



Issues, Etc.TM
Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio

TRANSCRIPT

Rev. Todd Wilken, Host

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"Speaking the Truth in Love to Those Burdened by Homosexuality"

Guest:

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Author of *Bearing Their Burden: Speaking the Truth in Love to People Burdened by Homosexuality*

10 November 2010

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WILKEN: There's no doubt about it. The cultural ground has shifted under our feet on this, if not many more issues, as Christians living in the open public square. The culture has primed both those who advocate for homosexuality, who are tempted by its particular sinful inclinations, and those who support the homosexual cause. The culture has primed them against anything Christianity might have to say about homosexuality. Witness, if you will, mainline

Protestant denominations eventually coming to the conclusion, and recently coming to the conclusion, that homosexuality essentially isn't a sin. No one can stand to hear this again. And yet if we do not treat it as the Scriptures treat it—as a sin—then there will be no remedy for this sin as there is for every sin in the person and work of Jesus Christ. How do we talk with homosexuals, though, struggling and burdened by this particular sin?

Greetings and welcome to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. Thanks for tuning us in. It's Wednesday afternoon, the 10th of November. Pastor Tom Eckstein is pastor of Concordia Lutheran Church in Jamestown, North Dakota. He's author of the new book, *Bearing Their Burden: Speaking the Truth in Love to People Burdened by Homosexuality*. Pastor Eckstein, welcome back to *Issues, Etc.*

ECKSTEIN: Hey, good to be here, Todd.

WILKEN: We are going to be, if you will, in the next hour singling homosexuality out. Are we singling it out because it is a sin greater than any other sin or vice with which I, or you, or anyone else is tempted, which I, or you, or anyone else commits?

ECKSTEIN: Oh, absolutely not. It's not worse than any other sin. In fact, I begin my book dealing with that very question. Why so much focus on this issue? Why would I write a book on this issue? Aren't there other sins? And yes, there are. In the beginning of my book I tell a story about when I was at a national youth gathering for our church body back in 1992, and we were going to some break out sessions, and I went to one that was on the issue of homosexuality. And when the presenter was done, he said, "Okay, does anybody have any questions or comments?" And immediately a young woman darted up, and she was visibly upset, and she started talking about why are we focusing only on homosexuality. Alcoholism causes much more pain and sorrow in this world than homosexuality does. Why don't we have a breakout session on alcoholism? And she went on and on. And I thought, "You know, she has a point." But as I started to think about it, why are we focusing, for example, today, on homosexuality and not alcoholism? You know, one point I make in my book is to my knowledge I don't know of any Christian in any denomination pushing for a movement to affirm drunkenness. To

my knowledge there's never been a drunkenness day at Walt Disney World. To my knowledge no major city sponsors a drunkenness pride parade. The point is that on this particular issue our culture and even some within the Church are clearly compromising what Scripture says. And so even though all sin is equally damnable before God, we have to address those issues where our culture and church is being tempted by the devil to compromise the Word of God.

WILKEN: Then, when we talk about homosexuality, and these distinctions must be very carefully made, are we talking about only outward acts and behaviors? Are we talking about inclinations, temptations toward? How do you sort that out, Pastor Eckstein?

ECKSTEIN: Well, certainly we're dealing with homosexual behavior, but we're also dealing with homosexual lust and desire. Although I want to make it clear that there's a careful distinction between homosexual lust and desire, and homosexual orientation. In other words, one may have the tendency, the orientation, to be sexually attracted to members of the same sex. That in and of itself is not necessarily sinful if that orientation does not move in a direction of desire or lust. Of course, because we're all sinners and have a sinful nature, very often it does. And then, of course, that sinful desire and lust, if left unchecked, can easily turn into sinful behavior as well. But the reason I like to make the distinction is there are some brothers and sisters in Christ out there, probably listening right now, who do struggle with same-sex attraction. But they are repentant. In other words, they're not affirming or justifying their homosexual lust or desire. They're not affirming or justifying homosexual behavior by any means. They are living in repentance and faith in Christ, and yet they continue to be burdened by same-sex attraction. I think we need to be careful that we don't give people the

message that oh, boy, even if you have same-sex desires, that sort of puts you outside the Kingdom, as though you can't really come to Jesus until you completely eliminate that orientation in your life. And so we have to be careful when we talk about repenting of homosexuality. That doesn't mean we're telling people that they have to become heterosexual in orientation before God can accept them. What we are calling them to do is to acknowledge that homosexual lust and behavior is not of God, but through Christ we have complete forgiveness and the strength to live a pure life.

