

Sexual Identity Issues: Towards  
Graciousness and Inclusion  
Ephesians 2:11-22, 3:6-7

Sermon

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### **Ephesians 2:11-3:7**

<sup>11</sup> Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. <sup>12</sup> In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope.

<sup>13</sup> But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. <sup>15</sup> He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups.

<sup>16</sup> Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

<sup>17</sup> He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. <sup>18</sup> Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

<sup>19</sup> So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. <sup>20</sup> Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. <sup>21</sup> We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.

<sup>22</sup> Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

### **Ephesians 3 vse 6-7**

<sup>6</sup> And this is God's plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus. \* <sup>7</sup> By God's grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.<sup>1</sup>

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\* Or because they are united with Christ Jesus.

<sup>1</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). Holy Bible : New Living Translation. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Eph 2:11-3:7). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

## INTRODUCTION:

### I. ONE OF THE MOST INTRINSIC AND CORE ASPECTS OF OUR BEING IS OUR IDENTITY

#### A. WHO WE ARE...

1. Our family, our upbringing, the area we were brought up in, what we were taught, and the people we grew up with, the language that we were taught—all had a big influence on who we have become
  - a) Also our genetics, our DNA; those marvelous cell based codes that we inherit from our parents—play a huge role in who we are
  - b) As we see in the studies of twins
2. In all of this we want to turn out, and be seen as normal, and we want to be accepted and respected and loved
  - a) Short people don't always like being short
  - b) Some people with red hair love it others wish they were blonde or brunette
  - c) People who are born with big noses, or large posteriors, or high pitched voices, who are short, or have red hair—can have trouble accepting that part of who they are, and can struggle with their image and the negative reactions including bullying they experience
3. One aspect that plays a major part in our identity is our sexuality
  - a) This is a very basic, primal, and dominant aspect of who we are, how we see ourselves, and how we view others,
  - b) Men and women are both created in God's image, but we are in many ways, profoundly different, while at the same time being in even more ways, the same

**B. WE HAVE ENOUGH CHALLENGES DEALING WITH OUR MALE / FEMALE DIFFERENCES**

1. Without throwing in the variations of sexual orientation, known these days under the acronym of LGBT, or LGBTI.
2. 'LGBTI' refers to those whose sexual orientation, gender identity or sex differ from heterosexual or male/female sex and gender norms.<sup>2</sup>
3. It stands for;
  - a) Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and other sexuality (LGBTI)

**C. BECAUSE OUR SEXUALITY IS SUCH A CORE PART OF OUR BEING**

1. It impacts us deeply and profoundly at psychological, emotional, mental, physiological and relational levels,
2. It includes powerful hormonal effects and primal motivations, orientations and desires
  - a) Because of this, it is very hard to be objective and open minded on the topic
  - b) We are all heavily effected, and have a bias that is deep and wide
3. So it is important to humbly recognise our innate bias
4. Heterosexual males, especially, but women as well, tend to have an innate revulsion towards homosexuality
  - a) This in large part has led to most societies being aggressively homophobic
  - b) We have no chance of being objective and fair unless we humbly recognise the role our own sexuality plays in our views on the issue of sexual identity

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<sup>2</sup> Gabi Rosenstreich, LGBTI People Mental Health & Suicide, Briefing Paper, Revised 2nd Edition, 2013 , Beyond Blue, <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/bw0258-lgbti-mental-health-and-suicide-2013-2nd-edition.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

**S.P.S:**

**D. THOUGH WE TEND TO START WITH OUR OWN VIEWS AND LOGIC,**

1. As Christians, when we seek to understand any topic to do with our human life and identity,
2. We need to start with God, who is love and grace, who is about inclusion, reconciliation, peace and wholeness

**E. THIS IS A HUGE TOPIC**

1. And it is has come to the forefront again because of the debate over same sex marriage.
  - a) But we can only begin to address the many issues that are involved, and even those only briefly
  - b) So please keep that in mind today
  - c) As we can't possible cover every question that it raises
2. But we can hopefully make a beginning, and one based on the plain message of Jesus Christ, rather than particular interpretations of a few verses or the emotive teachings of zealous but too often misguided religious voices

**F. PRAYER**

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## BODY:

