

October 4, 2015

Counterculture: The Great Identity Crisis

Romans 1:18 – 32

We are continuing with our series we've entitled: Counterculture: God's Alternative Gospel Community, in which we have been examining some of the major issues of the day, and looking at how the Bible and the gospel calls Christians to think about these things and respond to them. Today we want to look at the issue of gender and sexual identity. It is not an understatement to say that in our culture today, there is a massive sense of confusion and perplexity over this issue. We've had to begin grappling with unfamiliar labels like LGBT, LGBTQIAA, transgender, cisgender, trans-people and many many more, as people invent new ways to express themselves. We are confronted with the reality of alternative lifestyles that were once considered deviant mainstreamed into our schools and homes and workplaces. We are facing a radical cultural shift in how we interact with men and women, boys and girls, and how we deal with the consequences of redefining what was once a fairly simple dichotomy.

Transgender bathrooms, and transgender locker rooms are springing up all over. Our very own White House is actively working for changes to state and federal policies that promote homosexual and transgender needs. White House Chief Data Scientist DJ Patil has launched a new initiative called the #transneeds project to better serve transgender people. In once recent tweet he called for their input to help government design 'Jobs, healthcare, housing and a safe place to pee' for transgendered people.¹ We've seen homosexuality come fully out of the closet to find not only an affirmed and accepted place in our society, but overturn centuries of tradition and practice and redefine what it means to be married. We've watched as the White House itself was turned into a welcoming banner for the homosexual agenda. And we've listened as doctors and psychologists and other experts have told us that gender is not necessarily fixed according to biology, but rather depends on how one views themselves.

One article I read described the issue this way: *Where does gender come from? Its source is not entirely understood and may not be the same for everyone. The formation of gender identity is likely established by hormonal influences in the womb, but it may also be affected by social and cultural factors, including the messages we receive from the media and from our families and communities. Our gender identity and/or gender expression may shift over time.*² We've certainly seen that kind of shift highlighted in recent days as former Olympic athlete, Bruce Jenner, after living as a man for 60 some odd years, discovered that he is actually Caitlyn Jenner, a woman trapped in a man's body. But whether it is someone who decides that the gender they were assigned at birth is not the right one, or that they are actually homosexual or bisexual or lesbian or transgender or pangender or something else, what is clear is that there is a massive identity crisis in our culture today. Facebook lists 58 gender options to choose from in setting up your identity...and it could change.

One of the driving forces behind this issue today is what many have called the homosexual agenda: A set of beliefs and objectives designed to promote and mandate approval of homosexuality and homosexual ideology, along with the strategies used to implement such. In a speech on December 10, 2013, to a pro-family rally in Jamaica, Brian Camenker of *MassResistance* outlined the step-by-step approach of the homosexual agenda:

- legalize homosexuality
- promote gay pride parades
- demand non-discrimination laws
- insist on homosexuals' adoption of children
- push the homosexual agenda in schools

¹ <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/09/30/white-house-promotes-safe-place-pee-transgender-community/White House Promotes Safe Place to Pee For Transgender Community, Charles Spiering, September 30, 2015.>

² <http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/health-info/separating-sex-and-gender/ Separating Sex and Gender, April 10, 2014>

- force "gay marriage" on society
- demand public funding to deal with increased homosexual-related social problems
- promote the transgender agenda
- impose a large-scale loss of free speech
- ban counseling for kids confused by homosexual issues, and attack churches³

Much of the confusion around gender and sexual identity can be traced to this unprecedented push for social affirmation and cultural acceptance by the homosexual community. And as prominent public figures have come out of the closet on this issue, increasingly they turn to the church and say, 'Why won't you accept us? Why must you insist on calling this sin? In light of the fact that the Bible doesn't say very much at all about this, why do you preach against it? Why don't you preach against injustice and hypocrisy and not loving your neighbor as yourself? Why single out homosexuality as the big sin issue?' And the answer is we don't focus on the sin of homosexuality to the exclusion of other sins. But we are talking about it because of those who want to paint this lifestyle and everything that flows from it as a normal and legitimate and moral lifestyle. In other words, for centuries we've not had the debate because recognizing that homosexuality is a deviant, sinful lifestyle has never been a question.

