

Homosexuality: What Would Jesus Say to Ellen?

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Tough Questions the Critics Ask

Matthew 7:1-5

I want to begin today's talk with two words: Ellen DeGeneres. If you haven't spent the last three months in a cave, you know that this past week the Disney produced sitcom, "Ellen," showed Ellen DeGeneres come out of the closet and in a very warm, very reasonable way tell the world that she is a lesbian. Of course, she has been featured on all of the talk show – Oprah, Diane Sawyer's show, the cover of Time Magazine and countless interviews. Homosexuality is **the** hot issue of the 1990's.

It is not only hot, but it may be among the most important and volatile issues to confront the church and the culture in the last several hundred years. Just scan the daily newspapers and you will see how important this issue is. Recently, I just scanned a couple of days' of newspaper articles and I found articles on how gay youth are not modifying their behavior in the age of AIDS. I found articles on how custody battles are being fought between estranged lesbian couples that are battling for their artificially inseminated offspring. There was an article on the controversy surrounding Hawaii's decision to legalize same-sex marriages.

In the last couple of years, there has been enormous discussion about the civil recognition of same-sex marriage. Then there was the Supreme Court's recent decision to strike down the Colorado referendum, which prohibited homosexuals from being a protected class under Colorado municipal legislation. Just a few years ago, here in Columbus, the city council in a closed door session added sexual orientation to Columbus' equal employment opportunity law. So along with the more traditional prohibited bases of discrimination – things like race, gender, national origin, and religion, the city of Columbus added homosexuality.

Now, the subject of homosexuality has not simply remained out there; it has invaded the church in an enormous way in the past five years or so, becoming one of the most hotly debated topics in the 90's. Something like 46 denominations have debated issues ranging from the ordination of homosexual clergy to the question of legitimizing homosexual marriages. More and more denominations are revising their historical opposition to homosexual practice. And there is a growing body of literature that makes the claim that the Bible does not prohibit loving homosexual unions. Christians, of course, exposed to the popular press and media, read articles in Newsweek and US Today suggesting that there is now a mountain of scientific evidence suggesting that homosexuality is biologically based. We read about church leaders being outed in gay newspapers. And, of course, horrific stories of molestations by priests, clergymen, trusted Boy Scout leaders.

We also read about Christian individuals and churches responding, sometimes harshly, sometimes kindly. Jerry Falwell has been quoted extensively concerning Ellen coming out of the closet. Falwell apparently calls her Ellen Degenerate, which fueled another whole series of articles and counter-responses. The Southern Baptist Convention last year voted to recommend to its member churches and 14 million member denomination that Southern Baptists not visit Walt Disney World or Disneyland because of the perception of family unfriendliness. This was due to Disney's very vigorous support for spousal benefits to be awarded to same-sex couples on an equal basis with traditionally married couples and Disney's turning over of Disney World to various homosexual groups for an annual Gay Pride Day at Disney World.

Then here at Vineyard, we have one of the largest church-based ministries to people in the state who have AIDS or are HIV positive. And we have support groups for those wishing to come out of unhealthy same-sex relationships.

Given the incredible swirl of information and media coverage and charges and counter-charges and moralizing and rebuttals, is there any wonder why the average Christian man or woman sitting in the average church in America finds himself or herself entirely confused about what Jesus would say to someone like Ellen.

Now, I realize we are always on dangerous ground trying to articulate Jesus' view of a person or a subject, because we dare not put our words in His mouth. This is precisely what the third commandment, which says not to take the name of the Lord in vain, was written to prevent. It was designed to prohibit people from attaching the Lord's name to our own empty thoughts. I will try to stick as close as possible to what Jesus actually said.

One of my hopes as a pastor is to form a church that thinks Christianly. That you have the capacity to look at life from a Christian and biblical vantage point. One of my great joys is assisting people to sort through the confusing issues of living life in the 90's. If you are a parent, I hope to give you some handles in discussing this issue with your children. If you are a guest, I hope to demonstrate to you the reasonableness and graciousness of Jesus' approach to homosexuals. If you are struggling or have struggled in the past with homosexuality, if this touches close to home, I hope that today's message might be a message of encouragement to you.

In any case, I don't think it matters where you are coming from. You absolutely need to sort through this critical issue. As I said in my opening, it may be the most important issue facing the church and facing the culture in the 90's. Let's go before God and ask for His help.

