



REASON TOGETHER
— CHURCH —

IS IT A SIN TO BE GAY?

Hebrews 4:14–16; James 1:13–15



— Sermon & Pastor's Commentary —

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Aloha, everyone, and welcome.

I am thankful that you have joined us today.

Let's spend some time together examining God's Word.

Open your Bible.

Bring your questions.

Let's reason together through God's Word.

If this is your first time worshipping with us, we are especially glad that you are here.

We will never ask you to stand or otherwise single you out.

There is a guest card available if you would like to share your first name and email address with us.

That is all we ask for.

We would simply like the opportunity to thank you for being here and let you know about future studies.

We also want our guests to understand that we do not pass an offering plate.

If you are a member of another church, we encourage you to continue supporting your home church.

Our giving opportunities are provided for our members as an act of worship and responsibility.

After our time together, I hope you will join us at the Reason Together Café.

There is no charge for the coffee.

It is locally grown.

And there are always free refills on conversations.

Before we open the Scriptures, let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father,

We thank You for giving us Your Word.

We ask You to help us approach it today with honesty, humility and compassion.

Remove from us any pride that would cause us to examine someone else's sin while ignoring our own.

Give us the courage to accept what Your Word says, even when it challenges something we have always believed.

Help us speak the truth without cruelty.

Help us demonstrate love without compromising the truth.

Most of all, help us see the Lord Jesus clearly.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

I want to begin today with a question.

It is a short question.

It is only seven words long.

But those seven words may cause some people to become uncomfortable before we ever open the Bible.

The question is this:

Is it a sin to be gay?

Some people have already answered.

They heard the word "gay" and immediately said yes.

Others heard the question and immediately said no.

Some may be wondering whether I am about to soften what the Bible says.

Others may be wondering whether I am about to use the Bible as a weapon against people they love.

Someone listening may have a son, daughter, brother, sister or close friend who identifies as gay.

Someone else may be personally experiencing same-sex attraction and has never told another person.

You may have carried that struggle silently for many years.

You may love the Lord.

You may believe the Bible.

You may sincerely want to live faithfully before God.

But you may also be afraid that if anyone in church knew about your struggle, they would never look at you the same way again.

If that describes you, I want you to hear something at the beginning of this study.

You are not being singled out.

You are not being placed on display.

We are not opening the Bible so that we can examine you.

We are opening the Bible so that every one of us can examine ourselves.

This study is not merely about homosexuality.

It is about temptation.

It is about desire.

It is about the human heart.

It is about the difference between facing temptation and yielding to it.

That means this study concerns every person in this room.

It concerns the person tempted by alcohol.

It concerns the person tempted by anger.

It concerns the person tempted by greed.

It concerns the married person who feels attracted to someone other than his or her spouse.

It concerns the person who struggles with pornography.

It concerns the person who is tempted to lie, gossip, steal or hold a grudge.

We may not face the same temptations.

But every one of us knows what it means to be tempted.

Before we decide whether it is a sin to be gay, we must decide what we mean by the word “be.”

That little word is the doorway into our entire study.

When someone says, “I am gay,” what exactly is that person saying?

Is that person describing an attraction?

Is that person describing a temptation?

Is that person describing an identity?

Is that person describing a relationship?

Or is that person describing sexual conduct?

Those things are related.

But they are not identical.

If we place them all into one category, we may give an answer that sounds certain while failing to answer the actual question.

Suppose someone says, “I am an alcoholic.”

That statement could mean several different things.

It could mean that the person is presently drinking and has surrendered control of his life to alcohol.

It could mean that the person has not consumed alcohol for twenty years but still recognizes a particular vulnerability to it.

It could mean that the person experiences a temptation that someone else does not regularly experience.

Those are not identical conditions.

Suppose someone says, “I struggle with anger.”

That does not necessarily mean the person is presently screaming at his family or attacking someone.

He may be acknowledging a temptation that he is actively resisting.

The struggle itself may demonstrate that he has not surrendered to it.

Suppose a married man recognizes that a woman other than his wife is attractive.

Has he already committed adultery simply because his mind registered that she was attractive?

Or does sin enter when he chooses to continue looking, begins imagining what does not belong to him and welcomes that desire into his heart?

Those distinctions matter.

They matter because the Bible makes distinctions.

Our responsibility is not to create a standard that feels strict enough to satisfy us.

Our responsibility is to discover where God places the boundary.

What does God call temptation?

What does God call lust?

What does God call sin?

At what point does one become the other?

Let’s begin with a passage that may not be the first passage people expect in a study about homosexuality.

Please turn with me to Hebrews, chapter 4.

We will begin reading in verse 14.

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;

“but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace,

“that we may obtain mercy,

“and find grace to help in time of need.”

The writer of Hebrews tells us something remarkable about Jesus.

He was tempted.

He was not merely aware that temptation existed.

He experienced temptation.

Hebrews says that He “was in all points tempted like as we are.”

Yet the verse ends with three decisive words:

“Yet without sin.”

Jesus was tempted.

Jesus did not sin.

Therefore, temptation and sin cannot be the same thing.

If temptation were automatically sin, then the Bible could not tell us that Jesus was tempted and remained without sin.

That does not make temptation harmless.

It does not mean we should play with it.

It does not mean we should deliberately place ourselves in situations where we know we are likely to fall.

But it does mean that the arrival of temptation is not identical to yielding to temptation.

Notice what the passage says we should do when temptation comes.

It does not tell us to hide because we are ashamed.

It does not tell us to pretend that we were never tempted.

It does not tell us to remain outside the church until all temptation disappears.

It tells us to come boldly unto the throne of grace.

Why?

Because Jesus understands.

He can be “touched with the feeling of our infirmities.”

He knows the pressure of temptation without ever having surrendered to it.

