

*Appendix A*  
*Original 1994 Missouri Presbytery Report*

**FAITHFULNESS TO GOD'S STANDARDS:  
THE LORD'S CALLING TO HOMOSEXUALLY-INCLINED CHRISTIANS**

A report in three parts presented to the Missouri Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America by its appointed *ad hoc* committee charged with guiding the Presbytery in responding to a particular Session's question, namely, whether monogamous, life-long and loving partnerships formed by homosexual couples professing an evangelical faith in Christ should be accommodated by the church.

On June 20, 1994, at a specially called meeting, the Missouri Presbytery:

- 1) adopted **the Summary Statement** in this report "as the substance of its advice on the question raised" by the petitioning Session;
- 2) adopted a recommendation "to commend **the Arguments** [section of this study] as consistent with the teaching of the Word of God and our doctrinal standards;" and
- 3) adopted a recommendation "to commend to the Session **the Appendices** [attached to this report] as useful information for their consideration."

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**FAITHFULNESS TO GOD'S STANDARDS:  
THE LORD'S CALLING TO HOMOSEXUALLY-INCLINED CHRISTIANS**

**Part 1: Summary Statement**

On June 20, 1994, at a specially called meeting, the Missouri Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America adopted **the Summary Statement** “as the substance of its advice on the question raised” by the petitioning Session.

# **I. Formulation of the Question and Summary of Presbytery’s Answer**

## **Question**

While all the elders [in the petitioning congregation] acknowledge that promiscuous homosexual behavior is censurable, there is difference of opinion about lifelong, committed homosexual partnerships. The central issue could be framed this way:

What kind of homosexual behavior in a Christian professing the evangelical faith should be regarded by the church as censurable, that is, as behavior whose practice and defense constitutes a serious compromise of the loyalty to Christ they have professed and therefore warrants a sympathetic but firm discipline?

Is all homosexual behavior censurable, on the grounds that what constitutes it illicit is that it is *genital*? Or, is only “sleeping around” homosexual behavior censurable, on the grounds that what constitutes it illicit is that it is *promiscuous*?

## **Answer**

We reject the following judgment of Sir Kenneth Dover, widely regarded as having written the most thorough work on homosexuality among the Greeks:

No argument which purports to show that homosexuality in general is natural or unnatural, healthy or morbid, legal or illegal, in conformity with God's will or contrary to it, tells me whether any particular homosexual act is morally right or morally wrong . . . . Any act may be—to me, or to any other individual—aesthetically attractive or aesthetically repulsive. Any act may be committed in furtherance of a morally good or morally bad intention. Any act may have good or bad consequences. No act is sanctified, and none is debased, simply by having a genital dimension.

Greek Homosexuality,  
Preface, p. viii (1978)

What our study of the biblical texts reveal, what our doctrinal standards concur in, and what was summarized in the most recent General Assembly pronouncement on the matter (the 1993 letter to President Clinton) is that what is morally objectionable about homoerotic relationships doesn't simply have to do with questions of motivation (whether they proceed from lust or love), or their social character (whether monogamous or promiscuous), but rather with their intrinsic character as involving same-gender intercourse, since this represents a confusion and twisting of God's created order and boundaries for sexual expression. It is a distortion of Scripture to abstract the principle of “fidelity to one partner” from the man-and-woman-in-marriage context in which that principle is embedded everywhere in the Word. *Hence, our conclusion is that what constitutes homosexual behavior censurable is that it is illicit not merely on the grounds of being promiscuous, but on the grounds of being genital.* As our exegesis will show, those who reject this conclusion have not made their case from the Word of God.

God's order for us, constituted by the very structure of what he judged to be good at creation, is heterosexual desire, love, and commitment; and the chief boundary within which he instructs us to find true, human sexual fulfillment is the public institution of marriage.

We acknowledge that homosexual partnerships can be motivated by love and not merely by a crass desire to use the other person only for sexual gratification. Nevertheless, it is a misplaced love, springing, as it does, from a disordered desire. As such, it cannot truly fulfill the deep human desire for security and intimacy that finds at least a substantial satisfaction, according to the will of God, in heterosexual marriage. This, more than the general looseness of the times, is the likely explanation of the phenomenal rate of fidelity-failure among homosexual couples.

While homoerotic desire as well as behavior is the result of the Fall, homosexually-oriented men and women who bow before Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior should never be treated as second-class citizens within the church. They should be accepted with open arms as fellow victors in Christ's defeat of sin, death, and the devil at the cross, and as fellow combatants in the ongoing battle to bring that victory into fullness in the world and in our own lives. These believers need—and love demands that we give them—patience, real understanding, and sympathy. This will be especially true in situations where exclusively homosexual desire is persistent and where marriage, therefore, with all of its blessings and pleasures, will be an unlikely prospect. Especially there, we must appreciate the sense in which remaining loyal to Christ may entail deep suffering, and should give to that brother or sister the same sympathy and support that we are called to give heterosexual believers for whom also the call to sexual fidelity may involve profound suffering: those who are single, or sexually incapable, or plagued with sexual obsessions, or who find their affections wandering, or those who must endure a difficult marriage. Particularly important will be the church's determination to help Christians who continue to struggle with homosexual desire learn to develop deep, but non-erotic same-sex friendships. The church also has to do better at building a real sense of community within its congregations to help offset the loneliness that so often besets single people.

In pastoring Christians who feel homosexual desire, we must acknowledge that it may well be that they will battle with this to one degree or another for the rest of their lives. Sexual urges and temptations do not disqualify someone from heaven; complete surrender to them does. Most writers on spirituality throughout church history have dealt with the topic of “besetting temptation” or “besetting sins”—those areas of our lives in which we struggle most intensely to see the power of God transform us. We have included a brief discussion in the Arguments on how some of the Puritans handled besetting sin. We cite here one illuminating quotation from that section:

[Whatever is a person's] besetting sin in a state of nature will most generally remain so when he is in a state of grace; with this difference only, that in the former case it has the entire ascendancy over him—in the latter it meets with continual checks and is not suffered to have dominion.

This is not to say that there cannot be substantial healing for those afflicted with homosexual desire. The testimony of many Christians is that the Holy Spirit has, indeed, been at work in them transforming such desires. However, we must also take seriously the testimony of other believers that this is an area that they have struggled with well into their mature Christian years.

But to accommodate homoerotic partnerships in the church in the name of mercy, or in the name of justice for the weak, on the grounds of the inevitability of their failing to keep God's norm of chastity or marriage, is, in fact, to set up a new norm beside that established by Christ through his inspired apostles; it is to quench the power of the Holy Spirit who, as Paul himself teaches us, perfects Christ's power in us through the very weaknesses we find so difficult to

endure; and it is to compromise the integrity of the church which, as the bride of Christ, is called to live not only in the joyful freedom of the forgiveness of sins, but also in the serious determination to turn away from what is evil in order that she may please her Lord by striving to be pure for him, and by representing—in her corporate life and in the individual lives of her members—his holy character to the unbelieving world.

Only if we can demonstrate that the apostles do not clearly call Christians to sexual fidelity in the form either of heterosexual marriage or chastity in their preaching of Christ, can we theologically justify a new sexual norm that would allow us to accommodate homosexual partnerships. But such lack of clarity has not been, and we believe cannot be, demonstrated—whether exegetically or theologically. The apostolic teaching, as the historic church has understood it, stands as a fixed point for us in our great need of divine guidance about the place and purpose of sex.

But in answering this way the question whether there ought to be church discipline for homosexual practice, including such acts between committed homosexual couples, we recognize with shame that other sins deserving of it are too rarely or too inconsistently disciplined in Presbytery's churches.

There are cultural factors behind this failure, including the widespread practice of sexual sin of every kind, the everyday occurrence of divorce on extra-Biblical grounds, and more fundamentally, our society's pursuit of individual freedom and happiness. We must all acknowledge that our expectations of believers in their obedience to God's commands and our consequent reluctance to practice discipline have been shaped by this cultural context.

We recognize also that in a society where there is little loyalty to any institution, including the church, people move to another church very quickly if even the hint of censure, let alone discipline, is raised.

Beyond these factors there is the challenge of Scripture which sets before us a high level of commitment to one another, a self-sacrificing love, and what Francis Schaeffer called an “orthodoxy of community” as the only setting in which faithful and effective church discipline can take place. Are we ready to be first, as elders of Christ's church, in spending ourselves for our congregations in the costly way that Scripture demands of us?

With this sobering call before us we acknowledge that God's Word does indeed demand that we practice discipline. But for what kinds of sin? We have to humbly bow before God in the recognition that we are all sinners in thought, word and deed. We are to teach God's commandments with a view to restraining sin in its many forms, including sins of the heart. Yet, we are not to exercise formal discipline against all sins.

There are, in addition, disputable matters where believers have genuine and deeply felt differences of opinion about what obedience to God in the details of their lives means, or about doctrinal matters that either are themselves unclear in Scripture or else not essential to the integrity of the gospel. Discipline is not appropriate in these areas either.

When we examine the Scriptures we discover that it is persistent and flagrant sins of speech and behavior that call forth God's requirement of discipline. Sins which offend against the Ten Commandments, such as: idolatry, slave-trading, adultery, fornication, homosexual practice, theft, dishonest business practice, gossip. These are offenses which destroy the possibility of fulfilling the two great commandments to love God and to love my neighbor. Here, where the

heart of the Law is exposed, the Lord asks us to train his church in righteousness with the faithful and chastening practice of discipline.