What would Jesus say to Ellen or other homosexuals? I want to first consider with you what Jesus would say to the church regarding its attitudes about homosexuality, because Jesus always spoke most strongly to the religious community and usually started with people who studied the Bible and claimed to love the Bible before dealing with folks who were involved in an immoral lifestyle. And so I would like for us to read together Jesus' words concerning how it is that we in the church should approach anyone who we think is involved in a sin.

Let's take a look at Matthew 7:1-5,

“Do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye. How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite! First take the plank out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

Now, I would suggest to you that Matthew 7:1 is often the most misquoted and misunderstood verses in the whole of the Bible. If you speak about homosexuality in a critical way, if you raise objections to equating homosexual marriage to heterosexual marriage, if a church leader suggests that there might be something wrong with ordaining a practicing homosexual, immediately someone is going to quote Matthew 7:1, “Judge not. Do not judge or you too will be judged.”

Now, I would suggest to you that Jesus is in no way calling for Christians to suspend their critical faculties. He is not saying here, “Christian, I want you to get rid of all of your moral discernment. Lay aside your discernment about the rightness or wrongness of any particular activity. Instead, Christian, I want you to approach the world with an easy going, benevolent tolerance, like a doting old grandpa, so that you look at the abuser or the person who abandons their children or the addict or the person who is unwilling to forgive and you say, ‘Hey, while some things feel wrong to me, who am I to judge?’” Jesus never says to the Christian, “Get rid of your moral discernment. View everything as various shades of grey.” That is not what He is calling for here in Matthew 7:1.

You say, “Rich, how do you know that? How do you know that He is not making a blanket statement saying, ‘Who are we to judge?’ You have no right to say something is right and something is wrong. How do you know that Jesus is not making a blanket statement?”

Well, just look down a few verses to verse 6 where Jesus says, “Do not give dogs what is sacred. Do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under feet and turn and tear you to pieces.”

How are we to determine that there are certain people before whom we need to exercise great discretion in speaking? That you don’t say anything before anyone? That you figure out who your audience is before you shows your goods and displays your treasure? So many Christians are so foolish here and naively say anything and everything to anyone with a camera or a reporter’s badge on. Whatever judging excludes, it does not exclude thinking about who your audience is before you speak, especially about a subject as volatile as homosexuality. Jesus is saying to the church, “Come on, men and women, think! Use some tact. Be wise before you shoot off your mouth.”

Or how about looking down at verse 15 where Jesus says, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.”

If Christians are to take a blind, silly approach to life in which we say never judge anything or anyone, how are we to recognize false prophets? And why does Jesus call us to look at their fruit?

How could a church ever exercise church discipline, which Jesus calls us to do on occasion in Matthew 18, if we are not allowed, in an absolute sense, to judge? If we are not to judge, why does Jesus, in John 7:24, tell us to judge, but judge using right judgment. It is not all judgment that is being condemned by this statement “judge not,” Jesus is condemning the self-righteous judgment that religious people often fall into. He is condemning the position of superiority in which a person stands above the individual and the practice that they are condemning. He is condemning looking down on people. The self-righteous haughty view that comes through so much religious and Christian thinking and discussion about homosexuality, about the Ellen Show, the view that screams to the world, “I am better than you. I am not like you. You are filthy and I am clean.”

See, friends, we Christians are always called to live life on a tightrope, on a knife's edge. We are constantly going to be pulled to the left, to the libertine position, the hyper-tolerant position – “O, come on. Live and let live. Don't call anything sin. Don't exercise any moral discernment. Don't exercise any discipline. Every lifestyle is equally valid; it's all just a matter of perspective – you like chocolate, I like vanilla.” But we will be pulled just as hard to the right by the self-righteous smug, self-satisfied hypercritical judgment that stands above people and speaks to them in a belittling, shaming, condescending and non-rescuing way.

The Sadducees, by the way, represented the libertine position, in Jesus' day and the Pharisees represented the self-righteous position of moral superiority. Jesus rejected both easy-going moral tolerance and moral superiority. If you want to know where Jesus ends up on any issue, he will always be on the side of maximum mercy and maximum righteousness, maximum grace and maximum truth. Listen to the challenge that He issues to the church. He says, “OK, church, you want to talk about homosexuality? And issue pronouncements and call Ellen ‘Ellen Degenerate’? Do you want to do so because you say you hate sin and that you are standing on the side of God and on the side of morality?”

