

TABLE TALK

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...these words... shall be upon your heart; you shall
teach them... and talk of them... Deut. 6:6,7



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The LMS 20th Anniversary

The June gathering of the LMS for its annual Conference and Convention was very special this year in that it was also a time of celebration and thanksgiving for twenty years as a church body. The worship and conference presentations all centered on the four Reformation Solas that make up the seal of the LMS (see the upper right hand corner of this page).

Beginning with this issue, the conference presentations, each focusing on one of these solas, will be included in the upcoming issues of Table Talk.



LMS President, Rev. Dr. Ralph Spears, donning his scholar's hat, such as was worn in Luther's day.

The First Sola: Sola Gratia (Grace Alone)

Rev. Dr. John S. Erickson

The task set forth by our Lord to the first disciples was that they should "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Fa-

(Continued on page 2)

A response To The Supreme Court's Decison on Same-Sex Marriage

As a church body the LMS has not made a statement on the recent court decision, but we fully endorse what has been stated on the web site of the International Lutheran Council of which we are a member (<http://www.ilc-online.org/2015/06/29/american-lutherans-respond-to-supreme-courts-legalization-of-same-sex-marriage/>).

In addition, included in this newsletter is a presentation titled, *Does Love Win?*, by Rev. Mark Jeske of *Time of Grace Ministry*, that addresses the issue. See page 6.

ther and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything [He had] commanded [them].” He did so with the promise that He would be “with [them] always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:19,20). The calling to this task has been called “The Great Commission,” and has been understood to continue as the task of the Church of Jesus Christ on down through the centuries of time and up to, and including, the present day. And what does that task entail? It is the sharing of the good news of the Gospel... which is summarized for us in The Four Reformation Solas of the LMS-USA, namely: That Salvation is by Grace Alone, through Faith Alone, in Christ Jesus Alone, as revealed to us in Scripture Alone.

Grace Alone

Armin J. Panning in *The People’s Bible: Galatians, Ephesians*, p. 149, writes of how Paul in those familiar words of Ephesians 2:8 and 9 “gives center stage to the concept of grace. Like love and mercy, ‘grace’ gives us a glimpse into the heart and mind of God. The essential aspect of God’s grace is that it speaks of a quality in God that makes him willing - yes, even eager - to give us undeserving sinners great and precious gifts.”

In a general sense, grace has to do with God’s activity rather than with His nature. “Grace is the dimension of divine activity that enables God to confront human indifference and rebellion with an inexhaustible capacity to forgive and to bless” [Gilbert Bilezikian, *Grace*, Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. 1, p. 898].

Right from the beginning we see divine grace. We see divine grace in the garden of Eden in God’s response to the sin of our first parents (Gen. 3:15, 21). God’s calling of Abraham was of grace. But not only Abraham’s calling with its promise of blessing, but through him, to

bring blessing to his descendants, was also of grace (Gen. 12: 2,3).

Both the election of Abraham and God’s promise of universal blessing find expression in the covenant which God made with Abraham. The purpose of that covenant was that the grace of God might be extended to the whole human race. “My covenant is with you, And you shall be the father of a multitude of nations... And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant” (Gen. 17:4,7). “This promise was to be understood as finding fulfillment on the basis of grace, not of race, so that it would become applicable to all Abraham’s offspring - not only to Jewish believers, his racial descendants, but also to his spiritual descendants, believers from all nations who profess a faith like Abraham’s” (Rom. 4:16). [ibid., p. 899].

It should be pointed out that the word grace is not found in the Old Testament. What we do find is the Hebrew expression *hen*. *Hen* has to do with favor. We also find another Hebrew term, *hesedh*. This is a term which has to do with divine as well as human love. Israel based its election upon God’s favor, a favor without end. “In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,” says the LORD your Redeemer. “To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again” (Isa. 54: 8-9). [P. Kirn, *Grace*, The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, p. 41] So, the concept is there in the Old Testament, however, it is also the case that the Old Testament merely anticipates and prepares for the full expression of grace as we find it in the New Testament. On the basis of

