

411: Why can't we agree that 'love is love'? – Week 3

There may be a short answer to this question. I'm not going to give it.

No matter how simple the question may seem, it is a **very weighty and complex question**. And, I don't want to take lightly a subject that deeply impacts real people with real, complicated feelings and fears. **Perhaps some of you** in this room have experienced the struggles and pains associated with this subject. Perhaps some of you have only been able to be honest with a couple friends or have never spoken openly with anyone about having same-sex attraction. So, I won't give a short, compassionless answer.

Also, because **the sin that wars inside of me**, personally, is different than the sin that wars inside of others, I don't have the right to speak with authority or as if I understand the complex feelings which the LGBTQIA+ community deals with. For this reason, I'll avoid promoting my opinions and limit our teaching to **scripture alone** which **does have authority, which is clear, and which cuts through confusion**. Scripture is universal because it's our Creator's Word applying to all people in every situation, and sufficient for leading in life and godliness for all people in any situation.

Disclaimer: I will say this from experience. Because we come to Jesus as sinners by nature, and because He's holy and loves us too much to leave us the way we are, His word is often uncomfortable grinding against our natural inclinations and desires.

Now, if you're in this room and you feel the walls are suddenly closing in on you, and you're wishing you hadn't come tonight, it's going to be OK. You're in a safe place. Jesus loves you, and those who love Him, care about you.

LOVE IS LOVE? When society prints this on a bumper sticker or paints it on the side of a building, they intend to communicate that love between anyone is equally valid, beautiful and right. But they're not just talking about any kind of love, but that everyone should be allowed to date, have sex with, and marry whoever they are attracted to.

After all, love is good, right? More love makes the world better. How could love ever be wrong? Perhaps the best place to start would be to unpack society's understanding of what love is. **(Google) Love is an intense feeling of deep affection.** This is supported by all media.

- But, with this definition, the phrase "love is love" has a couple issues for a Christian.

1. **'LOVE IS LOVE' MAKES EACH INDIVIDUAL THE JUDGE OF WHAT LOVE IS.**

The slogan "love is love" is used to give validation to the relationships within the LGBTQIA+ community. It's a statement of morality **claiming** that love itself is the greatest good and inherently right. According to this motto, any romantic/sexual relationship which has sincere, intense feelings of affection ("love") is, therefore, good and should be celebrated.

'Love is love' elevates romantic/sexual love to be the most important kind of loving relationship and its greatest expression is sex. But, is romantic/sexual attraction the only kind of love which a person can experience? Love for parents, love for children, love for siblings, and love for friends are a few other powerful loves which are vibrantly displayed in the world.

When we strip away the romantic façade of the motto, what it's saying is "You should get to have sex with whoever you want if it's love."

But who determines if their relationship is "love?" The individual does... based on their feelings and what they want. **So**, if love is always morally good, and it's the individual who decides **IF** it's love, then the individual becomes the judge of what is morally good.

So to claim, "It's love because I say it's love, therefore it's good because I say it's good" is to accept that there is no moral standard higher than an individual's desires. That's scary.

Jeremiah 17:5-8 – (It compares the outcomes of trusting in humanity and trusting in the LORD. Why wouldn't we trust in the LORD? What would lead us to trust in flesh and end up like that? This is why we as Christians can't agree that any individual gets to decide what love is.)

- **9a** - *The heart is deceitful above all things,*
 - **Prov. 21:2** - *Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart.*
 - Wait, why is my heart trying to deceive me, trying to sabotage me?
- **9b** - *...and desperately sick; ("incurable," "totally wicked")*
 - **It's hopelessly unable to be morally upright.**
 - The world just needs more love, right? No, not if it's poisoned by a corrupt heart.
- **9c** - *...who can understand it?*
 - It's completely irrational. (**v.10** – only God understands it)
 - There are two truths we must learn from this verse.

1. Christians cannot... must not base what we ought to do by what we feel like doing. That is an anti-Christian mentality. God's people are no longer guided by our hearts/flesh.

- **Gal.5:16-17** - *Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.*

2. As Christians, we are not our own judges of right and wrong. Our beliefs and affections are not our standard. Culture's dos and don'ts are not our standard. Not even "love" is our standard. For a Jesus-follower, God is our standard, and we submit to His definition.

