

Romans 13 Re-Encountering-Culture 'The Prayer 20/20 Impact' March 15, 2020

Dear Praying Friends, and Partners In Prayer Team,

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."
Roman 13:14 (NKJV)

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." **1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NKJV)**

Have you ever been trapped and didn't know what to do? Have you ever been asked a "hot topic" question, and struggled with the answer because you knew that no matter the answer you would give, you felt trapped?

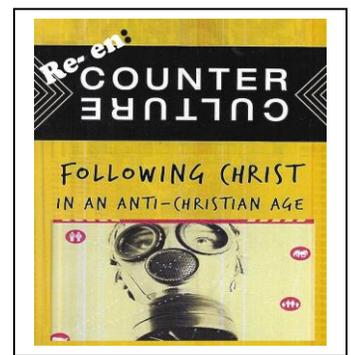
How do we live in an increasingly anti-Christian world? What do those who are not "Christian" think of those who say they are Christ-followers? How do you answer the question, "So, do you think I am going to hell because I am gay? Why can't I be a gay Christian?" Those questions are double-edged traps. They are designed to back us into a corner so we can't respond in a Biblical way. These traps are designed to always make us come out looking wrong. And our real spiritual enemy delights in that (Eph. 6:10).

If you remember last week in our sermon, we looked at an occasion when Jesus was being backed into a trap on the issue of paying taxes. We also saw in the week prior



that Jesus was being backed into the question of "What is the greatest commandment?" In both those cases, the religious and political establishment (the Herodians and the Pharisees) tried to use a trap on Jesus. The religious leaders, about whom Jesus was speaking, plot how they can trap Jesus. Things were so bad that the Pharisees brought in the Herodians as co-conspirators. They joined forces with the party that supported Rome's domination of their own people. Politics, anger, and fear are a dangerous

combination that makes for unlikely alliances. If you remember, they started with flattery. "We know that you, Jesus, are true, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth; and show deference to no one." They were buttering Him up; hoping Jesus would let down His guard. "What do you think?" they ask. "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" If Jesus said yes, He risks offending and losing His followers and all those for whom Roman taxation is a daily reminder that they were dominated by a foreign power in their own land. If He said "No," He risks being



charged with insurrection and treason. Rome's supporters, the Herodians, were there as witnesses. They were just waiting to catch Jesus!

The questions may be different but traps like this are still a part of our counter-cultural world today. It's played out every time we oversimplify complex issues, categorize people, pigeonhole parts of our lives, and try to manipulate. We want to be right! We want to trick people into giving a wrong answer. Let me give you three examples:

"Is abortion permissible?" Say "yes" and you will be seen as supporting the killing of babies; one who ignores the commandment against murder. Say "no" and you contradict a woman's constitutional right as determined by the Supreme Court of the United States and don't care for the welfare and personal choice of women.

"Do you support America's wars?" Say "no" and you will be seen as unpatriotic and failing to support our troops. Say "yes" and you have to answer for the violence, death, and destruction that seem so contrary to Jesus' life and teaching.

"Is homosexuality lawful?" Say "yes" and you will be labeled a compromiser, a person who denies the authority of Holy Scripture. Say "no" and you will be accused of being homophobic, prejudiced, and denying the Gospel's message of love and inclusivity.

In whatever form it takes, the Pharisaic-Herodian conspiracy is about power, manipulation, and agendas. This is still the same trap today. The enemy of our souls, who is never seen behind the trap, uses it to destroy relationships and undermine faith. Sadly, that is all too evident today in our political and economic systems as well as in our churches. I don't have to tell you how this next generation currently thinks about Christians in this matter. In the publication "*UnChristian*" by Dave Kinnaman, it says a national survey found the three most common perceptions of present-day Christianity: antihomosexual (94% of millennials and younger), judgmental (87%), and hypocritical (85%). How do people see us who love the Lord? They are concerned that we will reject them as a person because of something they believe, which relates to their identity. Recent publications from *Christian Headlines.com* say that 47% of mainline pastors support same-sex marriage. In the release it says: "*An evangelical distinctive is the ultimate authority of the Bible has over one's beliefs despite changing cultural perspective. It is not surprising then that of the evangelical pastors across all denominations continue to not support same-sex marriage and view as wrong. That is because they believe literally God's Word.*" Is that not telling to us of those who are supporting the gay agenda? They are finding their approval from "religious" people who are not Bible-believing.

