



Volume 11 Issue 2

West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle



February 2024

Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

Homosexuality is Sin

What does God think about homosexuals? Scripture is clear: He loves them and desires their salvation, just as He does with all other sinners.

In fact, it is God's love for sinners that provided the only means for their salvation: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Likewise, God patiently restrains His judgment on sinners: "*Do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:8–9). In love, He holds back His righteous wrath, while paving the only path to salvation.

That is God's consistent message to His people: "*As I live!*" declares the Lord God, *'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways!'*" (Ezekiel 33:11). Throughout Scripture, God lovingly pleads with sinners to repent before He unleashes His wrath.

Ultimately, it's only through God's love that anyone can be saved in the first place. Scripture is clear about the sinner's spiritual condition:

You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (Ephesians 2:1–3)

The only hope for those trapped in the slavery of sin and its spiritual death is God's love. "*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 2:4–6).

For those of us who have been rescued and redeemed by God's love—who have been transformed from spiritual death to life in Christ—it is our calling and privilege to bring the good news of the gospel to others, pleading with them to repent and believe while there is still time.

Sadly, that is not the message many churches are bringing to homosexuals today. One of the supreme tragedies of our time is the reclassification of homosexuality as normal, acceptable, and even noble behavior. Too many churches have compromised the truth of God's Word and capitulated to the whims of the culture. They have acquiesced to the idea that a person's deviant sexual proclivities are a genetic feature, rather than a perversion from which he needs to be rescued. There is a massive movement in the church today to normalize homosexual behavior—a relentless attempt to provide appeasement for the fierce guilt of unchecked lust and rebellion.



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To that end, many churches today readily dole out the false assurance to homosexuals that God loves and accepts them just the way they are. They claim this is a tolerant, loving message, but the truth is that it's a deceptive and destructive lie. By failing to identify and confront sin as sin, these churches are denying homosexuals—and all sinners—their only source of hope and deliverance.

If God's people are going to be faithful to His calling and the work of His kingdom, we need to be clear and consistent on what His Word says about homosexuality.

What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality?

The truth is that homosexuality is not an alternative lifestyle. It's not simply a viable sexual orientation, a genetic predisposition, or a personal preference. In fact, it is nothing more than a perverse sexual proclivity—one of many that Scripture identifies as rebellious deviations from God's good design.

There is a beautiful clarity and simplicity in God's creation of mankind. *"God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them"* (Genesis 1:27). His Word tells us that suitability and compatibility were at the heart of His creative design for human relations (2:18). And from their inception, God revealed His design for marriage and family: *"For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh"* (v. 24).

It's no wonder that sexual sin explodes into the world shortly after the Fall and the expulsion from the garden. The pagan religions of the early world enfolded all kinds of perverse practices into the religious rites of their false gods. Immorality was a consistent feature of ancient idolatry.

By the time the Lord delivered His people from Egypt, sexual sin was such a prominent part of life that He included specific prohibitions against it in His law. In fact, it's clear from God's law that ancient satanic religions had great success when it came to blurring the distinction between males and females. Deuteronomy 22:5 says, *"A woman shall not wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God."*

The first verse of chapter 23 identifies another dominating degeneracy of the day: *"No one who is emasculated or has his male organ cut off shall enter the assembly of the Lord."* Just as we see today, God's creative work was under assault. In the ancient world, men would become eunuchs to serve in the temples of pagan gods, often as male prostitutes. Parents attempting to gain the favor of their preferred deity would give their sons for service in the temple, mutilating them and turning them over to a life dominated by the gross debasement and immorality that passed for worship in the ancient world.

We get a sense of just how pervasive sexual sin was in Leviticus 18. There the Lord codifies His commands against a host of immoral behaviors, forbidding His people from engaging in incest, child sacrifice, and bestiality. The Bible is clear that such practices were commonplace among the surrounding nations. *"You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes"* (v. 3).



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Listed among these wicked perversions is homosexuality: *“You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination”* (v. 22). God is unequivocal in His condemnation. *“Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants”* (vv. 24–25). The chapter closes with this dire warning:

For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do so shall be cut off from among their people. Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the Lord your God. (vv. 29–30)

In case that wasn't clear enough to God's people, He gave further instructions for the punishment of such sinful perversions. *“If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them”* (Leviticus 20:13). It's worth noting that homosexuality isn't singled out as exclusively punishable by death—the Lord demanded the same penalty for adultery, fornication, incest, and bestiality. The message to the Israelites was unmistakable: *“You shall not follow the customs of the nation which I will drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have abhorred them”* (v. 23). God made it clear that the immorality that dominated the ancient world was not to be tolerated among His people.

