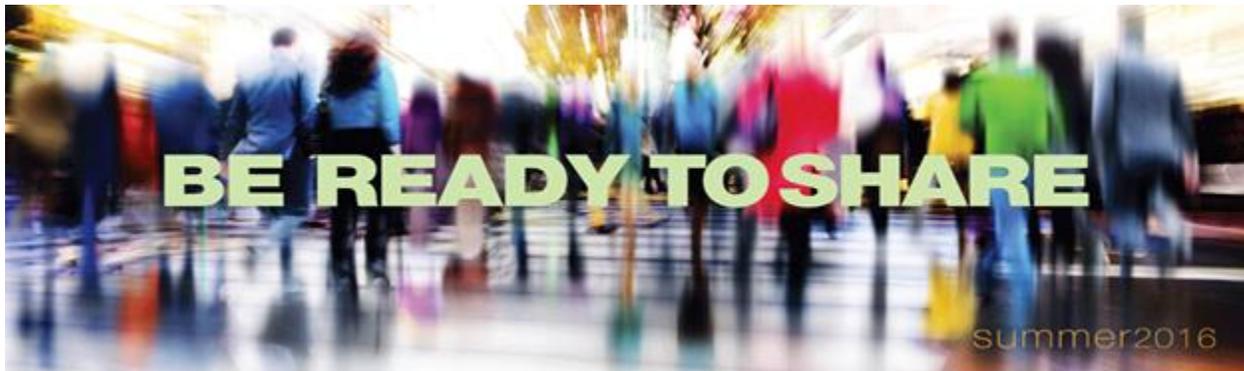


Why Are Christians So Anti-gay?
Be Ready to Share Summer Sermon Series 2016
1 Corinthians 6:1-20
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
July 31, 2016

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 6:1-20



We continue this morning in our summer equipping series *Be Ready to Share our Faith*. We mentioned at the beginning of the summer that the fastest-growing segment in American society is the so-called *Nones*. These are people who have no religious identification at all. That means the number of *Nones* in America has grown to 23%, which means that at least one out of every four people around you has no vital relationship with Jesus Christ. Within that group, almost half say that they have a deep sense of wonder about the universe. They have questions without answers. We've been looking at many of the questions that we hear from the culture, questions like: Hasn't Science disproved Christianity? If God is good, why is there so much suffering in the world? Don't all religions teach basically the same thing? If I commit myself to Jesus Christ, does that mean I have to renounce my culture and my lifestyle? We looked at these throughout the summer. Sincere questions deserve honest answers. The study of apologetics, or the defense of Christian faith, should not be seen as a defensive or hostile reaction to the world, but as a welcome opportunity to exhibit, celebrate, and display the treasure of Christian faith in the world. As believers in Christ, we have something to offer the world that the world needs, even if they do not always think to ask.

This morning, we turn our attention to a very important topic in our culture. It seems very new in our culture, although it is actually a very old question, the question of homosexuality. The question before us this morning that we hear from the culture is why are Christians so anti-gay? Doesn't God love everybody? We want to look this morning at how believing in the Bible does not make us bigots, but actually able to present Christ in our contemporary moment. The

gospel gives us something very rich to share. We want to look together at 1 Corinthians 6 as our text to see this issue and to frame it. Each week this summer, we have had a testimony, and we are going to do something a little different this morning. We are going to combine the testimony with the second half of the sermon in real time. So, keep your Bibles open to 1 Corinthians 6, and we will take a look at how God's Word locates this topic for us.

Why are Christians so anti-gay? Doesn't God love everyone? This is the question we hear around us, and we turn our attention 1 Corinthians 6. The chapter begins, you will notice, with an intense atmosphere of litigation. Can you imagine, people have stopped talking with one another and are just suing each other? They are asking the courts to decide my rights and to correct your wrongs. You see the Bible is very relevant. I didn't plan this, but we also live in a very litigious era where we look to an external authority to decide. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6, actually shames the proud Corinthians. He says to them in 1 Corinthians 6:1:

“When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?”