### II. LET'S BEGIN WITH WHERE WE ARE CURRENTLY WITH OUR PERSONAL VIEWS ON SAME SEX ISSUES?

#### A. WE ARE GOING TO ASK FOUR QUESTIONS THAT HELP US SEE WHERE WE ARE ALONG A CONTINUUM OF VIEWPOINTS.

- a) Write down 1, 2, 3 or 4 on a piece of paper, and drop it into the basket as it comes round<sup>3</sup>
- (1) I believe homosexuality should be condemned and believe homosexuals should be excluded from the church congregation and membership
  - (2) I tolerate homosexuals, but only if they keep quiet and anonymous
  - (3) I am happy to welcome homosexuals but don't believe we should ordain or marry them
  - (4) I believe in extending equal rights, privileges and opportunities in the church to all, including LGBTI people

#### B. FIVE MORE QUESTIONS:

- (1) Is gay sex sin?
  - (2) Are some people born gay?
  - (3) Is being gay a choice?
  - (4) Can gays become straight?
  - (5) Is it a sin to be gay even if celibate?
2. Like you to watch a brief presentation that asks and reflects on these questions and beliefs that underlie our approach to this issue. <sup>4</sup>

#### C. WHAT THIS VIDEO SHOWS

1. Is the flawed presumptions many Christians base their views and conclusions about same sex attraction upon

<sup>3</sup> In our service we collected the slips and calculated the average to get an idea of where we are as a congregation on the issues.

<sup>4</sup> *Shocking What straight Christians really think about gay people!* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boHWIgQ9GrM>

2. If we presume that gays have a choice about being gay, and that they *can* change, then it is easy to conclude that gays have made a wrong moral choice, that being gay is a therefore a sin that can and should be repented of
3. If we are to seek truth, and grow in understanding about such a complex and emotive matter, surely it is important that we humbly consider whether our views are based on such flawed presumptions.

**D. WHAT IF THOSE ASSUMPTIONS ARE WRONG, AND PEOPLE ARE BORN GAY?**

1. What if one day in their teens they suddenly wake up to find they are attracted to those of the same sex?
2. Let's think back into our early adolescence
  - a) Do you remember when we first found ourselves mysteriously "falling in love" with someone of the opposite sex
  - b) Do you recall that whole stage of life when we started having all sorts of mental and physical feelings of attraction and desire?
  - c) Did you choose that?
3. The evidence is that this is what happens to gays as well, they go through the same experience, but they discover that they are attracted to those of the same sex

**E. BUT WHAT ABOUT CHANGING OUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION?**

1. Can you or I choose to stop being attracted to the opposite sex?
2. I am not talking about sinful lust, adultery etc.
  - a) We are not at this point discussing how we live out our sexuality, but about our innate sexual orientation
  - b) The way we are, who we are physically, physiologically, psychologically, hormonally

3. So, in regard to our own innate, involuntary, inherent sexuality, the natural attraction and desire that is innate to heterosexuality
  - a) Could we as heterosexuals, choose to change that sexuality if we wanted?
4. I think most of us would conclusively agree, the answer is no

**F. THE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE IS ALSO THERE, THAT NEITHER HETEROSEXUALS, NOR HOMOSEXUALS CAN CHANGE THEIR INNATE SEXUALITY<sup>5</sup>**

1. Again, we are not talking about moral issues, just the same sex or opposite sex attraction
2. The evidence shows that our sexual orientation is genetic, it just is, we don't chose it
3. South African science researchers, Michael Pepper and Beverley Kramer make this clear;

People who are attracted to others of the same sex develop their orientation before they are born. This is not a choice. And scientific evidence shows their parents cannot be blamed. Research proving that there is biological evidence for sexual orientation has been available since the 1980s. The links have been emphasized by new scientific research. <sup>6</sup>

- a) It is true some people are bi-sexual, but even that isn't a chosen proclivity.
4. Again, we are not talking here about how we choose to live out that sexuality, but the fact that our sexual identity is not something we choose. It just is.