And lest someone think that such provisions applied only to God's covenant with Israel in the Old Testament—that somehow His condemnation is now outdated and irrelevant to modern society—the Lord wove similar prohibitions into the New Testament as well. In 1 Timothy 1, the apostle Paul includes *“immoral men and homosexuals”* alongside murderers, kidnappers, liars, and perjurers, characterizing them all as *“unholy and profane,”* and *“contrary to sound teaching”* (vv. 9–10).

The apostle delivers an even stronger condemnation in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10: *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.”*

Scripture is clear. Homosexuality is a sin—one of many that God rebukes, condemns, and will one day judge. Which is why it's so tragic that so many churches today have compromised the clarity of Scripture to capitulate to this sinful, rebellious world.

Just consider the biblical illiteracy or outright defiance of encouraging a group of sinners to identify themselves by their particular sinful proclivities. We don't single out liars, thieves, or adulterers for special recognition in the church. Why treat those with a predilection for the sin of homosexuality any different? The world wants to elevate homosexuals as a special, protected class. When the church buys into that thinking, it contradicts the biblical call to repent of that sin.



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Others attempt a more nuanced compromise, hoping to carve out room for those not acting on their lustful impulses. Many in the church today want to downplay same-sex attraction or excuse it altogether. They might even adopt the worldly perspective that homosexual attraction is an immutable characteristic—essentially laying the blame at God’s feet. But that notion ignores the fact that any sinful desire for anything God has forbidden is itself sinful. In fact, it gives license to those tempted by other sexual perversions—all the way up to pedophilia and bestiality—who believe their wicked bents are likewise inherent to their makeup, and acceptable as long as they don’t act on them.

Moreover, making excuses for sinful inclinations nullifies Paul’s exhortation to “*consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience*” (Colossians 3:5–6). All evil in the heart must be repented of and mortified—not entertained and excused.

Such obfuscation is unbecoming of God’s people. We need to be clear and consistent with the biblical truth about homosexuality. We need to faithfully identify it as sin, while lovingly calling those caught in its grip to turn from it and believe in Christ. And we likewise need to be clear about the dangers it presents. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**

Be Above Reproach

America’s church culture suffers from an abundance of unqualified church leaders. What’s worse, many of these mavericks preside over a form of church government incapable of restraining or disciplining them.

Tragically, in many cases it’s the media that holds these leaders accountable—tragic because the media ends up doing a job that God has delegated to the church. Furthermore, the unbelieving world enjoys a front row seat to shameful scandals that bring reproach on Christ.

Many of these churches publically profess their allegiance to the Bible. However, the problem of unqualified leaders stems from a failure to heed Scripture’s clear teaching on the qualifications for church leadership. And it’s not as if those qualifications are a mystery; Paul was very clear about the qualities every church overseer (pastors and elders) must possess.

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. (1 Timothy 3:2–3)

Paul makes it clear that an overseer in the church of Jesus Christ must be first and foremost above reproach. The Greek particle *de* (translated “must”) emphasizes that this is an absolute necessity. A life without blame is the overarching requirement for leadership in the church.



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The Need for Godly Leadership

The Greek word translated above reproach (*anepilēmptos*) means “not able to be held.” The man who is above reproach cannot be arrested and held as if he were a criminal because there is nothing for which to accuse him. Obviously, it does not mean he is sinless. It means that his life is not marred by some obvious sinful defect in character which would preclude him setting the highest standard for godly conduct. He must be a model for the congregation to follow (1 Peter 5:3). He also must not give the enemies of the church reason to attack its reputation (Titus 2:8).

Pastors must take great care to remain above reproach for several reasons. **First**, they are the special targets of Satan, and he will assault them with more severe temptation than others. Those on the front lines of the spiritual battle will bear the brunt of satanic opposition. **Second**, their fall has a greater potential for harm. Satan knows that when a shepherd falls, the effect on the sheep is devastating. **Third**, leaders’ greater knowledge of the truth, and accountability to live it, brings greater chastening when they sin. **Fourth**, their sins are more hypocritical than those of others because they preach against the very sins they commit. In short, leaders need an abundance of God’s grace and power because of their greater responsibility and visibility.