Do you stop talking with each other? He says that inside the community, we should look to God's Word. He says in 1 Corinthians 6:2:

“Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases?”

He says in 1 Corinthians 6:3:

“Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!”

That is not the subject of the sermon this morning, but it is a fascinating line that God's people in some way will sit near Christ and will concur with His judgment in some mysterious way. But, Paul makes the point that if we sit with Christ and will concur with His eternal, righteous judgment, can't we handle talking about matters like human sexuality? In a sense, he frames the issue with *how much more*. He criticizes the church for arguing with one another, for suing one another, and for not talking with each other, and in the end, not simply looking to God's Word with humility and coming to God in our brokenness and not putting any limits on what God can do in Jesus Christ. He says in effect: “Look, you are acting in an unrighteous way. You are acting with unrighteousness by insisting on your rights, by insisting on your choices and seeking the broader culture to affirm your decisions, rather than by looking to God's Word in humility, one with another.” So that's the set-up. Then we come to 1 Corinthians 6:9, and he says, while he is talking about unrighteousness:

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?”

If you persist in a pattern of unrighteousness, then you will not inherit the kingdom of God. That's a high-stakes statement, isn't it? Then he describes unrighteousness in 1 Corinthians 6:9b-10 in several different ways. He says that our unrighteousness, our sinfulness, manifests itself in these ways:

“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.”

Our unrighteousness manifests itself in sexual immorality of all kinds. Our sinfulness, our unrighteousness, expresses itself in our idolatry of all kinds; it manifests itself in our adultery; it manifests itself in the practice of homosexuality; it manifests itself in the practice of robbing from one another; greed; drunkenness; revelry; in swindling. If you don't know what swindling is, ask your neighbor. Swindling is thievery on a grand scale. It's the Bernie Madoff syndrome of planning to rob, extort people on a great scale. Notice that these 10 expressions of sinfulness in our lives bring the whole community into danger in 1 Corinthians 6. Tucked right in the middle of this list is the description of homosexuality, and that's the topic today. I don't want us to reach for this topic without seeing the context or set-up. It is very important that we see from Scripture that homosexuality is never presented in Scripture at the top of any list of sin. In the main passages in the Bible, in Leviticus 18, in 1 Corinthians 6, in 1 Timothy, in Romans 1, homosexuality is listed within a large description of how our sinful brokenness manifests itself in our living. Sometimes Christians fall into the temptation and say this is the sin of sins, that this is the top of the list, and yet it is never located that way in the Bible.

In an interview in a Veritas Forum recently, someone put the question straight to Tim Keller: “If you're homosexual, does that mean you're going to hell?” Keller said: “Well, being a heterosexual doesn't make you go to heaven. What makes you go to hell or makes you go to heaven is your reaction to the unfathomable grace and transforming power of Jesus Christ that is offered to all of us in the gospel. That's how you go to heaven or hell.” In 1 Corinthians 6, notice that homosexuality is included in this list. You may struggle with greed. You may struggle with not being able control your appetites in a variety of ways. So, notice it's in the list, but also notice that it is in the list. There is a movement in our culture today, and you may think of this from popular mainstream media, television programs, the way we are communicating to ourselves today is that homosexuality is normal, it's biology, it's just a lifestyle choice like any other. This is even manifesting itself in biblical studies. If you look at various translations of 1 Corinthians 6, you will see a variety of translation options for these terms that are used. Sometimes you'll hear people say that the Bible never explicitly mentions homosexuality, but I will tell you as a biblical scholar, that's not true! The terms that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 6 are very clear terms. There are actually two terms: one for the active partner and one for the

passive partner in homosexual relationships. Luke Timothy Johnson, a well-respected New Testament scholar, has recently written an article endorsing homosexuality for the contemporary world. As I've gotten to read more of his writings, I realize that, for him like many others, the tipping point is not a careful reading of Scripture. The tipping point is personal experience, and it's the experience specifically of his own son. But, Luke Timothy Johnson at least has the integrity to state publicly that the Bible actually is clear. He says with integrity, and this is coming from a New Testament scholar who is encouraging people to change their attitude about homosexuality:

"I think it's important to state clearly that we do in fact reject the straight forward commands of Scripture and appeal to another authority when we state that same-sex unions can be good. What is this authority? We appeal to the weight of our own experience."