**G. THE PRESUMPTION THAT PEOPLE BECOME GAY BY CHOICE**

1. And that they can change to be heterosexual leads to making it a moral, ethical and religious issue

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<sup>5</sup> *What does the scholarly research say about whether conversion therapy can alter sexual orientation without causing harm?*, Columbia University, <http://whatweknow.law.columbia.edu/topics/lgbt-equality/what-does-the-scholarly-research-say-about-whether-conversion-therapy-can-alter-sexual-orientation-without-causing-harm/>

<sup>6</sup> Michael Sean Pepper & Beverley Kramer, *About the Science of Sexual Orientation*, [http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/06/11/the\\_science\\_of\\_sexual\\_orientation\\_the\\_latest\\_on\\_genes\\_chromosomes\\_and\\_environmental.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/06/11/the_science_of_sexual_orientation_the_latest_on_genes_chromosomes_and_environmental.html)

- a) The logic is that people need to reverse that choice, to repent and change to become righteous in their sexuality

#### **H. WHAT OTHER CONCLUSIONS AND ATTITUDES HAS THIS PRESUMPTION LEAD TO?**

1. Believing that LGBTI people, given the opportunity in our societies, will persuade others, including perhaps “our children” to become gay etc.
2. The campaign then becomes, we must protect our society and our children by preventing LGBTI people from being in positions of influence, such as teaching, because they may persuade them to changing their sexuality

#### **I. SOME MAY SAY, BUT WHAT ABOUT THEIR MORALITY?**

1. That is a fair question.
2. But what about the morality of heterosexuals down through the ages?
3. Isn't it judgmental to presume that most LGBTI people are immoral?
  - a) For instance, in the US the percentage of LGBTI people who are Christian is almost half, and increasing, whereas it is shrinking among the heterosexual population.<sup>7</sup>

#### **J. OUR CALLING BY GOD, WHETHER WE ARE GAY OR STRAIGHT**

1. Is to live in his love, and grow to be more like his Son through the guidance and strength of the Holy Spirit
2. So perhaps we can move towards the place where we don't judge, oppose or feel or act fearfully or antagonistically towards those who don't share the same sexuality, in the same way we learn to approach those of different races, religions and cultures.

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<sup>7</sup> Eliel Cruz, Report: Half of LGB Americans Identify As Christian, The Advocate, <http://www.advocate.com/print/politics/religion/2015/05/12/report-half-lgb-americans-identify-christian>

3. I'd like to briefly have us think about the commonly heard, anti-gay messages and campaigns that are often promoted by evangelical and fundamentalist religious preachers

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### III. CONSERVATIVE VIEW

#### A. MANY CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS HAVE OUTSPOKENLY BRANDED LGBTI PEOPLE AS SINFUL

1. A pastor in Texas threatened to set himself on fire if the same sex marriage law was upheld in the US Supreme court
  - a) Groups like Focus on the Family have spent much time and money on opposing gay law reform, and promoting programs that insist that gays can and should change their sexuality, claim homosexuality is preventable and treatable.<sup>8</sup>

#### B. SOME SUCH AS FRED NILE CLAIM HOMOSEXUALITY IS A MENTAL DISORDER

Nile is opposed to homosexuality which he has described as a "mental disorder"<sup>9</sup> and calls homosexuality a "lifestyle choice" that is "immoral, unnatural and abnormal".<sup>9 10</sup>

1. We see on the news religious people waving placards condemning gay people to hell, and telling them that God hates them and their ways
  - a) There is a continual outpouring of articles and videos on the Internet, condemning homosexuality, and those other Christians who seek to accept and defend them
2. As important as it is to defend and uphold the purposes and sacredness of marriage,
  - a) So much of the opposition to gay law reform and same sex marriage is based on fears that the family is being put under threat by gays

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<sup>8</sup> Colorado Springs Gazette, "Dogfight Over Gays Heads to Streets," 15 Aug, 2006

<sup>9</sup> Fred Nile, article in Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fred\\_Nile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fred_Nile)

<sup>10</sup> Journalist Alan McKinnon writes, The removal of homosexuality as a mental disorder has given homosexual activists undue credibility, and they have demanded that their sexual behaviour be affirmed in society, such as demanding that homosexual marriages be recognised legally.<sup>10</sup>

- b) But LGBTI people only compose 2% of the population <sup>11</sup>
    - (1) And isn't it better to encourage monogamous, loving, committed relationships, than the opposite?
    - (2) How does the official sanction of a gay couple take away from the marriages of heterosexual marriages?
  - c) Aren't there more important kingdom issues of injustice, poverty, and suffering that we as Christians should be focused on?
3. One view is that we insist that those born with same sex-attraction should live celibate lives, and deny their sexuality, and need for companionship and a loving monogamous relationship?
- a) That is clearly a choice and an option that many Christians would encourage
4. But how does legislation, condemnation, marginalization and exclusion that many advocate and practice help LGBTI people deal with the challenges that their sexual orientation brings?
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<sup>11</sup> Gabi Rosenstreich, Gabi Rosenstreich, LGBTI People Mental Health & Suicide, Briefing Paper, Revised 2nd Edition, 2013 , Beyond Blue, <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/bw0258-lgbti-mental-health-and-suicide-2013-2nd-edition.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