As Christians we often hear, 'Why call out homosexuality as a sin when Jesus never even mentioned it? Aren't you being prejudiciously selective in the sins you speak against?' Well, the fact is, Jesus never once talked about incest or bestiality and no one in their right mind would consider those acceptable. And an argument from silence is not really an argument at all. Furthermore, to say that Jesus never said anything about homosexuality is not entirely accurate. In Mark, Jesus told His disciples, "*What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,*" Sexual immorality is a Greek word, *porneia*, which was used to describe every kind of sexual sin, including homosexuality. Jesus never singled out homosexuality because it wasn't necessary to point out that it was sin to His listeners. The Jews of His day understood their Bible, the Old Testament, explicitly condemned homosexuality, and it wasn't a controversy at all.

That is not the case today. The normalcy and morality of homosexuality is a controversial issue today. Especially in the church. And it ought not to be. The Bible is undeniably clear on this. Even revisionist theologians who want to make a case for homosexuality admit this. Pim Pronk, a gay Dutch theologian says, "*wherever homosexual intercourse is mentioned in Scripture, it is condemned. With reference to it the New Testament adds no new arguments to those of the Old. Rejection is a foregone conclusion; the assessment of it nowhere constitutes a problem.*"⁴ But that hasn't stopped the biblical revisionism in the Christian community. In January of this year, TIME Magazine came out with an article entitled, "How Evangelicals are Changing Their Minds on Gay Marriage". Prominently featured is Ryan Meeks, the pastor of Eastlake Community Church, a large, multi-site congregation in the Seattle area. On the morning of January 25, Meeks confirmed the position of the church's leadership: the staff of Eastlake had unanimously embraced the homosexual lifestyle, declaring that openly homosexual men and women could become members of the church. Prior to that announcement, Eastlake had already performed a so-called same-sex marriage.⁵

We are focusing this morning on homosexuality because that is one of the biggest issues facing the church today and it is the main issue that is driving what I see to be this great identity crisis in our culture. And it is important for two reasons. First because the truth of God's word is at stake. Does the Bible condemn or praise this kind of behavior? And the answer is an unequivocal yes. There are at least eight lists of sins that are guaranteed to keep you out of the kingdom of God and sexual immorality, along with explicit mention of homosexuality is included in every list.⁶ And secondly, the real question is, why would you promote a lifestyle and behavior that would keep you out of heaven?

3 <http://www.massresistance.org/docs/gen2/13d/jamaica-speech-121013/index.html>

4 Pim Pronk, *Against Nature? Types of Moral Argumentation Regarding Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 279.

5 <http://www.christianpost.com/news/seattles-worst-play-call-ever-and-its-about-gay-marriage-not-the-super-bowl-133535/>

6 Mk. 7:21-22; Rom. 1:24-31; 13:13; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5-9; 1 Tim. 1:9-10; Rev. 21:8.

Homosexuality is really an identity issue. What we are dealing with today is a massive, collective, identity crisis. 'Who am I?' And we are trying to define ourselves in ways which were never intended. We've always had an issue with this, but where identity once was answered perhaps with a job description or marital status, we are now answering that question by saying, 'I'm gay' or 'I'm straight' or 'I'm transgender' or some other sexual identity. We've bought into the lie that our sexual desire is who we are. The problem is we are not answering the question the way our Creator intended. The Bible tells us that we have been created in the image of God, and it is only by looking at Him that we can fully understand who we are. We were never meant to find our identity in some sort of profession or behavior or lifestyle. We were meant to find our identity in the God who created us and sustains us and invites us into fellowship with Him through His Son.

In the beginning, back in Genesis, God created us to live and work and walk with Him in perfect union, perfect shalom. He creates the heavens and the earth, all the animals and fish and birds, all the trees and vegetation, and then He creates man and woman and puts them in a garden. They have perfect freedom there. They can do whatever they want. Everything is perfect. There's just one thing they can't do – one rule: don't eat from that one tree. If you eat from the tree, you'll die. The one thing they shouldn't do becomes the only thing they want to do, and everything goes to hell in a hand basket. That's the short version. But the point of the story is that God creates this perfect place and He gives them everything they need to live, and it's heaven. The garden was a real place, but it is also a metaphor for the place where all your desires are met and all your needs are satisfied. It's perfect.

