

Discussion on Studying Theology & Loving Our Neighbors

Special Presentation

The Rev. Jeff Stivason, Ph.D.

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Jeff: Our gracious heavenly Father, we bow before You and give You thanks. We know that each day is a gift from Your hand. And as we enter into another we are thankful for it, and recognize that each one is guided by Your providence. And so, Father, as You take us throughout the course of today's events, we pray that You will make us mindful that You are the King and the Sovereign not only of this land but of the whole world, that You are the Redeemer of the world through Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And Father, we pray that as we have opportunity to speak to those in our path about the gospel that You would give us utterance, a confidence to speak and an ability to utter the things that mean so much to us, to unfold the mysteries of the gospel that we might make them known, that we might tell others of the things that saved us—the Lord Jesus Christ and His cross. Father, as we bow before You today we recognize that this is a gift from Your hand, to have time to open Your word and study it, and to think about the truths of it. We pray, Father, that You will watch over us, but also tend to our minds and motivate our hearts, and give us whole persons that respond to Your gospel in such a way that we not only love it, but that this love is detected by others so that they too long to know the Christ, the Savior that we know.

Father, we certainly pray for many on our hearts and minds. We think of our brother Bruce and pray for him continually, asking that You will be with him as he recovers, but also his wife as she attends to him and continues to do her work outside the home. Father, we also think about Gideon tomorrow as he speaks. We're thankful for the men You've called to the ministry. And Lord, we pray that You would give him utterance, and that he will in many ways vindicate the gifts that You've given him. And we pray, Father, that he would continue to study and cultivate those, that he might be a servant in Your kingdom as he is today.

Father, we ask that You would bless us now as we open Your word. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: Okay.

Sig Tragard: Jeff, we do have a microphone. So wait for it if you have a question so that we can get you on the recording.

Jeff: Let me say one thing. I do want to go to Romans. But I want to say one thing about something that Sig said earlier. I'll try to condense it if I can. That is often the point.

I don't know if you guys have read Bob Goff's book. He may have had a couple of more recent ones. It's a book where there are basically twenty chapters of biographies—stories about how God worked in the lives of his students. Does that ring a bell with anybody?

Don Maurer: Is that the one that you talked about where he said that it's not good to do Bible studies?

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Jeff: Yeah. Good memory, Don. And the title has *Love* in it. Does this ring a bell?

Sig: Like “*love your neighbor.*”

Jeff: Yeah, but it’s not. I’m worried about these things because I’ve been thinking about this myself. Here’s what oftentimes happens.

Let me give you an illustration. And I’m going to count on the Bishop to come in and save me at some point. (*Laughter*) I’m thinking about the Rechabites in Jeremiah 35 in that regard. This is just modeled after that. Let’s say this for instance. Remember, the Rechabites. Jonadab was the father, and he commanded his children not to drink wine. Jeremiah tries to bring them into the temple area and serve them wine. And they say, “No, we’re not going to drink the wine because our father told us not to drink the wine.” It’s that kind of pattern that I want us to think about. And I want to set aside the Rechabites for now.

But I want you to think about two generations past, or something like that, where a father goes to his son and says, “Look, son, we don’t drink wine. This family has never put wine to our lips because.” And then he goes and tells them the story about the past. And he tells them about something that happened in their family. And this is why they never touch wine. And so that son carries forth the tradition. And he tells his son, “Son, we never drink wine. And here is why we never drink wine, because of this,” and so on.

Then the next son comes along and he tells his son. “Son, we never drink wine, and this is why.” And then the next son comes along. And the next son just assumes that his son knew why they never drank wine. And then the next son comes along and has no idea why they don’t drink wine. It’s just a family tradition.

And oftentimes I think that is sort of the way we think about theology. This is just stuff we know, but it has no real impact with the world that we live in. So theology becomes sort of a tradition that we pass down. We gather in Bible studies; we pass it down. We don’t really know why we pass it down from one generation to the next, but we just do, as if it doesn’t really mean anything. It’s just sort of held in abstraction.

And the bishop indicated—and I agree wholeheartedly with him; not that it matters—(*Laughter*) But the bishop said to us earlier that theology is Christian living. It informs all areas of the Christian life. But it’s sort of that example. The fathers need to tell their children why it is that we hold this tradition. This is why we do what we do.

For instance, when we tell our kids and when we teach our children, we sit our little three-year-old down and say, “Honey, the hypostatic union.” (*Laughter*) When we sit our children down and we teach them that Jesus is both God and man, we don’t just say, “He’s both God and man. Now shut up and believe it.” We tell them that Jesus is God and man, and had to be God and man because were He just God He couldn’t be our substitute as men and women, right? And if He were just a man then He would be like us, and sinful. So He had to be the God-Man in order to save us—something simple like that. And yet the explanation is there. So with the explanation being there we embrace the idea of Jesus being the God-Man. Why? Because it becomes the foundation for our hope and salvation, and so on.

