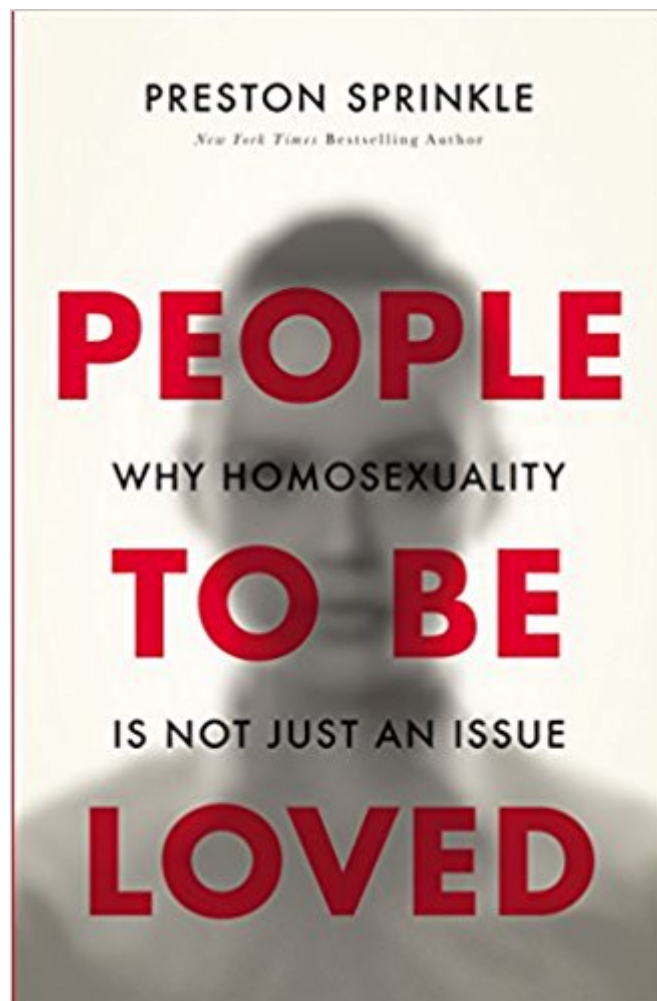




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People To Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just An Issue



Synopsis

Christians who are confused by the homosexuality debate raging in the US are looking for resources that are based solidly on a deep study of what Scripture says about the issue. In *People to Be Loved*, Preston Sprinkle challenges those on all sides of the debate to consider what the Bible says and how we should approach the topic of homosexuality in light of it. In a manner that appeals to a scholarly and lay-audience alike, Preston takes on difficult questions such as how should the church treat people struggling with same-sex attraction? Is same-sex attraction a product of biological or societal factors or both? How should the church think about larger cultural issues, such as gay marriage, gay pride, and whether intolerance over LGBT amounts to racism? How (or if) Christians should do business with LGBT persons and supportive companies? Simply saying that the Bible condemns homosexuality is not accurate, nor is it enough to end the debate. Those holding a traditional view still struggle to reconcile the Bible's prohibition of same-sex attraction with the message of radical, unconditional grace. This book meets that need.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a remarkable book. The tone overflows with love, compassion, and grace. Preston is an exceptional biblical scholar, and as such, his exegesis of Scripture is excellent. As I read, I kept thinking, "Preston really loves the LGBTYQ Community." • This book will be a resource at Transformation Church. -- Derwin L. Gray, Lead Pastor Transformation Church, author of *The High Definition Leader* With the poignant accuracy of a scholar and the passionate heart of a pastor,

Preston challenges Christians to look at the LGBT community from a deeper level. Specifically, he drives home the point that LGBT people in our lives aren't nameless faces, but real individuals that God loves. Each person has a voice, deserves to be listened to, and needs to be valued.

I'm thankful Preston has pushed us further into the tension of grace and truth. -- Caleb Kaltenbach, lead pastor, Discovery Church; author, *Messy Grace*

In his new book, *People to Be Loved*, Preston Sprinkle serves as a trustworthy guide through the debated passages of Scripture that relate to homosexuality. His thoughtful, balanced reflection on the arguments on both sides, as well as his willingness to share with the reader what he has concluded, reflect the kind of "convicted civility" that is often lacking in any discussion of the topic. Sprinkle's approach also models for the Christian a commitment to respectful engagement with others with whom you may disagree. -- Mark A. Yarhouse, PsyD, Professor of Psychology and Rosemarie S. Hughes Endowed Chair, Regent University