When should discipline be introduced? Will we immediately discipline on the first rumor of flagrant sin? Of course not. The Apostle Paul teaches us that discipline is for professed believers, not for unbelievers, and so we must be careful not to drive the seeker of truth away

or prevent an unbeliever from hearing the gospel in our zeal to uncover and denounce sin. With the professing believer, too, we will seek the direction of the Word and the Spirit as we teach and apply the Scriptures to their life. God sanctifies his people over time, not all at once. Calvin's wise pastoral advice is helpful to us here:

Just as we deservedly censured Plato . . . because he imputed all sins to ignorance, so also ought we to repudiate the opinion of those who suppose that there is deliberate malice and depravity in all sins. For we know all too well by experience how often we fall despite our good intention. Our reason is overwhelmed by so many forms of deception, is subject to so many errors, dashes against so many obstacles, is caught in so many difficulties, that it is far from directing us aright. (Institutes, 11.2.25)

We are to devote ourselves to teaching, encouraging, persuading, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, that Christians may grow into the likeness of God. It is the stubborn and persistent sinner who ignores the faithful teaching of God's Word, the patient counsel of wisdom and the sacrificial love of brothers and sisters in the Lord—this is the one who is to be disciplined, not the believer who struggles to do what is right, who sometimes falls into sin, who agonizes over failures, and who seeks for counsel and help.

When we practice discipline it must be applied in humility, in love, in prayer and with tears. It is only those who are spiritual who are able to restore someone who is overtaken in sin. If we are willing to discipline we must also be willing to provide the practical support and help which will aid our erring brother or sister in turning away from that which displeases God.

We ought also to pay careful attention to the steps which Scripture lays out for us: going once alone, then a second time with one or two others, then as a Session, and only when these have failed, disbarring the unrepentant sinner from the communion of the Lord's Supper and eventually from the social fellowship of the body. Even when such extreme action has to be taken however, the offender should always be welcome to public worship so that, sitting under the ministry of the Word in the midst of the worshipping congregation, their hearts might be convicted and moved to contrition. And when God grants that, let the church indeed celebrate it!

Scripture demands that we discipline stubborn and persistent disobedience to God's commandments in other areas as well. Will we heed the Word of God and begin to rebuke malicious gossip, unjust business practice, easy divorce and the other sins which require the same discipline that homosexual practice does? Are we willing to proclaim with open arms the gospel of grace to sinners of every kind and to call them to repentance as we serve them in love? These are the challenges God's Word and our Confession set before us.

## **II. Exposition of Presbytery's Answer**

The traditional understanding of the Christian church that sexual intercourse is rightly confined to the covenant relationship established by heterosexual marriage is grounded in the clear and uniform teaching of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> Although this proposition has been challenged in the wake of the sexual revolution, the various attempts to reinterpret the biblical teaching meet with stubborn resistance on the part of the texts themselves (see section on exegesis). The forgiveness of sins which the church proclaims in the gospel includes some quite specific content when it comes to sexual conduct. Since it is good news to know what one is actually being cleansed of by the blood of Christ, the church is most helpful when biblical norms are presented without compromise in announcing the grace of God in Christ to sinners.

We hardly need to be reminded that in the sexual sphere as in all others, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Nor is sexual sin to be regarded as the only or supreme transgression for which we are called to repentance. Consider the climactic "abomination" of Proverbs 6:16-19.<sup>2</sup>

There are six things the Lord hates,  
seven that are detestable to him:

    haughty eyes,  
    a lying tongue,  
    hands that shed innocent blood,  
    a heart that devises wicked schemes,  
    feet that are quick to rush into evil,  
    a false witness who pours out lies,  
    *and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.* (emphasis added)

And we ought to remember the context of Isaiah's free offer of the gospel, the call to repentance issued to "Sodom and Gomorrah," Isaiah's provocative metaphor for disobedient Israel:

Wash and make yourselves clean.  
Take your evil deeds out of my sight!  
Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!

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<sup>1</sup> In Berkhof's terminology, it rests on the first degree of the analogy of faith, the positive analogy, founded immediately upon multiple passages of Scripture where the teaching is clear and positive. L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960) 164. For the proper use of the analogy of faith ("Interpret Scripture as a whole in the light of all of its parts") in regard to the issue of "slavery" (the same word can be used to denote institutions that are morphologically distinct, e.g., indentured servitude, forced reparation as a consequence of war, commercial or chattel slavery) see Appendix 1, "The Analogy of Faith and Slavery." See also, for a helpful discussion of the biblical view of slavery, "The Kingdom and Slavery: A Test Case for Social Ethics," Guenther Haas. (*Calvin Theological Journal*. 28 (1993) 74-89). For homosexual practice there are no such "countervailing" texts; the norm of heterosexual marriage is uniform from the creation narrative in Genesis to the vision of the new Jerusalem "as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" in the book of Revelation.

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word translated "detestable" in the NIV ("abomination" in the KJV) is to'ebah, also used in Proverbs for a unjust business practices (11:1) and acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent (17:15). It is scandalous when Christians use the term "abomination" only in condemnation of the sin designated to'ebah in Lev 18:22 and 20:13. Equally to be faulted is the current tendency to make no distinction between violation of the food laws and violation of the sex laws on the grounds that Leviticus labels both "abomination." Actually a different word, sheqets is used for the former (Lev 7:21 and ch. 11, passim). Whereas to'ebah is used for both ritual and moral purity, sheqets is used exclusively in the cultic sense. Cf. Isa 66:17, Ezek 8:10.

Seek justice,  
    encourage the oppressed.  
Defend the cause of the fatherless.  
    plead the cause of the widow.

Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord.

Though your sins are like scarlet,  
    they shall be as white as snow. (Isa. 1:16-18.)

According to Jesus' definitive perspective on the law, the weightier matters which we are to make our primary concern and diligently practice are *justice*, *mercy*, and *fidelity* (Mt 23:23; cf. Mic 6:8, "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"). In concentrating for the moment on fidelity, and that in the one specific area of sexuality, it is necessary to bear in mind the full scope of the Christian calling in order to maintain a due sense of proportion when dealing with sexual issues, and especially to remember the requirements of justice and mercy as well as fidelity in relating to homosexual persons in the name of Christ.

The mandate given by Christ to the church to disciple the nations involves a twofold process: "baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20). Baptism marks the entrance into covenant relationship with the triune God and membership in the community founded on the death and resurrection of Christ and committed to him as Savior and Lord. The community of the faithful grows in grace as the Holy Spirit works by and with the Word to produce loving obedience to the law of Christ, which is his direction for the way of life that is pleasing to God and truly fulfilling for human beings made in his image. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the believing community's celebration in worship of that covenant relationship secured for believers forever by Jesus. This celebration and holy remembrance of Christ's pain suffered for us at the cross takes place in the very presence of the risen, reigning Christ who comes to his people by the power of the Holy Spirit. Whereas baptism is the rite of *initiation*, the Lord's Supper is the rite of *participation* in the covenant promises and in the very life of God. God has given us the sacrament of the Lord's Supper not only for the magnifying of his grace in the eyes of his children and the sealing of all the benefits of Christ's death to them, but also, as the Westminster Confession puts it, "for their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto him . . ." (WCF 29.1)

The church's role in discipleship of the faithful is to a large degree fulfilled by nurture in preaching and teaching the Word, whether publicly or privately administered. As Paul reminded Timothy, the holy Scriptures are able to make us wise for salvation—not simply conversion but the whole process of renewal—through faith in Christ Jesus. "All Scripture," he continues, "is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Faithful ministry of the Word teaches us what we need to know for our salvation and the glory of God; exposes our faults, announces our forgiveness, and sets us straight; and trains us in the way of righteousness as, by the Spirit's power, we are enabled more and more to live for God.

In the sphere of sexual sin as well as others, the primary means of discipleship is through the Word bringing about repentance and renewed dedication, comfort and release from guilt for past failures, and dependence upon the Spirit for challenges and temptations in front of us. Thus Paul,

invoking the Word of truth, expects that a Christian who sees nothing wrong with occasionally resorting to a prostitute will have a change of heart when presented with the incongruity of such behavior for a member of the body of Christ (1 Cor 6:15-17). In relation to the Lord's Supper, the church fences the Table and thereby calls the faithful to self-examination in light of the preaching and teaching of the Word, and also excludes unbelievers and the willfully disobedient. Normally that is sufficient for guarding the purity of the body, Christ's bride, and the well-being of individual members.

There are circumstances, however, which call for corrective discipline beyond the ministry of the Word. The proper goals of such discipline are (1) the glory of God, (2) the purity and spiritual health of the body, and (3) the recovery of delinquent members (cf. BCO, §27-3). In practice, it is not wise to pursue all faults by formal discipline; but those which are fundamentally incompatible with profession of the true religion seriously threaten the integrity of the community and may not be overlooked by a responsible leadership.<sup>3</sup>

The New Testament itself provides the paradigmatic example in Paul's call for discipline of the immoral brother on the part of the church at Corinth (1 Cor 5:1-13). The situation is that a man in the church is involved in an ongoing sexual relationship (the force of the present infinitive (*ekein*) with his father's wife (i.e., his stepmother), an instance of sexual immorality (*porneia*) condemned by Jewish and Roman law alike. "The problem is not only the conduct of the incestuous man, but it is the attitude of the congregation in allowing the behavior to continue in the church."<sup>4</sup> Why? Because the glory of God and the general welfare of the body, as well as the spiritual state of the offending individual, are at stake in issues of open sexual immorality. Part of the reason has to do with the nature of institutions.

