

Grace & Truth Inside Out
Gender, Sexuality and Marriage, Part 2
Various Passages

Throughout all time, God has called His people to trust Him, to walk in His ways, and to proclaim His glory through word and deed. Regarding His chosen nation, Israel, God called her in the Old Testament to be set apart. Leviticus 18:1-5 states:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'I am the LORD your God. You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes. You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the LORD your God. So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD.'"

Likewise, God speaks through Peter in the New Testament in 1 Peter 2:5-12 to Christians - the Church:

...you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture: "Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed." This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone," and, "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Did you notice the multi-varied identity and position Christian people have? On the one hand, we're a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. Why? So that we may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. On the other hand, though, we're aliens and strangers in a land that is not our final home. Beyond what we say, in what we do we're called to abstain from fleshly lusts, to keep our behavior excellent, and to persist in good deeds despite false accusations that we're doing what is evil. Why? So that as people observe us, they will glorify God. You see, being one saved by God by grace through faith has always meant being set apart. Specifically, the results of such a salvation mean possessing an identity granted and determined by God, having access to power through the Holy Spirit to live according to His standards, and being distinct from - and sometimes persecuted by - the unbelieving world. Because of these things, Christians really must come to a

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point where they trust God's ways more than anything else, no matter how intense the pressure or temptation becomes to do otherwise. To use a phrase from the Apostle Paul found in his letter to the church in Rome, it's called the "obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5; 16:26).

Today, we're going to look at what the Bible - God's Word - says about gender, sexuality and marriage. In a world where gender is coming to be defined more by an individual's "inner compass" than by innate physiology, where sex of all kinds is elevated to a place of chief importance in terms of personal identity, self-gratification and freedom of expression, and where believing and speaking according to God's standards found in Scripture are increasingly considered outdated, irrelevant and unenlightened at best and bigoted and hateful at worst, we should pause to hear what God has to say about this scene. But before we do, I must ask again: Do you trust God's ways more than anything else, no matter how intense the pressure or temptation becomes to do otherwise? For you see the passage I'm about to read, taken from the Old Testament, tells us what God has to say about practices and messages promoted by so-called prophets that run counter to His ways and His words...and He says so, I might add, in a most unambiguous and unyielding way. So, without further ado, hear the word of the Lord from Jeremiah chapter 23 (reading from the New Living Translation):

“What sorrow awaits the leaders of my people—the shepherds of my sheep—for they have destroyed and scattered the very ones they were expected to care for,” says the Lord. Therefore, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to these shepherds: “Instead of caring for my flock and leading them to safety, you have deserted them and driven them to destruction. Now I will pour out judgment on you for the evil you have done to them. But I will gather together the remnant of my flock from the countries where I have driven them. I will bring them back to their own sheepfold, and they will be fruitful and increase in number. Then I will appoint responsible shepherds who will care for them, and they will never be afraid again. Not a single one will be lost or missing. I, the Lord, have spoken! For the time is coming,” says the Lord, “when I will raise up a righteous descendant from King David’s line. He will be a King who rules with wisdom. He will do what is just and right throughout the land. And this will be his name: ‘The Lord Is Our Righteousness.’ In that day Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety. In that day,” says the Lord, “when people are taking an oath, they will no longer say, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, who rescued the people of Israel from the land of Egypt.’ Instead, they will say, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the people of Israel back to their own land from the land of the north and from all the countries to which he had exiled them.’ Then they will live in their own land. My heart is broken because of the false prophets, and my bones tremble. I stagger like a drunkard, like someone overcome by wine, because of the holy words the Lord has spoken against them. For the land is full of adultery, and it lies under a curse. The land itself is in mourning—its wilderness pastures are dried up. For they all do evil and abuse what power they have. Even the priests and prophets are ungodly, wicked men. I have seen their despicable acts right here in my own Temple,” says the Lord. “Therefore, the