At Kenwood, we are committed to the Word of God even when it pushes us beyond our own experience. I don't want to be trapped inside my own experience, and I don't want that for you either. There is no power transformation lurking within. So, notice that it is not at the top of the list, but notice that it is in the list as an expression of our sinful brokenness. In 1 Corinthians 6:11, Paul says:

"And such were some of you."

You see we are all grouped as manifesting unrighteousness in our lives. We all share sinful brokenness in common, but notice that this is one of the most thrilling and exciting uses of the past tense of all time. There is a lot of theology lurking in grammar: "Some of you **were** these things." You were greedy; you were idolatrous; you were swindling and staying up all night in revelry and degrading the relationships around you; you had same-sex attractions you couldn't control; you manifested sinfulness in a variety of ways; you were living in an out-of-control way, all of you, and that's how you **were**. The only reason he uses the past tense is if something has changed, and what's changed becomes evident in the second half of the verse, 1 Corinthians 6:11b:

"But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

This change is so arresting, so startling, so surprising, so unexpected, something we are so resistant to even believe it's possible, that Paul has to use the strongest negative word in the Greek language so that we know this is real. Three times he says **but, but, but**. Most English translations can't handle this many "buts" in a verse, so they smooth it out and leave just one. The ESV reads: "This is what you were, **but** . . ." There are three **buts** in this verse: You were this, your life was a wreck in all kinds of ways, but let me tell you what happened: **But** you were washed. You were washed, which is the language of conversion and baptism. You were washed, immersed, in living testimony of coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Not only were you converted,

but you were also sanctified. You were set apart. The really theologically minded among us think to ourselves: “Wait, this is out of order. Usually you are converted, and you are justified, and you are sanctified. Paul has this order mixed up.” Usually sanctification doesn’t come before justification, but it does here in the inspired, inerrant Word of God. The reason it comes before here is, he says, that you were washed, you were converted, and the next great amazing thing that has happened to you is that you have been set apart now so that you can belong to Jesus Christ, so that our primary identity is no longer found in a description of our sexual behavior or attraction, it is no longer found in our bank account, it is no longer found in any lifestyle choice. But, our primary identity is: I have been set apart and I belong to Jesus Christ. I have been washed. I have been set apart,—and this is the mind blower and you can’t find this anywhere else on the planet—but I have been justified. You see, the language of justification means that all of us in that collective train wreck of sin brokenness that is revealing itself in our lives, the unrighteous list of 10 groups, all those unrighteous people are now declared righteous. That’s the gospel, and that can happen only through the atoning death of Christ who dies for greedy people, who dies for immoral people, who dies for the swindler, who dies for the person who struggles with their sexuality. You **were** these things, **but** you have been washed, **but** you have been set apart, **but** you have been justified.

For many of us, the topic of homosexuality scares us. Some of us stay safely at a distance. We are sure of our convictions, and we lament the movement of our society, and we just stay at a safe distance. We come to church, we go home. Maybe someone in our family system or our workplace identifies themselves as gay, and we avoid them. Others of us have become so immersed in the contemporary moment that we embrace the world's version of the story uncritically, and say: “Well, doesn’t God just want me to be happy?” If you stop reading the Bible, you end up there. Some of us even quietly condone heterosexual sin just because it’s heterosexual. Many of us feel ill-equipped, ill-prepared, and afraid to engage, and the topic remains impersonal. That is why I want to make it personal this morning, and I want to invite my friend Jerry Armelli to help me preach the sermon. Jerry has a master’s degree in education, and he is a licensed, professional counselor. Jerry is the cofounder of Prodigal Ministries here in Cincinnati, and Jerry has lived 1 Corinthians 6. He lives it with the hundreds of people this ministry is touching each week. As we talked this week about sharing Jerry’s testimony, we went back and forth and talked for an hour and a half, and we both converged and thought, why don't we just preach the second half of the sermon together?