In a conversation polarized by hate, fear, and misunderstanding, Preston Sprinkle steps into the fray with a thoughtful, articulate, nuanced, humble, and courageous take on the current debate over sexuality and the Bible. His particular cocktail of professor, pastor, and down-to-earth regular Joe is an intoxicating blend that makes for good reading and even better learning. I'm thankful for Preston and this book. -- John Mark Comer, pastor for teaching and vision, Bridgetown: A Jesus Church in Portland

Preston Sprinkle has a deep reverence for Scripture and a great love for people, meaning this book is not just accessible and lively, but rewarding and compassionate. It deserves to be widely read. -- Sam Allberry, associate pastor, St. Mary's Church, Maidenhead, UK

Preston Sprinkle does conservative Christians a needed service by guiding them into the complexity of biblical interpretation, sexual ethics, and compassionate listening. His meticulous research is applied with an even hand as he affirms and critiques arguments coming from both affirming and nonaffirming Christians, all the while offering wise pastoral counsel to straight and gay alike. Affirming scholars will disagree with various points in his interpretation but there is no question that Sprinkle is going as far as he can go within a nonaffirming viewpoint to move this debate away from the rhetoric of the culture war toward a more productive, respectful, loving conversation. -- Megan K. DeFranza, author, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female and Intersex in the Image of God*

Powerful and accessible, *People to Be Loved* engages top scholarship from all sides of this conversation in a way that's easy to read and down-to-earth, respectfully avoiding straw men while exploring Scripture with conviction and grace. Moreover, Preston models a posture for straight Christians to allow the abuse and mistreatment gay people have experienced to break and reshape us, to let their beauty and dignity draw our eyes to Jesus, and to "front love" as we seek to embody the sacrificial love of our

King for his world. -- Joshua Ryan Butler, pastor, Imago Dei Community (Portland)

Amidst the arguing at fever-pitch comes Preston Sprinkle and *People to Be Loved*. I am grateful for his thoughtful perspective and great desire to love at the risk of being both criticized and marginalized. I pray more people will opt into relationship and conversation with one another in the way Preston has and find deeper friendship and understanding. -- Alan Chambers, author, *My Exodus: From FEAR to Grace*; www.AlanChambers.org

With honesty, empathy and all-too-uncommon grace, Preston Sprinkle contributes brilliantly to the ongoing conversation our culture is having regarding Christianity and sexuality. Preston has done a rare thing: addressing controversial issues and dealing with perplexing questions in a way that is fair and gracious to all participants. This is a refreshing and immensely helpful book in navigating the deep waters of sexual ethics. I highly recommend it! -- Mike Erre, pastor, First Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton

Preston Sprinkle (PhD, Aberdeen) is a teacher, speaker, and New York Times bestselling author. He has written several books including *People to Be Loved*, *Living in a Gray World*, *Charis*, and *Erasing Hell*, which he co-authored with Francis Chan. Preston has held faculty positions at Nottingham University, Cedarville University, and Eternity Bible College. He and his family live in Boise, Idaho, and he currently helps pastors and leaders engage the LGBTQ conversation with thoughtfulness and grace.

In *People to Be Loved*, New Testament professor, Preston Sprinkle, presents the traditionalist case against same-sex relationships. The book is an easy to read, lay level introduction to the six biblical passages on same-sex intercourse (along with a few chapters on related issues). Divided into three primary sections—Old Testament, New Testament, and pastoral issues—the bulk of his discussion is on the Graeco-Roman period and the New Testament. There are pros and cons to the book.

Pros: I love Preston Sprinkle's compassion and desire to listen to LGBT folk. He tends to "get it" more than other conservative writers. For example, I can tell Sprinkle has heard the hearts of those who are gay affirming in way that say, Kevin DeYoung, has not. Sprinkle also demonstrates humility, even acknowledging that it's always possible his views could shift in the future if additional study warrants that. So, even though Sprinkle has a non-affirming position on same-sex relationships, those who disagree with him will appreciate his efforts to befriend and listen.

Surprisingly few books exist from the traditionalist perspective providing a solid discussion of the biblical texts; the ones that do tend to be written by ultra-conservatives who don't typically grasp important nuance to the discussion or can be antagonistic toward LGBT people.

