

LOVING YOUR LGBT NEIGHBOR

Mark 12:28-31

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Turn with me to Mark 12:28-31.

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28 One of the scribes approached. When he heard them debating and saw that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, “Which command is the most important of all?”

29 Jesus answered, “The most important is Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. 31 The second is, Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other command greater than these.”

3. This incident is about a conversation between Jesus and a scribe. Scribes were experts in the Old Testament. They were the teachers of the law, the Rabbis, and the lawyers in Jewish society because they knew the OT law better than anyone. They were highly respected. The word “Rabbi” means “honored one” or “great one.” People let the scribes go to the front of the line, have the best seat in the house, and when a scribe entered a room, everyone stood to their feet in respect. They wore special robes that made them stand out so that everyone would know they were in the presence of a scribe. They were buried alongside the tombs of the patriarchs and the prophets.

4. This scribe had a question for Jesus. “Which command is the most important of all?” If you have been a Christian for awhile and know your Bible, then that’s an easy question because you have heard Jesus answer it. But imagine if you were a Jew who had never read the New Testament. The scribes searched the OT and counted 613 laws. They liked that number because there are 613 letters in the Ten

Commandments. Over time theories developed about the number of laws. There were 365 negative commands – one for every day of the year – and 248 positive commands – one for every limb and organ of the body. The scribe seemed to be asking Jesus an impossible question. Every command is important, and since there are 613, how could Jesus pick out the one that was most important?

5. But it looks like Jesus didn't hesitate. He said, "First, love God, and second, love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus didn't make up some new commands. The command to love God is part of a passage of the OT called the Shema (Dt 6:4-9). It is the most important passage in Judaism. When praying, devout Jews wore little leather boxes on their foreheads and wrists called phylacteries; and inside are tiny copies of the Shema. If you go to a Jewish home, on the right side of every doorpost (except for bathrooms and small closets) you will see a mezuzah, a little cylindrical box with a tiny copy of the Shema. So, they were very familiar with the command to love God. As for the second command, love your neighbor as yourself, this comes from Lev 19:18 and is considered the core ethical principle in Judaism.
6. Jesus said that there is no command greater than these. Why? Because if you closely follow these two commands, then, by default, you will also follow all the other commands. If you love God, you won't commit idolatry. If you love your neighbor, then you won't commit murder, or theft, or dishonesty.
7. Today, I want to focus on the second command. "Love your neighbor as yourself." And since it is Pride Month, I want to talk to you specifically about loving your LGBT neighbor.

II. GUIDELINES FOR LOVING YOUR LGBT NEIGHBOR

1. You are commanded to love your LGBT neighbor.

- i. As a Christian, you must love your neighbor as yourself. Who is your neighbor? Everyone.
- ii. One time Jesus was asked that question. "Who is my neighbor (Lk 10:29)?" That's when Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan,

which is about a Samaritan showing love to a Jew. Back then the Jews and Samaritans hated each other. Jesus' point was that you are supposed to love everyone, no matter who they are.

- iii. The Bible makes it very clear that you are not just to love those who love you, or fellow believers, but even your enemies, those who hate you, those who mistreat you, and even those who persecute you.
- iv. **Luke 6:27-28 27** "But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.
- v. With that being said, you should love your LGBT neighbor.
- vi. The truth is that your LGBT neighbor is worthy of your love. They are human beings, created in the image of God. God loves them so much that He sent Jesus to die for them on the cross. God desperately desires the salvation of every human being. So if God loves them, then you should to.
- vii. But that leads to the next question. What is love? What does it mean to love?

2. You are not loving your neighbor by affirming and applauding their sin.

- i. People just assume that they know what love is; that they know how to love. But the Bible says that God is love (1 Jn 4:8). His character and His commands reveal the true nature of love. We learn how to love by studying God's commands, and by studying how God treats people, and how Jesus treats people.
- ii. And what we discover about love is this: Love is giving people what they need, not what they want. Love is doing what is best for people, not what makes them feel good.
- iii. A simple analogy of this kind of love is parental love. If you love your child, you don't always give them what they want, because sometimes their wants are not good for them. And you don't always make your child feel good; sometimes you intentionally make them feel bad because you know that's what they need.

