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October 13, 2006

Forum on Homosexuality and the Bible

Summary: We affirm that God loves all people, and wants all people to experience His grace. We welcome all people as part of our community of faith here at FPCB, regardless of where they are in their spiritual journey or of any behaviors they are engaged in. We also affirm that for our own good, to help us live life to the fullest, God has given us His commands which are meant not to circumscribe our lives, but fulfill them. His commands tell us what things bring life and what things bring death. As our designer He knows better than we do what is good for us, even if it seems difficult for us to do. Wherever homosexual behavior (as opposed to simply feelings) is mentioned in Scripture (without exception) it is defined as a sin (that is, missing the mark of God's intended best for us). Where scripture is unequivocal, we are unequivocal. Homosexual behavior is not God's best for us.

We recognize that people who experience homosexual desires do not choose these desires. We believe, however, that God wants to bring these people to wholeness as defined by His word to us in scripture. For the homosexual person that might mean choosing a life of meaningful, vital celibacy surrounded by a community of close Christian friends. It could mean entering into marriage with someone of the opposite sex, leaving behind homosexual behavior, and choosing instead intimacy with their wife or husband. As long as there is no deceit and nothing hidden in the relationship, many people find these marriages very fulfilling (some in our own church). In some cases, it may mean finding freedom from homosexual desire.

Everyone is welcome to be part of the community at FPCB no matter where they are in their journey of faith, regardless of what behaviors -- sexual or otherwise -- they engage in. All are welcome into our community. However, scripture is clear that when it comes to leadership within the church there is a different standard. Therefore, we do not put people into ordained leadership at FPCB (Deacons, Pastors, Elders) who repeatedly engage in behavior that scripture calls sin. We all sin, but if there is no repentance, nor any willingness to name as sin that which scripture defines as sin, we do not believe that person should be in the highest levels of leadership. That applies not just to homosexual behavior (as opposed to feelings), but anything that scripture names as sin. This applies, however, only to the highest levels of leadership. Again, all are welcome into the community regardless of behavior, beliefs, or where they are at in their spiritual journey.

Forum on Homosexuality and the Bible

Lord, I pray that you would select the words that I say, and that you would help me say those things which would most accurately reflect your heart on this topic. Lord I pray that you would help all of us to hear really only what you have to say, and not what anyone else has to say. Lord, I pray that in the discussion, as we listen to each other, we could listen as brothers and sisters in Christ, respectfully. Lord I pray also that you would help us to hear your voice in the conversation, because yours is the one we want to follow. We pray this in the name of Jesus, amen.

I want to thank all of you for being here. As you know, this is a bit of a hot topic, a bit of a controversial topic. I'm glad you're here. I prefer to do this in a forum, mostly because it allows you a chance to talk back and to have dialog. I know in this church there are a wide variety of opinions on the subject, and just scanning those of you who are here, I know there are a wide variety of opinions in the room. What I'm going to do is I'm going to take about an hour to talk about what I see in scripture as it relates to this issue. For those of you who are still awake after that hour, we'll have conversation, and you can give me your feedback, your push back, your questions, your disagreements. We are a church where it is cool to disagree with the pastors: that is okay. There is no litmus test here. We are all trying to figure this out together in Jesus. So feel free to disagree; feel free to agree, as well.

Where I want to start, and to me this is important, is with an apology. The first thing I want to say as a Christian to anyone in this room who has struggled personally with the issue of homosexuality in your own life, or maybe you have a friend or a family member who has struggled with homosexuality, the first thing I want to say is, I'm sorry. I apologize for all the ways that Christians have failed to show the real face of Jesus to you, in all kinds of different ways. I'm a Christian, and I take responsibility for that. I know that I have probably failed to show the real face of Jesus to people who were struggling with the issue of homosexuality either in their lives, or in their families, or with their friends. So I want to say I'm sorry, I apologize. And I apologize in advance if I say anything hurtful. I don't mean to. And I know there's a great deal of pain around this topic, I know there's a great deal of woundedness around this topic, and I know that that pain is probably in this room. My goal, what I hope to do, is to show what scripture says about this issue, and then maybe give some suggestions for how we then live. I hope the Holy Spirit helps me do this.

The second thing I want to say, is to state very clearly that if you struggle with the issue of homosexuality in your life, you are welcome in this church. You are wanted in this church. You are loved in this church, and no one should judge you in this church, and I want to make that very clear. I will go on to say what I think

scripture says about this subject, but I want you to hear that. If you struggle with this issue, you are welcome in this church.

As I said, my goal is to show as best I can what scripture says about this, and then we'll have some conversation. Just a couple disclaimers: it's possible that I might irritate you at one point or another. As I've said in the announcement, when I've done this in the past I've managed to irritate everybody in the room at one point, no matter what you think about this topic. I expect to do something similar tonight. Then you'll get a chance to push back. I have a couple requests. The first is that you would listen to the whole of what I have to say. Sometimes on this issue, as a preacher, people will pick one part of what you say and turn it into the whole thing. As I've said, I'm going to talk for almost an hour and I ask that you listen to the whole of it and not take one part out of the context of the rest of it. Also, before you go out of this room and quote me, for the sake of the unity of this church, could you please make sure that you heard what I was saying and what I meant? Just so that we're all clear on the communication. And again, you'll have a chance to push back.

I want to start with two working premises: the first is that on this topic, the two extremes that I see played out in the media are both not Biblical and wrong. On the one side of this issue you get sort of the super-judgmental, "you're really an awful person if you have homosexual desires," there's this condemnation, this judgment. I don't think that represents what the Bible has to say about it. But I think the other extreme is also wrong, where you hear people say, "Well, you know, this is good, and God approves, and God made you this way." I think neither of those extremes really captures what Scripture says. The second premise that is going to work through all of this, everything I have to say in the next hour, is that the laws that God lays down in Scripture are meant for our good, not to make us miserable. When God gives us a law, even though it's hard to follow, even though it might not feel natural at first, it's not meant to make us miserable. Those two premises will govern everything I say.

I want to start with two passages of Scripture, both out of the Gospel of John. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Grace and truth, both. And we as Christians are forever falling off the horse on one side of that another, aren't we? You've got the Christian community truth people, who always want to tell you the truth, and make sure you know how much of a sinner you are, and want you to understand the Bible doesn't like what you're doing. Then on the other side in the Christian community, you've got people like me who tend to be grace people, "Oh, that's okay. God forgives you. I love you." Both are true, you've got to have both together, and in some kind of equal

proportions. Grace and truth. Finally, if you don't have both, you don't have either. If you're only telling the truth all the time, truth truth truth, then it's not really the truth, because you're not talking about the Grace of God, and that's also true. Also, no one's going to hear you because your truth is getting in the way and you're so obnoxious about it. If all your doing is grace, well finally that's not grace, because part of grace is being given the power to lead new lives. So if you're not having both truth and grace in perspective you have, at the end of the day, neither truth nor grace. You need both truth and grace, especially when approaching an issue like this.

I want to look at a passage where this plays out. You know the passage very well. "At dawn, he [Jesus] appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" Truth. They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw stones at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this those who heard began to go away, one at a time, the older ones first, (probably because they had accumulated more sin over their lifetime, they just had longer to do it,) until only Jesus was left. The woman still standing there, Jesus asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir." "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now, and leave your life of sin."