WILKEN: In that sense, and probably only in that narrow sense, Pastor Eckstein, isn't it strongly akin to what the Church will still say today about chastity before marriage?

ECKSTEIN: Oh, absolutely.

WILKEN: I mean that we are asking people, "Well, you may not be able to completely eliminate the desires for pre-marital sex, but you do not have to act on them, and we would expect all those who are not married to live in daily repentance of that and all other sins.

ECKSTEIN: Exactly. To me, that's a beautiful parallel, because there are many, many people who have heterosexual desires. And what does God call us to do in that case? He calls us, according to Scripture, to remain chaste in thought, word, and deed until marriage. Of course, none of us do that perfectly. We all struggle with sinful desires and temptations and even behaviors, but as Christians the Holy Spirit moves us to acknowledge those sins, repent of them, and rejoice in the forgiveness we have in Jesus. But it's a perfect parallel. Single people who have heterosexual orientations are called by God to live celibate lives as well.

WILKEN: Is part of the problem—I mentioned at the outset that the culture has

primed many people who are on the front lines of this battle and people who are standing on the sidelines in this battle—to simply dismiss out of hand anything that the Church, Christianity, the Bible may say at all on the subject of homosexuality? But is part of the hurdle getting someone to realize that it is, in your words, a burden like any other sin?

ECKSTEIN: I think that is part of it. You know, there are others who have bigger issues with Christianity in general, but I think for those who at least accept the basics of Christianity, letting them know that when we're talking about the issue of homosexuality, we're not saying it's the worst of all sins or, much less, the unforgivable sin. But it's a burden like any other sin. And that's one reason I titled my book this way—bearing their burden. You know, in Galatians, chapter 6, Paul says that if anyone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore them gently, thereby bearing each others' burdens and thereby fulfilling the law of Christ. And it's interesting, he doesn't specifically mention homosexuality there, in the sense that any sin we struggle with is a burden. In fact, we're burdened by original sin. That's the ultimate burden. But for those in our culture who are dealing with same-sex attraction, you know, very often I think church bodies like ours, who take a Biblical stand on homosexuality, we get a bad rap. We get slandered as though we don't want people with same-sex attraction in our churches. That's the farthest thing from the truth. We want to reach out to these people in love. They're welcome to come to our churches and stand with fellow sinners and receive the Body and Blood of Christ with fellow sinners in repentance and faith. And so we're all burdened by sin. And so those who struggle with homosexuality are no different in that sense.

WILKEN: Okay, what does the Bible have to say about homosexuality? Where do you begin?

ECKSTEIN: Yes, that's a very, very good question. And one point I make in my book is that we have to begin in the beginning. I think one mistake many Christians often make is we immediately jump to the Sodom and Gomorrah text, which I do deal with in my book. But that is a mistake for two reasons. First of all, all we can really find in Sodom and Gomorrah is condemnation of homosexual "gangry." I deal with some other issues relating to that in the book, but that's not a good place to begin for that reason. Secondly, we need to begin in the beginning with Genesis, because there we get the positive description of what God's good gift of sexuality was meant to be. In Genesis we see that God created sex as a good and wonderful thing to celebrate, but between one man and one woman within the covenant of marriage. In fact, one thing I try to unpack by looking at Genesis is that we see that sexuality is really given to humans for two reasons: one, for reproduction, but not merely for that; also for a man and a woman to celebrate the unconditional, unique love that exists between a husband and a wife in marriage.

WILKEN: Well, let's take a break right there. When we come back, I want you to pick up right there, still in Genesis, with the positive gift that God has given in human sexuality, and the purposes for that gift. Pastor Tom Eckstein is our guest. We're talking about speaking the truth in love to those struggling with homosexuality.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. We're spending this hour of the program on this Wednesday afternoon, November 10, discussing how one approaches—how do you even begin a conversation with?—someone who is struggling with homosexuality. Now, before

the break you said the Biblical case must begin at the beginning with Genesis and God's good gift of marriage. You said there are two purposes: one, obviously, the procreation of children; the other one...please pick up where you left off.

