

# Fully Alive & Same-Sex Attraction: The Call to the First Identity

by Stewart Ruch

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of living under the authority of God's Word and rejecting the lie that we are alone, in order to find true identity and freedom in Christ.*

**Duration:** 48:56

**Scripture:** Romans 1:18-32

**Topics:** "Homosexuality"

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## Description

In this sermon, Bishop Stuart Ruch shares a personal story about his son breaking his wrist during a soccer match. He emphasizes the deep love he has for his children and how he would fiercely protect his relationship with them. Bishop Ruch then discusses the invisible attributes of God, specifically his eternal power and divine nature, which are clearly perceived through creation. He highlights the tension between serving ourselves and serving the Creator, and how choosing sin can momentarily evaporate our connection with God.

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## Transcript

This is Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois. This week's sermon, entitled, Fully Alive and Same-Sex Attraction, The Call to the First Identity, is by Bishop Stuart Ruch and is part four in the series. Two years ago I was watching my then-freshman-in-high-school son playing a soccer match.

This is not unusual. I spend most of my Saturdays and a few weekday nights watching my boys play soccer. But all of a sudden, Ellison went down.

This also was not unusual. What was unusual was that he wasn't getting back up. Someone yelled out from the field, Ellison's hurt.

And I read over to where he was sitting, and I saw him hunched over, and I realized as I looked at the misshapen angle of his arm and his hand that he had broken his wrist, and that he was in very significant pain. I crouched down on the side where the arm had not been broken, I got his arm around me, I picked him up, I walked him over to the family van, got him in the front seat, I buckled him, and I said, Ellison, I know you're in great pain right now, and getting you to the emergency room is going to be a journey of pain as well, but hang in there, you're going to be better. I feel that way in some ways this morning.

I feel like a spiritual dad, and I've got some sons and daughters who are in very significant pain. I know that there are those of you here at Rez, those in the diocese, those who are listening to this on audio right now that are in very significant pain. Some of you are in the pain of having unwanted same-sex attraction.

Some of you are in the pain of being very close to family or friends who are in a significant struggle, they're in pain around the same-sex attraction, and that causes you significant pain. Some of you may not be in pain, but you're confused, and you're intimidated by the questions around same-sex attraction, homosexuality, and the scriptures. So let me say to all of you, as I said to Ellison on that day, it can get much better.

As you live God's Word, and you live God's way, you can move from where you are now to a place of greater peace, and a place of greater clarity. Every preacher writes sermons with someone in their head. As a matter of fact, when I train young preachers, one of the things I teach them is to get clear who's in your head, who you're writing it to, and make sure they're the right person.

So I wrote this sermon with two groups of people in my head, on my heart. First of all, I'm teaching this for the men and women, and the young men and young women who are here at Rez, and in our diocese, who have unwanted same-sex attraction. For 30 years, Resurrection has been a place where many have come and have found incredible freedom from same-sex attraction, and peace in their first identity as Christians.

There are many celibates here at Rez, many, and some who would identify as having significant same-sex attraction. There are over a dozen couples that I know of, so I assume there are more, where one spouse at least has had, or still has, significant same-sex attraction. So here at Resurrection, this is not a foreign issue for us, nor is this in any way a clinical or theoretical issue.

This is an issue about home. This is part of being in the house of God here at Resurrection. That's the first group, and that's the primary group I wrote this for.

The second group is all of us who may not have this particular identity struggle, but we have keen identity struggles ourselves, and we need to apply the same process of living God's Word and living God's way. And, when it comes to questions around same-sex attraction, we need to be clear about the scriptural teaching and about our responsibility to this teaching. So how do we live our first identity in Jesus? You'll see the outline there in your bulletin of the sermon notes section.

You can also use your prayer journal that we gave a few weeks ago. But our outline is simply, live the Word, which would be the bulk of this teaching, focusing especially on Romans chapter 1, and then some on 1 Corinthians chapter 6, both written by the Apostle Paul. And then live the way, focusing on John chapter 14, and our Lord's teaching is there.

All right, let me define terms. It's really important when having conversations that involve delicate matters like this one does, let's define terms. I've used the term same-sex attraction.

Okay, if you've done any reading in this area, you already know that I am forecasting something of a trajectory by using that word. So you know that. I want you to know that I know that you know that, okay? By same-sex attraction, I'm referring to men or women who experience a strong sexual, emotional, often as well communal desire for the same gender, one that goes beyond healthy, biblical desire for good friendship.