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paths they take will become slippery. They will be chased through the dark, and there they will fall. For I will bring disaster upon them at the time fixed for their punishment. I, the Lord, have spoken! I saw that the prophets of Samaria were terribly evil, for they prophesied in the name of Baal and led my people of Israel into sin. But now I see that the prophets of Jerusalem are even worse! They commit adultery and love dishonesty. They encourage those who are doing evil so that no one turns away from their sins. These prophets are as wicked as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah once were." Therefore, this is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says concerning the prophets: "I will feed them with bitterness and give them poison to drink. For it is because of Jerusalem's prophets that wickedness has filled this land." This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says to his people: "Do not listen to these prophets when they prophesy to you, filling you with futile hopes. They are making up everything they say. They do not speak for the Lord! They keep saying to those who despise my word, 'Don't worry! The Lord says you will have peace!' And to those who stubbornly follow their own desires, they say, 'No harm will come your way!' Have any of these prophets been in the Lord's presence to hear what he is really saying? Has even one of them cared enough to listen? Look! The Lord's anger bursts out like a storm, a whirlwind that swirls down on the heads of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not diminish until it has finished all he has planned. In the days to come you will understand all this very clearly. I have not sent these prophets, yet they run around claiming to speak for me. I have given them no message, yet they go on prophesying. If they had stood before me and listened to me, they would have spoken my words, and they would have turned my people from their evil ways and deeds. Am I a God who is only close at hand?" says the Lord. "No, I am far away at the same time. Can anyone hide from me in a secret place? Am I not everywhere in all the heavens and earth?" says the Lord. "I have heard these prophets say, 'Listen to the dream I had from God last night.' And then they proceed to tell lies in my name. How long will this go on? If they are prophets, they are prophets of deceit, inventing everything they say. By telling these false dreams, they are trying to get my people to forget me, just as their ancestors did by worshiping the idols of Baal. Let these false prophets tell their dreams, but let my true messengers faithfully proclaim my every word. There is a difference between straw and grain! Does not my word burn like fire?" says the Lord. "Is it not like a mighty hammer that smashes a rock to pieces? Therefore," says the Lord, "I am against these prophets who steal messages from each other and claim they are from me. I am against these smooth-tongued prophets who say, 'This prophecy is from the Lord!' I am against these false prophets. Their imaginary dreams are flagrant lies that lead my people into sin. I did not send or appoint them, and they have no message at all for my people. I, the LORD, have spoken! Suppose one of the people or one of the prophets or priests asks you, 'What prophecy has the Lord burdened you with now?' You must reply, 'You are the burden! The Lord says he will abandon you!' If any prophet, priest, or anyone else says, 'I have a prophecy from the Lord,' I will punish that person along with his entire family. You should keep asking each other, 'What is the Lord's answer?' or 'What is the Lord saying?' But stop using this phrase, 'prophecy from the Lord.' For people are using it to give authority to their own ideas, turning upside down the words of our God, the living God, the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "This is what you should say to the prophets: 'What is the Lord's answer?' or 'What is the Lord saying?' But suppose they respond, 'This is a prophecy from the Lord!' Then you should say, 'This is what the Lord says: Because you have used this phrase, "prophecy from the Lord," even though I warned you not to use it, I will forget you completely. I will expel you from my

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presence, along with this city that I gave to you and your ancestors. And I will make you an object of ridicule, and your name will be infamous throughout the ages.”

The God who spoke those warnings centuries ago through His prophet, Jeremiah, is the same God who has spoken through His Word - the Bible. And because He is the everlasting God, His Word remains firm...His Word remains just...His Word gives us precepts and principles that provide answers and direction in all matters of life...and His Word has something to say to us today regarding gender, sexuality and marriage. Obviously from the Jeremiah passage, God does not take kindly to manmade messages being peddled as though they are from Him. In light of all these things, as I preach this sermon today I dare not...I must not...deviate from His Word!