John 1:17 that grace must be understood as a New Testament concept and that it was not really present under the Old Covenant. The Apostle John explains it this way. "The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (v. 17). In other words grace 'came into being,' 'came to pass,' 'happened' historically in Jesus Christ. That is why they did not have a word for 'grace' prior to the time of Jesus Christ, in the Old Testament era." [The Grace of God, James A. Fowler, <http://www.christinyou.net/pages/gracegod.html>]

The word John uses in the Greek is the word Charis. Paul speaks of this grace...and for him the concept of grace is fundamental to the Gospel. "It is God's free favor toward sinners, effecting their salvation in Christ. It is entirely spontaneous and excludes all relation of debt or merit. It is mediated by redemption; its result is righteousness (Rom. 5:21) or forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7), and its aim is eternal life (Rom. 5:21). [O. Kirn, p. 41].

The difference between the Old Testament and New Testament understandings might be thought of in this way, that "the Hebrew words in the Old Testament referred primarily to the attribute of God, whereas the Greek word Charis in the New Testament is used to refer to the new, and unique activity of God in Jesus Christ... Grace is the dynamic of God's activity in and by the Son, Jesus Christ." [Fowler].

Grace speaks of the salvation of God in Christ. Paul puts it this way, "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation" (Titus 2:11). Here we see a contrast with the Law of the Old Testament. The Law had no provisional power within it to enable one's keeping of the commandments. The keeping of the Law could only be attempted by means of human effort... a striving for meritorious obedience. Grace on the other

hand is "the functional provision of God for the behavioral expression of God's character within mankind.... grace does not instrumentally cause functional behavior in man, but grace is essentially the dynamic function of God in man to express His character in human behavior by His Son, Jesus Christ." [Ibid]

In Roman Catholicism grace is regarded as "infused." The idea is that the believer is "infused" with the capability of living and functioning in God-pleasing righteousness and good works. But if this is the case... then we have works coming into the picture, works that are meritorious. But the proper biblical understanding is that grace is not instrumental. Grace is a gift of God and not of works (i.e., human effort). Grace is the "essential expression of the vital character of God within" the Christian who is "receptive to God by faith. The Law demanded works of obedience. Grace is received by faith so as to express God's vital and essential good character in good works of behavior." [Ibid] Grace is God at work... God's doing in the life of the believer. Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

The grace of God by which we are saved is the "favor Dei," which is that merciful, affectionate disposition, that good will of God toward men, according to which He forgives sins to those who are worthy of eternal death. It is the unmerited love of God toward men (Jn. 3:16; Titus 3:4,5). From this concept of grace must be excluded every regard for the meritoriness of men. God's grace is not in the least affected, motivated, or influenced by any worthiness in us; in fact, the slightest injection of

man's merit and worthiness utterly destroys the concept of grace. "If by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace; otherwise work is no more work" (Rom. 11:6). The grace of God and the merit of man are exclusive terms. [Koehler, p. 79]

Prevenient grace. I mention this because I was on the fringe of a controversy involving this teaching by a pastor I knew a few years ago. Prevenient grace is a term used to describe the grace given by God that precedes the act of a sinner exercising saving faith in Jesus Christ. In other words a grace "by the proper use of which man is supposed to be able to affect his conversion." [Edward W. A. Koehler, A Summary of Christian Doctrine, p. 79]

Since denying the necessity of God's grace prior to a sinner's conversion is clearly against biblical teaching, the non-Calvinist theological systems have to affirm a doctrine of grace that precedes a person's exercising of saving faith. Since non-Calvinists do not believe the saving grace of God always results in the sinner coming to Christ, Christians down through the ages have referred to a type of faith they call prevenient. Simply put, prevenient grace is the grace of God given to individuals that releases them from their bondage to sin and enables them to come to Christ in faith but does not guarantee that the sinner will actually do so. Thus, the efficacy of the enabling grace of God is determined not by God but by man. . .

