



## Session Five: Sex and Marriage

### Let's talk sex and marriage in a woke culture...



Amy Grant is “The Queen of Christian Pop.” That’s why folks were stunned 23 years ago when Amy walked out on her husband to marry country star, Vince Gill, who left his wife for her. It was a greater shock when she recently announced she was hosting a gay wedding for her niece and her same-sex partner.

In a *Washington Post* interview, Amy said, “Jesus just narrowed it down to two things: love God and love others. I mean, that’s pretty simple.” This simple distillation of faith has given her wiggle room to become a vocal supporter of the LGBTQ community. Amy’s not alone. An October 20, 2021, *Newsweek* ran this headline: [Nearly 40 Percent of U.S. Gen Zs, 30 Percent of Young Christians Identify as LGBTQ, Poll Shows](#). In 2019, *Pew Research’s Attitudes on Same-Sex Marriage* reported that two-thirds of mainline Protestants and Catholics now support same-sex marriage. Evangelicals support it by a smaller percentage. But their 30% of support is up 11% since 2004 and has spiked higher among Gen Z evangelicals.

### Is Amy Grant right?

Franklin Graham says, “No!” In a Twitter response to Amy Grant, he said we *are* to love God and others. But Jesus said, if we love him, we will keep his commandments. And Jesus defines homosexuality as sin.



Loving others means caring enough to tell them the truth. He concluded, “The authority of God’s Word is something we can never compromise.”

## **So, who's right? Amy Grant or Franklin Graham?**

If you were to ask the question to a roomful of Evangelical Boomers and Gen Zs, most grandparent age folks would agree with Rev. Graham, but a large percentage of those under 29 would side with Ms. Grant. Such is the generational divide, even amongst Christians. Outside the Church, 90% of Z's would agree with Amy Grant. Most would label Graham a homophobe and hater for the way he called out Amy on social media.

So, here's a better question to ask: With whom would Jesus side? After all, both Amy and Franklin cite Jesus' words. And so should all Christians. He is our Savior and Lord. As the Author and Finisher of our Faith, he gets to define what it is. Our culture screams, "My body, my choice." We say with St. Paul that our bodies are not our own. They were blood-purchased by Jesus. Our choices are not our own. They belong to the One who owns us. On moral issues, we have no other choice than boldly to declare, "Jesus said it! I believe it! That settles it!" We'll come back to Amy Grant and Franklin Graham later, but right now we want to see what Jesus says we are to believe and how we are to respond to those who think differently.

### **FIRST, WHAT ARE WE TO BELIEVE?**

More precisely, what does Jesus believe? We can know because he left a record in the four Gospels. And, here's the shocker: he was more of a purist on sex and marriage than the ultra-Orthodox rabbis of his day. He was more conservative than Moses. Probably more hardcore than Franklin Graham. Amy Grant is cherry picking our Lord's words when she tries to make him a softie on issues like same-sex marriage. If Jesus got on Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, or Snapchat to post his views, heads would explode. This is what Jesus believed:

#### **1. God's design for marriage is nonnegotiable.**

Again, we aren't talking about the sexual behaviors of nonbelievers in our pluralistic nation. It's not our business to judge those outside the church. God will do that. It's our job to judge ourselves. When Jesus was speaking on these issues it was to Jews, and not to pagan Greeks or Romans. His words on marriage are to those in his kingdom.

The best place to go is Matthew 19. The Rabbi from Nazareth had already stirred up a hornet's nest when he said, in his Sermon on the Mount, "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery." [Mt. 5:32] No divorce, except in cases of adultery. No remarriage. If you do, you're an adulterer. If you

put your spouse in the position of remarrying, she, and the person she marries, become adulterers too.