Turn in your Bibles with me to Romans chapter one. In this letter, the Apostle Paul is writing "...to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints..." (Romans 1:7). After this greeting, Paul then crafts, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, an absolute masterpiece that proclaims the good news that God alone saves people from the just penalty of sin and then empowers those He saves to live for His glory. He launches into this message early on in the letter. He sort of gives us the punchline right up front in Romans 1:16-17:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

Sounds encouraging, right? Exciting? You bet. The very next verse, though, takes us down a path going in the opposite direction. Listen to the rest of chapter one:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with

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men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

I believe this passage, better than any other in Scripture, presents the contrast between God's definition of and purpose and design for gender, sexuality and marriage with that of the sinful world. Notice where the passage begins. God's wrath is revealed from heaven against two things: all ungodliness and unrighteousness of mankind. The word *ungodliness* means lack of reverence for God...lack of worshipping Him. It has to do with one's mind and heart. The word *unrighteousness* means acts that are not just or righteous. It has to do with one's actions. So Paul is telling us that God's righteous judgment is upon all men because of their rebellious minds, hearts and hands. Why? Because rebellious man has suppressed, which is an active term that means to hold away from oneself, the truth. And the rebellious man does this even though he knows better. The passage says it this way: *...that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them* (Romans 1:19).

Paul then presents God's argument from the starting point of original creation. Essentially, what he is saying is that all men are accountable before God. Notice the destructive progression of man's sinfulness. First, his rebellion marked by lack of honor and thanks to God results in futile speculations and a darkening foolish heart. This is the starting point. Ignoring the God who created him and made such power evident to him, he begins to look to himself. The word *speculations* means the thinking of a man deliberating with himself. This is not godward! Rather, man elevates himself to a position of supremacy. He supplants the one true God with gods of his own making. In this so-called wisdom, foolish mankind exchanges God's glory for a counterfeit that can never measure up to or replace the real article. So, because of this we see the first of three mentions of a chilling phrase: *God gave them over...* (Romans 1:24,26,28). The first stage is a giving over to impurity so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. In this state, they worship creature instead of creator. Next, God gives them over to degrading passions, defined as unnatural and indecent sexual acts with members of the same sex, resulting in them receiving in their own persons the due penalty of this erroneous way. In this

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state, they no longer see fit to even acknowledge God. Finally, then, God gives them over to a depraved mind. This word *depraved* means not standing the test, unapproved, unfit, spurious, reprobate. No wonder such people *do the things which are not proper* (Romans 1:28). Paul then gives a list of sins that characterize such people. Not every person commits every one of the sins mentioned. However, such a depraved person is "filled" with these kinds of sins. To better understand what this means, one need go no further than the last verse of the chapter. Listen to how people such as this are described: *...although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them* (Romans 1:32). This is a picture of a brazen, hardened, willful person who not only practices - *keeps busy with* is a rendering of the word - sins in the face of death as a consequence, but even gives hearty approval to others who do the same!

At this point, maybe you're saying to yourself, "Whew! I'm sure glad I'm not like one of those people! They're a mess!" Well, lest we think we're somehow exempt from God's righteous judgment and/or that we're somehow superior to the people Paul just described, listen to what he says in the very next verses, Romans 2:1-4:

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

Ultimately, Paul says the following in chapter three: *What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin...* (Romans 3:9); and *...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...* (Romans 3:23). Clearly, in light of these truths we can say the following: We are all sinners, none of us can save himself from the penalty sin (which is death and separation from God), and we all need someone to save us.

So what does all of this have to do with gender, sexuality and marriage? I'm glad you asked! To find our answer, we need to go to the same place Paul referenced in Romans chapter one...back to the point of original creation. So turn with me in your Bibles to Genesis chapter one. As you recall this is the account of God's creation of the heavens and earth, and living things within them. As described in

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verses 24-25, on the sixth day God creates all of the creatures that make their primary dwelling on land...generally described as the beasts of the earth, the cattle, and everything that creeps on the ground. But that's not all God created on that sixth day. Look at what verses 26-28 say:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

So, in this passage we see the following foundational truths inherent in God's original creation: (1) Human beings are the only creatures made in God's image, (2) the human race is comprised of males and females, (3) humans are to rule over all other creatures and subdue the earth, (4) God blessed humans, and (5) God commanded those first humans - one man, Adam and one woman, Eve - to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Psalm 8 serves as a fitting commentary regarding the station of human beings within God's created order. In it, David writes:

*When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas
(Psalm 8:3-8).*

As you may also recall, we've reflected in past weeks on God's rule and authority being expressed in His purpose and design. We said God does things on purpose, and that He does them according to His master design. Well, Genesis chapters one and two are "ground zero" for revealing those things to us! Genesis one speaks of gender directly ("male and female He created them") and sexuality indirectly ("Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth"). Chapter two gives us a deeper dive into these things, and also documents the first - and model - marriage ceremony.