That last sentence is the balance just right: neither do I condemn you, but go and be whole in the Grace of God. Grace and truth. What I love about this story is like so many other times when Jesus was presented with a false binary choice, "should we stone her or let her go," he just figured out a different answer. "Is it A, or is it C?" Jesus just kind of goes, "No, it's not either A, or C. It's not even B in the middle, sort of a compromise. It's a banana." It's a whole different paradigm. It's something you've never thought of before. It's not the mushy middle. It's not A, it's not C, it's when he was presented with a false binary, he just came up with a third way. One of the things I want to challenge us tonight is, we need to be people of the third way. Can we be people who get that balance of grace and truth right, and not some kind of mushed out compromise, but just something that is completely different. "Woman, who condemns you? ... Neither do I, go and sin no more." And the reason he says go and sin no more is not because he's thinking, "oh, you're a horrible, terrible, wicked woman." For her own good, he says leave this life of sin. Let me define the word "sin" because in our culture I think it's come to mean sort of, icky, horrible, disgusting person, and we kind of apply it to people like Hitler

and that's about it. "Sin" in the Greek word for "sin" was originally an archery term, and it meant "to fail to hit the bull's eye." So if you shot an arrow and it deviated and didn't quite get in the center, that was a "sin," you missed the bull's eye, you sinned. That comes down in our understanding morally: to "sin" is to fail to hit the bull's eye of God's intended best for us. To "sin" is to fall short of what God intends for us, of becoming everything that he intended us to be. It's not to say, "oh, you horrible, terrible person." Again, God gives us the rules he gives us not to make us miserable, but ultimately to make us whole and fulfilled, even if the rules make it harder, even if the rules prohibits something that may feel good to us. A simple analogy would be: it feels very good to me to eat four dozen chocolate chip cookies in a sitting. And I can – it's astonishing. But it is not good for me. I don't want to trivialize the pain around homosexuality, again, as I started with that apology, in the middle I want to be cognizant of the fact that we Christians have often stepped all over people on this issue and caused pain, and I want to keep that apology out there. I don't mean to trivialize it. But I do want to say that God will often call us to something that can be hard for our own good, and sin is when we miss his intended best for us and for the people around us.

So let's look at what scripture says about homosexuality. This section is the "truth" section of this talk. Some of the passages I'm going to read are going to sound harsh to our modern ears, there's going to be some truth, but hang on, grace is coming toward the end. To start with, scripture has almost nothing to say on the subject. Very little. There are relatively few passages that directly speak to homosexuality. Jesus said absolutely zero about it. There are far more passages about not gossiping, and far, far, far, far, far more passages about caring for the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized, than there are about homosexuality. That said, there are more passages about homosexuality than some people would care to admit. There are about fourteen, depending upon opinions. There are at least fourteen that directly mention homosexuality in scripture, and another six that seem to mention it indirectly. About twenty passages in all. I'm not going to give the whole list here, but I can give it to you. If you email me, I'll send you the list. Before I look at what some of these passages say, I just want to state emphatically it is not a sin according to scripture to feel homosexual feelings. Behavior is always what is at stake in Scripture, and you'll see that in the passages. It's not the feelings, it's not necessarily sexual orientation, it's the behavior, it's what you do, it's acting on it that Scripture speaks to. I'm going to keep saying this to be clear, if you are personally dealing with homosexual feelings you are welcome in this church. You are welcome in this church. All of us have sin. None of us get up every morning or go to bed at night and say, "I really hit a bull's eye today, didn't I, morally speaking." None of us do that. So the ground is level at the foot of the cross. All of us need to find Jesus.

Let me look briefly at just a few of the scripture passages that talk about homosexual behavior. Genesis 19. This is Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah: Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom, both young and old, surrounded the house. They called to Lot, [he had some male visitors with him, they were actually probably angels or messengers from God,] “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out so that we can have sex with them.” Lot went outside to meet them, and shut the door behind him. And he said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.”

Now the first thing to notice is that Lot is an absolutely horrendous human being at this point. I mean, he is failing to hit the bull’s eye in a big way. This isn’t an “oops,” this is obscene, what he says there. Let that be a caution to the Christian community. In his zeal against homosexual behavior, he became horrific morally. It can happen. We need to be very careful. That said, though, it is also clear from this passage that homosexual behavior is viewed as sin.

Next passage, Leviticus 18, this is repeated in Leviticus 20: “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman. That is detestable.” Again, notice the act is detestable, not the person. The person is not considered detestable, it’s the action.

I Corinthians 6. Taking a longer passage out of this. “The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already.” Paul is chastising the Corinthians. You’ve heard me say this before: Someday I want to preach a sermon series on Corinthians. I want to call it, “This Church is Crazy.” Because it’s just like the craziest church, they’re doing all kinds of things. And Paul is taking them to task on it. “Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers. Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God.” Two things about this passage: Homosexuality is listed as a sin, but so are a lot of other things, including slander, suing people, all kinds of stuff. The second thing to notice about this passage is there’s grace, and redemption, and forgiveness, and wholeness. I love that phrase: “But such were some of you, until God called you, and washed you and cleansed you.”

Romans 1, a long passage, I’m going to read the whole context. “For although they knew God they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their

thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man, and birds, and animals, and reptiles." So, idolatry. "Therefore God gave them over to the sinful desires of their hearts, to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the creator, who is forever praised. Because of this God gave them over to their shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women, and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind; to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful. They invent ways of doing evil. They disobey their parents. They are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decrees that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, but also approve of those who practice them."

Again, notice homosexuality is listed as a sin, but in context of a lot of other behaviors. I would wager that every person in this room could find themselves somewhere in that list. And most of us could probably find ourselves in two or three places in this list. It's just one of many. The second thing to notice is, again, the feelings aren't condemned but the behavior is listed as sin. But even here in Romans, homosexual behavior is not the whole issue. The main issue is idolatry. The main issue is walking away from God. The main issue is taking our cues from created things rather than from the creator. That's the main issue. And it leads to all kinds of problems in human beings. There's that long list. What Paul is trying to say in this passage is our lives, our happiness, our wholeness is not to be defined by what we do sexually, it's defined by God.

I think one of the places where I feel like the way we approach this subject in contemporary culture is perhaps the most broken and far from Biblical truth, is the statement or the phrase, "I am gay." You hear people say that. Using the "to be" verb, the verb of ultimate identity, to define yourself, rather than saying, "I do homosexual behaviors," or "I do heterosexual behaviors," we say, "I am gay," or "I am straight," "I am," as though that were the essence of our identity. That is what Paul is really after here. We do not take our cues, we do not take our identity from created things, from what we do sexually or anything else. We take our identity from God. "I am a child of God redeemed in Jesus Christ." That is my identity. What I do is another thing. The idea that our identity is somehow wrapped up in

what we do sexually is Freud, not the Bible. And we have decided that Freud was crazy about most things. So why are we still following him here? Our culture really does believe that the worst fate in life is never to have sex, and that what we do sexually is somehow who we are. I think what Paul is saying is, "No, that is a tragic form of idolatry, and it leads to all kinds of things, including homosexual behavior."

Those are just a few of the passages that mention homosexuality. Again, there are about twenty in all. In every single one of those passages, homosexual behavior is described as a sin, without one exception. Sin again in the sense of missing God's intended best. And again, also, sin for which there is grace, redemption, forgiveness, wholeness, second chances. And sin in the sense that we are all sinners, no one's better, no one's worse, the ground is level at the foot of the cross. But what the Bible says without exception, whenever it mentions homosexual behavior, without exception, is that it falls short of God's intended best for us as human beings.