The Leader’s Role in Maintaining Godliness

To protect themselves leaders must spend in-depth time in the study of God’s Word. They must be “*constantly nourished on the words of the faith [Scripture] and of the sound doctrine*” (1 Timothy 4:6). The psalmist wrote, “*Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You*” (Psalm 119:11). A leader must continuously expose his life to the light of the Word of God. He must also be a man of prayer, and be accountable to others in spiritual fellowship.

The Church’s Role in Maintaining Godly Leadership

The church also has a role in maintaining godly leadership. The church is responsible to measure its leaders by that standard of being above reproach. The all too common practice today is to forgive a leader who sins grievously and immediately restore him to ministry. The church, like God, must not hesitate to forgive those who truly repent. But to immediately restore them to leadership lowers the standard that God expects leaders to follow. And since leaders serve as the visible pattern of holiness and virtue for the congregation, the standard for the entire church is lowered.

In 1 Timothy 3:2–7, Paul lists four areas in which a man aspiring to church leadership may be evaluated as to whether he is above reproach. These have to do with his moral character, home life, spiritual maturity, and public reputation. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**



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Preserved by God

Winston Churchill is often quoted as saying, “*Sure I am of this, that you have only to endure to conquer. You have only to persevere to save yourselves.*” Considering what he accomplished in his life, such a statement is certainly appropriate. Churchill’s victories demonstrated his ability to persevere to the end. He overcame great odds, and his self-sustained fortitude enabled him to endure the hardships and complexities of political life during the Second World War.

While Churchill’s assertion is accurate, it is only accurate insofar as it pertains to our natural human capability. Churchill’s call to persevere to save ourselves is by all means applicable to soldiers in wartime. It is a stern charge to fight to the end in order to overcome the enemy. And, indeed, it conveys a similar exhortation found in Scripture. In Hebrews, we are called to run the race that is set before us (12:1). The apostle Paul likewise exhorts us to endure so that we might reign with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12), and, while teaching His disciples about persecution, Jesus said, “*the one who endures to the end will be saved*” (Matthew 10:22). The testimony of Scripture is clear; we must persevere to the end in order to obtain salvation. However, this is only one part of the biblical equation.

Although the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is the last point in the Calvinistic acrostic, it is by no means the final doctrine of salvation. On the contrary, it is foundational to every aspect of our salvation. At the very core of the perseverance of the saints is the sustaining power of God—the only reason we are able to persevere is because God almighty preserves us. He is both the Author and Finisher of our faith, and it is only in Him that we live, move, and have our being.

Unfortunately, many Christians have become practical deists. They have been duped by the notion that after having begun the work of salvation in our lives, God leaves us to our own devices while He sits back awaiting our failure. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is precisely because God sustains us that we are able to endure faithfully to the end. By His loving hand, He blesses us with discipline. By His kindness, He leads us to repentance, and by His sacrifice, He has conquered the Enemy and defeated death. For this reason, we will endure because we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. Therefore, we live coram Deo, before the face of the God of our salvation. ~ **Dr. Burk Parsons**

Understanding Personhood

We live in a world where there is much cruelty and violence. Whether we watch local or international news on television, we hear of countless instances of intimidation, injustice, thefts, beatings, murders, and wars. In some places, violence seems to be a way of life; elsewhere, it seems to explode unexpectedly in apparently peaceful places. How do we account for this violence?

Many today claim that violence does not really arise from the human heart, but it is the result of external social conditions. If we can make the social environment better, it is said, the essential goodness of man will manifest itself. Many others claim that violence is a result of man’s evolutionary development and was necessary in his struggle for survival as an animal. Neither of these claims is biblical or ultimately helpful in understanding the violence that we observe in our world.



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Christians understand that human beings were created good, but fell into sin and rebellion against God and alienation from one another. Apart from God's redeeming and renewing grace, fallen man finds only violence in his heart. David expresses the truth eloquently as he writes of God's attitude toward the wicked: *"The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man"* (Psalm 5:5–6).