I mean, theology has deep roots in how we live, and not just how we live but in how we think. But we can’t just teach it in abstraction and then hope that it develops those

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roots. We have to work those roots into our living. Does that make sense? I think that was a significant enough point this morning that I just wanted to touch on it and think about it a second. But do you have anything? Would you add anything, Bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: Luther and Erasmus both spoke around the question about the bondage of the will or the freedom of the will. And Luther said, “Erasmus goes after bad behavior.” He said, “I go after the doctrine,” because it’s the doctrine that ultimately shapes the behavior. So he was really very strong on that. That’s what got him in trouble.

Jeff: Yeah. You know what I’m reminded of? Do you guys remember this? R. C. Sproul wrote a children’s book. It was his first children’s book, *The Priest With Dirty Clothes*. And he tells the story about how he wrote his second book. And I don’t remember what the second book was. I think it was *The King Without a Shadow*. And he wrote the second book.

And when he wrote the second book he had a completely different copy editor. And the copy editor changed all sorts of things, not the least of which the copy editor changed the word “sin” to “bad choices.”

And this is so funny. He said to the copy editor, “You know, I am all for advice on grammar and syntax and sentence structure. I think I’m okay on theology.” (*Laughter*) “I think we’ll leave the sin there.” Anyway, yes?

Ron Baling: When I was in college years ago (maybe I’m still in college), (*Laughter*), one of the guys said that we don’t need religion; we’re good, moral people. So I think we’re on the wrong path.

Jeff: Yeah, right. Well you know, if you read *Pilgrim’s Progress*, you always get guys that slip in over the side of the gate that are Formalist and Hypocrisy. But those guys are the guys that have been taught the tradition and don’t understand why. They just have the form and they don’t have the substance.

Ron: “*Having a form of godliness, but denying the power.*”

Jeff: Yes, the form of godliness lacks the power. Absolutely. Does anybody else want to say anything about that?

Sig: My concern in bringing this up, Jeff, myself included; I’m not trying to say that I’m doing this and you’re not. But what I’ve found is that I think theology is wonderful. I love theology; I think that’s why most of us come here.

Jeff: Yeah.

Sig: But we dwell on only one big part of theology, and not so much the application, like loving our neighbor. I had a friend of mine teach a Bible study on the hard sayings of Jesus.

Jeff: Yes.

Sig: And I asked him. I said that I think the hardest saying is—well, loving our God is pretty hard. But loving your neighbor is very hard; it’s hard to do. I mean, how do we really do it?

And I also think about loving our enemies. I mean, the practicality is that I don’t think that many of us—myself included—hang out with prostitutes and pimps and all the bad people, the ones that Jesus ran right into the middle of in His culture—the lepers, the tax collectors, whatever would translate into our generation—the homosexuals, the trans-

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genders. We don't know what they're like. We certainly don't think they belong in our churches because they're sinful. And that's the kind of thing I was getting at. How do we embrace a whole side of our culture that doesn't feel comfortable in our churches, let alone come to the church?

Jeff: Well you know, I don't think that it has so much to do with this. If we took a straw poll and said, "Who thinks that their church would not be welcoming of a homosexual who attended?", I don't think that any of us would raise our hands and say, "My church is not welcoming toward them."

Sig: But see, I think the question is would the homosexual be comfortable in your church?

Jeff: So I think that the issue in our present moment is not necessarily our church. I think the issue in our present moment is that we have a situation. And let's just minimize this and take two groups—the Christians, and let's take the LGBTQ-plus community, okay?

We have a situation now between us that really is one of fear. So the church looks at the gay community and fears what they see coming. And when we fear I think we fear things that have to do with our kids. I know there are even disagreements within the gay and trans-gender communities, and so on about this. But let's leave those to the side for a minute.

You now have the trans-genders wanting to have it so that their boys who are trans-gender can participate in our girls' sports. And we think at the least that's not fair. Why? Because our girls won't get the scholarships that they once received, and so on. So there's that kind of fear that is in some ways really inconsequential.

But then we have fears about men using our girls' bathrooms. And that's a little deeper, right?, especially if the state begins to mandate that type of behavior for the church. Now we have growing concerns because we believe in a binary, man and woman. We don't believe in a mono, right? We don't believe in a mono existence of sexes. And this begins to cut against our theology, not against our pocketbook. And then we see the way in which in 2015 that the gays and lesbians cut against marriage, and all of this.