PASTOR DAVID: “So, Jerry, we are really honored that you are here today and that you have taken time to be with us. I want to ask you first if you can describe for us your perspective on how the Scripture lists homosexuality within this list in 1 Corinthians 6. Can you get us started with that?”

JERRY: “Yes, sure. First of all, thank you for the invitation. It’s really courageous of you, and I am grateful for it. I love to share the Good News of Jesus. I am going to follow up on what you have already said to drive it home more and give an illustration of how this how this works in individuals. The way I see it is that we have original sin that we are all born with. Nobody comes into this world without original sin. There is also, as I call it, the big buffet of sin options. There’s the buffet table of sexual stuff; there’s the buffet table of money; there’s the buffet table of food; and there’s a buffet table of *blah, blah, blah*. All of these are options to us out there. That sexual table has a lot of different options and choices on it, and so does the money one, and so does the food one—from anorexic to bulimia to whatever we do with food. What do we do with money? Hoard it? Give away too much? We’re not balanced with it? Then we have the sin orientation that we are all born with. What is it that gears some individuals to the buffet table of the sex, the table of food, the table of money, or whatever it is? I say it's chance, choice, and circumstances. As a Christian therapist, I know there is original sin. All the buffet sin options are out there, but it's these chances and choices and circumstances that gear an individual to one of the buffet top tables. For some, it’s two or three. We do not pass through life without partaking of one, two, or three of those buffet sin options. For some of us, that is a chronic thing throughout our life. Some of us receive a deliverance or healing, and we never go back to the buffet table of that sin option. For some of us, it peeps its head up some time in our life and goes back down, then there are other triggers and it comes back up. But all of us can relate to this dynamic that we were born with original sin, and we have these buffet sin options. For some, it is same gender attraction or homosexuality. It is that chance, choice, and circumstances. If I laid a line of cocaine here on the pulpit and I had an audience of a thousand, there would be probably several, a dozen or maybe more, whose heart would start racing, and their mouth would start watering. They would start planning how they could get to some cocaine. For another individual, if we would put out a food buffet table up here, their heart would start racing, and they would wonder how they could get to it. For some, a sexual sin option, maybe it's same gender relationships, maybe it's all those other things that are buffet table options on there that I won't go into, but it's the chances, and choices, and circumstances that will say: “Why would someone go to cocaine? I don't get that. I don’t understand that. It is disgusting.” Another one, the food one: “I don’t get that,” but another person it would trigger into: “This is my one life-dominating sin problem.”

PASTOR DAVID: Tell us a little bit more, Jerry, about your personal story and how God took you from being gay-identified, knowing homosexual lifestyle culture. How did Jesus Christ meet you there, and how did you come to know Christ?

JERRY: Oh, that’s a big story. To wrap it up in a nutshell, I was born with this original sin. I could not escape. Then the circumstances and chances and choices of my life, choices of my own conscious and unconscious, choices of others against me sinfully, chances, circumstances of