Now, let me take some objections to the argument I just made, that homosexuality is sin. Let me talk about them, objections you will hear. "That isn't fair. They can't help it. They're born that way. How could God call it a sin when they can't control what they are feeling? Why should they be prohibited from acting on it, since they were probably born with it?" A lot of that is probably true in a certain way. I don't think that homosexuals choose it. As a pastor in the Bay Area I had five or six different people who I counseled through this issue in their lives, a couple of students, and a couple of adult men. I've watched this unfold in human lives five or six different times, and none of those people chose it. I'm not sure people would want to ever choose it. Why would you choose it? So can we please get over the idea that people just wake up one day and decide to do this? That's just isn't the experience, at least of the five or six folks I have counseled through this issue with. Exactly what causes it we don't know. There's a lot that's vague. Is it nature? Is it nurture? It depends who funds the study, frankly, and what their political agenda is. There's data on both sides. It's probably, in my opinion, I'm not a scientist, just taking a guess, multifactored. When I was a Stanford I knew a pair of identical twins, same genes, exact same genes, one was gay, one was straight. And in fact a lot of the identical twin studies bear that out, where there is one gay identical twin, the other one is usually straight. There may be a genetic component. I think that there's probably a genetic component, there's some evidence that suggests there is. But it seems to me that maybe it's multifactored, that it may be an analogy more like alcoholism: maybe there's a genetic predisposition, and then life experiences will affect the outcome of that. But we don't know. What we know is there almost certainly not "choosing" it. So is it fair? They can't help it!

Theologically, and again, this is a theological answer, all kinds of things happen that aren't fair to us. We live in a fallen world. Our bodies are broken by sin and fallen from what they originally were. That means all kinds of things don't work the way God wanted them to. People are born blind, or they get cancer. Those aren't good things. God doesn't say it's a good thing. He says that's a result of sin. We get broken by other human beings. Other human beings hurt us and harm us. That's a result of sin. Somehow this happens in a fallen world. God doesn't like it. God didn't want it. God one day is going to set it right. Even in this life God can make us whole. But it still is not God's intended best. It falls short of God's intended best for us.

Not what I want to say parenthetically is, for those of us who are straight, we need to realize the exceptionally heavy cross that the homosexual person has to bear, particularly in our culture. Yes, it's the result of a fallen world, not what God intended, but it is a very, very painful, heavy cross to bear. I think that those of us who are heterosexual, when we deal with our gay brothers and sisters, we should have two responses. One is compassion. One is admiration, for the courage it takes to carry that exceptionally heavy cross. We've all got our stuff. But this stuff just weighs a lot, and I think we need to have compassion and admiration for that.

It isn't fair, you're right. God wants to heal that not fairness. God wants to heal that brokenness. That what sin is: it's not what God intended.

Second objection: "You know, the Bible is outdated on this issue. These are just old-fashioned notions. We've progressed. Let's just ignore it. Let's ignore those parts of the Bible. They don't apply today anymore. It was cultural back then." I don't believe anything in the Bible is outdated. Now, I think everything needs to be read in the context of the whole Bible, but I get very nervous about saying, "This part of the Bible applies, and this part doesn't." Here's the reason: if we start picking and choosing, then who's our God? We are our God. God is not our God. The advantage of revealed religion, that is, religion that God reveals to us, as opposed to religion that we make up, the advantage of revealed religion is that it can critique us, it can change our behavior, it can say, "No, this is wrong, and this is right." If we start making those decisions, then our God becomes our culture, not God. And I think it's a very dangerous slope to say, "This applies, and this doesn't." Where do you draw the line? Well, I guess that we can ignore the poor. Why not? It's cultural. We're rich. It's their problem. I just think that's a slippery slope. We need to take the Bible as a whole.

Another objection: "This is a civil rights issue." You hear this one a lot. "Look, we've loosened up conventional wisdom and thinking about women, and minorities. This is the exact same thing." Particularly in the Presbyterian Church as the debate rages over whether or not to ordain practicing homosexuals, you will hear this a lot. "Well, we've progressed when it comes to women and minorities;

we need to catch up here.” I think there’s a huge difference. I think there’s a gigantic difference, and it’s this. You can find passages in Scripture where women lead. You can find passages in Scripture where women teach. You can find passages in Scripture where women teach men. Deborah is the leader of Israel in the Old Testament. First Corinthians, Priscilla and Aquila instruct Apollos. Romans 16 a woman named Junia is mentioned as an Apostle. Women were the first preachers of the resurrection. Yes, there are passages in Scripture that would say that women shouldn’t be pastors. There are those passages. And there are others that indicate that well, they probably could and should be. Where the Bible expresses a multiplicity of opinions, we are free to choose, based on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But where the Bible is univocal, we are constrained to obey, in my opinion. In my opinion. When it comes to the issue of women, and women in ministry, women in leadership, the Bible expresses two opinions. When it comes to the issue of homosexuality, wherever it is mentioned, without exception, it is mentioned as a sin, falling short of God’s intended best. If there were one exception, I’d be giving a different talk tonight. If there were one exception. And sometimes I wish there were, it would make this talk easier in our culture. But there isn’t. There isn’t. And I think there are good reasons for that. So I don’t think it’s the same as women, or minorities. Nowhere in Scripture is it considered a sin to be a woman, or a minority. Slavery is tolerated in Scripture, but nowhere does it say it’s a good thing. And Paul even says, if you can get out of it, get out of it. It’s sort of lived with as an evil in the world. Nowhere is it affirmed as good. No, women can lead. But univocal when it comes to the issue of homosexuality.

“The Bible is really talking about a different kind of homosexuality when it mentions it. It’s talking about Greco-Roman pederasty, is what it’s really after.” This is a common argument that you’ll hear, that the homosexuality of Paul’s day was really more pederastic, and that’s what Paul’s condemning. There is some truth in that. Greco-Roman culture, particularly in Greece, it was very common among affluent men to have a teen-age lover for a while, sort of considered a rite of passage in affluent Athenian society especially. So there’s some truth in that. But the problem is, the Bible is capable, and the Greek is capable of distinguishing between boys and men, and wherever it’s mentioned it seems to be talking about adult males to adult males, or adult women to adult women. The Old Testament knew nothing about pederasty or Greco-Roman culture, so the Old Testament certainly is not referring to that, it didn’t exist when the Old Testament was written. It feels like a heavy dose of “reading into” the passage and highly speculative to say, “Oh Paul must be talking about this,” when there is no textual evidence to bear that out.

“This isn’t what Jesus would do. Come on. Jesus was tolerant. Jesus affirmed everyone. Jesus accepted everyone.” That is true. That is true. Jesus was all of those things. And he also called people to be whole in him. He did both grace and

truth. So I think, again, if we can get the balance right, we are walking as Jesus would walk.

“We don’t follow other parts of Scripture – why follow this?” Like the old joke where pastor is out with one of his parishioners and they’re golfing, and the parishioner slices the ball and starts cussing, and the pastor looks at him, and the parishioner says, “Oh, it doesn’t matter, Pastor. I cuss a little you pray a little. Neither one of us mean anything by it.” Yes, we all sin and fall short of the glory of God, absolutely. But we are still called to turn away from it. Yes, there are things we don’t do any more. Leviticus has a mind boggling, numbing array of laws. Many of them we don’t follow, like, don’t put cotton and wool together. Like a sort of divine wardrobe guide, or something. Don’t eat shell fish or pork. Women wear a veil. Yeah. Here’s the thing, though. Wherever we are ignoring Levitical dietary laws, women wearing veils, there is another passage in Scripture that would allow us to do it. God himself suspends all the dietary laws in the New Testament, because they don’t apply anymore. God himself suspends all kinds of ceremonial laws, says they don’t apply in the New Covenant. God never changes his moral law, ever. So where we are saying, “well women don’t wear veils anymore,” there’s another passage in Scripture which allows us to do that. Again, where the Bible has a multiplicity of opinions we are free to choose. Where the Bible has one opinion I believe we are constrained to obey.