So we have all kinds of fears. Our fears range from what is this going to do to our kids and their college opportunities, to what is this going to do to Christian theology, to what is this going to do to our church's existence? For instance, let's say that the government says that if you don't acknowledge all of these things you lose your tax-exempt status. Once that happens, many churches will find it hard to exist. So there's a great deal of fear. And I don't think the fear is unfounded in its place.

However, on the other side gays and lesbians have a fear of Christians. And they fear Christians because, first of all, they fear. Why? Because the media hypes it. The Hillsboro Baptist Church has all those horrible signs about gays and lesbians. "God hates fags," and all that kind of thing, and they act like idiots, right? They act like idiots. And so you have that kind of thing.

But you also have a lot of rhetoric going on that for us is just passionate, zealous theological rhetoric, right? For instance, "you guys shouldn't be able to marry." And we believe that's a theological position that has practical import, right? But they hear it as

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“You’re going to sever me from the person that means most in my life.” And we can’t minimize that. I mean, they’re grafted to the person that they’re grafted to emotionally for a reason, right? And we’re telling them, “You have to sever this kind of relationship.” That produces fear, right?

And so we’ve got two groups that are really afraid of one another. And I think that’s the reason. And so how do you deal with that? Well, I personally think—and you feel free to critique this,—but I personally think that we’re not going to have a campaign that’s going to overcome that. You’re not going to put up a banner in front of your church that says, “We’re not mean; come visit us.” (*Laughter*) It’s just not going to happen.

But what does need to happen is this. And there are gays and lesbians and trans-genders and so on and so forth out there. And when we meet them we have to show them what a Christian really is. And that means holding our positions, but holding them with such grace and love and respect that they are disarmed by the fact that they’ve just met a Christian, right? And that’s the kind of thing.

And you know, we need to work at that, and here’s why. You know as well as I do, and maybe you’ve felt it yourself, that as soon as you meet somebody you get charged up because you don’t want to be disloyal to Christ. And so you may actually even be mean to somebody who is a sinner. And then you walk away and you say, “I just told them the truth,” when really what you did was that you were kind of an idiot; you know what I mean? And you could have been more loving and open, and yet resolved in your positions. You could have talked to that person and had a really great dialogue with them, walking away knowing that you disagree with one another. And yet they have a way different view of a Christian than you have. And you’ll have a different view of them. You won’t think they’re less wrong.

And this is the danger, right? The danger is that as soon as the face gets put on a position, all of a sudden people have a tendency to back away from what they believed. So here’s the real challenge for us as believers: to really love people and yet to love God more, such that we hold to the positions we hold without apology. And yet we love people who don’t hold those positions. That’s the challenge for us.

It’s easy, it’s most easy to sort of dig our trench and say that now the war is on. And I can be mean to everyone who doesn’t hold my position. And that’s not where we ought to be, especially in this culture war.

Jim Hamilton: My question is how tolerant should a church be in accepting members that are practicing—

Jeff: Yes. If you have a couple of gay men attending your church, this is kind of the ironic thing, right? Say you have a couple of gay men attending your church. And this is the funny thing: one is Catholic and one is Protestant. And the one that’s Catholic says, “How did you get the readings that you’re reading on any given Sunday morning?” Why? Because they’re thinking of the Roman Catholic mass and the missal and what they read, and how that’s set and structured, as if you are somehow disobeying authority by just choosing your own Scripture texts. Meanwhile they’re sitting there “married,” right?—man and man. And so what do you do with this?

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And so now, listen. You're having conversations with them, and so on and so forth. And you're not making their "marriage" the primary focus; you're just interacting with them. And as it comes up you're interacting with them, right? And all of a sudden they say, "You know, we know you think we're wrong in what we're doing," and so forth. "But we want to join this church."

And you say, "Well, you can't join the church." And they say, "Why? Everybody here is a sinner."

And you say, "I know, including me. But you're living in unrepentant sin. You're living in a pattern of sinfulness. I mean, I realize that my life is full of incidences of sin. But at this point, even if I'm dealing with a pattern of sinfulness in my life I'm trying to mortify it, to put it to death, and you're not. This is an open pattern of sinfulness. You're not trying to mortify it; you're condoning it."

That's where we can say this. You ask how tolerant can the church be? The church can be tolerant, but it can't ever condone sin, a pattern of continual sin. Go ahead.

Jim: But there's a difference between tolerance in the workplace and tolerance in the church.

Jeff: Oh, sure.

Jim: And I've had gay people at work and I've never discriminated against them in any way.

