes on to condemn the practice of this. In passages like 1 Corinthians chapter 6, where it's listed among a number of things, practices that mean we won't inherit the kingdom of God.

I mean, if there was only homosexuality in the world, there would not be any children in the world, would there? I mean, that's just the reality. And so, why is there homosexuality in the world?

[11 : 18] Well, because humanity's fallen, point two. In Genesis chapter 3, the very next chapter, God said to Adam, because you've done this, then cursed is the earth because of you.

The earth is fallen, which is why we have diseases and disasters. But then he also says, and you're going to have hard work until you return to the ground.

In other words, we will all die. This means that both earth and our bodies are broken and will decay, sadly. Paul says something similar in Romans chapter 8.

A creation was subjected to frustration, and it's decaying. The sun is decaying. I mean, it's still got, I don't know how many millions of years left in it, but the sun is decaying.

And our bodies are decaying. I mean, sadly, we know this is true, don't we? And so we groan, longing for the redemption of our broken bodies.

[12 : 21] You might have groaned as you got out of bed this morning. I did. The point is, our world and all humanity is fallen, which includes our bodies and our desires.

And so for some people, they can't help but be same-sex attracted. Now, at this point, people want to talk about the gay gene, so let me just briefly mention this.

Dr. Patricia Werrikoon says, after decades of research, then we can confidently say there is no single gay gene. And this seems to be the case even years ago.

So back in 2014, a gay journalist, Julie Bindle, wrote this book about what it means to be homosexual today. That's the subtitle. She interviews a geneticist, Dr. Andrew Rutherford, who himself says there is no gay gene.

But scientists know there are developmental issues that take place in the womb, where different hormones combine with different genes we inherit.

[13 : 26] And this can lead to biological predispositions. And so Dr. Werrikoon says on the very next sentence, and yet there can be in sum a biological predisposition towards same-sex attraction.

It's the same for those who may be predisposed to cancer or asthma or bipolar, or as we saw last week, to feeling gender dysphoria.

And for those who develop this, you know, it's just what happens. They cannot help this. In biblical terms, we have fallen bodies and desires.

In fact, we are all born with a predisposition to be selfish, aren't we? And we have this desire, whether we want it or not, don't we?

As I've said before, you never have to teach children to be selfish or say no. It just happens automatically, doesn't it? This doesn't mean then that people like Sam walk around in a constant state of same-sex attraction, just like we don't walk around in a constant state of feeling selfish.

[14 : 34] But it does mean when they're romantically attracted to someone because of their looks or an emotional connection, it's the person of the same sex. Because it's a fallen attraction.

As Sam said in the video, it's a desire he does not want to have. And yet, despite years of praying about it, he still has. As does just under 5% of the population, according to surveys.

It continues to come automatically to him, just as selfishness continues to come automatically to us. And so we cannot say to people who are same-sex attracted, just get over it.

Any more that we can say to each other about our selfishness, just get over it. That's a work in progress, isn't it? And Jesus offers help, point three.

You see, God loves all people, doesn't he? And Christ died for all people, didn't he? In fact, Christ saves all who believe. Romans chapter 10 says, everyone, whether you're same-sex attracted or opposite-sex attracted, either way, everyone, who calls on the name of the Lord, Jesus, will be saved.

[15 : 52] And when we believe, when we believe in Jesus, we enter a new state of life. We are washed, sanctified, justified. That's what Paul goes on to say in that 1 Corinthians passage we saw before, in verse 11.

Now, before we single out one group, the paragraph in the top, you know, the group, the men who have sex with other men, I want you to notice that we're actually all on that list.

Do you realize that? Apart from the fact that we've all probably committed adultery in our hearts, we are all idolaters. An idol is anything we serve or put before God, which includes our family, our money, our health, ourselves.

And can anyone in this room say that they've always put God first in their lives? Really? I haven't. We have all at times failed in this, haven't we?

And so we are all guilty of idolatry, aren't we? But the good news is every person who believes in Jesus is washed or forgiven.

[17 : 04] Verse 11, sanctified or made holy in God's sight, justified or put right with God in life. And this comes with a new identity.