Same-sex attraction, men or women who experience a strong sexual, emotional, even including communal desire for the same gender, but one that goes beyond a healthy, biblical desire for good friendship, which is critical in the Christian life, good friendship. Same-sex practice, this refers to men or women who engage in sexual relationships with those of the same gender. In the Scriptures, same-sex practice is always considered a sin.

On the other hand, same-sex attraction is not in itself a sin, although it can certainly lead to sin. Okay, final term, Paul. Who is Paul? It's important to have a background on Paul because I'll be looking at the Apostle Paul, primarily in his writings in Romans 1, but he also wrote 1 Corinthians.

He also wrote 1 Timothy. There's only three key references to homosexuality in the New Testament, three key ones in the Old Testament as well, by the way. But Paul wrote all three in the New Testament.

Paul basically was the smartest Jewish rabbi in the room who encountered the resurrected Jesus and in that encounter gave his life to Jesus, found his identity as a Jewish rabbi male in Jesus, and then gave his whole work to understand how all that he had learned and memorized in the Hebrew Scriptures could be taught and fulfilled in the revelation of Jesus crucified and Jesus resurrected. Especially intriguing to Paul was Jesus' power to not only create man and woman in the beginning, but to recreate man and woman in His image. Okay, let's look at Romans 1. So you'll want your bulletins open and your Bibles open as we work through Romans chapter 1, which is regarded as sort of the seminal passage to do thinking around identity in Christ and thinking around the question of same-sex attraction and specifically in Romans 1, same-sex practice.

Starting with verse 18, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. It's a very full sentence. It has several important terms.

But there's really one word that is beeping and flashing, first of all, and that's the word wrath. We need to understand wrath in its linguistic and its particular cultural context, its theological context. Wrath, in this case, is not God with a flash of anger.

This is not God expressing a kind of emotional rage. That can be human wrath, but you can't understand human wrath by God's wrath. God's wrath actually is different.

Instead, as scholars who have studied this particular word that's used here in the Greek language, wrath would be a refusal to remain neutral in the face of injustice. Wrath would be a refusal to remain neutral in the face of injustice. It could be extended to be understood, in this case, as a kind of father hostility against anything that would hurt, particularly a son or a daughter.

What is God's wrath directed toward? Paul says it's revealed from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. How do we understand unrighteousness in this case? In this context, as Paul will continue teaching, we see that unrighteousness is any behavior or belief, and I want to, we need both of these, that's really important. So it's any behavior or belief that would suppress the truth about God.

God's not neutral when the truth about Him, we'll talk about the truth about Him in just a moment, when the truth about Him is covered, is confused, is smeared, is broken. God is not neutral about that, because at the heart of the truth about God is that God wants you to know Him, and He wants to know you. God wants to have the closest possible relationship with you, and you to have the closest possible relationship

with Him, and anything that would in any way obscure His message through creation, which is understood as kind of a general way of speaking to us, or through biblical revelation, a very specific and special way, anything that would obscure that will bring God's not neutral response, because He finds that, at the heart of it, a deep injustice, because He so wants to be known, and to know you.

I do an annual camping trip with one of my, I have six kids, so I do an annual camping trip with one of my kids, and now they want to figure out how we can do two a year so I can move through them more quickly. Because we all look forward to that camping trip every year, it's a two, three day trip, we go away and it's a chance to do wilderness skills, we get out in the canoe on the lake, it's stuff like that, but the main reason I do that is because I want to know my son or daughter better, I want them to know me better, and we have this intensive time together where we really get to know each other deeply, we end up in conversations we don't usually have during normal life and week. If all of a sudden there was a law passed that I could no longer have the annual camping trip with my son or my daughter, you would see my wrath.

I would not be neutral about someone trying to keep me from telling my kids how much I deeply love them, and living it with them, and them living it with me. Indeed, I would have a father hostility about that. At the heart of this truth, and we see this in verses 19 to 20, and specifically the verse 20, the heart of the truth is his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived.

In other words, God is moving in two profound ways, through creation, to communicate who he is, we'll get to that in just a moment, and through the scriptures. As a matter of fact, this talks about creation, and it talks about creation in the scriptures. You're getting both general revelation and teaching about that, the creation, and special revelation in that we are reading the Bible itself as we learn this and understand this.