Jeff: Sure.

Jim: But I think there's a difference. It's against the law to be intolerant in the workplace.

Jeff: Right.

Jim: The church is a different story. And I don't know how tolerant we should be of homosexuality or any other sinful behavior in the church without changing your values.

Jeff: And that's what I'm saying. The church can't change the truth. And so it's sort of like a brick wall. It's the foundation; it cannot change. But we can interact with people in multiple ways; you know what I mean? And some people choose to take the truth and treat it as an excuse for being ignorant to others. And some people take the truth as it is and love others, and actually in some ways love others into that. Go ahead, Bishop.

Bishop Rodgers: I was just thinking of another situation. At the time we were running newcomer's classes. And we happened to notice that Jack and Jill had the same address, but they weren't married. So we had to deal with that in the church too, and that's a bit more difficult.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: Because it's not quite so obvious as two gay people. But we had to frankly say that "you're welcome to come to the class. You're welcome to come and worship. But you can't join the church as long as you're living together."

Jeff: Yes, and it's funny you say that, Bishop, because I was just thinking about a situation that happened in the first year of my first pastorate. This was 27 or 28 years ago. I was not very sensitive about how to handle these things back then. I wish I had been better at it. But there was a man and a woman who started coming to the church, and they were living together.

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And they were young. And again they had just started coming to the church. And I found out that they were living together. And so here's what I did: I preached against it. *(Laughter)* And they didn't show up after that.

Bishop: Yeah, right.

Jeff: And I didn't preach on it, but I mentioned it from the pulpit; bad deal. Unwise, right? I mean, it's not unwise to say those things from the pulpit. But in the providential scenario it was very stupid to say that from the pulpit at that moment in time.

Bishop: You need to deal with it pastorally.

Jeff: I need to deal with it pastorally. And so could I have rewound the tape 28 years I would have dealt with it in a much different way. But you see, that's the way we can sort of make out the enemy and then feel justified. Well, it's because they didn't want to hear the truth, that sort of thing.

You know, maybe it's not that they didn't want to hear the truth. Maybe it's that they were open to hearing the truth. They were just open to hearing it from a nicer person. *(Laughter)* Go ahead, Don.

Don Maurer: That could be, Jeff. On the other hand, though, what is love? If you're dealing with a passage such as Romans 1:26-27, if you preach through a book, you're going to come to that passage, and you're not going to be able to avoid it. And I guess the trick, if you can call it a trick, is to teach it thoroughly, and yet not to make the person feel like "we don't want you here." And that's not always easy. But what is love? Is love affirming someone in their sin? Or is love speaking the truth gently and lovingly? And if they don't receive it, well, there's nothing you can do about that.

Jeff: Well Don, what's love got to do with it anyway? *(Laughter)*

Don: Okay, Tina Turner. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: I guess what I would say is this. In a congregational setting where you are in a small church of 100 or 200 people, and you know and they know they've got this issue, how I've dealt with that since that time is that if I'm going to deal with a text that I know is going to touch directly on a person's issues, the previous week I'll go to them and say, "Hey, look. I want you to know that this is just coming up in the text, and I'm going to preach on it. But I want you to know that I'm not targeting you. It's coming up in the text, "which is why I think that preaching from books is the best way to go, because no one can say, "You picked this because"—that sort of thing. So I talk to them about it and they're debriefed.

Don: Okay; that's good.

Jeff: Don Bishop, you have something.

Don Bishop: We've really been speaking only in the context of them coming to our churches.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: But what do we do about going out to them and preaching the gospel?

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: In *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* by J. I. Packer there's a part where he is saying that evangelism is becoming a friend to these people, and learning to be loving to them, and in that context preaching the gospel.

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Jeff: Yeah.

Don: Loving them is serving them first. (*Unclear*) There are certain things that we do to prepare for the gospel. We gave out all that food to people. And now we have three or four people coming to church to hear the message of the gospel.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: Maybe that's what you're talking about. What is the church doing outside of the church?

Jeff: Yeah. And I don't want in any way to disparage organized attempts for the church to go out. But my own view, Don,—and you can feel free to push back; I'm not protective of this view. My own view is that the church has sort of gone into a programmatic mode because people aren't sort of just living the way that the gospel kind of suggests that they live.

For instance, let me read something to you. This is from Colossians 4:5-6. *“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of your time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”* And I think that's a great text speaking to evangelism—not sort of getting programmatic, but seizing the opportunities that God places in your path via the providential unfoldings of life. We're to seize and make the most of them and put them to use, right?