1 John 5:1 states clearly that the cause of a person's believing in Jesus Christ is that he was born again (i.e., regenerated), by which John had already told us is "not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13) and is something necessary in order to even perceive the kingdom of God (John 3:3), let alone enter into it. As long as we recognize the

biblical truth of the natural man's deadness in sin (Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13), his need of a new heart (Ez. 11:19, 36:26), and that man is a pile of bones needing to be breathed on by God to be brought to life (Ez. 37:3-7), we can see that man does not need to be made "better" or "partially alive" but that man needs to be resurrected! Therefore, the doctrine of prevenient grace is without biblical support. [www.GotQuestions.org]

God offers His grace to all. If grace is defined as "God's undeserved favor," there is a sense in which it can be said that all are recipients of God's grace. The fact that we live and breathe is due only to the grace of God (1 Tim. 6:13). The fact that all (the righteous and unrighteous) can enjoy favorable weather is due to the grace of God (Matt. 5:45). But we are thinking here of grace in a more narrow sense... that of salvation. And yet even here, the offer is made to all. "God so loved the world that he gave..." (Jn. 3:16). "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men (Titus 2:11). However, this does not mean that every man, woman, and child will be saved. The Bible is clear that this cannot be. What this does mean is that God is a gracious God and He has made heaven potentially available to all who will receive his offer of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:12; Acts 2:38-39).

Access to Grace. God has provided access to His saving grace... there is no secret formula necessary. And... as has been mentioned... it is available to all. What is this access to grace? It is The Means of Grace... Word and Sacrament. The Bible clearly teaches we are saved by grace through faith. Romans 10 and 11 are informative in this regard. The necessary faith is a gift of God... and He makes this faith available to us through His Word... through the preaching of His Word. The fact that people do not have this faith is because they have refused His

Word... they have refused His preachers (the prophets he sent to speak to the people in His name). Further, our Lord instituted the Sacraments through which he gives to us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Cheap Grace. Cheap grace is a term coined by the German Theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his volume, *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937). He spoke of cheap grace as “the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.” For Bonhoeffer cheap grace boils down to an emphasis on the benefits of Christianity without consideration of the costs.

Cheap grace may have slightly different looks depending on the denomination or distinctive practices of a particular group, but in simple terms the idea is that as long as a person makes a profession of faith in Jesus, that person is saved (Rom. 10:9), even if there are no fruits of faith evident in that life (Matt. 7:16-20). Biblical discipleship, on the other hand, is costly (see Luke 14:25-33; Matt. 4:17; Acts 2:38; Lk. 6:46).

Cheap grace seeks to hide the cost of discipleship from people. It seeks to claim that as long as we make a profession of faith, we are saved. God’s grace covers all our sins. Again, that is a wonderful truth! The apostle Paul says as much when he writes, “Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:2-21). Yet, right after writing that, Paul follows it with this: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue to sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Rom. 6:1-2). Salva-

tion by grace alone through faith alone is so much more than simply mouthing the words “Jesus is Lord.” We are not saved by a profession of faith. We are not saved by praying the sinners prayer. We are not saved by signing a card or walking an aisle. We are saved by a living and active faith (James 2:14-26), a faith that manifests itself in repentance, obedience and love of God and of our neighbor. Salvation is not a transaction; it’s a transformation. Paul says it best when he says that we are “new creations” in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). There is nothing “cheap” about grace! [Ibid]

Continuing in grace. Although there are many who would deny it, it seems a clear teaching of Scripture that it is possible for a Christian to fall from grace. Paul warns, “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!” (1 Cor. 10:12). If it were impossible to fall from grace, why did Paul feel it necessary to “urge” the members of the congregation in Antioch to “continue [note: present tense] in the grace of God” (Acts 13:43). In Galatians 3:26-27, Paul describes the Galatian Christians: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” But then, a little later he speaks of some of these ‘Christians:’ You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (Gal. 5:4).

The state of grace must be continually held to if there is any hope of not falling from divine favor and if one’s initial reception of Heaven’s grace will not have been “in vain.” (2 Cor. 6:1 in connection with 1 Cor. 15:10). The promise of a gracious God, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

“Grace is a soul-thrilling concept; it must be deeply appreciated, but never manipulated or distorted.” [Ibid.]

Gay Marriage Is Here. Does Love Win?

1 Corinthians 6:1-11

by

Rev. Mark Jeske

The entire country is abuzz with discussion over gay marriage. In past months and weeks, there has been an intense national debate, once again, about whether gay marriage is appropriate.