WHAT IS LOVE? 1 John 4:7 - *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.*

- **V.7a** – *"let us love one another"* There's a politically correct motto society can get behind. Everyone should have feelings of affection for each other. That will surely make the world a better place. "Let's download a nature photo, crank an Instagram filter to 100%, slap that phrase on with a sans-serif font, post it, and collect "likes" from every camp. But John has NO intention of leaving his readers with a hazy definition of "love."
- **V.7b** offers the "why" we love one another. *"for love is from God"* = changes everything. Love has an origin. And its source is not from within man. GOD is the fountainhead of love. And there is no true love which has a different source. **BUT if it's FROM God, then God defines it**, and all other definitions fall short.

- **V.7c** – Since true love is not something people are creating from within themselves, if there is real love in a person, it must be from God. True love a blinking neon sign over the head of those who are “*born of God and know God.*”
 - **Disclaimer:** A non-believer can display many loving qualities, but all genuine Christians will radiate God’s love because the source of love is in them.

1 John 4:8 - *Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

- **V.8a** – The opposite is true. Someone who lives without exhibiting genuine love indicates they are neither born of God nor know Him.
- **V.8b** – Here is God’s definition of love. It is one of the most important, mysterious, and yet clearest statements in the Bible. **Love is the character of God.** All of God’s goodnesses are summed up in one word: **love.**
- Culture does not get to define God’s character as whatever they want it to be so they can excuse their sinful heart’s desires. Love is not love. God is love.
- Then John reminds us of what God’s love looks like when its expressed.

1 John 4:9-10 - *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

- THIS is how God expressed love. This is how God manifested His character. This is what real love looks like, and John is using it to teach us how we should love one another.
- Notice: True love is not expressed through sex. True love is expressed through sacrifice.
 - Love gets close to the one loved. It gives life. It chooses the undeserving.
 - **A list of Godly love’s expressions: 1 Cor. 13:4-8**
- How can we have real love in us? **V. 1 John 4:13 = His Spirit is in us = God, Himself is in us.**
- What will it look like? It will look like Jesus’ character.

~ **Human love is not the highest moral good. God is the highest moral good.**

~ **Love is not strong feelings of affection. Love is God’s very character.**

~ **The clearest expression of love isn’t the sex and suicide of Romeo and Juliet. The clearest expression of love is the passion and bloody sacrifice of God’s Son on the cross of calvary.**

~ **Loving doesn’t make a Christian. God makes a Christian loving.**

1) We can’t agree that “love is love” because no individual has the right judge what love is. Love is objectively defined by God, most clearly seen in His people, and expressed as His character. Anything less is a hollow, unfulfilling, man-made imitation.

2. ‘LOVE IS LOVE’ MAKES HUMAN BEINGS IDOLS

So, love Himself, by His Holy Spirit, dwells in and pours out of a Christian. But who should receive this expression of God’s divine character? Repeated again and again, in 1 John is that God’s people love “*one another*” **but how is this different from what the world is pushing?**

Matt. 22:35-38 – *And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment.*

- Jesus quoted **Deut.6:1-6** which the faithful Israelite quoted twice every day of their lives.
- Each of the three: “*Heart... soul... mind*” are all encompassing expressions clearly meant to convey the whole person with nothing reserved for anyone or anything else. God isn’t added to the list of people a Christian loves. God holds all the love of His people.
- Here is another reason we cannot agree that “love is love.” All a Christian’s love and devotion and honor is to God, alone. Whoever receives our love becomes our god. God is jealous of our love. Our love being given to anyone or anything else is idolatry.
 - Now that this is clearly established, Jesus says:

Matt. 22:39-40 - *And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*

- Remember what John made clear. The love God calls us to give “*one another*” is never our own human love, but the God of love is loving others through us.
- “**like it**” (Gk. *homoios* – 9x) - Every other use of this word in Matthew is when Jesus is loading up to give a parable to teach a truth. To teach what was invisible and mysterious, Jesus would use analogies and metaphors which were visible and understandable.
 - The visible love Christians pour out on others is merely an illustration of their love for God. (**Ex. A superior field goal kicker is probably a not a great football player but a great soccer player.**)
- **A supreme love for Christ is our focus.** First, we give Him ALL of our fickle, human love and worship. Then He, through His Spirit, dwells in us. Finally, HE loves others through us with His character-reflecting love.
 - In the hands of Love, Himself, our sin-stained love is redeemed and sanctified.
 - “The most loving thing we can do for others is love God more than we love them. For if we love God most, we will love others best.” – Jon Bloom

What’s the result of removing Love Himself from being on the throne of our heart’s devotion? What’s the outcome from putting our love up for sale to whoever will make us happy or stirs deep feelings of affection? We’ll exchange God for something far inferior.

