What Does This Church Think of LGBT?
“Topics you always wanted a sermon on” series
I Corinthians 6:9-11; John 8:1-11

Back in 2013, Pastor Tim Challies wrote: “It is becoming increasingly clear that homosexuality will be a defining issue for the twenty-first century church, at least here in North America. It seems inevitable that same-sex marriage will soon be legalized across America; it has been the law in Canada for several years now. Meanwhile the acceptance and celebration of homosexuality is becoming a cultural shibboleth, (that is a test used as) a means of determining who has a voice worth hearing and who does not.

In the middle of all this is the Christian church which, since time immemorial, has held that the Bible forbids homosexuality. Is it time, as so many insist, for Christians to take a second look at the Bible, to get with the times, and to embrace homosexuality as a valid lifestyle, a valid expression of love and sexuality? Many Christians feel threatened, like their backs are against the wall, and that this issue represents a major threat to their faith. But is it possible that Christians have been thinking about the issue all wrong? As Peter Hubbard asks, “What if homosexuality is not a threat but an opportunity? Could God use one of the most controversial moral issues in our nation to awaken His church rather than damage it?”

This challenge fits right in with the question someone in our congregation submitted early last winter for our “Topics you always wanted a sermon on” series. The exact question was “What does this church think about LGBT?” In other words, what does Barre EFC think about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender actions (that is what LGBT stands for)? It has been 5 years since Pastor Tim wrote the earlier quote and the issue is even becoming stronger as we will see next week when we talk about gender. Because there is so many encouraging things I would like to say or illustrate, but don’t have time to do, I have produced a packet of 5 articles, testimonies and news reports on this subject. Those are on the lobby table. Those will represent first hand experiences of those with same-sex attractions. Let’s become free & confident in God enough so we can genuinely listen and dialogue. And may great good come out of these difficult times – especially in challenging each of us personally to pursue holiness stronger. Now we are a big enough group that there are some here that are struggling with same-sex attractions yourself, or maybe some actions you have done in the past. I hope by the end you might see God’s truth in a bigger way and even be able quietly reach out to myself or another leader to talk through your struggle inside. We all want ourselves and the others around us to find greater freedom in Jesus.

So what does the Barre EFC think about LGBT? Because we are a Bible-believing church, our answer is based on God’s word to us – the Bible. So we start with “What does God say in the Bible about LGBT?” The Bible is actually quite clear as reflected here in this short passage in I Corinthians 6:8-11. READ.
PROPOSITION: Every human has unchosen feelings/desires which we need to submit to Jesus. God’s goal for every human on planet earth is the same: redemption, reconciliation & new life!

I. We believe God’s ways are always best

A. Sin keeps us from heaven

The first thing that we see is that human sin keeps us from heaven. READ I Cor 6:8-9a. “Inheriting the Kingdom of God” refers to going to heaven and receiving all the blessings that God has for us as His spiritual children. God’s Kingdom is so radically holy that those who insist on living their own way, instead of God’s way, simply will not be there. We may rationalize our behavior and feel we have a right to do certain things but those thoughts, excuses & rationalizations simply will not stand up when examined by God’s righteousness. At the core, sin makes a god of our self. We can NOT do what we want, when we want and how we want and expect paradise forever – we’ll mess it up. All humans need to humble themselves before Almighty God and follow His way.

B. Same sex sexual relations (actions) are sin

Second we are given some actions God considers clearly wrong. READ v 9-10. This is a pretty broad list here that covers far more than sexual immorality. Speaking about “thieves” do you know that more was stolen from stores by the employees than by shoplifters? And the level of slander in our land is off the charts as people pass along false posts on social media without personally checking them out first. In the middle of this list, we read at the end of verse 9 “men who have sex with men”. So “men who have sex with men” will not inherit the Kingdom of God any more than those others. It clearly is referring to same sex actions, not just inclinations – it is the actual physical sexual relations that are the sin. But these same sex actions are also not on some separate level from other sins God calls us not to do.

C. We are all sinners

Romans 3:23 reminds us that we are all sinners – “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” No one can continue to regularly do any of the actions in this list, saying God is fine with it & have any confidence they are going to heaven.