And notice how in verse 11, Paul says that is what some of you were. The implication being not now. We have a new identity.

Our world these days seems to be obsessed with labels. If you've got young kids or teenagers or grandkids, you'll know this, especially when it comes to sexuality.

It seems people are desperate to have a sexual identity. I'm straight. I'm gay. I'm trans. You know, all that sort of thing. It's lots of talk about this these days. The problem is our feelings are flawed and often change, especially for kids going through puberty.

What's more, we are more than our sexuality, aren't we? We have other interests and hobbies and work and things like that. And so our sexuality doesn't cover every aspect of our lives.

[18 : 10] And so our sexual identity is not a great one. It changes and it doesn't cover every aspect of our lives. A far better label or identity to have is one that does not change and does cover every part of our lives.

The one that God gives us in Christ. The one where we are his child. For when we believe in Jesus and are washed, sanctified and justified, we are given the right to become children of God.

John chapter one, at the top of the screen. In fact, as John says in his first letter, he says, see what great love the father has lavished on.

I love that word lavished, lavished on us. That we should be called children of God. And that is who we are. That's our identity.

And this is a way better identity because it does not change. We never cease to be God's lavishly loved child. No matter how we're feeling that day, do we?

[19 : 14] And it covers all of life. For we remain God's child every minute of every day, don't we? In fact, it even means that we are co-heirs with Christ if we are God's children.

And so everything Christ inherits, we will inherit, which is extraordinary when you realize it. The identity is way better than any other identity kids or people give themselves today.

And so this is what we need to show those we know who are struggling with their identity. That Jesus offers not just a new state, but a better identity.

And one that comes with family. A family of other children who can encourage us in life. As Sam said on the video, whatever family he has given up to remain single and celibate, he receives a hundredfold back in this life, whether brothers or sisters, mothers or children in Christ.

And this new identity also comes with God's spirit to help us resist faulty feelings and disordered desires. Something that we all need to do.

[20 : 28] Now, in our second reading, Paul says that each of you, he doesn't single out particular group, he just says each of you, each of us should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable.

Because each of us have disordered desires from time to time. But God's spirit helps us resist those desires. So we don't sin. Which means there is a difference between a disordered desire and actual sin.

Just because someone sometimes feels same sex attraction doesn't mean they are sinning. I think sometimes we Christians think that.

But that's not what James seems to suggest. So James chapter one on the screen says, each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire, then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin.

And sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Death. Temptations can come from the outside or from the inside. And here it's from the inside, isn't it?

[21 : 36] It's from our fallen desires. But notice that desire leads to or gives birth to sin. It is not the same as sin. So it is possible to have disordered desires, like a predisposition to be selfish or same-sex attraction, but then not act on those desires.

Even for heterosexuals, where there is a difference, we have an ordered attraction and find the opposite sex attractive. That's part of God's design.

But if we're not married to them, that that ordered attraction can quickly turn into a disordered desire, which then in turn gives birth to sin.

So for example, the ordered attraction of, oh, they're attractive, to the disordered desire is, oh, now I really want to have a look again at that one, to the sin of actually having a prolonged look.

So you commit adultery with them in your heart, says Jesus. Or you flirt with them with your words, or you imagine what life is like with them in your minds. The point is, James is saying there's a difference, even between disordered desires, where we want to do something that we know is not right, an actual sin, where we give in to it.

[22 : 58] And so it is possible to have same-sex attraction and be a Christian. To be like Sam, who seeks not to sin. After all, the very fact that Paul tells us to control our bodies suggests that we are still tempted with disordered desires ourselves, doesn't it?

And that sometimes we even fail. And so thank God for his grace and ongoing forgiveness in Christ for all of us. And for his spirit who helps us to resist more and more so we can grow in our ability to control our bodies in a holy and honorable way, whether we are opposite-sex or same-sex attracted.

And so how are we to respond to all this, point four? Well, firstly, love the person. For as we saw last week, they've been made in God's image and so have incredible dignity and worth.

We all do. Indeed, as Jesus said, love your neighbor as yourself. Yeah. And the moment you meet someone and are next to them, then they are your neighbor.