Therefore, when temptation comes, we can approach Him for mercy and “grace to help in time of need.”

The time of temptation is a time of need.

It is also a time when grace is available.

Now turn back to Matthew, chapter 4.

Verse 1 says:

“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.”

We must read that sentence carefully.

Jesus was led by the Spirit.

He was tempted by the devil.

Jesus did not follow Satan into the wilderness.

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the place where the devil would test Him.

The devil then presented Jesus with opportunities to disobey the Father.

Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights.

He was hungry.

Satan said:

“If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.”

There was nothing inherently sinful about bread.

There was nothing sinful about eating after a fast.

The temptation was for Jesus to act independently of His Father and use His divine power according to Satan’s direction.

Jesus answered:

“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

Satan then took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and urged Him to cast Himself down.

Satan even quoted Scripture.

But he twisted Scripture into an invitation for Jesus to test the Father.

Jesus answered:

“It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”

Satan then showed Jesus the kingdoms of the world.

He said:

“All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.”

Jesus was presented with an offer of a kingdom without first going to the cross.

He could have received the crown without enduring the suffering.

But the price was worshipping Satan.

Jesus answered:

“Get thee hence, Satan:

“for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”

Each temptation was real.

Each temptation was rejected.

Jesus answered Satan with the Word of God.

Temptation came to Him.

Temptation did not conquer Him.

This establishes our first Biblical truth:

Being tempted is not the same as sinning.

That truth applies whether the temptation involves pride, power, food, anger, money, alcohol or sex.

The nature of the temptation does not erase the distinction.

A person may experience an unwanted temptation without having chosen its arrival.

The moral question is not merely:

“What temptation appeared?”

The moral question is:

“What did I do when it appeared?”

Did I reject it?

Did I flee from it?

Did I take it to the Lord?

Or did I invite it to remain?

That brings us back to our question.

Is it a sin to be gay?

Before answering it, let's establish something about which the Bible is clear.

The Bible identifies homosexual conduct as sinful.

Leviticus 18:22 says:

“Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.”

Leviticus 20:13 repeats that prohibition within the laws governing Israel.

We should understand that Christians are not ancient Israel.

The church is not instructed to administer the civil penalties found in Israel's law.

We are not authorized to harm, threaten or persecute anyone.

But the moral prohibition expressed in those passages does not disappear.

The New Testament repeats it.

Romans, chapter 1, beginning in verse 24, says:

“Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts,

“to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

“Who changed the truth of God into a lie,

“and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator,

“who is blessed for ever.

“Amen.

“For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections:

“for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:

“And likewise also the men,

“leaving the natural use of the woman,

“burned in their lust one toward another;

“men with men working that which is unseemly,

“and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.”

The passage speaks of lust.

It speaks of people burning in that lust.

It speaks of men with men “working that which is unseemly.”

Paul is describing both cultivated desire and resulting conduct.

Now turn to 1 Corinthians, chapter 6.

Beginning in verse 9, Paul writes:

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?

“Be not deceived:

“neither fornicators,

“nor idolaters,

“nor adulterers,

“nor effeminate,

“nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

“Nor thieves,

“nor covetous,

“nor drunkards,

“nor revilers,

“nor extortioners,

“shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

We should not try to soften those passages.

God designed sexual intimacy for marriage between a man and a woman.

Any sexual conduct outside that covenant is outside God’s design.

That includes adultery.

That includes fornication.

That includes homosexual conduct.

The Bible is clear about the act.

But our question is not merely:

“Is homosexual conduct a sin?”

If that were the question, we could answer it quickly.

Our question contains the word “be.”

Is it a sin to be gay?

For purposes of this study, we are using “being gay” to describe the experience of persistent same-sex attraction.

We are not using it as another name for homosexual conduct.

We are not using it to describe cultivating sexual fantasies.

We are asking whether experiencing the attraction or temptation is automatically the same as committing sin.

The passages we just read do not authorize us to erase the distinction between temptation, lust and conduct.

At the same time, we must not make the opposite mistake.

We must not say:

“Only physical actions matter.”

Jesus did not teach that morality begins at the surface of the body.

Jesus addressed the heart.

Turn to Matthew, chapter 5.

Beginning in verse 27, Jesus said:

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,

“Thou shalt not commit adultery:

“But I say unto you,

“That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”

Notice the wording.

Jesus did not say that every man who sees a woman has committed adultery.

He did not say that every recognition of beauty is adultery.

He said:

“Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her.”

There is purpose in that look.

There is intention.

A person sees and then chooses to continue.

He takes what entered his awareness and begins using it for his own imagination.

The physical act may never occur.

The other person may never know what happened.

But something was willingly cultivated in the heart.

Jesus calls that heart adultery.

Therefore, we cannot teach that only a physical act can be sinful.

Sin can occur when temptation is welcomed.

Sin can occur when desire is deliberately fed.

Sin can occur when someone repeatedly returns to a fantasy because he enjoys what it provides.

This applies equally to heterosexual and homosexual desire.

A married man cannot say:

“I never touched the woman, so I did nothing wrong.”

A single man cannot say:

“I only imagined sexual relations with her, so I remained pure.”

A person experiencing same-sex attraction cannot say:

“I never performed the physical act, so everything I cultivated in my imagination was acceptable.”

The standard is the same for everyone.

Temptation is not sin.

But willingly embracing lust is sin.

Now let’s turn to James, chapter 1.

James helps us see the progression.

Beginning in verse 13, we read:

“Let no man say when he is tempted,

“I am tempted of God:

“for God cannot be tempted with evil,

“neither tempteth he any man:

“But every man is tempted,

“when he is drawn away of his own lust,

“and enticed.

“Then when lust hath conceived,

“it bringeth forth sin:

“and sin,

“when it is finished,

“bringeth forth death.”

