

Pastor Michael O'Neill

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### A Christ-like Response Heterosexism

1 Corinthians 9:22-23

1. Say "Yes" to the Mess
- John 8:3-6; Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22; Jeremiah 17:13; Romans 5:8

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- John 1:14, 17; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Ephesians 4:15

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- Romans 7:21-25; Galatians 2:20, 3:27; Matthew 10:37-39; 2 Corinthians 5:17

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West Valley Church Michael O'Neill 8/20/17

## Isms: A Christ-like Response Heterosexism<sup>1</sup>

The "ism" we are addressing today is "Heterosexism." (Well, sort of!) Heterosexism is the belief that marriage is only defined as between a biological man and a biological woman. Now that's a bit of a misnomer, or a mis-direction in the title for today, because this is an "ism" that we agree with and believe in. But to say we agree with heterosexism means that at the same time, there are other forms of marriage that we do not agree with, specifically homosexuality, including identifications of sexuality that are commonly grouped together as LGBTQIA – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or sometimes "questioning"), intersexual (which involves biological ambiguity – meaning someone is born with undefined body parts or two different sexual body parts) and asexual (a person who does not identify with *any* sexual orientation or attraction).

So today, we are *not* going to focus on the "ism" that we *do* agree with, but rather the other lifestyles that we do *not*, because our culture wants us to define marriage as *any* relationship between any and every identification. Our culture wants us to accept and embrace any and all sexual orientations.

While we *will* look at our Biblical positions, I don't intend to spend all our time defining or debating those Biblical positions; rather, I want us to look at what our *response* to them ought to be. Trust me: it's not that I like to stand in front of oncoming freight trains, which is what this topic feels like. But we've been relatively silent on this issue, and I've known for some time that we needed to talk about ways we should be thinking about this issue as a church and as Christians. Given the complexity of this issue, I have to warn you in advance that this message is a few minutes longer than usual. I must also admit that I'm speaking primarily to heterosexual Christians here this morning. But if you are not, I'm praying that what you will hear today is love, acceptance, and freedom in Christ that is greater than any orientation.

Caleb Kaltenbach, *Messy Grace: How a Pastor with Gay Parents Learned to Love Others Without Sacrificing Conviction* (Waterbrook Press, Colorado Springs, CO, 2015); Mark A. Yarhouse, PsyD, *Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends* (Bethany House Publishers, Bloomington, MN, 2010); William M. Greathouse and George Lyons, *New Beacon Bible Commentary: Romans 1-8; A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Beacon Hill Press, KC, MO, 2008); David A. Ackerman, *New Beacon Bible Commentary: 1&2 Timothy; A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Beacon Hill Press, KC, MO 2016); Chris Edmondson, *Homosexuality: A Biblical and Logical Look at Arguments Against Homosexuality and how the Christian Should Respond...* (accessed Mon., Aug. 14, 2017)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Resources:

This Sunday and next are the last two sermons in our summer-long sermon series called "Isms: A Christ-like Response," looking at some of the different ideas facing us in our culture today. We will wrap it up on Labor Day weekend with a pastor's panel discussion, answering questions that you have raised. Which I want to remind you, if you have questions, observations, disagreements about any of these philosophies that we've addressed in our series, tell us! You can do that in one of several ways: you can use the cards in the seat back in front of you, you can email us at "isms@wvcnaz.com" or you can message us through our West Valley Church Facebook page.

I also want to remind you that we've been in this series because these "isms" are ideas and philosophies that are around us every day and dominant in our culture. Often they affect and infect our faith without our even being aware of it. So we are calling these hot-button issues to our attention so we can see what the Bible says about them, and know what our position should be and how to respond in Christlike, loving, grace-filled ways to the people who hold to these views. Many of you have shared your engagement with this series and your appreciation for it, summed up by the person who said, "I personally would like to be a part of a church that can openly converse about these topics in a positive dialogue where we may not all agree, but we do respect and have grace and compassion. If I can't have these conversations in the church and learn from my pastors what the Bible has to say on these issues then where am I to turn?"