How so? By speaking a gracious word, seasoned with salt. It's gracious because you've experienced the gospel, and seasoned with salt because you're wise in Christ, right?

And so the idea in my mind is that the best idea is for every believer to be making the most of the opportunities God sets in their path. Then what begins to happen is that you get a really missional church.

And I think what has happened is, people have sort of insulated and isolated. And they get really busy. You know, I've got to get home from work and I have to go to this game and I have to go to this practice. And by the time I get home we barely have enough time to eat together and then crash into bed, and do the whole thing over again. And I think that we're not focused because there's no time to sort of be focused on what's going on around us, and being missional in our perspective, you know?

Now I want to say this, too. And again I'm really open to push-back on this. I used to be of Packer's mindset: make friends for the sake of the gospel. But I am not there because I've watched that. And I'll give you an example. I had a guy call me up years ago. I hadn't seen him for ten or fifteen years—maybe ten years. We graduated together.

He called me up. We used to live four houses apart from one another and hang out a lot. And we hadn't seen each other in years. He called me up and he said, “Hey, I'd like to get together with you about an opportunity.”

“Oh, really? Okay.”

“Yeah, but you know what, Jeff? Forget the opportunity. I do want to talk to you about it, but I just want to reconnect, you know?”

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So we met and he presented Amway to me. (*Laughter*) And then he said to me, “Jeff, you know what? I don’t care if you do get involved in this.” But he said, “It’s great to reconnect with you. I just want to start a friendship up again,” blah-blah-blah.

I said, “That’s great.” So I took his tapes and his books and I decided against it. I sent it back to him and I said, “When can we meet again for lunch?” I never heard another word from him. (*Laughter*) And sometimes talking about the gospel like that makes me feel like we’re just making friends to share the gospel. And some people would say that’s the best altruism you can have--to make friends and share the gospel. But what happens is that when people don’t receive the gospel those kinds of friendships sort of fall away. And people feel like you just sort of connected with them to share the gospel. And they come away with a bad taste in their mouths.

And I’m not suggesting that any one of us has that kind of thing in our minds when we do this. But I think that kind of thinking sort of breeds that kind of cycle. I am much more in favor of sort of an organic approach, where we actually make the most of opportunities that God sets in our paths.

Now people can use that as an excuse; I get it. Well, I don’t have anybody in my path. You know what I mean? But you know, we pray for opportunities, we look for opportunities. I mean, we’re the best persons to tell if we’re being honest with ourselves in the face of God and the Scriptures, right? So I don’t know; that’s my—Yes?

Jim: I had a fellow working with me who was gay. And he developed black spots on his face and arms. I was concerned for other employees who didn’t want to be near him. And I kind of watched this develop. And I called him one day and I said, “Tom, I’m concerned about your health.”

And he said, “Well, you can probably already figure out that I have AIDS, and I do.”

And I said, “Well, I don’t know how much flexibility I can show you in terms of you continuing to make a contribution that you’re making. So I want you to see the company doctor, and we’ll get some guidance from him.”

So he went to see the company doctor. And the doctor came back to me and said, “He does have AIDS. It’s not contagious for people in your office, so you don’t need to worry about that.” But what I wanted was the flexibility to be fair to him in terms of his being ill, and putting up with his missing work because of his illness through AIDS, And he ended up being very thankful.

Jeff: He ended up being what?

Jim: Very thankful.

Jeff: Sure, yes.

Jim: Then he passed away.

Jeff: Well, think about it like this, because I think your question seems to be how tolerant can the church be and hold its positions? And in a Presbyterian context you guys may call this something different than we do. But you have members and then you have adherents. Adherents are people that visit you and are regular attenders, and so forth. And sometimes adherents may have the privilege of coming to the table with you. In our own context it’s if they are members of another evangelical church and they have a profession

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of faith in Christ. And so they don't have to be members of the church in order to commune at the church.

However, if you have adherents who are living in an open and practicing gay lifestyle, and they want to come and join, you have to say, "You can't join."

Then they'll say, "Well, can't I just commune with you?" You say, "You can't commune with us."

You know, these are the sorts of borders and boundary markers that are set that I can't change, right? Somebody else made them; I can't change them. And frankly, you know, each one of us would change them if we could, right? I mean, how many times have you been in a situation where there was somebody you really loved and cared about, and they said, "Can you do this for me?" And you knew you couldn't do it. But if you could do it, you'd move the marker for them, right? But the best thing in the world is for you to be able to say, "I just can't. The power is not in my hands to change this boundary marker. I didn't set it and I can't change it. Somebody else has to change it. So the best thing we can do is to sort of work with where it is and where you are. But it can't change." And that's what I mean by the tolerance, and how the church is not at liberty to change what God has established.