James gives us a picture of conception and birth.

Something presents itself as desirable.

The person is drawn toward it.

The temptation entices.

Then lust conceives.

Once it has been joined with the person’s willing consent, it gives birth to sin.

Sin then grows toward death.

The temptation must not be ignored.

But neither should temptation be confused with its final offspring.

There is a difference between hearing a knock at the door and inviting the visitor inside.

You may not control who knocks.

But you decide whether to open the door.

You decide whether to invite the temptation into the living room.

You decide whether to offer it a chair.

You decide whether to keep feeding it until it feels at home.

Martin Luther is often credited with an illustration that makes the distinction clear.

You cannot keep birds from flying over your head.

But you do not have to allow them to build a nest in your hair.

We cannot always prevent the first awareness of temptation.

But we can refuse to provide it with a permanent home.

Suppose a man has struggled with alcohol for many years.

He walks past a place where he once drank.

The sight awakens an old desire.

For a moment, he remembers the feeling alcohol provided.

He experiences temptation.

At that point he has a choice.

He can continue walking.

He can call someone he trusts.

He can pray.

He can remind himself what alcohol destroyed.

Or he can stand outside and begin imagining the drink.

He can tell himself that one would not hurt.

He can begin planning when he might return without anyone knowing.

The temptation has now been welcomed and cultivated.

The boundary is not merely between standing outside and holding the bottle.

Something occurred in his heart before he ever walked through the door.

The same principle applies to anger.

Someone treats you unfairly.

You immediately feel anger.

Ephesians 4:26 says:

“Be ye angry, and sin not.”

That statement alone proves that experiencing an emotion and sinning with that emotion are not necessarily identical.

But if you replay the offense all day, imagine ways to hurt the person and nurture hatred, the anger has been given a home.

The same principle applies to heterosexual attraction.

A person notices someone who is attractive.

That first recognition is not automatically lust.

But if the person deliberately looks again for the purpose of sexual imagination, temptation has been welcomed.

The same principle applies to same-sex attraction.

A person becomes aware of an attraction that he did not consciously choose.

The arrival of that awareness is not automatically the same as yielding to it.

But if he chooses to cultivate the sexual fantasy or pursue conduct forbidden by Scripture, temptation has crossed into sin.

The distinction is not permission to see how close we can walk to sin without committing it.

It is an invitation to recognize temptation early enough to resist it.

First Corinthians 10:13 says:

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man:

“but God is faithful,

“who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able;

“but will with the temptation also make a way to escape,

“that ye may be able to bear it.”

Notice that Paul does not promise the absence of temptation.

He promises God’s faithfulness in temptation.

God provides a way to escape.

Sometimes the escape is physically leaving a place.

Sometimes it is turning off a device.

Sometimes it is ending a conversation.

Sometimes it is confessing the struggle to a mature Christian who will pray with you and hold you accountable.

Sometimes it is refusing to remain alone with thoughts that grow stronger in secrecy.

The way of escape will not always remove the desire immediately.

But it provides a way to remain obedient while the desire is present.

That truth matters for someone whose temptation persists.

Some people have testified that their same-sex attractions diminished after coming to Christ.

Others have faithfully followed Christ for many years while continuing to experience the temptation.

We should not promise that every temptation will disappear in this life.

The Bible does not make that promise.

A Christian who continues to experience temptation has not necessarily failed.

The presence of a battle may demonstrate that the person is still resisting.

Victory does not always mean that the enemy never returns.

Sometimes victory means that every time the enemy returns, you continue standing with Christ.

A person may remain sober while still recognizing a vulnerability to alcohol.

A person may remain faithful in marriage while occasionally experiencing attraction to someone else.

A person may remain sexually pure while continuing to experience same-sex attraction.

We should not call faithful resistance surrender.

We should not place a burden on someone that Scripture does not place there.

At the same time, the Christian must never make peace with sin.

Grace does not tell us that obedience is unnecessary.

Grace teaches us how to say no.

Titus 2:11 and 12 says:

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

“Teaching us that,

“denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,

“we should live soberly,

“righteously,

“and godly,

“in this present world.”

Grace does not merely forgive us after we fall.

Grace teaches us to deny ungodliness.

Grace gives us strength for the struggle.

Now we are ready to return to our original question.

Is it a sin to be gay?

If by “being gay” we mean experiencing an unwanted or uninvited same-sex attraction, then experiencing that temptation is not the same as committing sin.

Let me say that again carefully.

If “being gay” describes the experience of same-sex attraction or temptation, without willingly cultivating lust or participating in homosexual conduct, then the experience of that temptation is not identical to committing sin.

Jesus was tempted.

Yet He remained without sin.

But if “being gay” means willingly embracing homosexual lust, pursuing a same-sex sexual relationship or participating in homosexual conduct, Scripture gives us a different answer.

The Bible identifies that conduct as sin.

The answer depends upon what we mean by “be.”

That is why a one-word answer can be technically correct and pastorally misleading.

If someone asks:

“Is homosexual conduct sinful?”

The Biblical answer is yes.

If someone asks:

“Have I already committed homosexual sin simply because I experienced an attraction that I did not invite and am trying to resist?”

The Biblical answer is no.

Temptation is not surrender.

A struggle is not the same as defeat.

A person who comes to the throne of grace for help should not be treated as though he has already abandoned himself to sin.

But there is another issue hidden inside the word “be.”

It is the issue of identity.

We live in a time when people are encouraged to construct their identities around their strongest desires.

If someone feels a desire deeply enough or consistently enough, society may say:

“That is who you are.”

But the Bible does not teach us that our strongest temptation determines our deepest identity.

A man tempted by alcohol is more than his temptation.

A woman who struggles with anger is more than her anger.

