

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Pastor Glen Weber's Message of January 24, 2010
"Out of the Closet – Into the Church"**

[Today's message answers the question: How should we as a congregation relate to those who are in a gay lifestyle?]

[Topics: Gay Lifestyle; Reconciliation; Conviction of the Holy Spirit; Cheap Grace; Costly Grace]

Excerpt: We're actually in a three part series. Last week we talked about living together and sexual immorality and God's desire for relationship. In two weeks, pastor Glen will be talking about marriage. Today's subject is a very tender topic, which you can tell by the title of the sermon: "Out of the Closet and into the Church."

Back on December 5th, we had a gathering over at CLF, Eric Shaw's church, where Dan Rogers talked to the pastors in the morning about Christian Ethics. Part of the discussion was regarding how we are going to deal with the gay people, who are looking for spirituality. They are looking for God. In fact many of them have grown up in a Christian home and have since departed. Now they're looking for churches to help them connect to God.

Dan Rogers said, "Every WCG/GCI congregation I've ever pastored had gay people in it." Now we didn't know that. And it was never talked about in our congregation, but it was more common than we think.

Back in the 1980's pastor Glen had several gays in his congregation and commented that it was a challenge trying to deal with the situation. Statistically, we have numerous people in this congregation who are gay. And obviously we live in a California culture that is strongly promoting it, strongly encouraging gay lifestyle.

We had a big vote last fall on same sex marriage, because the court voted against our previous vote. Now we have a big court case going on right now deciding whether they can overturn Prop 8 through the courts.

And so it's an ongoing battle and it's affecting the churches. It's affecting many of us and some of us have dealt with the issue because a person in our family comes out of the closet and announces that they are gay.

So would a gay person or a gay couple feel welcome at New Hope Christian Fellowship? And how should we respond to them? What does that look like to us as God's people? How are we going to deal with this as time goes by? In the past it was easy – we said you're not welcome here. It was simple for us, but not very simple for them.

So first let's go on a quick theological tour to remind us about what we've been studying lately. In **Colossians 1:17**, we read, "**He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.**" So it's all about Jesus Christ and what he has done.

18) "And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." Hopefully Jesus has the supremacy in our lives – and in New Hope Christian Fellowship and in Grace Communion International and hopefully in the greater body of Christ. It's crucial we get started there.

19) "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him," All that God was – was in Jesus Christ.

20) "and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." God reconciled all things in heaven and earth. God reconciled all people. That means gay people are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ' shed blood.

Now this doesn't mean that they've accepted or entered into relationship with Jesus Christ. But they have been reconciled. The verb is past tense. The Greek is very clear here.

We've also quoted **2 Cor. 5** lately as well. **18) "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:"** So Paul is saying that God has reconciled everyone and those of us who have accepted that reconciliation, are sent out on a mission of reconciliation to the world.

Last week, pastor Glen talked about couples living together who we would consider reconciled. They are welcome to come here. Now we hope over time, that we can present the Gospel in such a way and discipleship in such a way that they will say, "Oh, our relationship isn't ideal according to Jesus. We need to become more like him."

19) "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." That's the platform pastor Glen wants to set today. Paul is saying that God has reconciled the world to himself and he is working in them and not counting their sins. That doesn't mean that they completely accepted their salvation or they've entered in a relationship with God. They have choices to make.

"And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." Notice it isn't the message of judgment. It's a very big difference!

20) "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." Now this next thought in this verse is our message to others. **"We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."** Our message is this – God has been reconciled to you. But we implore you to be reconciled to him. Choose to enter in to what God has already done for you. And we are sent as ambassadors to do that.

You probably recall that there was that whole orphanage in Haiti that collapsed. 54 children survived the earthquake. Most of those children were carrying American passports. They had already been given citizenship to come to the United States or Canada.

The governor of Pennsylvania was contacted and asked if he could get those kids out. He tried various things to accomplish it. Finally what he did was to call up the US Ambassador to Haiti and asked him to help get those kids out. And within two hours he had permission to

leave. Why? Because the ambassador had the authority of the government to speak and bring those children into a relationship with the United States of America.

God has sent us as ambassadors to the world, to people who are caught in an equivalent of Haiti spiritually speaking. God is telling us that we have what it takes to draw them out. We understand what reconciliation means. We need to reach people with this good news and draw them into a relationship with God.

So this is the theology behind what we're going to talk about today of how do we, as a church, relate to a culture that is so strongly emphasizing homosexuality.