Sprinkle's book is a breath of fresh air in its sensitive approach to the topic. His book generally provides a decent overview of the key biblical passages. Cons: I didn't love this book as much as I had hoped. Having read Sprinkle's blog I had high expectations. I was surprised to see that it took the tired "Let's discuss the six passages on homosexuality" approach. The six passages have been debated ad nauseam. There is serious need for fresh engagement on the topic. He also took a fairly colloquial approach that didn't resonate with me. For example, I really don't want to read the word "hump" (slang for sex) in any book. Given that he is also simultaneously publishing a book on the topic for youth, I expected the "adult" version to be a little more seriously written. The conversational style can lend itself to verbosity. I enjoyed reading Kevin DeYoung's biblical discussion more; it was concise and better stylistically. However, I can't recommend DeYoung's book because the second half is so problematic as to be harmful, in my opinion. In terms of his basic arguments, I don't have too many objections to Sprinkle's main points. He is a good exegete. But I would quibble with the following: Sprinkle's primary argument is that Scripture prohibits same-sex relationships because it violates the importance of sexual difference for marriage. He bases this on the word *kenegdo* in Genesis (corresponding to, standing opposite of), as well as Jesus' reference to Genesis emphasizing male and female in his discussion of marriage/divorce. Sprinkle also refers to Ephesians 5:21-32, interpreting it as saying the relationship between Christ and the church requires a fundamental difference (37). He states "Paul roots sexual difference between man and woman in divine difference within the Triune God" (38). He sees the relationship between man and woman as "equal-yet-different" and that even though woman submits in the way Jesus submitted to the Father, this does not mean inferiority. Sprinkle sounds like a complementarian and seems to blend gender and Trinity in a way similar to other conservative evangelicals like Larry Crabb. There are significant problems with this connection of gender and Trinity. For a quick critique I recommend the online article: "You, Me, and the Heavenly Three?" by Fred Sanders. I also recommend "Eternal Functional Subordination and the Problem of the Divine Will" by D. Glenn Butner, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58 (2015): 131-49. I am not convinced that the Bible portrays the purpose of marriage as existing primarily to teach us something about the Trinity or to be an icon of the Trinity. Much of this argument places too much emphasis on Father/Son without sufficient attention to the Holy Spirit. And it relies on a subordinationist view of the Trinity. It also risks stretching biblical metaphors too far, taking them in too wooden fashion. Sprinkle never fully

clarifies what the sexual difference is. He seems to want to base it primarily on undefined characteristics of masculine and feminine. He doesn't come out and say this. But he minimizes procreation, and therefore, anatomical sexual difference in his argument. I am not sure why he does this except that he seems to understand procreation is not a very compelling argument against same-sex unions in our modern culture. He acknowledges that lack of procreation is the reason many writers in antiquity would have objected to same-sex relationships, but suggests this isn't a reason to concern us now because the ancients gave other reasons also:

Blurring gender distinctions, using your body in a way it wasn't designed, and forcing another man to act like a woman, were among other reasons (67). He minimizes procreation but insists that same-sex relationships are a departure from God's intention in creation and violate gender boundaries, which goes against the way [we] were created as males and females (92). But he is never clear on exactly what this intention in design involves. He emphasizes *para physin* (contrary to nature) as important to the debate, but goes through a lot of trouble of denying this is related to procreation (94). He says if the point is a prohibition against procreative sex then evangelical couples wouldn't be able to use contraception. Here he betrays his modern sensibilities. The Catholic Church is consistent with the history of church tradition in seeing procreation as an important aspect of marriage. This is what Genesis 1 suggests and this is what Christians have held from the beginning (and this is apart from any discussion on the contraception issue--but simply a recognition that procreation is an important aspect). The Reformers softened that somewhat. But really, it was not until modern contraception that it was even possible to conceive of marriage/sex apart from procreation. Absurdly, Sprinkle writes: "Paul discusses marriage and sex quite frequently, and yet he never mentions procreation." As if anyone in antiquity could think of sex apart from procreation! Even today with all our advanced contraception 49% of all pregnancies are unplanned. Unless someone is infertile, procreation is what happens when you have sex, especially in antiquity. Many evangelical Christians have adopted a rather secular modern understanding of marriage "companionship with sanctification thrown in. Procreation is considered peripheral. Sprinkle is no different. Yet, if marriage is essentially about companionship and sanctification, there is no reason to deny same-sex unions. This is why Sprinkle is forced to fall back on a nebulous understanding of sexual differentiation, a differentiation that oddly has nothing to do with what that physical difference primarily results in, namely, procreation. Moreover, Sprinkle leaves out references to *para physin* that point to procreation as the issue. For example Philo, a contemporary of Paul, writes: "Not only in their mad lust for women did they violate the marriages of their