As Bible-believing followers of Christ, how are we to respond to the trap of "Why don't you accept us?" Our bottom line is: don't make us accept or excuse something that God so clearly gives us an answer to believe. That is why many parents and grandparents are grieving and hurting as they watch their children and grandchildren walk away from church and the Lord. I even had a time this week to ask several pastors "What would they preach or say if given this topic for a Sunday message?" The



majority said they would not even preach this topic. Why? Some are afraid of the issue. Some are fearful of being labeled unloving and hateful. Some worried that the issue is being “aggrandized” and not treated in a sensible way, and others just want to avoid controversy. So, honestly, I felt trapped into the dilemma of what am I to say about such a controversial issue?

Jesus refused to play the game. We should be the same. He didn’t answer their question; at least not in the way they wanted. Instead He deepened the question and turned it into a question of faith and life. There will always be controversial counter-cultural issues to address: taxes, economics, church-state relationships, war, homosexuality, abortion, capital punishment, personal finances, gun rights, the definition of marriage, euthanasia, and children’s schooling. The list will go on and on. The title of our study today is: “The Gay Dilemma, How Do I Love and Accept?” “Why?” Because we as believers are seen by this world as intolerant and hateful even when we are not trying to portray those qualities and trying to be faithful to the truth of the Word of God. So, why even bring this issue to the table on a Sunday morning? I pray that I have much compassion how we treat and answer this issue today. I don’t want us to be trapped in the world’s agendas and arguments. We certainly aren’t Jesus, who was the very Divine Son of God. He could see hearts and look into the very souls of those people who were trying to trap and trick Him before He answered. We certainly can’t do that. So, how in this counter-cultural upside-down-world, can we keep from being trapped by the world’s message? How do we handle living in a true “Romans-Chapter-One” world? What should we as a church do? I believe we start in Romans 13:14, *“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”*

At the risk of myself being named a “hater” or being accused as “unloving”, I think we must honestly look at why we are bringing this issue up. Why are we? Because we live in a world where this generation has shifted from seeing nothing wrong with the lifestyle to claiming we are being prejudiced. As the world tries to make it a right to express and have this worldview, we must not cave into the world’s “mold” of thinking Romans 12:2. We also have seen people change in their thinking based on love and acceptance. More Christians back down and are silenced because they don’t want to be accused of judging, so no one is willing to talk about what God says is the truth. As the church, by which I refer to the evangelical Bible-believing followers of Christ, we will see more and more people who struggle with same-sex attraction run to the world for its affirming and supportive influences and accuse believers for being unloving. We have in our churches parents who are prayerfully sorrowing over their children and grandkids as they move in this direction in life. Nobody seems to care anymore about the issue as God sees it. More believers are trying to love, and struggle with not approving something that God so clearly tells us is wrong and are told to not say anything in order to maintain their relationships. We feel believers must compromise by not saying something is right or wrong. We have all found it touching our lives in some way or other through the lives of our very own families. We feel trapped.

As I was praying, I decided to contact a friend of ours from Iowa. The story and testimony of this friend is incredible, and I wanted to get us into a live feed, but she wasn’t able because of her Sunday ministry commitments. However, I sent four questions to help us as believers “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” surrounding this issue, and she sent the answers back to me that will help us understand, and answer

the questions set before us. I prayed all week preparing for this message, that I would be able to be clothed in Christ. Look at the last verse of our Romans 13 passage: *“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (Romans 13:14).* What does that mean?