## IV. WHAT ABOUT JESUS' APPROACH?

### A. WHO DID HE REACH OUT TO AND EMBRACE AND INCLUDE?

1. Who did he speak against, and boldly oppose?
2. What did he say to those leaders who judged, condemned and marginalised the lost, the broken and even those with moral problems?

### B. WE HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT MISSION

1. Who is God, what is his nature, what is his overall plan?
2. Was Jesus sent to condemn and to push away those who don't conform to religious norms, to campaign against their lifestyle
  - a) No, he was God in the flesh,
  - b) He came to save, not to condemn
  - c) And as always, he acted out of love, to befriend, rescue, graciously forgive, support and nurture
3. As Paul makes clear, and as we see in Acts, and throughout the history and writings of the New Testament Church
  - a) The mission of God and of the church was to bring peace and reconciliation between humans and God, and between people

### Galatians 3:26-20

<sup>26</sup> For you are all children\* of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes.\* <sup>28</sup> There is no longer Jew or Gentile,\* slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children\* of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

### C. ALL PEOPLE ARE LOVED CHILDREN OF GOD

\* Greek *sons*.

\* Greek *have put on Christ*.

\* Greek *Jew or Greek*.

\* Greek *seed*.

1. That is our primary identity, and the true reality of their being
  - a) In Christ we find our true identity, and unity with God and one another
  - b) We are to view everyone as God's children, and not discriminate, judge and exclude people because they are male or female, or gay or straight.
2. We are all one in Christ, and as such we are the true people of God.

#### **D. EPHESIANS 2**

1. Gentiles were feared as being a corrupting influence, and were avoided and opposed at every level
  - a) But now, since Christ has come, God's plan of bringing all things, and all people into unity in and through his Son and Spirit is advancing
  - b) Let's see how this reads if we were to change the words Jew and Gentile, to 'gays and straight'
    - (1) Remembering that the point Paul is making about the acceptance and inclusion and reconciliation of all people, Jew and Gentile and apply it to the reconciliation of people of varying sexual orientations

#### **Ephesians 2:11-3:7**

<sup>11</sup> Don't forget that you **Gays** used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the **Straights**, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. <sup>12</sup> In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. <sup>13</sup> But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united **Straights** and **Gays** into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. <sup>15</sup> He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between **Straights** and **Gays** by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. <sup>16</sup> Together as one body, Christ reconciled both

groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

<sup>17</sup> He brought this Good News of peace to you **Gays** who were far away from him, and peace to the **Straights** who were near. <sup>18</sup> Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

#### *A Temple for the Lord*

<sup>19</sup> So now you **Gays** are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. <sup>20</sup> Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. <sup>21</sup> We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. <sup>22</sup> Through him you **Gays** are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

**3:6** And this is God's plan: Both **Gays** and **Straights** who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus.\* <sup>7</sup> By God's grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.<sup>12</sup>

### **E. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF SCRIPTURES THAT ADDRESS THE MORAL SIDE OF SEXUALITY**

1. And some that relate to homosexuality
2. But there are scriptures that deal with all types of other behaviours as well
  - a) What we are seeking to establish first is the approach that we are to take to those who are different to us, those whose lifestyles we find inappropriate, and may view as abhorrent and sinful

### **F. JESUS' APPROACH, AND OURS, IS NOT TO INSIST THAT EVERYONE GETS THEIR LIFE SORTED BEFORE THEY ARE ACCEPTED**

1. But to seek to reconcile and befriend all people in an attitude of graciousness and unconditional love and acceptance

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\* Or because they are united with Christ Jesus.