neighbors, but also men mounted males without respect for the sex nature which the active partner shares with the passive; and so when they tried to beget children they were discovered to be incapable of any but a sterile seed. And let the man who is devoted to the love of boys submit to the same punishment, since he pursues that pleasure which is contrary to nature, and since, as far as depends upon him, he would make the cities desolate, and void, and empty of all inhabitants, wasting his power of propagating the species. Sprinkle concludes his discussion of para physin by saying he thinks the term was used to critique same-sex relations as against the design of nature or, in Paul's view against the design and intention of the Creator. The fact that Paul uses para physin in a context saturated with allusions to Genesis 1-2 suggests that this meaning is most likely what Paul has in mind (98). Yet, Genesis 1 clearly ties this design to procreation. And what does it mean that it is against the design and intention of the Creator? The anatomical design is procreative by nature. It's nonsensical to speak of physical design apart from procreation. Ejaculation is physically designed for impregnation. This does not in any way diminish the pleasure aspect of it. Scripture affirms pleasure as part of sex. But, the biblical authors don't, and couldn't possibly, imagine sex without procreation—not a in a world without modern contraception. To suggest otherwise is anachronistic. A second issue I would like Sprinkle to address more clearly is the lack of attention to female-female sex in Scripture. Conservatives typically rely heavily on Genesis and Ephesians to make their case. Yet, many of the passages in Scripture that prohibit same-sex relationships don't discuss sexual differentiation in the manner of Genesis or Ephesians as the rationale. Why not? Why is the focus almost exclusively on men? In contrast Genesis and Ephesians clearly refer to both sexes. Romans might be the primary relevant passage, but even here there can be some issues. For example, Paul seems to assume same-sex desire stems from rejection of God. Yet we know this is not the case. He should also address the fact that Augustine and others interpreted Romans 1 as women having anal sex (perhaps to prevent procreation—the emphasis being on satisfying nothing but passions). He touches on this in a footnote, but it deserves discussion in the main body of the book. He needs to go a little further in examining the heavy emphasis on male sexuality. I suspect it was related to procreative capacity—men wasting their seeds while women were just incubators. It wasn't conceived as really sex between women because no penis or seed was involved. Finally, on the pastoral front, I was disappointed in chapter 10. When he gets to the point of asking what a non-affirming view means for those who are gay, he starts with the suggestion that change is possible. He doesn't come out and endorse orientation change therapy, but he

suggests that it could be successful for some. Then he offers the possibility of mixed orientation marriage, and finally celibacy last. From the beginning of the book, Sprinkle is under the mistaken impression that the number one reason that gay people leave the church is because other Christians are not nice to them. They are rejected. It is true that many leave the church because they have been hurt. But even conservative evangelical churches these days tend to be pastoral in their approach to the issue. It was 20 years ago that Focus on the Family started their Love Won Out conference that began encouraging a pastoral approach (even as they used ex-gay testimonies for political purposes). From my experience and observation over the last couple of decades, the number one reason people end up affirming same-sex relationships is because life-long single celibacy becomes untenable. If you read the testimonies of ex-ex-gays, what you hear over and over is: "I didn't change." Its not that we were necessarily given false promises either. Ex-gay ministry always said it was about holiness and not heterosexuality, but we all wanted heterosexuality because singleness seemed unbearable. The heroic endeavor to live a celibate life becomes more challenging as time goes on. Like many in the conservative church, Sprinkle has not wrestled adequately with the reality of life-long single celibacy. He points to a few celibate gay poster children who say they are making it and life is not miserable. And yes, these do exist. Celibacy is not impossible—at least not for everyone. But, ask a college group of fifty 19 year old Christians to make life-time vows of celibacy, and how many of them do you think would succeed? Never date. Never have children. Never have a companion. No family. Probably not the majority. Celibacy is an unnatural state. We all have a biological drive to couple with another person. Making a vow of life-time celibacy is very difficult and many people do not succeed. And that is essentially what is being asked of gay people. It is not the same thing as a straight person being single. They can date and have the opportunity to marry if someone comes along. It is not hard to say no when no one is available; it is nearly impossible to say no when you meet the love of your life. In this conversation, people need to discuss the reality of celibacy from the perspective of vowed celibacy--not the "I just so happen to be single" heterosexual. Ask the typical heterosexual single if they would be willing to take a life-time vow of celibacy. It feels much much different. This challenge of celibacy has been recognized throughout church history. Paul said if someone could not keep celibacy they should marry. Theologians throughout history who believed that celibacy was superior still acknowledged that marriage was a concession for those who could not achieve it. Martin Luther went so far as to say celibacy was futile and stupid to try. So, I think we need to take an honest look at what our own church tradition has said on celibacy, as well as the realities of what we know about how difficult vowed celibacy is to live out. It may not be possible for everyone to

