

The Grace and Truth Tightrope

John 8:1-11
May 1, 2022

Please open your Bibles today to John 8.

I don't have an iPhone, but I heard this past week that Apple has released a new emoji –that of a pregnant man. I'm not making that up. Also this past week, the president of a teacher's union declared that we must teach 5 year olds about transgenderism. In addition, our US State Department is pushing for a gender X on US Passports and the current administration wants to use tax money to pay for gender reassignment surgeries for minors. A university announced a job for **only** women, transgender, non-binary, or **two-spirit people**. Disney's new children's movie, Lightyear, which comes out in June features a kiss between gay characters and most of you are aware of Disney's opposition to the bill passed in Florida that prohibits teaching K-3rd graders about sexual orientation. We could go on and on.

On the other side of the horse, it hasn't been too many years since Matthew Shephard was brutally murdered in Wyoming because he was gay and some, under the guise of Christianity have said and done vicious things to LGBT individuals. What's a **Christian** to think? What's a **Christian** to do? Few, if any issues are as highly charged as the one we're going to discuss today. It would be much easier, and perhaps safer in the short run, to just omit this and let it play out in our culture, but this is a struggle all of us are engaged in and about which the church must speak.

It would probably be helpful to define some terms right off the bat although that is difficult because there is not full agreement among those in LGBT circles. In general L stands for lesbians, females attracted to other females, G is for gay, men with other men, B is bisexual meaning attraction to both men and women. T is transgender or someone who is changing from one sex to another. And Q means either queer or questioning. There are all kinds of variations and as I said there is disagreement. Although these are the most common, Facebook actually has 58 different gender identities and even a fill in the blank option if none of those work for you. I don't understand. But there's much I don't.

We all now have relatives, friends, coworkers, and neighbors in one or more of these areas. Our employers encourage us to celebrate Pride Month and affirm these lifestyles in various ways. What does God have to say about this and how are we to navigate the stormy waters of culture that are swirling around us? How do we keep from falling off the horse on either side and maintain a steady biblical witness? My deepest desire today is to hold up a Biblical model that is true to God's Word in **all** aspects. I'm asking for your prayers, your grace, and your patience as we broach this explosive topic

today. I pray that these words will be received lovingly and reflected on and prayed over. Let me also say that this topic is so broad it is impossible to cover it fully in the time that we have, but we're going to do our best and I would welcome further discussion and questions.

As usual, Jesus has gone before us to give us incredible insight and wisdom as well as a wonderful example from which we can all learn. If you are able, please stand as we read from John 8:1-11

1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the **first** to throw a stone at her." 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

We live in incredible times. The world is changing faster than we can keep up with. We are inundated daily with a tsunami of ideas advancing and promoting many things contrary to Scripture. One of the primary changes that has swept into our world, our community, and even our homes is the redefinition of marriage. In just a few short years, the culture has shifted from embracing and supporting more or less a Biblical concept of marriage to something radically different.

Up until **very** recent times, people in all cultures at all times in all religions have upheld marriage as between males and females and most have affirmed one of each. This **new** concept is **very recent** historically. In his first term, President Obama said that marriage consisted of one man and one woman. But before his second term was over, in less than 8 years, he shifted dramatically. And so has society. Same sex marriage, which was illegal in most every state just 7 years ago, is now the law of the land and a moot issue for much of our nation. Sadly, the Biblical connections between marriage and sex and creating and raising children were severed many decades ago which has helped lead us to this moment. People say that what happens in their bedrooms doesn't affect anyone else. It does. In the church and in the culture, it affects what type

of parents and homes children will be raised in. And what type of a society we have.