God in creation, and God in biblical revelation, has fully revealed himself, especially in the creation of male and female made in his image, because God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is a unity, one God, with distinction, three persons, and male and female who echo his image are a unity, human, they're persons, male and female, with distinction. God has so wanted to get our attention, and so wanted to give us and impart to us who he is, he has taken the most prominent reality of creation, male and female, and he is employing that so that we can have an embodied experience of knowing who he is, and that has been surrounded by the teachings of God's Word, the words from God's mouth, to help us understand all of what that actually means. There is no greater pedagogical method that could ever be employed in our lives now and in the teaching about our lives that are fully and completely synchronized.

God is passionate, as even the passion of his Son, Jesus, to show you how much he cherishes you and how much he is a God who can be cherished as well. The truth is given in creation, so the Paul says in verse 20, we're all without excuse. Creation itself sings of unity with distinction, and you can learn that song that you hear through creation in the very notes given us in the score of the Scriptures.

John 14 continues with this understanding, this is why Jesus says, if you love me, you will obey my words. He also uses the word commandments. Commandment and words can go back and forth in the Hebrew language.

The Ten Commandments are also the Ten Words, and they're not simply dictates, they are words from a Father who wants you to know about Him. So living a life in the Word and the word live the Word, that phrase is very intentional, we embody our lives in the Word. We learn it, yes, we memorize it, yes, but we live the Word.

The lie that Paul speaks of later, the lie is that we're alone, or certainly that God wants us to be alone, that's the lie. So here is the most critical identity decision that you can make. Does God's Word decide who you are? The question is not so much one of homosexual orientation or heterosexual orientation, but one of a Word of God orientation, which is to say, and which leads to a Jesus orientation.

Three weeks ago in the opening sermon to this series, I asked the question, who decides who you are? I hope you've been working on that. If you didn't hear that sermon, please go back because these sermons build on each other. Who decides who you are? Let me put a finer point on that question in light of the teaching of Paul in Romans 1. Who has the authority to decide who you are? That's probably one of the most important questions over the six weeks.

And any of you who consider yourselves serious Christians should be answering that question very clearly. You should know your answer to that question. It's a very radical question, actually.

Who has the authority to decide who you are? That will not only help you understand if you have unwanted same-sex attraction how to walk that journey, it will, but that's a question for every single Christian that has an impact, yes, on our sexuality, on our relationships, on our money, on how we think about church, our manhood, our womanhood. Everything comes under that searching question. Dr. Luke Timothy Johnson is a famous biblical scholar.

He was very involved in the 1990s Jesus Seminar where he was defending the Orthodox understanding of Jesus and Jesus' nature, who believed for many years that same-sex practice was incompatible with God's Word. Then several years ago, Dr. Johnson changed his mind. When he changed his mind and he embraced same-sex practice, albeit with caveats like monogamous same-sex practice, he had to admit that he could not support homosexual practice based on the authority of God's Word.

He had to switch authorities. Dr. Johnson writes this, I think it important to state clearly that we do in fact reject the straightforward commands of Scripture and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good. And what exactly is that authority, he writes? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience.

He asked the question, who has the authority to determine who one is, and he answered it. One's experience has primary authority. This is not to say that we as believers and as Christians in our worldview don't take experience seriously as part of our sacramental lives.

We do take experience actually very seriously, but we're clear about primary authority. And Dr. Johnson, to his credit and his candor and his consistency, is clear. I think he's clearly and tragically wrong, but he's clear.

We should all be so clear. By the way, it's not just Dr. Johnson, several other scholars who have done more New Testament studies and more Greek work than most of us could ever imagine doing. Several New Testament scholars have come to the same conclusion that they cannot justify same-sex practice through Scripture, but must indeed develop another authority.

God's heart is that we know Him through creation and especially through revelation. As Paul lays out this understanding of God's heart, he then lays out our heart or our sin, verses 21 to 25, especially verses 24 to 25. If we go against God's Word, or we choose not to live under the authority of God's Word, what happens? Paul teaches that what happens is that God, quote, gives us up.

Verse 24, therefore God gave them up in the loss of their hearts. Verse 26, for this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Verse 28, and since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind.

