

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin

February 24, 2019

Me? A Friend of All: Finding Love in an Unconditional Bible

Love wins. That is the mantra of the LGBTQ community. Don't tell me who I can or can't love. Love wins.

That is a powerful argument. Who are we to tell someone they can't have love? Could it possibly be true: Love wins?

Could this become the mantra of the Christian community to the LGBTQ community? Not in a taunting way, but in a way that offers hope. Yes, we too want love to win for you and us.

- Let love win in the way that we treat you.
- Let love win in the way that you see God.
- Let love win in the way that you experience a deep, soul-satisfying love.

Let love in. But what does love really look like? Who gets to define what love really is? A gay individual can rightly ask a straight individual, "Why is your definition of love better than mine?" Is there an absolute truth, an undeniable definition of what love is really supposed to look like?

I believe that Genesis 2:24-25 is the foundational passage for understanding the interpersonal relationships that are the focus of this discussion about love. These are the last words spoken in the perfect world of the Garden of Eden.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame (Genesis 2:24-25).

Some of you here today or listening online may be ready to tune out because the Garden of Eden is just a fairy tale and has nothing to do with life and love today. I get that. Many people feel that way. Can I share with you why I feel differently?

It goes back to two simple ideas. I look around the world and I see incredible design. As I first wrote this, I am sitting in our sun room, designed by someone, typing on a laptop, designed by someone. I could not imagine them just happening by accident.

Then I look outside and see the trees. How do they grow from a seed? There was an intelligent design placed into that seed.

Then I look at my hands on the keyboard and am amazed that they get about 90% of the letters typed correctly even without my looking. And my hands work very much like yours. I see intelligent design everywhere. These were no accident.

So I see evidence of an all-powerful Designer in creation. Then I ask, “How do I know who that all-powerful being is?” I look down at the Bible that I read every day, always and constantly asking, “Is this really true?” I’ve read this book countless times, and every time I am convinced more and more of this one fact. Jesus rose from the dead. And if Jesus rose from the dead, then this book must be from the all-powerful God who created the universe. This is what I’ll be talking about at Easter. Come and join us on that journey.

These two ideas...

- There is a God who designed and created the world, and
- This God reveals himself in Jesus Christ.

It is these two ideas that lead me to believe that the Garden of Eden is not just a fairy tale. Jesus, the risen Son of God, quotes this passage as God’s word in Matthew 19:4-6.

Granted, some of you who are hearing this don’t believe these truths. I’d love to talk with you about that. But this is what leads me to conclude the Bible’s definition of love is better than mine or yours.

So what can we learn from Genesis 2:24-25 about love?

One key thing. Sexual union is not love. God designed that to be the product of love. The order is key.

- A man will leave his father and mother. It is public. It doesn’t happen in the back seat of a car. We announce to the world that our primary relationship will no longer be with mom and dad but with our spouse.
- A man is united to his wife. It is permanent. There is a life-long commitment. “Till death do us part” is more than just words. This is God’s will.
- Then the two become one flesh. It is a protected place. In this place of permanent relationship, the intimacy of the sexual union is protected.

The man and his wife were naked and yet felt no shame. The marriage bed is to be as close to the perfection of Eden as we will get, where husband and wife are not focused on themselves, but on caring for the needs of the other. There is no shame when both enjoy a perfect relationship with their Creator and serve their Creator by serving their spouse.

But the word “love” isn’t even used in Genesis 2:24-25! Where is love? Love is not simply an emotion or an urge. Love is action. Love is sacrifice. “This is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10). Read over the definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Love is sacrificing. Putting the needs of the other before yourself. Patient. Keeping no record of wrongs. It always protects.

Love is really all about serving another as the Savior has served us.

How does our working definition of love compare to God’s real definition? If you are heterosexual, it is easy to stand in judgment over the sins of the homosexual. But God’s Word speaks much more about heterosexual sin than homosexual sin.

Love is not lust or simply sexual desire. Jesus warned, “Whoever looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-30).¹ It is not self-sacrificing love to look at an individual, whether in person or on a screen, as an object to be used for your own personal pleasure.

And it is not just the homosexual community that has fallen into the same trap as the people in Corinth. They thought that sex was like food, an irresistible appetite that you shouldn’t try to control. How many in the heterosexual community think the same way, assuming that sex is a natural thing to enjoy without any of the safeguards of a permanent, life-long relationship? We in the heterosexual community do well to listen to God’s Word through the Apostle Paul:

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body (1 Corinthians 6:12-13).