That's how it works. And so we are to love them, including those who struggle with same-sex attraction. And if we do, it can even help them to come to Christ, like Tracy.

[24 : 26] My name's Tracy. I'm a physiotherapist. I live in London and I'm nearly 30 years old. I became a Christian about three years ago.

Before that, I hated Christians. I couldn't stand them. I knew I was gay when I was 12. I dealt with that as a teenager.

And then, sort of in my 20s in London, lived a very normal life as just another gay person in London. I had a girlfriend.

We had a mortgage. It was no big deal. I really couldn't stand Christians and their homophobia. The thing that really surprised me about my first trip to the church that I now go to is just how really wonderfully friendly and welcoming everybody was.

They weren't any of the things that I associated with Christians. They weren't self-righteous. They didn't want to have really intense discussions with me about my thoughts on the Bible or my life or anything like that.

[25 : 31] They asked me what I did. They wanted to know who I was and they genuinely wanted to get to know me. And then the second and third time I went, they remembered my name and they asked about things that I told them I was going to do.

And it was just very obvious that they were clearly just really happy I was there. I think we should get a coffee machine like that. That looked pretty good, didn't it?

But it's all rocket science though, is it? Love the person because they are a person. But also because it might help them to become a Christian like Tracy. As I said last week, they first need to believe in Jesus before they can follow Jesus, like everyone.

But second, hold the truth. One of the lies that our world says is if you love people, you have to agree with people. But that great passage on love from 1 Corinthians 13 that's read at weddings around the world, you know that passage that says love is patient, love is kind, and so on.

Notice it also says love rejoices with the truth. Yeah. And so we had to love the person but also hold to the truth.

[26 : 48] We had to love the person but not their disordered desire nor their sinful behavior. After all, we had to love each other but not our selfish desires or our selfish behavior, aren't we?

But holding to the truth will mean that once they are a Christian, helping them to live as a Christian, which means reminding them of the wonderful truths about Christianity, like their new identity as God's lavishly loved child, which is so much better than any sexual identity, and that there is grace and forgiveness whenever we fail.

We need that too. We mustn't forget to remind people of these wonderful truths because the reality is they're likely to already know the difficult truths for them, that sex is for marriage between a man and a woman, and they're likely to already struggle with those truths, especially because for many, like Tracy, it means ending her relationship with her girlfriend and perhaps finalizing her mortgage in London, giving all that up.

It's not easy to do. These are big calls for people to make. And so we're to help them by thirdly, being their family, giving them relationship and their own place to belong.

Even those who have Christian parents or grandparents, we need to provide family for them because you know what young adults and teenagers alike, parents don't count.

[28 : 20] Okay? Whatever they say, it doesn't seem to matter as much. It's what other peers and friends say. And so we need to be their peers and friends, give them a place where they feel they belong and are loved.

We should do that for all single people, actually, who don't have their own family. We need to be their family, both as a church and as individuals or biological families, which requires spending time with them and including them like they do for Tracy.

Walking into church on Sunday is a bit like coming home. It's like walking into a family living room and being greeted by your siblings. Only there are hundreds of them.

And it's just a wonderful experience. I've got some friends who've got two little boys. They're four and six. I've known them for two and a half years. They are wonderful.

I see them nearly every week. I go around to read the Bible with their mum. But before we do that, I see them, I play with them, read them stories. It's summer, we go on the trampoline.

[29 : 25] It's hugely precious to me being part of their family. And I feel very much like that's what I am. That's how they treat me. I go on holiday with them.

If I'm having a hard time, I see them. It's been a really wonderful gift. And I wonder if this is an area that we could do better at sharing our lives with one another, particularly those who are on their own.

I know I could. Perhaps like Jill Wilson, whose funeral was last Friday. She would go and watch movies with a single girl in our church who struggles and just hang out with her.

It's beautiful. Or like another member of our church who takes a widower out for coffee every Thursday for a chat. Now, both these people were or are retired. And so, yes, they have more time.