A married person tempted by adultery is not required to build an identity around that attraction.

A person experiencing same-sex attraction is more than that attraction.

The temptation may describe one part of that person's experience.

It does not tell us the person's entire story.

It does not tell us whether that person is kind.

It does not tell us whether that person is honest.

It does not tell us whether that person is generous.

It does not tell us whether that person knows Christ.

It certainly does not tell us whether that person is beyond the reach of God's grace.

For the believer, our defining identity is found in Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:3 says:

"For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

Verse 4 says:

"When Christ, who is our life, shall appear,

"then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

Paul does not merely say that Christ improves our lives.

He says that Christ is our life.

Our past is not our ultimate identity.

Our temptation is not our ultimate identity.

Our worst failure is not our ultimate identity.

Our culture's label is not our ultimate identity.

The Christian belongs to Jesus.

Return with me to 1 Corinthians, chapter 6.

We previously read the warning in verses 9 and 10.

But the passage does not end with the list.

Verse 11 says:

“And such were some of you:

“but ye are washed,

“but ye are sanctified,

“but ye are justified

“in the name of the Lord Jesus,

“and by the Spirit of our God.”

Those may be the most important words in this entire study.

“Such were some of you.”

The Corinthian church included people with serious sexual histories.

It included people who had worshipped idols.

It included thieves.

It included greedy people.

It included drunkards.

It included verbal abusers.

It included people who had committed sins that brought shame and destruction into their lives.

Paul did not say:

“There is no place in the church for people like you.”

He reminded them of what Christ had done.

“Ye are washed.”

Their sins had been cleansed.

“Ye are sanctified.”

They had been set apart for God.

“Ye are justified.”

They had been declared righteous through Jesus Christ.

They were not saved because they had never sinned.

They were saved because Jesus saves sinners.

They did not enter the church after they became good enough.

They came to Christ because they knew they were not good enough.

That is the gospel.

A person does not have to become heterosexual before coming to Jesus.

An alcoholic does not have to eliminate every craving before coming to Jesus.

An angry person does not have to conquer every emotional response before coming to Jesus.

A sinner comes to Jesus as a sinner.

Jesus forgives.

Jesus washes.

Jesus sanctifies.

Jesus justifies.

Then Jesus begins teaching that person how to walk in obedience.

That walk may involve difficult choices.

For a person experiencing same-sex attraction, obedience may involve celibacy.

It may involve surrendering the possibility of a relationship the person deeply desires.

We should not speak about that casually.

It is easy to describe someone else's sacrifice as though it costs nothing.

Jesus calls every disciple to deny himself, take up his cross and follow Him.

The shape of that denial may differ from one person to another.

But no Christian is exempt.

A married Christian must deny every sexual desire directed toward someone other than his or her spouse.

An unmarried heterosexual Christian is called to celibacy unless and until marriage occurs.

A Christian experiencing same-sex attraction is also called to sexual purity.

The standard is not:

"Everyone else may follow every desire, but you may not."

The standard is:

"No Christian has permission to place sexual desire above obedience to Christ."

Jesus is Lord over the heterosexual believer.

Jesus is Lord over the homosexual believer.

Jesus is Lord over our bodies.

Jesus is Lord over our thoughts.

Jesus is Lord over our relationships.

Jesus is Lord over our identities.

This is where the church must examine itself.

It is possible to state the correct doctrine with the wrong spirit.

It is possible to speak the truth in a way that makes us feel superior rather than grateful.

It is possible to condemn sins we do not personally find tempting while excusing the sins that feel familiar to us.

Some churches have spoken about homosexuality as though it were the one sin from which people cannot be forgiven.

Yet the same churches may overlook pride.

They may tolerate gossip.

They may excuse greed.

They may laugh about gluttony.

They may ignore heterosexual adultery until it occurs in a prominent family.

They may allow bitterness to remain untreated for decades.

Then they speak about homosexual sin as though it belongs to a separate class of human wickedness.

That is not Biblical.

First Corinthians 6 places homosexual conduct in a list.

It is serious.

But it is not alone.

The same passage that warns about homosexual conduct also warns fornicators.

It warns adulterers.

It warns thieves.

It warns covetous people.

It warns drunkards.

It warns revilers.

It warns extortioners.

No one gets to stand outside that passage and point inward at everyone else.

Romans 1 is often quoted when discussing homosexuality.

And it should be considered.

But Romans does not end after chapter 1.

At the beginning of chapter 2, Paul says:

“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest:

“for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself;

“for thou that judgest doest the same things.”

Paul does not withdraw anything he said in chapter 1.

He turns toward the person who was nodding in agreement and says:

“Now let’s talk about you.”

That is the Reason Together approach.

We do not gather around the Bible to discover ammunition for someone else.

We gather around the Bible and allow it to examine every one of us.

How, then, should the church respond to someone who confesses a struggle with same-sex attraction?

Galatians 6:1 says:

“Brethren,

“if a man be overtaken in a fault,

“ye which are spiritual,

“restore such an one in the spirit of meekness;

“considering thyself,

“lest thou also be tempted.”

Notice the word “restore.”

The goal is not humiliation.

The goal is restoration.

Notice the required spirit.

“Meekness.”

The spiritually mature person does not approach with pride.

He remembers his own vulnerability.

He considers himself because he also can be tempted.

Verse 2 says:

“Bear ye one another’s burdens,

“and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

Some temptations become heavier because people believe they must carry them alone.

They fear that confession will lead to rejection.

They fear becoming the subject of gossip.

They fear that every friendship will be reinterpreted through the lens of their temptation.

The church should be the place where truth and grace meet.

It should be a place where someone can say:

“I am struggling.”

And a mature Christian can answer:

“You do not have to struggle alone.”

That does not mean approving sin.

It means helping someone pursue holiness.