But God gives them this perfect place so that their satisfaction and enjoyment would serve to point them to the One who gave them all this. It was never meant to terminate on themselves or the things around them, but on God Himself. And that becomes the problem. From the moment Adam and Eve bought into the lie that this was all about them, that God was somehow keeping the best stuff from them and didn't have their best interests at heart, the world and everything in it was broken. Shalom was shattered and the world has been living with the consequences of that. And we've been wrestling with an identity crisis ever since, because we've exchanged the source of our joy and satisfaction and our identity for something far less. You see, that's the trouble with sin, any sin, lying, adultery, stealing, homosexuality, fornication, they promise what they cannot deliver – they lie. They promise joy and satisfaction, but in the end all they do is deliver death.

A lot of people, Christians included, look at the Law of God, Thou shalt and Thou shalt Not, and conclude that God is a kill-joy. God doesn't like people who have fun. God really doesn't have your best interests at heart. But the Law of God came into the world precisely because we chose against our best interests, and we exchanged paradise for sweat and toil and hardship and pain. The Law was given to expose our sin and lead us to conclude that we were worthy of death and needed a Savior. In other words, it was meant to humble us. And it was meant to give us joy. God gave us His law, He gives us commands all throughout Scripture, not to beat us down and say, 'Do what I say or go to hell', but to line our thinking and our hearts up with the way He created everything to work in the process of restoring what was lost. ***In other words, the Law of God is given, not to rob us of joy but to lead us into joy.*** Jesus told His disciples in the gospel of John: *If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.* John 15:10-11 The commandments of God are for our joy, not our distress.

But in our arrogance and pride, we consistently choose against our best interests. And the passage we read this morning shows us the inexorable progression downward those choices lead us. In this passage, Paul first answers the objection many have even today. How can God hold people who don't know Him accountable to Him? ***18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*** First of all in verses 16-17 he says the righteousness of God is revealed through the gospel, and then here he says the wrath of God is revealed through His punishment of unrighteousness and ungodliness. And he points out that no one has an excuse because He has revealed who He is and by what right He can bring punishment, through the very things He created.

What this says to us is that everyone knows that there is some higher authority to which they are ultimately held accountable. There are no innocent people. Forget the innocent tribesman in Africa. He doesn't exist. Kyle was sharing at our community group this last week that even though he was a total pagan, he always felt guilty about some of the things he was doing. He knew they were wrong but he kept trying to explain away the sense that he was going to be held accountable for those things. And this basic revelation of God is in every human heart without exception. There is a sense of right and wrong, even if you've never been to church and never heard the gospel. And you have to keep explaining God away.

Paul says that in doing that we make three fatal exchanges. Pick it up in verse 21: **21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.** The first exchange is trading the glory of God for creation itself. **Where God intended that praise and worship and adoration would focus on Him, we said no, it will focus on us.** Where God gave us life and breath and being in order that we would be able to worship Him, we take those things and worship ourselves. He gave us food so that we would eat and enjoy and thank Him for His provision. He gave us sex so that we would understand that He is beautiful and great and know that He desires intimacy with us. And we take those things and point them all toward ourselves. In other words, we take what was meant to move our affections and our desires and our praise to the Creator and instead turn it all on ourselves.

So first of all there is the exchange of the Creator for the creation. We begin to identify ourselves by creation, not the Creator. He's talking about idolatry here. **Idolatry is setting anything and anyone up in your life as more important than God.** That is, anything besides God that is functionally more important to your happiness, your identity, your hope and your meaning is really your god. And that god begins to be the source of your identity. But like all lesser gods, it is ultimately unable to do what it promises it will. It cannot deliver anything more than temporary joy, temporary hope, temporary meaning. And it cannot give you a real sense of who you are. Because like all temporary things, whatever you build your identity on in this world, will either leave you one day, or you will leave it, and then you're really lost.