So much of this prayer letter is about Donna’s story. I want her to express her testimony and for us to hear from her what we as believers should do. Here is our aim as we read her story: pray that we will have hope about how God is able to work in anyone’s heart and bring him or her back to Himself. Pray that we will gain insight, courage, and an ability to change our paradigm of how we think about this issue, and be willing to let God help us understand and witness rightly to those who struggle with same-sex attraction. Pray for parents and grandparents who sorrow as they don’t know what to do for those they love who are running and moving away from God. We want them to have hope that God can bring anyone home to Himself again.

So, here is Donna’s story:

“I became actively gay as a freshman in college in 1983. Prior to that, I remember wishing I was a boy before I even went to school, thinking that I preferred boys’ clothes and activities. I had a crush on my kindergarten teacher and several of my girlfriends in elementary school. I never dated in middle school or high school--I was not asked out by boys, although I had several good male friends. Sometimes boys would make fun of me, usually finding something about my appearance objectionable such as size (I was taller than most and heavier), my hair (red), or my skin (extremely freckled). I continued to be attracted to my girlfriends (not all of them), but I was deeply closeted, and not even my sister or my closest friends knew. I had accepted Jesus as my Savior at the age of nine after starting to attend a Baptist church with family friends. Our whole family started to attend, and we all accepted the Lord and became regular attenders. I read the Bible on my own at this early age, memorized Scripture, enjoyed singing hymns during services, and had a full grasp of everything that was being taught. There was a church split when I was eleven and we started going to a much larger church that had its own Christian school that my sister and I did not attend--we did not fit in well with their youth group. Women and girls were not even allowed to wear pants--dresses and skirts only, all the time (we wore jeans at home and to school). While homosexuality was not addressed, acceptable behavior, "normal" sexuality, and purity were common topics. I had found the passages about homosexuality in my own reading, and instinctively knew this was not the place to ask questions.



Home was not a safe place for it either. When my dad worked all day and mom was home alone with me and my sister (we were 20 months apart), her doctor gave my mom medications to help her stay awake with the babies, and sleep when the babies slept. She became addicted to prescription uppers and downers in the sixties when it was no problem to obtain them. Most of the time she was fine, and she took care of us, read to us, and worked around the house while we played endlessly outside or in our room. But she was unpredictably mean, and we learned that when she was sleeping we had to avoid waking her. Sometimes there was no reason that we knew for her to be mad, but she was, and although I didn’t want to, I feared her. As I grew older, my fear changed to a smoldering unexpressed hatred that she interpreted as rebellion. She now began to physically punish me for "my attitude" or for "what I was thinking". I did what she said and I

never talked back to her, but I deeply resented how she treated me, and anger became a part of my personality . She had gotten free of her addictions by 1973 after my brother was born, so this dynamic between us was something different. She had a very troubled and abusive childhood and adolescence herself. I didn't bother to try and understand. I escaped to school with early classes and I got jobs as early as age 11.

By the time she dropped me off at the curb at the dorm at the University of Iowa in 1982, I don't know which one of us was happier--me watching her drive off, or her pulling away. I did well in pre-Pharmacy classes, a major I chose after turning down scholarships for writing and vocal music at other colleges. I had to have a career that paid well when I got out--well enough in case I didn't have anyone to go home to. I was the only one on earth who knew I was gay. I knew it was wrong, I thought I might go to hell if I gave in to it, and I was certain my family would disown me. I fell in love almost immediately with a friend I met down the hall. I spent all my free time in her room with her and her two roommates, doing homework, watching TV, and going out socially. I even slept down there a lot, as it was widely acknowledged that my roommate was an oddball. The relationship became physical the final month of classes in 1983, I visited her at her home during the summer, and we were roommates for the rest of my college career. However, she was only "experimenting" with a gay relationship, and continued to date men. But she had a gay friend whom I met first at college, and later back in their hometown. This friend and I hit it off well and eventually fell in love. Her name was Bea, and we remained in a relationship for the next 14 years.