If a person confesses temptation, do not treat the confession as though it were the sin itself.

If a person confesses sin, do not treat the confession as though repentance were impossible.

Listen.

Pray.

Open the Bible.

Help establish wise boundaries.

Remain present after the first conversation.

Do not turn someone's most vulnerable confession into tomorrow's church gossip.

Bear the burden.

Point the person toward Christ.

The church should also provide something more than prohibition.

If our only message is:

“Do not commit this sin,”

we have not yet described the fullness of Christian fellowship.

People need spiritual family.

They need friendship.

They need meaningful service.

They need places where they are known for more than the temptation they resist.

They need brothers and sisters who will share meals, celebrate victories and remain present during lonely seasons.

The answer to sinful sexual conduct is not isolation.

It is holiness within the body of Christ.

There may also be someone listening who does not experience same-sex attraction but has treated homosexual people cruelly.

Perhaps you used demeaning language.

Perhaps you laughed at jokes designed to humiliate them.

Perhaps you assumed that every gay person was hostile to God.

Perhaps you believed that treating someone with kindness would be interpreted as approving everything that person believed or did.

Jesus never required us to choose between truth and compassion.

We can believe what Scripture says about sexual conduct and still treat every person with dignity.

Every human being was created in the image of God.

Every person is someone for whom Christ died.

Every person should be able to enter this church and hear the truth without becoming the object of ridicule.

Love does not require us to call sin righteous.

Truth does not require us to become cruel.

Jesus was full of grace and truth.

His church should reflect both.

Perhaps someone listening has engaged in homosexual conduct.

Maybe it was years ago.

Maybe it happened recently.

Maybe it is continuing now.

The message of 1 Corinthians 6:11 is for you.

“Ye are washed.”

There is forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

There is no sexual sin that His blood cannot cleanse.

There is no past so stained that His grace cannot reach it.

But grace calls us to repentance.

Jesus does not merely forgive us so that we may continue unchanged.

He calls us to turn from sin and follow Him.

Repentance does not mean that every temptation immediately disappears.

It means that we change whom we obey.

The temptation may continue speaking.

But it is no longer Lord.

Jesus is Lord.

You may stumble during the process of learning obedience.

When you do, confess the sin.

Receive God's forgiveness.

Stand again.

Do not interpret one failure as permission to surrender completely.

First John 1:9 says:

“If we confess our sins,

“he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,

“and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Perhaps you have never participated in homosexual conduct.

But you are exhausted by the temptation.

You have prayed for it to disappear.

You have wondered why God has not removed it.

You may have concluded that the presence of the temptation means God has rejected you.

Return to Hebrews 4.

Jesus is a High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities.

The passage does not tell you to run away from Him.

It tells you to come boldly.

Come for mercy.

Come for grace.

Come for help in time of need.

Your temptation is not greater than His grace.

Your struggle does not make you unreachable.

You do not have to pretend.

You do not have to create a false testimony in which every temptation vanished the moment you prayed.

You must tell the truth.

You must pursue holiness.

You must refuse to allow temptation to become your master.

But you may come to Jesus exactly as a person in need of grace.

That is why the distinction in today's question matters.

If we call temptation itself a completed sin, we may place false guilt on people who are faithfully resisting.

If we pretend that cultivated lust is morally neutral, we may provide false comfort to people who need repentance.

If we treat homosexual conduct as acceptable, we contradict Scripture.

If we treat homosexual sinners as beyond forgiveness, we contradict the gospel.

We need truth in every direction.

So let's answer our question one final time.

Is it a sin to be gay?

The Bible does not use the modern word "gay" as a category of sexual orientation.

Therefore, we must define what we mean.

If "being gay" means experiencing persistent same-sex attraction or temptation, the arrival and experience of that temptation are not automatically identical to committing sin.

Temptation is not sin.

Jesus was tempted, yet without sin.

If that attraction is deliberately cultivated into lust, sin has occurred in the heart.

If that desire is expressed through homosexual conduct, Scripture identifies the conduct as sin.

The word "be" does not give permission to sin.

But neither does it permit us to condemn someone merely for experiencing a temptation that he or she is resisting.

The better question may eventually become:

What will I do with the temptation I experience?

Will I allow it to define me?

Will I feed it?

Will I follow it?

Or will I bring it to Jesus?

That question belongs to every one of us.

Your particular temptation may not involve homosexuality.

But something calls your name.

Something promises satisfaction outside the will of God.

Something tells you that obedience costs too much.

Something whispers that because the desire feels natural, it must be right.

Something argues that because the struggle has lasted a long time, surrender is inevitable.

The gospel gives us another answer.

You are not required to obey every desire you experience.

You are not abandoned in temptation.

You are not saved by the absence of struggle.

You are saved by the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Him there is forgiveness.

In Him there is a new identity.

In Him there is strength to obey.

In Him there is a church family that should help carry the burden.

In Him there is grace to help in time of need.

Perhaps today you recognize that you have been confusing temptation with identity.

You have said:

“This is what I feel, therefore this is who I am.”

Jesus invites you to receive a greater identity.

You may say:

“I belong to Christ.”

“I have been washed.”

“I have been sanctified.”

“I have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Perhaps today you recognize that you have been cultivating something in your heart while telling yourself that you had not sinned because you never acted physically.

Jesus sees the heart.

Confess it.

Bring it into the light.

Receive His forgiveness.

Perhaps today you recognize that you have treated another person’s temptation as though it were worse than your own.

Repent of that pride.

Ask God to give you the spirit of meekness described in Galatians.

Perhaps today you have never trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior.

The central issue is not whether your sins are homosexual or heterosexual.

The central issue is that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

You cannot wash yourself.

You cannot justify yourself.

You cannot earn salvation by improving your behavior.

Jesus died for our sins.