- iv. This is why it is not loving to affirm or applaud your child's sin. When your child makes a sinful choice – they hit someone, steal something, lie, deliberately disobey – the most loving thing to do is to point it out their sin, teach them the right way to behave, and give them an incentive to change.
- v. In the same way, if your neighbor is living in sin – having premarital sex, cheating on his wife, stealing from the company, getting drunk – the way to love him is not to affirm and applaud his sin. That may be what he wants, but it's not what he needs. That may make him feel good, but it's not what's best for him. The way to love him is to speak the truth in love, gentleness and respect.
- vi. In other words, love does not mean unconditional approval and affirmation. Just because I disapprove of my son's behavior doesn't mean I don't love him. And your disapproval of your neighbor's behavior doesn't mean you don't love him.

3. You are not wrong to say that a behavior is sinful.

- i. The most popular verse in the Bible used to be John 3:16, but I think it has recently been surpassed by another verse.
- ii. **Matthew 7:1** Do not judge, so that you won't be judged.
- iii. This verse must might be the most misunderstood verse in the Bible. According to many people, it means that you shouldn't say that another person's behavior is sinful. But there are three problems with that interpretation.
- iv. First, that's a self-defeating statement. "It's wrong to say that a behavior is wrong" is a self-defeating statement. It is illogical. In other words, the moment that you say it's wrong to say that a behavior is wrong, you have just violated the very thing you are condemning. You just did the very thing you said they shouldn't do!
- v. Second, nobody believes it. Nobody actually believes that it is wrong to say that a behavior is sinful or immoral. The same

person who says, “Don’t judge,” judges people all the time. They say Trump is evil; in fact, he is the antichrist. They say his supporters are deplorable. They say it’s evil to not use a person’s preferred pronouns. They say that ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) is evil for enforcing the law. They say that Israel is evil for defending itself against Hamas.

- vi. Nobody believes that it’s wrong to say that a behavior is wrong. The only reason people say, “You’re not supposed to judge” is to shut you up; to get you to stop speaking the truth; to get you to stop being the light of the world and the salt of the earth.
- vii. Third, Jesus didn’t live that way. Jesus often condemned people and called out sinful behaviors. He reserved His most severe judgments for the Pharisees in Matthew 23. He called them a brood of vipers, evil and adulterous, hypocrites, children of hell, blind fools, law-breakers, full of greed and self-indulgence, and full of every kind of impurity. Why would Jesus act a certain way and then tell you not to? On the contrary, the Bible tells us to imitate Christ!
- viii. What did Jesus mean when He said not to judge? Look at the context.
- ix. **Matthew 7:1-5** “Do not judge, so that you won’t be judged. 2 For you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use. 3 Why do you look at the splinter in your brother’s eye but don’t notice the beam of wood in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ and look, there’s a beam of wood in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First take the beam of wood out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother’s eye.
- x. Jesus wasn’t saying not to judge, but not to judge hypocritically. Don’t condemn pornography if you are looking at it. Don’t condemn adultery if you are living in adultery. Don’t condemn

drunkenness if you're a drunk. Before you point out someone else's sin, make sure you overcome it first. Then you will have both the compassion, understanding, and ability to help them overcome their sin. And your purpose for pointing out another person's sin is not to make them look bad, but to help them – to help them to get the splinter out of their eye. It is to help them recover, and heal, and be reconciled to God.

- xi. The first three guidelines were about you. The last three are about your LGBT neighbor.

