

Against Nature

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[0 : 00] And this is the beginning of a conversation, not the end. And I'm aware as we come to a topic like this, there are all sorts of thoughts and hopes and desires.

People have different questions and they want different things. Some people would love to have sort of a Daily Wire, Ben Shapiro, you know, takedown about how the liberals are so bad.

And we could leave that just feeling so good about the fact that the church is conservative on social issues. Some of you are coming and you remember that you have friends and family members that are part of the LGBTQ plus community.

And you have questions about how can I interact with them and engage them? What do I say when I talk about these things? I had a seminary professor who reminded us any time we discuss this topic, we are talking about someone's relative or someone's friend.

Some people are coming to this topic and you're actually experiencing same-sex attraction of some sort. And they're unsure maybe what to do with it. There's questions people ask. Hey, can someone change their attraction?

[1 : 05] And if so, how? Maybe you're coming this morning and you already know that you disagree with what I'm going to say. And so you're just waiting to see how badly I mess it up this morning. I mention all of that today to set some expectations.

We're not going to address all of that this morning. In fact, I imagine many of you, if not all of you, are going to be a little bit disappointed. We're going to do one thing and one thing only, which is to lay out Paul's specific point in this specific passage.

Among pastors, there's this phrase we use that says, the point of the passage is the point of the sermon. And Paul is not making every point here.

He is saying one thing and really one thing only. And it's this, I'll tell you at the very beginning before we even pray. Paul's point is very simple and it's this. Homosexuality is against God the Creator's design for this world.

That's Paul's point. There's a Creator. He's made the world. He has a design. His design is for one man and one woman in marriage.

[2 : 19] If you're wildly offended this morning, I certainly hope it is not by me and my imperfections, but by the Word of God. And it's for that reason that I invite you to turn now.

We're in Romans chapter 1. We're going to start with verse 24. You can turn with me in your Bible. You can turn on your phone. You can turn on your worship guide.

Turn in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so that's why we read it now, starting at verse 24. Verse 26.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word.

[3 : 47] Father, our Father in heaven, we do thank you that you have created this world. We thank you that it's not an accident. It's not random. It's not chaotic.

But that you have given it an order and a design and an intention. And even more than that, we thank you that you haven't left us to figure that out on our own. But instead, you've spoken clearly to us in your Word.

And we ask that you would do that very thing this morning. That you would help us as we come to a passage that is challenging in our time and our place. That you'd help us to see and understand.

You give us great clarity and wisdom. You would do what we're not able to do by ourselves. Which is to hear clearly from you in your Word. To see and obey and respond in praise to you.

We ask all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. As I imagine most of you, if not all of you know, as we come to June, every year we have sort of this secular calendar of secular holidays.

[4 : 55] And June is not just a holiday. It's an entire month called Pride Month. Which is dedicated to celebrating the LGBTQ plus community. Now back in June of 2017, a Royal Dutch Airlines decided that they wanted to make their support of that community clear as possible.

And so they wanted to have a great advertising campaign around it. And they posted an image on Twitter that is now famous. We might say infamous. And the picture is very simple. It has three different seatbelts on it in a row from top to bottom. The first seatbelt at the very top has two buckles. The second seatbelt in the middle has two latches.

And then the third seatbelt at the very bottom has one buckle and one latch. And with that image, they said this in their tweet. It doesn't matter who you click with.

Happy Pride Amsterdam. And if you want to see the image I'm talking about, all you have to do is Google the phrase, it doesn't matter who you click with. Now as you think about that, what is the problem with that image?

[6 : 12] It in fact matters a whole lot who you click with. Even more than that, only one of those seatbelts actually works. Right?

Only the seatbelt at the bottom. It turns out for a seatbelt to work, you need one buckle and one latch. Who would have guessed? Right? And so this became infamous because this tweet was trolled all over the internet.

Right? All the comments under it and the retweets were saying, look, this actually, this is backfiring. Right? If I'm on an airline, which of those three seatbelts do I want to choose?

One and only one. Right? There's only one way to use a seatbelt where it actually works. Right? Only the seatbelt that has this complementarity to it, only one of them is actually going to be able to close and save you.

And so to state the obvious, a seatbelt needs one buckle and one latch. Why? Because that's the way it's designed.

[7 : 26] There is a creator. The seatbelt has a creator, right? He's designed the seatbelt to work in a certain way. That is Paul's very basic point in this passage.

You can look with me at verse 26. He says, God gave them up to dishonorable passions, for their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature.