Jesus sent shockwaves through the religious establishment and shivered the timbers of Jewish men everywhere. No ultra-Orthodox rabbi was that hardcore. Like religious leaders, then and now, they had adjusted God's commandments to fit the changing times. Even Moses had allowed people to get divorced for more reasons than adultery. Although God said in Malachi 2:16, "I hate divorce," Jewish religious leaders allowed men to divorce their wives for the most trivial reasons. They only had to lodge a complaint, get a certificate of divorce, and toss their wives out on the street. There was virtually no-fault divorce in the Good Ol' Boys Club of Jesus' day.

So, here we are in Matthew 19. Some Pharisees come to test Jesus. They open with a question in verse three: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason he chooses?" Folks today might want to debate Jesus the same way. "Come on, Jesus, you're being too narrow. There must be other good reasons people can divorce and remarry." But Jesus won't get drawn into a debate. He simply points to Scripture in verse four: "Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator made...?" He then continues on quoting from Genesis two and God's design for marriage." He won't debate because there is nothing to debate. Jesus says in effect, "God said it. I believe it. That settles it." It's non-negotiable.

They argue in verse seven, "Why then did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" They ask, "Why did Moses *command*...?" Jesus pushes back in verse eight with, "Moses *permitted*..." Jesus won't allow people to play a slight of hand with Scripture. Why did Moses *permit* divorce? Jesus goes on in verse eight: "...because of the hardness of your hearts." Moses was not only a prophet; he was also a pastor. As a pastor, I understand what Jesus is saying. Like Moses, we have to play the hand we are dealt. The church is not so much a haven for saints as it is a hospital for sinners. People come to Jesus with lots of baggage. Barring a miracle, some marriages are beyond repair. Some saints are too weak to do the right thing. Too many are hardhearted. Though they're in the Church, they still think like the world. It takes a while for them to shed their old mindset and habits. As a result, Moses *permitted* divorce.

But Jesus doesn't back down. He says in verse eight, "But it wasn't always that way from the beginning..." God set his design for gender, sexuality, and marriage on the drawing boards of eternity past. He put it into action in Genesis two with Adam and Eve in the Garden. He didn't make it up as he went along, and it isn't renegotiable in changing times.

Jesus ratchets down by reiterating that divorce and remarriage, except in cases of adultery, is wrong. He echoes what he said in verse six: “Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.”—not Moses, not the divorce certificates of First Century Judaism, not the divorce courts of today, nor permissive churches who turn a blind eye to the scandal of wholesale divorce and remarriage in the church today. Let me reiterate Jesus’ belief: God’s design for marriage is nonnegotiable.

## **2. God’s eternal design for sex and marriage is explicit.**

Jesus quotes from Genesis 2 in Matthew 19:5&6, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” God’s design for marriage is made up of these nonnegotiables:

**Sexual relations are to be binary.** A man and a woman. A father and a mother. Not a man with an animal. Not a man with a man, or a woman with a woman. Not bi-sexual. Not pansexual or polyamorous. Not auto-eroticism. Not virtual sex as in pornography. “...a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife...”

**Sexual relations are reserved for marriage alone.** “A man will leave his mother and father and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh.” It is clear from an unbiased reading of the text that a single man and a single woman engage in a sexual union (“one flesh”) only *after* their status changes to husband and wife. Then that sexual union is only to be experienced between them. Jesus underscores the logic of that in verse six when he adds something that’s not in the Genesis account: “Therefore, what God has joined together [the one flesh] let no one separate [or come between].” Pre-marital sex violates God’s design. So does extra-marital sex, pansexuality, intersex, polygamous and polyamorous sex, and all the other letters of the LGBTQIA+ alphabet. So does refusing to have sex with your spouse. So does jumping from spouse to spouse. Or abandoning your spouse. All are forms of what Jesus labels adultery.

**Marriage is for life, except in cases of adultery.** Jesus says, “...what God has joined together let no one separate.” Adultery can separate. Death can separate. A non-Christian spouse can demand a separation. But nothing else should separate us from the one to whom we vowed, before God and witnesses, to remain married to even in sickness, poverty, sorrow, disappointment, and times when all our needs aren’t being met and the grass looks greener on the other side. In a divorce saturated era, this seems like a draconian view. But the One who

loves us most knows that no one ever wins in a divorce, and things seldom get better when we jump into another relationship.