He was buried.

He rose again.

He offers forgiveness and eternal life to everyone who comes to Him in faith.

John 6:37 records the words of Jesus:

“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

That promise is not limited to people with respectable histories.

It is not limited to people with socially acceptable temptations.

It is for the sinner who comes to Jesus.

If you come to Him, He will not cast you out.

Let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father,

Thank You for speaking to us through Your Word.

Thank You for showing us that temptation and sin are not identical.

Thank You for warning us that temptation must never be welcomed, cultivated or allowed to rule our hearts.

Forgive us for the times we have yielded.

Forgive us for the lust we have entertained.

Forgive us for judging others while excusing ourselves.

Forgive us for speaking the truth without love.

Forgive us for claiming to love while withholding the truth.

Help every person who is carrying a private temptation.

Give that person courage to come boldly to the throne of grace.

Provide mercy.

Provide strength.

Provide a way of escape.

Provide trustworthy Christian friends who will help carry the burden.

Help this church become a place where sinners hear the truth, experience compassion and discover the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.

For anyone who has never trusted Christ, help that person recognize the need for salvation and call upon the Lord Jesus today.

Thank You that in Christ we can be washed, sanctified and justified.

Thank You that our temptation does not have to become our master.

Thank You that our past does not have to remain our identity.

Thank You that Jesus saves sinners.

We ask all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Thank you for spending this time reasoning together through God's Word.

If you would like to talk privately about today's study, I would be honored to sit with you, open the Bible and continue the conversation.

Please join us at the Reason Together Café.

The coffee is free.

The refills are free.

And so are the conversations.

To those joining us for the first time, we say:

Aloha Nui Loa.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Aloha.

REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

IS IT A SIN TO BE GAY?

Hebrews 4:14–16; James 1:13–15

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 4:15

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

Commentary in Brief

CENTRAL CONCLUSION Temptation is not sin. Experiencing same-sex attraction is not identical to cultivating homosexual lust or participating in homosexual conduct. Every desire and action must remain under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

“Is it a sin to be gay?” appears to be a yes-or-no question. The difficulty is that the word gay may refer to attraction, temptation, identity, relationship or sexual conduct. Those meanings are connected, but they are not identical. The word “be” therefore becomes the doorway into the study.

Scripture is clear that homosexual conduct lies outside God’s design for sexual intimacy. Scripture is equally clear that temptation and sin are not the same event. Hebrews 4:15 says Jesus was tempted, yet without sin. James 1:13–15 describes desire enticing and then conceiving before it gives birth to sin. Matthew 5:27–28 prevents the opposite mistake of treating only physical conduct as morally significant.

This commentary expands the Biblical reasoning behind the sermon. It defines the controlling terms, examines the progression from temptation to willing lust, explains the principal passages concerning same-sex conduct and asks how a church can preserve truth while becoming a trustworthy home for people who are resisting temptation.

1. Define the Question Before Answering It

Several Meanings Inside One Word

Modern English uses gay in several ways. One person may use it to name a persistent pattern of attraction. Another may use it as a public identity. Another may mean participation in a same-sex relationship. A listener who hears only one of those meanings may answer a question the speaker did not ask.

The Bible does not use gay as a modern category of sexual orientation. That does not mean Scripture has nothing to say about same-sex desire or conduct. It means that the modern term must be opened and examined rather than dropped unchanged into an ancient text.

The Definition Used in This Study

For purposes of the sermon, being gay refers to experiencing persistent same-sex attraction. It does not automatically mean cultivating sexual fantasy, entering a same-sex

relationship or participating in homosexual conduct. Once those additional meanings are introduced, the moral question changes.

READING PRINCIPLE Define the modern word. Identify the exact experience or conduct under discussion. Then ask which Biblical passage addresses it.

Why Both Careless Answers Fail

An immediate yes may treat every attraction, temptation, identity label and act as the same moral event. It can place guilt on a person who is resisting an uninvited temptation and may teach that honest disclosure is unsafe. An immediate no can be equally misleading if the hearer uses gay to include cultivated lust, a sexual relationship or conduct Scripture prohibits.

The qualified answer is not an attempt to avoid clarity. It is the clarity required when one contemporary word carries several meanings. Biblical precision sometimes requires a sentence where a slogan would be easier.

2. Tempted, Yet Without Sin

The Controlling Passage

Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” The verse joins genuine temptation with complete sinlessness. If temptation were automatically identical to sin, those two truths could not stand together.

The verse does not say that Jesus experienced every specific modern temptation. It does not teach that His holy human nature possessed inward corruption. Its necessary conclusion is narrower and decisive: the pressure or presentation of temptation is not itself moral surrender.

The Throne of Grace

Hebrews does more than settle a definition. It tells the tempted person what to do. Because Jesus sympathizes with human weakness, believers may come boldly to the throne of grace for mercy and help in time of need. The response to temptation is neither pretending nor despair. It is honest dependence upon Christ.

PASTORAL ASSURANCE A person who comes to Christ for help in resisting temptation should not be treated as though the confession of struggle were itself a confession of surrender.

3. The Wilderness and the Source of Temptation

Led by the Spirit, Tempted by the Devil

Matthew 4:1 must be read carefully. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness and tempted by the devil. The Spirit led. The devil tempted. Jesus did not follow Satan into the wilderness, and He never accepted Satan's authority.

The tempter appealed to hunger, presumption and authority. Jesus refused every proposal through obedient trust in the Father and the truthful use of Scripture. The narrative provides a living picture of temptation encountered without temptation being welcomed.

A Necessary Christological Limit

Christ's temptation proves that temptation and sin differ. It should not be used to claim that Jesus experienced same-sex attraction or every form of fallen desire. The sermon does not require that claim. It requires only the Biblical distinction between being tested and yielding to the test.