D. The answer is the gospel

So what is the answer to these sins and the temptations to do them? It is the gospel. READ v 11. We are washed by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross for us, we are justified by Christ’s death in our place and we are sanctified by Jesus’ righteousness being credited to us & the Holy Spirit’s work in our life. This is the GOOD NEWS or gospel of Jesus. We can not clean ourselves up enough by human effort to be worthy of the Kingdom of God but when we repent of our wrong, believe in Jesus and commit to going God’s way – not only does God start a genuine personal relationship with us, but He also brings help into our lives so we can say “no” to ways God considers wrong.
E. Focus on sin, not just a sin (or sin category) – no despising or excusing

Right off we can see two challenges that will help us bring good during this cultural controversy. FIRST, because we believe all sin, as Christians, we want focus on sin, not just a sin or a sin category. The depravity of our sin nature is deeper and worse than any individual sin. So if you or I despise those who are struggling with same-sex attractions then we really are minimizing our own sin and thinking we are better than others. In a similar way it would be unloving and uncompassionate to say God approve of or is fine with that which He calls sin. God is clear no one who willfully and regularly engages in unrepentant sin will inherit the Kingdom of God. Our individual sins or sin categories may be different, but we are all sinners who are totally dependent upon God’s grace to be saved from the eternal consequences of our core sin. Focusing on sin, not just a sin or category of sins, brings us back to our common goal of encouraging holiness in ourselves and others.

F. Let this drive you to identify what urges you need to regularly say ‘no’ to

The SECOND challenge that helps to bring good out of the controversy around us is to let any discussion of other sins we aren’t personally tempted by, drive us personally to identify what urges we struggle to say ‘no’ to regularly. This transforms us & puts us back on God’s path to holiness. Roseria Butterfield was a strong lesbian who came to know Jesus as Savior and Lord. A couple years after she left her lesbian lifestyle, she challenged the adult Sunday School class she was in, “I had to give up my lesbian lover, what have you given up to follow Christ?” To their credit, most of the people in that class shared something important they have given up for Jesus. Jesus said clearly that anyone who wants to be His disciple must deny themselves, take up the cross and follow Him (Luke 9:23). Victory is IN the struggle, not that we don’t have any struggle. What is your personal challenge that hinders the growth of holiness in you? Endless worry, lust, selfishness, materialism, sinful pride, thinking the world owes you? You and I constantly have feelings that are trying to deceive us and that is no different than same-sex attraction.

II. What is victory for those with same-sex attractions

So what does victory look like for those with same-sex attractions who want to follow Jesus? The same as it looks for any other Christian?

A. A strong relationship with Jesus

Victory starts with a strong relationship with Jesus where we continually grow in our confidence & trust in God’s ways! If a person doesn’t really trust Jesus, then they are going to insist that they have to understand everything first before obeying – that is not faith. That is making a god of ourselves & our very limited human understanding. The stronger our sin temptations, the more real our personal relationship with Jesus needs to be for victory. Over the years, God has convinced me personally that all of His commands are valuable – whether I understand why or not. I have seen how every command of God provides something positive for us and protects us from something negative. So no matter how hard God’s commands seem, they are for our best!
B. An identity based on who we are in Christ

Second, victory continues as our identity changes from what others think, what we can or can’t do or how we feel. We now see ourselves as being forgiven sons & daughters of Jesus, saved by grace and seeking to respond through honoring Jesus with our actions.

C. Abstinence from same-sex sex

Third, victory comes in abstaining from wrong actions & doing God honoring actions in their place. Victory is in the struggle, not trying to get rid of any struggle. So victory in same-sex attraction comes from abstaining from actual same-sex sexual actions. It is no different than any other strong desire leading us to do something God doesn’t approve of.

D. Notice what is not in this list

Notice that I did not say victory for those who feel same sex attraction is to never feel same-sex attraction again. Heterosexual desires are not the goal – living a holy life is. Sometimes God completely takes away our desires to sin in an area – but even when that happens there is another area of temptation we need to regularly battle in our lives. There are testimonies of both in the packet on the table. But if we don’t have a Biblically informed picture of what spiritual victory looks like then we are going to put unrealistic expectations on others or ourselves. Men are victorious over their desire for pornography, not only when they don’t have any sexual desires, but when they don’t give in to the temptation to turn it on. It is actually through our struggle with sin that we learn greater faith and trust in Jesus because we will not be victorious over the long run without His power. Don’t go by “feelings of victory” – go by the transformation God is doing over time. That is why it is essential to remember our verses from 2 Peter 1. It is progress that is key.

