

REL C 200: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Part 2 Transcript

[00:00:00] **TY MANSFIELD:** This video is still part of the same segment. We're talking about this idea of teaching and clarifying doctrine as one of these two ultimate goods that we have to hold in tension. Teaching doctrine, teaching truth, personal ministry. Loving our neighbor, like loving God and living God's law, with loving our neighbor wherever they might be in their own journey of seeking to understand and live out truth.

[00:00:29] There's a statement here. There was a talk. Former Dean of Religious Education Robert Millett. He was a professor here at BYU, religious education, was the dean. He's retired now, but he was invited to give a talk—an address—in honor of Truman Madsen, who's a very well-respected, well-loved LDS philosopher. In this talk, this Truman Madsen lecture series, he gave a talk on the recovery of eternal man. In this talk, he talked about the changes in the Christian concept of God that took place in the councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon, quoting Evangelical scholars stating this. And the key thing here is this is a statement of Brother Millet also quoting these Evangelical theologians, but the key here is that there's something analogous here that we're going to speak to—to concerns and narratives and ideas about sexuality and gender.

[00:01:40] Brother Millet says this, he says, "What was the result doctrinally" of these changes? "One Christian scholar observed that 'the classical theological tradition became misguided when under the influence of Hellenistic,' or Greek, 'philosophy; it defined God's perfection in static, timeless terms. All change was considered an imperfection and thus not applicable to God. Or as one group of Evangelical Christian scholars has written, 'The inevitable encounter between biblical and classical thought in the early church generated many significant insights and helped Christianity evangelize pagan thought and culture. Along with the good, however, came a certain theological virus,'" and that language is very potent, a theological virus, "'that infected the Christian doctrine of God,'" this God without body parts or passions, "'making it ill

and creating the sorts of problems mentioned above. The virus so permeates Christian theology today that some have come to take the illness for granted, attributing it to divine mystery, while others remain unaware of the infection altogether.”

[00:03:01] Now again, this idea that the Greek world, the Hellenistic classical world, had very specific ideas about God and the universe, and who we are, and where we come from and that sort of thing. That early Christians are trying to evangelize to. There’s a conversation between those two things. What he’s saying is, along with the good, they weren’t just adapting, kind of the spirit of speaking in tongues, speaking to the people according to their own language and tongue. It also changed some of the core Christian conceptions of who God is and who He is to us. The embodied God that does have body parts and passions, and those changes that happen theologically he’s referring to as this theological virus—that we’re going to change ourselves in order to evangelize this broader culture—and that became very problematic for them.

[00:04:10] Today we face some similar cultural tensions. It’s not Greek and Hellenistic philosophy, at least in historic terms, but there are some very specific cultural trends, cultural currents, and narratives that are fundamentally opposed, or at odds with, the gospel of Jesus Christ and to the degree that we abandoned these core principles and these core truths in order to not seem hateful. That becomes something like an ideological, philosophical, theological virus. It is very hard and it requires a high level of maturity, spiritual maturity and emotional maturity, to hold space for both of these truths. To understand and hold to this doctrine. Again, not adopting or adapting to larger cultural currents. Holding to those while being able to be in relationship. I’ve said this before and I’ll say it again: people will tend to err on one side or the other, and spiritual, emotional, intellectual maturity requires being able to hold those in a healthy, proper tension.

[00:05:26] President Oaks said this: “There is so much that we don’t understand about this subject,” referring to same-sex attraction, “that we do well to stay close to what we do know from the revealed word of God. What we do know is that the doctrine of the Church, that sexual activity should only occur between a man and a woman who are married, has not changed and is not changing.” We’ve heard it before. We’re hearing it now. We’re going to hear

again that this is not changing, and we're also going to ramp up the compassion and the love so that people know that we love people wherever they are, even as there is a divine commission and stewardship to continue teaching these divine eternal truths and to not succumb to moral relativism, which is the culture of the day.

[00:06:19] What in the plan of salvation informs our understanding of same-sex attraction? We have to understand and have a testimony of each of these doctrines if—become converted to them. Not just understand their truth, but really feel them and seek to live them out personally and to teach them to others where the Spirit will call us to.

[00:06:38] One, we have to understand the nature and definition of God. We understand the nature of premortal life. The divine nature of the body. The purpose of mortal life, to come here to learn, to develop godly attributes through a number of different challenging circumstances. The role of marriage in that eternal plan. The eternal nature of gender and the indispensable necessity for male and female. The complementary nature of male and female to come together to form a whole. We also understand that God loves all of His children equally and has made provision for all of our happiness, both in this life and in the life to come.