“God is doing a new thing.” The analogy to the Gentiles in Acts. In Acts, the Jews thought the Gentiles were accursed. They wouldn’t have anything to do with them. They were sinners. God brings in the Gentiles. Many people have argued, “Couldn’t this be the same thing? God is doing a new thing. Just like he opened the Jewish temple to Gentiles, might he not be opening the church to people today?” This is the best of the bunch, as far as I’m concerned. This is the best argument, that the people who would argue differently from me have. I think this is a very strong argument. Again, here’s my problem with it. Here’s why I ultimately find it not convincing, although I do think there’s something really intelligent about it. Again, God including the Gentiles was something he had wanted to do from Genesis chapter 12 on. It’s all over the Old Testament. The Jews just weren’t doing it. So the supposedly new thing God was doing by including the Gentiles wasn’t new at all. It was very old. They just hadn’t been doing it. Again, Scripture indicates all along that this new thing was what God had planned all along. With homosexuality you can’t find that. You can’t find any scriptural warrant for that.

The last one, “What’s really wrong with it? Come on, they’re not hurting anybody. It feels natural to them. Why do we make a big deal about it? There’s nothing really wrong with it.” There’s a couple of things that I would want to say in response to that. I think, again, homosexual desire isn’t wrong, it’s behavior that we’re talking about. But I think it does fall short of God’s intended best in a couple

of ways. And parenthetically, the other thing that I want to say is the goal here is not to be heterosexual, either. The goal is to be Christo-sexual for all of us. I'm not sure that every sexual act inside marriage between a man and a woman is good by God. I think there's plenty of sin that goes on in the marriage bed too, if it's self-centered, manipulative, all kinds of things. So the goal isn't to go from homosexual to heterosexual, we're all in this boat together trying to put our sexuality under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, all of us. All of us. When it comes to homosexuality, though, I think there's a couple of things where it falls short of what God intended. One, God created us Male and Female. Somehow, male and female together, we capture more of who God is than apart. And sex was given to us as a gift to get us off our own little island of self. The reason that he created us male and female so that we would have to cross over our self to a different gender, often feels like a different species, sometimes, and have to figure out how to have unity with this person who experiences the world so differently than we do. And that is good for our soul, because it gets us out of self, and into someone else. That is God's intention for sexuality. The problem, the place where I think that homosexuality falls short of that, is it's just a little bit more narcissistic. You get the world, you see the world, you're in the same kind of body I'm in. You kind of experience the world in the same kind of way that I do. Of course there are still differences there, but there's something just a little narcissistic about it. I think that's why it falls short. God intended sex to be this true intimacy where we get out of self, cross over to the other, and still find unity. The other thing, and this comes from my experience having counseled intensely with these five or six different people, and more than that on a one or two times counseling basis, what all of them without exception have told me, including the ones that are sort of saying "I think it's okay," is that their homosexuality, they feel, is also part of a deeper woundedness inside of them, particularly when I have talked to male homosexuals, they have described it as part of a bigger issue for them, about feeling included in the community of men. Oftentimes they will tell stories of feeling excluded or unloved by their father in some pretty significant ways, or by peers. The "or" is important. If you are the parents of a gay child, I did not just say you caused it, okay? I just want to make sure you understand that. Somewhere along the line, either peers or family or whatever, these men will talk about feeling, "I just didn't feel like I belonged, that became a deep wound in me." Or they will talk about fear of men, they were perpetually bullied, or fear of father, that was a wound. And they eroticized the fear, or they eroticized the desire, because it was just easier to deal with if you eroticize it. It's one way to control it. And they experience it as this deeper kind of brokenness. And all of them, including the people who said, "You know, I think there might not be anything wrong with it," when they got honest with me, said that this was part of their past. So I think that there's something that they're trying to get out of this that was good and whole, and somehow became sexualized.

Also, another reason, and lesbians, I know less about that, I have not worked with as many lesbians, but again, what I know anecdotally, and I do confess it's just anecdotal, is that there's similar stuff in their background as well. Also, the stats aren't great. I mean, the culture wants to say, "well, the monogamous homosexual relationship is possible." Well, first of all, heterosexuals can't throw stones with a 52% divorce rate, so let's just get that clear. I'll just editorialize for a minute, maybe before we go out and want to save marriage we should save marriages in the church so that we're not getting divorces. I say that as a divorced person, as you know. The stats on the supposedly monogamous homosexual relationship are not good, particularly for men. It is very rare. Women do better on that, but even homosexual women have far less rate of monogamous relationships than heterosexual women. Granted, you might want to say, "Well, that's because it's not accepted in our culture." There's probably some truth to that. But even as it gets more and more accepted, it doesn't seem to be changing that fact in the gay community.

So I believe that homosexual behavior from a reading of Scripture, from my knowledge of having walked through this with different people, falls short of God's intended best. And there's a part of this that I will just take on faith as well. The thing about God is he's bigger than I am, and I'm not going to understand everything he has to say. Again, that's the advantage of being a God. The God that I can control and understand and does everything that I understand is me. And if I'm worshipping that God, I don't want to, because I've made him up. There's part of me that wants to say, "P.S. God designed us, he knows how we work best. If he says this is not our best, then we need to trust him on that." Again, I can put orange juice in my car if I want. But the manufacturer tells me, that's not going to do it any good. So I think that there's a part of us that needs to listen to our manufacturer.

Okay, that's truth. How about grace?

By this point you're probably wondering, "Well, what is this homosexual person supposed to do? This is so unfair. This is so wrong. This is so narrow-minded. What is this person supposed to do?" I believe that God offers wholeness to every human being, including the homosexual person. This side of the grave, and fully, on the other side of the grave. We're doing a sermon series called Remade, Jesus says: "Behold, I make all things new." And I don't believe there are exceptions to that. I believe where God says "this is the ideal" he gives us power to begin to get there. And I think that for the homosexual person the Holy Spirit can make them whole in a couple of different ways. Again, I want to say, I don't want to say this glibly. I certainly am not going to say, "Just pray about it, and it will go away." I'm not going to say that, because I don't think that happens. Maybe that happens occasionally, really rarely, maybe 1% of the time. But it hasn't happened for

anyone I have known who has struggled with this. So I don't want to be glib, and I do again want to acknowledge that as I say this I'm aware that for the homosexual person this is a very painful, difficult cross to bear, and that those of us who are heterosexual need to be careful when we start pointing fingers and giving prescriptions. So I want to do this carefully, and with that apology that I issued in the beginning out in front of me.

Three ways that I've seen God bring wholeness to the homosexual person: one is to remove or diminish the homosexual desire, an option that is usually pooh-pooed in the media as not possible, though there's an awful lot of data that indicates that it is. And that data gets suppressed in the media. Again, I'm not saying this is a matter of just praying about it and it will go away. I think the complete removal of homosexual desire, completely, is probably pretty rare, I don't know for sure, but I'm just guessing that that's pretty rare. Even rarer is the instant miraculous cure that I was talking about. Usually, as I've seen it played out, it's a combination of a lot of prayer, a lot of therapy, and then key is a great community. A great community of people around them, particularly for the men that I have worked with who have struggled with this issue, the key for their wholeness was a community of men who came around them and said, "We love you, we support you, we don't judge you, we're going to help you find God's wholeness as the Holy Spirit guides you." And those people became kind of a band of brothers, the community of men that in the case of the men that I've worked with felt like they never had. For many, many gay people, the brokenness was formed in community. It must therefore be healed in community. And one of the challenges I want to issue to us at FPCB is, can we be that kind of community? Outright removal of the desire is probably pretty rare, though I think it can happen: God can do anything. But I also think it can be diminished over time. I don't think that is always the case, but I think it is more often the case than the secular media would let us believe.