If you have unchurched friends, you know that these issues are primary in their minds. If you have unchurched friends on Facebook, you know that these topics often come up with them. We can choose to respond in informed, grace-filled ways, or we can choose to respond in dogmatic, condemning ways. We want to help you do the former so that you might see some people in your life come to Christ personally. The apostle Paul himself said:

"To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." (1 Corinthians 9:22-23, niv)

I'm making the assumption here that (a) you *have* genuine friendships and relationships with unchurched people, and that (b) like the Scripture we just read, you want to do whatever you can to understand, love, and dialogue with them in order to introduce them to Jesus Christ. We want to equip *you* in *your* calling. If you *don't* have those relationships with unchurched folks, then your issue is *not* this sermon series – you need to start obeying Scripture and the Spirit and developing relationships with folks outside the church.

On that note, please allow me to begin this message today by inviting us to...

# 1. Say "Yes" to the Mess

Caleb Kaltenbach is a Christian pastor with gay parents, and he writes (in a book I'd highly recommend), "When you deal with people, you'll always get messy. When

you choose to love people who think and act differently than you, the situation could get extremely messy. And yet these are the very people to whom Jesus has sent us in his name." If we are going to extend grace to others just as Jesus has done for us, and just as he calls us to, it is going to get messy. We must love people no matter who they are. We've got to be willing to enter into those messy relationships (besides, we are messy, too, right?).

Sometimes, to be willing to say yes to the mess, we are going to be judged and rejected by other Christians. There are judgmental Christians out there who believe that LGBTQIA folks are the vilest of sinners and should be condemned. If these people see you developing friendships with gay folks, they will accuse you of being worthy of the same judgment.

It reminds me of one of my favorite stories in the Gospel of John. Early one morning, Jesus was in the middle of teaching a crowd of people when something interesting happened:

"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." (John 8:3-6a, niv)

The first thing you might notice is that someone is missing from this story: where's the dude?! The Old Testament law says that anyone caught in the act of adultery was to be stoned (Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:22). If they caught her, they should have caught him too. Even though they were both guilty, in that culture many times promiscuous men got a pass, but a woman of loose morals was looked down on severely.<sup>3</sup> In other words, this woman was considered too messy to extend grace to. She was bad news – just like many Christians view LGBTQIA people today.

The long-time church leaders of Jesus' day were trying to trap Jesus. They knew his tendency to forgive people, so they thought they laid a great trap: if Jesus set her free, he was disobeying the religious rules. If he condemned her, he'd lose his followers because he would be no better than the legalistic church people.

But instead of giving an answer, Jesus did something strange...

"Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger." (John 8:6b, niv).

What was he writing? We don't know. The Scripture doesn't tell us. Some say he was making a list of the sins of the accusers. But there is an interesting verse from the Old Testament that might relate, from Jeremiah:

"Lord, you are the hope of Israel; all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water." (Jeremiah 17:13, niv)

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Kaltenbach, 19

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> ibid, 26

Maybe Jesus was writing the names of the men in the dust to make the point that the woman caught in adultery had not forsaken God; it was the long-time church leaders – the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees – who had forsaken God, because they were no longer about loving people, but were about judging and condemning people.

Jesus then told them that if any of them didn't have any sin themselves, they were welcome to throw the first stone. They knew *they* were the ones now trapped, so they dropped their stones and walked away.

And then Jesus did something amazing: he offered her grace in all her messiness. He told her he didn't condemn her and that she was forgiven. And then he told her to stop sinning. He offered both compassion and conviction – he offered grace, and he spoke hard truth. If Jesus can do that for *her*, he can do that for *anyone*: homosexual, heterosexual, or anyone in between.

Aren't you glad that Jesus didn't decide that *we* were too messy to get into a relationship with? Are you glad Jesus said yes to getting involved in our mess? The Apostle Paul said...

"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8, niv)

"While we were still sinners. Not when we had it all together. Not when we were moral and clean cut and smelled good. Not when we started attending church. Not when we started acting the way Christians act, listening to Christian music, or...participating in the Christian sub-culture. Not when we started believing! What did Paul say? Paul said (say it with me): while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

We need to extend that same kind of love – a love that doesn't wait for people to be perfect or to get everything in order before beginning a relationship with us...It's imperative that we have grace for people while they are still thinking, speaking, and acting in ways that we might not agree with...People in the LGBTQIA community are not a faceless enemy. They are real people who need to know God loves them." It gets messy. People are messy. Entering into dialogue is messy. Helping people, gets messy. Love is messy.