Human beings flourish in communities where responsibility for the common good is focused by divinely ordained structures or institutions. To cite the formal sociological definition, "an institution is a pattern of expected action of individuals or groups enforced by social sanctions, both positive and negative."<sup>5</sup> Because we both shape and are shaped by the institutions in which we live and have our being, there is all the more reason to seek to have them conform to the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

One very good reason for making an issue of the Corinthian church's tolerance of the on-going incestuous relationship is that, intentionally or unintentionally, it allowed a competing institutional norm to emerge within the fellowship.<sup>6</sup> By allowing incest to be regarded as compatible with the Christian calling, the church was failing in her responsibility to maintain the divinely-ordained community norm. Thus both the glory of God and the wellbeing of the body were at stake in the church's unwillingness to intervene in the situation.

This may help explain why sexual immorality (*porneia*) characteristically heads Paul's "vice lists" in the New Testament (1 Cor 5:10, 5:11, 6:9-11, Gal 5:19, Eph 5:3, 5:5, Col 3:5) or connects

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<sup>3</sup> The conditions which according to the Larger Catechism make some sins a more serious offense before God (i.e., when done against the light of nature, when done against the explicit letter of the law, when not only conceived in the heart but carried out in words and actions, when done deliberately and willfully with delight and continuance) are also relevant in this regard. See Arguments, p. 37, "The Question of Homosexual Sin and the Westminster Standards."

<sup>4</sup> Gerald Harris, "The Beginnings of Church Discipline: 1 Corinthians 5," *New Testament Studies* 37 (1991): 5.

<sup>5</sup> Robert N. Bellah et al., *The Good Society* (New York: Knopf, 1991) 10. Bellah rightly points out: "Institutions are not only constraining but also enabling. They are the substantial forms through which we understand our own identity and the identity of others." *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> For a full discussion, see the article by Gerald Harris cited above.

immediately with the will of God for our sanctification (1 Th 4:3). Marriage and the family are divine institutions designed for human fulfillment, so that one important component of sexual fidelity is maintenance of the community norm of permanent and exclusive heterosexual union. Actions which erode that norm—adultery, desertion, unjust divorce, and all forms of non-marital intercourse—are in the nature of the case serious violations, not only because of the unique bearing of sexual sin on the individual (1 Cor 6:16), but also because of its bearing on the community and its shared institutional expectations and practice. The church is no mere humanly-constructed institution but in its corporate identity is called the Bride of Christ and is given the high privilege of representing to the world the good and faithful character of her Savior.

This is especially relevant to the church's ministry to Christians who are subject to persistent same-sex erotic attraction. Chaste friendships, including deep and intimate same-sex friendships, are not at issue in the call to sexual fidelity. Intimacy and the joint activity of friends are human goods that ought not be denied persons simply because of their sexual orientation. Moreover, the church needs to be particularly sensitive to the suffering entailed by the call to abstinence as the only biblical option for homosexual Christians who feel they are unable to marry.<sup>7</sup> We consider the report adopted by the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod in 1980, entitled, "Pastoral Care of the Repentant Homosexual" to be sound in its theological conclusions and pastorally useful for teaching homosexual Christians how to think about themselves in light of the Word and how to appropriate the power of the gospel for their particular fallen situation.

In calling Christians to honor God's standards for sexual fidelity, it is important to remember the principle so well articulated by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America in its Book of Discipline:

Discipline should be exercised with prudence and discretion, in full dependence upon the guidance of the Spirit of God, *with love for both the Lawgiver and the lawbreaker*. There must be general rules. In applying these to particular cases, all the circumstances must be taken into account, and different action may be called for in similar cases, at different times, for the attainment of the same ends. (1.4, emphasis added.)

And even when elders must pursue discipline to the point of excluding offenders of God's norms from the fellowship, this neither constitutes a degeneration into legalism nor represents a withdrawal of grace from them:

Excommunication, rightly practiced, never cuts people off from grace. On the contrary, its function is to prevent persons from anesthetizing themselves against grace. Excommunication is the form under which the church continues to make grace available to the impenitent.<sup>8</sup>

In conclusion, we do not see how Christian believers, who have genuinely tasted the divine kindness in the grace of Jesus Christ and learned at what great cost they were redeemed, can then go on to plan, enjoy, and celebrate again and again sexual encounters which the Word teaches them will displease their Father in heaven, and for the likes of which they believe Christ endured pain all the way to his death. And can we as elders be faithful to the gospel and at the same time teach redeemed consciences to justify such a remarkable incongruity? If we are willing to make accommodations to this form of disobedience, by what rationale will we be able to hold back from accommodating other sins which some Christians claim to find irresistible in their experience?

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<sup>7</sup> See "Arguments: Ethics," p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> *Discipling the Brother*, Marlin Jeschke, p. 105.

To be sure, such accommodation seems like mercy and genuine concern for those who feel overwhelmed by their desire for love and companionship. Especially if those theories are correct which hold that the homosexual condition develops early in life by means of some deep estrangement between the child and one or the other parent, there will be need for mercy and affirmation for the person. All of us are sinners and sinned against. It is one thing, however, to demonstrate, for mercy's sake, understanding and acceptance of those who struggle with homosexual desire; it is quite another to conclude that mercy demands we accommodate those who insist they cannot help living out their desire. We should note the paradox in this warning once given by Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

Nothing could be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing could be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin.<sup>9</sup>

And yet, even in the call to intervene against a brother or sister in Christ on behalf of that brother or sister, we are expected, according to Paul's admonition to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 5, to feel sadness rather than have a sense of victory. There is no justification for an attitude of moral superiority on the part of any of us. As Bonhoeffer also said,

Anybody who lives beneath the Cross and who has discerned in the Cross of Jesus the utter wickedness of all men and of his own heart will find there is no sin that can ever be alien to him. Anybody who has once been horrified by the dreadfulness of his own sin that nailed Jesus to the Cross will no longer be horrified by even the rankest sins of a brother. Looking at the Cross of Jesus he knows the human heart. He knows how utterly lost it is in sin and weakness, how it goes astray in the ways of sin, and he also knows that it is accepted in grace and mercy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cited in "The Redemptive Power of Church Discipline," Ron Lutz. (Class Syllabus)

<sup>10</sup> *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1954), p. 118.

**FAITHFULNES TO GOD’S STANDARDS:  
THE LORD’S CALLING  
TO HOMOSEXUALLY-INCLINED CHRISTIANS**

**Part 2: Arguments**

Commended by the Missouri Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America as consistent with the Word of God and our doctrinal standards to a congregation asking whether committed partnerships formed by homosexual couples professing an evangelical faith in Christ should be accommodated by the church.

June 20, 1994

## ARGUMENTS: EXEGESIS

The question about what the Bible teaches concerning homosexuality has to be the central question for us. As churches of the Reformation our life is governed by the principle, sola scriptura, Scripture alone. This does not mean that there is no element of interpretation and judgment involved when it comes to the meaning of the text. In fact, we confess our agreement with the Reformed Ecumenical Council's 1992 statement, "though clear and sufficient, the Scriptures are in need of interpretation." Indeed, this is the responsibility Christ lays upon his church, and we must not shrink from it in situations of controversy. The sola scriptura principle doesn't tell us what to do when Christians disagree about Scripture. What it does is assure us that not every interpretation is credible, and clarify for us what must remain the focus of all disagreements: the meaning of the biblical text. Hence, all disputes about homosexuality have to be brought humbly to the Scriptures where we listen for the Spirit to judge, exonerate, or refine our ideas and opinions. The Westminster Confession sums up the sola scriptura principle well:

The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. (WCF 1.10)

So the central question for our church is: what do the Scriptures teach concerning homosexuality? This question must be answered and the corporate life of our churches ordered on the basis of the answer we discern in the text itself.

### **The Biblical Framework**

It is clear from Genesis to Revelation, that the Word of God commends, celebrates, and sanctions genital sexual expression when it is between a man and a woman and when it is within the institution of marriage. Heterosexual sex, love, and marriage is regarded in the Word as God's norm. It is, self-evidently, the only kind of relationship which is life-giving, as it is the only relationship capable of procreation; and its capacity for personal communion and companionship is rooted not in the mere humanness of the couple but in the complementarity of each being the same with a difference: Adam finds in Eve not merely a helper, but a helper who is a woman corresponding to him as a man.

Now this basic sexual "structure," if you will, of human existence is qualified and relativized by the Word of God as well as praised and approved. There from creation, it becomes twisted and broken by the fall into sin. And Jesus' teaching in Matthew 22:23-33 that there will be no marriage in heaven, and Paul's intimations of the same thing in I Corinthians 8:29-31, imply that the sexual order of the first creation will be transformed and superseded by the new creation when it comes in its fullness and our bodies are changed. Nevertheless, between the Fall and the second coming of Christ, heterosexual love, sex, and marriage continues to constitute God's sexual order and becomes an arena where the Holy Spirit wants to apply to our fallenness the redemption won for us by Christ at the cross.