4. Your LGBT neighbor is living in sin.

- i. For you to understand effectively love your LGBT neighbor, you need to see their behavior from God's perspective. And according to God, their behavior is sinful. Let me make this very clear, because the Bible is not ambiguous on this point. Homosexual behavior and transgender behavior are sinful.
- ii. Let's start with the Old Testament.
- iii. **Leviticus 18:22** You are not to sleep with a man as with a woman; it is detestable.
- iv. **Deuteronomy 22:5** A woman is not to wear male clothing, and a man is not to put on a woman's garment, for everyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD your God.
- v. When you bring up verses like this from the OT law, people will often argue that the OT law also says you can't eat pork, or cut your sideburns, or mix certain kinds of cloth. It's true that there are some OT laws that passed away with the coming of Christ. For example, Christians no longer observe the laws about offering sacrifices and avoiding certain types of food. But not all OT laws have passed away. There are many OT laws that are still morally binding. How do you know which ones? The New Testament tells us. Jesus and the authors of the New Testament make it very clear which OT laws are still binding, and the laws against

homosexuality and transgenderism are included. Let's look at what the New Testament says.

- vi. **Romans 1:26-27** 26 For this reason God delivered them over to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 The men in the same way also left natural relations with women and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error.
- vii. Notice how this passage describes homosexual behavior: Disgraceful; unnatural; shameless; error.
- viii. What does the New Testament say about transgenderism?
- ix. **Matthew 19:4-6** 4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that he who created them in the beginning made them male and female, 5 and he also said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."
- x. Jesus said two things about transgenderism:
 - 1. First, there are only two genders – male and female.
 - 2. Second, gender coincides with biology.
 - a. In other words, Jesus is affirming the idea that a male is a biological male, and a female is a biological female.
 - b. How do we know?
 - c. Jesus defined marriage as the union of a male and a female.
 - d. If He didn't mean biological male and biological female, then He would have been endorsing homosexuality. He would have been saying that it is okay for a biological man to marry a trans woman, which is also a biological man. That's homosexuality.

- e. We know that Jesus didn't endorse homosexuality because He repeatedly endorsed the very OT that condemns it (Mt 5:17-20; see also Mt 19:1-6 on Mt 22:37-40 where Jesus quotes from the OT in agreement).
- xi. So we see very clearly that there are only two genders – male and female, and gender coincides with biology.
- xii. The Bible is not unclear about these matters. Having sex with the same gender and acting like the opposite gender are sinful behaviors.

5. Your LGBT neighbor is suffering.

- i. All sin leads to suffering. Choose to sin, choose to suffer.
- ii. I like how **Brian McLaren** describes sin. He writes, "To understand what sin is, it's essential to frame it, so let me give you some ways to frame sin:
 1. If life is a machine, then sin is a bad gear that makes the machine malfunction.
 2. If life is a kingdom, then sin is a terrorist movement in the kingdom.
 3. If life is a family, then sin is a feud between family members.
 4. If life is a body, then sin is an untreated disease that poisons the whole system.
 5. If life is a river, then sin is mercury or arsenic that pollutes it.
 6. If life is a garden, then sin is the army of slugs that eat your tomatoes.
 7. If life is a computer, then sin is a virus that destroys your hard drive."
- iii. Sin may be pleasurable for a moment, but in the long run it destroys, it ruins, it harms, it kills. A gay person may say, "I love being gay." A drug addict loves heroin, but that doesn't mean it's healthy. Sin is like drinking saltwater. If you are thirsty, then initially drinking saltwater will feel good; it will feel like you are

quenching your thirst. But eventually it causes severe dehydration, vomiting, kidney failure, confusion, and possibly even death.

- iv. The Bible describes sin as a heavy burden (Ps 38:4). Sometimes people don't realize how much of a burden it is because they got so used to carrying it. But interestingly, the Bible says that God's commands are not burdensome (1 Jn 5:3). God's commands were given for our good; they enable us to live life as it was meant to be lived. They lead to human flourishing.
- v. Jesus said He came to give people abundant life – a full and meaningful life (Jn 10:10). As long as your LGBT neighbors are living in sin, they are missing out on the best life. They are suffering, and often don't know how much better life can be.
- vi. This is why you are not loving your LGBT neighbor by affirming or applauding their sin. All you are doing is encouraging them to continue a life of suffering and hardship; to miss out on the best that God has for them.
- vii. When you see your LGBT neighbor, look on them with compassion. They are suffering. They are hurting. They are burdened. Their sin is destroying them.