Now people try to, right? I mean, people try to change what God has established by saying, "Well, the Bible is a book that's like any other, and it's culturally conditioned. So culturally this was wrong. But now it's not culturally wrong. The Bible doesn't really speak to our culture. It only speaks to a culture wherein these things were considered wrong. Now the mores have changed, and so the Bible doesn't really speak to that."

And we need to say that the mores have changed. But the ethos—the ethic of the Bible—hasn't changed, which means that because the ethic of the bible hasn't changed, and the ethic of the bible transcends any culture, then it speaks right down into this culture. And so the boundary markers can't change because the ethic of the Bible hasn't changed. So I think that's kind of the way we could think about sort of the immovability of God's word and being loving, and so on. Yes? Let's go across here. Go ahead; we'll start there.

Sig: Oh, now you say it. *(Laughter)* Go ahead, David.

David Drab: I'm so glad you brought this subject up today, because I think—

Jeff: Well, this is Sig's doing. *(Laughter)*

Sig: You weren't listening during the announcements.

David: Everybody was seeing if they could harass you about those shoes. *(Laughter)*

Sig: I am openly happy. *(Laughter)*

David: Because we have so many problems in this culture and in our world today. We have answers, and yet no one really knows where to get those answers. And I had an encounter yesterday, beginning with an official business associate, a leader in social work in the city. And after she moved from the business side to the executive I had to explain why I chose a particular charity to support. And in that discussion there was the context of what was right or wrong of a moral nature. *(Unclear)*

Sig: Hold it closer to your mouth. Let me hold it. *(Laughter)*

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David: It was totally of a moral nature. And I often see the dramatic change in people who have seared their consciences and they confess to something they've done wrong. They embrace the opportunity for healing in their lives.

So the bottom line was that this woman that I talked to was a Christian who is a member of a Christ-centered church, and has absolutely no relevance of her feelings and her faith. And we act as lynch pins. The main thing is repentance. If we remove guilt from the world we live in—and we have,—we are losing the opportunity for repentance, because there's no need for repentance whenever you're the victim. It's just a huge point in so many areas, you know. So it's in everything, every sphere of culture, whether it's medicine, science, journalism, politics, government, everything. We're the same old Christian lynch pins; we identify everything from personal experience. So I really appreciate this idea of seizing the opportunities, because that's what God puts in front of us.

Jeff: Yes, that's a perfect example of it. You know, I would say this, and I know it's kind of incidental. You know, you raise a great point. When you think about guilt today, our whole cancel culture is based on guilt, right?

Don Maurer: Yep.

Jeff: And it's based on guilt, but it's based on guilt because you've violated the changing mores. So if you've violated what's moral today, (and moral today is that two men can marry), and if you say that's not right, then you've violated today's morals.

But we have to remember that the ethic, the ethos of the Bible has not changed. And so what they're trying to do is to displace true guilt for breaking the ethic of the Scriptures, and supplant it with false guilt for those who critique the morals of the day. And frankly that's getting the best of us, and you're right to point that out. It's getting the best of us because slowly but surely what feels like guilt is what cancel culture says is guilt, and not what the church says is real guilt. And you're right; it's being supplanted. It's moving us in a troublesome direction.

It's those kinds of opportunities that give us the ability to put back in front of a person what really is right and wrong, and so on. And it kind of teaches us what the Bible teaches. Don't despise the small things. It's the single person sitting in front of us that we have the chance to influence.

You know, I'll just tell you this. Have you heard of the name Rosaria Butterfield?

Don Maurer: Oh, yeah.

Jeff: Okay. With Rosaria Butterfield, if you've read her book, her story actually begins with a pastor. This woman was studying Greek to learn how to read the New Testament so she could write a book against evangelicals. And she reached out to a pastor. And the pastor reciprocated by inviting her to a meal at his home. And that started a friendship between them. And it was one person—you know, one person.

And you know, here's this woman who gets hired to head the Department of Queer Studies at Syracuse. And now she's changed; she's become a Christian. She has a live-in partner; that comes to an end. She has to tell Syracuse that she no longer embraces the position.

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And so guess what? For years she feels like “my life has been sinful and wrong-headed. But now I’m at a dead end, because my Ph.D. was in queer studies. My job was in queer studies. My whole life went into the gay community. And now I have nothing. I have Christ which is everything, but worldly speaking I have nothing.”

And it was interesting because she decides to write her book, right? And she writes her book, and this is the interesting thing. She sends it to publishers to get published. But she gets refused because it’s not titillating enough. The publishers want more of the raciness of her conversion. And she says, “I’m not putting that in there.” And so she gets it published by a small publisher, and it has an amazing impact.