ECKSTEIN: Yes, the other—and I think this is important—the other is that God has given sex in Genesis 2. You know, the two will become one flesh. It's meant to be a celebration of the unconditional, *agape*, sacrificial love that's intended to exist between a husband and his wife. In fact, as I argue in the book, I believe this gift is meant to be a reflection of the ultimate marriage, the ultimate *agape* love, that exists between Christ and His bride, the Church, but more on that later.

But the reason I want to stress that there are those two purposes for marriage is that some make the mistake in our culture of saying that the only real purpose for sex is really for reproduction. Well, the pro-gay crowd can jump on that because they can say, "Well, wait a minute. There are many heterosexual people who have sex and they either use birth control or they're not even capable of having children. And so, obviously reproduction isn't the only reason to have sex. And so, therefore, homosexual sex could be okay." But that's just the point. Sex in the Bible is not merely intended for reproduction; it's also meant to symbolize the unique love that exists only between one man and one woman in marriage. And it's interesting, in the Song of Solomon, we there have a celebration of sexuality within monogamous marriage. And it's interesting, in the Song of Solomon, never once does it talk about reproduction. It's talking about the celebration of this *agape* love between a groom and his bride.

And I think that's so important, remember, because even though there are various human relationships, marriage between one man and one woman is absolutely unique.

And so we cannot make marriage anything we want it to be. God has defined what marriage is, and it's actually a reflection of the ultimate marriage between Christ and His bride, the Church.

WILKEN: Where else in Scripture would you look to outline the basic parameters of its message about homosexuality?

ECKSTEIN: Okay, well, still sticking with Genesis, when you jump ahead to the New Testament, you have Jesus in Matthew 19 going back to Genesis to talk about how marriage is one man and one woman, and outside of that the only option is celibacy. You have Paul dealing with Genesis in 1 Corinthians 6 and also Ephesians 5 to talk about sex being celebrated only within marriage.

And then, of course, after those positive descriptions of what marriage is and how everything outside of it is sin, then we get the next clear teaching in Scripture on homosexuality found in the universal sex laws in Leviticus, chapters 18 and 20. There we get the clear prohibitions against homosexuality listed there. I don't know if you want me to spend a little bit of time there dealing with pro-gay reactions to the Levitical text?

WILKEN: Let's do that in a minute. One question kind of has to intercede here, and that is someone's going to say, "Well, you didn't say anything about Jesus. He doesn't say anything about homosexuality, and certainly never explicitly condemned it." How do you respond to that?

ECKSTEIN: Yes. Thanks for bringing that up. In fact, I have a whole section in my book that deals with that. First of all, in a real bullet format let me sum up my response to that. First of all, Jesus never deals with the issue of bestiality or incest or, for example, in Leviticus, it also talks about how we should not oppress people with disabilities. Jesus never explicitly mentions

that either. Does that mean He doesn't care about incest or bestiality, or that He's indifferent to oppressing people with disabilities? Of course not! Just because Jesus is silent on the issue doesn't mean that He's in favor of it.

Secondly, we need to realize that when we understand that the Jewish culture of Jesus' day unanimously agreed that the Levitical universal sex laws condemned even consensual homosexuality, we realize that Jesus didn't need to beat a dead horse. He didn't need to deal with an issue that was a no-brainer among the Jews of His day.

Thirdly, when you get to Matthew, chapter 19, there Jesus clearly teaches that according to Genesis, again, sex is meant for one man, one woman in marriage, and every act of sex outside of that is sinful. Therefore, according to Matthew 19, the only option to sex in marriage is celibacy. So for Jesus, it's either sex in marriage, or celibacy.

And then another interesting point in the Gospels is when Jesus talks about the sins of the heart. He talks about how, you know, greed, lust, adultery, and then also *porneia*, flow from the heart. And that Greek word, *porneia*, within the Jewish culture was sort of an overall umbrella term for all the various sexual sins described in the Levitical code. And so, by Jesus referring to that, it shows again that He would have been opposed to homosexuality.