I didn't tell my parents I was gay until 1987, after I had graduated, had my first job, had a place to live, and Bea had moved in with me. I left the car running in the driveway. I felt sure my mom suspected, but she did not have a clue. I also expected her to kick me out, but she surprised me by saying that I would always be welcome to come home. She insisted that I stay until my dad came home to tell him myself, which I did. He showed little response, but also was surprised, and agreed with mom that I could come home. As I left, I had no idea what to do with my family. As it turned out, I didn't go home very much at all, not wanting to be there for holidays without Bea, whom they didn't like. Bea's family accepted me so it was easier to spend time with them. I also never went to church, having become angry while still a teenager in the legalistic youth group. I read the Bible very infrequently after becoming actively gay. Bea and I were openly gay everywhere we lived and worked in Iowa, and usually found people to be friendly and accepting of us. Everything looked great, especially to our gay friends, and I was as happy as I had ever been. But I knew down inside that I did not have the connection I expected--something was held back that I could not explain.

In 1994, I had a brush with death. Bea and I were with her mom, driving in a rainstorm late at night. We had been visiting family (a new baby had been born), and we were talking and not paying attention to the weather. There was a flash of lightning ahead of us, and we all saw a tornado. It was too fast to tell if it was a big one far away or a small one close by. I turned the radio on to try and find weather, with a voice in my head telling me we should stop at the farm we were driving past. A few seconds later, a piece of barn hit the vehicle on my side, pushing us into the other lane. Another tornado we had not seen was beside us in the fields. I told Bea's mom to take the whole vehicle into the ditch. She passed a culvert, then found a shallow ditch and eased into it on the lee side of a house. I looked up. We were under power lines. By now the air was full of debris--there was no way we were getting out of the vehicle to lay in the ditch. Three times, the vehicle moved as if it might rise and roll. The voice in my head said that we would not die. The tornado crossed the highway within 50 yards of where we stopped (we saw its path the next day, marked by boards from the cartwheeling barn stuck in the field). We were able to drive home that night, but I could not sleep. I knew that if I had died, I would not have gone to hell. My sins were covered and forgiven, and this sin was like the others to God. But I could not shake the thought that I would have had to give an account for my life and how I spent it. And I prayed "Lord, if You will not break me, I will listen". From the next day onward, I began to read the Bible again. I had to know what God said about me, about my life, about homosexuality. If I could have read Greek and Hebrew I would have, because I did not want any misinterpretation. I desperately wanted it to be okay. I went to a few churches, but I felt ill at ease in the ones that proclaimed it was okay,

knowing that they were ignoring some passages. From the outside looking in, things actually deteriorated, and Bea and I got into a "threesome" with another woman, recently divorced with kids. Even our gay friends thought something was wrong with that.

But interestingly enough, she was also a Christian. One time she and I were talking, and I asked her what her devoutly Christian mom would say about gay people. She said "Mom would say they are deceived". I remember how those words pierced my mind and heart at the same time. I thought, "Who hasn't been deceived? I have been. And when it happens, you are convinced that what you believe is true, until you are confronted with the truth and you see that it isn't. And everyone, including me, knows how it feels." I could not shake those words. They were stuck in me and they would not go. What if I was deceived? She also had some Christian friends--they were Spirit-filled, charismatic Christians. They spoke in tongues. So did she. I had never met anyone like this, and I had only read about speaking in tongues in the Bible. When I met them, they were friendly to me. I went to their church, and they were interested in meeting me. Some things were said during one service that offended Bea, but they wanted to know what was offensive so I explained it and they listened and I could tell that they were very sorry (it was nothing Biblical, it had to do with gay culture). During one service, people were invited to write on a piece of paper one thing that they were struggling with. Then you could pray and come forward to the altar, and put your paper in a box. The pastor and his wife would then pray over the box, turn everything over to God, and burn the box. I wrote "homosexuality" on my paper and put it in the box. More months went by.