That is why it is always wrong (it is actually testing God) when we get involved with something we shouldn’t, then pray, “Lord, if this is wrong or not Your will, then take these feelings from me.” Then when the feelings remain people claim it is evidence that those actions must be OK with God. That is simply not how God works. That is the temptation satan tried to get Jesus to do – jump off this high point and God’s angels will save you. Virtually every person who has spoken to me about their same-sex attraction has said (1) I didn’t choose this – it just happened; (2) I prayed for God to take the feelings away; (3) God didn’t and now I am tired of the inward battle. That is the real turning point – not just in dealing with same-sex attraction, but in dealing with any temptation struggle we regularly face! IF the overwhelmed same-sex attracted person chooses to obey Jesus and doesn’t act on their feelings as a way to positively honor their Lord, then there is victory – not always in feeling right off, but in reality. But if the overwhelmed same-sex attracted person rationalizes the plain Words of God and believes the deception of sin, then they will temporarily feel better, only to find themselves becoming more and more in bondage and farther and farther from God. This is true for all of us, just different temptations! Turn to John 8.
III. How are we to respond to the LGBT beliefs or inclinations?  

So how do we respond to those with LGBT beliefs or inclinations? We want to bring hope and compassion into all peoples’ lives. Practically speaking a person needs to be struggling with their same-sex attraction before there is an openness to a different path. We can’t necessarily see that on the outside, which is why it is doubly important to listen and ask questions. Right now our culture says, “If someone has LGBT inclinations, you need to affirm that and encourage those actions.” Jesus shows us a very different picture of help here in John 8. We want to treat LGBT people with great compassion even as we join Jesus in calling them to abandon homosexual for the greater pleasures of knowing Christ.

A. Don’t be pulled in to the trap, but reframe it  

As we read in the service, the religious leaders set a trap for Jesus in John 8:1-8. This is the same “gotcha” we face at times today when we hold on to God’s truth in a culture that no longer respects that. So if you are put on the spot in a LGBT challenge, follow Jesus’ lead – He doesn’t let Himself get pulled into the trap, but reframes the discussion. READ v 5-6. The key isn’t what Jesus is writing on the ground – the key is Jesus is not answering the question they were so sure would trap Him. Don’t be sucked into answering every troll, outrageous comment, challenge or question? Because Jesus won’t answer – the leaders keep pushing Jesus. READ v 7-8. Notice Jesus reframes the question — OK, let the one who is without sin start the judgement. Have confidence in God, this is His battle, not ours. We are simply witnesses.

B. See the person not just issue  

Second, in these intense, uncomfortable times keep making yourself see a person, not just an issue, cause or frustration. READ v 9-10. The religious leaders didn’t care about this woman as a person – she was just a pawn in their attempt to discredit Jesus. Where is the man? He is just as deserving of stoning. In all the bitterness and argumentativeness around us – see individual people as ones made in God’s image and with the same broken sin nature as we have whom God is reaching out to in love.

C. Offer the path of hope and healing (law can not change a heart)  

Third, offer the path of hope and healing. READ v 10-11. On the one hand, Jesus doesn’t condemn her, meaning He doesn’t bring final judgement by starting the stoning. Jesus is the only one there without sin. But notice “not condemning” does not mean approving an alternate lifestyle or not challenging her actions. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” Those are very strong words. He not only judges the adultery, but also her whole approach to life. Then Jesus calls for immediate change of actions – break off that relationship immediately – stop living together right now. NOTICE that this is the complete opposite of what our culture is asking us to do. They want us to approve and celebrate, even help. We are not loving someone by ignoring the danger they are heading for, but we also can’t change hearts by just declaring law. Jesus does declare the woman’s actions wrong, but in a way that offers a different path. There are a lot of people who struggle with same-sex attraction that are counting on us to help them go a different way, when culture just says, feel good about yourself.
D. "Fear of the Lord" is the beginning of wisdom - Never compromise God's truth
Jn 8:11b
Finally remember that "the fear of the Lord" is the beginning of wisdom. NEVER compromise on God's truth – Jesus clearly doesn't here. Without the truth one can not be set free. Have confidence in God, He brings good out of ANY situation!

IV. What about the modern challenges?

A. I was born this way
While we haven't found any clear genetic evidence of homosexuality, affirm that their feelings of same-sex attraction can arise without any deliberate choice on their part. All of us have some urges, desires, and feelings that would not honor God which arise deep within us. Understanding the depth of the depravity of our old sin nature helps us be helpful. We all are called to say 'No' to some of our desires to honor Jesus.