And then he makes the same point, verse 27, about men. And the men likewise gave up natural relations with women. What does Paul mean here by contrary to nature?

What does he mean by giving up natural relations? When Paul uses this word nature, he's saying this, there is a design to the universe. There is a way that the universe has been created, has been designed to work.

It is not arbitrary. God, when he made this world, had a plan. He has an intention. There is, in fact, an owner's manual.

[8 : 28] This is not some random structure that we get to come to as a blank slate and try to figure out how it works. And so one of the major points is this, that Paul is making.

God has created men and women to complement each other sexually. We could say it another way. Sex between a man and a woman is the only sex that honors the intention of the creator.

And in 2024, we might take that a step further. We might say sex between a biological man and a biological woman, the only sex that honors the intention of the creator.

I'm gonna invite you to look with me on the back of your worship guide, which lays out this same point. The mandate for sexual relations in scripture is tied to the design of the body.

[9 : 37] The body has a purpose to it. It has a creation. The logic and good of marriage is tied to the design of those bodies. Male and female bodies are designed for one another in a reciprocal, complementary, and life-giving way.

Same-sex sexual activity signals a misuse of the body since homosexual acts thwart or work against the natural purpose of sexual design, which is another way of saying there's a creator, he has a creation.

He has made it to work in a specific way. Now, Paul doesn't say it here in this passage, but he makes it clear in other parts of scripture, it's not just that this is for a man and a woman, it's for a man and a woman who are married to each other.

We talked about this before, I think at least in our Sunday school at the end of 2022. Remember the ethicist David Jones says that this is the reason because sex is a life-uniting act, and so it must be accompanied with a life-uniting intention.

The act and the intention go together. That's why it's reserved for marriage. And so again, you can see this, this is on page seven of your worship guide. When human beings engage in homosexual activity, they enact an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality, the rejection of the creator's design.

[11 : 23] And so really we're repeating the same point over and over at this point, which is that God is the creator of this world. It is God, not us, who determine how this world is supposed to function.

It is God, not us, who determine what is the right and wrong use of our bodies. This brings up another point that goes back to last week.

If you were with us as we looked at verses 18 through 23, one of Paul's points is that there is this burning clarity in creation, that creation just screams about God and his ways.

It should be obvious to us that men and women are designed by God to go together, right? So how did Dutch airlines, how did they not think that this image was gonna backfire, right?

Is it not obvious two of those seatbelts don't work? Well, just think about what we saw last week.

Verse 18, very beginning, we were told the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

[12 : 49] In other words, it should be obvious. In fact, it is obvious. We just suppress it. God has made it clear in creation.

And so again, if you have your Bible with you, you can see this is from last week. Verse 22, claiming to be wise, they became fools. They were so caught up in this worship of the creation, not the creator, they missed a very elementary, a very basic mistake, right?

They should have known in advance this was going to be retweeted over and over. As we think about this argument, God is the great creator.

He's given us his intention for the world. I wanna say a couple things. First, to Christians and then to non-Christians. If you're a Christian, remember what we looked at in verse six.

Paul says, you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. We talked about the fact that if we belong to Jesus Christ and not to ourselves, he is the one who tells us how we work in this world.

[14 : 06] He's the one who tells us how we're supposed to use our bodies and what we're not supposed to do with him. And so if you belong to the creator, it is a logical step to say, you behave in the way that honors his creation.

If you belong to the creator, you behave in a way that honors his creation. And it turns out that God is the creator, cares a lot about what he's made.

Right? Imagine that if you're an artist and you create this great work of art and someone comes up before it and they just splatter new paint all over it. How's that artist gonna feel?

Oh, that's great. I'm glad they did what they wanted. No, you've taken my creation and you have misused it and abused it.

Part of what we believe as Christians is that this world and the creation in it really matter. We honor the world in the way that God has made it.

[15 : 14] It's God's creation. It's not ours. His intention, not ours. We use it in the way he says. So first I wanna tell you that.

God's the creator. Second thing I'll tell you is this. Look with me on page eight of your worship guide. It is widely accepted today that if a person senses a disjunction between biological sex and sexual desire, the only proper course of action is to accept their psychological state as their true authentic self.

But why? Why assume that feelings are more important than the body? And the quote is saying this.

Hey, look, you might have two things that don't match up. Your sexual desire and your body, they may not correspond to each other. Why would you choose your feelings over your body? That's an assumption you've made, right?