4. How Desire Conceives

James Describes a Progression

James 1:14–15 says that a person is drawn away and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, after it has conceived, gives birth to sin. Sin, when fully grown, brings forth death. The language is developmental rather than flat.

The Greek word group translated desire or lust can describe strong desire and is not evil in every context. Jesus earnestly desired to eat the Passover, and Paul desired to depart and be with Christ. The object, direction and willing use of desire determine its moral character in a particular passage.

From Arrival to Consent

The first awareness of temptation may occur without invitation. Sin develops when the heart welcomes what God forbids, deliberately returns to it, uses another person in fantasy

or plans how desire may be expressed. James does not provide a mechanical timeline for every thought, but he does prevent us from calling every stage the same thing.

A Real Evangelical Disagreement

Christians who affirm the same Biblical prohibition of homosexual conduct still disagree about how to describe the moral status of same-sex attraction. Some call the attraction itself sinful because it reflects desire directed outside God's design. Others distinguish the involuntary experience of attraction from the personal act of consenting to lust.

The sermon adopts the second distinction while preserving the concern of the first. It does not call every fallen impulse good or exempt desire from sanctification. It says that moral disorder in the human condition should not be collapsed into a completed personal act of sin when the person is resisting rather than consenting.

THE MORAL TURN The approved sermon describes the turn through willing consent, cultivation and eventual expression. Temptation should be resisted early, but resistance is not the same as surrender.

5. Sin Can Occur Before Physical Conduct

Looking in Order to Lust

Matthew 5:28 says that whoever looks on a woman “to lust after her” has committed adultery with her in his heart. Jesus is not condemning eyesight or the mere recognition that another person is attractive. He addresses a look directed toward coveting and sexual possession in the imagination.

This passage keeps the sermon from becoming an act-only defense. A person cannot claim purity merely because no physical encounter occurred. Deliberate fantasy and welcomed lust matter before God. The same standard applies to heterosexual and homosexual desire.

Not a Mechanical Two-Look Rule

The distinction should not be reduced to saying that the first look is innocent and the second look is always sin. Jesus addresses purpose and the heart's intention. Wisdom asks whether the person is resisting temptation or recruiting sight, memory and imagination to feed it.

6. What Scripture Says About Homosexual Conduct

The Prohibition Is Clear

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 prohibit male same-sex intercourse. Christians are not ancient Israel and possess no authority to administer Israel's civil penalties. The moral question, however, is not dependent upon Leviticus alone.

Romans 1:24–27 describes dishonorable passions, mutual same-sex desire and men with men working what Paul calls unseemly. First Corinthians 6:9–11 and 1 Timothy 1:10 add apostolic warnings. Read within the Bible's male-female account of marriage, these passages prohibit homosexual conduct.

More Than Exploitation Alone

Some interpreters argue that the passages condemn only pederasty, prostitution, rape or exploitative relationships. Those practices existed and are certainly included wherever the language applies. Romans 1, however, speaks of mutual desire and frames the conduct through creation and the male-female distinction. The warning is broader than exploitation alone.

Romans 1 Must Continue into Romans 2

Paul's warning in Romans 1 should be read without embarrassment. It should also be read without allowing the morally confident listener to remain outside the text. Romans 2 turns toward the person who judges and warns that condemning another does not remove one's own accountability before God.

The movement does not cancel the sexual ethic of Romans 1. It removes pride from the person applying it. The church may name homosexual conduct as sin only while remembering that every member stands in need of the same mercy and the same Lord.

EQUAL STANDARD Any sexual relationship outside the marriage covenant between a man and a woman falls outside the Biblical setting for sexual intimacy. This includes heterosexual fornication and adultery as well as homosexual conduct.

7. First Corinthians 6 and the Gospel Movement

Difficult Translation Terms

First Corinthians 6:9 contains the Greek terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. Their precise social references have been debated. The KJV's wording, "abusers of themselves with mankind," sounds conduct-oriented. Some modern translations use homosexuals, a word that may sound as though Paul condemns orientation apart from conduct.

The study does not build its entire conclusion upon one disputed English rendering. The wider evidence includes Leviticus, Romans 1, 1 Timothy and the Bible's sexual ethic. This allows the commentary to acknowledge lexical questions without making the prohibition disappear.

"Such Were Some of You"

Verse 11 is the theological high point: "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus." Paul's list includes sexual sinners, idolaters, thieves, greedy people, drunkards, revilers and extortioners. No one sin is placed beyond the reach of Christ.

The verse establishes a change of standing, allegiance and manner of life. It does not require us to claim that every temptation immediately vanished. It does require that no former practice remain the believer's unquestioned master.

8. One Standard for Every Believer

No Desire Is Automatically Lord

Modern culture often treats a deep or persistent desire as self-authenticating. Christian discipleship asks a different question: Is this desire consistent with the will of the Lord to whom I belong? Every believer must submit body, imagination and relationship to Christ.

A married heterosexual Christian must refuse sexual desire directed toward anyone other than the spouse. An unmarried heterosexual Christian is called to chastity unless and until marriage occurs. A Christian experiencing same-sex attraction is also called to chastity. No group is permitted to place sexual desire above obedience.

Costly Obedience

For a person whose same-sex attraction persists, obedience may include lifelong celibacy. The church should not speak as though that sacrifice costs nothing. Jesus calls every

disciple to self-denial, but the body of Christ must help carry the particular burdens that discipleship brings.

9. Attraction, Label and Identity in Christ

A Description Is Not the Whole Person

A recurring temptation may accurately describe part of someone's experience. It does not reveal the person's whole character, spiritual standing, gifts, friendships or future. No one should be reduced to the temptation he or she resists.