Romans 1:18 - *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*

- God wrath is against the ungodly and unrighteous. What have they done?
- They “**suppress the truth**” = actively covering it up. They hide the truth within themselves and from themselves. **What truth?**

Romans 1:19 - *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been*

clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

- What truth are the ungodly and unrighteous suppressing? The knowledge of God.
- An unfiltered, unbiased look at creation reveals there's a powerful, divine Creator that exists, is all-powerful, and is completely 'other' from us (*divine*). (**Ps. 19:1-4**)
- The proper response to this revelation would be to pursue Him to know Him but instead...

Rom. 1:21 - *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him,*

- This is the main accusation/condemnation against us. We chose to not prize God above everything else. We withhold praise and honor and love from the One who's worthy.

Romans 1:22 - *...but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and **exchanged** the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

- Willful suppression caused man to foolishly, even fatally "**exchange**" (3x) loving the superior "*immortal God*" for His inferior creation. This is man's great sin. Instead of worshipping the Creator, mankind prefers to worship anything else instead.
- **Today, our idols may have different shapes, but they are the same idols. People may not kneel in front of a stone goddess, but they'll kneel to pornography. They may not leave their babies on a fiery stone altar in front of a god of wealth, but they'll let their baby leave in a garbage bag behind a clinic to further their career.**
 - Idols like these, and many you and I are tempted by, are an ever-present black hole.

Ro. 1:24 - *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they **exchanged** the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

- The word "*lusts*" isn't only sexual. Lust is wanting what's forbidden. It's every desire which prizes creation over its Creator.
- Three times we'll see God's punishment is "**giving them up**" to exactly what they want, to be slaves to their own desires. = the act of God completely abandoning the unrighteous.
 - What a terrifying punishment, that God, who lovingly restrains even unbelievers from the full depths and consequences of their heart's wicked wishes, would reach a point of releasing those people to have them with the consequences.
- Now, Paul gives one example of the kind of sin that will infect a society which has suppressed the truth and exchanged their worship.

Romans 1:26-27 - *For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women **exchanged** natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

- "**consumed with passion**" – Notice the participants are experiencing real, powerful feelings. Perhaps these are the very real feelings the "love is love" motto is referring to.

- Paul describes homosexuality as an example of shameless idolatry. (Lev.18:22, 1Tim. 1:9-10)
- Side note: The word for “men” in both uses is signifying biological gender, not age. There is no room for the argument this is describing pedophilia or rape, but not homosexuality.

All sexual sin is man loving/worshipping/prizing creation (self) over the Creator. Why did he stop to emphasize homosexuality? Let’s look at God’s created design for sex.

Genesis 1:26-28a - *Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness. [...] 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them.*

Genesis 2:22-25 - *And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*

- **God fashioned men and women differently**, on purpose. In marriage, they are spiritually and sexually submitting to His design and order. (Jesus affirmed **Matt.19**) 1 man + 1 woman within the covenant of marriage is the God-commanded-and-blessed design and proper context for sex
- **Any distortion of His created order is defiance/rebellion** against God.
- **Why are they suppressing the truth of God?** If they admit there’s a Creator, they would have to admit there’s an objective moral standard and intentional design which their heart’s desires don’t line up with. They want to do what they want to do and lust for who they want to lust for. So, they ignore creation’s cries and suppress the truth of God.
- But Paul isn’t just accusing those in sexual sin as those who are rebelling against God’s authority and design. **He intends to not let any of us off the hook.**

Romans 1:28 - *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*

- We are ALL sinners, and we all have the sinful desires to make idols for ourselves.
 - **John Calvin** – “The human heart is an idol factory.”
- God is demanding total allegiance. Our hearts, minds, bodies, including our sexuality, belong to Him and should be placed under His authority and design.