Finding time can be a real struggle for some of us, I know. But it's worth us all thinking about how we might be family for others, particularly for those who are on their own. And especially for those who have chosen to be on their own for the sake of following Christ.

[30 : 29] Well, I need to finish. There'll be some here today, my guess is, that are so focused on the truth they find it hard to love. And there'll be some here this morning who are so keen to love that they find it hard to hold to the truth.

And perhaps there'll be some who have family or friends who are same-sex attracted or practicing that attraction. And so they find it hard to believe that God's design is actually good for us.

I must confess that I don't have this struggle, so I thought I'd let Sam, who does, have the final word before we pray. I'm convinced what the Bible says on this issue is good because I'm convinced God is good.

I'm convinced God is good because actually Jesus has shown his goodness to me in his death and resurrection. I see the goodness of his words in so many areas of life.

The one who made me and knows me better than I know myself is going to know what's good for me. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we thank you that you know us better than we know ourselves.

[31 : 43] We thank you that we know you are good because only a good God would give up his only son Jesus to die for us. And we know Jesus is good because he willingly went to the cross for us.

And so help us, we pray, to practice both truth and love. Help us, we pray, to have the mind of Christ himself. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's stand and sing May the mind of Christ my Saviour. May the mind of Christ my Saviour live in me from day to day by his love and power controlling all I do and say.

May the word of God enrich me with his truth come out too loud so that all may see I triumph only through his power.

May the peace of God my Father in my life forever reign that I may be come to comfort those in free and pain May the love of Jesus fill me as the waters fill the sea in exalting in exalting self-erasing this is victory May I run the race before me strong and brave to face the fall though he will give only love to Jesus as I own will go

[34 : 23] May his beauty rest upon me as I seek the lost to win and may they forget the channel sing only here Please be seated.

Let's pray. Our loving Heavenly Father Father we come before you asking for your forgiveness for all our sins in word thought and deed please accept our prayers this morning Father we give thanks for the beauty we see in your wondrous creation forgive us for not taking care of it as we should we pray for people suffering in various countries due to persecution wars corruption and natural disasters we pray that in your great mercy you will heal our broken world and put to right all the wrongs being committed grant world leaders a spirit of peace and reconciliation help all leaders including ours here in Australia to work together with mutual forbearance and respect protect them from corruption and the temptation of self-serving so that the world may be a secure home for all its peoples great shepherd of your people bless our ministers here in Australia and around the world fire their hearts with passion for your word and care for your people that they may joyfully proclaim your gospel in truth we give much thanks and praise for our ministry team here at Holy Trinity and St. John's who faithfully preach from your word each week bless encourage and guide them as they serve you especially Andrew who leads the team we also pray for Helen and our pastoral care team that you grant them wisdom and discernment as they care for our church family heavenly father in your mercy please give to this diocese and archbishop after your own heart who will walk in your ways give us a leader of vision and a teacher of your truth so that your church may be built up and your name glorified we ask you of your goodness

Lord to comfort and sustain all who in this transitory life are in trouble sorrow need sickness or any other adversity we pray for the families who are grieving the loss of their loved ones that you may continue to comfort them we pray for Barbara John Kate Noreen and Vaya Wu with ongoing concerns we also pray for those in care accommodation and from St. John's who are in need please relieve them according to their needs and give them a firm trust in your goodness and promises we also pray for your blessings on their caregivers we are reminded this morning that in Christ we have new identities as God's children we are to practice truth and love as Jesus Christ did so as to reflect him in our daily lives we ought to live lives that are holy and point people to Christ our Savior help us Father to do just that each and every week accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen well because of the topic this morning and the fact that we all have disordered desires I think there's things that we can all ask God's forgiveness for knowing that he loves to forgive so as we come to the Lord's table and because we're also running a bit behind why don't we just pause in quiet and reflect on our own lives and if there is something that you wish to ask God's forgiveness for then do that in the quietness of your head and heart so let's just pause for a moment let me break in gracious Father we thank you so much for the blood of Christ which assures us forgiveness for all our sins we thank you in his name Amen Lord's marvelous Lord's prochine Lord's 2023

Oh my goodness Lord's Shah God's prochine Love's UM