Fine. I am glad that you hate sin. All true Christians ought to hate sin. But if you really hate sin, why not start with the sin in your own life and hate that? Verse 3: “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay not attention to the plank in your own eye?” Is it not incredibly hypocritical of the church to scream about the sins of people out there and to pay no attention to our own sins? Beat up on Ellen, that's cheap and easy. She is not the daughter of some prominent member of the church's deacon board or a major giver to the church's building fund.

Let me put it this way. Jesus is saying that the starting point for being able to say anything meaningful about homosexuality or abortion or any other social sin in our country is a searching personal repentance on the part of the individual who is going to make such a pronouncement. If you say you hate sin, then you must first hate it in yourself. Many Christians acknowledge that they are sinners and confess their sins, but they don't see their sin as being quite as awful as the sin of homosexuality. They view the sin of homosexuality as being particularly

revolting, particularly heinous. And so we have a right then to pour our venom out on homosexuals, while being kinder and gentler to other sinners.

Is homosexuality at the bottom of the heap in terms of Jesus approach to sin? Paul does say in Romans 1 that homosexuality is an example of a culture that has separated itself from God. But it is very clear that homosexuality is not at the bottom of the spiral. In fact, in Romans 1, Paul goes on and says that "...since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind to what ought not to be done, to become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They were full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless and faithless, heartless and ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them." Slanderers deserve death? So do gossips? So do the greedy? Perhaps we do not have a leg up.

Let me cut to the chase right now. It is appropriate, I believe, for a homosexual to say to the church, "Church, here you are making pronouncements against what I am doing, claiming to hate immorality. Church, have you done a searching and inquiry concerning the sins that you are most guilty of? Christian pastor, have you vehemently condemned greed in your church?" For after all, Jesus never said one word about homosexuality. But he said a lot about greed. He warned people to not build big palaces and shove them full of goods. He told us that it would be very difficult for the wealthy to get into the kingdom.

Deal with sin, fine. But deal with it using just and righteous judgment. And deal with the sins that afflict the church. Things like gossip and slander and greed and divorce. Deal with the church's socially acceptable sins. Of course, Jesus is using biting sarcasm in verses 4-5 when he condemns the hypercritical moral superiority of those who say things like "Ellen Degenerate." He says, "How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite. First take the plank out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

If we are going to do eye surgery on someone, especially someone who is not even in the church, Jesus says there is nothing more ridiculous than being a blind ophthalmologist. You have massive amounts of hidden sexual brokenness in the church. You have massive, redwood forest sized logs of unforgiveness and bitterness? Deal with that. Then you will see clearly enough to take the speck out of other people's eyes.

Let me make one last application of our starting point here. It is so appropriate that Jesus uses the image of eye surgery when He explains to the church how we are to deal with someone's sins. Because the eye is the most sensitive organ in the body. If you have ever had anything lodged in your eye, you know that even the smallest speck can cause you incredible agony and pain.

When I was in college, I was doing some roofing and a little piece of metal flicked up and got under my eyelid. I tried to get it out with my finger. It was

scratching the inside of my eyelid and beginning to scratch the surface of my eye. It was driving me crazy. My eyes were filled with tears. My nose was running. I was absolutely blind up on this roof. I had to close my eyes and blindly climb down a 2-story ladder and walk myself to the student health clinic that was 3 blocks away. I was going through the street madly trying not to bump into anything. When I got to the clinic I just announced, "I have something in my eye. You have to help me." Fortunately, a very kind doctor rushed toward me and laid me on the table. She took some little swab and under a magnifying glass gently poked it in my eye and pulled the piece of metal out. I experienced such enormous relief when that speck was out of my eye. And, by the way, gentle confrontation is one of the kindest things you could ever do for anyone.

When we approach anyone concerning his or her sin in any area, remember that you are doing eye surgery. You are not taking a callus off the bottom of their foot. You are not dealing with something on their knee or elbow. If you get a hypersensitive reaction to your correction, it is because you are dealing with their eyes.