Now we know in **Lev. 18:22**, in the Old Covenant law it said, "**Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.**" Some translations say it's an "abomination." So definitely the heart of God was not for this to happen. There's no question about that. But why did God say not to do this? Does he go around and make rules for the heck of it?

No, since this was happening all around and God told them that this wasn't going to happen in Israel like the other nations, because this wasn't his will. If you want to read an interesting book, read the autobiography of Yassir Arafat. One of the things he wrote about was that in Al-Fatah, they practiced homosexuality in order to bond their group together.

Now they were all married. Yassir Arafat had a wife and kids. And most of the other men were married as well. But they all practiced homosexuality as a culture thing. We tend to camp on the rule. But what does God say about this issue? And how does God view it?

Now we need to spend a little bit of time today in **Romans 1** to help us think this through. Now **Romans 1** talks about how God started us and that we've been going downhill ever since. From Adam and Eve, it's been a downhill roll to where everybody ends up in sin.

In **Romans 11**, Paul wrote that both Jew and Gentile were in disobedience so that everybody could experience God's mercy. So even Israel with the law went into the gutter. Yes, mankind went that way, but in **Romans 4, 5 and 6**, it shows that God has provided us with a solution.

And the solution was that Jesus was going to come. And Jesus was going to make a difference. Jesus justified us and sanctified us. So how do we get out of that gutter that we fell into?

Romans 1:20, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

God is everywhere, everywhere you look. He's there if you want to see him. He's visible. He's available. People can't say that they didn't know God was around, because he's going to say, "All you had to do was take a walk in your flower garden and there I was." Does this mean that they are under condemnation? No. God's just saying that he was there around humanity.

21) "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him," One of the ways to keep from turning away from God is to be always thankful. If you're constantly thanking God for all the things he's doing in your life, you're much less likely to

forget about him or turn away from him. It's when we become unthankful and ungrateful and start getting crabby about things is when we start turning our hearts away from God and others.

"but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." When they turned away from God, their hearts became darkened and they rejected God.

22) "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles."

Now the emphasis on this verse is how mankind chose other gods, once they turned away from God. Mankind chose idols and began to worship birds, flies and other creatures. So mankind turned away from God and began to worship other gods and thus turn their hearts astray.

24) "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another." Now God could have stopped humanity from doing this. But he allowed humanity to make choices. So Paul is saying that when people turn away from God, sexuality is expressed freely and openly.

Look at the 60's. Time Magazine was declaring "God Is Dead." And what happened to sexuality. It went all over the place. Because when we don't have God in our lives, we go and do what we jolly well please. So humans began to mess up their relationships as they turned away from his ideal and began to do other things.

25) "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen. 26) Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts."

Now humanity began to go from their sinful desires into shameful lusts. Humanity began to pervert sinful desires. So it's now whatever one's heart desires is what people do.

"Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27) In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion."

So all kinds of diseases begin to happen. All kinds of heartache begin to happen. Paul does call it perversion because it's not what God intended. It's the not the ideal that God set up between a man and a woman.

Now this verse becomes the club most Christians use for beating up the homosexual community and for pushing them out the door and telling them that they are not welcome in their church. And they forget that 2 Cor. 5 tells us that God is not counting men's sins against them. So somehow we have to reconcile these two Scriptures, because the same author is writing both. Does it make it OK? Paul is not saying it's OK, but it's what God is allowing at this time.

28) "Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done." So we've gone from sinful desires, to shameful lusts to a depraved mind. So we need to follow where Paul's going here. Now Paul is going to tell us what a depraved mind looks like. So how many people get kicked out of church for these sins in the next couple of verses?

29) "They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy," Have you ever felt any envy when some drives up to church in a new SUV? Do you think whether they are still tithing? Does envy ever set in with us when our neighbor builds an addition to their house? Envy is all over the place, isn't it? Now Paul says envy comes from a depraved mind, which is worse than shameful lusts.

"They are full of envy, murder [hatred in our hearts], strife, deceit and malice." Do any of us bicker and quarrel with each other and go sniping behind people's backs? Paul is saying that these things are worse than homosexuality and sexual immorality. Now we like to pull the other two verses (1:26-27) out and say that's disgusting behavior.

But Paul is saying this is worse. Now in the past, many sermons were given about gossip in the Worldwide Church of God. Now that we understand grace, we don't have so many issues as we had before – so gossip isn't as prevalent as it was before.

"They are gossips, 30) slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31) they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless." So all these sins are worse than sexual sins and come from a depraved mind.