It is not self-sacrificing love to consider divorce an option when you and your spouse don’t get along. We don’t have time to look into this issue in detail. Certainly abuse and infidelity make many an individual a victim of divorce. But considering the prevalence of divorce within the Christian community, can we blame the homosexual community for saying, “Take the beam out of your own eye before you take the speck out of ours” (Matthew 7)? We in the heterosexual community need to hear Jesus as he says that divorce except for marital unfaithfulness² or desertion³ is adultery in God’s sight.

And even in a “functional marriage,” we can misuse the sexual union as a manipulative tool or something that we can force from the other. Listen to Paul’s words to the married Corinthian Christians in the very next chapter.

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual

¹ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell” (Matthew 5:27-30).

² Jesus answered them, “Moses allowed you to divorce your wives because you’re heartless. It was never this way in the beginning. I can guarantee that whoever divorces his wife for any reason other than her unfaithfulness is committing adultery if he marries another woman” (Matthew 19:8-9 *God’s Word Translation*).

³ ¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partners leave, let them go. Under these circumstances a Christian man or Christian woman is not bound by a marriage vow. God has called you to live in peace (1 Corinthians 7:15).

consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1 Corinthians 7:3-5).

According to God's definition, love is not sex. Love is sacrificing for each other, protecting each other, serving each other. The intimate relationship of husband and wife in the publicly announced, permanent, protected relationship of marriage is the fruit of giving yourself to the other, protecting the other, and serving the other.

Let the heterosexual who is without sin cast the first stone at the homosexual (John 8:7).

And yet we don't ignore the passages about homosexual behavior either.⁴ There are a number of New Testament passages where the Apostle Paul has to deal with the homosexual behavior present within his society and even within the church. Remember, as you read these next sections that he is writing to the Christian churches in Corinth, Ephesus and Romans. He wouldn't mention these sins if they weren't present and people weren't struggling with them.

Paul includes homosexual behavior in the list of sins that separate a person from God now and forever.

Don't you know that wicked people won't inherit God's kingdom? Stop deceiving yourselves! People who continue to commit sexual sins, who worship false gods, those who commit adultery, homosexuals, or thieves, those who are greedy or drunk, who use abusive language, or who rob people will not inherit God's kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9-10 *God's Word Translation*).

He does it again in his letter to his co-worker Timothy who was serving the church in Ephesus:

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me (1 Timothy 1:8-11).

The last passage I want to quote at length is Paul's letter to the church in Rome. He warns that homosexuality is the fruit of a society rejecting God and wanting to be their own gods.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one

⁴ I encourage you to read Mike Novotny's book *Gay and God: Loving Everyone God Made and Everything God Wrote* (Google "Time of Grace Store" to find a copy). In that book Mike explains why I'm not going to use the Sodom and Gomorrah account (Genesis 19). There is more to that story than just homosexual behavior.

another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1:26-27).

Paul goes on to include many other sins. This is the frightening truth: If we ignore God's will, he will punish our sin with handing us over to more sin. Sin is never a neutral enemy. It is a powerful adversary seeking to drown us in more and more sin. It is always seeking to control more and more of our lives.

Brothers and sisters, God's word is clear about heterosexual sin and homosexual sin. The only place God wants us to enjoy sexual intimacy is in the publicly announced, permanent, protected place called the marriage of one man and one woman.

We have all broken these laws regarding sexual relations, if not in actions, certainly in thought. On the outline I ask you, after you reread the passages about homosexual sins (and many others), read also the marvelous gospel passages. I'm just going to list them here. Ponder them. Claim them as your own. No matter how you have broken God's commands, there is forgiveness for you.

And that is what some of you were (i.e., homosexual, greedy, slanders). 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 (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23-24).

What does this mean for the homosexual sinner and the heterosexual sinner? Love requires death! Love requires the death of our Savior. Everyone of us needs his death to pay for our sins, whether we are heterosexual or homosexual. Praise God that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

It also requires our death. These acts of the sinful nature are only going to bring death upon us. So we are in a mortal combat to put to death the acts of the sinful nature, whether heterosexual temptations or homosexual temptations.

Dr. Martin Luther encourages us to go back to our baptisms as we carry on this battle. In Fourthly of Baptism in his Small Catechism, Luther wrote:

What does baptizing with water mean?