Does love really win? The Supreme Court decided by the narrowest of margins that the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act – one man, one woman – would no longer be allowed to restrict people's rights to marry. Gay marriage is now the law of the land. It is now a federal decision; the state's opinions no longer matter on this and gay people will be free now to marry anywhere in the United States. This is a big deal.

This is a social discussion, it's a legal discussion, but there also is a spiritual dimension to this because human beings were created by God and our gender was given to us. Marriage was invented by God on the sixth day of creation and we need to take a look at the spiritual aspects. Join me for that discussion from God's point of view.

2015 is sure going to go down as a year of social change. Things that have been in the works for a long time in that particular year have really kind of blown apart, haven't they? We need to decide what is the right hill to die on and what is not and Christians have not always picked their way through that minefield; it's harder than it looks. You don't want to hear from me, but you do need to hear from God today and I invite you to take your Bible and open it up to 1 Corinthians 6 and realize that same gender sexual attraction is not just something that erupted within your lifetime. This has been going on forever. It is simply part of the brokenness that has exhibited itself among human behav-

iors as soon as there were more than two people.

At the time that St. Paul wrote these words, in the time of the Roman Empire and in the Greek culture which it was built on top of, there wasn't even a word for homosexuality because it was just assumed that an aggressive sexually active male would have a whole variety of partners. It was not considered essential that you would limit yourself to just your wife and it was considered to be somewhat normal that you would sometimes have a gay lover, preferably younger than you. There was a big preference for boys in those days. The Emperor Hadrian, for instance – lived a couple of years after St. Paul, he had children himself, of course, but he also had this young man who would travel with him and everybody knew would share his bed with him. Today, in our country as Christianity and the Christian Bible explicitly has less and less influence on our public policy, it's not that whole new categories of sins are arising; it's just coming above ground because it was always there.

There are differing estimates as to the percentage of the population that has a similar sex attraction and there are some people that honestly can swing both ways, I guess that's the "B" in LGBT. There are plenty of people who – like as Hadrian did – have preferences in both directions. It's always been that way. The only thing to argue or debate about is how big a portion of the population is it. The gay right's advocates would like to have you believe that ten percent of people are naturally inclined to be attracted to people of a similar gender. I have read some studies that it's fewer than five percent in actuality; that ten percent is kind of inflated. But if you put together all the people

who not only live that lifestyle but also have it on their mind and would like to do it or fantasize about it or think about it or maybe don't do it but they're okay with it and like they would do it if they could or found the right person, that number could be substantial.

So here it is: Now is this a hill to die on or not? Should we Christians back off of this the way we backed off of the opposition you may have heard of in this very church 75 years ago, that interracial marriages were evil and not God's intent? Or is this a hill to die on and say, "No, God has spoken," we can go no further. Let's listen to God.

1 Corinthians 6 and its sister chapter right next door in chapter 7 have some of the most profound insights into human sexuality in all of the Bible and a couple of weeks ago if you were here for my message about divorce and what needs to be done when there is a dysfunctional marriage, how do you talk to people, how do you think about marriage and divorce, chapter 7 is powerful. It is also powerful to celebrate singleness. All of you who are not married right now are not second class citizens in God's eyes. You have a great life and Paul said, "I wish you could be like me." In fact, if you are a widow, for instance, he says, "Don't rush into getting remarried; I think you'd be happier staying single. I love my life," he said. Do you believe me? You're looking – here's what I'm getting from the single people – you can't, I know, you're probably going to sneak onto Match.com before I'm even down to the end of "amen," aren't you?

Love where you are in life. If you're married and maybe your marriage is difficult, don't fantasize about being single again; it's just going to make it harder. If you're single, don't hate your life and say, "I'd be happy if I was married." Let me hear all the single people say, "I love my life." Okay, let's hear all the married people say, "I love my spouse." Alright, see? Love where you're at;

that's the message of 1 Corinthians 7.