**God's design for marriage calls us to be equally yoked.** That's an old agricultural term that means you don't yoke together an ox with a donkey, or a horse with a bull. Their differences will never allow them to pull in the same direction. In the same way, a Christian should not marry a nonbeliever. Notice Jesus' words "united" and "one flesh." How can we be united if we aren't in harmony regarding our Savior, faith, and its values? That's why St. Paul wrote, "Don't be unequally yoked with nonbelievers." [2 Cor. 6:14] As a pastor, I've seen marriage between believers and nonbelievers work out, but far more often I've seen them lead to division and heartbreak.

### **3. God's eternal design for sex has a sequential order.**

Notice the order of progression: first, *LEAVE*; second, *UNITE*; third, *BECOME ONE FLESH*. Leaving is **commitment**. As we say in the wedding vows, "And forsaking all others..." Uniting is **covenant**. It is a formal exchange of vows to one another before God and witnesses: "I am going down the river of no return with you, and I'm not jumping ship." There is an exchange of rings as a sign of those covenant promises. The minister declares that they are now husband and wife, and ties the knot with the words, "What God has joined together let no one separate." After the covenant ceremony is the wedding night: becoming one flesh. That's the **consummation**. The sexual union. Without it there is no real marriage. But it is the third, not the first step in God's order.

Compare God's sequence with a Hollywood movie. A guy meets a gal at a bar. Before the night's over, they're in the sack (consummation first) Then they move in together to test whether or not they want to be committed. A few years later they decide to get married—unless they've already broken up. Almost half of cohabitating couples break up. Our postmodern culture has reversed God's order. Here are some facts: A new study in the [Journal of Marriage and Family](#) gives sobering data that cohabitation increases the odds of divorce later. Those who were virgins when they tied the knot had a significantly lower divorce rate. Those who engage in premarital sex have less sexual satisfaction after they are married. Less than 25% of marriages survive an extramarital affair. As our families dissolve, teen suicide is on the rise, kids are struggling with identity issues, and 24.7 million children live in a home without their biological father.

### **4. Jesus wants to fix his own people first**

In Matthew 19, Jesus had to straighten out the thinking of the religious leaders. When he came to clean house, he didn't go to Pilate's courthouse or the red light district of Jerusalem. He went to the Temple. Judgment always begins at the house of God. There are dizzying changes taking place in our postmodern culture—especially in the area of gender, sexuality, marriage, and families. A lot of Christians have been fighting a culture war, trying to stop the madness. But the critical issue today, isn't the White House, Statehouse, Courthouse, School house, or movie house. It's the church house, your house, and my house. At least in our houses, the light of Jesus should shine brightly in an increasingly dark world. At least in our houses, our children, grandkids, and neighbors should see that God's way is better than that of a world gone mad.

## **SECOND, HOW DO SHARE THESE BELIEFS ?**

Again, our verse for this: "Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." [1Pet. 3:15] That sums up the way Jesus dealt with others. He lived a holy life. And yet he moved easily among the most unholy people. He loved the most unlovable of people, and had table fellowship with notorious sinners. He treated them with gentleness and respect. And that's where I appreciate Amy Grant. She said in a *Washington Post* interview, "I know that homosexuality is a sin. But I want to bring the love of Jesus to the LGBTQ community." Good for Amy! I'm not sure that Franklin Graham has always been as gentle and respectful in his interaction with those same people. So I find myself in a quandary. I love Amy's heart for the lost, but I agree with Rev. Graham's insistence on biblical truth. Somehow we have to have both. So, let me jumpstart our thinking with a few strategies:

### **1. Start when our children and grandkids are young.**

As parents and grandparents, it's never too early to start mentoring our kids on issues of gender, sex, and marriage. Do you remember when the children tried to join the adults gathered around Jesus and his disciples shooed them away? In Matthew 19:4, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." A moment later, the Pharisees showed up to argue with Jesus about marriage and divorce. Do you realize that those children were listening in on that very grown up conversation. Why then are we afraid to talk about things like gender, sex, and marriage with our children? I guarantee that our public schools are talking about gender, transgender, and sexuality with children as young as preschoolers—only from a woke perspective. Some of your granddaughters get the *American Doll* magazine. Last year this magazine for little girls put out an

issue promoting transgender. Disney movies now have gay characters. And, even if we homeschool our kids, they live in a media saturated world. We may have heard the “birds and the bees” talk when we were teens, but we have to have those talks with our kids much earlier.

But, most of all, you have to model what a healthy marriage looks like to them. As a grandfather, I have decided that the best way I can counteract the seductions that will entice my granddaughters, Mira and Mae, is to let them see me loving Jesus passionately, my wife passionately, their parents passionately, and them passionately. I have to show them the Jesus that the world scorns.

## **2. We have to practice what we preach.**

Our children and grandkids are quick to point out our hypocrisies and inconsistencies when we call them out for their radical views of gender, sex, and cohabitation outside of marriage. And they roll their eyes and respond, “Okay, Boomer.” Before we clean their house, we had better clean our own.. I know that some of us have been divorced and remarried, we’ve had dysfunctional marriages, maybe even lived together before marriage. Maybe our spousal relationship isn’t so hot right now, and our children and grandkids are aware of it. I’m not here to condemn anyone. Nor is Jesus. He has covered our past sins with his blood and washed us clean. But, he *is* saying to us what he said to the adulteress woman: “Go and sin no more.”

If you think what is happening in our culture is scandalous, look at the Church. I don’t need to drudge up the data from the Barna Group, or the stats from Pell Research or the Gallup Poll. As a pastor doing premarital counseling, I was stunned by how many Evangelicals had already engaged in premarital sex prior to their wedding. I was even more surprised when I found young people who were still virgins. I was flabbergasted by how many Evangelical men, in my churches were hooked on pornography. How many marriages in the church had experienced infidelity, and how many parishioners had been unbiblically divorced and remarried. I counseled many married couples who had not engaged in sex for months or years. Then, when I got to Naples, I saw something even more surprising. Christian Baby Boomers—widows, widowers, divorcees—who were engaged in sex outside of marriage and even moving in together without the benefit of marriage. So, when we violate those parts of God’s design for marriage, wouldn’t you say that we’ve lost our credibility when it comes to speaking to the more radical behavior of our next generation kids? We need to get it back.

## **3. We need to combine our convictions with compassion.**

This is critical: we don't have to love the sin, but we must love the sinner. Jesus ate with prostitutes, but he never affirmed their lifestyle. Amy Grant is right to want to have fellowship with the LGBTQ community. She should be applauded for treating them with gentleness and respect. But, as I will show you shortly, she is wrong to host a same-sex wedding. Her compassion blinds her to her convictions. On the other hand, Rev. Graham is sometimes too harsh, and comes across judgmental in his public statements against homosexuality. His convictions often come without a sense of compassion. I'm not sure I would have taken to Twitter to attack another Christian. The world doesn't need to see Christians calling each other out on social media. When we talk to our children and grandkids, we must avoid name calling, derogatory terms, catty putdowns of LGBTQ folks, or judgmental statements. We should also avoid a holier-than-thou attitude toward those with whom we disagree. Convictions should be wrapped in compassion.

#### **4. Spiritual transformation must come first.**

We repeat this often: every dialogue with others on hot button issues should always lead to the gospel. The greatest hindrance to LGBTQ people coming to Christ is the assumption that they have to commit to changing their lifestyle as a precondition. We often try to talk people out of their bad thinking or sinful behavior. But the flesh can't overcome the flesh. Only the Holy Spirit can transform people. Our job is to point them to Jesus. To call them to ask Jesus into their lives. Then let Jesus do the changing in his time and way, according to his priorities.