So, what's the wrath of God feel like if we've chosen to walk under from the authority of Scripture into another authority? What does it look like? Well, apparently it doesn't, unless it looked like a lightning bolt, or even perhaps immediate drama. Instead, it looks like God giving us what we've asked for, and this actually can feel like relief, it can feel like, ah, freedom, it can feel like I'm finally being myself. Why? Because we're serving ourselves.

We're serving the creature, verse 25, rather than the Creator, and the tension of living in our sin natures with the Creator who calls us into union with Him, and thereby calls us into confession, and repentance, and the suffering that's part of being crucified with Christ. See, my first sermon can momentarily be evaporated in that moment to choose sin. I remember in the several years I had in my early 20s, when I was not living or walking as a Christian, I remember waking up in the morning, afternoon, evening, where I engaged in behavior I knew to be sinful, and I expected I would feel bad, I'd feel gross, I'd feel cold, things weren't right, I didn't feel bad at all.

It was actually a sunny morning, and I reasoned, therefore, I didn't feel bad, maybe I wasn't bad, and I was relieved, and excited to go and do likewise again, but I was actually experiencing God's wrath. God was giving me over. And now, I was very alone.

I wanted to be alone, I wanted to self-invent, and God gave that to me, a reality of isolation that would soon set in. Christian thinker C.S. Lewis, writing in the mid-20th century, in the book *Great Divorce*, wrote this, there are only two kinds of people in the end. Those who say to God, Thy will be done, and those to whom God says in the end, Thy will be done.

The dizzying and startling biblical reality of the freedom of the human person who is not forced to love God, but called to love God. We now get to verses 26 and 27, where Paul speaks of same-sex practice. He does so illustratively, he does so to illustrate a sin in which a creature is served rather than the Creator.

I think it's important to note, this is the most extensive he deals with same-sex practice. He will mention homosexual practice in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy chapter 1, but even when he deals with it most extensively here, he didn't start with it, nor does he end with it. It is an illustration, a vivid one, of Paul's picture of what it looks like when a creature serves their own creaturehood rather than the Creator.

So why does Paul speak of same-sex practice here? Is it just because Paul is always writing about same-sex practice? No, they just said that that would not be the case, he's not always writing about same-sex practice. Why does he do so? He does so because it's a vivid illustration of a sinful practice that obscures the image of God. He does so because God wants to be known by creating male and female in His image.

It's a design, it's the most beautiful, profound, exquisite, living art piece that proclaims that God is love and that God in Himself is a unity with distinction. Same-sex practice, understood in this context, is a kind of broken image. It is not a unity, same-sex practice, because anatomically speaking, which also connects to the reality of the soul, because the body and the soul in the Hebrew and Christian understanding are dynamically united, the male body is not designed to fit with another male body.

The same is true of the female body with the female body. This is not a unity, and it's not a distinction, of course, because it is, by the very description, same-sex. For any of you who may not be part of the Christian community, but you're here or you're listening to this, this is one reason why Christians have energy around this matter.

It's not because this is the worst sin ever, I'll speak to that. It's not because we in the church don't have other significant and grievous sins. We have other significant and grievous sins, but it is because this is one sin of a handful of sins that can confuse the image of God and what He wants to say to us and to all the world.

Note that natural, looking at verses 26 to 27, for the women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another. Natural is not simply saying, oh, they were doing something unnatural, you should do things that are natural. That's not Paul's argument.

The word natural there in the original language has to do with design and has to do with the image of God. So, what Paul is saying could be paraphrased this way, women exchanged God-designed relations for those that are contrary to God's design. Two final observations on this Romans 1 text, as I just alluded to.

First, Paul is not saying that same-sex practice is the very worst sin. He talks about a lot of other sins even more, and he's mostly concerned about union with Christ. As a matter of fact, in chapter 2 verse 1 that was read this morning, he confronts anyone who would argue that this is the worst sin.

Indeed, we all in our sinful nature, he says, practice the very same things. Does Paul mean we all practice same-sex practices? No, he doesn't mean that. What he means is that we all practice self-serving, creature-worshipping, self-invention that is categorically deeply prideful.