What would Jesus say to the church about its approach to Ellen? We learn, #1 that the church itself must engage in a searching inventory of its own moral life before it starts speaking to the Ellens of the world. We learn that we have no capacity to see clearly while we have logs in our own eyes. We learn that our scales of relative sins are frequently completely out of balance and that the trees in the eyes of the church are often much worse than the specks that we see in someone like Ellen. And we learn that anytime we engage in correction, we must be exceptionally gentle and gracious, never standing above someone with an air of moral superiority, but standing on the same level, speaking out of our own brokenness, out of our own need for grace, in the classical phrase, "one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."

Now having considered what Jesus would say to the church, let's consider what Jesus would say to Ellen. I think that there is probably no better place to look in considering Jesus' attitude toward both sin and sinners than the end of John 7. It is the story of the woman caught in adultery. Turn to John 7:53.

"Then each went to his own home. But Jesus went to the Mt. of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers' of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him."

Now, I must tell you that this favorite story of many readers of the New Testament doesn't appear in the oldest and best manuscripts. And you probably have a note to that effect at the top of your page or a footnote. It is, however, quoted by a follower of the apostle John named Papias at the beginning of the 2nd Century. And it was commented on by a number of earlier church fathers. The story does appear quite consistent with the Spirit of Christ. And it flows neatly into the text. Moreover, Augustine suggested that certain stories of

adultery and Jesus' attitudes were cut from early manuscripts because of the early church's hyper-reaction toward sexual sin.

The bottom line is that we do not know conclusively if this was written in the gospel of John. My preference would be to retain it although perhaps not in its current place in the order of the gospel. What does the story tell us?

It tells us that a woman was dragged into the presence of Jesus, perhaps wrapped in a blanket, perhaps just covering her front with her clothes. She had to have been according to Jewish law caught in the very act of adultery. Under Jewish law of the day, it was not enough for there to have been suspicious circumstances to condemn her for adultery. She could not have been condemned simply because she walked out of a bedroom with a man or even was found lying with a man in a bed. She had to be caught in the act. And two witnesses had to swear out an affidavit saying that they both saw the man and her in the act, all of which suggests a set-up, particularly since the man is not dragged before Jesus.

Some recent scholarship on how Jews handled adultery in the 1st Century indicate that the set up here could have been by her husband, who desiring to put away his wife did not simply want to divorce her because of adultery, which was the common practice. In a divorce, the wife would take with her any property that she brought into the marriage. However, if she were killed, all the property that she had brought into the marriage would revert to the husband.

The short of it is the gospel writer tells us that Jesus was presented with the following question. "In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. What do you say?"

You say, "What is the trap here? What is the dilemma?"

The dilemma could have been between a harsh and lenient view of the Law of Moses – between easy-going Sadducees and self-righteous Pharisees. If He strictly adhered to the Law, Jesus might have lost those followers of His who saw Him as leavening the Law with mercy. If He said to set her free, He could have been seen as someone who was directly opposing the Law of Moses and lost those followers who still adhered to the Law. Or the trap could have been between the Roman law, which forbid Jews from executing a person, and Jewish law, which required it. It is very possible that these Scribes and Pharisees wanted Jesus to do something that would result in condemnation from the Roman government or by the Jewish High Court.

In any case, the gospel writer goes on with this very interesting little note saying,

"But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with His finger. When they kept on questioning Him, He straightened up and said to them, 'If anyone of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground."

Now there has been an enormous amount of speculation regarding exactly what Jesus was writing with His finger on the ground. We certainly can't be dogmatic about it because the gospel writer doesn't tell us. But I happen to believe that what Jesus was writing on the ground were the Ten Commandments. It says that He was using his finger. As you may recall, the

Ten Commandments were written on clay tablets by the finger of God. Jesus is implicitly pointing to Himself as the one who wrote those Ten Commandments back on Sinai and is now writing it in clay before the Scribes and Pharisees. He is subtly announcing, "I am the God who gave you the Law." And he is saying, "OK, you want to condemn this woman for violating the 7th commandment? That's wonderful. You obviously love God's commandments. Well, let's consider the other commandments and see if you love them as much as you love the 7th."

