

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

January 19, 2020

Grace, Truth, and Dishonorable Passions

Romans 1 - Part 2

Prayer: *Father, again, we are at that place in the service where we are opening up your book. We are just so grateful and thankful for it. We're thankful for the truth that you've given us and we're at a difficult part in your book. And so I pray, Lord, this morning as we begin that you would just go ahead of us, that you would prepare hearts, that you would just enable me to speak the truth in love and that if there's any misunderstanding or any ways that this is not communicated well, I pray that your Spirit would guide and direct and make up the difference. And I pray that this again would have permanent value, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, two weeks ago we began looking into a very difficult but very enlightening passage in the book of Romans. And the reason why we began looking into it was because it seemed to describe our country and our culture with amazing accuracy. When something written over 2,000 years ago seems to dovetail precisely with where our culture finds itself today, it behooves us to take some time and effort to

see what God is saying. The passage is speaking about the wrath of God, and it opens up with this troubling statement in *Romans 1:18*. It says: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* We spent a good deal of time the last time uncovering just what it was that caused God's wrath to be revealed, and we discovered that the grave sin that's behind all the other sins in our culture is the suppression of truth. We looked further to find that this suppression of truth centers around acknowledging who is the author of creation. God says that creation itself has much to say about who God is and that he reveals those invisible parts of his character having to do with his power and with his nature in what it is he has created. He says in verse 19: *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 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.* God goes on to say that in spite of overwhelming evidence that this world did not happen by chance and that all of the creative things that abound in it from microbes to fish to animals and birds and mountains and oceans and stars and planets, they all shout that there is indeed a creative designer of all things visible, who is worthy of honor for the sheer enormity of his creative power and

that in spite of that evidence, we choose any and every alternative to God as creator, including the prevailing idea in our country that the actual author of everything in creation is this new god now referred to as "no thing" or "nothing." This is the God who creates through random chance and vast oceans of time. Verse 21 says: *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

Well, that brought us to the very first expression of God's wrath revealed. And we pointed out that the wrath of God is not at all as how some people have come to expect. You know, most folks think that God's wrath is expressed in earthquakes and famines and disease but in this particular case God is very clear about how it is that his wrath is expressed. Three times throughout this passage we see repeated the phrase: "God gave them up," "God gave them up," "God gave them up." And each act of God giving us up is a progressive removal of his sovereign control. In essence it's God saying I will give you up to your own natural foolishness. I will take my hands off of you and allow you to see just how far this foolishness is going to take you. I mean I used to use the term "judicial blindness" to describe God's taking his hand off

human decision-making so that mankind feels the full brunt of what it's like to be choosing blindly without any divine guidance whatsoever.

Well, last time out we looked at the very first instance of God giving a culture up. God had pointed out that in spite of overwhelming evidence of God as creator, man chose instead to worship created things such as birds, animals, creeping things, and other human beings. And as punishment, God was going to give us up to the profane worship of human bodies, and we see that in the statement that follows. This is verse 22. He says: *Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.* Well, I said last time that this first giving up by God, this very first expression of God's wrath is exactly what our culture has undergone in the last fifteen years. There is no better description of the scourge of pornography that has gripped this country from top to bottom than to say -- quote -- *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.* That was the penalty that God imposed on us -- quote -- *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. So because we chose to worship the creature rather than Creator, God has chosen to remove the restraint surrounding the dishonoring of our bodies among ourselves. But sad to say, the wrath of God doesn't stop there. Because the focus of our rebellion is the creature, God then says he gives us up to dishonorable passions among the creatures. Verse 26 says: For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and 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. Well, the first thing we have to note with this, understand that God is not imposing this on us. He's not making a zombie force engaging in dishonorable passions. Rather "God has given us up" means that he's removed the restraints that he's allowed our natural, fallen, sinful inclinations to proliferate. And so we've entered into a time similar to what Israel went through in the book of Judges. Judges 17 says: In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. I don't know if there's a single sentence anywhere that better describes what our culture now sees as its basis for morality. Everyone does what's right in their own eyes. There's no biblical standard of right or wrong, and because there is none, LGBT Q has become an acronym that now defines our