But that’s because one person invested in one person, which is amazing when you think about it. And it teaches us not to despise the small things, like David sitting down with a person who seizes the opportunity in front of him, to make an impact in that person’s life. You know, that sort of thing? Bishop, you have it.

Bishop: I was thinking that when I was a kid, in our various congregations, we all had people that we knew who were gay. But we worked with that group. Nobody was at war. It’s when the movement said “this is my nature,” that we were in bad shape. “And if you do not bless this procedure and the way I’m living, then you’re rejecting me.”

Jeff: Right.

Bishop: And that’s the whole thing that has to be overcome by love and charity, because it starts out with such a keen sense of rejection on their part. They feel absolutely rejected.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely.

Sig: I wanted to share a brief experience I had at my church, which is more liberal in comparison to your church or Don Maurer’s church, where a gay couple approached our priest and wanted to get married in our church. And the priest brought it into our vestry that I was on. And I obviously had problems with it. But I took the time to write out my concerns. But I was inviting the vestry—there were nine of us—to study it. And I didn’t think that any of us had a good theological background to say yes or no. I knew in my heart that I thought it was wrong, that they should not be married in our church. And I thought it was great that the priest should bring it to our attention.

So it’s just a short paper, about a page-and-a-half to say, here’s what I see in the Bible. So I say that they shouldn’t be married. But I think we should discuss it and study it. And no one on the vestry would embrace a Bible study about that, to look into it further. The consensus around the table was that they love each other.

And I didn’t dispute that they loved each other. Only one of them came to our church; the other partner didn’t. And what I’ve found with a lot of gay men and women that I know is that they tend to have just one that goes to church, and the other one doesn’t. And I don’t know why that is; that’s another subject.

Anyway, knowing that the vestry wanted to debate it and study it, I felt like why aren’t we studying it? Why don’t we look deeper into it? And there was this automatic consensus that well, they love each other. Why wouldn’t we bless their union?

And as a consequence I looked into it a lot. And quite frankly my approach to evangelism which I love to do; I love to talk about Jesus, is that I don’t try to convert

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anybody or change their lifestyle. I want them to think about it. I don't want to preach; I'm not a good preacher. So I just want to bring up all of the subjects. And there is a lot of trash in our churches that people outside of the church want answers to. Homosexuality is just one. I mean, we could go on for days. And the church needs to be honest or real. And that's what I think we have to own up to as Christians. Who is God? Who is Christ? And it takes a lifetime. It really takes a lot of time to sit down and talk and not be just like your Amway friend that we've all had experiences with. And they want it quick and they want it fast, and make a decision. It doesn't work like that. Jesus never worked like that. But He hung out with the people that were marginalized. And that's what I was just bringing up. Hopefully—

Jeff: That's right. I think that we're sort of looking. You might want to work your way back to Don there. I may be wrong about this. But I think we're living sort of in a carry-over from the Second Great Awakening in the 1800s. It was an Arminian awakening, and you had sort of a decisionalism. And so our church sort of functions in that way. And so we're looking for a decision. We're looking for somebody to make a decision for Christ, rather than just working and just talking with people.

You know, there's a big difference between having E.E.—Evangelism Explosion—memorized and sort of getting to that decision point, versus what that pastor did with Rosaria Butterfield—inviting her over for dinner and sort of letting her relationship develop, and sort of talking about the difficult things, and so there being a distance and then a coming together again and then more conversation, and so on, to the point where what the pastor was doing was just letting God work.

Sig: Amen.

Jeff: As he presented her with the immovable foundations of God's truth. You know, you're welcome here at any time for a meal to talk about these things because we want to love you. But these things can't change. And so you just have to deal with them some way in your life, and I'm here to help you to deal with those things.

And also here is this minister as he's doing this, praying that God will convert her to these things, right? You know, there's a big difference between those two mindsets.

Sig: I couldn't agree with you more; that's excellent.

Don Bishop: I totally agree with what you're saying. Evangelism isn't a one-time thing where we preach to a person and say, "Oh, you've rejected this. Okay, I'm moving on." It's a lifestyle.

Jeff: Yes.

Sig: You're still loving them.

Jeff: Yep.

Don: And it may take a long time. I think of a person like Richard Gantz who was a Jew. It took a year before he was finally convinced.

Jeff: Did you say Richard Gantz?

Don: Yes.

Jeff: Yeah. It's kind of an amazing thing. Someone read Isaiah 53 to him. And he said, "Don't read those Christian Scriptures to me; I'm a Jew." (*Laughter*)

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Don: When I was over in Israel there was a young woman in a book store who was asking questions about Christians, and so forth. And I read that to her.