Let me just say this, also: when you treat gay people as if they belong to some "homosexual agenda" that you feel is being perpetrated against our culture, you dehumanize a person in God's image – a person God loves. You might feel justified in condemning them because they are an "agenda." Granted, there are those who have organized an agenda. But every single LGBTQIA person is an individual who is loved by God. Don't fall into the trap of turning people into parts of some agenda machine. Build dialogue and relationship instead.

And understand that if you are going to say yes to the mess, there are some things that will have to be overcome in the relationship, among them being the...

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> ibid, 31-32

#### 2. **Sins** of the **Church**

The problem is, we've blown it big time when it comes to this. And folks in the LGBTQIA community are fully aware of our sins – there's a good chance they won't trust *you* because of this. Now, when I say the "sins of the church," understand that I'm talking generally – meaning, the church in our culture. Not all churches have behaved badly, but enough of them have, that it is the stigma and the stereotype that our culture has of *all* churches. It only takes one Westboro Baptist Church protest to convince them that *all* churches are like that. It's not fair, and it's not right, but it's real in their minds because perception is reality. They think *you* are part of an agenda to condemn *them*.

And, even though we personally might not be guilty, we still have to confess and repent on behalf of *all of us*. If you don't agree with that, you haven't read the prophets in the Old Testament lately. Time and again, the prophets *who had not sinned* would repent on behalf of the Israelites who *had* sinned and abandoned God. So today, we find ourselves having to do the same – repent of the sins of some churches because our LGBTQIA friends will think we are going to treat them the same way.

What do we have to repent of?

How about this – Jesus said:

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." (Lk 6:37, niv)

There's no condition on this. Do not judge, do not condemn. Period. How on earth is it possible for *this* to be excused? If that's not judging and condemning, if that's not sin, I don't know what is.

But you and I don't have to do *that* to be guilty of violating that verse. It is very possible to violate that verse with far more subtle and simple things. We violate it when we look at a gay person with disgust. We violate it when we call them derogatory names under our breath. We violate it when we make jokes about them. I confess to you that I have been guilty of this. Even though I knew people who were gay, I used to laugh at jokes about them. I've confessed this before, but I'll do it again now, on behalf of myself and other churches – I confess and repent, and O God, please forgive me; forgive us!

Like it or not, if we are going to say yes to the mess and build genuine friendships of love and acceptance, we must personally own, confess, and repent of the sins of the church – if we are guilty, and even if we personally are not.

Up until now, you might think I'm suggesting that we should approve of their orientation. But I never said that! Download my manuscript and reread these notes to this point and you will see I've never said that – any more than Jesus did when he chose *not* to condemn the woman caught in adultery. But what I am saying is we must...

### 3. Show **Grace** and **Truth**

The first chapter in John's Gospel makes some introductions to us about Jesus when he describes whom Jesus is and what he arrived here to do. This is what it says:

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of *grace and truth*...For the law was given through Moses; *grace and truth* came through Jesus Christ." (John 1:14, 17, niv, *italics added*)

It is vital that we approach this subject with both *grace* and *truth*. What does this mean? The Apostle Paul wrote:

"A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people. Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will learn the truth. Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil's trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants." (2 Timothy 2:24-26, nlt)

And in another place, Paul wrote:

"We will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church." (Ephesians 4:15, nlt)

Grace and truth could be described as compassion and conviction. One author writes, "Conviction is living my life according to God's standard and God's truth.

Compassion is the awareness that I need to love sinners, always remembering that I am one, too.

Conviction must always be combined with compassion. If they ever get out of balance in your life, you will be an out of balance person, and your decisions will be skewed by it. A person who is *all conviction* is a person who will eventually become a heartless Pharisee. You will harden your heart to your own sin and you will push people away from God if you are all conviction.

If you are *all compassion*, you will lose your moral compass. You will degenerate to a person with mere sentimentality, a person who lives off of sound bytes, a person who is not thoughtful, and person who really does not help people because you're not committed to truth.

We have to be people of conviction and compassion.

Bottom Line is this: If a sinner cannot see and feel the love of Christ in us, then our witness is not Christian. People who practice homosexuality are not enemies of the church; they are victims of the enemy and they need God's love. We must always speak the truth in love."

Finding this balance is not easy; it is easy to side only with grace, or only with truth. It is very demanding to ride the tension between the two, but that is what Jesus did

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Chris Edmondson

and that is what we are called to do. We are not on one side or the other; we are on *both* sides.

So I've talked a lot about grace – mostly because that is the one that is often the hardest for us to live out; but what about the *truth* part? What are our...