1 Corinthians 6 helps Christians find their way in a culture that was going crazy. Christians were the counterculture in the Roman Empire, in a place with no moral rules; where sexual immorality was everywhere. Christians – the longer I live, the more I realize we're becoming a counterculture again – where the majority of the herd is not interested in what God says; they're interested in what I want. There isn't even a unified Christian witness; half the Christian church even thinks that these words in the Scripture no longer apply.

What words are those? Glad you asked. Chapter 6 begins with a rebuke against this congregation because they were suing each other in court and Paul said how shameful that is. Christian congregations are supposed to be a place of peace, of love, of support for one another. You're supposed to walk in and suddenly feel a vibe where you can let your guard down, where nobody's going to hustle you, take advantage of you, push you around, or try in some way to use you or manipulate you into being somebody you're not. But it's to be a place of affirmation, a place of healing, a place of forgiveness, a place where you can get a new charge of hope to go at living your life again. And if people perceive that your congregation is full of fighting and enmity, you're going to drive people away instead of welcome them in. So the first two paragraphs are quite a stern scolding about their impetuosity and running into court and suing each other. He said, "You would be better to suffer an injustice than let the public see you fighting with each other."

Now suddenly, he pivots a little bit and unloads some intense teaching about living in the counterculture of Christianity and a world full of appetites that has not been informed by Jesus and his word and there's a very powerful sentence starting in the third paragraph: "Do you not know

that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?" Wicked – the Greek word for wicked σατανικος, means people who are not right with God. They don't have his righteousness. They're at odds with God; they're on the outside looking in. In other words, our goal is not just to try to be busybodies and snoops and get into people's business and try to mess with their lives by making them shamed or feeling bad about themselves. Our goal is to stop people from committing spiritual suicide because if you are disconnected from God, you're disconnected from life itself. You are never going to have a happy life right now in time because God will not let you be happy. Guilt will hang over you that you cannot get rid of by any effort of your own and just doing whatever pleases you or what you feel like is not going to make you feel better. You will know in your heart it's wrong.

Secondly, you will be miserable in eternity for the Day of Judgment is coming and people, you and I, will be held accountable for what we believe and how we've lived. So this is a big deal. Don't be deceived; Satan will use every human desire and every human appetite and try to turn it against you and manipulate you into pandering to your appetites no matter what the damage to other people and to you. Don't be deceived.

If you were the devil or you were on Satan's sales staff and you got a big sales meeting coming and you have to show how many people you have – whose lives you've messed up – and so you know you've got your quota. What tools would you use to go at people to corrupt them and make them act crazy and go against God? Where would you attack? I think I know where I would. What are the things where Satan gets his wedge in? Sexual temptation is always a winner, an old standby. In fact, if I were Satan, I would start

with that. I wouldn't waste time dinking around; I'd go straight for that and try that first and see what I could work. Making people miserable where they're at so they'll cheat to try to get what they want.

Unfulfilled in marriage? Have an affair. Single but wishing you had somebody? Have your boyfriend stay over and pretend to be married for a while. Don't have the patience, he won't propose yet? So what? Bring him in. Take the shortcut. I'd start at sexual temptation.

If that wasn't working right away – money, money, money, money always gets people's attention. Wave some money under people's noses and get them by the nose and hook them and drag them off. I'd work at people's mouths; do damage with your mouth. And actually the biggest of them all is I'd get them to pay no attention to God. I would disconnect people from God's word and I would put substitutes in their place for them to worship and chase after that will promise to be much more fulfilling. It worked with Eve and so that's exactly what we've got here.

But the dirty ten, the terrible ten attitudes – now, this is not an exhaustive complete list of all human sin – but these are ten examples of lifestyles, not just sins, but lifestyles or ways of living, that without repentance will kill you spiritually. These are all suicidal and not just for unbelievers; they do this because they don't know any better. But Paul was writing to Christians because these ten things were making inroads into the congregation. These are temptations and troubles for you and me, too.

Now as we take a look at this terrible ten, be careful of your pointing finger and I'll be careful of mine, too. This pointing finger makes it seem like I'm up here and you're down there. Everybody's broken and the brokenness that's going to be listed here are examples of brokenness in you, too. We're all born broken.

