

REL C 200: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Part 1 Transcript

[00:00:00] **TY MANSFIELD:** Welcome to the next segment. In this segment, we're going to deal with some of the more complex social issues, and sometimes in the social science and other sciences, that have to do with sexual and gender minorities. This unit is understanding sexual and gender minority issues including same-sex attraction, same-sex marriage, and to some degree gender dysphoria or transgenderism, and what Church leaders have said about that—how that relates to the doctrine of the Church.

[00:00:30] These are some of the issues that more and more young people are addressing or struggling with. And if not personally wrestling with faith and/or sexual identity, if you don't already love somebody who has wrestled with these issues, you're going to love somebody at some point in the future who's wrestling with this. Self and identity and figuring out who we are and where we fit, because we all have this hunger to belong and a hunger to connect, these are really core issues to who we are.

[00:01:03] As the LGBT movement has grown in the United States and throughout the world, there are more and more people who are wrestling with questions about these issues. It's going to be important to try to tease out what is the doctrine saying, where is culture, and how do we sit in that? And one of the things that's going to be challenging, and that everyone's going to wrestle with, that Church leaders wrestle with, is that there is a tension between two core goods and two core needs.

[00:01:36] One of those is teaching doctrine and the other is personal ministry. How do we understand truth, and how do we sit with people who are wrestling with the complexities of mortality in a number of different ways? And sometimes Church leaders teach truths or teach certain ideas that may not seem as compassionate as we would like, but they're not necessarily speaking in the context of personal ministry. They're just speaking to truths that they feel called by God to reinforce, re-establish, and sometimes that may come across as a little cold.

[00:02:15] And, on the other side, we have personal ministry. And sometimes with personal ministry the Lord is saying, “Shut your mouth, you don’t need to say anything.” This is about just sitting with people that you love and being with them and helping them to feel you. They want to feel. They want to be heard, and they want to be known, and that kind of thing. There’s a prominent Mennonite minister who said that “To be heard and to be loved are so close that they are often indistinguishable.” The ministry side is how do we be with people, and there is no truth in that. It’s about relationships, not facts or doctrines.

[00:03:02] And sometimes Church leaders have wrestled with this. I’ll share a statement here in a moment from President Oaks where he says that what he calls the paradox between love and law is something that they struggle with and that we’re going to struggle with. There’s always a tension there. They are both goods, and they are both important, and yet sometimes we can err on one side or the other, and it’s going to require all true Latter-day Saints to learn how to hold both of those goods, both of those principles—divine principles—in healthy gospel-consistent ways.

[00:03:47] So for this section, we’re going to talk specifically about teaching doctrine. Actually, I’m going to share a quote, and then we’ll go into teaching doctrine. So this is a statement, that just talks about this tension, from President Oaks, and he said this. It was a BYU Idaho address last year. He says this: “Jesus commanded us to love our neighbors and also to keep the commandments. Similarly, He commanded us ‘to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,’ and also to ‘love one another.’ Some see a contradiction in these two commandments—to ‘love one another’ but to keep the commandments, which means to follow God’s laws. Those who honor God’s commandments may be seen as not having love for those who do not follow His laws. Conversely, reaching out in love and kindness can sometimes be seen as condoning choices that are contrary to God’s laws. However, these seemingly contradictory ideals are in fact a paradox. Not only can we follow both directives of the Lord, but in finding an appropriate balance we can live out both principles in a deeper, more complete way.”

[00:04:59] The thing that's key here is that a paradox is two seemingly opposing truths. They're both true, but they seem to exist in tension, or perhaps conflict, with each other, and yet still remain true. So he's talking about how do we live in an optimal tension between these two ideas without erring on one side or the other? We can talk about commandments and laws in cold ways that are completely unempathic of the lived experience of other people. Or we become so empathic that we just want to say, kind of the morally relative approach, "This is his truth or her truth or there is no truth." Whatever works, whatever makes you happy, is a kind of moral relativism that is spiritually harmful. People err on one side or the other, and we have to learn how to hold both of those.

[00:05:54] But President Oaks goes on, "The balancing I have described is not easy. Experience teaches that when we seek to keep all of the commandments in our personal lives, we are sometimes accused of having no love for those who don't. When we show personal love and support loving causes, we are sometimes misunderstood," and he's speaking of the brethren, "as implying support for results that contradict our other commitments."