And two other things regarding that. If Jesus had affirmed homosexuality, I find it interesting that we have no record of His Jewish opponents ever confronting Him on that issue, because when you realize that the Jewish people of Jesus' day were completely opposed to homosexuality, if Jesus had actually affirmed it, His Jewish opponents could have really backed Him into a corner and slandered Him by pointing that out to the multitudes. But they didn't. Nowhere do they ever accuse Jesus of

affirming homosexuality as a way to discredit Him. So right there we see that it's very likely that He shared their Biblical view that homosexuality is sin.

And finally, even though Jesus Himself doesn't address the issue explicitly in the Gospels, the apostle Paul, who does speak for the Lord Jesus when he deals with the Gentile culture, which did affirm homosexuality, there Paul clearly passes on the word of Jesus as His apostle and makes it clear that the Bible condemns even consensual homosexuality.

So that, real quickly, is the way to answer that question that, well, why didn't Jesus mention homosexuality if He was opposed to it.

WILKEN: Okay. So you've made the case from Scripture itself, whether or not someone wants to hear it, you've made the case that the consensus there is that homosexuality is numbered among all the other sins that God condemns, including sins that you and I are inclined toward. One of the things you've got to do, as you well know when you speak the truth in love, is often overcome the objections. You mentioned them just a moment ago. Let's try out a few. With regard to the Old Testament, look, there are a lot of things that are condoned in the Old Testament, like slavery, and apparently it looks like the oppression of women. And there are a lot of crazy things that are prohibited, like eating certain foods. And no one takes those things as universal laws applying to everyone anymore. *A la*, the prohibitions, in particular in Leviticus, should be kind of laid aside as those others have.

ECKSTEIN: Yes. Well, one of the sections in my book is titled, "Red Lobster fans can take Leviticus seriously." [Laughs] And the reason I title it that is that a few years ago I was talking with a liberal pastor who affirmed homosexuality. And we were in the Biblical discussion about, you know, what

Scripture says about the issue, and I referred to the Levitical text. And he jumped in and said, "What's your favorite restaurant?" And I said, "Well, I like this one, and I really love Red Lobster. I love shrimp." And he goes, "Ah, well, remember next time you go to Red Lobster, you're sinning." And he winks at me. And, of course, his reference was parts of the food laws in Leviticus, part of which, you know, forbid the eating of shrimp. And the argument goes, "Well, we no longer hold to those laws. So why would we also follow what Leviticus says about, you know, homosexuality?" Well, at first that seems like a good argument until you begin reading the book of Leviticus and thinking through the whole matter.

How would I respond to that? Well, first of all, regarding the food laws, we know that they were given only to Israel and only for a temporary period of time. Nowhere does God condemn the Gentiles for eating shrimp or pork. It was given only to the Jews. And even those food laws were abolished in the New Testament when Christ fulfilled the Old Testament. So the food laws no longer apply. They never did apply to the Gentiles.

Secondly, there are universal moral laws in Leviticus that clearly apply to all people of all times and places. We need to distinguish those from the temporary, ceremonial laws given only to the Jews. So in Leviticus 18 and 20 we have sex laws that God condemns the Gentiles for breaking. And another interesting point you can make to people who like to play games—"Well, we don't obey this law in Leviticus. Why should we pay attention to what it says about homosexuality?"—I usually point out, you know, "Are you against murder? Are you against oppressing people with disabilities? Do you think you should love your neighbor? Or do you think we should have just courts that don't treat the poor unjustly?" On and on. And they'll say, "Of course. I agree with all of that. Well, all

those laws are found in the book of Leviticus. Are you going to chuck out everything, throw out the baby with the bathwater, so to speak, just because we supposedly don't follow what it says about eating shrimp? And that's a good way to begin by helping them see that obviously we need to distinguish between parts of Leviticus that have to do with ceremonial laws only for the Jews versus other parts of Leviticus where clearly we're dealing with universal moral laws that apply to all people of all times and places.