The question for us is not what the Courts or the President or Facebook says, but what does God's Word say about sexuality. It actually says a lot. In the very beginning God made human beings as male and female to reflect His image together in marriage. **Both** sexes are needed to do that. We could spend months discussing how God's full image is expressed as male and female come together in the holiness and sanctity of marriage and sex. That cannot be done by two males or three females, or anything else. God knew what He was doing and He still does. There is **no** instance in either the Old or New Testaments of any sexual union or behavior being blessed or ordained by God except between a faithfully married man and woman. The effort to rewrite what the Bible says about marriage and sex by churches and pastors is particularly disturbing for we do **not** have the authority to amend God's Word on this or any other issue. When we do, look out.

In the past, when discussing God's Word with folks whom I knew didn't agree, I was sometimes apologetic that it condemned their sin. No more. God wants our best and His Word describes that for us. He's not trying to spoil our fun. He's trying to maximize it. That's true not only with LGBT issues, but any sex outside of a one man/one woman marriage. God's not being hateful, He's being loving. If you told me the bridge up ahead was out and that I should turn around, I would be stupid for ignoring your warning and even stupider for hating you for warning me. God wants our best. Even when it conflicts with our desires. And His Word describes it.

There's an effort today to paint the church as hateful, prideful, out of date and out of touch, but 98% of what we do as a church has nothing to do with these issues. We shouldn't talk about them any more than other sins, except as they are forced upon us by society, but we also shouldn't shy away from them either. The church must proclaim God's Word whether it's popular or not. As issues arise in our culture, we must speak, even as Jesus did for we have God's best right here for all people.

People sometimes claim that Jesus never said anything about homosexuality. This is blatantly false. When asked about divorce in Matthew 19, Jesus held up God's model for marriage and sex when He said, "at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female...'" The Jewish society clearly did not accept anything like LGBT and if Jesus thought differently He would certainly have said so as He did on other issues they had wrong.

There is another false assumption that homosexual orientation is biological. That there is a gay gene or something. If there is, scientists have yet to find it even after looking for it very hard for many years. They really want to find it. But so far, no luck. It's not there. Unlike one's skin color, eye color, and hair color all of which are

genetic. Speaking of genetics, even though some have gender reassignment surgeries, every cell of their bodies still has either 2 x chromosomes making them female or an x and a y making them male. Swimmer Lia Thomas is still a male. Until you can change his chromosomes and muscles, brain, and bones, he is still a biological male regardless of how many surgeries he has.

But in today's passage, the woman was not involved in an LGBT affair. It was adultery with a man not her husband. She didn't try to protest and tell Jesus that adultery was not wrong. "Don't you know times have changed?" No, she knew it was wrong. It still is. Notice how Jesus handled this situation. Everybody was ready to stone this obvious sinner. They even had the rocks in their hands and the self-righteousness in their eyes. One word and she's dead. "Let he that is without sin cast the first stone." "At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there." Why the older ones first? Usually the older we get the more sinful we realize we are. Is adultery sin? Absolutely. Is homosexuality sin? Yes, the Bible clearly says so in many places and we've looked at those before. But are there any among us who has not sinned sexually? Perhaps not physically but Jesus said, (Matt 5:28) "...anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Let's recognize we're all in the boat labeled sinful people.

I remember someone trying to minimize their child's fornication by saying, "At least they're not gay." Sin is sin is sin and we're all guilty right along with this woman. In a discussion recently, someone told me, "I don't think God will send good people to Hell." I agreed. Unfortunately, Jesus is the only good person. All the rest of us are sinful and in need of His forgiveness and His righteousness in place of our own. Until we admit this, none of us have any hope of heaven no matter what we've done or haven't done. Is it Ok for people who have sinned sexually to come to church, for adulterers, LGBT, lusters, etc? Absolutely! Or this place would be totally empty today! Where else should we be? All who seek God are welcome. But in order to be baptized, we must repent of, or turn from our known sin, whatever it may be. Even Jesus said so.