In this passage, David highlights three key characteristics of the wicked. **First**, they are boastful and proud. They assign far more value and importance to themselves than they deserve, failing to acknowledge the superiority of God over them. **Second**, they are full of lies and deceit. They live according to falsehoods that they invent rather than according to the truth of God. **Third**, they are bloodthirsty and violent. In their pride and self-deceit, they are willing to use cruelty to advance themselves rather than pursuing love and peace.

Early in Genesis, we see a picture of this wickedness in action. Cain murders his brother Abel out of selfishness (Genesis 4:8). Cain's great-great-grandson, Lamech, also shows this selfishness: *"Lamech said to his wives: 'Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me'"* (Genesis 4:23).

The selfish sense of superiority that we see in Cain and Lamech can be seen in many ways throughout history. Consider this judgment about the attitude that was foundational to the British Empire:

Britain's empire was not liberal in the sense of being a plural, democratic society. The empire openly repudiated ideas of human equality and put power and responsibility into the hands of a chosen elite, drawn from a tiny proportion of the population in Britain. The British Empire was not merely undemocratic; it was anti-democratic. . . . My contention is that in terms of administration itself, while there was clearly a great deal of racial arrogance among the administrative class as a whole, notions of class and hierarchy were as important, if not more so.

While Cain and Lamech seem to show their power out of selfishness, other wicked individuals seek to justify their violence. In one way or another, they claim that the victims of their violence are in some way inferior or less human than they are. I can justify violence against those who are not like me: they are not part of my family, my neighborhood, my tribe, my nation, my race, or my religion.

The wicked justification of violence may well be at its worst when it appeals to science. We can see that in a particularly clear way in the Nazi movement in twentieth-century Germany. The character and historical appeal of Nazism is complicated, but one important element of its ideology was its use of science. In particular, it used the theory of evolution. If evolution teaches the survival of the stronger at the expense of the weaker, it seems to follow that stronger races should dominate inferior races. Nazi scientists claimed to have scientific means for distinguishing races and for proving the superiority of the Aryan race to others, particularly Jews and Slavs. Today we know that the Nazi science was bogus, but at the time it convinced many, including some of the most educated scientists. Nazi ideology did seem to be a logical extension of evolution.



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A distinguished historian wrote of the intellectual environment that prepared the way for Nazism:

Integral nationalism, anti-Marxist “national” socialism, social Darwinism, racism, biological anti-Semitism, eugenics, elitism intermingled in varying strengths to provide a heady brew of irrationalism attractive to some cultural pessimists among the intelligentsia and bourgeoisie of European societies undergoing rapid social, economic, and political change in the late nineteenth century. But were social Darwinism and eugenics really irrational for evolutionists?

The leaders of the Nazis applied such Darwinism to politics. Adolf Hitler declared: “Politics is nothing more than the struggle of a people for its existence. . . . It is an iron principle [—] the weaker one falls so that the stronger one gains life.” Heinrich Himmler foresaw a battle to the point of annihilation of those subhuman enemies I mentioned throughout the world against Germany as the core nation of the Nordic race, . . . against Germany as the bearer of culture for humanity.

The Nazis wanted to take Jews’ property and expel them from Germany. They wanted to drive Slavs out of Eastern Europe and take their land. Out of a selfish desire for power, they visited hideous violence on Jews and Slavs, using a scientific justification that dehumanized these people. Millions of Jews and Slavs died.

The “scientific” justification of slavery also rested on notions of racial superiority. The enslavement of black Africans in recent centuries was justified by the claim that they were racially inferior to white Europeans and Americans. Some even claimed that slavery was a civilizing and Christianizing institution. In reality, it was a violent institution promoted in the interest of cheap labor. Here again we see scientific and moral justifications for a violent and dehumanizing practice.

In our day, the justification of abortion similarly rests on “scientific” arguments that proclaim the unborn baby to be merely subhuman tissue. Proponents of abortion insist that they are exercising their freedom legitimately. However, they have actually dehumanized the unborn child to justify their elimination of unwanted pregnancies.

In these three instances, we see bad science used by wicked men to make moral or religious judgments as if they were objective scientific conclusions. The real problem is not science, but the abuse of science. The horrendous effect of these pseudo-scientific justifications is dehumanizing violence born of selfishness.