32) "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."

All of humanity has slipped into a depraved mindset to one degree or another. Maybe we grew up in a Christian home and our parents kept good control on us and we didn't do these things as much. But the heart was still there and if you gave us half a chance, we would lie, cheat, steal, bicker, quarrel and fight, etc.

God has allowed us to slip into sin so that we would know that we need him to rescue us – which is what **Romans 4, 5 and 6** tell us. Now it's so easy to pull out the homosexuality verses and make a really big issue out of that. This issue affects our politics.

Pastor Glen (tongue in cheek) is waiting for Prop 9, which is going to outlaw all gossips! And Prop 10 that will outlaw people who slander others! All sins listed here in **Romans 1** show us where we've strayed from God. But mankind tends to pick out the sins they feel the most uncomfortable with and then beat the drum against them. We walk in parades and hold signs up and do some very inappropriate Christian activity in the name of God.

Now with that said, Paul still writes that homosexuality is wrong. Just like pastor Glen said in last week's sermon that living together and having sex outside of marriage is inappropriate. Neither one is ideal. But the reality is that we have people who've been told by society the last 30 years that this is OK.

So how do we deal with people who have grown up believing that it's OK to be attracted to a person of the same sex? How do we wrestle with these issues? Well, our tendency is to say it's sin. End of story.

Alcoholism has been accepted in our church for about the last 20 years. Originally alcoholism was a very bad sin. You get drunk and you're labeled a sinner. Period. Then the scientific community talked about how it's a disease. In the late 1980's and early 1990's the medical profession noted that in families where grandparents and mom and dads drank a lot, it affected the genes of their children. And we now know that a child can be born with a propensity for alcoholism, because of a change in their DNA.

So these people have to be very careful not to touch alcohol because they have a genetic disposition towards alcoholism. It can be proven that genes can actually change. Now they haven't proven this with homosexuality yet.

But pastor Glen believes that something similar is happening in some people where from birth, they believe that they are attracted to the same sex. But not every homosexual is born to automatically be that way. A lot of them make a choice. Since the homosexuals like to promote their lifestyle in the schools, they must believe that you can make a choice.

Now just as alcoholism is sin and has to be dealt with, we don't tell most alcoholics that you have to get over it before you come to church. The only time we would ask an alcoholic to stop being a part of our fellowship is when their alcoholism directly affects our membership while they are here together. In other words, if they come to services drunk and cause a ruckus, we would have to deal with that. Not because of their alcoholism, but because they were causing division.

We don't kick out alcoholics. We don't kick out people who are living together. We try to make them see that there's a better way. Likewise we don't kick out people who are gossips. We try to make them see that it's not best going around peoples' backs and saying things. That's not godly. And so we wrestle with these things.

What was Sodom's sin? Many of us would say it was those gay guys trying to grab those angels. No, that's not what God says. He says in **Ezekiel 16:49**, "**Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.**" That's why Sodom was destroyed. Now these things also caused sexual immorality that we just read in **Romans 1**. These things manifested themselves in homosexuality.

So how do we deal with a person who is sitting here who has a desire for a person of the same sex? How do we help them? How do they get help? Can they get help here or do they have to go into the homosexual community and told that it's OK? Or do they go to counselors who tell them they are an abomination? Would they be safe here to come out and say that they are dealing with this issue?

To help us view this, here are some excerpts from a book called, *Love Is An Orientation*. It's an excellent book especially if you have family members into homosexuality. It's written by a very dedicated Christian man, whom God called to the homosexual community. He started by going into their gay bars and relating to them. And then he eventually moved into a gay neighborhood. And he now speaks at GLBT (Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transsexual) conferences

about Jesus because he earned their respect. Let's start out with a non-homosexual issue concerning President Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky.

One summer evening, I was reading an interview with Billy Graham's daughter. She was telling some of the fondest memories about her dad and recalled one time in particular, when the graham family was attending a rally in support of President Bill Clinton after his sex scandal was made public.

A reporter asked Billy Graham, "Why are you here supporting this man after everything he has done to this country?" Reverend Graham's answer was succinct, powerful and true. "It's the Holy Spirit's job to convict, God's job to judge and my job to love."

When I read that sentence I started to cry because it just put words to what I had unknowingly been doing within the GLBT community since my immersion began. It's not the job of Christians to convict the GLBT community. That's the Holy Spirit's job. It's not the job of Christians to judge the GLBT community. That's God's job. It's the job of Christians to love the GLBT community in a way that is tangible, measurable and unconditional – whether we see our version of "change" happening or not!