[00:06:29] Because there has been more and more of an effort. I think historically there's been a little bit more of a focus on teaching doctrine and teaching truths. There's been more and more of a focus in recent years on seeking understanding and personal ministry and listening to people, being with people. As President Monson said, and actually I have a slide in another unit, he said, "Never let a problem to be solved become more important than a person to be loved." We have to start with people because we're all brothers and sisters. You, all of us, the Church leaders, may at one time or another struggle in holding these two opposing goods and ideals and truths in optimal tension.

[00:07:23] We have these two truths, these tensions. In this first section, in both this segment and part two of this segment—a separate video, but still part of the same segment—we're just going to be focusing on teaching doctrine. And so I want that to be really clear because we're going to spend time on personal ministry too. Sometimes if you're a person who is struggling with sexual identity or figuring out who you are as a sexual person and negotiating your identity

with God, with faith, with broader cultural movements and whatnot, we want to understand that in a very personal, human, empathic way.

[00:08:05] So we're going to be spending some time with that. First though, we're going to be talking about doctrine, and we have to be very clear about where the doctrine is, and we have to hold to that doctrine even as we have compassion for ourselves and others who may be struggling with these issues, whether as parents, friends, or whether this may be something that you personally are wrestling with.

[00:08:30] Teaching clarifying doctrine. Elder Holland said this: "First, let's be absolutely clear on what God wants for each of us," His children. "He wants us to have all of the blessings of eternal life. He wants us to become like Him. To help us to do that, He has given us a plan. This plan is based on eternal truths and is not altered according to the social trends of the day. At the heart of this plan is the begetting of children, one of the crucial reasons Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden. They were commanded to 'be fruitful, and multiply,' and they chose to keep that commandment. We are to follow them in marrying and providing physical bodies for Heavenly Father's spirit children. Obviously, a same gender relationship is inconsistent with this plan." Now, this is from an Ensign article that he gave, and there's some language here that also overlaps with a Church pamphlet, that the Church created, called "God Loveth His Children." This talk, helping those who struggle with same-gender attraction.

[00:09:37] The context for this statement is those who are wrestling with sexuality, orientation, and identity—be that faith identity or sexual identity—conflicts. So that from Elder Holland, this from President Oaks: "The Book of Mormon teaches that our Savior 'inviteth all the children of men to come into him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile.' Bond—the opposite of free—means more than slavery. It means being bound (in bondage) to anything from which it is difficult to escape. Bond includes those whose freedom is restricted by physical or emotional afflictions. Bond includes those who are addicted to some substance or practice. Bond surely refers to those who are imprisoned by sin—'encircled about' by what another teaching the Book of Mormon calls 'the

chains of hell.' Bond includes those who are held down by traditions or customs contrary to the commandments of God. Finally, bond also includes those who are confined within the boundaries of other erroneous ideas. The prophet Joseph Smith taught that we preach to 'liberate the captives.'"

[00:11:02] There are a lot of broader popular cultural social trends, social sexual identity movements, gender identity movements, that the brethren are seeing as cultural movements with cultural ideas and cultural narratives that have increasingly saturated the thinking in popular culture and to some degree thinking in the Church. Or at least among Church members, and they're trying to speak into this, and that's a challenge when a lot of the broader cultural ideas seem very appealing.

[00:11:40] We have to understand that this isn't just about liberation from woundedness or sin. It's about if we're going to live the gospel well, if we're going to root deeply, we have to shed bad ideas, and that can be very hard. We have to really root and ground in the doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ so that we don't succumb to bad ideas. Even as attractive as they might sound.

[00:12:12] This from Elder Kristofferson: "Some even suppose that those standards will someday change," speaking of chastity. "That is simply not true . . . The law of chastity has applied since the very beginning, when the Lord commanded a man to leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife and to none else. Our doctrine—not just belief, but doctrine—that sexual relations are only appropriate and lawful in the Lord's eyes between a man and a woman legally and lawfully married is unchanged and will never change."

[00:12:53] I want to be really sensitive about this because there are people who believe that there is going to be a change in the Church somehow similar to the changes in policy around no longer practicing plural marriage, the changes that occurred with race and priesthood. Those are two fundamentally different changes based in whole different sets of assumptions and principles and concepts.