B. You Christians today are just against things, you are so narrow-minded and bigoted
Being "for" something automatically means you are against its opposite in some way. What I love about this challenge is that it is a really helpful reminder to every Christian to not just focus on the "no", but turn and make our goal positive. We are for reconciliation with God, transformation and freedom deep inside. We want the best for them, not just what is easiest for us.

C. The Bible verses don’t apply to loving same sex committed relationships
Currently, there are many attempts to say the 6-8 clearest verses against homosexual and lesbian sexual actions are misunderstood and don't apply to loving or committed same-sex relationships. These attempts are all false and twist the plain meaning of the text incredibly. Bill Wick has made detailed summaries of 3 books that deal with these verses and claims in depth. You can e-mail the church office for copies – they are long summaries of 25-45 pages each! But no question is left unanswered.

D. Jesus never mentions homosexuality or same-sex marriages
One of the most popular claims in our day comes from a faulty argument from silence. "Jesus never specifically condemns homosexuality or same-sex marriage; therefore, Jesus must be for it, because He is loving." But if we accept this contorted logic, Jesus must also support human trafficking, child abuse and sex with animals because he never spoke out specifically against them either. Given the culture, Jesus' direct teaching on gender & marriage & His affirmation of the whole Old Testament, there is no way one can give actual proof Jesus approves of same-sex unions.

V. Follow-up question: Should a committed Christian go to a same-sex marriage ceremony?
A follow-up question was put in my box a couple weeks ago: "Should a committed Christian go to a same-sex marriage ceremony?" What makes this question super tough is that there is no clear way to please God and not threaten the relationship with the other. The closer the relationship the more that is at stake. Can we invite our gay son & partner to
family gatherings — of course? Can we welcome into our home, our lesbian mother who divorced our dad for her female lover? Absolutely! Can we offer real friendship and love to committed, active LGBT friends & neighbors who totally disagree with everything we believe — without a doubt. We are all humans made in God’s image, broken by sin and struggling with sinful desires that feel good. But the public marriage service is different than these other relationship situations. So my response has always been the same: “What is the purpose of the wedding and your presence there?” As a pastor who officiates weddings, I always make mention that those attending are witnesses to encourage this union. If my presence there is seen in any way as a confirmation or approval, I personally can’t be there. By the way, my kids also know that I can’t be at a wedding of a Christian to a non-Christian. I treat LGBT issues the same as all others.

Now not all pastors will agree with me on this. A number will say that maintaining the family relationship is most important and gives the best chance for their change over time — Christians are already too known for just saying ‘no’. I simply ask grace for each other’s convictions. This is a Romans 14 situation where each person needs to be convinced in their own mind, but we are to give grace to one another. God confirms His ways most clearly over time. So I encourage you not to get upset at Christians who take a different position than you do on this point. On a practical note, if you choose not to go to a same-sex marriage of someone close out of a desire for you to be faithful to Jesus make sure you also do some sacrifice, some act of love, some gift (but not for the wedding) in the future. Leisa and I had a principle in bringing up our kids that if we ever asked them NOT to do something because of OUR faith, that we replaced that with something else of equivalent value. You are not going because of your faith, not their preference.

So what does this church think of LGBT? The same as we think of any other area where God has called us one way, but our culture is choosing to go a different way. We desire that individuals find a desire for holiness and a personal relationship with Jesus in their own lives. We are willing to be maligned, so we can offer hope to people when they start to question cultural values. At the same time we want to personally challenge ourselves to battle our own powerful inner temptations in Jesus’ power the same way we think others should change. Finally, we want to learn to trust God more and be more confident that He can bring good out of even the toughest situations. Virtually all societies, faiths and people groups in the past have come back to the importance of marriage between one man & one woman for life when challenged by alternate lifestyles, why are we becoming unglued now? We have seen even the hardest advocates for unbiblical thought personally come to times of inner questioning, why do we lose hope? Let these problems and conflicts in culture help you gain a greater heart for people, a stronger confidence God is at work, and grow your desire to honor Jesus in all you do. If you are personally struggling with same-sex attractions, don’t be afraid to quietly talk to myself or one of the other leaders here in a private setting. It will not unnerve us and we won’t attack, tell others or publicly try to shame you. Please know we will encourage you to consider the way of Jesus instead of the easy way of feelings. Because we are facing the same challenges just in a whole different area, and we have experience the power of Jesus’ way!