We're born disconnected from God. We have to be reconnected and that is the Spirit's mission with you and that's the Spirit's mission to make you a connector to help other people.

Here are ten that without repentance will give you an unhappy life and a miserable eternity. Four are sexual, three are money, two are mouth-related, and one – the biggest of them all, in fact – is idolatry, which is actually the first commandment. God really only needed one commandment because if you got something else on the throne of your life, all the other stuff just kind of flows out of that. It's really the original sin.

"Don't be deceived," now here come ten: "Neither the sexually immoral," the Greek word σατανικος means people who have sexual activity outside of marriage in any one of its many ways; so just a generic word for non-marital sexuality. Let's just say any kind of sexual activity outside of marriage is something that puts you in this category. And don't shoot the messenger, by the way. These are not my rules for you; this is your Creator's rules for your life.

"Sexual immorality." "Idolaters," I mentioned already. "Nor adulterers," now that's hard to figure out in English. There are not good exact English words for what is said in the original Greek; σατανικος in Greek means adultery in the sense that it's a marriage-wrecking activity, as well. In other words, a single woman who has an affair with a married guy, they're not only sinning against each other and against their own bodies, they're also sinning against that guy's wife because they're wrecking her life, too. He's betraying her and she is stealing what does not belong to her like David stole Bathsheba away from Uriah. So this is sexual immorality with victims besides just the two of them.

The next two words relate to male-to-male sexual activity and here are

two words that do not have exact English equivalents. Depends on which translation you have; I'm using the NIV here. My older NIV that I have right here says "male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders." Neither of those is a good translation. The newer 2011 version or the NIV says, "Men who have sex with men."

That's actually a lot closer; although there are two different types of activity described. One of them, *malakos*, the first word that's on the bad ten, are the soft boys. In other words, they are the receivers in sexual activity. These are people who participate in the homosexual activity, man to man, where it is done to you. The other word, *arsenokoites*, means a man who has sex with another man. It's not offenders or criminals, it's not as though rapists are being condemned here; just the very activity itself. The doer and the do-ee, as it were. Does that make sense? We've got kids here; I can't get too much more specific than that. Nod if you get my drift. I'm serious. Make a motion with your head if you follow me. Okay, thank you.

That's bad. It's on God's list. That as a lifestyle without repentance is spiritual suicide. This is a hill to die on, yes it is. Let's finish the list and it's not just that God is picking on people with that particular vulnerability. "Thieves and the greedy." If you have an appetite for money more than God, you're committing suicide, as well. Money lust is a form of idolatry and if you want it bad enough to take it from somebody else and without repentance, you're living in spiritual death. In fact, you're not living at all. It needs to be recognized, repented of, and rebuked.

Now two things having to do with the mouth: "Drunkards." If you pour too much alcohol down your throat to the point where you lose control of your life or you become addicted to it, that also is a form of spiritual

suicide. Now drunkard is like a mocking word; we don't use that word too much today anymore. It was more popular, I'd say, a hundred years ago. Today we'd say an alcoholic and today alcoholics often are viewed as victims or like it's a disease, like it just came over you. But there's no way out of alcohol abuse unless the individual chooses to hold himself or herself responsible for her actions and believe that with help, you can change your attitudes and behaviors.

"Slanderers," are people who are verbally abusive. You use talk, you use your mouth, to beat other people down. You think, "Man, I can see that these other things are sinful but just talk? That doesn't seem all that serious a business." Yes, it is.

Or "swindlers." In other words, this is white collar crime. Thieves is blue collar crime where you break into people's houses and steal stuff. Swindlers are when you embezzle money, when you falsify documents at your business, or when you try to cheat the government out of what you legitimately owe, or when you try to cheat a customer; that's called swindling. When you live that life without repentance, it is spiritual suicide. That's what some of you – it's a very powerful word right here; if you have your Bible open, check it out – and that is what some of you "were." Change is possible. "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

So one of the things we know is that it's not like there's all these regular sins and then being gay is like the nasty sin or the super bad sin; it's just one more way of being broken. And shaming and having contempt for people and scorning and shunning people who have sexual addictions or who are pointed in the wrong direction with their desires is not how to bring about that change.