<sup>12</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). Holy Bible : New Living Translation. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Eph 2:11-3:7). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

2. Are LGBTI people the sole exception to that?
  3. Because we are talking about sexual issues and morality, does that put them outside of God's love and embrace
  4. Are we to insist that they change their sexual orientation before we accept them as friends, or as church members?
    - a) And if they are or become Christians, do we then become policemen of their sexual activities?
  5. Should LGBTI people not be treated the same as everyone else?
    - a) Shouldn't we be gracious, tolerant and merciful towards them in the way we are towards each other
    - b) How do we relate to, and treat heterosexuals who aren't living the ideal life of the Kingdom?
  6. Do we hold to a puritanical, church is only for the righteous approach?
    - a) Or do we believe and seek to practice the church as a refuge and home and place of spiritual rescue and healing for the lost and the weak?
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## V. WALK A MILE IN MY SHOES

### A. BEFORE WE CONCLUDE LIKE US TO CONSIDER LIFE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LGBTI PEOPLE

1. It is easy to abstractly, clinically and morally pigeon hole and condemn people we don't know
2. There is the old saying, and the classic song by Joe South based on it; <sup>13</sup>

...walk a mile in my shoes

Hey, before you abuse, criticize and accuse

Walk a mile in my shoes

- a) Let's start by taking a very brief look at the history of persecution against LGBTI people

### B. HISTORY OF PERSECUTION OF LGBT PEOPLE

1. Attitudes of discrimination, rejection, shaming, condemnation and aggression and abuse to the point of violence have predominated down through history
  - a) Religious groups have been at the forefront of it all

When the [Roman Empire](#) came under [Christian rule](#), all male homosexual activity was increasingly repressed, often on pain of death.[\[8\]](#)

In 342 CE, the Christian emperors [Constantius](#) and [Constans](#) declared same-sex marriage to be illegal.[\[9\]](#) Shortly after, in the year 390 CE, emperors [Valentinian II](#), [Theodosius I](#) and [Arcadius](#) declared homosexual sex to be illegal and those who were guilty of it were condemned to be publicly burned alive.[\[8\]](#)

Emperor [Justinian I](#) (527–565 CE) made homosexuals a [scapegoat](#) for problems such as "famines, earthquakes, and pestilences."[\[10\]](#)

Laws and codes prohibiting homosexual practice were in force in [Europe](#) from the fourth[\[8\]](#) to the twentieth centuries, and Muslim countries have had similar laws from the beginnings of [Islam](#) in the seventh century up to and including the present day. ...

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<sup>13</sup> Joe South and The Believers - Walk A Mile In My Shoes

During the [Middle Ages](#), the [Kingdom of France](#) and the [City of Florence](#) also instated the death penalty. ...These punishments continued into the [Renaissance](#), ...

{In 1534] England.. made sodomy ... punishable by death. This act was replaced in 1828, but sodomy remained punishable by death under the new act until 1861. The [last executions](#) were in 1835.

In [Nazi Germany](#), homosexuals were among the groups targeted by [the Holocaust](#) <sup>14</sup>

## 2. Homosexual acts were a crime here in Tasmania up until 1997

### a) According to Wikipedia,

The last man to hang for sodomy in the British Empire was in Tasmania in 1867. In the subsequent hundred years Tasmania had the highest rate of imprisonment for private consenting male sex anywhere in the world.<sup>[2]</sup>

For several years in the 1980s, the Tasmanian Parliament refused to pass laws decriminalising private same-sex sexual acts.

..in May 1997 that Tasmania repealed its anti-homosexuality laws.<sup>[2]</sup> <sup>15</sup>

### b) Christians were in most cases at the forefront of instituting and continuing such penalties, believing society, marriage and the family were being protected by them.

## C. **FRUITS OF CONDEMNATION;**

1. Jesus talked about knowing people and attitudes and actions by their fruits;
2. What are the fruits of the condemnation and ostracisation of LGBTI people and their relationships?
3. Particularly in their adolescence, LGBTI people have felt confused, disoriented, second class, rejected and often dirty, and rejected by society, family, peers and the church and God.

### a) Alex a gay youth says,

"I always knew that I was gay. I also remember seeing heterosexual couples and knowing that I wasn't like them. I would get very depressed about not

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<sup>14</sup> Violence against LGBT people, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violence\\_against\\_LGBT\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violence_against_LGBT_people)

<sup>15</sup> LGBT Rights in Tasmania, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT\\_rights\\_in\\_Tasmania#cite\\_note-7](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_in_Tasmania#cite_note-7)

being like other kids. Many times I would take a kitchen knife and press it against my chest, wondering if I should push it all the way in," said Alex, a 14-year-old gay youth.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. Kevin Caruso adds,

... innumerable lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youths have similar feelings.