culture. This is the form of punishment in and of itself. And I want to tread very carefully here. I mean we're getting into an area that folks say you need to avoid this like the plague. I mean the entire culture has shifted in the area of LGBT Q responses and rights, and anybody now who says that homosexuality is in reality a sin issue is now squarely aligning himself or herself on the side of bigots and haters. I know there's numbers of churches who like to say we love you enough to tell you the truth. My hope is that they do actually love you enough to tell you this truth. And again, we have to understand what God is saying here. The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven not because of homosexuality per se, that's not the offense, the offense is the suppression of truth. Suppress the truth on level 1, God gives us up to the dishonoring of our bodies, and pornography becomes accessible and acceptable as a perverse form of entertainment. And instead of recognizing where we're headed and seeking God's solution, we go headlong in the wrong direction which causes God to enter into his second phase of giving us up, and this again we find in verse 26. *For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions.* Let me just first state for the record that if you are struggling with same-sex attraction, we love you. We want you to be part of our community. We want to share the love of Christ with you. But you have to understand where Christ and the culture is today. They are in two very different places. Our culture has whole-heartedly

given itself over to the idea that you can be Christian and a member in good standing of LGBT Q community, and there's simply no way to square that with what God says. In *1 Corinthians 6* God says: *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.* You have to understand, those are not my words. I didn't say that, God said that. Paul said that writing it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It leaves no doubt that the ongoing acceptance of homosexuality as a lifestyle choice precludes inheriting the kingdom of God. And I know that's completely at odds with much in the evangelical world today. I mean, churches everywhere are falling like dominos when it comes to accepting the idea that homosexuality can be a vital part of a person's sexual expression as a Christian. Folks, we just love you too much to deny you this truth. I mean I would much rather you hate me as a bearer of bad news than love me as a bearer of good news that is in fact a lie. I mean I find it astonishing that so many churches put out rainbow flags saying they are welcoming and non-condemning, implying that those fundamentalist types that are still warning folks about the dangers of the lifestyle are just the opposite. I would challenge that thinking. In fact I think the script has been flipped. I think that those who

are still willing to warn folks about the dangers of same-sex attraction knowing that it now labels them as haters and bigots, that they are the ones who are actually demonstrating genuine love. And here's why.

I've said before the worse thing that you can do to anyone who is locked in a sin is to take a perfectly forgivable sin and turn it into an unforgivable sin. And there's a way to do that, and the way you do that, the way you make any sin unforgivable is you refuse the grace of repentance. Let me just repeat what is critical about what God says about the forgiveness of sins. This is what God says in *1 John 1:9*. We read this all the time. God says: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Now we look at that, it's obvious right from the start that God's offer of forgiveness, it comes in the form of a conditional clause. A conditional clause is a if-then set of circumstances. God is saying if you do A, I will do B. If we confess our sins, then God is faithful and just to forgive us those sins. Now you probably heard me mention that the word for "confess" here is a compound word made of two Greek words. The two words are "homo" and "logeo." "Homo" means same; "logeo" means to speak. "Homologeo" means "to same speak." What that means is to agree, to be speaking the same language, to be on the same page, to be saying the same

thing. And what God means by that word "confess" is that if we agree with the Holy Spirit's conviction about a sin and we bring that conviction before him, then he is faithful and just to forgive us that sin. The condition here in this conditional clause is that you must same speak with God's Holy Spirit about the sin you're confessing. In essence you must agree with God that homosexual expression is sinful. That's the Holy Spirit convicting us.

But what if you're surrounded by people who tell you that homosexuality is not a sin issue but instead a genetic predetermination or a form of personal expression or even a gift of God for which you have no responsibility and no need whatsoever for confession? What if people who claim to be loving you convince you you have no need to even seek the grace of repentance and certainly no need to ask for forgiveness for something that is no longer considered sinful. I mean, have they not made a forgivable sin unforgivable? If you take away the first condition for forgiveness, that is a willingness to confess sin, then you've made the second part that God is faithful and just to forgive us of sin an impossibility. I mean to me that is the exact opposite of loving somebody. To me that is a form of profound hatred. I mean imagine being told that you're perfectly healthy when in reality the folks telling you that no, you have a hidden health issue that's going to kill you. And if you question the people telling