It had now been about three years since I told God I would listen to Him. I had continued to read the Bible nearly every day, and my exposure to other Christians had grown. My level of conviction was growing intense. In one local worship service, the presence of the Lord had become so strong that I had to leave the building. I decided that I would "fast" from my relationships for 40 days--as much to see if I could be celibate as to seek the Lord. It was excruciating, and I barely made it. Sometime after it was over, I was lying alone in one of our bedrooms. My mind was overwhelmed with conviction on one hand, but on the other, knowing that I could not walk away, I was bargaining for grace. I could not believe what the Lord was asking me to do. In desperation, alone in the dark, I said out loud "I am never going to win this". There was a pause, then I heard an audible voice say to me "I have already won it for you". I lay very still, startled, waiting to see if there would be more. In the waiting, I realized that my mind had become quiet and still for the first time in so very long, and I knew that the Prince of Peace had spoken to me. I also knew that He had spoken the Truth. When I got up and left that room, I never went back to my relationships again. Unlike before, my mind was also able to focus away from thoughts and memories that tried to draw me back, and there was a genuine ease about letting them go even though I continued to live in the same house from May 1997 until September 1997. My intention was to live celibate. I did not think about whether it would be possible to be straight--that was too much.

In September 1997, I was invited to go to the charismatic Brownsville Assembly of God Revival in Pensacola Florida with a bus full of strangers (I knew the one person who had invited me). By now I was accustomed to being out of my comfort zone with God, so after praying and confirming that I was supposed to go, I was on my way. But with some circumstances on the long trip down, I was compelled by the Spirit to give my testimony over the bus microphone. One of the things I said that night was "I don't know if I was born gay". In the back of the bus, there was a loud shriek, but I kept going. When I was done, people prayed for me and anointed me with oil, and I went back to my seat. In a few minutes, the pastor's wife came to get me, saying "there's something you need to see". I went with her and sat down next to a woman who was lying in the aisle of the bus in some kind of a trance, speaking in tongues. Apparently, I was told, she was the one who had shrieked during my testimony, going into a "prayer of travail" when I said "I don't know if I was born gay". I was supposed to sit and listen to what she said. I thought "okay"....but then the woman spoke in English. And she said things that she had no way of knowing. The first thing she did was to say that when I said, "I was born gay," that I grieved the Holy Spirit. This cut me to the heart, because as you can imagine, with the choices I had made recently, grieving the Holy Spirit was not my intention. The next time she spoke

English, she quoted 2 Peter 2:22, a passage that had been bothering me but I had not talked about to anyone. The Holy Spirit was beginning to deal with me about "the fool returning to his folly like a dog returning to its vomit", but I didn't want to listen. She told me I could not live in the house with "them" any longer. God had my attention now. She said other things that night, hard things to hear. When I went back to my seat, it was the first time in my life that I wanted to die. But God asked me if I wanted to die, or if I wanted to live for Him, and I decided to choose life. When the sun came up, I was on Pensacola beach to see it. My new charismatic friends introduced me to the concept of "renouncing" things, and I renounced out loud that I was born gay. But I said just to the Lord that He would have to show me what happened to me, because I hadn't chosen it either.



Yes, I had chosen to act on my feelings, but I had not chosen the feelings. We spent a week at the Brownsville Revival, where I was filled with the Spirit, received the gift of tongues, and was forever changed in many ways.

I told Bea she would have to move out (she couldn't afford the house without me, and the other woman had an apartment already for her and her kids). This was not received well. I moved out to a furnished apartment while she looked for something. I paid the bills, ran out of money, borrowed money, cashed out life insurance, gave her new credit cards, gave her the truck that was paid for, and she took nearly everything from the house. I lived in the empty house for a year and paid off debt. During the first few months of this, the Lord answered my question. Without counseling, without a support group, without a book on the subject. He sent me back to church with my parents (they lived only 20 miles away this whole time) to restore that relationship first. And he revealed to me that in anger I had made a childhood vow--that I would never be like my mom. And in so doing, I had pushed her away from me so hard that I had damaged my own identity formation, pushing away my own femininity. A vacuum had been created, and I had been attempting to fill the void on an emotional and physical level. This revelation astounded me--and it set me free. As soon as I saw where the feelings were flowing from--from my woundedness, not from who I was--I no longer had to act on them. The truth actually did set me free. The Lord also brought an old friend from childhood back into my life. She was about to go through a very hard time, and God arranged it so that she became a Christian, I became her mentor, and she became a safe close female friend for me. God is so good.