If you assume, well, of course, my feelings are what matter most, you need to ask the question why. Why did that win? Why didn't you say, oh, my desires must be wrong and my body must be right?

[16:32] I'm just gonna lay that question out there. There are books and volumes written about how in our culture we got to a place where we decided that feelings are more important than biology. And so I'll just leave you with that.

Why is it that the feelings win? Why isn't it that the body wins? And I'll just tell you again, the reason in the Christian worldview that the body wins is because God is the creator of heaven and earth. Body trumps feelings, not vice versa. We trust God the creator regardless of how we feel. You can feel very strongly that a seatbelt with two latches will keep you safe.

You can feel that as strongly as you want. That doesn't make it real. If you're in a plane crash, that is not the seatbelt that's gonna keep you safe.

It only works when it's used the way it's designed. It's only safe when it's used the way it's designed.

[17:50] I told you I was gonna have something for Christians and for non-Christians. If you're not a Christian, what I just said to you might not make sense at all. We actually have to back up a step.

The statement I just made doesn't make any sense unless there is in fact a creator of heaven and earth. And so you might say, man, that's great, Matthew, that you think there's a designer and a creator.

I actually don't think that. And so I do think my body's a blank slate and I can do with it whatever they want. Paul's point here actually rises or falls based on whether that is true.

His argument here, his discussion of homosexuality actually flows out of, it's underneath his claim about God as the creator. And so look with me now at verse 25.

He says, they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator. Logically, that's what comes first.

[18:49] That's the important point. Notice that word exchange. It's gonna show up, I believe, in the very next verse, verse 26. For this reason, God gave them up to dishonorable passions for their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature.

These two, it's not an accident that Paul uses the word exchange twice. He's telling us, hey, there's a logic to this. There's one exchange that happens first, then there's another exchange that flows out of that.

The real fundamental foundational problem is that they've exchanged the creator for the creation.

Now, guess what happens as a result of that? Many bad things happen.

One of them is this. And so Paul's argument rises or falls, it succeeds or fails based on whether he's right. Is there actually a creator to this world?

If it's not, if there's no creator, everything I've just said to you, you can throw away. Right? That's the actual question. Did God make man? And so if you're not a Christian, ultimately our disagreement probably isn't about sexuality fundamentally.

[20:03] Our disagreement's actually a disagreement about God. Has God made the world? And so we have to back up. We actually have to answer that question first.

Now, I'm not gonna unpack all of that for you. You know, there are also books and books that have been written about this. I wanna put a rock in your shoe. Think about this.

The fact that there is a man and a woman that come together to reproduce is the sign, one sign, that there is a creator.

And the reason for that is this. In her book, *Love Thy Body*, Nancy Piercy points out that evolution, macroevolution, actually can't explain why we have what she calls sexual dimorphism, which is the idea that we have sexual reproduction, not asexual reproduction.

She puts it this way. Sexual dimorphism cannot be explained by any current Darwinian theories.

Why did sex evolve in the first place? It is far more efficient for an organism to reproduce asexually simply by dividing and making a copy of itself.

[21:18] Evolution can't explain why we don't reproduce asexually. She goes on to say, hey, let's imagine that evolution did produce that. How would you have intervening stages between asexual and sexual reproduction?

You'd have to leap, right? You have to go immediately from one to the other. If you don't, whatever that species is is going to immediately die out. And so this is their, that's why this is a question we don't have an answer to.

This is her conclusion. It is far more plausible that sexual reproduction is a product of intelligent design that natural processes were guided by a goal or a purpose.

The simple fact that a man and a woman have to come together to reproduce is a sign that God has created this world.

In fact, there's no other plausible explanation. This again goes back to last week. Remember, verses 18 through 20, Paul says, look, what is in creation about God is clear.

[22 : 30] It's obvious. Those who don't see it, verse 18, suppress the truth. I'm just going to summarize for one minute.

We've been talking about a lot of things. Here's the two big points I've made, really three big points. Point one, God's the creator. He has a design to his creation.

If you are a Christian, remember that you belong to the creator. Your body has priority over your feelings. point three, if you are not a Christian, remember, sexual reproduction points to a creator with a design.

If there's a designer, it really matters what he says. Okay? That's where we're at at this point. I have a few more things to tell you. You may be thinking about this and wonder, like, why of all the issues, how did Paul get there?

Like, we're talking about the gospel and we're talking about, you know, in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith, for faith, and then suddenly it feels like we took this super abrupt left turn.