[00:07:24] Same-sex sexual practices are contrary to the commandments and the plan of salvation. Learning how to live the gospel of Jesus Christ with same-sex attraction can be exceptionally difficult. But can and is done by many Latter-day Saints, and there's a growing number of Latter-day Saints who are sharing their stories and being more open because a lot of the voices that we tend to hear are people who have left the Church or people who want to challenge the Church. There's a number of individuals for a long time who just sort of blended in. They didn't really want to be public. They just wanted to blend in. There's a growing number of individuals who are feeling moved upon by the Spirit to share their stories about how they reconcile their own sexuality, same-sex attraction, within their own sense of identity as a person, as a child of God, with their faith and their faith commitments. They're doing that within the current theological doctrinal structure and commitments of the Church.

[00:08:18] We covenanted at baptism to mourn with and comfort our brothers and sisters. Our approach to all should be loving kindness and acknowledgement of their infinite worth. Again, President Monson: “Never let a problem to be solved become more important than a person to be loved.” This is all personal and affects people on a very core, heart level. We also covenanted at baptism to stand as a witness of God and, by extension of his plan, to live out his laws, to promote those truths. So it’s hard. These are the principles that we’ve all covenanted to—that we have to seek to live out and understand and have a testimony of, become converted to. That’s going to be very difficult in your journey to becoming a spiritually, emotionally, intellectually mature disciple of Jesus Christ and to be able to live that out in the world on campus, as you leave BYU, et cetera.

[00:09:19] Elder Oaks has laid out 11 foundational issues that we need to understand as part of this space of being grounded in truth and living compassionately. So, gender is an essential characteristic of our existence. The purpose of mortal life is to prepare to become like our heavenly parents. Our destiny of eternal exaltation requires eternal marriage between a man and a woman, and that’s not changing. No one will be denied this blessing because of issues outside of their control. Every difficulty, every experience that we have in mortality, or that family members have, or people that we love have is all with purpose and design. They came to earth with a “customized curriculum,” to use Elder Maxwell’s term. A “customized curriculum” that was designed to help them develop and learn Godly attributes. To learn how to have faith, to learn to trust God, to develop a relationship with God, to learn to attune to and respond to the whisperings of the Spirit. These are all the things that we came here to develop the attributes of God. There is not a single experience that someone can have in this life that prevents them from fully living out the eternal plan. That we don’t always know what that’s going to look like for each person, but there’s one plan of salvation and that plan of salvation is for all.

[00:10:44] Every single person, regardless of their individual experiences, if they have faith, will not be denied any blessing either in time or eternity. Although the conditions of mortality can limit our freedom, they cannot deprive us of our agency. Church leaders have also, again, been

very careful to stop using that term. They've noted that term is not scriptural. Agency isn't free. Agency is very costly, right. Discipleship is very costly. Agency is really tied to stewardship more than it is to freedom. We may lose freedom. Somebody in a prison cell has lost certain freedoms, but they have not lost their agency. We have to understand those differences. So there may be certain freedoms that I don't have. I don't have the freedom to feel however I want or to do whatever I want, but I have agency within the domain of circumstances and stewardships that I have in this life. It is essential that we all experience opposition.

[00:11:46] Seven: Satan seeks to get us to misuse our sacred powers of procreation—to discourage marriage and childbearing and to confuse what it means to be male and female. Satan seeks to persuade us to misuse the sacred gift of our body.

[00:12:06] Nine: There is a difference between feelings of attraction and acting on those feelings, particularly sexually, right. That's where that line is that there's no sin in being human. There's no sin in having feelings. There's no sin in being attracted. But there is sin in exercising agency to make choices that are outside the bounds the Lord has set for our stewardships of sexuality, stewardships of gender, to bring back in that language from a previous segment, as we live out the plan of salvation.

[00:12:47] Ten: God desires to bless all of His children with all they choose to receive and will save all who will be saved. Finally, we are required by God to love one another. These are the foundational issues that we all need to understand, accept, gain testimonies of, become converted to. Get a divine witness if you need to, in order to fully live out our stewardships or relate to others in loving ways around sexual and gender issues.