WILKEN: With only about a minute here, real quickly, how would you respond to someone who says, "Look, there are passages, but there are only a few of them, Pastor. It's not like it's all through every book of the Bible. It's only a few places." With about thirty seconds, a brief response.

ECKSTEIN: In the book I give this hypothetical discussion. Let's say someone says, "You know, Pastor, there's only two passages in the Bible that condemn bestiality, and they're both in Leviticus. Nowhere else are they even mentioned. So I think we should affirm that." Well, even most people who affirm homosexuality wouldn't agree with that. The point is all of Scripture makes it so obvious that homosexuality, even the consensual form, is forbidden, that the six clear passages are more than enough for us to take a stand on what Scripture teaches on that issue.

WILKEN: Pastor Tom Eckstein is our guest, pastor of Concordia Lutheran Church in Jamestown, North Dakota, author of the new book, *Bearing Their Burden: Speaking the Truth in Love to People Burdened by Homosexuality*.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back. I'm Todd Wilken. This is *Issues, Etc.* Our guest: Pastor Tom Eckstein. We're speaking the truth in love to those struggling with homosexuality. Tom,

here's one that I think probably slips under the radar with a lot of people, because it sounds so reasonable, it sounds like it's really got kind of a basis in cultural differences, differences in the times where we live. Someone says, "Look, these authors of Scripture—Old Testament, New Testament—they were men of their times. They were living within their culture. That was a culture that largely looked down on homosexuality and other forms of sexuality. And besides, they didn't really have any experience with modern homosexuality. They didn't have experience with this being a genetic orientation. We now know we're born this way. They didn't have any experience with the desire for life-long monogamous same-sex relationships. They would take a different view if they knew what we know."

ECKSTEIN: Well, first of all, regarding it merely being a cultural issue, whether it's in the Old Testament or the New Testament times, especially when you look at Leviticus, for the Lord who revealed the word of Leviticus through Moses, for the Lord it never was an issue of what did the culture believe or not believe. It was an issue of His will for our lives, including our sexual lives, based on how He had originally created the world in Genesis. So God was never really worried about what the culture may or may not have been thinking.

Secondly, when you especially get to the culture during the times of the Apostle Paul, especially as he's ministering in the Gentile culture, in his culture it was predominantly affirming of homosexual relationships. Oh, yes, there were some within the Greek culture who had problems with it for one reason or another, but for the most part you could find people within Greek society who affirmed that behavior. So by Paul taking a Biblical stand on homosexuality he was actually being counter-cultural. So the idea that he was simply influenced by his times is simply not the case.

But as far as the authors of Scripture, whether Old or New Testament, not knowing about the modern phenomenon of homosexuality being genetic, well, first of all, there is evidence to show that in Paul's day they did have an understanding of people who were predominantly homosexual in orientation. Obviously, they didn't understand genetics back then, but they did understand that there were some people for whatever reason had an inclination toward the same sex. And so this idea that Paul or any others of his day would not know of a homosexual orientation is simply not the case.

In addition, we have to understand that even in the modern world this whole slogan of homosexuality as genetic really has been disproven recently. It wasn't that long ago that the APA, the American Psychological Association (I include information about them in my book), they have come out and openly admitted that there really is not any good scientific evidence for homosexuality being caused solely by a gene. In fact, they haven't found a "gay gene." Instead, the evidence shows that there is a multiple-faceted type of cause for homosexuality, kind of a nature-nurture kind of mix. And so this whole idea that it's merely genetic and nothing more than that simply isn't the case in our modern world either.

But even if—I've made this point—even if we could find one day that there's some sort of genetic link to homosexual behavior, that doesn't change our Biblical position, because it's interesting that the Bible itself talks about the sinful flesh. In other words, when Adam and Eve fell, it wasn't just their immaterial soul that fell; it was their entire body. And so our whole bodies are broken and they're inclined toward various sinful desires and behaviors. And even though that's the case, the Bible doesn't say, "Well, because you have these sinful desires and behaviors, go ahead and act on them." No, what it says is, "Resist the desires of the

flesh." And so whether one has heterosexual desires that are in opposition to God's plan for our life or whether one has homosexual desires, God calls us to acknowledge that those are not His will, to resist them and not act on them. And even though there might be some people who have not chosen to have a homosexual orientation, they do choose to act on that. And so we need to make that distinction there.