Many do not feel safe to "come out" with their orientation because countless LGBT youths have been rejected by their families or friends, verbally abused, physically abused, or bullied as a result.

This intolerance against the LGBT community is rooted in ignorance.

Ignorant people cannot accept others that are not like them. And they do not understand that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people do not "choose" their orientation -- they are born lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, just like some people are born with white skin and others are born with black skin.

Adolescence is a very difficult stage for anyone to go through. But lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders have the added difficulty of coping with this ignorance -- and the intolerance, discrimination, hate and rejection that often accompanies it.

...studies indicate that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth are up to four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers. And those who are rejected by their family are up to nine times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers.<sup>17</sup>

#### 5. In an Australian article on the Beyond Blue website, by Gabi Rosenstreich, an Australian girl named Peggy is quoted, saying;

"Knowing what was facing me religion-wise and with my family I was pretty suicidal between the ages of about 16 and 19 ... Not so much because of people's homophobia but because of feeling totally trapped between a religion/family that didn't accept homosexuality and being who I was" ("Peggy", aged 20, in Hillier et al. 2008)<sup>18</sup>

#### 6. Rosenstreich tells us that

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<sup>16</sup> Kevin Caruso, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Suicide, <http://www.suicide.org/gay-and-lesbian-suicide.html>

<sup>17</sup> Kevin Caruso, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Suicide, <http://www.suicide.org/gay-and-lesbian-suicide.html>

<sup>18</sup> Gabi Rosenstreich

LGBT teens and young adults have one of the highest rates of [suicide attempts](#).<sup>[7][8]</sup> According to some groups, this is linked to [heterocentric](#) cultures and institutionalised [homophobia](#) in some cases, including the use of rights and protections for LGBT people as a political wedge issue like in the contemporary efforts to halt legalising [same-sex marriages](#).<sup>[9][10][11]</sup> [Depression](#) and drug use among LGBT people have both been shown to increase significantly after new laws that discriminate against gay people are passed.<sup>[12]</sup>

[Bullying of LGBT youth](#) has been shown to be a contributing factor in many suicides..<sup>[13]</sup>

Institutionalized and internalized [homophobia](#) may also lead LGBT youth to not accept themselves and have deep internal conflicts about their sexual orientation.<sup>[33]</sup> Parents may force children out of home after the child's [coming out](#).<sup>[34]</sup><sup>19</sup>

The elevated risk of mental ill-health and suicidality among LGBTI people is not due to sexuality, sex or gender identity in and of themselves but rather due to discrimination and exclusion as key determinants of health.<sup>24</sup> This is sometimes referred to as minority stress.<sup>25</sup>

Be very clear that being lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and/or questioning is not in itself a problem. Exposure to and fear of discrimination and isolation can directly impact on people's mental health, causing stress, psychological distress and suicidality.<sup>26</sup>

Up to 80% of same-sex attracted and gender questioning young Australians experience public insult, 20% explicit threats and 18% physical abuse and 26% 'other' forms of homophobia (80% of this abuse occurs at school).<sup>29</sup>

The vast majority have been told directly and/or via more diffuse 'public opinion' that they are not 'normal'.<sup>35</sup><sup>20</sup>

## **D. WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE OF LGBTI PEOPLE IN CHURCHES SUCH AS OURS?**

### **1. A friend of mine from back in the 80's wrote recently;**

I was in WCG and GCI, and knew many nice people - but they pulled back from me as a single - for whatever reason. When I returned to GCI years later, as a fully "out and proud" gay Christian, I discovered that the

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<sup>19</sup> *Suicide among LGBT youth*, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide\\_among\\_LGBT\\_youth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_among_LGBT_youth)

<sup>20</sup> Gabi Rosenstreich, LGBTI People Mental Health & Suicide, Briefing Paper, Revised 2nd Edition, 2013, Beyond Blue, <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/bw0258-lgbti-mental-health-and-suicide-2013-2nd-edition.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

congregation had been rumoring about my disappearance...I naïvely had no idea that my absence was credited to being gay...