They are as worthy of being loved by Jesus as you and I are. You and I are as broken as anybody – when I'm saying you and I, I mean you and I who are more heterosexually oriented. I fully expect that there would be any number of people here today who feel a longing for same sex attraction and I'm not sure how you're doing in wrestling with that or how often you've caved into that temptation. I don't think any less of you for that as I wouldn't expect you to be overly judgmental of me for my many weaknesses. We're all broken. We're all desperately in need of Jesus' forgiveness but that needs an attitude of repentance on your knees to say, "I have sinned. Lord, by your standards, I need help. Help me. I've been washed. You washed me of my sins in my baptism. I've been justified. The blood of Jesus from the cross has pronounced a 'not guilty' on me so that my past and its horrible weight has been lifted from me and I don't have to be dragged down by my past. I don't have to let my past mistakes define who I am right now. When I have a relationship with Jesus, his grace is new every morning and I count on that restart. I'm going to restart today. And I'm not going to let my past define me any longer. I've been sanctified. I'm not just struggling on my own. I have the Holy Spirit, the Sanctus Spiritus, sanctifying me. He lives within me to reload new software into my brain so I can think straight and to give me a spinal injection so I become a vertebrae; that I've got an actual spine and can stand up for what I know to be right. That I can use my mouth to honor God and my hands and feet to take me to good places and to do what is right."

So I am not interested in heaping scorn on people's past and if you're a straight person and you've got somebody in your family or one of your friends who has come out and said he or she is gay, shunning just does not work. If all the straight

people shun all the gay folks – the only place they can go to find some kind of affirmation is deeper into the gay world where the word of Jesus finds it harder and harder to get in. They need unconditional love – also the same way that Jesus treats you. What we’re interested in is not manipulating other people to make ourselves feel better. I’m not worried about gay marriage, for instance, being an assault on straight marriage, on heterosexual marriage.

Straight married people look at me right now: The biggest threat to your marriage isn’t some gay guy. It’s you. Straight people are the biggest risk to straight marriages and we’re doing a terrible job of it. Let’s just accept responsibility where it belongs and those of you who are married, take care of your marriages. We’ve got to be just as indignant about people who are not married living together; that’s a problem, too. A man and a woman who are living together and sharing a bed without being married are sinning as much as any gay person is. Repent of that and take care of some business. The greatest threat to your relationship with each other and with your God is you so it’s time to repent. Those are the hills to die on. That’s a place to take a stand and we today – I’m inviting you to jam your flagpole in the sand right here and say, “Right here. This is where it stops.” And even if we now once again become such a minority that we’re a counter-culture, so be it. It’s a price worth paying because that is the place of spiritual health. That is the place to be relieved of our sinful guilt. This is the way not to jeopardize our everlasting inheritance in heaven for these ten examples of unrepentant sin deny people the kingdom of God. And if you truly love somebody else, you’re not going to let him or her commit spiritual suicide. But let’s do it humbly; not picking that particular sin out in any kind of way as though it’s worse than anything else. Hum-

bly accepting the rebuke of others where we are wrong and letting ourselves be corrected. Daily repentance to get back on that road that Satan tries to keep knocking us off of and luring us off of and in this way, we’re showing that we’re interested in God’s opinion more than man’s opinion. And our culture may or may not help us as Christians. Sometimes it does; increasingly it doesn’t. We’re not going to let our value system be shaped by what happens to be allowed on television. But we want to know, Lord God, how may I serve you with my life.

Make sense? Alright, we’ve got work to do!

You know, this discussion of gay marriage and love wins is really important and it’s not a matter of some individuals putting their biases and prejudices on other people. The real issue here is not so much legal; the real issue is for you and me to dial into our God. This is a spiritual issue and you don’t truly love people who are committing spiritual suicide by letting them go ahead and do it. Love demands that you and I represent what our Creator and Savior God has revealed to us about his intent for the human race. Let’s love people enough to tell the truth.

Heavenly Father, We pray that you would help us to dial into you, our Creator and Savior. Let your thoughts be our thoughts and your words ours. Help us always to represent you well in your world and always to speak the truth in love. May our words always be truthful and loving. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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