The second way that God can bring wholeness is a full abundant singleness. Again, in our culture this is just like the most unimaginable fate because we've accepted Freud, and "the greatest good in life is to have sex." I just question that. It's good, but you can live without it, and plenty of people have done so, lived full and productive lives. Singleness, celibacy, is not a synonym for a disaster of a life. There are all kinds of things in life that are good and whole, and there are all kinds of ways to experience life in that wholeness. Life can be very abundant that way. And that may be the way that God makes a homosexual person whole. Here's where we Christians need to step in. Because if that is the option for certain people that God is leading them toward, that's a very painful option, even in spite of what I just said. There are questions about, "Then who is my family?" Here's a place where the Christian community can step up. How about being the radical, Acts 2 community that I see in the New Testament, and saying things like, to a

homosexual person, "You are now part of our family permanently. You live in our house. You are here every Christmas. You are here every birthday." In many families that would be a good thing, in some families that would be scary. But you know, I mean, "You are part of our family. We love you. You are not going to be alone." Wow. That would be a statement, if Christians started to do that *en masse*. It may be a full productive whole singleness. Many people have lived single lives, very rich, and very productive. One of my favorite examples of this is Henri Nouwen. It's come out since that he quite probably was gay. Brilliant man, has changed my life. He lived a life of celibacy. He had a very rich, very abundant, very joy-filled life. Henri Nouwen. Henri Nouwen.

Remove or diminish the desire. Full abundant singleness.

Heterosexual marriage. This one really doesn't get talked about in either camp. Marry someone of the opposite sex. Homosexual is a term that was coined in the nineteenth century. Before that, there really wasn't a concept of homosexuality. I've read everything printed in Elizabethan English there is, and it just didn't exist, the concept. The desire existed, of course. The behavior existed, yes. The concept, the idea that this was your identity, the idea that this was your destiny, was unheard of, unthought of. This is post-Freud, that this would be your identity or your destiny. The attitude, always in human history, has been, "Oh, do you kind of fancy men, or fancy the same gender? Okay. But what does that have to do with getting married and having babies." In fact that's how a lot of men or women lived their lives back then and some of them cheated on the side and many of them didn't. I am not talking about a sham marriage. I'm not talking about a marriage you use to kind of conceal the truth: that's a lie. That's not whole. That's not what I'm talking about. The marriages I'm talking about, the men I've counseled, this is the option that all of them ended up in. Their homosexual desires continue in many ways, usually very diminished, but still continue. Their wife knows everything, all about it. And their friends know about it. This is not a pretend, sham marriage to cover something up. It's a marriage of intense intimacy, actually. For these men, as they describe it, because in a marriage like this the intimacy is usually better and deeper than in a regular old marriage, because you've had to be more honest, you've had to expose your deepest fears, your deepest wounds, usually what emerges out of that emotional connection is a pretty intense sexual passion. Which is probably more the way God wants sexuality to be anyway. So in many ways it approaches closer to what God would want, because they have been so deeply known and so deeply loved. Again, the homosexual desire may still be there, but as one of the men that I've counseled said to me, "So I like vanilla ice cream better than chocolate, but if vanilla isn't good for me, and chocolate is much better for me, I like chocolate pretty well, and it works for me." Those are his words, not mine. He may still be tempted, so is every heterosexual man, usually every day, at least if the men that I talk to in my

counseling sessions are indicative. We are all tempted. But it doesn't mean we act on it. What these people have found, and what they will tell me, is that their life is fuller, richer, wholer, than the gay lifestyle that they left, because they are known more intimately, known more deeply, accepted at deeper levels, and have experienced God's wholeness. They've been remade. That's pretty powerful stuff. Again, it's still difficult, a heavy cross to bear. I don't want to say this glibly. But an option.

How should Christians respond? Let me just give you a couple of ideas. Grace and truth, certainly forgiveness, certainly acceptance, certainly love, but also hold out God's promise of wholeness. Not in a manipulative or demanding way, but say, "I believe that God could have this for you." Grace and truth, and not glib grace and truth. The gay people that I have counseled have said to me over and over, "Don't say, hate the sin, love the sinner." Don't say that. I know what we're getting at when we say that, but it's wounding. A much deeper grace and truth, and grace goes first. Even in the John Scripture, "Grace and truth." Lead with grace. Jesus is our savior, and then he is our Lord. He dies for us, and then he is our Lord. He serves first, grace first, grace first. In the Bible, God always speaks truth to power, and grace to the outcasts. Now truth comes along, but lead with grace.

Here's the most important thing. Jesus first and Jesus only. If you take nothing away, this take away, please. Jesus first. The main thing, the main thing, the main thing, and the main thing is Jesus. When I was a pastor on the Stanford campus I would get a version of this question all the time: "So, I suppose you want me to stop getting drunk on Saturday night if I become a Christian. So, I guess I can't sleep with my girlfriend anymore if I become a Christian." Or, with the gay people that I would counsel, "I guess the first thing you want me to do is leave my gay lifestyle." I would always say, "Can we talk about that later? Way later. Like, way later. I don't want to talk about that with you. The only question I have for you is: How's it between you and Jesus? How's it between you and Jesus? Because when Jesus gets in your life, he's going to change a whole lot of things. He's going to change how you spend your time; he's going to change how you spend your money; he's going to change how you talk about other people; and he's going to change you sexually. I don't know what order he's going to do that in. I have no idea. He may be more concerned about that gossip habit you have right now, and that may be the first Five Year Plan, I don't know. All I know is, I'm not your sanctifier, Jesus is. All I know is, I'm not your sanctifier, Jesus is."

My job was not to get someone to stop being a gay person. My job was to introduce him to Jesus, and let Jesus take it from there. Now along the way I could describe for them what I thought wholeness might look like in that area, as well as

describing what wholeness might look like in how they deal with their finances. But Jesus. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

One time I did this for a group of people and it was this sort of very fundamentalist church, and they brought in a bunch of complete non-Christians, and they had me give a talk similar to this. It was horrible. People were yelling at me. Literally, they would stand up and scream at me. Both sides. I told my friend, "You so owe me big. Next time I ask a favor, you give it to me." At the very end of this a high school kid stood up and he said, "I don't understand all of this. I really don't know. The only thing I know is I hope this doesn't get in the way of anyone knowing Jesus." I just wanted to say, "Amen." The Jesus of Scripture will *always* lead us to truth. The Jesus of *Scripture* will always lead us to truth.

The last thing is serve the gay community. How do we respond? I think we serve the gay community. In my opinion we have no right to say anything until we have served the gay community. I believe, and I hold myself accountable to this too, I believe we were handed a great opportunity 25 years ago to do this, and we missed it. That was when the AIDS epidemic came out. It was then considered a "gay disease." We know it's not, but it was then considered that. It was creating all kinds of fear in the gay community, and the Christian community was not there. There were some. Definitely there were some. But predominately what got said over the air waves was, "This is God's punishment." All that stuff. And I just think that if the church *en masse*, if Christians *en masse*, had said, "Oh this is horrible. How can we serve? How can we help? How can we care?" Remember what, you've heard me say this many times, first century Christians, what did they do when the plague came to Rome? They stayed in Rome, and they cared for the sick. If we had done that, (and I was an adult at the time, I was in college, I didn't do anything, so I hold myself accountable,) I think we'd be having a completely different conversation today, if *en masse* we'd done that. I think, Jesus comes as a servant, then he is our Lord, he tells us grace, and then he tells us truth. How can we serve the gay community? I occasionally get invitations to go speak at one of these rallies, you know, anti this or for that, around this issue, and I've always turned them down. I've been asked to speak at a rally in Olympia, and I always say, "No, that's not how I view my assignment in the Kingdom." But I was talking about a year ago to a well known, I guess you would call him an anti-gay activist in the community, not Ken Hutchison, another person, and he is in the battle, publicly, politically, and that is his assignment in the Kingdom. But he said to me in the conversation, "I think I need to be doing what I'm doing, but sometimes I think the most effective thing would be if I just sat down with a bunch of gay leaders in King County and listened to their pain." I said, "If you do that, I'll be right beside you." Someday I'll probably call him up and say, "How about we go do that?"