As the accusers look over Jesus' shoulder to see what he is writing, one by one, they realize that they have violated others of the commandments. If anyone ought to be condemned, it was the accusers. Perhaps they didn't honor their fathers and mothers. Perhaps they had stolen in the past. Perhaps they had violated the Sabbath at some point. Perhaps they had taken the name of the Lord in vain. Perhaps they had lied. I think Jesus got up to the 9th commandment, stood up and there were still a few people smugly saying, "All these we have done. Let's get a big stone and get on with our lynching." And then Jesus stooped down again and wrote the 10th commandment, "Thou shall not covet" a commandment not aimed at our outward behavior, but aimed at our hearts, calling into question our desire for that which is not rightly for ours. When they saw the 10th commandment written, the remaining few self-righteous drifted away. As it says in verse 9,

"At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman standing there."

There is only one person who could stare into the face of the Ten Commandments and never flinch. There is only one person in the history of the world who could maintain the honest claim that He had never violated any of the commands. That person is Jesus. And now Jesus shows the heart of God toward Ellen and other sexually broken people. The sexual sinner is always full of shame before God. The sexual sinner always feels that God must hate them. And that their only option is to flee from the presence of God. The sexual sinner is often angry with God. "Why did you allow this to happen? Why did you make me like this? Why won't you set me free from these temptations?" In short, the sexual sinner always believes that what they will receive from the hand of God is the same thing that they receive from their own condemning consciences, and from the self-righteous religious community. So Jesus bores in on this profound blanket of shame that this woman is covering herself with. Not only a physical blanket that she is clutching around her body, but a blanket of shame, a blanket of self-imposed reaction and rebellion to God.

Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?'

If Jesus spoke to Ellen, he would say, "There is only one person who could justly condemn you; that's me. There is only one person who could stand above you with a pointing finger, but I don't do that." Look at how Jesus responds.

"No one, sir," she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'

Mercy. Grace. Forgiveness. Do you know how much homosexual offenders need to be put in touch with the heart of God for them? That over against the

religious community's communication of revulsion and the demonic lies that you could never go to God, homosexual offender, God in heaven is sickened by your behavior. Jesus announces in the most affectionate terms possible, "Neither do I condemn you." That if there is grace and God's love for you, if you allow your hands to be empty so you can receive it, go to God with a broken heart, acknowledging your sin, laying down your anger toward God; you will not be condemned. You will be received.

But Jesus doesn't fall off the knife's edge into an easygoing kind of liberal tolerance. He wouldn't say, "Ellen, go ahead and live your life style. Do whatever you need to do to fill that hole of love in your soul. If you need another man, if you need another woman, even outside the bounds of God's commandments go ahead. I don't condemn you." Look at the wonderful balance in Jesus' approach to sexual sinners. I don't condemn you, Ellen, but I don't condone your sin either. He literally says, "Now go and stop sexually sinning from this moment on." Mercy and righteousness. Grace and truth. Every real word from Jesus will perfectly strike this balance.

You say, "Well, Rich, are you saying that homosexuality is sin?"

I have read the work of some recent biblical scholars who now suggest that the Old Testament and New Testament prohibitions against homosexual practices have been long misunderstood. That what all the anti-homosexual texts are about, is condemning heterosexuals engaging in homosexual sex. Or what is prohibited, is simply using homosexual sex in idolatrous worship environments. But the Bible never condemns loving, committed, homosexual relationships.

I have read some of the recent studies on homosexuality in the Bible that put just that type of spin on the scriptures. To make a long story short, I always have the feeling that some biblical scholars have the mind-sets of defense attorneys, who when looking at a law or a commandment work diligently to find a loop hole in the law or at least diligently to sow enough doubts in the minds of the jurors that they won't be able to apply the law to this particular client.

Friends, while it is true that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality as frequently as it does other sins such as greed or slander or gossip, the biblical prohibitions against homosexuality are clear and completely unambiguous. At every mention, homosexuality is condemned as sin. Leviticus 18:22 says, "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable." Leviticus 20:13 says, "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death. Their blood will be on their own heads."

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, "Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders will inherit the kingdom of God."

The Bible is very clear that the only permitted form of sexual expression is heterosexual sex within the bounds of marriage. Every other form of sexual expression is uniformly condemned.

Condemn someone for acting reasonably and lovingly in accordance with his or her nature? But might not someone like Ellen protest and say, "Right now there is a mountain of scientific evidence that proves that homosexuality is simply

a matter of biology. Compassionate people don't challenge someone for being left-handed or being non-Caucasian. That is biologically determined. There is a mountain of scientific evidence proving that homosexuality is biologically determined.