birth order, socioeconomic things, death, sickness, all this constellation of factors goes into to change, choices, and circumstances. I do use that word *constellation* because it is somewhat akin to the image the stars in the sky of factors that can contribute to one's orientation, to one of the buffet sin options out there. Do you hear that translated there? I have an orientation, had an orientation, to one of the buffet sin options out there because of repeated molestation for one, because of my perceptions of what it meant to be a man, and the conclusions that I came to that were: "I'm not enough, I'm inadequate, I'm wrong, and I should be a girl." There was a little transgender issue going on in my life for a while where I thought I was more like to be a girl than I was to be a guy. I had everything it took to be a girl, nothing to be a guy. All this was of the dynamics that went into developing my sexuality, developing my gender self. All of those factors that led to a state of confusion to me, until I started hearing what 'gay' was, what homosexual was, and I could identify with the thoughts and feelings of it and began to question myself: "That's what I am. Is that what I am? That is what I am." I came to the conclusion that I am a homosexual. That was in my early 20s. Interesting, Pastor, to note that you used the term *gay-identified*, because that is the term that I use. I knew I was homosexual. Now was the choice if I felt okay with it. Am I going to go gay, because gay is a social construct? It's a man-made construct. It's not of God anywhere, but the world has constructed this thing where we've blended behaviors and identity and feelings into saying this is what *gay* is. Human sexuality in relating is so much more complex, and it is simple and trite and pat just to say because someone is attracted to the same sex, they are gay. If they have had a pleasurable sexual experience with same gender, they are gay, or they have romantic or codependent type feelings for a person the same gender, they are gay. Oversimplified.

So I went on this quest. I investigated the gay circles, the bars, organizations, talked to straights, talked to gays, talked to clergy. I got all sorts of mixed answers about its being okay or not to God. Finally, in depression, not getting answers, someone led me to a small Catholic prayer group where I met Jesus as a living Person that was invested in me. I knew that I was very lost and I was very blind, and this Jesus was my Savior. So I recognized Him as the Savior of my life, and then gradually I made Him the Lord of my life, which meant my surrendering all my thinking, all my thoughts about men, women, sex, sexuality, all my thinking about life, marriage, all masculinity, all of that, submitting all my relationships with my mom, with my dad, with my abuser, with my siblings, with my peer groups, with men, with women, and surrendering to His design for those. It meant surrendering my past Him, surrendering my future to Him—very unknown. At one point in my life, it looked like I would never be loved like I want to be loved, and I would never love someone like I wanted to be loved, because I could never be with a woman, and God says I can't be with a man. Hopelessness. Surrendering my future to a God and knowing His nature gave me a hope to continue on in the future. So, I met Jesus and gradually made Him the Lord of my life. I lived as a very happy single man, had great relationship with dudes, good relationships with girls. By that, I mean not over-identifying with

them because guys to me were very scary, very fearful. I had dread, I had inadequacies, but I didn't feel that towards girls. I closely identified with them. In my submitting all these relationships, God switched that around to where I found my identity in males, my belongingness and my affirmation and affection there. Then I became opposite to females, and therefore attractions could come because now I was the opposite of them versus the same as them, not just biologically, but an identity—these areas of feelings and identity and behaviors that go into this thing. Anyway, then I met this girl named Mia, and it was wow. We dated for two and a half years and I said: “Do you think we have enough of what it takes to be married?” She said yes, and we did. That was 22 years ago this year, and we have a beautiful daughter who is the joy of my life.

PASTOR DAVID: Jerry, you've experienced a very profound transformation, and many of us here, and even legislators in our city, say that you cannot encourage a transformation. It's against the law in Cincinnati to counsel for transformation. I want to ask you: Is transformation possible through Christ, and have you seen transformation happen through Prodigal Ministries in Cincinnati?