you that you were fine and they told you well, the options for people with this sickness are difficult and they're life changing, and even though we know deep down this is going to kill you, we didn't want you to go through those kinds of difficulties. Would you then think that they are the ones who are really caring? I mean if they said we no longer believe the Bible, especially when it comes to areas of sexuality, at least they would be speaking the truth. But to dress up the denial of scripture as a form of love and compassion reminds me so much of what Jesus said when he asked in *Luke 11: What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?* See, grace offered to those struggling with same-sex attraction without any truth whatsoever is no different than offering snakes and scorpions to someone who is simply asking for fish and eggs, because God is willing to heal any sin except the sin for which you refuse to ask for forgiveness. And if what God says is truth and if suppressing the truth is a hideous crime in God's eyes, then what option do you have but to speak the truth in love?

I just finished reading a wonderful book entitled *A Change of Affection* by Becket Cook. It's subtitled *A Gay Man's Incredible Story of Redemption*, which has got a forward written by Francis Chan. Cook was a man steeped in the homosexual life-style. This

was a man who was a set designer for Hollywood stars like Meryl Streep, Katy Perry, Oprah Winfrey. He was a deeply cynical man who had no use whatsoever for Christianity until one day God miraculously opened his eyes. And his book is an incredible story of 180-degree turn that basically he walked away from the life-style and into seminary with no regrets whatsoever. And he describes in his book the dangers of rewriting scripture. He says this: "The consciences of today's Christians are being corrupted by the oppressive cultural milieu and the extreme social pressure surrounding the issue of homosexuality. But we know that the law of the Lord is written on our hearts, (Jeremiah 31), and though we may succeed in muting our conscience, the word of God is eternal: 'The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever' (Isaiah 40). It is never safe to tamper with conscience, and it is absolutely fatal to tamper with God's Word."

Folks, tampering with God's word is the only way you can sell the idea that the LGBT Q life-style and Christianity are compatible. There are plenty of churches who are quite willing to take profoundly obvious scriptures such as our text this morning and literally turn them inside out. It's almost as if we're back in the Garden of Eden and the serpent is repeating the line all over again slightly different at this time, saying, "Has God really said that the gay life-style is wrong?" This issue has somehow managed

to split the church, splitting it right down the middle and there are churches that are happy to tell somebody struggling with same-sex attraction they're going to hell, end of story. There's also churches happy to tell the very same strugglers not to worry at all, that those scriptures speaking about homosexuality as sin are really just anachronisms just relics from those backward days when we truly didn't have a handle on the Bible's view of sexuality. Can we say right from the start that neither of those positions is Christ-like. In fact they're anything but. We need to look to Jesus who was the perfect example of grace and truth. But more often than not we just ignore his example. So we've decided to split in two and that you make the choice between churches who speak the truth with no grace at all and churches who speak grace with very little concern about truth. The fact is that any church that seeks to represent Christ has to understand that he was totally committed to both.

As Randy Alcorn put it in his book *"The Grace and Truth Paradox"* -- quote -- "Truth oriented Christians love studying Scripture and theology. But sometimes they are quick to judge and slow to forgive. They are strong on truth, weak on grace. Grace oriented Christians love forgiveness and freedom. But sometimes they neglect Bible study and see moral standards as 'legalism.' They're strong on grace, weak on truth. Countless mistakes in marriage,

parenting, ministry, and other relationships are failures to balance grace and truth. Sometimes we neglect both. Often we choose one over the other."

And what God wants from this church clearly is both. But understand that our culture has turned the corner on this. Our popular culture and media is intent on convincing us that this is now settled, that homosexuality is no longer even remotely to be considered a moral issue. In fact more and more states are enacting legislation making it illegal to even offer any type of counseling suggesting that people have the power to turn away from same-sex attraction. You see the LGBT Q lobby is incredibly powerful and has a lock hold on what you're allowed to know about where our culture is on same-sex attraction. And it doesn't want you to know that there are hundreds of believers who are struggling with same-sex attraction who are finding the grace and power in Christ to turn from that lifestyle. My guess is that none of you were informed by the press about to what took place this past September as opposed to yesterday's women's march which was everywhere. Amanda Casanova of *Crosswalk* writes this about what took place in September. She says: "Hundreds of people gathered in Orlando over the weekend for a Freedom March, an event featuring men and women who say Jesus delivered them from the LGBT lifestyle. Many of the event's leaders had abandoned an LGBT lifestyle. The

event's worship leader Edward Byrd, shared that he formerly identified as androgynous before he became a Christian. The Freedom March's founder, Jeffrey McCall, said he was a former transgender prostitute. The Uprooted Heart founder, MJ Nixon, who baptized people at the event, said she was a former lesbian." You've never heard of this, you've never even seen remotely that these people even exist. The article goes on to showcase people who, by God's grace, have abandoned the LGBT lifestyle. I mean, as far as the culture and the press is concerned, these people do not exist.