Can we serve first? What would that look like? I think it would look like being part of trying to deal with the AIDS epidemic. The church now is doing it. Christians have figured that out. That's the good news. We were slow, but we've figured it out. That's the good news. I think it's doing that. I think it's being those friends. I think it's being that community of people around people who struggle with this. Maybe it's inviting them into our families. Politically, this is where I get really confused. So at this point I just start to throw up my hands. What about in the political arena out there. We're kind of forced into it, you've got amendments and Marriage Acts, and what about in our own denomination, I mean I'll tell you where we stand and where I stand on that, we don't believe that ordination for a practicing homosexual is appropriate or scriptural. That is where this church officially stands. I agree with that theologically. I want to put all kinds of grace around that. Again, someone who feels this, no problem. But someone who acts on this, and does not want to turn away from it, we would not ordain them in this church. In the same way as if someone had committed adultery, if they said, "That is wrong and I'm not going to do it any more," we would ordain that person. But if someone committed adultery and said, "What's more, I'm going to keep doing it. And I think it's a good thing. I really like it. I just can't resist it." We would say, "No." So the standard in our denomination and in this church is fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman and chastity in singleness. It says nothing about orientation, it's all about behavior. That is the official position of this church and I agree with that.

In our denomination as you know there is a lot of discussion, controversy, and differing opinions on that, as there are in this church. In the last general assembly, which is kind of our Grand Pooh-Bah Organization, there was a decision made to allow local, regional bodies to waive the clause that requires fidelity and chastity, but then there were all kinds of other amendments tacked onto that, and we're in kind of a wait and see period. But where this church stands is fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman and chastity in singleness.

What about in the larger political realm out there? How do we talk about it politically? Christians have the right to advocate their positions in the public sphere. I think Christians ought to vote their conscience. However, for me, I see Jesus and the early church serving more than they are forming political action committees. There are many immoral things to protest, in Rome. Female infanticide was rampant, not to mention throwing people to the lions and crucifying them. There was a lot of stuff to object to in Rome, and I don't see the early Christians doing that. What I see the Christians doing is serving the Roman community and then living their own ethics within their community. When they did that, it was very attractive. One of the reasons Christianity grew so fast is, amongst themselves, they would not practice female infanticide. Female infanticide was rampant in the Roman world, but the Christians would not do it.

Women found that very attractive, because it was making a statement. Not only that, women could have leadership roles. Women were affirmed. As they lived out their own ethic, people were drawn to them.

I think that yes, there's probably a place for the public advocacy and all of that, but I just feel like we'd be better off if we served more and yelled less. That's my opinion.

And that's all I've got to say. So, we have about thirty minutes for you to talk back.

Questioner: Since there was no English word for homosexual until the nineteenth century, what was the Greek word used in the Scripture passage? There were two Greek words; one was for the passive partner, and one for the active partner. Both of those are used in the New Testament. The concept of homosexuality was known and understood in those days. Robert Gagnon is a professor that has the best book on this (*The Bible and Sexuality*, by Robert Gagnon) and explains it quite carefully.

Dr. Dudley: Let me clarify, when I say that the word didn't exist, or the concept didn't exist, I should more rightly say that the concept as we understand it didn't exist, that this is somehow your identity, this is somehow something that you would use the "to be" verb about. That's really more a 19th century development with psychiatry. It was always considered more a moral issue, more a behavioral issue, than an identity issue, but it was certainly practiced. We understand it is a sexual orientation, but that wouldn't have been how they thought about it through most of human history. But certainly the feelings existed, the actions existed, of course.

Questioner: It produces children, and I think that is one of the main things, the way God helps us to be whole, because we have to get outside of ourselves and take care of children. Now in your discussion of this whole subject, you don't mention the result of the heterosexual union. And I think that's very important. And believe me, now that I'm a grandfather and get to really have fun with children, grandchildren, the carrying on of the race or the group is God's intention, and that comes from the heterosexual union. And we have to care about our wives, and they about us, and work together to try to raise children that are whole and have a chance to be whole in God's eyes.

Dr. Dudley: Yeah, thank you. I actually had it in my notes and somehow I forgot to mention it. I skipped over it. But see how the Holy Spirit works? You got it in there. Children – makes you wonder what else is in the notes, doesn't it? Every Sunday I always leave something out. Yes, I think that's another important part of the heterosexual union, and why God created us male and female. That's another way of stepping out beyond ourselves. It also is a love that issues out, produces

something other than itself. It doesn't exist in and of itself, or for itself, it produces something, which is what God's love does: it creates all of creation. That said, as you probably know, there are a great many homosexual couples who would say, "We'd love to have children, if you would loosen up your laws and let us adopt easier so that we can do that." But I still agree with you, the aspect of procreation is very important.

Questioner: I have a teenage son who's gay, so this is a very deep issue for me, and the whole time I was sitting here listening to you I was thinking of a question to ask you, and you've nailed every question. This was a brilliant discussion. That's all I have to say. Thank you very much. Are you going to make this available on the church website?

Dr. Dudley: Yeah, it's been taped.

Questioner: Because my son is a voracious atheist, Sam Harris fan, and on and on. But he's open to, at least, he's a very bright guy, and he'd be open to looking at this. It was brilliant.

Dr. Dudley: Thanks, I appreciate you saying that. I think one of the things that breaks my heart around this issue is: a) your son, who I don't feel has probably seen the face of Christ in our culture from the church. Either, you get the, you all know the stereotype, the judgmental deal. But the other, hey, this is as best as God can do for you. I mean, I'm not ... Tolerance, it's a funny virtue. It's our cardinal virtue in this culture. But you think about it, I've said this in sermons before, if I said to my wife, "I just really tolerate you, I want you to know from the bottom of my heart how I tolerate you, specially right now." Tolerance is a synonym for "I don't care." And I think "love" is the cardinal virtue in Scripture. And what love says is, "I love you, I'm not leaving you, there is nothing you can do to make me not love you, there is nothing you can do to make me think less of you, this doesn't define you, you're more than that, and God has more than that, and I'm going to be here with you until you find it. It's not going to be easy, it's going to be hard, and I'm not going to give up." And what breaks my heart is I don't think your son has had a lot of opportunities to hear that, because in our sound-bite culture you just get one of the two extremes. It just drives me crazy, I can hardly watch the news anymore. I swear, when one of these things come up and they go find the Christian protestors, I swear they scan the crowd for the dumbest Christian there, they put the microphone in his face, they probably let him talk for thirty minutes saying stupid thing, and they tape the thirty seconds that was the stupidest thing he said, and that's what gets on the air waves. Right? It just drives me crazy. No subtlety. But other than that I don't have an opinion. Thank you. It's a complicated thing: how do we do grace and truth?

Questioner: I understand how a lot of people who act out homosexual behavior feel hurt by hard nosed Christians who see no sense of grace, but I think that there are people who will feel hurt no matter how well you present yourself to them if you confront their sin. So I don't think I can always measure how well I've done by whether they feel hurt or not.

Dr. Dudley: I agree. And I don't, in my, I'm a grace person. I always fall off the horse on the grace side. We all fall off one direction or the other, and I always go too far grace wise. I agree with you it's got to be both grace and truth, and I agree that when you confront someone with their sin, often they will not feel very good about you. Try preaching the stewardship sermon, and talking about money. You guys are great, that wasn't meant for you, you are a great church. But in other churches I've been in. And any kind of sin, you're right. And I don't think we should pull our punches. But what I'm advocating is that we understand that grace without truth is not grace, because the Gospel's bad news before it is good news. And if you're not also saying, "God has more for you. This is not God's best, you are falling short," I think, it's not grace, because you're not calling them to grow. And truth without grace is not truth, because you are leaving out the hope of grace.