[00:13:19] But there is this idea that the Church's teachings on sexual morality are going to go the way of plural marriage, blacks in the priesthood. And Church leaders are continuing to try to reinforce, "You need to prepare yourself for the fact that this is just not true. This is not going to change, and it's not going to be like that." And so here we are, they're grounding us, trying to reinforce, or at least help us deepen our roots in, the doctrinal principles that are really foundational to our faith as much as we continue to maintain compassion and empathy, either for those who disagree or for people who may choose various different lifestyle paths.

[00:14:06] Next, there's another statement from a very well-respected Christian author, N. T. Wright. He's sort of seen as the C. S. Lewis of today. C. S. Lewis had *Mere Christianity*. He has a book called *Simply Christian* and then another book called *Simply Jesus*. Very well-respected theologian, Christian author, Christian writer. In a book called *Simply Christian*, he makes a statement, and in this statement he's speaking to the broader Christian church, to the Christian world. In many ways, some of the culture or the trends that he speaking to are things that we see in the Church as well.

[00:14:53] He says this: "We have lived for too long in a world, and tragically even in a church . . .," speaking to the broader Christian church, "where the wills and affections of human beings are regarded as sacrosanct or right or correct as they stand, where God is required to command what we already love and to promise what we already desire. The implicit religion of many people today is simply to discover who they really are and then try to live it out—which is, as many have discovered, a recipe for chaotic, disjointed, and dysfunctional humanness. The logic of cross and resurrection, of the new creation which gives shape to all truly Christian living, points in a different direction. And one of the central names for that direction is joy: the joy of relationships healed as well as enhanced, the joy of belonging to a new creation, of finding not what we already had but what God was longing to give us."

[00:15:57] So here we are in a broader cultural context that all of you have lived and grown in. There's a concept in more philosophical terms called expressive individualism. And you see this sort of playing out in different ways within the broader popular cultural trends, media

narratives, et cetera, where this idea of what it means to live true to who you really are—and who you are, who you really are—is a philosophical question, not a scientific one.

[00:16:30] Some people might say, “Who I am is what I feel.” Some people might say, “Who I really am is what I believe and what I value.” If I’m trying to be true to who I am as a son of God or a daughter of God, that might mean something different than being true to who I am in terms of living out something that I feel or desire that may or may not be in the best long-term interest.

[00:17:00] Elder Holland once said, “You can have what you want or you can have something better.” And his invitation to us, Elder Holland’s invitation, is that if we want something better, we have to believe and live for something higher than just what’s happening in the current.

[00:17:16] And this is the trend that N. T. Wright is speaking to—that we want a God who tells us we can have whatever we already want and that wouldn’t make us, wouldn’t ask us, to sacrifice or to do hard things. But that’s not the God that we worship. The God that we worship asks us to have a vision, for “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

[00:17:43] We have to believe in something higher. We have to trust in something higher. That requires being anchored in something more transcendent, or we have to root through or cut through a lot of the cultural interference and the cultural static to really understand what those doctrines and principles are and live them out in spirit-filled, life-giving ways.

[00:18:04] In our culture, we often think of being single as synonymous with being lonely and isolated, and that is simply not true. There are some very lonely married people. So we have to change how we think about what it means to be single and what it means to be married and what our rights or entitlements are. Because if we think that the ultimate good and ultimate entitlement of life is romantic partnership, that’s going to affect the choices that we make in this life and may at times cause us to make choices that are contrary to the doctrines and commandments of God. That was N. T. Wright.

[00:18:40] This from Elder Bednar: “The eternal importance of chastity can only be understood within the overarching context of our Heavenly Father’s plan of happiness for His children. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a single, undeviating standard of sexual morality: intimate relations,” sexual relations, “are proper only between a man and a woman in the marriage relationship prescribed in God’s plan. Such relations are not merely a curiosity to be explored, an appetite to be satisfied, or a type of recreation or entitlement to be pursued selfishly. They are not a conquest to be achieved or simply an act to be performed. Rather, they are in mortality one of the ultimate expressions of our divine nature and potential and a way of strengthening emotional and spiritual bonds between husband and wife.”

[00:19:43] This is the undeviating standard. Church leaders are not going to change on this. The Church is not going to change on this, and we have to really gain a testimony and become converted to that truth even as we continue to have compassion and empathy for those who may think differently or believe differently or live differently.