6. Your LGBT neighbor will suffer for eternity unless they repent.

- i. Sin doesn't merely cause present suffering, it leads to eternal suffering.
- ii. **1 Corinthians 6:9-10** 9 Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males, 10 no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God's kingdom.
- iii. Notice how this passage describes homosexuality: It is unrighteous. It is placed in a list of evil behaviors. Why is that significant? If you claim that God approves of homosexuality, then you must also claim that God approves of idolatry, adultery, sexual

immorality, stealing, greed, drunkenness, etc. Also, the Bible says that those who practice these behaviors, that is, those who refuse to repent of these behaviors, will not go to heaven. If your LGBT neighbors refuse to repent, they will go to hell.

- iv. This means that your LGBT neighbor's greatest need is salvation, which requires repentance. And therefore the most loving thing you can do for your LGBT neighbor is to share the gospel with them, including the need not only to believe in Jesus, but to repent of their sins.
- v. I realize this is not a pleasant thing to say or even to think about. But that doesn't mean that it's not true, or that it doesn't need to be stated. My father-in-law had his first heart attack when he was twenty-nine years old. He was obese and lived a very unhealthy lifestyle. The doctor told him that if he didn't lose weight and change his lifestyle he would die at a young age. That wasn't a pleasant thing to say; it probably didn't make my father-in-law feel good. But it was the truth, and it's what he needed to hear. He heeded the doctors advice and was able to live another thirty years. Talking about the eternal consequences of sin is not pleasant, but it is true, and it needs to be said if you are going to love your LGBT neighbor well.

7. Your LGBT neighbor can be saved.

- i. Right after Paul says that those who practice homosexuality and other sins cannot go to heaven, he says this:
- ii. **1 Corinthians 6:11** And some of you used to be like this. 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.
- iii. Paul was writing to the church in Corinth, and in that church were a bunch of formerly LGBT people. But what happened to them? They were washed, sanctified, and justified. They were changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- iv. Don't believe the world's lies. The world says that LGBT people are born that way and can't change. It's not merely that they aren't morally obligated to change; they can't change. They were born gay; they were born trans. The Bible says this: Whether you were born that way or not, God doesn't want you to live that way, and He can change you.
- v. I'm inspired by the countless stories of LGBT people who have turned to Christ and been radically changed. Christopher Yuan was a gay, drug-dealing dental student. After being expelled, arrested, and diagnosed with HIV while in prison, he found a Bible, gave his life to Christ, and repented of the homosexual lifestyle. Today he is a pastor and Bible professor.
- vi. Another fascinating story is that of Rosaria Butterfield. She was a lesbian, and a tenured English professor at Syracuse University. Her primary field was critical theory, specifically queer theory. She advised LGBT student groups, and actively lobbied for LGBT legal advancements with her lesbian partner. In 1997 she was researching the Religious Right and what she called "their politics of hatred for people like me." Her research led her to a pastor and his wife, and they eventually became friends. Two years later, after reading the Bible through several times, she became a Christian, repented of the homosexual lifestyle, and two years later, married a pastor, and together they adopted four children.
- vii. Your LGBT neighbors aren't stuck in sin. The same God who created the universe, who rose Jesus from the grave, who transformed Saul into Paul, and who changed you, can also change them.
- viii. With the foundation laid, I want to briefly address seven practical questions about loving your LGBT neighbor.

III. QUESTIONS ABOUT LOVING YOUR LGBT NEIGHBOR

1. Should you attend a gay wedding?

- i. If your gay friend invites you to their wedding, should you attend? Absolutely not. No. You might say, "I don't support their marriage, but I want to show them that I support them." Here's the problem. A wedding is the formal celebration of a marriage. Your presence at a wedding sends the message that you support and celebrate the marriage. As a Christian, you cannot celebrate what God condemns or even give that impression.
- ii. It is not unloving to abstain from an event for moral and spiritual reasons. Is it unloving for a black man to refuse to attend a Klan meeting? Let's you have friend who is a stripper. Is it unloving to refuse to go watch her perform? Of course not.
- iii. Being invited to a gay wedding is an opportunity for evangelism. Instead of attending the wedding, you can explain to your gay friend why you can't attend and then share the gospel with them.
- iv. I realize that if you don't attend the wedding your friend may cut you off. That may be the end of the relationship. But remember a couple of things. First, you aren't ending the relationship, they are. You aren't rejecting them; you just can't attend their wedding. But they are fully rejecting you because of your faith.
- v. Second, remember the words of Jesus.
- vi. **Matthew 10:34-37** Don't assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. The one who loves a father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; the one who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.
- vii. Jesus knew that your relationship with Him might jeopardize your relationships with others. And He said very clearly that when that happens, you must choose Him.
- viii. By the way, if you find yourself in this situation and you need support, I know someone in our church who was invited to a gay