The reason I raise this objection on Ellen's behalf is because that is what the media has been saying for the last six years. Newsweek magazine, a few years back, had a picture of a baby on the cover with the headline, "Is this child gay?" Let me suggest to you, having read the scientific evidence, that the mountain of biological evidence for homosexuality is something smaller than a speed bump. There are actually, at this point, just two major studies suggesting a biological predisposition toward homosexuality. There was one study that was published in a 1991 issue of Science magazine by a homosexual researcher named Simon LeVay. Simon LeVay conducted post-mortem autopsies on 35 men who had died. Nineteen of the 35 men were homosexual and they all had died of AIDS. Sixteen of the men were presumed to have been heterosexuals and six of them had died of AIDS.

What LeVay found was that in a certain region of the brain, heterosexuals generally had more brain cells than homosexuals did. But this wasn't an absolute finding. Three of the homosexual men had more brain cells than the presumed heterosexuals in that area of the brain.

You say, "What does this study prove?"

Simon LeVay himself would say, "Absolutely nothing." It may be that there is an anatomical difference between homosexual male brains and heterosexual male brains. But the fact is this study does not prove it at all. The sample size is simply too small, involving only 35 men, to generalize to the entire male population. Since many of the men had AIDS, we do not know the affect of AIDS or the affect of behavior on that portion of the brain. And the study's findings have never been reduplicated. Simon LeVay himself also said that the measurements were so technical that he is not even sure if his measurements were accurate.

Two researchers, Bailey and Pillard, did the other study. It was a study of identical twins. They found that 52% of identical twins in this study turned out to be homosexuals. Only 22% of fraternal twins were both homosexuals and only 9% of sibling brothers were both homosexuals. Since there was a higher incidence among identical twins than among siblings or fraternal twins, it was postulated that there must be a genetic link because identical twins are genetically identical.

Now what does this second study prove? Well, like LeVay's study, absolutely nothing. Because it is a well-known fact that identical twins have a profound influence on each other and so if one twin decides to engage in a certain behavior, it is very common for the other twin to follow suit. Moreover, identical twins are nearly always raised identically. And so we can't factor out the issue of child-raising and family background. But, perhaps most importantly, if biology was destiny, then we ought to have a 100% correlation between genetically identical people, not 52%. In other words, if homosexuality was genetically determined then if one identical twin was homosexual, the other identical twin in

100% of the cases ought to also be homosexual. The fact is that at this point, it is completely erroneous to state that there is conclusive, scientific evidence that homosexuality is biologically caused. There is no such mountain of evidence. There is at best a speed bump. The two studies that I cited are the two major studies that bolster this claim.

What causes homosexuality, then, Rich?

We simply don't know. Sexual behavior is one of the most complicated things for researchers to analyze. Biblically, we understand that all sinful behavior springs from the heart of man. Here is what Jesus says in Mark 7:18.

"Are you so dull? Nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean. Rather, it is from within, out of men's hearts, that come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly."

Here is what Jesus is saying. Christian person, Ellen, you must entirely reject any theory of causation whether about homosexuality or about any other sin in which the fundamental cause is located outside the heart. It is each of our hearts that is a fountain that produces our own sins. It is not our parents. It is not life events. It is not simply our genetics. It is something deeper, that Jesus calls the heart. It is the real you, the broken you, the fallen you.

Now this broken you may be tempted because of life's traumas. The broken you may find itself tempted because of genetic predispositions. The broken you may find itself tempted because of parental sins and environmental factors. But all this stuff from the outside does not cause sin. It is our own hearts that cause us to sin, our own brokenness, and the place inside of us that makes decisions.

Now finally, you must understand what Jesus' message is to Ellen. Jesus' message is not simply, "Ellen, live with your broken heart." Live earnestly, yearning for a homosexual relationship. Live boiling over with desire. Just don't act on your desires. Just don't touch. Just don't consummate any actions. Be a homosexual, but don't act homosexually.

That is not Jesus' message. Jesus' message of hope to Ellen and some of you is that your heart, this fountain that bubbles up homosexual desire in you and bubbles up heterosexual lust in me, this heart of ours that bubbles up foul thoughts and bubbles to the surface greed and envy and covetousness and one-ups-manship and self-righteousness – this heart of ours can be changed and washed.