Jeff: Yeah. *(Laughter)*

Don: They don't read those things. It's a lifestyle.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: And the first thing is the people that we're in touch with every day. It's how we gently and lovingly explain these things.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: And the other thing is reaching out to those who are in need of things. But still we have to be patient.

Don Maurer: And I think that with Rosaria Butterfield, one of the things she brings out in her book which is really good is this. For example, if a person has gone out of the gay lifestyle or is no longer drinking or whatever, but still struggles—and that's a possibility; they could struggle lifelong with the temptation—we have to be there for them. If someone says, "Boy, I have this urge; I have this temptation," we have to be there for them, instead of just "Oh well, you're back in that sin again." We have to be very, very careful.

Jeff: Yes.

Don: And Rosaria Butterfield still has friends that she had before in the gay community and she still loves them, and that's great.

Jeff: That's right.

Michael Rush: Nice shoes, Sig. *(Laughter)* I think that one of the reasons that frustration builds sometimes is that not intentionally; I don't think it's intentional. But we forget the fact that no matter how "nice" we are or how loving we are, we don't have the power to change anybody.

Jeff: Yeah.

Michael: And we always have to remember that the same God that convicted us of our sin is the same God that will convict the homosexual, the idolater, the adulterer, the thief, the murderer. It's going to be the same God. And our confidence has to be in Him. The fact is that He is the God of ordered steps who even creates the situation that we're in, having the conversation that we're having, who sets up that particular situation. That same God is working. And I think it's really important to remember that. We have our confidence in Him. We know that He's still building His church, "*and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.*"

Sig: Amen.

Michael: We always have to keep that in mind.

Jeff: Amen; that's great. And what you were saying makes me think to myself that even I won't prevail against it, right? *(Laughter)* Even if I'm not acting the way I ought to act, that will not hinder God, right? God will even use that. Now I don't want to misbehave.

Michael: Right.

Jeff: And show lovelessness. But I'm not going to hinder God's purposes in that person's life, right?

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Michael: Right.

Jeff: I may not enjoy the blessings that I could enjoy. But the purposes of God won't be thwarted. That's great.

Sig: I mentioned a little while ago that a neighbor church of ours in East Liberty, pastored by Lauren Mann who died recently, had a marquee on his church. It says, "*If you don't like the way you were born, be born again.*" And I think that's a vital saying. We can't do it. All this cultural stuff, we can't shift it.

Jeff: Right.

Sig: It's only the power of God that can shift it.

Jeff: That's right.

David: Yes. I was just going to say to Michael's great point that it is predicated on a prayer relationship. As we seek Him we begin to see what He sees in those people. And we can talk to them out of concern for their lives, what they're doing, and show interest in them.

Jeff: Go ahead.

Ron: One last thing. I agree with everything everybody said. But I think that what happens, and one thing that we need to be careful of, is let's say that a cyber-thief wants to join the church.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ron: But what would happen is that he would have a strong contingency of the congregation to encourage him not to do that. And as Sig was saying, I think that what happens with the homosexual issue is that if we don't have a strong contingency in our churches to encourage them not to do that, it would be like the cyber-thief. And the homosexual community doesn't do that.

Jeff: No. And I think that they don't because once a face gets put to the position. And sometimes it's a son or daughter, and so on, or it's a nephew or a cousin, right? Sometimes it's a father or a mother who later in life has grown children and says, "This is who I really am"—that sort of thing. All of a sudden faces get put to positions. And then people think that they have the liberty to move the positions that God has set. And they don't.

Ron: I think the Scripture speaks to that issue. Jesus said that "you go to the ends of the earth to make a convert, and you make him twice the son of hell as you are." If I embrace the hit man or the practicing homosexual, I may not get into that stuff. But if I'm telling him that this is okay I'm making him twice the son of hell as I am. I think that the real issue is a strong congregation. If someone comes into the congregation and wants to join, that's fine. But we have to indicate that our congregation is strong enough to encourage him not to do that.

Jeff: Yes. All right, I'm going to end on that. Father in heaven, thank You for this day and for the time You've given to us. We know our times are in Your hands. And yet You call us to redeem the time and to make fruitful every opportunity that You've given to us. And so, Father, we pray that You will help us to speak with grace and the wisdom that You've supplied us in Christ in every opportunity we have with folks. And we pray, Father, that You will bless us and them. Bless Your church. We're thankful, Lord, that the

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gates of hell will not prevail against it. And we rejoice in that and pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. (*Applause*)