And then there's this news as reported by *CBN*. They said this: "Capitol Hill - A number of former homosexuals and transgendered people gathered recently outside the U.S. Congress to say sexual identity can be changed and their changed lives are proof. These folks came to Capitol Hill to warn Congress is considering legislation banning some counseling that could lead LGBT Q people out of these lifestyles. They're leery of legislation they feel discriminates against former gays and transgenders. They said they oppose HR5, HR3570 and Senate 2008."

Now this article had dozens and dozens of testimonies. I gave you right now excerpts from four of these remarkable testimonies and, like I said, there's plenty more. This is Luis Ruiz from Orlando,

Florida. He said: "For a long time, I was very broken and hurt. I found out that I was HIV positive because I was promiscuous. While I was searching for men, sleeping around a lot, I didn't realize that there was a man looking for me. And His name is Jesus. I was able to find a church where they loved me. And they taught me that my identity is not my behavior. My identity was not who I thought it was. But it was a child of God. So I stand here to say that I was a homosexual and now I am a child of God."

Kevin Whitt of Dallas, Texas writes: "I'm a former transsexual, drag queen, and prostitute. I lived a life of much gender confusion, much abuse -- verbally, physically, sexually -- by my father. Over the years I had had probably 5,000 sexual partners because I was a sex worker. I hated myself. I hated the fact that I was a man. I never knew how to accept myself or truly love myself. And then about six years ago, someone invited me to church. And God began to change my life. Began to change my heart. And began to change my sexual identity, my gender confusion. And I began to heal from all those things. Change is possible. Because if God can change me, He can change anybody."

KathyGrace Duncan of Portland, Oregon said this: "My name is KathyGrace Duncan, I'm from Portland Oregon and I'm a former transman, former transgender. Before I went to kindergarten, at a very

early age like three or four, I believed that I should have been a man. I felt that I should have been a man. My dad was very emotionally and verbally abusive to my mom, which told me that women were hated, women were weak and they were vulnerable. I was then molested by a family member which went on for two years, also confirming that women were weak, vulnerable and hated. At age 18, I finally surrendered and went into the lifestyle, took hormones and changed my name. From there, I began to live as a man. Two weeks later, I got saved. However, because I didn't hear from the Lord, I thought He was okay with my lifestyle. Four years later I was confronted by the church, and they asked me, 'Who are you? Who are you really?' And at that point, I told the truth and said, 'I'm a woman living as a man.' And the Holy Spirit blew into me. And I realized at that point I needed to go back to being the woman that He created me to be. The next day I started that journey out. Five years later -- it took five years for the hormone effects to really wear off -- and at that point, I crossed over and began to live fully as a woman. That was 26 years ago. And I have to say, I'm changed. I'm free. I no longer struggle with the attraction to women."

And finally Christopher Sims, who was tortured by his parents, he says: "I'm a person who formerly had a same-sex attraction. When I was very young in New York City, my father -- who is a pastor --

raped me. And when I got to kindergarten, my mother and my father decided to take me out of school. And I was taken out of school for a total of eight years. And during that time, I was tortured by my mother. My mother was very hurt by men. So any sign of masculinity was a trigger and a threat to her. I learned that I could not be masculine. I learned that I had to be effeminate. I had to emulate my sisters to avoid triggering her and so that I could survive. By the time I was 18, I had been living in Alaska for a year. I had been through foster care. That was a time where the things that I had suppressed began to manifest themselves through pornography addiction. By that time I had a restraining order. I was in anger management. I was in counseling for PTSD. And I had a measure of gender dysphoria. And it was also that year that a friend who was 18 decided to force me to go to church. I wanted nothing to do with church. But when I went to that church, I saw something in those people's eyes that I had never seen before. I saw a God that my parents did not tell me about. Those people in that church -- they didn't hate me or anything. They loved me. I saw life inside of them and I wanted that freedom and that life. The love that I saw inside of their eyes convicted me of the error of my ways. And I remember for three weeks just telling God how sorry I was for all the wrong that I had done. And He said, 'Christopher, I love you.'"