The only way for gays and lesbians to believe what Christians profess about love is through tangible, measurable and unconditional behaviors that speak for themselves (p 107-108).

So we have to reach out and love them and care for them. And loving them doesn't mean acceptance or approval. We just show them Jesus. The Bible says it's the Holy Spirit's job to convict.

By reminding ourselves that we're not the solution to a person's salvation, we re-crown the King in his rightful place as the center of each person's relationship (p 176).

So, in other words, we don't have to do God's job of convicting them of their sin, of telling them that they need to get saved. We can just love on them and let God do his job. And as we point them to Christ and show them Christ's love, they can respond to that. And God can work in their heart to transform them.

If everyone is a sinner, and if James 2:10 is actually true (which I believe it is), then in God's eyes we're all the same – Christian or non-Christian, gay or straight (p 183).

Yes, we are all sinners. We need his reconciliation. We need his justification and his help to change us.

We're not called to posit theories that support our assumptions. We're not called to speculate about genetics or developmental experiences or spiritual oppression in faceless groups of other people.

We're called to build bridges informed by the Scriptures and empowered by the Spirit. We're called to let a just God be the judge of his creation. We're called to let the Holy Spirit whisper truth into each person's heart. And we're called to show love unconditionally, tangibly and measurably (p 187).

Yes, we're called to love them and let the Holy Spirit change their heart. He can do that to all kinds of sins that are listed in **Romans 1**. God has changed our hearts. And he can change their hearts.

In the early 1980's in Prince George, pastor Glen was dealing with a young man who was gay. Even though he was loved, he decided to move into a gay community at Vancouver. He contacted pastor Glen a few years ago and asked if they had the same discussion today would he (pastor Glen) say the same thing?

Pastor Glen wrote back, "Nope. We'd talk differently this time." That's because pastor Glen would be looking at this situation through the eyes of law, but through the eyes of Jesus. The concern would be how could he connect him with Jesus.

Now we have an extra issue in America, because we have politics involved. We can say our peace in the political issues. For instance Prop 8 comes along and we have to decide how are we going to vote. Hopefully we are voting on it in a healthy way. Now some of you here voted for Prop 8 because you believe homosexuality is wrong and same sex marriage will break down the institute of marriage. And you did it with all faith.

Others in this room voted no, because you believe the constitution says that we are all created equal and the law applies to all of us, whether we like the sin or not. So some voted "no" based on what they understand concerning the rights we all have under the constitution.

So who is right? It depends upon how you weigh all the considerations, doesn't it? So that's why, we as a church, don't take political stances on these issues. So when you vote, you have to make up your own mind. Pastor Glen didn't say before you can come in this door, you had better voted "yes" or "no" depending how he viewed it.

Now there were some churches who said, if you voted for Prop 8, you're out of here. Now other churches said if you voted against Prop 8, you're out of here. We need to educate our minds as to how we view this.

Yes, God says this isn't the ideal, not is gossip or slander or a lot of other things. But our issue is – how do we deal with people who have that proclivity? And how do we work with them to let God deal with their heart? Pastor Glen believes how we do that is to invite them and love them. And we will care for them, show them the love of Jesus and let them experience what real relationship is like. And we'll let the work of God begin in their hearts and maybe they will consider what we have to say.

The church doesn't take political positions. That's your job. We don't stand in the voting booth with you. You have to educate your heart and mind. What we try to teach, as a church, as a fellowship, that this issue isn't the ideal, but we are willing to love and help and care for those who are caught up in any sin.

And as long as it's not disruptive to all the rest of you, the body, they are welcome. We won't allow them up on stage to lead worship if they are living together or in a homosexual relationship or if they are gossips forever tearing up the congregation or if they have malice in their heart that comes in our conversations with them. All these people are welcome here as long as they don't cause division. Does this make sense to all of us?

Now here's one last quote so you can know where Pastor Glen is coming from. It's from the book, *The Cost of Discipleship* written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was killed as a martyr during WWII because he was against Adolph Hitler's Jewish persecution policies.

We need to understand that what we've been discussing today is not cheap grace! All of us still have to face sin in our lives. All of us have to wrestle with the fact there is sin. There is cheap grace and there is costly grace.

Cheap grace says, "I'm forgiven, I can do what ever I want. I can live outside my marriage. I can have sex with 14 people if I want. I can be gay. I can be a malicious vindictive bitter person. I can have an anger problem and if I want to lose my temper that's my business and not yours."