2) We can’t agree that ‘love is love’ because it prizes a sexual relationship over our God who is worthy of all our love and defies His authority. For believers, all the love expressed to others is an illustration of their supreme love for God.

THE WAR IN ALL OF US

Has Jesus been misrepresented by unloving, uncompassionate Christians? Yes. This is why it's important for us to reflect Jesus and His love.

How would Jesus treat any of the people in the LGBTQIA+ community? The same way He would treat any sinner. How did He respond to the woman caught in adultery?

John 8:1-7 - *The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst 4 they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. 5 Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" 6 This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. 7 And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."*

- He's not saying, "Her sin isn't that bad because it's the same as their pride or greed." Quite the opposite. He's accusing them. Before their holy God, their pride and greed are just as foul and wicked and defiant as her sin. He's not elevating her, He's exposing them.

John 8:8-11 - *And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. 9 But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."*

- He treated her with compassion. He loved the person they rejected.
- But because of His great love for her, he acknowledged her sin and commanded her to walk in righteousness. **Jesus doesn't play softball with sin.** In fact, the opposite is true.
- **Matthew 5:27-29** - *You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.*

Do homosexual sins send a person to hell? Just as much as every other sinful desire which isn't atoned for at the cross. Those in the LGBTQIA+ community rationalize their lifestyles by saying they were born this way. **Sinful? We're all born that way. AND HERE is where everyone in the room is in the 'hot seat.'** **We all need to pay attention.** When does David say his sin began?

- **Psalms 51:5** - *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*
 - Sin is spiritually hereditary.
- ***Romans 3:11-12** - *"None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."* (But there's hope. Keep reading.)
- **HOPE: Romans 3:23-25a** - *...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*
 - **Out of His great love, Jesus has come to redeem us from our sinful nature.**

1 Cor. 6:9-11 – *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. **BUT** you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

- **3 forms of sexual sin up front:** God’s design for marriage and sex was as perverted and disregarded in Paul’s day as it is in ours. But there was redemption in Jesus.
- God called them out! Christians, He called you out, but He called you to a war.

You have seen that the river current you once enjoyed and flowed easily with is headed for hell because it violently opposes the One who saved you and loves you most. But, when you against the flow, you quickly discover three forces opposing you trying to sweep you away again.

Ephesians 2:1-3 - *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

- The world around us is pressing on us constantly to conform and return to the flow.
- The #1 influencer in the world, satan, is constantly firing lies and temptations.
- BUT... there’s a saboteur in our camp, and the traitor is wearing a mask of innocence in every mirror. The wolf in sheep’s clothing is the sinner in our skin.
- **Romans 7:18-19** - *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.*

How do we put sin to death? (Col.3:5) How do we not give in to our desires? (Rom 13:14)?

Ephesians 4:22-24 – (Context: Comparing a Christian to the world they just left)

Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

- **1) Put off the old self:** It’s going to take sacrifice, it’s going to sting, it’s going to take daily discipline, but you **MUST** starve it to death.
 - **John Owen** – “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.”
- **2) Put on the new self:** We live out our new identity in Christ. We are new creations (2 cor.5:16), our identity is His righteousness (2 cor.5:21), and we are in His eternal loving favor (**Eph.1:6**). We live out our sacrificial love for Him. We marinate in His presence allowing the Holy Spirit to transform our minds with His word and wash us daily with His holiness.

Perhaps you’re hearing what the Bible says about sin in your life and you’re not sure where to go from here. God is asking you to trust your sinful, unfulfilled desires to Him. He is calling you to trust that Jesus’ love and satisfaction is better than the “love” of anything or anyone else.

I challenge you to consider, what **MUST** be put to death in your life? (**Col.3:5**) What worldly influences do you need to cut out with great intolerance? Who are your distractions? What have you exalted above your Savior?

I challenge you to consider, **WHO** do you need to speak to? **James 5:16** - *confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.* Enjoy the freeing experience of no longer living in secret sin. Expose it; name it; confess it; repent from it; kill it.

I challenge you to press into relationship with your Savior. Choose a deep, supreme love for Him and know His grace, His love, His commands, and His freedom.

John Newton – “Though sin wars, it shall not reign; and though it breaks our peace, it cannot separate us from His love.”

~ *Soli DEO gloria*