After a year, my debts were paid, and the Lord said I needed some more new friends. So I started going to different churches in the town where I lived. I liked several of them, and since the services were at different times, I could attend two or three churches. This enlarged my circle of friends rapidly. I told my story in all the churches, sometimes to the whole congregation, sometimes in small groups, sometimes to the pastor and the deacon board. I felt I needed to do so, since some of the people knew me "before". I found everyone to be accepting and supportive, and God was given the glory. After about three years, I was surprised when I realized that I had begun to find men attractive. I prayed about it and cautiously started dating. I met my future husband on a blind date set up by a mutual friend. We married just over a year later on December 29, 2001. We are still married, and we still live right outside the town where all of this happened. I still work as a pharmacist, but I go out and minister whenever I'm invited to go along with my crazy charismatic friends.

So, how do we learn from Donna's story? Donna and her husband Larry are still great friends with us. They spent five years with Lori and me in our "home small group" with six other couples and families. We still keep and in touch and pray together. Larry recently lost both his parents in a car accident three years ago. But, I learned through this wonderful friendship to put on Christ and love in a real way. I was able, through Donna's testimony, to learn how to witness and treat friends. I also made a commitment to be helpful and safe to any young person who struggled with same-sex attraction.

When I got up this morning I put on my clothes. I dressed up nicely because I was a Pastor who was preaching to a group of believers. I didn't put on my swim suit to pose and show off all my muscles. I didn't put on my best black suit to look like I was going to a funeral. I didn't put on my casual flip flops and garden digging shorts, even though there is nothing wrong with having those outfits. I chose to put on my clothes with the intention that they would be part of me all this day, that they would go where I go and do what I do. They will cover me and make me presentable to others. That is the purpose of clothes. In the same way, the apostle is saying to us, "Put on Jesus Christ when you get up in the morning." Make Him a part of your life this



day. Intend that He go with you everywhere you go, and that He act through you in everything you do. Call upon His resources. Live your life in Christ.

Puritan Preacher, John Gill said it this way, "As a man puts on his clothes when he rises in the morning, we dress ourselves in Christ's righteous apparel. We slip into His sleeves of strength, we button up His attitudes, we tie on His manners, and we dress in the coat of His character. We don't do that without the help and power of our livery valet the Holy Spirit." I had to actually look up the words for "livery and valet". I found out on a site an article called, "Seven Downton Abbey Terms American's Don't Know," that the word "livery" is the Old English word for lively and colorful clothes which servants wore when they were upstairs serving in the main rooms of the English Lords. They had to be dressed in wonderful apparel to be in the proximity of the royal residents; different from being downstairs. Also "valet" isn't someone who parks cars, as we use the word today; valets were the man servants who helped dress the Lord for the day. He would stand by putting on the clothing, pressing out the wrinkles, and brushing, in order to help the Earl dress rightly. That is a great picture of what the Holy Spirit wants to do for us in this counter-cultural world. He wants to help us be "like Christ!" Who doesn't want to understand the change that our Salvation brings to all of us? We need to address today's issues by first "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ!"

These words have forever been made famous by their connection with the conversion of Saint Augustine. Augustine was a young man in the fourth century who lived a wild, carousing life, running around with evil companions, doing everything they were doing. He forbade himself nothing, went into anything and everything. His words themselves allow us to understand that he wanted the freedom to love anyone he wanted. And, as people still do today, he came to hate himself for it. When we try to chase after the wrong things in life for our identity, we will find it somehow unfulfilling. One day he was with his friend in a garden, and he walked up and down, bemoaning his inability to change. He said, "O, tomorrow, tomorrow, and tomorrow! How can I free myself from these terrible urges within me that drive me to the things that hurt me?" And in his despair, as he walked in the garden, he suddenly heard what he thought was the voice of a child — perhaps some children were playing in the garden next door — and the voice said, "Take and read, take and read." He could not remember any children's games with words like that, but the words stuck. He went back to the table and found laying on it a copy of Paul's letter to the Romans. So he opened the Bible, and God searched His heart! If anyone, no matter our situation, truly searches for all that Christ is, God says we will find Him. Augustine flipped the

Scriptures open, and these were the words he read: *“Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies, and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ... Romans 13:13-14a”*.