Cheap grace says I've been forgiven so it doesn't matter. But Bonhoeffer writes this in his book on page 45.

Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus; it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart.

It comes and says, "Yes you are forgiven but now follow Jesus. Now find out what God's heart for you is. To people who are bitter, that's not God's heart. Hebrew says that a bitter root will tear you up and it's going to affect other people. That's not God's desire so he says, "Follow me out of that."

People who have tempers and who are forever losing it with other people, that's not fun. Your relatives and friends won't talk to you. Your kids are mad at you, because you keep flying off the handle at them. Costly grace says that you need to follow Jesus, because he didn't fly off the handle. And the same is true of sexual sin, whatever version.

Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him.

And pastor Glen believes that all of us who are sinners – raise your hand if you don't think you are a sinner – can love other sinners and care for them and if we preach the grace of God to them, the yoke of Jesus and what Jesus' heart is for them. The Holy Spirit can transform them and change them. And the love of God that we express to them will change them.

Now will that make us a little uncomfortable? Yes! Some of you hearing this may never come back to this church ever again if we allow gay people to come in. Now if you go to another church, you will probably be with gay people, but you won't know who they are. Statically, there aren't any churches in America that don't have gay people in them or people that have that inclination.

Pastor Glen had some members leave his church in Idaho because there were two sex offenders attending church. It was common knowledge about them because they had to leave the congregation to go to jail and then came back once their sentencing was completed. What was so amazing was that these people, who had left, didn't have any children. Do you know where they went? To a local mega-church where there were probably a hundred sex offenders, but they didn't know who they were. What kind of thinking is that?

Pastor Glen hopes that most of us, if not all of us, will say, “God loved me. I can love others, whatever their issues are. I can ask God to help me love them and let him begin to draw them.”

We used to think that if we expressed too much of God’s love and grace, they’ll think it’s all OK. Well, that’s true if there is no such thing as the Holy Spirit. The more you express God’s love and grace, the more the Holy Spirit is going to impact them – because that’s his job to convict people of sin, righteousness and judgment.

So costly grace doesn’t mean that someone is scott-free and can do what they please. Costly grace means that we need to follow Jesus. And as we preach grace and we preach forgiveness, God will draw their heart.

So hopefully this message will help us deal with our culture that is our there. It’s become more common and obvious. You see gay or lesbian couples now even on airplanes. We as a church need to know how to deal with it.

We work with many people who have many of the types of sins that we’ve been discussing today in **Romans 1**. So we need to love on them and not just be judgmental. And that should affect how we think and how we act.

And as we do that, the love of God will transform people, because God’s love has transformed all of us here today and will continue to transform us and will continue to transform others. So we walk in faith dependant upon the Holy Spirit to do his job.

Let’s pray.

“Father God, we bow at your throne today. Lord we so underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit. We have been so concerned about the fact that if we love and accept a person who is a sinner – whatever that sin is – that they will do just more of it. Instead of believing that the power of the Holy Spirit will come into their lives and he will bring transformation, and he will bring conviction, and he will bring righteousness to their lives.

So Lord help us to love them, help us to care for them and help us to welcome whatever type of sinner walks through our door. We ask all this in Jesus name. Amen.”

General Group Question: How do you think God wants Christians, as his ambassadors to treat people involved in a gay lifestyle? Briefly explain your answer.

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other’s needs afterwards.

1. What is the significance of Jesus’ resurrection? (Rom. 1:18)
2. What did God the Father achieve through the sacrifice of his Son? (1:20)
3. How would you explain God’s reconciliation to others?
4. How does God deal with sin in the New Covenant? (2 Cor. 5:19)

5. As Christ's ambassadors, what should our message be to non-Christians? (5:20)
6. How does God reveal himself to people? (Rom. 1:20)
7. What is the primary problem people have in their relationship with God? (1:21)
8. What happens to the minds and hearts of people who reject God? (1:21-22)
9. How does God respond to people who ignore and deny him? (1:24,26)
10. How are attitudes toward sexuality affected when a person denies God? (1:26-27)
11. What are the sins of a depraved mind? (1:28-31)
12. How should we, as Christians, treat an alcoholic? Should we treat a gay or lesbian differently or in the same way? Briefly explain.
13. What was Billy Graham's answer to a reporter as to why he supported President Bill Clinton after his sex scandal was made public? So you agree with his answer? Why or why not?
14. What's the difference between cheap grace and costly grace?
15. How do you think God expects us to treat all people?