achieve. No one likes to talk about that or acknowledge it. But we need to at least have the honest conversation. In conclusion, Sprinkle offers a sensitive, caring look at the issue while providing a good overview of key biblical passages--and does so in an accessible manner. However, we have yet to see a book from the traditionalist camp that has caught up with the times in terms of where the gay-affirming conversation is happening. Conservatives tend to take a rule-book, propositional based approach to Scripture. Thus, the primary fixation is on the six biblical passages. But, people are not being persuaded by that argument. The gay-affirming virtue ethics position is compelling and that is not adequately addressed in Sprinkle's book. The conversation needs to start first with a discussion on hermeneutics--"how does one interpret the text and why? And how does one go about appropriating ethics from Scripture? There is an entirely separate conversation in biblical and theological studies on what it means to appropriate ethics from the Bible. The discussion on homosexuality should include that. Moreover, sexual differentiation is the crux of the debate, thus, I would like to see a book that skips discussion on the six passages and focuses on this primary issue. This has not been adequately unpacked. The arguments for why sexual differentiation is so important in our day and age are lacking. Given that sexual differentiation does not have much meaning for many people today, arguing as if it is a given isn't sufficient. And I can already say that a position that tries to rely on the Trinity to make its case is going to fail.

I thought, going into this book, that it would be crap from a young, restless, reformed guy. Even if Sprinkle fits that bill, he must number among the most intelligent and faithful of that crew. I have read many of the books on homosexuality and this is the most Biblically incisive, accessible, and pastoral that I have encountered. The only gripe that I have is that Sprinkle is a bit flip in tone throughout the book, which I was okay with but some may find off-putting considering the serious nature of the topic he addresses. Nonetheless, this is a must read for every pastor and anyone interested in what God (and thus the Bible) says on a divisive issue of our day.

Preston Sprinkle does a great job of framing this book. I liked it so much I've read it multiple times. In today's world, the Church has social issues that it needs to address. Many think these issues cannot be addressed politely, but in *People to be Loved*, Preston does a great job of addressing them in that way. I love the way the discussion starts with the words we use, framing it is a time to listen. If we listen to others, we cannot dehumanize them. Then, it addresses specific Bible verses and his interpretation, which he did with care. Woven throughout is how our posture should be in these discussions. I've read 4 or 5 books on homosexuality and the church, and NONE have been

better than this!

A very thought-provoking and graceful book that addresses one of the most important social issue that the church faces today. It so often saddens me to see how the church and Christians treat and refer to the LGBTQ community. I have personally seen and witnessed pastors stand in the pulpit and mock and ridicule this group of people (I have also walked out while this was happening), while the congregation laughs. This book reminds us that we are the body of Christ and we are called to love, without judgment. Thanks, Preston, for such loving insight and compassion.

While it sounds like a shallow compliment to call this book entertaining, I'm still calling it that. Because I've read three books now, and the best ones are approachable, humble, treat gay people as people who are loved by God who happen to be gay, and are well researched. One of the books was so dry it brought me to tears. So this book was a relief. I felt like we were chatting over coffee in the back room. I suppose my stance matters, so I'll share. I'm on a journey through this whole gay marriage and the church thing. Right now I'm on a trajectory from non-affirming, to reexamining, toward affirming now. Now I am preparing to share this stuff with others. So I'm outlining my own set of affirming vs non affirming observations/conclusions/interpretations for each of the passages, and this book will be my non-affirming set. I believe that Christians and churches in general are great at making outsiders feel welcome, whether they are divorcees, felons, minorities, women, children, goths, slobs, or whatever. They don't even bat an eye to hoarders of wealth or gluttons. But if you're gay, God help you. It's become a line in the sand at so many churches. And the basic argument is, "Isn't the Bible clear on this?" I've even had an acquaintance that I respect say that he knows all about the subject, but thinks that reading a book about it is unnecessary. "The Bible is all I need." Well, whatever your position, you should read this book. It's entertaining, at least. :)

Whether you agree with his conclusions, you cannot doubt for one iota his compassion and love towards all.

Great book a must read.

This is perhaps the first step for some people trying to understand and reach across the aisle. I'll give it credit for making the first step, but there's much work to be done.

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