And He also dealt with her sin. Neither do I condemn you, which means He forgave her. God forgives sexual sin if we confess and turn from it! In the first chapter of this Gospel, John describes Jesus as the One "14...who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Say grace. Say truth. These are two ends of the same tightrope. We must keep them both tight. When Jesus forgave her, He yanked the grace end of the tightrope tight. But when He said, "Go and sin nor more," He yanked the truth end tight. Most of us are good at one end or the other. We're good at knowing the truth-what's right and what's wrong. What the Bible says about sin. And we should. But we often pay little attention to grace about which God also speaks volumes of in His Word.

Others are really good at the grace end. God forgives, it's no big deal. NO! Sin is always a big deal no matter what it is! Don't try to redefine sin according to culture or our opinions or our relatives or our peers or whoever. God defines sin. There has always been sinful sexual behavior but never until very recently has a society or even the church tried to say it's not sin. We must hold onto the truth end. **And** the grace end. And it's hard, but faithfully following Jesus demands both. Truth without grace is abuse. Grace without truth is permissive. Truth and grace are vitally important for our society, for our church and for every believer.

This challenges us to respond to all with grace and love. We all have unmarried heterosexual friends who live together which is sinful, and yet we're still friends. We all have friends that love money too much or alcohol or work. And yet we remain friends with them even as they remain friends with us in spite of our sins. We don't let the sin prohibit the relationship, or define it. We mustn't excuse it, but it doesn't prohibit a friendship. If we're going to be like Jesus, we must love our LGBT relatives, neighbors, and coworkers, even as we sinners are loved by God. We must be like Jesus: full of grace. Full of love. But we also must not excuse their behavior, or ours, and stay full of truth. When there are bathroom issues or pride celebrations, etc we must lovingly, gracefully, but honestly stand for truth in whatever ways we can. We are not to hate others nor are we to celebrate what we know to be sin. It's a tightrope.

Part of being grace-full is also understanding others. Just because there is no genetic reason doesn't mean LGBT individuals have chosen that and don't sense their orientations deeply. With the exception of some, especially young people who are easily swayed by peers, many individuals do feel very strongly attracted to their same sex for whatever reasons. Many studies have been done and they are inconclusive. Sexual orientation is usually not a choice. So it's unfair to say, "You don't really feel that way. You're just making that up." But it's also untrue to claim a biological justification for it or to excuse sinful behavior. Sexual behavior is a choice.

When issues do come up, true friends can and should discuss them openly and honestly. We don't have to agree about everything to be friends, do we? No relationship can be built on an assumption that you have to agree on everything in order to be my friend or child or parent. That's a false choice. Don't fall for it. We can still be friends and love and talk and laugh and etc. If they don't see it that way, that's on their end, not ours. Jesus didn't hate this woman when He called her adultery sinful and told her to stop it. Any more than He hated Peter when He called him Satan. Any more than He hates us when He says, "You cannot love both God and money."

Looking back at the Scripture, Jesus not only saved this woman from death, He not only forgave her, He also admonished her to stop sinning. The NIV says, "leave your life of sin (your lifestyle of sin)." Sounds like it was a pattern. And that's true no matter

what type of sin we're committing. Some of us have a gossip lifestyle or a pride lifestyle that we must leave. Just because I spilled coffee doesn't mean I should keep on spilling it. Or to keep lusting or any other sin. Just because I deeply feel a certain way or am oriented in a certain direction doesn't mean it's OK for me to act on that. I may really want to kill my neighbor, which I don't, but that doesn't give me permission to do it. Feelings, orientations, and desires are different than actions. What we do with these is what matters. While our orientations and feelings may not be a choice, we do choose what we do with them. Celibacy or living single is an option for anybody regardless of their orientation. It's not always easy, but neither is any kind of faithful obedience.

I don't know which end of the tightrope you need help with the most today. Grace or truth? Whichever it is, ask the Holy Spirit to help you pull both ends tight at the same time. To be as much like Jesus as we can on this and every issue. And to receive His great forgiveness that we might **all** go and sin no more.