And then Paul says, 'This leads to the second fatal exchange': **24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.** When you choose things over God, when you choose the gift over the Giver, what happens is that God says, 'Go ahead. Chase it. Here's where it leads'. And if you hear this, what it leads to is impurity. The word is **akatharsia**, uncleanness. This word in the New Testament is almost always associated with immorality, especially sexual immorality. And Paul makes it clear that this is what he means: **to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.**

When you take the position of worshipping the creation over the Creator, what you eventually come to is sexual immorality. You see we were meant to honor and worship God with our bodies as well as our minds and hearts, but if the only god you have is you, or things, you end up worshipping your lesser god with your body. The exchange here is truth for a lie. And this takes us all the way back to Genesis where that is exactly what Adam and Eve did. The truth was that God was a loving, wonderful, gracious God who loved His creation and ordered everything for their happiness and good. The lie was that God was a jealous, lying, egotistical being who wanted His creation under His thumb and didn't really care about their welfare. Instead of defining ourselves by the truth, we end up defining ourselves by a lie.

And then Paul gives us the third exchange: **26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.** When you exchange the glory of God for a lesser god, when you exchange the truth of God for a lie, what happens Paul says is that God hands you over to the reality of what you are doing. **In other words, if you begin by suppressing the truth about God that is revealed in nature, you will eventually suppress the truth about yourself that is written in nature.**⁷ Homosexuality is a very vivid outward illustration of our very real inward rebellion against God.

7 Kevin DeYoung, What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality, (Crossway, 2015), 52

You see, Genesis tells us that God created Adam, and then He made the woman and brought her to Adam who says, *"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."* **24** *Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.* And as Paul tells us in Ephesians, what God created when He made man and woman and brought them together in marriage in the garden, was a living illustration of the relationship He intends to have with us. **God has written His intentions to love us, pursue us, win us and wed us in creation itself.** Why are men built the way they are? Why are women built the way they are? Why are men built to be the pursuers, the initiators? Why are women built to be the pursued, the responders? They are reflecting the design built into them by their Creator. And the greatest perversion, the greatest rebellion against that illustration is for a man to say, 'No thank you God, I'll love myself, or another man.' Or for a woman to say, 'No thank you God, I'd rather have another woman.' In the same way that marriage between a man and a woman is a living illustration of God's desire and pursuit and love for us, homosexuality is a living illustration of our rejection of God and our pursuit of ourselves. Nothing says 'I reject you God', more than this.

Now let's look at where this ends up: **28** *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29* *They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30* *slanders, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31* *foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32* *Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.* Paul says that when you center your affections on the things of God instead of God Himself, when you exchange the truth for a lie, when you exchange God's love for self-love, you end up stealing from God. The Bible makes it very clear that everything you have, all that you are, has been given to you by God for God. You are not your own. You belong to your Creator. You don't have the right to choose to live as you please. To do so means that you are committing treason against the Sovereign of the Universe. And in every country in the world, that's a death sentence.

To acknowledge God means to give God the praise and glory and honor and allegiance He is due. George Frideric Handel, the great German composer who wrote that incredible symphonic piece, 'Messiah', signed the end of many of his manuscripts with the letters, 'SDG' which meant 'Soli Deo Gloria' – 'to God alone be the glory'. He was keenly aware that his genius had been given to him by God for God. As he was writing the Messiah, when he got to the Hallelujah chorus, his servant found him in tears saying, "I did think I saw heaven open, and saw the very face of God." Johann Sebastian Bach, another great composer, signed every manuscript with those initials. These men were openly acknowledging that everything they were, all that their hands and minds produced were given to them by God for God.