Now I want you to note, I want you to note a thread in all four of those conversations. I'll repeat it. These are just little lines from each one: Luis Ruiz said, "I was able to find a church where they loved me and they taught me that my identity is not my behavior. Kevin Whitt said: "Then about six years ago someone invited me to church and God began to change my life." KathyGrace Duncan said: "Four years later I was confronted by the church. And they asked me, 'Who are you? Who are you really?'" And Christopher Sims said, "It was also that year that a friend who was 18 decided to force me to go to church. I wanted nothing to do with church but when I went to that church I saw something in those people's eyes that I had never seen before. I saw a God that my parents did not tell me about. Those people in that church, they didn't hate me or anything. They loved me." We see "the church," "the church," "the church," "the church." And when we say "church," we're not talking about a building, we're talking about a community. And in fact if you think about it, there's only one community remaining who still believes what the Bible teaches about same-sex attraction, that it is outside of the will of God and spiritually deadly. The only folks who believe that now is the church. Our culture no longer believes this at all.

It was Francis Schaeffer who pointed out that cultures collapse when they believe in biblical principles only for romantic reasons.

You see, for years our culture said that same-sex attraction was wrong but it had really no idea why. As Schaeffer said, they believed it for romantic reasons. They believed it because their parents believed it and their grandparents before them believed it, all as a part of their culture. But the idea that it goes against God's biblical order of creation, that God said he created us in his image, male and female he created us, and that all of creation bears the evidence that female and male are to complement each other and that in marriage is only male and female that can only make one flesh. All of the reasons why homosexuality cannot be affirmed go back to the most basic assumption there is, that there is a God who ordered his creation, a God to whom all of us must one day give an account. And it is this God who unequivocally declares that homosexuality is sin. That's the truth part of the equation. What is critical in all of this is that we administer the grace part because Christ in his gospel is always a combination of grace and truth. So what do you do if your son or your daughter, your friend, your brother, your cousin, your aunt, your uncle embraces the lifestyle? Well, the first principle is this: Love God first then love your neighbor as yourself.

I have a dear friend whose adult daughter left her three children and her husband for a lesbian relationship, and the person she left her husband for also left her husband and family for this same

relationship and both of these individuals came from a very solid, very solid evangelical churches. And they're now attending evangelical churches that affirm their lifestyle. And for all intents and purposes, they're very comfortable because of that affirmation. That's not remotely what loving somebody is about. That's not remotely what speaking the truth in love is about. My friend had a conversation with his daughter and he said I love you and I will always love you but I will always love God more, and because he loves God more, he cannot go along with the subterfuge that says everything is just fine. So what do you do? Well, the first thing is attitude. You weep for those who are caught in this longing for the gift of repentance for them, seeking to restore them in a spirit of gentleness. *Galatians 6* says: *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.* If you have someone who is caught up in the lifestyle, the next thing you have to do is commit yourself to prayer, understanding that no one has access to the inside of your loved one's head but your loved one and God. And time and time again we read of people coming back into the fold as a result of prayer, as a result of God's Holy Spirit convicting and bringing them back. We just read four of them. And secondly we recognize that there's another subterfuge that's often applied to this over

and over again. It's thinking that my son or my daughter, my friend or my cousin who is now in the lifestyle, well, they accepted Jesus when they were seven years old or they got baptized when they were twelve or they gave their lives to Jesus when they were a teenager, so therefore at least they're saved. Listen, I believe any of those scenarios could be true but there's also much evidence to the contrary. And the last thing I want to do is burst any bubbles about understanding the spiritual health of those who are close to you, but we're talking about speaking truth in love. And part of that is being honest in assessing the spiritual health of those that I love. Part of the assessment is understanding that Jesus went out of his way over and over again to warn us about false conversions. The parable of the sower and the seed lays out a number of different kinds of false conversions, much of which appeared at first to be real. Jesus warned us in the story of the wheat and the tares that there would be plenty of people who looked and acted like Christians at one time who were actually not believers. I mean I say that not to increase your pain but to sharpen your strategy when dealing with someone caught in this lifestyle. It doesn't help them or you to fall back on a gesture made many years before, hoping that somehow that makes everything okay. God tells us over and over again that when conversion is genuine, the Holy Spirit enters into your life and your life begins to change. You bear fruit in keeping with your conversion. A life