#### **4. Statements on Sexuality** as a church?

One of the passages that is often cited about homosexuality is found in Romans 1:24-32. In this passage, Paul is writing about *any* people who reject God and choose to live their lives however they want – not just homosexuals. The result is that God gives them what they want – they are free to live as sinfully as they desire. I want you to notice that there are many different types of sins here – not *just* homosexuality – but it is among them:

"God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are 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 have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. 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." (Romans 1:24-32, niv)

Paul is saying that, apart from God, we have given up our humanness – made in the image of God, and we've been reduced to less than what we were created to be. We gave up the image of God and began worshipping ourselves – our own image, which has led to all kinds of sins of self-worship. As inhumane humans<sup>7</sup> we totally exchanged the truth of God for a lie – the lie that the serpent in the Garden spoke that led to our original sin (Genesis 3): that we would be our own god. We exchanged everything that was natural for what was unnatural. Homosexuality is one of those exchanges that Paul lists, but so is gossip, slander, lies, and on and on. Paul saw homosexuality as a violation of God's created order. On a side note, I might

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Greathouse and Lyons, 76

add that the misuse and destruction of the planet is also a violation of the created order in Genesis 1 & 2 – and creation care is a part of what it means for Christians to obey God and get back to the right order. That was the point Pastor Jason was trying to make last week.

But Paul NOWHERE indicates that the sin of homosexuality is somehow worse than any other sin; *every* sin is apostasy against God. But neither would Paul argue that homosexuality is a choice – he is saying that it is another expression of the natural outflow of the sinful nature that is within us. I would imagine that if you told the Apostle Paul that a person was born that way, he would say, "Of course they are. We are all born that way! We are all born into sin. That is why we need Jesus Christ!"

As many of you know, Shelly and I attended our recent General Assembly that takes place every four years in the Church of the Nazarene, with delegates from all over the world gathering together to affirm our unity even amid our differences, and to come to agreed upon statements of our faith. Because of the ever-changing nature of our world and the needs of people, we revisit our doctrines and statements – not to change their core principals, but to reword them in ways that reflect responses to today's needs.

One of those was our church's statement on human sexuality. I'm not going to read the entire thing here, because it is quite lengthy. But I am pleased to say that it does a fine job of walking that challenging balance between grace and truth – much more so than our previous statements, which were weighted more toward truth without grace.

I have included a copy of that document on the church website along with the sermon manuscript if you are interested in reading it in its entirety – and I would STRONGLY suggest you do so, if you want to know where your church stands and what our statements are.

But let me just lift a few statements from that document:

"Our brokenness in the areas of sexuality takes many forms, some due to our own choosing and some brought into our lives via a broken world. However, God's grace is sufficient in our weaknesses, enough to bring conviction, transformation, and sanctification in our lives. Therefore, in order to resist adding to the brokenness of sin and to be able to witness to the beauty and uniqueness of God's holy purposes for our bodies, we believe members of the body of Christ, enabled by the Spirit, can and should refrain from:

- Unmarried sexual intercourse and other forms of inappropriate sexual bonding
- Sexual activity between people of the same sex
- Extra-marital sexual relations
- Divorce
- Practices such as polygamy or polyandry

Sexual sin and brokenness is not only personal but pervades the systems and structures of the world. Therefore, as the church bears witness to the reality of the beauty and uniqueness of God's holy purposes we also believe the church should refrain from and advocate against:

- Pornography in all its forms, which is desire gone awry.
- Sexual violence in any form.

#### We affirm that:

Where sin abounds grace abounds all the more. Although the effects of sin are universal and holistic, the efficacy of grace is also universal and holistic. In Christ, through the Holy Spirit, we are renewed in the image of God. The old is gone and the new comes. Although the forming of our lives as a new creation may be a gradual process, God's healing is effective in dealing with the brokenness of humanity in the areas of sexuality.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, no matter how broken we are, God's grace, the resurrection power of Jesus Christ, and the healing and restoring and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit are capable of returning us to wholeness. It might take time, but it is not only *possible*, it is *available* right now, no matter what your brokenness is, no matter what your mess is. You can start the journey toward wholeness and health.

You see, you can make a...