JERRY: I could pose the question to everybody: What did Jesus do for you? How did He transform you? How did He change you? How did He change the trajectory of your life? You thought you were going in one direction, and He said: “I call things that are dead, I call them to life and make them as though they were not that.” That's the God that we serve. I serve the God of the Bible, and that's all He does, is want to enter into humanity and change it. He doesn't want to leave it as it is. He doesn't want to leave us unto ourselves. He wants to be the Lord. He wants to be the Father. He wants that. So what did Jesus do for you? Even in the Bible, Jesus walks up to people and says: “What do you want?” Could you imagine Jesus ever saying: “No, no, no, no”? I know sometimes it isn't His will, but I think He says: “What you want?” Everything that the people said, He gave, or He gives the grace to go on with that. I tell my clients I don't make any guarantees of change. I just say: “What do you want? Go after it with everything you've got and I'll support you with everything that I've got, but let's live in reality also, that this world has been contaminated by sin and we can rise above that through Jesus and what He has done.” I think of what Prodigal has done. We have been in business for 30 years, myself and two other gentlemen who came out of gay identities. We wouldn't be in business all these years if we weren't putting out a product, to put it in business terms, but it's also because I've been in this for 30 years, that I've seen generations be transformed and changed: men and women who were gay-identified with partners now married with children. I see them in the grocery stores, I see them in the post office, and I think *transformation*, as I know in my own life. I never thought that I'd ever be with a woman, let alone have children.

That was dead and gone. This is where God has led and brought me, so He is changing generations because He washes, He justifies, and He sanctifies. There is even a deeper, deeper study in your own Bible study groups: What does wash mean in biblical terms? What does sanctified mean? What does justified mean? That is available to everybody, and the persons with same-gender attraction are not disqualified from being justified, sanctified, and washed. We have to be careful, church, because we're being seduced into the ideology and thought process of the world. We're not filtering through the Spirit of God. We're not filtering through the Word of God. I got ahead of myself. I can get a little passionate about this.

PASTOR DAVID: In any church on a Sunday, there is mixture of people here. There is a mixture people listening online. Jerry, what do you want those who are gay-identified in the culture to know? We look to that group specifically.

JERRY: We, the church, more now than ever as I see it in the political and social world, are going to have to look different. We have to shine brighter in our marriages, in our sexual purity, in the way we handle money, and with the widows and the poor and the orphans and impoverished, in all that, we have to shine much, much brighter. So in that, sometimes we have to say no to looking like the world, very much. This is an area where we have to say no. We can't let this come into the body of Christ. Let me give a little illustration about a crystal bowl. I love my mother-in-law, and I wanted to do something great for her. So there's the love, and I wanted to do something for her. In my mind, in me, out of me, I created this image of a crystal bowl that I was going to blow myself through glassblowing. I was going to make it seven inches high and four inches deep, in this color, and in this size. That was the design of it. Then I would say: "Do you know what the intention of it is? It is going to sit on my mother-in-law's mahogany dining room table with the chandelier shining right on it." Out of love, I created something and I gave it design and intent. In human sexuality, we have the capability of doing all sorts of things with sex. Look in Leviticus at all the things that God knew that the human person is capable of: animals, to multiple people, to same gender, to dead people, the whole gamut of it. He knew we have the capability of it, but He gave it design and He gave an intent for it. Like my glass bowl. Someone could take it off my mother-in-law's mahogany table, scoop the dog food out of that bag, put it on the on the floor, and the dog could eat out of it. It has the capability of doing all sorts of things: holding water, holding food, digging a hole. But it doesn't mean that is what it was designed for or intended for. It is the same thing with our human sexuality: loads of capabilities, but God is clear of the design of it and the intent of it, because of His great love for creating life and making love. So that is the message I have, that Jesus has a divine design and intent for us who are heterosexually attracted, same-sex attracted, attracted to this, attracted to that, the whole gamut of it. There's a design intent that He comes to wash, sanctify, justify to make us walk in His path.

PASTOR DAVID: What you want Kenwood to know about being ready to share Christ with the

gay-identified neighbor, family member, or someone at their work?