Isn't it interesting, even funny, that God's creation that is described in as *a little lower than God* and *crown[ed]...with glory and majesty* was made of dust as seen in Genesis chapter two? That's right. Check out Genesis 2:7: *Then the Lord God formed man of the dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.* Meet Adam. After creating Adam, God

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put him to work in the Garden of Eden, cultivating it and keeping it as noted in verse 15. He also gave him parameters for abundant life in the garden. God further declared in verse 18 that *...it is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper*. Then, we see God parading every creature in front of Adam so he can name each one. Despite what must have been a huge collection of creatures, verse 20 intones *...but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him*. So, you probably know the rest of the story. God causes Adam to fall into a deep sleep, He takes one of Adam's ribs, and from it He fashions the first woman, Eve. Let's pick up the story from there in verses 23-25:

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

So, what additional components of God's purpose and design are found in Genesis chapter two? In an overarching sort of way, we can make the crucial summary statement that males and females are created for each other. This includes a unique bond at functional ("a helper suitable for him"), anatomical ("bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh...taken out of Man"), sexual ("become one flesh") and relational ("be joined to his wife...both naked and were not ashamed") levels. And in bringing both chapters together, we discover that distinct genders are necessary to accomplish the procreation of children through sexual relations in marriage. Another book in the Old Testament, Song of Solomon, adds additional depth to the purpose of sexual relations between husband and wife, emphasizing the erotic pleasures to be found therein.

To summarize, then, Genesis chapters one and two tell the story of God's purposeful, by design original creation. Human beings are made in God's image and are the crowning creatures among all of His creation. Gender is neither a social construct nor a matter of one's personal preference or longing. Rather, God created both male and female. Sex is, amazingly, not all that complicated if we follow God's prescriptions in these two chapters. It is always and only to take place within marriage, and it is always and only to take place between a man and a woman. And those two statements go together, because marriage is always and only between one man and one woman. Oh, how grand and glorious and life-giving are God's purpose and design for gender, sexuality and marriage!

What we see in the rest of Scripture...indeed what we see today...does not and cannot make sense, though, unless we include the rest of the story from the Garden of Eden as found in Genesis chapter

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three. Bottom line, innocence is lost...sin enters the world. Remember the words of Romans one: *even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.* This is the story of Adam and Eve. They were led astray by the great deceiver, Satan, who diverted their attention from honoring and thanking God by telling them lies. As they considered these lies, they began to futilely speculate, turning their focus on themselves and their personal gratification. Their foolish hearts grew dim, and they chose sin and death over life. God, in keeping with His righteous standard, judged Satan, Eve, Adam, and the earth itself. Romans 8:18-23 speaks of the effects of this original sin. The passage uses words and phrases like *suffering, longing, subjection to futility, slavery to corruption, groaning and pain.* Translation: Things are not like they should be and once were! In shockingly short order after Eden, we see references in Scripture to murder, incest, homosexual practice, transgender practice, bestiality, and other sins. And the list goes on in 2015!

The curse of sin is real. The pure longings we see in Genesis one and two have been replaced with the longings described in Romans eight...longings for God to make everything right again, which He will do according to the events that will unfold in the future as described in Revelation chapters 19-22. Until that time, though, creation - including human beings - is marked by futility and corruption. God's natural order for gender, sexuality and marriage - an order according to His perfect purpose and design - has been marred by sin resulting in widespread unnatural order pertaining to gender, sexuality and marriage. Nevertheless, we are still called to that original and perfect purpose and design in our practice. Because of this, God has consistently spoken against the unnatural order throughout Scripture. Consider the main Old Testament passages:

- Genesis 19, where the men of the Sodom sought to have sexual relations with Lot's visitors (angels who looked like other men), the outcry of sin became great before the Lord, and He destroyed both Sodom and Gomorrah;
- Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, where the practice of a man engaged sexually with another man is referred to as an abomination and a detestable act, and is punishable by death.