WILKEN: One more real quickly, and this is kind of a little piece of code that was in vogue a couple summers ago, in particular at the meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. They actually were using what sounded like Biblical language to describe the advocacy for homosexuality. They said, "Look, there are people whose consciences are bound in this direction, and if we tell them that what they're doing or their inclinations or acting upon them are wrong, we are going to make them violate their bound conscience." How do you respond?

ECKSTEIN: Yeah, and I deal with that whole issue in my book. I have a whole section on the bound conscience issue, because it sounds so Biblical, even Lutheran. You know, people refer back to Luther when he said, "My conscience is bound." But they forget what he went on to say: "My conscience is bound by the Word of God." And Luther didn't mean, "Well, you respect my bound conscience, and I'll respect yours." No, he said, "Our conscience is bound by the Word of God, and therefore unless I'm convinced by Scripture and plain reason." In other words, Luther was challenging them to show him from the Scriptures where he was wrong. It wasn't like he was saying, "Hey, you have your bound conscience on Scripture, I have mine, let's all just get along." No, he's saying, "One of us is right and one of us is wrong."

And another point I want to make about this bound conscience issue is that can you imagine in 1 Corinthians, chapter 5, where Paul deals with the issue of a man having an incestuous relationship with his father's wife, can you imagine a group in Corinth writing a letter to Paul saying, "Paul, we're really offended that you are judging this man who's having incest with his father's wife. You know, he and the woman and our consciences are bound to the Word of God, because our take on the Scriptures is that this is a valid relationship. They're loving. They're consensual. And so we believe that this is something God affirms. Now we respect your conscience-bound view, Paul, but we also call you to respect ours." Now could you imagine the Apostle Paul writing back to them saying, "Oh, I'm so convicted. You're absolutely right. You know, I should respect your bound conscience on this issue. You know, I'm sorry I've caused division in the Body of Christ. You respect my view; I'll respect yours; and we'll just all get along." No! Paul is very clear in 1 Corinthians that in spite of the understanding of the Corinthian Christians, who may actually be justifying this behavior based on some twisted interpretation of Scripture, he makes it very clear to them that our consciences can be misled, and they can be bound—or better yet, they can be in bondage—to false teaching and unbelief. And therefore, when Scripture talks about obeying our conscience, it's always our conscience that's captive to the pure teaching of the Word of God. And, unfortunately, the ELCA definition of "bound conscience," where we simply respect everybody's valid interpretation of Scripture, it really diminishes the authority of Scripture and the clarity of Scripture and replaces it with subjective human opinion.

WILKEN: Sally in Nebraska says this: "Witnessing to the homosexual who understands that it is a sin to act on his or her same-sex tendencies is a challenge in itself, but how do you approach those who

feel that they are acting on their homosexual feelings and it's perfectly acceptable because 'times have changed' and we're not hurting anyone else as long as we're in a consensual loving relationship."

ECKSTEIN: Well, first of all, for the person who does know it's a sin, in that case you don't need to beat them up with the Law too much; they've already been beaten up. They need to hear the Gospel and let them know that there's forgiveness and healing in Jesus.

But as far as those who have been misled into thinking that their consensual, monogamous, publicly accountable homosexual relationship is to be affirmed, first of all, we need to find out: are they willing to submit to the authority of Holy Scripture? If they are, then ask them lovingly if they'd be willing to study the Scriptures with you on that issue. And I've found in every case that when you're willing to go through the Scriptures very carefully and take them seriously, it becomes very clear very quickly that even consensual, monogamous, publicly accountable homosexual relationships are condemned by God's Word. In fact, I make the argument that those who are in publicly accountable, monogamous, consensual relationships are even in a worse state than the person, say, who knows it's wrong, maybe has a one night homosexual stand during a time of weakness, but then later repents. That person is in a better spiritual state than those who are living in unrepentant sin in a consensual, monogamous relationship. And so the point I'm making is that the consensual, monogamous, publicly accountable nature of a homosexual relationship does not remove it from the category of being sin condemned by God's Word. And so we need to help these individuals see this.