JERRY: I think the first thing I'm hearing is that there are two types of individuals in the world: people who know Jesus and people that don't know Jesus. Period! If a person does not know Jesus, our only job is to introduce them to the character and nature of Jesus, so hopefully they will bring themselves into a relationship with Jesus. If they say they know Jesus and there are these obvious sin things that aren't sanctified, justified, washed during the process of, it is our duty to lead them into the character and nature of Jesus and support them in their journey of letting go of the buffet top table that was the money table for them, or the food table, or the sex table, or whatever buffet table it is. Our job is to walk with them and support them. The message of Kenwood Baptist is that you are the healing agent of Jesus. This is where my people, my clients, come. I send them here to rub shoulders with you, for you to reflect purity of wholeness in masculinity and femininity in its fullness, to preach the Word from the pulpit in the Spirit and in worship. You are the healing agent of Jesus for the individuals dealing with same-gender attraction. You are the ones to be the harvesters. You go to your workplaces. You go to your schools. You go to your neighborhoods. You introduce people to Jesus, and you bring them into the Body of Christ. That's your job, and then Prodigal Ministries assists specifically in working with them on their sexuality and their identity and their behaviors.

PASTOR DAVID: Many of you need and want support in this endeavor, and I want to let you know that Jerry has information about Prodigal Ministries on a table in the back. We want to stand together. Part of why we wanted to preach in this way this morning was to model a serious and honest engagement on the topic, and Jerry, we are grateful for your being here. We have talked about the rest of 1 Corinthians 6 together this week, and we want to stand together in the ending of this passage, which is really a charge for all of us. It says in 1 Corinthians 6:18 for all of us:

"Flee from sexual immorality."

That is broad. That includes us all. Whatever your struggle was at that table that Jerry was speaking about, we are all summoned to flee from immorality, however it manifests in our lives. We are also invited this morning, through the gospel, in 1 Corinthians 6:19, to have our bodies become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit:

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?"

That is a stunning image. It's an image that goes all the way back to Eden when God breathes His Spirit into humanity. We become alive; we are made in the image and likeness of God; and we are made to have the Holy Spirit dwell within us. Mankind is not designed to live in isolation and separation or in the prison of our own experience apart from our heavenly Father, and the Word invites us to receive Christ. The great benefit of receiving Christ is that He fills us with the

Spirit and causes us to walk in His ways.

The last charge for all of us this morning is to receive the word of 1 Corinthians 6:20:

“You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

We do not belong to ourselves. We are not limited to what we might select or identify about ourselves. We are not limited to what we may have suffered or encountered. Many of us have chance or circumstances that have led us to places we would have never imagined we would be, and this morning, the Gospel offers us in Jesus Christ the opportunity to take that brokenness and to give that to Christ. This image that you were bought with a price means that Christ has paid to secure your forgiveness and mine and that we can belong to Him, not with legal fiction, not for wishful hope, but in the very real reality to be purchased by Christ and belong to Him and to have the freedom to glorify Him with our physical body in this life. The gospel offers us this hope. Transformation is possible in Jesus Christ. The church is to be seriously engaged with the culture, to make sure we don't put this at the top of our list, as the Bible never does, but we need to have the scriptural integrity to say that this is not God's design for human life. As Kevin DeYoung said:

“Believing the Bible does not make us bigots, just as reflecting the times does not make us relevant.”

What makes us relevant is the Good News of what God has done in Christ, and that is available for all who call His Name. Let's pray together. Why don't we stand as we prepare to sing in response?

Father God. We thank You for the gift of this morning. We thank You that the church is a place where honest questions can receive honest answers from Your Word. Father, we thank You that You know us better than we know ourselves, that You know us in our mother's womb. You know the number of our days. Lord, You know the sinful nature that we all inherit, and You know who and what we can become through faith in Jesus Christ. Lord, Jerry and I pray together for those specifically struggling with same-sex attraction this morning, those who feel trapped or pushed by life experience or circumstance. We pray that the power of the Holy Spirit would fill them now, bring them to Christ. We pray that Kenwood would be a place where people who are struggling can be, and we thank You that sanctification is not a prerequisite of following Jesus, but a result. I pray that You would bless Prodigal Ministries in our city, and we pray, Father, that You would give us courage and humility and open doors this week. Empower us to be ready to share. We love You, Lord, and we want to sing now and proclaim as we come together and see what You have done for each of us.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.