#### **5. Make the right choices in difficult situations.**

These are times that try our faith. Christian bakers have to decide whether to make a cake for a gay wedding. Parents have to decide whether to attend a child's same-sex marriage, or whether to let the gay couple stay in their guestroom later on. What do you say when your gay child says, 'If you can't affirm my sexual orientation, or include my gay partner in family gatherings, I'm cutting you out of my life.'? These are just a few of the difficult issues in a season of dizzying changes.

Let's just take on one, and then I will take questions from the studio audience. **What about attending or participating in a same-sex marriage?** This poses an interesting dilemma. If we are really consistent, we would never go to a wedding that doesn't conform to biblical standards: for example, divorced people getting married again out of accord with Scripture or a Christian marrying a nonbeliever. Because every rationale I am about to give for not participating in a same-sex wedding goes for those too. Case in point: you might not go to a same-sex wedding Amy Grant is throwing for her lesbian niece, but



would you have gone to her wedding to Vince Gill 23 years ago? (It does get dicey!)

**1) I am more than an attender. I am a participant.**

No one is just a spectator. Everyone is a participant. I may not be the officiant, or the bridesmaid, or the decorator, or cake maker, or even hosting it like Amy Grant, but I am a witness. And, by my participation as a follower of Jesus, I am a witness to who he is and what he believes.

So, by attending a same-sex wedding, I tacitly endorse this particular union and also endorse the notion that two women (or men) actually can get married. I cannot in good conscience go because I cannot endorse same-sex marriage (SSM).

I love and live by the ethics of Jesus. Would Jesus be in attendance? He was a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Though unconditional, his love was not static. Beginning with acceptance, he moved into challenge, as seen with Zacchaeus. He could go to supper with that gangster and other tax collectors. But he never went down to their tax collectors' booths and helped them extort money. He sat at table with prostitutes, but he never went down to the red light district and pimped for them. I can invite a gay couple to my home for supper, or go to theirs, but it would be quite another thing to participate in a wedding that violates everything God says about marriage.

Furthermore, I cannot in good conscience attend a same-sex wedding precisely because I love my gay friends or family members and want their best. I believe all sin damages. My sin damages me as their sin damages them. How can I celebrate what I believe harms them? And, how can I attend their wedding and frown, or not come up during the reception and congratulate them? Why should I attend and throw cold water on their celebration? That's not compassion. On the other hand, if I go and smile, nod in agreement, and congratulate them, I am displaying approval. That would be a public denial of my convictions.

And same-sex weddings are just another step in a succession of marital perversions. Waiting in the wings could be polyamorous marriages. How will people respond to wedding invitations from the excited trio? Research by sociologist Mark Regnerus indicates that "churchgoing Christians who support same-sex marriages are more likely to think . . . adultery [and] polyamory . . . are acceptable." I saw a news report the other day where a woman had a wedding, where she got married to herself. Would you go to that ceremony? Or to one where someone wed a cat or dog? I assure you: stranger things are on the way.

**2) I must gently and respectfully decline.**

It would be easiest to come up with some lame excuse as to why I can't attend. But their B.S. meter would probably sniff that out. It's better to decline with a gentle and respectful expression of why I can't attend, vulnerable and understated, free of smugness and distance. I must assure them of my love and friendship for them, while letting them know that I can't deny my friendship and loyalty to Jesus. If they protest that I am not accepting them for who they are, I must ask them to accept me for who I am.

Of course, I may lose their friendship. That's the risk of following Jesus. I might become a pariah in my family. But Jesus warned me that following him just might make that happen. THE WAY OF THE CROSS IS NEVER EASY.

[For the question and answer period, please go to our Legacy Imperative YouTube channel to find our Hot Button videos—My Body, My Choice: Sex and Marriage in a Woke Culture]

*A talk given by Dr. Robert Petterson, Founder and President of Legacy Imperative Inc [legacyimperative.org] in his "Sharing Jesus in a 'Woke' Culture" series at Covenant Church of Naples, FL.*