And another argument you can make—this is a good analogy—we could imagine, let’s say, an adult woman who has sex with her father, and let’s say it’s a consensual, monogamous, loving relationship, and they argue the fact that it’s consensual and monogamous and loving affirms the incest. Well, we would never make that argument; at least we hope we wouldn’t. And so just because a relationship is consensual and monogamous and even accountable doesn’t make it right.

WILKEN: When we come back from this break, more of your questions and comments for Pastor Tom Eckstein, pastor of Concordia Lutheran Church in Jamestown, North Dakota, and author of the new book, *Bearing Their Burden: Speaking the Truth in Love to People Burdened by Homosexuality*.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back. Ten more minutes with Pastor Tom Eckstein, speaking the truth in love to those who are struggling with homosexuality. This one comes from Jeff in Libertyville, Illinois: “How do you effectively communicate, that is, get someone to believe that when you, following Scripture, call their or someone else’s homosexuality ‘sin,’ that you’re not saying, ‘I hate homosexuals, or I’m afraid of homosexuality. There’s no real logic to that response, but it is common, and the fact that it’s rooted in emotion makes it that much harder to deal with lovingly and effectively. It is a very common objection: homophobia. It’s usually the first one.” Pastor Eckstein?

ECKSTEIN: Yeah, you know, this whole idea that homophobia, this unnatural fear of people who have same-sex attraction, to give someone that label simply because they believe what Scripture says about this being sin. The way I respond to that is, you know, I also believe that people who commit adultery are guilty of sin, and I would want

to reach out to them in love to show them God’s will for their lives. But if I’m against people who commit adultery, does that mean I’m guilty of “adulterophobia”? Or let’s say that there’s two people, a young man and woman, having sex outside of marriage. They’re guilty of fornication, and I want to lovingly confront them on that. Does that make me guilty of “fornicatorphobia”? I mean, no one would argue that. So when we reach out to people who are burdened by same-sex attraction, our goal is love. I have a big section in my book called, “Love Is the Reason.” And our goal is to reach out to them as fellow sinners, burdened with other sins as well, letting them know that, yes, they’re outside of God’s will, but that there is forgiveness and complete hope and healing in Jesus.

WILKEN: This is a great question from Gary in Canada. He says, “Do you think the Christians who want to hold the Biblical standard on homosexuality are often caught up in expecting to see the fruit of repentance? Shouldn’t the starting place be the kindness of God which leads to repentance?” Your thoughts?

ECKSTEIN: Well, first of all, you have to understand repentance in the narrow and wide sense. In one sense my repentance means acknowledging our sin deserves God’s wrath. And then there’s the wider sense of where repentance means not only agreeing with God about our sin, but rejoicing in the forgiveness that we have in Jesus Christ, which then produces the fruit of turning from our sin and striving to live according to God’s will. But one thing I think we have to make very clear, when we’re reaching out to people who struggle with same-sex attraction is that God is not asking them first to clean up their act, suppress their homosexual desires, or even stop their homosexual behavior before He will forgive them and love them and accept them. And I know some people are shocked when they hear me say that, especially God

doesn't ask them to stop their homosexual behavior. By that I mean if we mean that they have to completely cease from their behavior and never, ever, ever, ever do that again and then one day God will forgive them and love them, well, nonsense. I mean, who of us can ever promise that we'll never engage in sinful behavior until the day we die. If that were the case or the condition for being forgiven, that we never engage in sinful behavior, we'd all be going to hell. And so we need to let people who have same-sex attraction know, especially if they're burdened and crushed by their sin and realize, boy, no matter how hard they try, they're always going to have these desires and they might even slip and fall during a moment of weakness and engage in the behavior, they need to know that they are already forgiven for Christ's sake, that sinners can come to God in repentance, knowing that forgiveness is already there from Christ's words on the cross: "It is finished." And so repentance flows from being forgiven; it's not something we do to get forgiveness.

WILKEN: This one comes from Jeffrey. He says, "What is the first step in talking to a homosexual without totally alienating them so that they won't listen to the truth?"