The New Testament, likewise, contains prohibitions regarding homosexual practice. In addition to our Romans one passage, consider the following additional passages:

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- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, which states that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God, then presents a listing of sins under the umbrella of unrighteousness that includes the effeminate and homosexuals;
- 1 Timothy 1:8-10 deals with the law and its interface with the unrighteous, including immoral men and homosexuals;
- Jude 7, in referencing Sodom and Gomorrah, speaks of the sin of indulgence in gross immorality and refers to the men of those cities having gone after strange flesh, leading to the punishment of eternal fire.

Again, let me remind you that all of these proclamations are made within the context that things are not as they should be and once were! It is interesting to note as well that both Jesus and Paul emphatically champion in the New Testament the original created order and design from Genesis one and two in their statements found in Matthew 19, Mark 10, 1 Corinthians 6 and Ephesians 5 regarding sexual purity and the intended permanency of marriage between a man and a woman. Indeed, the overall story of the redemption of mankind to the praise and glory of God does not take place were it not for Genesis chapters one, two and three: Mankind needs restoration to God, the peoples of nations who will be blessed and saved have come forth from God's procreative mandate, and marriage between a man and a woman is still the best picture of Jesus' lasting love for His bride, the Church.

Now that we have considered these things, where does that leave us? How should we process all of this through a grid of Grace & Truth Inside Out? First, grace. To reiterate, the coupling of God's perfect purpose and design for gender, sexuality and marriage with the stain of sin that has impacted those things sets the stage for God's redemptive plan. Even though things today are not as they should be and once were, we live in the light and hope of the gospel. Romans 8:18, 23-25 reminds us of this most encouraging message:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us....And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

Regarding truth, remember its primary source is not found in books, articles, blog posts, broadcasts, talk shows, social media platforms, Supreme Court decisions, etc, etc, etc. Though such

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can be helpful as secondary sources, our primary source for truth is - and must be - the Bible. In it, we find what God has said. One of the reasons this sermon was populated so liberally with extended Scripture passages was to remind us all of these things. In the world today, I urge all of us to "...contend earnestly for the faith which was once and for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 3), including the faith that pertains to gender, sexuality and marriage. And I'll ask my question one last time: Do you trust God's ways more than anything else, no matter how intense the pressure or temptation becomes to do otherwise?

How about Inside Out? For starters, each of us as Christians should join the Apostle Paul in proclaiming "...by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10). We get pretty smug about things, don't we? We tend to categorize sins into some sort of hierarchy, and in doing so become functional legalists. From that vantage point, it becomes awfully easy to become judgmental. God hates all of that stuff! Remember, Paul referred to all of his human accomplishments as loss...even as dung! Indeed, the prophet Isaiah has this to say about self-righteousness:

For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on Your name, who arouses himself to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us and have delivered us into the power of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, You are our Father, we are the clay, and You our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, O Lord, nor remember iniquity forever; behold, look now, all of us are Your people (Isaiah 64:6-9).

For a person struggling with or perhaps immersed in sin related to practices outside of God's purpose and design for gender, sexuality and marriage, will you consider what the Bible has to say in these areas? Will you risk coming out to a Christian you trust with such a desire to consider truth? And for any sinner saved by grace, would you be the kind of person that a gay or transgender person would trust? Or would you scare...or worse yet, condemn...him or her away? Are we a safe place for a person seeking truth and hope in these areas, even if that process looks messy...and painful...and uncomfortable...and vulnerable...and sacrificial? Are we prepared for such a scenario...which stays in check as long as we can call it a scenario...but begins to feel maybe even a little bit dangerous when a person comes knocking on our door? Or would the word be out that ours is not a door on which to knock? Oh, may we be a people full of grace and truth! Let's pray. Our Lord, may we increasingly become a people infused with the hope and glory of John 1:14-18:

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And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

Amen.