Questioner: Yeah. I just want to make sure that people don't feel bad about themselves because they get this very negative thing back. Jesus was this great lover of people, and they ended up crucifying him. Obviously they were a bit pissed off at him.

Dr. Dudley: Yeah, and I've made plenty of people angry, despite of the way I'm a grace person, because I will not say to them, "Man, homosexuality is exactly the way God wants it, and wants you." I will not say that. I'll say, "I think God has more. Harder. But harder is often more fun."

Questioner: Most of the time we feel that homosexuality is a lifestyle choice. But one thing that seems kind of unfair to me, anyway, is that maybe a third of the cases they are programmed genetically to be, have homosexual feelings that persist from very early age throughout their life. It seems like it's a hoax or it's an unfair thing that's been programmed into these people. It's always been very disturbing to me.

Dr. Dudley: I'm not a scientist, so I can't solve the genetic vs nurture debate, but I think it is unfair, Clark. I think sin is unfair. I think children who are born with malformed hearts and people who get cancer when they are twenty, I think it all is unfair. And if it makes me mad at anyone, it makes me mad at the devil, I mean, he's just a jerk. You know, when we separated ourselves from God spiritually, (bodies and souls are connected,) our bodies no longer work the way God wants them to, so genes go haywire and all kinds of stuff happens. That breaks God's heart. And as we all know sometimes he does miraculous cures and sometimes

he leaves the thorn in our flesh for whatever, but gives us grace in that, and we grow through that. I think it's a terrible burden for people to bear. Again, I think for a heterosexual to just say, glibly, "Just pray about it," that just isn't the reality, for many people. I also want to say that for some people that can be the reality, and some people have found healing, and some people have found wholeness, and there are ministries that help people do that. We've got some handouts in the back that you can pick up, Exodus International and Metanoia Ministries are two that I can think of. So I think that it's a very difficult burden for them to bear. How we help them understand what God is doing in their life is very important.

Questioner: If a gene were to be detected that could be removed, would the church favor the removal of that gene.

Dr. Dudley: That's another forum (laughter). Let's put it this way, I think if there was a cure, of course we would. Tony Campolo a long time ago did a study with, I can't remember what the sample size was, I think it was fairly small, so it was probably not a great scientific study, but he interviewed a whole host of homosexual men, all of them non-Christian, all of them self-affirming, "this is the right way, this is a good thing, celebrate it, I'm gay and I'm proud" kind of people. He asked them 70 or 80 questions. One of them right in the middle was, "If there was a pill that came out tomorrow that would take this away, would you take it?" Almost every one of them said, "I would." So the idea that somehow people are just kind of, it's to your point, Clark, we need to realize the pain that's around this. I still want to say, I don't see this in the media, I certainly see it in the church, transformed lives, that are living in wholeness either through having the feelings taken away or diminished, or entering into a marriage that works, or saying, "You know what? Singleness has a lot of opportunities that being married doesn't."

Questioner: Do you think God makes mistakes?

Dr. Dudley: I do not think God makes mistakes. But I think in a fallen world, all kinds of things happen that God didn't want or intend, and that at some point God is going to put a stop to all of this. That's the doctrine of heaven, that there is wholeness on the other side. So no, I don't think God causes homosexuality, I don't think he created it, anymore than he created cancer. But again, body and soul – this is something we don't understand, because we're too Greek. We think the body is the prison house of the soul. That is not what Scripture says: it says body and soul are together, and what you do with one affects the other. What we do in our souls affects our bodies. If I worry too much I'm going to get an ulcer. So when we separated our souls from God, our bodies were no longer perfect, and now bad stuff happens: cancer, all kinds of stuff. And God's going to put an end to it. God in this lifetime is going to work through it to provide wholeness one way or the other, and God will put an end to it. Correct: you can still get cancer and not be apart from God, because we all have inherited this broken body, in one way or

another. We all die. In the same way, you can be devoutly dedicated to God and experience homosexual feelings, or cancer, or anything else. Hear me right, I'm not say, if you sin, God is zapping you. I'm saying, in a broken world we all suffer the effects of sin.

Questioner: I have this question. I have neighbors that are lesbians. They have been partners together for a long time. They have a young daughter together, somehow. My question is this: I'd love to invite them to this church, because I know that they want to be involved in a Christian church, but I don't know where you would strike that balance between truth and grace, because if they came here, and they looked at a Sunday morning bulletin, they'd see on the back, "Gay and Lesbian Support Group," and though I would want to serve them, and show them grace, and invite them into our church, I feel that it might also be a slap in the face, that I'd be trying to tell them, "God wants more for your life, so therefore I should break up your relationship." How would I go about striking that balance?

Dr. Dudley: That's where the rubber meets the road, that question you asked, and that's what I've had to deal with. As a pastor in the Bay Area, you can only imagine how many times I've had to deal with this. Our across the street neighbors are two men living together, and they've never said it, but they've implied heavily that they are gay. Let me answer that two ways. That's why that thing I said, "If you take nothing away, take this away: Jesus first, Jesus only." My job in life as a Christian is not to fix anyone's anything, my life is to lead them to their fixer. And so I just refuse to get in a conversation pre-Jesus, it's the cart before the horse. "The Bible says ... " "Well Bible, Schmible." If you don't know Jesus, it doesn't matter. So you have to get the horse, then the cart. So I always lead with Jesus, and I always say, "You know, I do think God has more for you. But I'm not judging you. I'm not saying you've got to stop this now, I'm just saying I want you to know Jesus, and he's going to deal with a lot of stuff in your life, I think he'll get around to this, but it may be twenty years, I don't know. He may worry way more about your overspending habit. I just know that he wants wholeness for you in this, and in everything else." I lead with Jesus. Now, once they know Jesus, I think the conversation can begin to switch. Then you can start, "Here's what your savior says, here's what your savior wants." Then you can bring in much more of the truth. I'm not saying no truth at all. But once they know Jesus it can become a different conversation. But man, when they don't know Jesus ... that's what I'm after.

As to bringing them to this church: I certainly would hope that we were the kind of community where anybody's anything could be exposed, and where we would manage to be people of the third way: I believe God has more, I believe this isn't God's intended best for you, but I'm not judging you. I've got my stuff, you've got your stuff. And that's for anybody's anything: pornography; messed up

marriages; adultery. Can we be the kind of community that neither celebrates sin, nor gets overly judgmental, but simply points to the cross, points to the wholeness God offers, and says, "We're on this journey toward it together." I hope we can get there. It is very hard in a church this size. I think we do a pretty good job, actually. I think you could legitimately say there are people who do not agree with me, and what I'm saying, and we love them too, and you can disagree. Come and find Jesus. This is part of why I don't do it from the pulpit: a) it needs a lot more time to get it right; and b) you can't, the audience is too broad, they can't hear it, it's not subtle enough in a sermon.

Questioner: Why do you think Jesus didn't say a word about this issue?

Dr. Dudley: I think because in his culture the obvious did not need to be stated. Jesus didn't say a word about a lot of things, either. Jesus didn't say anything about genocide, either. You can't really make an argument that because he didn't say anything about it, therefore he must have approved. It was so clearly a sin in his culture, he really didn't need to call it out. It would have been stating the obvious. That's my read on it. Debbie has something she wants to say.

Debbie: Jesus wasn't at all shy about saying anything when he disagreed with the prevailing culture, and the prevailing culture at that time took homosexual behavior to be a sin, and if Jesus had disagreed with that he would have spoken out about it. He did speak out about things when he disagreed with Pharisees. And if he didn't say anything about it that strongly implies that he did not disagree with it.