This is the Bible's framework for a sex ethic, and any discussion about homosexual sex needs to begin with this framework—its centrality, dominance, and pervasiveness in Scripture. The texts that touch on homosexuality specifically do not stand in isolation but are illumined in the light this framework casts.

### **New Testament Texts**

As the key to all Scripture is Jesus Christ, we begin with the apostolic teaching of the New Testament, where Christ and his law and gospel are set forth most fully and directly.

#### **Romans 1**

The most explicit text of the New Testament touching on homosexuality is Romans 1:24-27. Traditionally, the church has understood this text to teach (by way of implication) that homosexual (or homoerotic) sex is a manifestation of man's rebellion against God and hence an expression of unrighteousness, or sinful behavior. While Paul's focus in Romans 1 is not on Christian ethics within the church, as it is in, say, Ephesians 4 and 5, nevertheless Paul's use of homosexuality as an example of pagan immorality has been taken to imply that anyone claiming Christ as Lord should not be involved in homoerotic behavior.

In recent years this understanding of the text has been challenged and the traditional interpretation rejected by many. We agree that we should not cling to the traditional just because it has established itself. The traditional has to find a place with us by proving to be not just old but true. In this case, however, we see no compelling reasons to overturn the church's judgment that Paul, in Romans 1, portrays in no uncertain terms same-sex genital intercourse as an act of disobedience to God, and any defense of such actions, a reflection of profound spiritual and moral confusion.

As a general principle, the proposing of an alternative interpretation to a commonly accepted view of a given text of Scripture is not to be summarily thrown out of court merely because it is new. We believe that the Spirit uses human experience and history to illuminate the true meaning of the Word and to correct the church when that Word is misinterpreted. In this sense, we should not automatically despise an interpretation just because it is “revisionist.” Sometimes, the Holy Spirit speaking in and through the Word calls us to such revision.

But every attempted revision of Romans 1 in the name of new insight from the Spirit, seems to us too much like the beating of square pegs into round holes: they are cribbed and artificial, and hence, unpersuasive. We make our presuppositions clear: the burden of proof lies with those whose exegesis of Romans I would put Paul at variance with the heterosexual sexual norm everywhere present in Scripture, at variance with the importance he clearly attaches elsewhere to sexual purity within the church, and at variance with almost 2000 years of a near-universal ethical consensus on the matter among devout students of Scripture and teachers of the church.

We will set out the various revisionist proposals and then respond to them.

## Argument 1

Romans 1:24-27 cannot be used to disqualify long-term, loving, and committed homosexual partnerships because the predominant form homosexuality took in Paul's day was pederasty, a temporary and intrinsically exploitative relationship between an adult (and often married) man and a boy. In these relationships, the boy could be anywhere from 12-18, was always the passive and “giving” partner sexually, and was expected to outgrow this relationship in due time and then, as an adult, look for a boy-lover himself. It is clear that Paul would condemn this kind of homosexuality since it was, essentially, an adult having sex with a child; since it was an unequal relationship wherein the boy's role was only to serve the sexual desires of the man; and since its impermanence violated the biblical principle of lifelong fidelity to one's partner. This type of homosexuality, beyond dispute the norm in the Greco-Roman world, is what Paul is condemning in Romans 1. There is very little evidence that Paul knew of homosexual relationships of the type that some are pursuing in our own day where it is a sexual relationship a) not between an adult and a child but between two adults; b) equal, in the sense that the gratification of both partners is in view in sexual intercourse, and c) a lifelong commitment on the part of both partners. We can't be sure Paul would rule out such relationships because he simply didn't see them or know them in his day, and so Romans 1 cannot be simplistically taken as a condemnation of all homosexual relationships regardless of the social context—any more than the New Testament texts that seem to allow 1st century slavery can be taken as justification of all forms of slavery regardless of the social context.

In order for us to be able to apply Romans 1 to the 20th century, the social context of present-day homosexual relationships “must bear a reasonable similarity to the context which called the biblical statements into existence.”<sup>11</sup> If they do not, it is going beyond what Scripture teaches to use Romans I to outlaw lifelong and committed homosexual partnerships in the church. And first century pederasty simply does not constitute “a reasonable similarity” to many present-day, mature, relationships between two men or two women.

## Answer

The central problem with this revisionist view is that it never seems to seriously come to grips with the question: Is there any evidence in Romans 1 itself, or in the Scriptures, generally, or even in the wider cultural context, as to whether it was the pederastic or the homoerotic element Paul objected to in the relationships so common in his day—or whether it was both? Scroggs is convinced that we can't be certain of this and hence argues that Romans 1 is entirely irrelevant to the current discussion about loving homosexual partnerships.

There can be little serious dispute that Paul's aim in Romans 1 - 3:20 is to indict both Gentiles and Jews as being under the wrath of God for their sin, that all might see their need for a Savior, for a righteousness freely conferred upon them and not at all earned. Richard Hays and others have persuasively argued that Paul, in a calculating way, expounds on the moral profligacy of the pagan Gentile world in order to draw applause from his morally superior Jewish hearers. Thus rallied to the side of God and righteousness in opposition to Gentile unrighteousness, Paul pulls

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<sup>11</sup> Robin Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality* (1983), p. 125.

the rug out from under them and demonstrates their own complicity in unrighteousness, their failure to keep the high standards they hold the Gentiles to.

In his expose of Gentile moral darkness, Paul represents it as a manifestation of idolatry. Having “exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator” (1:25), God “hands over” the Gentiles to “shameful lusts” (v. 26 pathe atimias). And then follows Paul's description of both lesbian and homosexual relationships in vv. 26-27. The key lines are:

v. 26 Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones (literally, “exchanged the natural [e.g. from nature] sexual function for that which is against nature.”)

v. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men (literally, “the men left the natural sexual function of the woman in lustful passion for each other, men with men committing shameless acts”).

We make several observations:

- 1) With the word “function” (chresis) Paul definitely has sexual intercourse in mind. When this word is used in a sexual context it is a stock expression for sexual intercourse.
- 2) That Paul has pederasty in mind in v. 27 when he talks about males with males (arsenes en arsesin) is probably true, but we infer that not from the text but from our knowledge that this form of homosexuality was the most common form, and may well have been the only form that was openly practiced in the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day. But that Paul has more than pederasty in mind is clear from v. 26 where he speaks about homoerotic relationships between women. While we have much less information about homosexual relationships among women in the ancient world, there is no historical evidence that there was anything like “female pederasty” which paralleled the social institution of male pederasty.
- 3) A key phrase in v. 26 is “exchanging the natural sexual function for that which is contrary to nature.” Some have suggested that what Paul may have in view here is nothing more than deviant heterosexual behavior among women, perhaps the use of artificial phalli. All by itself, v. 26 conceivably could mean that. But coupled as it is with v. 27 where male homosexual relationships are clearly in view, it is not likely. Paul seems to be alluding to lesbianism—present, but usually not very visible in the ancient world.

The phrase “contrary to nature” (para phusin) is a common phrase in extra-biblical writers and is applied to homosexual acts by Plato, Plutarch, Athenaeus, Philo, and others. Scroggs insists that Paul's remark about lesbian homoerotic relationships being “contrary to nature” “has nothing to do with any theories of natural law.”<sup>12</sup> Yet he can also say, with reference to Greek and Roman writers,

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<sup>12</sup> Scroggs, p. 114.

For those who oppose pederasty, that which seemed most abhorrent about it was that it violated the natural order of creation, however creation was understood.<sup>13</sup>

If “contrary to nature” commonly means this for Greco-Roman writers, isn't it reasonable—without strong evidence to the contrary—to believe it means this for Paul too? There are places in Paul where it's clear that he views the world as having a certain structure or order built into it by God (See 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; 15:38-41). In fact, Scroggs expounds well the logic of Paul's movement in Romans 1 from the theological (the nature of God) to the ethical (the nature of the world, including relationships):

The real fall of humankind is its refusal (the issue here is “willful ignorance”) to acknowledge and be obedient to the true God. Ultimately that means the refusal to acknowledge the true reality in its entirety, for the refusal to “know” God brings in its turn a false knowledge of the entire creation, including a false knowledge of the human self. In short, to “fall” is to refuse to live in the true world and to construct a false world in its stead—all the while thinking, believing and claiming that the false constructed reality is actually true.<sup>14</sup>

Although the word “nature” in Paul's writings has various nuances, there are no good reasons for rejecting the view that here in Romans 1:26 it refers to what one theologian has called “the order of creation, ...the constant creational constitution of anything, what makes it the thing or entity that it is.”<sup>15</sup> To speak of “nature” then would be to speak of the “structure” of creation. “Structure [of creation] designates that which every created entity retains by virtue of being a creature of God.”<sup>16</sup>

In fact, the one use of “nature” in Paul often thought to render dubious his use of that word here in Romans 1.26, may well turn out to buttress the longstanding contention that in 1:26 “nature” refers to something like “the structure or character of a thing given it by God, that is, its created constitution.”

In 1 Corinthians 11:14 Paul wrote:

Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her?

Now since most post-60s Christians do not regard longer hair on a man as something contrary to nature, something against God's created order, it seems self-evident to many that “nature” in this verse means something like “social custom.” And if “nature” means “social custom” when Paul is talking about long hair, might it not mean nothing more than that in Romans 1 when Paul is talking about homosexuality?