You see, when you start down the path of rejecting God and pursuing self, you end up here. Paul says that God eventually gives you up to a debased mind, twisted thinking and you are filled up with all manner of unrighteousness. This is not an upward slope. And in some respects it seems as if we shouldn't focus on homosexuality given the extensive list of sins mentioned here. And yet the fact that Paul, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit singles out homosexuality as an illustrative example of the heart and mind that exchanges the glory of God for the things He made, that exchanges the truth for a lie, that exchanges natural relations for unnatural, probably means that we need to understand just how egregious this sin really is. There are lots of behaviors that constitute sin in the Bible, but there are only some that are labeled '**to ebah**', **abomination**. Kevin DeYoung points out in his book *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?* that *'...all the sexual sins in Leviticus 18 are lumped together under the term "abominations"...but only male-with-male sex is singled out by itself as an abomination. In fact it is the only forbidden act given this label in the entire Holiness Code. The death penalty, for both parties, also speaks to the seriousness of the offense.'*¹⁸

Let me ask you this. Are you angry and mad at those people who are pushing the homosexual agenda? Do you want to beat them down, drown them out, and silence their arguments? Or does your heart break for them? Do you understand that they are caught in the grip of a massive deception? Do you understand that they are being systematically robbed of real happiness and freedom, of eternal joy and shalom? Do you understand that this is true of everyone who rejects God and prefers their own way? It doesn't matter if you're a thief or a murderer, or a gossip or a slanderer, or an adulterer or a homosexual or a fornicator.

8 Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality*, (Crossway, 2015), 45

Every sin at the root means that we are preferring our way over Gods. And every one of those will end up giving you an identity apart from God and keep you from experiencing full joy and satisfaction and intimacy with God in this life and the next. Homosexuality is a sin that leads to death, along with murder, envy, adultery, along with being insolent, hostile and boastful. I like how Al Mohler puts it: ***'The reality is that every human being north of puberty is a pervert, in the sense that there isn't any Christian or any person we know that is without sexual sin...every honest person knows that whether it's a desire for relational fulfillment or the desire for the fulfillment of the flesh, we have all tried to make of our sexuality something that is basically idolatrous.'***⁹

Listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6: *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.* Did you notice in the list of sins in Romans 1 that disobedient children were mentioned? Did you think that was a little odd? I mean you've got evil, malicious people, haters of God, full of envy and murder and strife and inventors of evil, and then all of a sudden – disobedient to parents. And it is odd if you view sin as simply behavior. But God is after the heart – not behavior modification. And the same heart that says, 'Forget You God!' is the same heart that says 'No I won't do that' to his parents. And this will keep us out of the kingdom.

But thank God Paul and the Holy Spirit do not stop there: ***11 And such were some of you. 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.*** What this says is that redemption is possible. ***What this says is that you can never go so far that God's grace cannot reach you.*** Such were some of you. Some of you were sexually immoral, some of you were adulterers, some of you were idolaters, some of you were homosexuals, or lesbians or transgendered people. Such were some of you. But there is cleansing, there is holiness, there is justification available – in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God. The sin that deserves our death was taken by the Son of God who lived the life you should have lived and died the death you should have died and now frees you to a new identity in Christ. The gospel is not a call to clean up your life. The gospel is not a plea to modify your behavior. The gospel is a call to find your identity in Christ and maximize your joy in Jesus. All the other things you've given your life to in the pursuit of your joy cannot come through for you. It is only when we pursue our joy in Jesus, it is only when we bow to the design and plan of our Creator, that we will know true and lasting happiness. It is only then that we will truly know who we are and our identity crisis is solved.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 1 Corinthians 5:17

Our gracious God and heavenly Father,

We thank You this morning for Your great mercy and grace that comes to us through no merit of our own. Father God, You have created us and given us life and breath and everything that we could be Your sons and daughters to worship and praise and adore You with everything we have and all that we are. Forgive us for the many ways in which we have rebelled against You and gone our own way. Forgive us for taking the things of God and setting them up as gods, and pursuing our joy in them and not in You. Forgive us for letting the lie define and bring us into truth. Wash us this morning from the stain of sin, sanctify our hearts and minds, let us know the justification of a life made new by the precious blood of Jesus, and grant us that new identity You promise in Jesus, as we pray in His precious name, Amen.

9 Al Mohler, A Gospel Centered Response to Homosexuality, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2013/07/02/b21-panel-sbc-2013/>