Some in same-sex practice and others in other ways see the list in 1 Corinthians 6 that we'll look at in just a moment, adultery, drunkenness, thievery. Second, looking at verse 32, the very last verse with me, though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them, but they give approval to those who practice them. First of all, when you read the phrase, deserve to die, if you don't know Paul's teachings, you could go, what? Is Paul saying that those who practice homosexuality are the ones who deserve to die? Is he going to go somewhere with some kind of a law eventually that that should be the case? That's actually not what Paul's saying.

If you just pull a page out of any novel and just read that page, you won't understand the novel. What Paul is saying here, as he will say again in Romans 5, he will say that all sin, that the cost of all sin is death. That all sin that is not repented and confessed of is a life or death matter.

The wages of sin, he'll say, is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. He'll teach that in just a few chapters. So this is a life or death matter, as sin is a life or death matter, but secondly, he does speak to those who give approval to those who practice these things.

Speaking of same-sex practice, which is to say what? If he's speaking to those who practice, he's speaking to those who would approve that practice. So have you ever, perhaps because you wanted to be well-meaning, because you're a sympathetic, compassionate person, perhaps because you were afraid to speak up about what you knew God's Word said, or perhaps you wanted to be intellectually sophisticated, have you ever approved or even subtly encouraged someone in their same-sex practice, a subtle nod or a

little joke, a kind of I understand you moment, I want to call you to repent if you've done so. And it's the same way that I would call any who've engaged in same-sex practice to repent.

The Apostle Paul makes that a very clear and final statement at the end of chapter one. So where does this leave all of us, all of us now, so aware of the cost of sin in our lives? Where does this leave those who are in a profound struggle with same-sex attraction or who have been involved in same-sex practice? Paul will do more pastorally later in the book of Romans, but we actually get a concise understanding of this in 1 Corinthians chapter six. Here we get Paul's pastoral treatment of what he has taught.

Here in the second place he mentions sexually immoral, go to your bulletin there, idolaters, adulterers, men who practice homosexuality, thieves, the greedy. He says that these folks, and he is being very clear, these folks who are unconfessed in this, who are unrepentant in this, who have chosen this, will not inherit the kingdom of God. And then Paul says with a pastoral declaration of the power of the new creation, with a bold, bold exertion, and such were some of you.

This is an identity statement. You acted and behaved in this way. You were even identified with these behaviors in verse ten.

Such were some of you, he even uses a linking verb, a verb of being here, were some of you. Paul is making a bold identity statement that can only be proclaimed if the cross of Jesus and forgiveness of sins is true. He can only proclaim this if the resurrection and the new creation is true.

He can only preach that baptism, where he says you were washed, and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, you were sanctified, that's what he means by these things, were absolutely and completely true. As a matter of fact, he could only say this if you've been justified, you've been made new by the name of Jesus himself. There's naming again.

That the Father has named all who would follow Jesus with the name of Jesus. He has created a kind of unity with distinction in our very own personhood, male or female. That you are unified with Christ, you've been crucified with Christ, it is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you.

And yet the life which you now live, a distinction, you're unified with Christ, and yet you're your own person that Christ has created, and that Christ is redeeming, and that Christ is recreating. He posits everything here in 1 Corinthians 6, and everything he's taught in Romans 1, that no one is determined to live in any kind of constant sin, slavery life. Everything hinges on this.

This is true for every sinner or no sinner at all. Jesus teaches us a gospel identity creed in John chapter 14. This is either true for every sinner, or it's not true for any sinner at all, where he says I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

Does this mean that someone with unwanted same-sex attraction will never experience those feelings again? It doesn't. It doesn't mean that. All of us will fight against pride, lust, the desire to determine our own identities until we are fully, completely with the Lord at our death, and we are known as we know.

I was emailing with a friend, he's north of 45, married, has some children, about this question of same-sex attraction. This is prior to this series, and he wrote me an email that I asked permission to quote. I'll call my friend Sebastian.

He wrote this, my transformation has been of the heart in regard to his same-sex attraction, and my posture toward the Lord, one of humility and utter brokenness. I still have same-sex attraction. I've developed some sexual attraction toward my wife, which is God's gift to me, and a beautiful thing, but my same-sex attraction is still strong.

It is my thorn that keeps me on my knees. If I would have embraced my sexual desires as my identity early on, as the pathway to my wholeness, I would have missed the opportunity for the Lord to teach me so many things I needed to learn. Stuart, we're not better than we thought we were, none of us.