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<sup>13</sup> Scroggs, p. 60.

<sup>14</sup> Scroggs, p. 111.

<sup>15</sup> Albert Wolters in *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, cited in “The Kingdom and Slavery: A Test Case for Social Ethics,” Guenther Haas, *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993), p. 84).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84-85.

But there is a line in the Jewish writer, Philo, roughly a contemporary of Paul's, that may shed light on 1 Corinthians 11:14:

Much graver than the above is another evil, which has ramped its way into the cities, namely pederasty. In former days the very mention of it was a great disgrace, but now it is a matter of boasting not only to the active but to the passive partners, who habituate to themselves to endure the disease of effemination, let both body and soul run to waste, and leave no ember of their male sex-nature to smoulder. Mark how conspicuously they braid and adorn the hair of their heads, and how they scrub and paint their faces with cosmetics and pigments and the like, and smother themselves with fragrant unguents.<sup>17</sup>

Here Philo is criticizing the coiffured hair of effeminate boys in his condemnation of pederasty. Scroggs cites another similar statement in the Maxims of the so-called Pseudo-Phocylides:

At the very end [of the passage) the author declares that boys should not have long, coiffured hair, that the youthful period of a beautiful boy (pais) should be guarded carefully, for many are maddened by desire for male intercourse.<sup>18</sup>

Might it be that Paul is alluding to the very same thing in 1 Corinthians 11:14? That is, to the common phenomenon of effeminate youth in pederastic relationships whose “long hair,” in imitation of women, becomes part of their attractiveness, one of their charms? And insofar as their hair is long for this reason, because they are acting like women, it is to their shame and contrary to nature. It would not be the mere length of hair that is at issue for Paul (how long is “long,” anyway?), but rather sporting longer hair for what it was often worn for in the Greco-Roman society: for the playing of an effeminate sexual role.

If this is right, then so far from blunting the force of “nature” in Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 11:14 would help to establish it: according to the way God made the world, a man should act (sexually) and look like a man, and a woman should act (sexually) and look like a woman. And that which is according to nature, that which expresses our created, human sexual glory is erotic love expressed between two complements: a man with a woman.

The central objection Paul seems to have to the pederasty around him in the pagan world was not that it was adult with child, as he says nothing about that. What he is critical of is men “abandoning the natural function of [i.e., with] the woman” and “burning with desire towards each other.” That is, in the very words of the text, the core of the problem according to Paul, is males sexually desiring other males instead of having the “natural” desire for a woman. Paul seems clear enough about this when he says in v. 27 “males with males committing indecent acts.”

It must be remembered that the moral framework providing the background for Paul's ethics is not just the teaching of Jesus, but also the Old Testament law. And Paul's appeal to the Old Testament law time and time again should warn us against the simplistic insistence that the Old Testament

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<sup>17</sup> Philo, *The Special Laws* III. 37 (Loeb edition), p. 499.

<sup>18</sup> Scroggs, p. 132.

law held no authority for New Testament Christians (see specifically Romans 7:7-8, 14; 13:9-10; Ephesians 6:1-2; 2 Corinthians 6:16-17).

In the Levitical code the proscription against homosexual relations was patently clear:

Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.  
(Leviticus 18:22)

If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their heads. (Leviticus 20:13)

It may well be that Paul's language in Romans 1 is an intentional echo of these Leviticus passages with their deliberate rejection of male-male intercourse as morally analogous to male-female intercourse. In Romans 1:27 Paul puts it: "The men left the natural sexual function of the woman in lustful passion for each other, men with men committing shameless acts."

Now Scroggs is right to insist that the "males with males" cannot be taken to prove that Paul has homosexuality in general in mind and not just pederasty. Some who reject homosexual partnerships have argued this way: If Paul was only condemning pederasty and not homosexuality in general, why didn't he write "men with boys committing indecent acts?" But Scroggs has pointed out a parallel passage in Philo where, quite clearly, Philo is condemning pederasty, and yet uses "male with male," as Paul does here. We acknowledge, with Scroggs, that Paul is condemning pederasty in Romans 1. But Scroggs neglects to pursue the question, Why? What is it that Paul found objectionable in those men-boy relationships? The answer seems quite clear to us in the text: that it was sexual desire for and intercourse with "males with males" and females with females. Though it is clear from Philo that it is pederasty he is objecting to, he also tells us why he objects to it: it exploits boys, it is non-procreative, and in the very structure of its desire as rule thy male it is a pleasure contrary to nature.<sup>19</sup> Romans 1 indicates Paul is against it for the same reason.

## Argument 2

We cannot be sure that in Romans 1:24-27 Paul is ruling out all homosexual relationships since what he specifically condemns are homosexual liaisons characterized by "shameful lusts," being "inflamed with lust," and the committing of "indecent acts." All that Paul may be condemning here is homosexual promiscuity and homosexual perversions—i.e., the kind of sexual acts that most homosexual people themselves would consider perverse and debased.

## Answer

What Paul is ruling out was the pederasty so common to his time, on the grounds that it constituted a twisting of God's created order, of "nature." In that created order part of the sexual

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<sup>19</sup> Philo, Special Laws III. 39.

glory of a man is his desire for a woman and likewise, part of the glory of a woman is her desire for a man. That this twisting involves not merely overt acts but includes sexual desire as well is made clear at the beginning of v. 27: “Likewise the men, leaving the natural sexual function with the woman, burned with lustful desire for each other, males with males committing indecent acts . . .” If Paul was contrasting legitimate sexual desire of a man for a woman with some kind of sadistic desire, then that would have been the antithesis. But the primary antithesis in the verse is between sex with a female and sex with another male. Twice Paul emphasizes this in the phrase “burning with lustful passion for each other, males with males committing indecent acts . . .”

It is true that without any context the exact meaning of “indecent acts” (aschernosune) is hard to fix. But Paul’s insistence that lesbian and pederastic relations are “contrary to nature” suggests that for Paul, the indecency consisted in the grotesque artificiality that people would have to resort to for gratification in the absence of the sexual “fit” that is there between a man and a woman by virtue of their anatomy. In lesbian relations it would probably be mutual masturbation or the application on the part of one to the other of a mechanical phallus; and in pederasty it would probably be either anal intercourse or the so-called femoral or intercrural intercourse where the man would stand behind the boy and insert himself between the boy’s thighs to achieve orgasm. The burden of proof lies on those who can imagine that the Jewish apostle Paul would not have judged such things “indecent acts.” If he thinks of them as being “contrary to nature,” then some evidence needs to be forthcoming that he didn’t thereby regard them as intrinsically indecent.

We do not believe that Paul’s appeal to “nature” in Romans can be so easily passed off as some do in claiming that in using it Paul is just reciting a time-worn and conventional Stoic moral concept. It may be time-worn and conventional. It may even be Stoic. But that doesn’t constitute it either false or insignificant. Paul obviously attaches importance to it.

This whole concept of the “unnaturalness” of homoerotic sex, a concept rooted in Romans 1, has to be given due consideration if we are to help the Lord’s people understand not only that there are sexual boundaries but also why:

When heterosexual marriage is rediscovered for the unique creation it is, then...it is morally impossible not to criticize other sexual arrangements which pretend to equal it and always in the process, debase it. For instance, same-sex unions, as they are called, and often with the best intentions, make a travesty of heterosexual marriage when they too claim to be a union of one with another. An “other” (heteros)? As if the otherness of the two partners had nothing to do with their being bodily, genitally other each to each. As if they were other merely because each was someone else, of whichever sex, or merely because their two bodies were somehow joinable erotically and detachable. As if same-sex partners can authentically remain same-sex when in genital intercourse they have to substitute other-sex roles vis-a-vis. As if giving oneself to the other—say, with love—eliminated the importance of each being sexually opposite. The fact is, that is precisely how opposites come into their own as heterosexuals, namely, as each one’s other. As if the alternative to being one-with-an-other, when that is too forbidding or unattractive or inaccessible, is to be one-with-a-same (homos). In

fact the more consistent, even more "natural" alternative is just being one, celibately single, and in that way whole. So whole is celibacy that it has produced from among its ranks some of history's most perceptive, ungrudging witnesses to heterosexual marriage.<sup>20</sup>

We close with the following reflections on the biblical doctrine of "nature" made by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Ethics*, as we believe they are germane to the question of homoerotic sex and homosexual partnerships:

Through the fall the "creature" becomes "nature." The direct dependence of the creature on God is replaced by the relative freedom of natural life. Within this freedom there are differences between the true and mistaken use of freedom, and there is therefore the difference between the natural and the unnatural. In other words there is relative openness and relative closedness for Christ...<sup>21</sup>

...the natural can never be something that is determined by any single part of any single authority within the fallen world. And indeed whatever is set up in this arbitrary manner by an individual, a society or an institution will necessarily collapse and destroy itself in the encounter with the natural which is already established. Whoever does injury to the natural will suffer for it.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, "nature"—the very structure of the world—comes from God in creation and is maintained by him. It is what it is, and it cannot be changed by any of us with a humanly-derived rationale. If we try to change it, we will pay the price.

### Argument 3

In Romans 1 what Paul was condemning was heterosexual people acting contrary to their heterosexual nature and committing homosexual acts. This is a plausible interpretation of 1:26b and 27, "for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire towards one another . . . ." Paul finds it offensive in the extreme that there should be this sexual "crossing over." It is perverse to engage in homosexual acts if your basic nature is heterosexual and not homosexual.