spent fully embracing an ongoing pattern of sin is a good indication that that person has never received the Holy Spirit. ¹ *John 3:6* says: *No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.* If someone close to you has embraced this lifestyle, do not assume that since they made a profession of faith way back when that they're believers. They may indeed be prodigal sons needing to be called back to the fold but they may also be folks who have never experienced the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But either way we take no comfort that they are spiritually secure. And we engage prayerfully repeatedly at the risk of being misunderstood in the battle for their souls. I think my friend stated the principle very well, we are called to love these folks. God expects us to love these folks but he expects us to love Him more. And how that is reflected in the way you respond to a person caught up in a same-sex attraction is going to vary and differ depending upon the person and the relationship that you have with them, but in each case the principle remains the same. There must always be a balance of grace and truth.

And thirdly we need to seek the help of the church community. It was the church that God used to bring these folks back. We encourage others to pray, to weep and to reach out because there's all kinds of practical questions that we have to address, practical

questions that these situations bring up. One question that I've heard over and over again, should I attend a same-sex wedding. Very difficult question. I know one brother who told his sister and her same sex partner that he couldn't attend the wedding because it would mean that he was in agreement with the marriage, but he wanted her to know that he loved her and so he asked if she would let him take her and her partner out to lunch. What if my son wants to bring his same sex partner home for the weekend? If somebody would ask me that, my first question would be how would I respond if somebody wanted to bring somebody of the opposite sex home for the weekend? My response would be sure, but you're going to be sleeping in separate bedrooms. What should my relationship be with the grandchildren of same sex partners produced by surrogacy or sperm donations? Again, my response would be that children have no responsibility whatsoever for how they came into the world. They're just looking for people to love them. I mean there's dozens and dozens more questions, all of which needed to be treated individually by those who are seeking out God's wisdom for each and every circumstance, praying and knowing that this requires supernatural wisdom. God says: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.* Folks, if there's ever a time to ask ourselves what would Jesus do, it is now. So prayerfully commit to asking for the wisdom, grace, and strength to follow in his footsteps and

do likewise. I mean, there's no grace in an approach that says I reject you and your lifestyle out of hand, and there's no truth in the response that says this lifestyle is perfectly okay. Think of the testimonies we've just heard. These are people who have now come fully back into the fold. They speak again and again about church communities loving them enough to speak both grace and truth. They say that's what brought them back by the power of God's Holy Spirit.

You may not have yet have been touched personally by this second level of God's giving up a culture, but I'm warning you, it's only a matter of time. And again as I've said the last time, when we're in these type of situations, understand, God is always the solution. I mean, as these testimonies demonstrate, God has not abandoned us. He is here, he is present, he is powerful, and he's longing to use you and me as a means of bringing his grace and truth to a culture that has lost its way. The question isn't just are we willing to love those caught up in this lifestyle by showing them God's grace, it is also are we willing to love them enough to tell them God's truth like Jesus did, even when it might be painful for them and for us. John said of Jesus: *We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* Question is, are we willing to follow in the steps of the Master? *Ephesians 4* says: *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to*

grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. Let's pray.

Father, I know this is hard stuff, I know this is difficult stuff, I know that we live in difficult times. We live in a time when everyone does what is right in their own eyes. And Lord, it just is striking how the only place where you can find truth now is in the church, is in that community of people within the church, the subset now of people in the church who believe your word and believe what it says. And Lord, there's probably dozens and dozens of individual unique stories just in this congregation alone, and I pray for each and every person that they would pray and weep and seek for the gift of repentance for their loved ones, that they would recognize that this is way beyond all of our pay grades but that's okay, God's strength is that made perfect in our weakness and so that we would all collectively and individually reach out to God and ask for the wisdom we need moment by moment to have the privilege of bringing others back into the fold. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.