### 5. <u>Self-Identity</u> Decision

Mark Yarhouse is a Doctor of Psychiatry at Regent University and is the director for the Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity. Besides teaching and doing research, the majority of his counseling is with individuals and families who are working through sexual identity issues. He is a Christian. He has written a great book called "Homosexuality and the Christian" – I think it is a very balanced approach, full of grace and truth. In it, he is honest that there is simply not enough research that can prove that homosexuality is a choice; for many of his clients, he cannot pinpoint a choice or a "cause." But neither is there any definitive proof that states it is genetic or biological. And each case is unique to that person's life. He points out that liberals argue for a biological basis (or "nature") of homosexuality, because if biology is the cause, then we don't have to hold them to a traditional Christian ethic; biology would prove that God *made* them that way. Conservatives argue for the environmental basis (or "nurture") as the cause, which means the person has personal responsibility, or choice, for their orientation. Is it nature, or is it nurture? There simply is not yet enough definitive proof either way.

But he asks, "Can we set this aside?" Instead, he says, we should focus on *sexual identity*. He states that in these cases, a person usually has homosexual tendencies or inclinations, even as a child. Eventually, these can lead to homosexual attractions,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Excerpted from CA-701, COTN General Assembly 2017

which may or may not then lead to homosexual actions, which then lead to a homosexual orientation, which then becomes a homosexual identity. And he points out that those in the LGBTQIA communities would press for someone accepting a sexual identity *as soon as* they have homosexual *tendencies*. This is why they want children to identify as homosexual, or transsexual, as early as possible – *even in grade school*.

The trouble with this, according to Yarhouse, is that it takes a mature, thinking person to determine their identity, and even at that, we are far *more* than our sexual orientation. A gay identity is a socio-cultural label that people use to describe themselves. When people use this label, they have moved beyond their orientation or actions and have chosen what their identity is. Our culture wants to say that orientation *is the same thing* as identity. Yarhouse argues, and I agree with him – that orientation and identity are *not* the same thing. We are not defined by our attractions, or even our actions. Interestingly, Yarhouse's research found that Christians who adopt a gay identity, made their beliefs and values shift in order to line up with their identity and behavior. But Christians who did *not* adopt that identity and instead chose their identity in Christ, made their behavior line up with their beliefs and values.

Friends, Jesus Christ is *greater* than our attractions and orientations. In Christ we have the power to be greater than our tendencies, no matter what they are.

The Apostle Paul understood this struggle himself. He wrote:

"I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 7:21-25a, nlt)

The Bible tells us that our identity is no longer our old nature, but that we have a new nature, a new identity.

The Apostle Paul said:

"My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20, nlt)

Christ overcame death and hell; he can overcome our orientations and actions! Later in that same letter Paul says:

"And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes." (Galatians 3:27, nlt)

We have a new identity in Christ – the identity we were intended to have way back in the very beginning of the creation!

I remember a time when one of my boys was in high school, and he came to me concerned because another guy in school was hitting on him. He asked me what he

should do. We decided that he should be respectful but let him know that he liked girls. But that led to another discussion. I asked my son, "Do you think that guy could be a Christian *and* be a homosexual?" My son said, "No way!" I asked, "Why not?" He thought about it without an answer, so I asked it a different way, "Could he be a *non-practicing* homosexual and be a Christian?" My son said, again, "No way!" I asked, "Why not? How is that different than a non-practicing gossip?"

We determined that the bottom line is this: *Jesus needs to be our first love* – above anyone else. It doesn't matter if a person is homosexual or heterosexual. Jesus said:

"If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it." (Matthew 10:37-39, nlt)

We need to be *so in love with Jesus*, that we love him more than our sexual attractions. That is why the Bible says that there are even some people who never get married at all, so they can focus more on Jesus. Here's the point: we become most like the one we love the most. That can be another person, it can be some idea we have of the ideal person, it can become ourselves, or it can become Jesus. But if we align our identity with Jesus, only Jesus has the power to change our identity down to our very core so that our actions align with him. We actually can be a brand new person:

"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" (2 Corinthians 5:17, nlt)

Friend, I don't care what your mess is. You might be homosexual. You might be heterosexual. You might be wrestling with pornography, or marital unfaithfulness. Your identity might be some image that you are trying to project so that others will see you a certain way. If so, you are living a lie! But whatever your mess is, there is a God who loves you so much that he sent his Son to die and then rise from the dead so that you can have a new identity – the one you were supposed to have from the beginning – made in the image of God, through the person of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Will you choose your self-identity to be in Christ?

Pray