Augustine said that at that moment he opened his life to Christ. He had known about Him, but had never surrendered to Him. But that moment he did, and he felt the healing touch from Christ cleansing His life. He was never the same man again. He didn't change all at once; he constantly had struggles to forsake old things and ways of life. Augustine went on to become one of the greatest Christians of all time. Here is a quote that has made an impression in my life: *“You, God, made us for Yourself, and our hearts find no peace till they rest in You!”*

I asked Donna, three questions and her responses follow:

- “What could we share with anyone outside our church who are associated with the LGBTQ?” This is what she says: *“They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care as the saying goes. Whatever your point of contact, in whatever way possible, establish a loving, caring, appropriate relationship. This community of people struggles with anxiety, childcare issues, finances, addiction, loneliness, depression...everything that everyone else struggles with. The church has answers that are relevant and helpful because Jesus loves them where they are, and it's ok if we do too. The same Scriptures that we find comforting are comforting to them. The first step is the step of getting over our differences and focusing on what is the same. Human needs are met in God's superabundance.”*
- “What would you say to any Christian who struggles with same-sex attraction?” This is what she said: *“Christians who are struggling with same-sex attraction--there are so many points along this road as you can see in my own testimony. Because the lie that people are born gay is such a deep deception, Christians who counsel and help must understand it is a lie, but must also understand it is not necessarily the first place to start a conversation. My way out was Spirit led, and I recommend a Spirit-led, prayerful, individualized approach to ministry. I believe that there are many reasons people could be gay, but there is one thing in common--a deep wound/void where a lie has been planted. Cultivating a mindset where the person is open to considering other reasons why they might have same-sex attractions and emotions opens the door to the truth of what happened to him or her. Remember, God is in charge and He is patient.”*
- “What would you say to parents and grandparents who are praying for their loved ones?” (and note the encouragement she gives in her response) *“Parents and grandparents are helped by being given permission to continue to love and accept their kids. Hearing my testimony and that of others like me has also been a source of great hope. For teenagers still at home, I recommend an initial discussion where both parties may state what they think in the most respectful manner possible. After this, in a Christian home, I recommend that the home become "gay-neutral", meaning that there is no preaching on one hand, and no grand standing on the other. As needed, follow up discussions can be held, but they should not be "in the moment" as situations arise. This avoids a lot of unnecessary arguments where things escalate and both parties say hurtful things to each other. Gay neutral also means that friends will be coming to the home, but there should not be any overt signs that the friend may be "more than a friend", and the friends will be welcome. Otherwise, parents will not be seeing much of their kids and will not know who they are hanging out with. And pray, pray, pray. I personally know of one instance where after a few months of this*

approach, the 15 year old daughter decided she was no longer gay and began dating boys (with no intervention). For older children who are out of the home and visiting, home/family rules should be observed. If parents have allowed unmarried heterosexual partners to sleep in the same room, an LGBTQ child may rightly point out hypocrisy if they are not allowed the same. Start thinking about this now. The bottom line is to love as Jesus loved, and minister as He ministered. To the people who came and were curious, He said "Follow me". Those that followed Him learned the truth from what He taught and how He lived. For some of them, a day came when they could not accept something that He taught, and they stopped following Him. He loved all of them. Those that stopped following still learned something, and I like to think they are like I was--on a journey back to the Father."

That is what Jesus Christ is capable of doing! He gives us all the power to love. If we but choose to exercise this power in the moment that needs it, we can release in this world this radical, radical force that has the power to change everything around us. It will change our homes, our lives, our communities, our nations, the world — because a risen Lord is available to us, to live through us.