### Answer

Derrick Sherwin Bailey first proposed this view in 1955 on the grounds that the apostle Paul would not have known in his day the person who was a genuine "invert," that is, someone for whom not heterosexual but homosexual desire was natural.<sup>23</sup> John Boswell also takes up and

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<sup>20</sup> "Sain Sex," Robert Bertram, unpublished article, St. Louis, 1994, p. 17-18.

<sup>21</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 145.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>23</sup> D.S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (1995), p. 157

defends this argument in his book *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*,<sup>24</sup> the book which, on account of its wide-ranging, massive scholarship has done much to persuade people that the Christian Church needs a massive revision of its current, negative views on homosexuality. Boswell insists that Paul is describing in Romans 1:26-27 “the personal nature of the pagans in question.” That is, Paul is criticizing heterosexually-oriented pagans who engaged in homosexual acts. Paul is not here criticizing homosexually-oriented people who engage in homosexual acts since that behavior for them is perfectly natural, consistent with their homosexual nature. There are several decisive objections to this view:

1) Boswell is correct when he says “A possessive is always understood with ‘nature’ in Pauline writing: it is not ‘nature’ in the abstract but someone’s ‘nature.’”<sup>25</sup> This is true, but it is also implied in ancient writers when they use the concept of nature more abstractly: they mean, simply, the nature of people as human beings. What Boswell hasn’t demonstrated from ancient texts is that “nature” in first century Greek or Hellenistic Jewish parlance is sometimes used to describe that which is characteristic of individual persons.

2) But even more problematic for Boswell’s view is the fact that Paul in Romans 1:27 clearly describes homosexual desire as that which gives rise to the homosexual acts: “The men . . . burned in their desire toward one another.” A man burning with desire for a man is, by definition, homosexual; so then, where is the evidence in the text that Paul is talking about heterosexual people? Boswell never considers this problem. It will not do to counter that Paul must be talking about what we would call today the “bisexual” person. There was a great deal of bisexual behavior in the pagan world of Paul’s day. But Paul’s point in these verses is clear: he is not merely criticizing mixed sexual behavior, as if his concern was to say, “Exclusively heterosexual sex is morally acceptable and exclusively homosexual sex is morally acceptable; God’s judgment is revealed when individuals go back and forth, engaging in both kinds.”

Of course, Paul is condemning bisexual behavior, but not simply because it is mixed. Paul’s primary point in these verses is to illustrate the great ethical “exchange”—men wanting, having, enjoying, and justifying sex with men instead of with women—which parallels and derives from the great theological “exchange” that takes place when people substitute manmade gods for the one true God. The repetition of the “change” and “exchange” verbs (allaso, v. 23; metallaso, vv. 25-26) three times in this section is unmistakably thematic: the first two instances (vv. 23, 25) describe the spiritual “contortion” of idolatry, and the third (v. 26) describes the ethical “contortion,” the twisting of heterosexual desire and practice created by God, into homosexual desire and practice. Paul’s observation, as he looks around at the Gentile world, is that men are doing with men what God created them to do with women. And they not only do this, they justify it as well. Paul is not saying that idolatry leads in a straight line, psycho-somatically, to homosexual desire, but that when the absolute, true God is abandoned by man, God hands him over to the proliferation of, indulgence in, and defense of that which is a distortion of the good as it comes to us from the hand of God.

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<sup>24</sup> John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1980), pp. 110-111.

<sup>25</sup> Boswell, *Homosexuality*, pp. 110-111.

## 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

In these verses we have one of the so-called “vice lists” of the New Testament:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

What the NIV translates as “male prostitutes” and “homosexual offenders” are the two Greek terms, malakoi and arsenokoitai, respectively. The first term, malakoi, is certainly the more ambiguous of the two words. Scroggs has probably the most careful discussion of the term in a short excursus.<sup>26</sup> The word literally means “soft,” and is used of clothes by Jesus in Matthew 11:8. But it comes thereby to have a metaphorical meaning that is not in and of itself pejorative: it can simply be used of a person who is quiet and gentle in character. Clearly though, Paul is not using it this way in a vice list!

John Boswell insists that the word refers only to general moral laxity and has no connection to homosexuality at all.<sup>27</sup> But pro-gay historian Warren Johansson, arguing against Boswell, claims:

The word malakos had been a commonplace designation of the passive-effeminate homosexual at least since Cratinus (the older contemporary of Aristophanes) had satirized the mores of the swishy set in Athens in his play, Oi Malakoi, “The Effeminates.” Even if it had other meanings they all accord with the ancient conception of effeminacy as the result of luxury, idleness, and pampered self-indulgence...<sup>28</sup>

Johansson is defending the traditional view that malakos and arsenokoites are somewhat technical terms for the passive and active male partners, respectively, in pederastic relationships.

Scroggs thinks it is going too far to say that malakos would always be recognized as identifying the passive partner in pederasty, and thinks there is room to understand the word as signifying “a quality of lifestyle which some people associated with pederastic practices.”<sup>29</sup> But he cites ancient texts that make it clear that on occasion malakos does refer to the passive homosexual partner. And yet Scroggs insists that what is pejorative about someone who is a malakos is not simply that they are involved in pederasty, but that they live lives of luxuriant effeminacy and self-indulgent leisure.<sup>30</sup> Scroggs admits however, that when malakos is mentioned in connection with arsenokoites as it is in 1 Corinthians 6:9, it is probably to be understood as referring to some aspect of homosexual behavior.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Scroggs, *The New Testament*, pp. 62-65.

<sup>27</sup> Boswell, *Homosexuality*, pp. 106-107.

<sup>28</sup> “Ex Paret Themis: The Historical Guilt of the Christian Church,” Warren Johansson, in *Homosexuality, Intolerance, and Christianity*, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Scroggs, *New Testament*, p. 63

<sup>30</sup> Scroggs, *New Testament*, p. 65, 106.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

The definitive word on the semantic range of malakos has not yet been spoken. However, Scroggs and Johansson have cited enough evidence to make it likely that Paul uses it here to designate a passive homosexual partner.

As we noted, the word arsenokoites is less ambiguous. There seems to be a consensus that the word originated not in Attic Greek but in the later Hellenistic period. It is composed of two words, arsen, which means “male” and koite, which means “bed,” and then, metaphorically, “sleeping together,” i.e., sexual intercourse. The linguistic evidence suggests that we have no earlier usage of the term than Paul's mention of it here in 1 Corinthians 6:9.<sup>32</sup>

Many have suggested the likelihood that Paul coined this phrase directly from the Septuagint of Leviticus 20:13 where we find the phrase meta arsenos koiten gunaikos in the Levitical prohibition of males sleeping with males. In a lengthy and careful article, David F. Wright has satisfactorily refuted Boswell's contention that arsenokoites refers to male prostitutes hiring themselves out to women.<sup>33</sup> Wright demonstrates quite convincingly that the word should be translated “those [men] who sleep with males.” It may well be the case that by joining malakos and arsenokoites together here in 1 Corinthians 6:9 Paul is intentionally condemning both passive and active partners in pederastic relationships. However, this text, by itself, cannot prove that Paul is condemning all forms of homosexual behavior including committed, lifelong relationships. By using these terms he condemns pederasty. But the question has to be raised as to why Paul condemns pederasty—and that leads us back to a consideration of Romans 1.

## I Timothy 1:8-10

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine...(1 Timothy 1:8-10)

The only thing that needs to be said about this text is that Paul's use of arsenokoites here without the word malakos might be an indication that arsenokoites is Paul's generic term for all homoerotic behavior—not just the active, adult partner. It would still be true that what this word condemns is the homosexuality Paul knew in his day, pederasty. But once it is seen from Romans 1 why Paul condemns the homoeroticism of pederasty, then Paul's rejection of the contextually-defined homosexuality of his day cannot legitimately be restricted to that social context. Romans I makes clear that what Paul describes as a manifestation of human sin is the homoerotic in principle, its passions and acts.

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<sup>32</sup> Scroggs, *Homosexuality*, p. 107.

<sup>33</sup> “Homosexuals or Prostitutes: The Meaning of Arsenokoitai,” D.F. Wright, *Vigilae Christianae* 38 (1984), pp. 125-153.

## ARGUMENTS: ETHICS

What is God calling us to be and to do? That may be taken as the basic practical question of Christian ethics. Since God's call is never a bare invitation but presupposes his authority, power, and grace, and since God's call comes to us as members of the body of Christ, the question is more fully: What is God summoning and enabling us, his redeemed people, individually and corporately, to be and to do?

It is widely recognized that human conduct is subject to moral evaluation from a threefold point of view: goal, the good which the human agent seeks to realize, motive, the goodness of the human agent at the core of personal existence, and norm, the rightness of actions and practices by which the good is realized and goodness is expressed. The three together provide a comprehensive basis for moral judgment.

In biblical perspective, the controlling purpose of the Christian life is the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31), the impelling motive is love for God and our neighbor (Matt 22:37-40), and the directing principle is the revealed will of God (Rom 12:1-2), that is, to be more precise, the will of God as revealed in Christ and the holy Scriptures, illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

This is the fundamental orientation of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which in its first two questions asks:

What is the chief end of man?

Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

What rule has God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

The Word of God is presented here as divine direction (torah) which is instrumental in enabling us to attain the purpose for which we were created. In the Reformed tradition represented by the Catechism, the Spirit works by and with the Word as a means of grace, bringing us into union with Christ through faith in the gospel and more and more into conformity to his image as a consequence of its liberating power.

This liberation includes, among many blessed freedoms bestowed by God in the gospel, "yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love and willing mind" (Westminster Confession of Faith, 20.1). Faith works itself out in obedient love, following the example of Christ.

The scriptural direction for Christian practice comes in three primary forms: positive command, permission, and prohibition. The positive commands are open-ended, calling for love in the practice of justice, mercy, and fidelity at every opportunity (Mt 23:23; Gal 6:10). The prohibitions set boundaries for conduct becoming to a Christian; they specify what is always and everywhere incompatible with the kingdom of Christ. As a general rule what is not prohibited is permitted.

Thus, a Christian's diet may include both red meat and shellfish unless there is some other principle at stake, but neither is obligatory.

Logically the first question to ask in seeking scriptural direction on the rightness of some action or practice is the boundary question: Is it prohibited? Now it would certainly be a distortion of the Christian life to think of it mainly in terms of negatives. As C. S. Lewis once remarked, a prostitute may be closer to the kingdom of God than a church-going self-righteous prig—but of course it's better to be neither. Nevertheless, the scriptural prohibitions, for all their incompleteness as the measure of morality, have an important function in setting the limits beyond which we may not venture in the name of doing good.

The initial biblico-ethical question in relation to homosexuality is this: Does the Scripture universally prohibit same-sex genital expression, or does it permit same-sex genital expression within a loving and committed gay or lesbian relationship?

The church has long understood the Scriptures to teach that same-sex genital expression is universally prohibited by an intrinsic norm of rightness governing sexual relations.<sup>34</sup> That norm specifies that heterosexual marriage is the proper context for genital sexual expression, outside of which all sexual intercourse is disapproved.<sup>35</sup> Jesus himself cites in tandem the two key texts from the creation narrative: “Haven’t you read . . . that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’” (Matt 19:4-5). These principial texts are not without warrant denoted “creation ordinances” which establish the basic interpretive framework for thinking about sex. As John Stott comments on the significance of “becoming one flesh” in the Genesis context:

Heterosexual intercourse is much more than a union of bodies; it is a blending of complementary personalities through which, in the midst of prevailing alienation, the rich created oneness of human being is experienced again. And the complementarity of male and female sexual organs is only a symbol at the physical level of a much deeper spiritual complementarity.<sup>36</sup>

Stott goes on to point out that certain “preliminaries” are necessary to experience this “sacred mystery.” These “constituent parts of marriage” are set forth in Genesis 2:24. Stott’s analysis is as follows: “Therefore a man (the singular indicates that marriage is an exclusive union between two individuals) shall leave his father and mother (a public social occasion is in view) and cleave to his wife (marriage is a love, cleaving commitment or covenant, which is heterosexual and permanent).”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For a full presentation, see John Stott, “Homosexual Partnerships?” *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Tarrytown, N.Y.: revel, 1990) 336-64.

<sup>35</sup> Porneia is the general term for all illicit or immoral sexual intercourse. The specific form may sometimes be indicated by the context. If payment of wages is involved, it is prostitution. If it involves close relatives, it is incest. If it involves persons of the same sex, it is homosexuality. If it involves an unmarried couple, it is unchastity. If it involves a married person outside marriage, it is adultery.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

A somewhat neglected New Testament text that bears on the intrinsic nature of the sexual norm is I Corinthians 6:18, “Shun fornication (porneia). Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator (o porneuwn) sins against the body itself (to idion soma)” (NRSV). Brendan Byrne of the Jesuit Theological College in Melbourne makes a pertinent observation about this text.

It appears necessary, along with most commentators, to accept that Paul is making some kind of comparative judgment here. With respect to “body” fornication stands in a category all by itself. Paul is not denying that other sins have reference to the body, even to one’s own body, e.g., sins of gluttony, drunkenness, etc. But there is something about fornication that strikes at one’s own “body” in some particularly direct way, in comparison with which other sins are somehow “outside” the body.<sup>38</sup>

Byrne’s understanding of soma in this Pauline context is “the physical body particularly under the aspect of personal self-communication,” uniquely realized in sexual intercourse. “The immoral person perverts precisely that faculty within himself that is meant to be the instrument of the most intimate bodily communication between persons. . . . No other sin engages one’s power of bodily personal communication in precisely so intimate a way.”<sup>39</sup>

It might be argued that this has no bearing on responsible homosexual intercourse which is on a par with responsible heterosexual intercourse as an act of intimate personal self-communication. It would be more faithful to the apostle’s meaning to speak of sexual intercourse as “the instrument of the most intimate bodily communication between persons of complementary gender.” Paul assumes legitimate (non-incestuous, non-adulterous) marriage as the normative context for sexual intercourse, outside of which all genital relations, heterosexual as well as homosexual, are sins against the body itself as designed by God and therefore intrinsically wrong.

Given the experience of exclusive and persistent homosexual attraction on the part of some as a general consequence of the human condition, what is the responsible Christian position to take with regard to homosexual behavior? Currently three distinct strategies are recommended to Christian homosexuals: affirmation, accommodation, and abstinence.

### **Affirmation**

At one end of the spectrum is the view that heterosexuality and homosexuality are equally good, subject to the same moral norm of love and human fulfillment. An early and influential affirmation of homosexuality in this sense is the statement issued by a group of British Friends, Towards a Quaker View of Sex (1963).

[W]e do not regard the standards of judgment relevant here [i.e., to homosexuality] as being different from those that apply to other sexual problems. Surely it is the

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<sup>38</sup> Brendan Byren, “Sinning against One’s Own Body: Paul’s Understanding of the Sexual Relationship in 1 Cor. 6:18,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983): 613.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

nature and quality of a relationship that matters; one must not judge it by its outward appearance but by its inner worth. Homosexual affection can be as selfless as heterosexual affection, and therefore we cannot see that it is in some way morally worse . . . .

Further we see no reason why the physical nature of a sexual act should be the criterion by which the question whether or not it is moral should be decided. An act which expresses both affection between two individuals and gives pleasure to them both, does not seem to be sinful by reason alone of the fact that it is homosexual. The same criteria seem to apply whether the relationship is heterosexual or homosexual.<sup>40</sup>

This is also the official position of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Churches (founded 1968): “Neither heterosexual love nor homosexual love is sinful in itself. Sex acts only become sinful when we act in lust or in abuse of another person, abandoning the ways of love.”<sup>41</sup> So far among mainline denominations only the United Church of Christ has approached a position of full affirmation.<sup>42</sup> The National Council of Churches in 1993 tabled (90-81) the application of the UPMC for observer status.

In this approach to Christian ethics, no sexual act is intrinsically or inherently wrong. According to William Countryman sexual acts may be judged to be wrong only when “they also involve an offense against the property of another, denial of the equality of women and men, or an idolatrous substitution of sex for the reign of God as the goal of human existence.”<sup>43</sup> So also James Nelson:

I find it extremely difficult to label whole classes of acts as inherently right or wrong, since moral quality hinges so heavily on what is being communicated to the persons involved in the particular relationship and context. Yet, we can surely say that acts which by their nature are loveless—coercive, debasing to the other's sensitivities, utterly impersonal, obsessed solely by physical gratification—such acts of whatever sexual sort are excluded.<sup>44</sup>

The argument of Walter Wink is fairly typical: “There is no biblical sex ethic. The Bible knows only a love ethic, which is constantly being brought to bear on whatever sexual mores are dominant in any given country, or culture, or period.”<sup>45</sup> Although the Bible “clearly considers homosexuality a sin,” that judgment is not incorrigible. According to the “deeper tenor” of

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<sup>40</sup> *The Churches Speak on: Homosexuality*, ed. J. Gordon Melton (Detroit: Gale Research) 193.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 249

<sup>42</sup> In 1993 the UCC adopted a resolution “Calling on the Church for Greater Leadership to End Discrimination against Gays and Lesbians” which included the proposition that “moral judgments should not be made about who people are but rather on the basis of how community and covenant are formed and what responsible expression of sexuality might mean among people of all sexual orientations.”

<sup>43</sup> L. William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 243.

<sup>44</sup> James B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978) 128. For a more recent, concise statement of Nelson’s position, see his “Sources for Body Theology: Homosexuality as a Test Case,” *Body Theology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster, 1992): 55-71.

<sup>45</sup> Walter Wink, “Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality,” *Christianity and Crisis*, November 11, 1979, 1085.