I still visit GCI to be a presence and witness to others that one can be [Christian] and gay. But, I attend and invest my energy in service where I am not regarded as a second-class Christian or "broken" human being.<sup>21</sup>

2. Another friend has found his local GCI church a very difficult environment to fellowship in.
  - a) He has poured out his heart on many occasions, revealing the grief, depression and heartache he has experienced over the decades having been excluded from fellowship on numerous occasions over the last 30 years.
  - b) He tried years of what is called reprogramming therapy, that was run by a Christian Group called Exodus International, which is supported by many evangelical groups
    - (1) This caused great trauma, and suicidal inclinations as he went through processes that were supposed to change him to be heterosexual
    - (2) Exodus International has recognised its error and has apologised and stopped such programs<sup>22</sup>, but others continue with them
  - c) Members and leaders continue to talk to him, but treat him as flawed, and have made plain they feel his presence is a problem for their congregation

## **E.WHAT IS OUR REACTION AND RESPONSE**

1. to this history of discrimination, persecution, abuse and the resultant suffering LGBTI people continue to suffer?

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<sup>21</sup> Anonymous

<sup>22</sup> Exodus International is publicly apologizing—again—to gays and lesbians for "years of undue suffering and judgment at the hands of the organization and the Church as a whole."

The apology comes from president Alan Chambers, who writes in a blog post that his ministry not only has hurt many people, but also participated in a "system of ignorance" and "perpetuated that hurt" with the goal of reconciliation.

"For quite some time we've been imprisoned in a worldview that's neither honoring toward our fellow human beings, nor biblical."

Chambers continued: "From a Judeo-Christian perspective, gay, straight or otherwise, we're all prodigal sons and daughters. Exodus International is the prodigal's older brother, trying to impose its will on God's promises, and make judgments on who's worthy of His Kingdom. God is calling us to be the Father – to welcome everyone, to love unhindered."

For these reasons, the Board of Directors unanimously voted to close Exodus International and begin a separate ministry. "This is a new season of ministry, to a new generation," said Chambers. "Our goals are to reduce fear (reducefear.org), and come alongside churches to become safe, welcoming, and mutually transforming communities." *Christianity Today Gleanings*, June 21, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2013/june/alan-chambers-apologizes-to-gay-community-exodus.html>

2. This is something to think about and pray about, and seek God's direction in finding ways we can be part of a kingdom solution, and not part of the ongoing problem
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## **VI. MARRIAGE**

### **A. IN SAYING ALL OF THIS, WE AT THE SAME TIME UPHOLD A HIGH VIEW OF MARRIAGE**

1. We focus on and teach how God has created us male and female, and the special place that marriage has in his plan
  2. Marriage is as a testimony to God's desire to unite and bring together all diverse beings in a complimentary and fruitful way
  3. Christian teachers like Tom Wright and Ravi Zacharias emphasis the sacred state of marriage, and don't believe it should apply to same sex couples, but they and many others emphasise the point that we must love and relate openly to all people, without discrimination
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## VII. CONCLUSION

### A. JOE TKACH WROTE RECENTLY ON THIS TOPIC:

In creating us human, God gave us a common nature and destiny. And while we have these similarities, we also have differences. Sexual identity, job identity, positional identity and all other forms of identity are secondary subsets of who we are and are becoming. This is where the gospel must remain clear and not be diverted to lesser issues in response to an agenda being set by society. <sup>23</sup>

#### 1. Joe referred to Dr. Michael Yarhouse in regard to this topic. Yarhouse writes;

We also realize that sexuality is not the most important factor in our identity. Our calling, relationship and identity in Christ is the first and most important thing for all humanity. We have to find a way to extend one another grace. To suggest that all people who experience same-sex attraction have to achieve dramatic shifts as a testimony to the power of God will be unnecessarily divisive, a poor model of pastoral care, and a sure way of driving people out of the church altogether.<sup>24</sup>

#### 2. Joe Tkach gives us something important to think about by way of conclusion;

The gospel is about our identity and relationship to God and his relationship to us, now and forever. The gospel is not primarily about our social identity, our brokenness, or even our sin. It is about who we are and who we are becoming under the grace of God through Christ in the power of the Spirit. <sup>25</sup>

### B. PRAYER

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Tkach, GCI Weekly Update, January 14, 2015, <http://update.gci.org/2015/01/lgbt-issues/?format=printable&date=2015-01-14>

<sup>24</sup> Michael Yarhouse, On the Expectation of Change, <https://psychologyandchristianity.wordpress.com/page/2/>

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Tkach