We are all worse than we can imagine, and the love of Christ goes even deeper still, and the greater my need, the greater the redemption is, and the more thankful I am. He closed with this, at the end of the day, I just think identity matters. I am not a gay man, and I am not deluding myself.

There are just men and women, some of which may have varying degrees of same- or opposite-sex attraction. I am simply a Christian man who struggles with a specific sexual sin, a sin which left unchecked and unaddressed would consume me, but a sin which submitted to the cross daily has no power over me. My identity is in Christ alone.

He is my Redeemer, my Savior, my friend. A sin which left unchecked and unaddressed would consume me, but a sin which submitted to the cross daily has no power over me. My identity, Sebastian wrote, is in Christ alone.

If that doesn't speak to you, whether you have same-sex attraction or you have a same-sex practice background or not, if that doesn't speak to you, I'm not sure you've understood Christianity or the work of Jesus. That's for all of us. All of us will be consumed by our sin if left unchecked.

But I know for some of you who are same-sex attracted, you feel that in poignant ways. You feel it in very strong and what feels like determinative ways. It can seem to take over your whole identity because it seems so pervasive.

It's not just sexual. It's more than sexual. I've heard you explain that to me, many of you, in different ways.

I'm going to say more about the way home in just a moment, but I'm going to flip the outline where you see Live God's Way to the Way Through Conflict first, and then I'll speak to the way home as I conclude. So we live God's Word. As we seek to live God's Word, it's going to bring us into tension, a few different tensions, honestly.

And you need to be prepared for that tension, and I need to talk to you about that tension because we're embodied and we interact with people, and that means that disagreements come up and challenges come up. Living the Christian life is a part of learning how to work through conflict and tension. So when we live God's Way, this will happen.

So let me speak to kind of three areas where these tensions can be particularly pronounced as we seek to live God's Word and live God's Way. The first is the question, how do you relate to non-Christian LGBT plus friends and family co-workers? Before I say anything about this, I don't have a lot of space to address this, and this needs its own sermon, it's really, really important, but I need to speak to it even briefly. We will do more with this in our Q&A.

We actually have some folks that are, that have done more thinking on this than I have. But let me say this, and I'll use Pastor Matt's teaching from a month ago in regard to sanctity of life. My call, and I believe the Scriptures call me to practice radical hospitality.

You have LGBT family and friends, you open your heart to them. You come to know them as a person, not just in regard to their sexuality, they're much more than their sexuality, but as a person. You open your home to them, not as a project, but out of true affection and love and care.

You practice hospitality, but you practice it radically. You remember the teaching that Paul gave right before, verse 18 in chapter 1 of Romans, where he says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, it's the power, it's the good news of God for everyone, Paul says. So you enter into attention, you don't have to be afraid of those in the LGBT community at all, or even talk, speak it, think it, see about it as a, you know, as a complete us-them.

This is a matter for those in that community of coming to know Jesus first and foremost. Trying to save them into Jesus as we are any that don't know the Lord Jesus. And so you show hospitality, but you're not ashamed of the gospel, and you work through carefully when you can share the good news of Jesus, in proper and clear ways, and in loving ways.

Okay, second, how do you relate to those who call themselves and identify as gay Christians? This is actually far more challenging than how we relate to those in the greater LGBT community. The greater LGBT community have creation, Paul told us that. They can see what God is going to do in creation, but many don't have the scriptural revelation, or maybe they were given it in a cramped, small, unloving way.

And they've never really heard the counsel of God. But the gay Christian community, so identified and self-called, does have God's Word. And they are seeking to reconcile God's Word with a way that is completely contrary.

One of the phrases that's used in the conversations that go on around this would be A-side, B-side. I think it refers to the old school record that you would play for music that would have an A-side and a B-side. The A-side are those who would be gay Christian, who would be affirming of homosexual practice, often with the caveat of monogamous relationship, whether it's marriage or civil union or disagreed upon monogamous relationship.

This position, this sort of development, creates incredible confusion. And those who are in this place have put themselves in great peril, and they've put in peril those they draw in. And if you self-identify as gay Christian with this particular qualifications that I've noted, I must warn you that that's an open rebellion, and God will give you over to what you've asked for.

For those of you that are in close relationship with those that self-identify as gay Christian, you have a very challenging task. My encouragement to you would be to be aware of your conversation and dialogue, and be aware if it is always 100% empathy, because it should be peppered and salted with the clarity of the gospel. Don't be improperly sympathetic or empathetic.