Baptism means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means

that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Each of us has this daily life-and-death battle to carry out. Imagine the best action movie you can with the hero and the villain in deadly combat. That is you! You have to force that sinful nature under the waters of baptism and drown him. That means examining your life, whether you are tempted to homosexual behavior or heterosexual behavior, and seeing how that sinful nature is tempting you to find love in all the wrong places. Drown it by confessing your sin to God. Drown it by finding a fellow Christian whom you can trust to whom you can confess your sin. And then come forth victorious, not because you have done everything right and fulfilled some conditions, but because of the unconditional gospel promised to you in your baptism. Daily come up out of the waters of your baptism knowing that you are wrapped up in Christ, and that the words the Father said to Jesus he also says to you, “This is my daughter, this is my son, whom I love, with whom I am well pleased.”

I asked at the beginning, can it be true that “Love Wins!”? Is God keeping people from true love because he forbids heterosexual intimacy outside of marriage and all homosexual intimacy?

No, he isn’t keeping any of us from love. Love wins when we realize that who we are isn’t the sexual temptations that we have to battle. Love wins when we realize that our identity is not gay or straight, but child of God infinitely loved by the Father.

Love wins when Paul’s prayer about love in Ephesians 3 is fulfilled in us. Love wins when Paul’s prayer is fulfilled in our gay friends who are struggling against their temptations just as we do. Let’s pray Paul’s prayer for ourselves, for the heterosexuals in our lives that are looking for love in all the wrong places, for the homosexuals in our lives who also are looking for love in all the wrong places. As you pray this prayer about the fullness of God’s love, think about the last time you sat at a huge Thanksgiving feast. You were full. Absolutely satisfied. That’s the kind of fully satisfied love that God wants us to enjoy in him. Let’s pray:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:14-21).

My Next Steps to be a Friend to All

- **Learn more:** This message series is based on the book *Gay and God: Loving Everyone God Made and Everything God Wrote* by Pastor Mike Novotny, the new speaker for Time of Grace Ministries. Order a copy at www.TimeofGrace.org/store. Read this book to hear the Savior's call to "love people" and "love the passages."
- **Discuss what you are learning:** GroupWork questions for the "Me? Friend of All" message series are based on *Gay and God*. Booklets with the four weeks of questions are available at the Welcome Center. Discuss this topic in your small group, family, or circle of friends.
- **Ask questions:** We may understand the principle of the unconditional Bible, but how do you apply this truth in our daily lives? Lots of questions may arise. The questions you raise can help us develop the next message in this series. We also want to talk these questions through with you. We are providing the following avenues to have a dialogue:
 - **Write** a question on the back of your Connection Card.
 - **Text** a question to Pastor Pete at 414-350-1436.
 - **Email** a question to ppanitzke@stpaulmuskego.org.
- **Come back to hear more.** Me? A Friend of All requires:
 - **Unconditional Love** – Message from February 10
 - **Unconditional Gospel** – Message from February 17
 - **Unconditional Bible** – Today's message
 - **Unconditional Trust** – March 3 – Luke 13:1-9

You can find copies of messages from the last two weeks at the Welcome Center or watch or download a podcast at www.StPaulMuskego.org/worship/sermons.

GroupWork

Study 3 – Feb 24 – Mar 2

“But What About” *Gay and God*, pages 35 – 49

1. The message this week was based on Luke 13:22-30. What lessons did you take away from this message? What question(s) would you like to discuss as a group?

2. The author takes on four questions or issues. Write a summary of his responses and discuss.
 - a. “I was born this way” (pages 36-38).

 - b. “Only God can judge me” (pages 39-42). Key points to discuss:
 - Don’t judge a non-Christian.

 - Be careful what you post on social media.

 - The plank in your own eye.

 - Remove the speck (page 42).

 - c. Can LGBT people be saved? (bottom of page 42 through page 45) Key point: There is only one thing that keeps you out of heaven.

 - d. Why now? (pages 46-48) Discuss the concept of “identity.” An LGBT individual may base their identity on sexual orientation. A heterosexual may base their identity on their role as a parent or spouse. What is dangerous about that?

3. Read Colossians 3:1-11. Your identity is not in what you do, but in Christ. As a result, what must you do to natural desires?

4. Our identity is children of our heavenly Father. Close by praying together the “Address” from Luther’s Small Catechism.
Our Father in heaven.

What does this mean?

With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that he is our true Father and that we are his true children, so that we may pray to him as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father.