[23 : 52] Like, suddenly, without any warning, Paul is suddenly talking about homosexuality. To understand why Paul is doing that, we have to remember the big picture of what's happening in Romans.

So I told you last week, Romans chapter one, starting at verse 18, which we started last week, all the way through chapter three is making one big point. The one big point that's being made in those three chapters is summarized in Romans chapter three, verse 23.

Paul says, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So what you cannot do as you walk away from this passage is say this.

Oh, okay, great, I'm not gay. So it's all good. I don't have anything to worry about. I'm glad Paul spoke to those people out there. I don't need to worry about anything in here.

No, Paul is presenting this as one illustration of what is true of all humanity. Right?

[24 : 56] He's saying, look, everyone has replaced the creator with the creation. and as I'm preaching this to you, as I'm making this point, I, Paul, want to give you the most potent illustration I can.

In case you missed it, think about this. This is the clearest, most graphic example I can give you, the most visual illustration I can provide of how it's true that humanity has confused these things. And so why does Paul pick homosexuality of all the things he could talk about? Because it's so clear. he's trying to drive his point home.

We might say it's as clear as the fact that a seatbelt with two buckles won't protect you. John Calvin says it's possible for us to become blind at noonday.

That is, the most obvious things we can't see. I say all that to say this. you may not express yourself sexually in this way. You have still replaced the creator with the creation.

[26 : 12] Paul is using this as an illustration to drive home what is true of all humanity. If you doubt that, look ahead for next week. Verses 28 through 32, Paul then goes on to provide a bunch of other things that people do when they replace the creator with the creation.

I'll give you a little bit of a sampler. Here's the list. This is verse 29. Envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness, gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful.

Have you ever gossiped? Paul says you've exchanged the creator for the creation. And so the point of this passage is not homosexuals are bad, heterosexuals are great.

No, the point is this. All people have given up the worship of the one true God. And so the solution, the hope of our generation is not that the LGBTQ plus movement would go away.

The solution, the hope of our generation is that the people in this world would return to the worship of the one true God, the creator of heaven and earth.

[27 : 27] that's the solution. That's the problem that Paul is illustrating for us here. Yes, homosexuality is one way of turning away.

It's one way of replacing the creator with the creation. Paul's bringing it as this illustration to show us how clear and obvious it is. And then he's going to go on in the next verses, 28 through 32.

He's going to apply it to us. For chapter 2, he's going to say, you have no excuse, oh man, every one of you who judges. Now most of what I've shared with you this morning, many traditional religions would agree with.

Islam and Judaism would agree on much of the Christian sexual ethic. Christianity is different for this.

Paul is explaining that all the world deserves God's judgment. He brings up homosexuality as one example of all the world deserving God's judgment.

[28 : 30] And what does the rest of the book of Romans go on to say? God could have left us in sin. What did he do? He pursued us. God comes in the book of Genesis at the very beginning and he sees how corrupt mankind is and what does he say?

This is so bad, I'm going to destroy the earth. And he comes back to Genesis chapter 9 and what does he say? I'll never destroy the earth with a flood again.

I'm going to preserve this world despite its rebellion. I'm going to bring salvation instead of judgment.

Why will he not destroy the earth? Because he will destroy his own son. to people who worship the creation rather than the creator.

People like you and me. 1 Corinthians chapter 6 verse 11 Paul is talking about all sorts of sins. One of them includes homosexuality and he says this 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.

[29 : 54] Now if you know grammar you know that you were washed you were sanctified you were justified are passive verbs. He doesn't say you washed yourself you sanctified yourself you saved yourself.

No. God pursued you. He destroyed the world once with a flood. We justly deserve that he would do it again.

Instead he saves the world by his grace. It's the gospel. It's the good news. It's the good news for people out there and it's the good news for people in here.

For everyone who has faith and trust and belief in Jesus Christ. And so that's why we're going to sing together. What patience would wait as we constantly roam what father so tender is calling us home.

He welcomes the weakest the vilest the poor our sins they are many his mercy is more. Let's pray.

[31 : 02] Our father in heaven we do we do thank you that you remind us of what's true in this world that you haven't left us alone as orphans in a merciless universe but instead you've shown us the way to go.

We ask that you'd remind us you challenge us with our rebellion and you'd encourage us with our hope and our faith in Christ that you would grow our love for him.

We thank you that we don't have to worry this morning about whether we've earned or deserve these things instead we simply ask for them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.