I don't know if there is any more important message for homosexuals in our culture to get than this. It is a lie, a massive lie, served up to you by the world, the devil, and your flesh coming into an unholy alliance that says to you that you can't change. Accept your destiny. Don't fight it. The world says that there is a mountain of biological evidence that says you can't change. No one ever has and no one ever will. The devil whispers in your ear, forget it. You have tried to fight it. You have felt shame for a long time. Forget fighting. Your flesh says, "There must be a way for me to feel good about my behavior, to justify it. To deal with a conscience that condemns me." It all forms an unholy alliance that says you are what you are. That is a lie.

1 Corinthians 6 says this: "Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

Ellen says, "Great. Thanks for telling me that I am not going to go to heaven if I practice homosexuality. Thank you."

But Paul goes on and says, "That is what some of you were." There were people in the church in Paul's day, there are people in Vineyard Columbus, there are some of you sitting here, the Ellens, who need to hear the words, "That's what some of you were." You were the fountain producing these things. But you need not be that forever because your heart can be washed. You can be sanctified. You can be justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God. There is no more important word for a person struggling with sexual sin and who turns to Christ for salvation than "That is what you were."

How is the heart washed? How do I move from "I want? I want. I want, but I can't have" to "I no longer want. I no longer crave. I no longer am boiling over with lust?"

In the last three minutes I want you to look at that word "washed". WASHED. Because I believe that it is an acronym for six things that could change Ellen's heart and our own. The first letter is "W". It stands for worship. The apostle Paul in Romans 1 tells us where immorality comes from. Immorality springs from idolatry in the heart. You begin worshipping your own pleasure, your own comfort, and your own need for satisfaction. You put up idols of yourself and your own pleasure in your heart. And that leads to immorality. In the holy place of your inner being, you pull down idols of personal comfort and idols of sinful thoughts and you put there the person of Jesus Christ. You make Christ the continual object of your worship. You want your heart to be washed? Become a worshipper of Jesus in the heart.

Then, of course, there is the need for accountability. A – Accountability. The heart is profoundly self-deceptive. We love to lie to ourselves about how well we are doing in an area. But if you have been struggling for years with homosexual temptation or heterosexual lust, then you have struggled for years with an amazing amount of self-deception. And the only way for you to have a washed heart is for you to take your stuff and bring it to the light before God and before another trusted person. Because you will, in a self-deceptive way, like to see how close to the edge you can get without falling over. You will never be able to walk out a change of heart without an accountable relationship.

S stands for the Spirit's power. We are weak. The apostle Paul tells us, in 2 Corinthians 12, "But when we are weak, God is strong." Jesus in us can overcome any sin. Moment by moment in the sexual area of your life, you must surrender to the Holy Spirit's power. Breathe on me, Breath of God. Fill me with life anew, that I might love what thou doest love and do what thou wouldst do.

H is for hope. We begin the process of having our hearts changed by hope. There is a hope that maybe I could change, but you know in order to keep the process going you must regularly renew your hope because there will be times that you stumble. You are trying to worship God and be in an accountable

relationship and live by the Spirit's power, but you have a trip up, you have a failure. At that point, Satan will come along and say to you, "Just give it up. You have fallen all the way to the bottom of the hill again. You have fallen off the wagon, now go live in the gutter." And so in the middle of this process, you must renew your hope. Know, even from this place, that Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn you." That says to me I don't condemn you, now go and lift yourself up and sin no more.

Washing requires endurance. Friends, washing a sexually broken heart is a process. You can stop the act of sinning now. But the heart that has been filled with sexual idols and idols of personal pleasure and comfort, it takes great tenacity to pull those down. There is no quick fix for washing the heart. You simply can't cast that demon of sexual sin out of your heart never to return again. There is no one decision that will fix you forever. Washing is a continual process.

And that requires, finally, death to self. I am going to give you one simple way for you to know whether you hear distinctively Christian counsel about any problem in your life. Whether you are thinking like a Christian about a problem in your life. Does the change in your life require death to self? Does the change in your life require that a cross come into your life? Death to your will? Death to your goals? Is your sinful self's death involved in this change? Or is the change simply projected onto someone else, a strengthening of your self's pride, a bolstering of your self-confidence? If death to self is involved, if a cross is involved, you are hearing from Jesus.

There is hope for Ellen and others who are homosexual. There is hope for the heterosexually broken. She and we can be WASHED.

Let's pray.