wedding by a close family member and refused. I know they would love to encourage you.

2. Should you use a person's preferred pronouns?

- i. No. I'll start with a silly analogy and then give you a serious one. If my son told me that he felt like he was a dog – a dog in human skin – what should I do? Should I start calling him Sparky and treating him like a dog? I that what's best for him? Or consider a teen girl who is struggling with anorexia. She is paper thin, but she feels like she is overweight. How should I treat her? Should I affirm her anorexia and say, "You are fat; you should keep losing weight"? Only if I want her to die.
- ii. A transgender person is denying reality. They are rejecting the truth about who God made them to be. They are rejecting God's plan for their life. It's not honoring to God or loving to your trans friend to join them in their delusion. When you use their preferred pronouns, you are lying to them about who they are. You are saying, "You're right. You have the biology of a man, but you're actually a woman."
- iii. **Ephesians 4:25** Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another.
- iv. What if your job will fire you if you don't use someone's preferred pronouns? Use their name and avoid the pronouns.

3. Should you serve LGBT customers at your place of work?

- i. Absolutely. Unless you only serve people who are sinless. All of your customers are sinful; serving them doesn't mean that you approve of their sin.
- ii. The only time you shouldn't serve a gay customer is if it requires you to affirm or participate in their sin. For example, as a Christian photographer, you can take the graduation photos of a gay teenager, but you shouldn't take photos at a gay wedding. If you are a baker, you can bake a cake for a gay person's birthday, but

you shouldn't bake a cake for a gay wedding. If you owned a t-shirt company, you shouldn't make a shirt that had a pro-gay message.

4. Should you allow a gay couple to sleep at your house?

- i. Lydia and I had to face this situation several years ago. Her cousin came out as gay, and she and her partner wanted to come and stay with us for several days during the Christmas holidays. We said no. Why? We would be happy to have her and her partner over to the house for lunch, or for a visit, but not to sleep together. We're not going to let people sin in our home. I don't let people get drunk or do drugs in my house. And we wouldn't let a couple who was unmarried spend the night our house. So it's not that we're picking on gay people. We don't let people commit any kind of sin in our home.

5. Should you support Pride Month?

- i. No. At work they may ask you to wear a t-shirt or to decorate your office. On your team they may want you to wear a rainbow wristband, or a special rainbow jersey. These are things you can't do. You cannot celebrate what God condemns.
- ii. I'm inspired by the professional hockey players who, in 2023, refused to wear Pride-themed jerseys because of their religious beliefs. They risked their reputation and their livelihood for that decision. That's the right thing to do.

6. Should you allow your LGBT neighbors to attend your church?

- i. Absolutely. The church is not a hotel for saints, it's a hospital for sinners. It's not a cruise ship, it's a rescue ship. It's not a safe place from the world, it's a safe place for the world to hear a dangerous message. The church is the best place for your LGBT neighbors. At church they can hear the truth, meet Jesus, get saved, and get transformed.
- ii. Don't get me wrong. At church we're not going to water down the gospel. We're not going to shy from the truth. We're not going to

stop talking about sin. We're not going to pretend like there's nothing wrong with the LGBT lifestyle. But when we have visitors from the LGBT community we're going to welcome them, and love on them, and hug their necks, and minister to their needs, and pray for them, and most importantly, share God's word with them.

- iii. Because here's the truth: You need God's grace just as much as them. Before Christ you were lost too. And the mission of this church is not to coddle the saints, but to seek and save the lost.