ECKSTEIN: You know, that's a very good question, and it all depends. First of all—like one point I make in my book—let's say you know somebody, you're at the factory, and you're co-worker is a Hindu, and you find out he's homosexual. Well, his main problem is not that he's homosexual. His main problem is that he's an unbeliever. Don't start with homosexuality if the guy you're friends with doesn't have a clue about Christianity. Start with more basic things—who God is; what it means for us to be sinners; who Christ is and what He did to save us—and then eventually get to homosexuality with that kind of person.

But then again another person might be a more liberal Christian. Even in that case, even though you might want to address what Scripture says about homosexuality, the bigger issue is talking to them about the authority of Scripture and other issues of the Christian faith.

But let's say you meet somebody, and in many cases this is true, maybe they're already beaten up. They already know that homosexuality is a sin, but their caught in this sin because the Law has taken them as far as it can go. They've only heard that they're sinning, but they've never heard the Gospel that can set them free.

So find out where people are at. And especially if they're burdened by sin and under despair, they don't need to hear the Law anymore; they need to hear that they're forgiven in Jesus.

WILKEN: Jeremy listens in Hawaii. He asks, "How do we avoid confusing Law and Gospel in ministering to those who are struggling with homosexuality?"

ECKSTEIN: Oh, that's another good question. I think the most obvious one is making sure we don't make the mistake of saying, "You know, if you'd just get close enough to Jesus, your sinful homosexual desires will eventually go away." You know, the idea that we can somehow reach total sanctification in this life. I personally know some people who struggle with same-sex attraction who were so broken at some points in their life because they had been told by Christians that, you know, if you really did trust in Jesus, you wouldn't have homosexual desires anymore. Well, that's confusing Law and Gospel. The Bible never says that the Gospel means we cease to be sinners this side of heaven. The Gospel is for sinners who continue to struggle with their sinful nature and the desires of the flesh until the day they die. And so we need to remember that sanctification is not about becoming less sinful and more holy over

time, as though we need a little less of Jesus every day. Instead sanctification is simply living out our justification, realizing that we're new creations in Christ and by God's grace beginning anew every day in that complete and total gift of freedom that we have in Jesus.

WILKEN: I want to give you plenty of time for the answer to this last question, because it's probably the most important one. And that is, someone listening to us—doubtless someone listening to us—is in that position of struggling against homosexuality. What do you say to them right now, Pastor Eckstein?

ECKSTEIN: All right, if you're listening today, and the Holy Spirit has worked through God's Word to convince you that your homosexual desire and behavior is not God's will for you, and you're broken because you've tried and tired and tried to resist your same-sex attractions, and maybe you're even involved in same-sex behavior, and you just don't know how to break out of it, what you need to know right here and right now is that God loves you unconditionally. Forgiveness is already there for you in Jesus Christ. God is not going to ask you to clean up your act and become a heterosexual before He'll accept you; He accepts you here and now. And remember what the Apostle Paul said: "I am the worst of sinners, and yet Christ Jesus came to save the likes of me." He came to save the likes of you and the likes of me too, because I'm no better than you are. So if you're listening today and you're burdened

by homosexual desire and behavior, then rejoice in the fact that you are forgiven through Jesus. You are holy in His sight. And you can have freedom in Him. Rejoice in the salvation He's already given.

WILKEN: Pastor Eckstein, thank you very much.

ECKSTEIN: Yeah, my privilege.

WILKEN: Folks, I highly recommend—I *highly* recommend—this book: *Bearing Their Burden*. It's a Christ-centered, cross-focused book about homosexuality, answering the objections, and, even more importantly, talking about how the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ applies to my sin, your sin, to every sin and every sinner.

That's all it really is if you think about it in that sense. It is one sin among all the sins that burden each and every one of us. St. Paul found himself in a position where he could not hide his sin any longer. He could not deny it. He could justify it. He could not explain it away or make excuses for it. He eventually comes to the point of saying, "You know, there's something true that cannot be denied and that is Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners of whom I am the worst." And that includes me, and you. We all need Jesus, His perfect obedience, His death, and His resurrection. I'm Todd Wilken. Thanks for listening to *Issues, Etc.* Talk with you again tomorrow.