I love J. B. Philips' translation of this last verse: *"Let us be Christ's men from head to foot, and give no chance to the flesh to have its fling. ((Romans 13:14) J.B. Philips).*" That is the way to live. That is how we keep from being trapped into the agendas and accusing currents of this world. This is how we reach lovingly into the lives of those who want to follow Christ and truly love Him. This is what it means to be a real Christian- dress up, put on Christ before this world.

But some may say, "I'm not good enough, how can God even want me?" Paul reminds us that we must not deceive ourselves and believe we love Christ but do not move away from those dark things of the old life. He says this in 1 Corinthians 6:9, *"Don't you know that those doing such things have no share in the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who live immoral lives, who are idol worshipers, adulterers or homosexuals— will have no share in His Kingdom. Neither will thieves or greedy people, drunkards, slanderers, or robbers."* So, is Paul saying if I do one of these sins, God will send me to hell? No. At the same time "heterosexuality" will not get anyone to heaven either. Paul is reminding us that if our life character is to do these things, we deserve hell because we are running from Him and are all by nature sinners. Even if the only sin we committed was thievery, we would still deserve hell. But everything on this list can be forgiven. Then he writes: *"such were some of you"* (vs. 11). What? Go back and underline that phrase! Some of those Christians were doers and practitioners of those things? Yes, and I love how the Living Bible says it: *"There was a time when some of you were just like that but now your sins are washed away, and you are set apart for God; and He has accepted you because of what the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God have done for you"* (1 Cor. 6:10).

Following Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior means that He washes us, sanctifies us, and justifiably accepts us in His Son's righteousness. We are people washed, ironed out, and refreshingly clean from all our sins. We still seem to call some sins "more heinous" than others. But God doesn't have a scale from 1-to-10. All sin is the same before Him. A lie is just as bad as a murder. A sexual misconduct is the same as envy or hate. And the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all our sins! Oh, that we would run to our Savior today! Have we grasped the inestimable privilege of actually choosing to be clothed with the Life and Love of the Lord Jesus Christ? Is this

becoming a habit of heart and mind? In a world that wants to fight and trap us, and call us haters and unloving, let's show them how to put on Jesus!

Will you pray with me?

“Thank You, Father, for the freedom and the power You have given us to clothe ourselves with Christ and no longer gratify the desires of our flesh. Thank You for Your cleansing power. Thank You for Your indescribable love that picks up our ruined lives and washes us clean. Oh, the suffering souls crying out for love in a world that seldom cares. Father, forgive us if we've lost our passion for the lost. Help us remember there are billions left to win. Savior Jesus, we thank You that You have not left us in our own states of sin. We look to the cross, and thank You for saving us! Holy Spirit, we ask that You would continually turn our eyes upon the deep love You have displayed to us in Jesus, and that out of gratitude for the amazing grace we see there, our hearts and lives would be changed. Continue to conform us into the image and identity of Your Son, so that our witness will be winsome. We pray, in Jesus' love which will never let us go, Amen.”

**Praying to put on Jesus today,
Pastor Corvin <><**

Quote: “Should we warn others of the dangers of sin? Of course we should! But how are we doing it? It has been said about the great nineteenth-century Evangelist Dwight Lyman Moody that he was most qualified to preach about hell and the wrath of God because he did it with tears. Humility is a great place to start, especially when our goal is to point people to Christ. I've yet to meet anyone who was introduced to Jesus by someone who acted holier than thou! Only when we view ourselves as sinners are we able to see other sinners as God does.” ... Chris Yuan (Holy Sexuality, pg. 35.)

Quote: “Holy Sexuality- the purpose of this phrase is to transcend the current secular paradigm of sexual orientation that is unable to point toward God's clear intent. This term is meant to simplify and disentangle the confusing conversations around sexuality. The truth is God's standard for everyone is holy sexuality: which is- 'chastity in singleness and faithfulness in marriage and purity in both.'” ... Chris Yuan (pg. 46).

Quote from song:

“Don't tell them Jesus loves them
Till you're ready to love them too
Till your heart breaks from the
sorrow
And the pain they're going through
With a life full of compassion
May we do what we must do
Don't tell them Jesus loves them
Till you're ready to love them too” ...
Steve Camp