These scientific justifications of violence rest on reducing some or all humans to the status of animals. The psalmist anticipated this tragic situation in a remarkable way. Psalm 49 is addressed to all the people in the world in order to teach them wisdom and understanding. Here the teaching of wisdom begins by meditating on the universal reality of death. If death is the same for the fool and the wise, for the poor and the rich, for the weak and the powerful, what meaning does life really have? “Man in his pomp will not remain; he is like the beasts that perish” (Psalm 49:12). How can man be more than a beast? The answer is by knowing the truth: “Man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beasts that perish” (Ps. 49:20). Ultimately, only real wisdom or understanding separates man from the beasts. The truth is that only God can save His people from death and give them everlasting life: “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol” (Ps. 49:15).



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As Christians, we must beware of becoming self-righteous in our reaction to those who dehumanize people. There were Christians who were taken in by Hitler and Christians who defended slavery. We must not dehumanize those with whom we disagree. We especially want to make clear to those who have defended abortions or had abortions that all those who come to Jesus in repentance and faith find forgiveness.

As David described the wicked so insightfully in Psalm 5, he also showed the character of the righteousness that we all must pursue: *“But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you”* (Ps. 5:7). As Christians, we look away from ourselves, hoping only in the steadfast saving love of God in Jesus. Then, instead of boasting in our pride and selfishness, we bow humbly before our God. This is the antidote to dehumanization and violence in our world. ~ ***Dr. W. Robert Godfrey***

Last Things First

Do you ever have difficulty understanding how Scripture fits together as a coherent whole? I have a suggestion. The next time you read through the Bible, s t a r t with Revelation 20–22, and then go back to Genesis 1. Just as knowing the conclusion of a whodunit helps you see things you missed, the final chapters of Revelation can help you identify the major themes of Scripture that are introduced in Genesis and developed throughout the entire Bible.

In Genesis, we learn that God intends to establish His kingdom on earth with man as a subordinate king under Him. Adam and Eve are also given priestly duties insofar as they are to guard the sanctity of the garden. God establishes a covenant with them and manifests His presence in the garden. When Satan successfully tempts man, he usurps authority, and death is introduced into the world. Creation is cursed, man is barred from the tree of life, and God declares war on the Serpent.

In the final chapters of Revelation, we see the final resolution. The Devil is finally defeated, and mankind is restored to its intended role serving as priests and reigning under God (20:6). God reestablishes His presence with man, and the purpose of the covenants is fulfilled as they are now His people and He is their God (21:3). The effects of the curse are removed, and there is no longer any sin or death (21:4, 27). God fully establishes His kingdom, and access is again allowed to the tree of life (22:1–2). All of this is possible because of the work of the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

Read the Bible looking for these themes. Look for the ongoing conflict between the people of the Serpent and the people of God. Watch as God reestablishes His kingdom and His presence with His people. Observe God’s work of redemption. Observe how the resolution of all these themes comes together in the person and work of Jesus Christ, our King, our High Priest, our Redeemer, and Immanuel. ~ ***Dr. Keith Mathison***



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If you have a birthday or anniversary in February that is not posted here or is listed in error or you do not want to be published in this newsletter, please contact Walt or e-mail him at gwlcf10415@gmail.com.

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner February 2024

Birthdays

Tina K. (13)
Rita B. (14)
Andy L. (14)

Jacob David K. (24)
Brodie L. (27)

Anniversaries

Jonathan and April F. (5)
Daniel and Diana K. (11)
Mike and Rose M. (17)

General and Special Revelation

General revelation is so called because it comes to everyone, just through their being alive in God’s world. God has revealed Himself this way from the start of human history. He actively discloses these aspects of Himself to everyone, so that failure to thank and serve the Creator is always a sin against knowledge. In the end no denial of having received this knowledge will be admitted. The Apostle Paul uses God’s universal revelation of His power and goodness as the basis for his indictment of the whole human race as sinful and guilty before God for our failure to serve Him as we should (*Romans 1:18–3:19*).

God has added to general revelation the further revelation of Himself as the Savior of sinners through Jesus Christ. This revelation, accomplished in history and written in Scripture, is called “special revelation.” It includes explicit verbal statement of all that general revelation tells us about God.



West Suffolk Baptist Church Leadership

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