[00:13:19] Elder Oaks also said this. He said, "Some kinds of feelings seem to be inborn. Others are traceable to mortal experiences. Still other feelings seem to be acquired from a complex interaction of 'nature and nurture.'" We're all humans. Being human is a complex, messy experience. "All of us have some feelings we did not choose, but the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that we still have the power to resist and reform our feelings as needed and to assure that they do not lead us to entertain inappropriate thoughts or to engage in sinful

behavior. Different persons have different physical characteristics and different susceptibilities to the various physical and emotional pressures we may encounter in our childhood and adult environments. We did not choose these personal susceptibilities either,” at least in this life, “but we do choose and will be accountable for the attitudes, priorities, behavior, and ‘lifestyle’ we engraft upon them.”

[00:14:21] Being human is far more complex and messy than broader cultural narratives and social trends would have us believe. We have to honor that complexity and have compassion and empathy for that complexity in everyone’s circumstances, while also rooting, grounding in eternal doctrine.

[00:14:43] With regard to transgenderism, the Church leaders have said a lot more on sexuality and sexual identity. In the last few years, there’s been a potent cultural transformation. It’s been a very palpable cultural transformation around transgenderism as well. Elder Oaks made this statement. It was in an interview with the *Salt Lake Tribune* that he and Elder Kristofferson did. But he said this. He said, “Concerning the issue of transgender . . .” or transgenderism, “I think we need to acknowledge that while we have been acquainted with lesbian and homosexuals for some time, being acquainted with unique problems of a transgender situation is something we have not had so much experience with, and we have some unfinished business in teaching on that.”

[00:15:32] There’s historically been a lot more clarity, and that language may feel a little awkward, but it was very extemporaneous. It’s not something that he published. He was responding to an extemporaneous question with an extemporaneous answer. That’s how he answered that off the cuff. The church leaders are continuing to think through and work through a lot of these issues, looking at what is people’s lived experience with the human complexities and having to have compassion for that while also pushing against social trends, which are different or can make it more difficult, even, for people to address real human issues and challenges that they may experience personally. That’s another issue that he struggled with and that he’s spoken to in a number of addresses, particularly recently. So, that from Elder Oaks.

[00:16:32] Now this statement from Elder Ballard. A general conference address—a little harder, but I think it’s also important to hear what Church leaders have said on this. He’s speaking specifically to some of the cultural trends or beliefs or ideas around homosexuality. The talk was on being wary of false prophets. He said this—he said, “Let us be aware of false prophets and false teachers, both men and women . . . Beware of those who speak and publish in opposition to God’s true prophets and who actively proselyte others with reckless disregard for the eternal well-being of those whom they seduce . . . Now let me give you a few examples of false teachings of those who read by the lamps of their own conceit,” again, this is strong language. It’s hard language, and here it is from an apostle of the Lord. “Though ‘ever learning’ are ‘never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.’ False prophets and false teachers are also those who attempt to change the God-given and scripturally based doctrines that protect the sanctity of marriage, the divine nature of the family, and the essential doctrine of personal morality. They advocate a redefinition of morality to justify fornication, adultery, and homosexual relationships. Some openly champion the legalization of so-called same-gender marriages.” Now, this was in 1999. This was before even Massachusetts, the first state in the United States to legalize same-sex marriage, legalized same-sex marriage in Massachusetts and certainly before it became a legal across the United States. To justify their rejection of God’s immutable laws that protect the family, these false prophets and false teachers even attack the inspired proclamation on the family issued to the world in 1995 by the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles.”

[00:18:36] Very, very strong language. We’re over here in this domain of teaching clarifying doctrine. Those that we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators have that stewardship and responsibility to the Church. We, as a Church, have a broader responsibility also to be in loving relationships, and so we’re going to hit that here in just a second. How do we sit in love?

[00:19:01] So finally here, Elder Holland said this in a PBS interview. It was a documentary called *The Mormons*, and he said this in that. He says, “I do know that this will not be a post-mortal condition. It will not be a post-mortal difficulty.” He was responding to the director/producer’s question about the Church’s stance on homosexuality, same-sex

relationships. “I just say to her what I say to people struggling with sexual identity: ‘Hang on, and hope on, and pray on, and this will be resolved in eternity.’ These conditions will not exist post-mortality. I want that to be of some hope to some.” All of the circumstances that we experienced in this life can feel very real and sometimes very painful, and we want to honor and legitimize that for those who are wrestling with these complexities, and we have to do that while also honoring this broader internal plan.