Debate Over "Gay Christian"

Some believers reject the phrase gay Christian because they fear that it grants sexual desire governing identity. Others use gay descriptively while affirming Biblical chastity and primary identity in Christ. The phrase alone does not always tell us which theology the speaker holds.

The wiser pastoral response is to ask what the person means, what conduct is being approved and whether Christ remains the governing allegiance. Colossians 3 says the believer's life is hidden with Christ in God and calls Christ "our life." That is the positive identity the sermon places above every cultural label.

GOVERNING IDENTITY Temptation may describe part of a believer's experience. Jesus Christ names the believer's Lord, life, hope and eternal belonging.

10. Persistent Temptation and Sanctification

Do Not Promise Immediate Disappearance

Some Christians testify that same-sex attraction diminished after conversion. Others continue resisting it for many years. Scripture does not promise that every temptation will vanish immediately. Continued temptation does not necessarily prove hypocrisy or spiritual defeat.

Victory sometimes includes the disappearance of a desire. At other times it consists of repeatedly refusing the desire's authority and remaining faithful to Christ. A battle may be evidence that the person has not surrendered.

Grace Trains Us

Titus 2:11–12 says grace teaches believers to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. Grace is not permission to stop resisting. It is pardon for failure, instruction for holiness and strength to stand again.

Practical Help

First Corinthians 10:13 promises a way of escape. Practical escape may include leaving a setting, limiting media, ending a private conversation, calling a trusted friend, confessing cultivated fantasy or changing routines that repeatedly feed temptation. Spiritual help should be specific rather than merely telling someone to try harder.

A Life Larger Than the Struggle

A person should not be discipled as though resisting sexual temptation were the only purpose of Christian life. Worship, service, vocation, hospitality, friendship, generosity and spiritual gifts all belong to a full life in Christ. Accountability that discusses only failure can unintentionally make temptation the center of identity.

Wise support asks about holiness while also helping the believer build a meaningful life of love and service. The aim is not mere avoidance. It is growing into the likeness of Christ.

11. How the Church Should Respond

Restore in Meekness

Galatians 6:1 directs spiritual believers to restore someone in a spirit of meekness while considering their own vulnerability to temptation. The goal is not humiliation. It is restoration. Pride is incompatible with the work.

Protect Confidence

A disclosure of attraction is not automatically a confession of conduct. Leaders must listen carefully and protect private information. A vulnerable disclosure should never become church gossip or cause every friendship to be viewed with suspicion.

Provide More Than Prohibition

If the church calls someone to costly chastity, it must offer more than “do not.” People need spiritual family, durable friendship, shared meals, meaningful service and companions who remain present during lonely seasons. The answer to sexual sin is holiness within the body of Christ, not isolation outside it.

Parents and Families

When a child or adult family member discloses same-sex attraction, the first response will often shape whether future conversations remain possible. Parents should listen before assuming conduct, avoid threats and refuse public exposure. Conviction does not require panic.

Families may say clearly what they believe about sexual conduct while also affirming continuing love, relationship and willingness to walk through difficult questions. A disclosure of temptation should become an invitation to patient discipleship, not a reason to make the person manage everyone else's shock.

Consistent Church Standards

Pastoral standards concerning membership, leadership and discipline should address conduct and repentance consistently. A same-sex-attracted believer pursuing chastity should not be excluded merely for experiencing temptation, while unrepentant sexual conduct should not be excused. The same standard must govern heterosexual adultery, cohabitation, pornography and other sexual sin.

Reject Cruelty and Unequal Standards

Demeaning humor, ridicule and hostility do not defend Biblical truth. Neither may churches condemn homosexual conduct while quietly excusing heterosexual adultery, pornography, fornication, greed, gossip or pride. First Corinthians 6 places many sins in one list and one gospel beneath them all.

CHURCH POSTURE If a person confesses temptation, do not treat the confession as surrender. If a person confesses sin, do not treat repentance as impossible. Listen, pray, protect confidence, establish wise boundaries and remain present.

12. Repentance, Forgiveness and the Gospel

For the Person Who Has Sinned

Homosexual conduct, like every other sexual sin, calls for repentance. Repentance does not mean that every temptation immediately disappears. It means that the person changes whom he obeys. Temptation may continue speaking, but it is no longer Lord.

First John 1:9 promises forgiveness and cleansing when believers confess their sins. One failure need not become permission for complete surrender. The Christian may confess, receive forgiveness, stand again and continue learning obedience.

For the Person Who Has Never Trusted Christ

The gospel does not invite a person to achieve heterosexuality as a condition of salvation. All people come to Christ as sinners. Jesus died for sins, was buried and rose again. Salvation is received by faith in Him.

John 6:37 records Jesus' promise: "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." That promise is not limited to people with respectable histories or socially acceptable temptations. Christ receives the sinner who comes.

Conclusion: Truth in Every Direction

The question "Is it a sin to be gay?" cannot bear a careless answer. If being gay means experiencing persistent same-sex attraction or temptation without cultivating lust or engaging in homosexual conduct, the experience of temptation is not identical to committing sin.

If attraction is deliberately cultivated into lust, sin has occurred in the heart. If desire is expressed through homosexual conduct, Scripture identifies the conduct as sin. The word "be" does not create permission for sin, but neither does it permit the church to condemn a person merely for experiencing a temptation that is being resisted.

The church must refuse false guilt for resisted temptation, false comfort for cultivated lust, false permission for homosexual conduct and false hopelessness for sexual sinners. The final word is Jesus Christ. In Him sinners are washed, sanctified and justified. In Him the tempted find grace to help in time of need.

THE ENDURING COUNSEL Bring temptation to Christ before it is welcomed. Tell the truth about sin without turning truth into cruelty. Bear the burdens of people pursuing holiness. Let a believer's deepest identity be found in Jesus Christ.

Selected Sources

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