Don't be ashamed that there's very good news, and that should be a significant part of your dialogue. Indeed, Paul is really clear. When we interact with those in the world, Paul says, we are always out in the world.

We should be out in the world. That's part of our call, but when we interact with those who say they're in the house of God and yet live contrary to the word of God, Paul says, be careful. You might be influenced in that case.

So I share a pastoral warning in that regard. There's a third group in the recent developments, maybe the last decade or so, what would be called the B-side, although I'm not understanding exactly why this group would want to be on the same record. Maybe they don't want to be.

It's just, I don't know how it was created, but it's those who would identify as celibate gay Christians. There's been a lot of writing on this and some thinking and blogging on this. This is a group who want to say clearly we are called to live a celibate life.

We're not called to engage in same-sex practice. They're part of our family. They're part of the Christian family, and they should be absolutely commended for the way in which they've chosen to live a celibate life.

Indeed, some who have identified as celibate gay Christians have written very powerfully out of Romans 1 around the call to one husband, one wife, male and female marriage. But there are two cautions I would share here. The first is a biblical caution.

I have yet to be convinced in all the arguments that I have read out of the celibate gay Christian life how the word gay can at all be used to identify one as a Christian. Now, there's been a lot of writing on it. I'm just not convinced.

I don't see it scripturally. I don't see it in the history of the church. So I think as we're in dialogue with those who identify as celibate gay Christians, that's a continued dialogue that we should have, and I think it's important.

I don't see the biblical precedent. I see male Christians and female Christians. I see celibate Christians, and I see married Christians.

Second and pastorally, my concern there is that the celibate gay Christian position should not be a destination. It may be that on the journey, it's a place to consider, but I don't think it should be a place to end up. I think it potentially forecloses on the profound transferring power of the Lord who wants to make us all Christians, and that He is powerful enough to do so.

So finally, the way home. How do we live out God's word? This is especially important when it comes to a matter like same-sex attraction, because as I mentioned, this can be a powerful and consuming experience. Indeed, many who have same-sex attraction can feel like they have tried and tried to change it, and they cannot.

The most embodied way to live God's word and God's way is to live in the home Jesus speaks of in John chapter 14, verse 23, where He says, My Father and I will come to make a home with you. Ultimately, that home that Jesus refers to is the house of God. We know the love of God and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit by living in the house of God in deep community.

It is actually a shame upon my calling as a pastor, and it breaks my pastor's heart that so many who have struggled with same-sex attraction and same-sex practice have felt orphaned by the very church whose Lord has said, I will not leave you as orphans. And I regret that that has been true. I must honestly say, I

don't think a resurrection that has been our culture, but it doesn't in any way preclude me from the reality as a pastor that this has been true in the church.

The church has not been a safe place. It's not been a warm place. It's not been a connected place to share many struggles, including the struggle around same-sex attraction.

And I am deeply sorry to any who have experienced that. The church has been much more of an it than a she. And by that I mean we've been far too mechanistic, far too structured, far too programmed, and not connected, not warm, and not safe.

Let me say again to all of you who have worked so hard at resurrection to create a different culture, I'm not indicting us. I'm sure we've been vulnerable in places that I'm not even aware of, but I'm not indicting us, but I am saying this about the church, and I think it's true. Let me say to any of you who have unwanted same-sex attraction, come to the church.

Find a church. It's growing and developing. The churches are growing and developing more and more as a she and not an it.

We're pastors and leaders who are trustworthy, where you can disclose your struggle. You can get out from that place of isolation and confess your sins. Let me just say here, resurrection, if you have same-sex attraction, it's not that we want to remake you into a perfect husband, American husband, or a perfect American wife with perfect kids and perfect white teeth and a perfect minivan.

It doesn't even exist. And you may think that people are living that way, but I've been a pastor for 25 years. They're not.

But our goal is not to get you married with a perfect seeming life. Our goal is to get you Jesus, married or celibate. I'll do a lot more on celibacy next week.

If you're in pain, unwanted same-sex attraction, those close to you who are in that place, or confusion, let the church, with the word of God, come over to wherever you are, kind of crouch down there where you may be on the ground, walk up with you, and get you to a place in Jesus, in his house, where you can be much better. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen. Thanks for listening.

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