Dr. Dudley: In the Jewish culture ... Now Roman culture was a different deal. It was pretty widespread in Roman culture. But in Jewish culture it was clearly thought of as a sin, falling short of God's intended best. And as Debbie points out, Jesus was willing to overturn convention in all kinds of ways: he turned gender relations upside down. The way Jesus brought equality to women was unheard of in his culture. He was perfectly willing to do that. So I agree with Debbie.

Questioner: Yes, Scott, I just think this is awesome, what we're doing tonight. One thing that occurs to me though, as a church, and as a group of believers here, and that is the word "judgment." You've said many times not to judge. To me it is so confusing in relating to sin. We are to judge right and wrong, we are not to judge the motives of a man's heart. And that's where I find comments coming to the Christian, "Who are you to judge?" In my mind I'm saying, but we are to judge right and wrong behavior, according to God's word. So how do you speak on that? How do we relate that statement to the homosexual?

Dr. Dudley: I think so much has to do with, I use the word "judgment" because I think that's a shorthand word, but I agree with you we are called to distinguish between right and wrong behavior. Part of it is in that word "behavior." It is

behavior, not people. But so much is in the tone, so much is in the way you do it. So much is in ... That's why I talk about God's intended best. Not because I don't believe in sin. I believe in sin. I don't have a problem saying, "This is a sin – homosexuality is a sin." But how I communicate that to someone so that they can hear the truth that I am trying to get across is important. I have found in my discussions with gay people, when I say to them, "I'm not judging you as a person. I've got my stuff." First of all, that's the best place to go. "I've got my stuff, you've got your stuff, we've all got stuff." Just to level the playing field. When I say, "I believe that God has more, what you experience right now may be even good, you may be in a good relationship, I believe God has better, and more, and I believe that it's not perhaps as good as you think it is, but you know what? I'm not going to force it on you right now, because ultimately the person who can make that so in your life is Jesus. So can we just start to know Jesus?" I think there's a way to do it gracefully and gently without pulling punches. I don't think any gay person that I've counseled with has ever accused me of pulling punches. I don't think they've ever left thinking that I've approved, or thought it was God's will. And yet I don't think any of them, well no, some of them have felt judged. What the gentleman David said up here earlier, inevitably, no matter how careful we are, some people are not going to like what we say. And our reference point is God, not what they think.

Questioner: That last question that was asked was, why do so many different churches interpret the Bible differently on this point?

Dr. Dudley: I used to get asked a similar question when I taught literature in the University. Students would say to me, "How can you grade my paper? Isn't that just subjective? Isn't it your opinion versus my opinion? Isn't it all up for interpretation?" And what I would tell students is there are many ways that you can read the text of Hamlet, and there are many arguments you can make about what Hamlet means, and you can support those with the evidence from the text, and there are many arguments you can make that are not supported by the text of Hamlet. For instance, you can argue about whether or not Hamlet's tragic flaw was laziness, or fear, or pride, or whatever. You can argue about whether or not Hamlet was in love with his mother, and you can give arguments for and against, and it comes down to how well you support your point. But you could never, for instance, argue that Hamlet is really a play about the Queen of Sweden, because whenever Hamlet is mentioned he is described as the Prince of Denmark. Whenever he is mentioned. So you couldn't say that he's the Queen of Sweden, the text wouldn't support that. I think it's the same with homosexuality and the Bible. Every single time it is mentioned, homosexual behavior is mentioned in Scripture, it is mentioned as a sin. There is no exception to that. If there was just one exception, I think we would have a debate. But there is not one exception. So I would say that to interpret homosexual behavior as anything other than sin is not

supported by the text of the Bible. You may want to make other arguments that are outside the Bible, but as far as what the Bible says, there's no way that you can claim that the Bible says anything other than that homosexuality is a sin, because every time it's mentioned that's how it's mentioned. So I guess I would be saying I would disagree with their reading of Scripture, and argue that their interpretation is not supportable by the text of Scripture.

I just want to close our evening by telling you a story about a man I know from California, who's part of our church down in California. He was immersed in the gay lifestyle for a number of years, but always felt a kind of brokenness around that inside of him. Eventually he became a Christian. He didn't like church people at all, but he figured he liked Jesus, so he'd give him a try. At first, for a long time, he hid his struggles with homosexuality from his friends, and from the people who knew him, but eventually he opened up and told a few close friends, all of them men, what he was struggling with. And they responded with both grace and truth. They said to him over and over again, "We love you, there's nothing you can do that will change our love for you, we're not going to judge you, we're certainly not going to just tell you to pray about it and it will go away, or pray harder and it will go away. But we're also not going to say that this is the best that God can do for you, that there's no better life available. We are going to continue to believe for you that wholeness is possible. We're going to pray for you. We're going to be your friend. If you ask us to, we're going to hold you accountable to changing behaviors that you yourself say that you want to change. We're also not going to ask you about it every day. We're not going to come up and say, "Gosh, has God zapped you yet? Are you fixed?" We believe that this doesn't define you. We believe there's a lot more to you than this. You're intelligent, you've got a good sense of humor. There's a whole lot of stuff going on in you and we're not going to just let this define you. But we are going to seek God's wholeness for you." And that's what they did. They were great friends. They included him in everything they did. If they went to a movie they took him along. If they went to a baseball game they took him along. As time went on they shared some of their secrets, some of their sexual struggles with him. Things like pornography and lust, and marriages that were on the rocks, and various things. They really became that band of brothers, that community of men that this man had always longed for, and had never had. Along the way he got some good Christian counseling, as well, and eventually he was able to uncover some deep wounds that were inside of him. He was able to tell his friends about these deep wounds, many of them coming from his peers, that left him longing to be part of a community of men, and feeling outside of that. And to control that he had eroticized those feelings. He was able to open some of that stuff up, and tell his friends about those deep wounds, and as they came to light they lost their power as secrets always do once they are

exposed. Over time his attraction, same sex attraction, diminished. It never completely went away, but it diminished. Along the way he met a woman and fell in love with her. Told her all about himself and about his struggles, and she accepted him in that. For the first time in his life he felt fully known and fully loved, and for him that was a very erotic emotion. He married this woman. They have a couple of great kids, and he would say that he still struggles with same sex feelings, but he would also tell you that the life that he is living now is way more fulfilling than ever before. He's married, he has kids, he has these incredibly deep friendships that most of us long for and never get to. His struggles with homosexual behavior turned into something that got him to these friendships that most of us could never imagine, in terms of their depth. He's seen the power of God work in some amazing ways. I believe that God can bring wholeness to all of us, regardless of what we face, but even to the person who is struggling with same sex desires, God can bring wholeness. It may not look like this man's story, it may look like a full, rich life being single. But God can make all of us whole, regardless of what our brokenness is.

So my question to all of us, First Pres Bellevue, and my challenge to us, is can we be that kind of community to each other? Not just on this issue, but on every issue. Can we be the kind of community where whatever folks are struggling with, they can be open about it, and find God's healing. Not get judged or condemned, but also not be told, "Oh, this is no problem. It's okay. This isn't brokenness," when it is brokenness. Can we be the kind of community that offers both grace and truth? Accepting and loving, while at the same time holding out God's promise of wholeness to everyone, no matter what our brokenness is. Can we be that kind of community? Can we be people of the third way?

And I believe we can. I see, I think we're a long way in that direction, and I think that with God's help we can become more and more of that community, and we will be able to see the power of God.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for your ability to make us whole, and we pray for us as a community here in this church that you would help us to be people of the third way. Help us to be people who offer both grace and truth, both acceptance as well as holding out the promise of your wholeness to each other, in a way that is loving and life giving. We know that we can't do this without you, so we ask for your help. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.