Scripture, “God sides with the powerless, God liberates the oppressed, God suffers with the suffering and groans toward the reconciliation of all things.”<sup>46</sup>

The Anglican ethicist Philip Turner, currently associate dean at Yale’s divinity school observes the crucial shift in ethical thinking about sexual relations, the morality of which “is seen to depend not on an undertaking the terms of which are set by Divine providence but on the motivations and intentions of moral agents, and on the nature and consequences of their acts.” With specific reference to Nelson, Turner continues:

The acceptable motive for a sexual relationship is love; the acceptable intention is that “each genital act should aim at human fulfillment and wholeness.” “Fulfillment” and “wholeness” in turn are said to involve emotional sustenance, healing, and, most of all, growth for the parties involved. As can easily be anticipated, in this scheme of things the sexual act itself is to be judged not on the basis of goods that are internally related to the act itself (unity and procreation), but on the basis of whether or not it is “loveless.”<sup>47</sup>

In other words, it is “the quality of the personal relationship between the partners, not its sexual character or form, that is seen to be morally significant in making an assessment of the moral quality of a sexual relationship.”<sup>48</sup>

The problem with this approach is that in granting homosexual relationships equal status with heterosexual relationships, it effectively annuls the will of God in creating humankind as male and female. Neither the complementarity of man and woman, anatomically self-evident, nor the procreative benediction of God upon the sexual partnership of marriage, count for anything in making moral judgments with reference to sexual intercourse. “Sex, in this accounting, is accorded a purely instrumental worth deriving its entire value from the end to which it is a means.”<sup>49</sup>

Clearly God’s sexual preference for human beings is a loving, committed, permanent, and exclusive heterosexual relationship. The uniform teaching of the Scriptures is that human beings flourish and find true sexual fulfillment only in the companionship and partnership established by the marriage covenant. The proposal that homosexual partnerships are an equal alternative to heterosexual marriage ignores the original and abiding will of God and discounts the effects of the fall.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 1086.

<sup>47</sup> Philip Turner, “Sex and the Single Life,” *First Things* No. 33 (May 1993): 15-16. Turner is also one of the signatories of “The Homosexual Movement: A Response by the Ramsey Colloquium,” *First Things* No. 41 (March 1994): 15-20. Cf. Carolyn J. Mooney, “Attack on Homosexuality Angers Divinity Students,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 11, 1994, A38.

<sup>48</sup> James P. Hanigan, *Homosexuality: The Test Case for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Paulist, 1988)

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

## Accommodation

A second position recognizes both the permanent norm of heterosexual marriage and the fallenness of human nature. It argues that precisely because the fall renders the ideal unattainable for persons with a permanent homosexual orientation, the norm should be accommodated to their situation. Thus, Helmut Thielicke regarded homosexuality as “abnormal” and counseled homosexual persons to seek medical and pastoral therapy, but proposed that “the constitutional homosexual, who because of his vitality is not able to practice abstinence,” structure sexual relationships in an “ethically responsibly way” for the realization, not of the ideal, but of the person’s “optimal ethical potentialities” given the irreversibility of the condition.<sup>50</sup>

Sometimes referred to as the “theory of compromise,” Thielicke’s position has Roman Catholic exponents as well, the best-know of which is Charles Curran. The position may be paraphrased as follows: “[i]t may be necessary at times to accept, albeit reluctantly, homosexual expressions and unions as the lesser of two evils, or as the only way in which some persons can find a satisfying degree of humanity in their lives.”<sup>51</sup>

The House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England, in a statement issued December 1991, gave sanction to the position, at least to the extent of allowing it as a matter of individual conscience. In addressing the question of “The Homosexual in the Life and Fellowship of the Church,” the bishops first state two principles:

The first is that homophile orientation and its expression in sexual activity do not constitute a parallel and alternative form of human sexuality as complete within the terms of the created order as the heterosexual. The convergence of Scripture, Tradition and reasoned reflection on experience, even including the newly sympathetic and perceptive thinking of our own day, make it impossible for the Church to come with integrity to any other conclusion. Heterosexuality and homosexuality are not equally congruous with the observed order of creation or with the insights of revelation as the Church engages with these in the light of her pastoral ministry....

This leads directly to our second fundamental principle, laid upon us by the truths at the very heart of the faith: homosexual people are in every way as valuable to and as valued by God as heterosexual people. God loves us all alike, and has for each one of us a range of possibilities within his design for the universe. This includes those who, for whatever reason, find themselves with a homophile orientation which, as far as anyone at present can tell, cannot in their case be changed, and within which therefore they have the responsibility of living human life creatively and well.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex*, trans. John W. Doberstein (London: Clarke, 1964) 284-85

<sup>51</sup> Cited in Hanigan, 67.

<sup>52</sup> *Issues in Human Sexuality: A Statement by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England, December 1991* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Morehouse, 1991) 40-41.

For those in the latter condition and calling, the Bishops hold out two options. The first is “to witness to God's general will for human sexuality by a life of abstinence,” embracing the self-denial involved in this decision out of love for Christ and in dependence upon the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. It is acknowledged that this is “a path of great faithfulness, travelled often under the weight of a very heavy cross.”<sup>53</sup> The second option is presented as follows:

At the same time there are others who are conscientiously convinced that this way of abstinence is not the best for them, and that they have more hope of growing in love for God and neighbour with the help of a loving and faithful homophile partnership, in intention lifelong, where mutual self-giving includes the physical expression of their attachment.

In responding to this conviction it is important to bear in mind the historic tension in Christian ethical thinking between the God-given moral order and the freedom of the moral agent. While insisting that conscience needs to be informed in the light of that order, Christian tradition also contains an emphasis on respect for free conscientious judgment where the individual has seriously weighed the issues involved. The homophile is only one in a range of such cases.

While unable, therefore, to commend the way of life just described as in itself as faithful a reflection of God's purposes in creation as the heterophile, we do not reject those who sincerely believe it is God's call to them. We stand alongside them in the fellowship of the Church, all alike dependent upon the undeserved grace of God.<sup>54</sup>

In keeping with the nearly universal practice of the churches, the bishops draw the line at clerical ordination. In effect they are saying that although heterosexual and homosexual unions are not equal in terms of morality, those who are persuaded that homosexual union is for them an optimal morality are allowed the liberty of such practice without ecclesiastical censure. This represents a typical compromise. Max Stackhouse, for example, observes that “our sexual organs were created for specific conjunctions,” but allows that “those relationships where they cannot be joined as they were designed by God to be joined are second-best relationships.”<sup>55</sup>

The accommodation position is initially attractive because of its compassion and empathy. “It accepts stable homosexual relationships in the interest of promoting a fuller, more humanly rich life for homosexual individuals.”<sup>56</sup> The problem is that although the Mosaic law made some concessions to the hardness of men's hearts, specifically in tolerating arbitrary divorce (Dt 24:1-4), Jesus expressly calls his people in this dispensation of the fullness of grace to the original will of God at creation (Mk 10:2-9). To allow such divorces as Moses tolerated, even with good intentions, or to endorse the theory of compromise for homosexual relations, even with the best of motives, is to embrace a species of doing evil that good may result, which Scripture expressly

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Max L. Stackhouse, “Thirty-eight Theses on Christian Social Ethics and Sexuality,” *This World* (Spring 1988): 122, emphasis added.

<sup>56</sup> Hanigan, 79.

rejects as an ethical principle (Romans 3:8). “To intend a moral evil, even for an ultimately good purpose, is to intend evil, no matter what rationalizations may be offered in defense of that choice.”<sup>57</sup>

If the church has good scriptural reasons for believing that homosexual actions are sin, it must lead the faithful in their new obedience, not shift the responsibility to the conscience of the individual. The call to Christian discipleship is superior to what we may feel is necessary for a fulfilled and satisfying life as a sexual being. The church is bound by the will of Christ in Scripture, not her own best judgment, in seeking the good of the members under her care. As Turner observes, “If Christians are asked to say ‘no’ to sexual relations outside the bond of marriage, it is because they are called upon to honor God by saying ‘yes’ to a providential ordering of life intended both for the glory of God and our individual and common good.”<sup>58</sup>

### Abstinence

Recommendation of the course of abstinence is most fully developed in the Roman Catholic tradition. Pope John Paul II clarified elements of the Roman church's teaching in 1986, particularly its view of homosexuality as a condition: “Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder.”<sup>59</sup> Consequently, living out the orientation in homosexual activity is not a morally acceptable option.<sup>60</sup> The Pope underscores that the church’s doctrine on this issue is “based, not on isolated phrases or facile theological argument, but on the solid foundation of a constant biblical testimony.”<sup>61</sup>

What, then, are homosexual persons to do who seek to follow the Lord? Fundamentally, they are called to enact the will of God in their life by joining whatever sufferings and difficulties they experience in virtue of their condition to the sacrifice of the Lord's cross. . . . The cross is a denial of self, but in service to the will of God Himself who makes life come from death and empowers those who trust in Him to practice virtue in place of vice.<sup>62</sup>

We must be prepared to suffer rather than to disobey a clear command of Christ. It is Christ's own example that encourages us to persevere even in the face of intense trial—and no one should try to minimize the extent of the sacrifice involved in sexual abstinence. The book of Hebrews repeatedly refers to the suffering and temptation by which Christ was perfected that enable him to be a merciful and faithful high priest, a sympathetic leader of those he is bringing to glory (Heb 2:10, 18, 4:15-16, 5:7-10). The perspective of Geerhardus Vos on these texts is highly illuminating.

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>58</sup> Turner, “Sex and the Single Life,” 19.

<sup>59</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons” (1986) in John F. Harvey, *The Homosexual Person: New Thinking in Pastoral Care* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987) 235.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

Because Christ's sufferings were not sufferings in general, but specifically temptation sufferings, sufferings which became for Him a source of temptation, therefore He can succor those who are in an analogous situation, i.e., tempted to sin by their sufferings. . . . the sufferings which He has behind Him and carries with Him as a past experience . . . enable Him to know what force of temptation suffering exerts to make the sinner fall. His mercy thus grasps the sufferer in his moral capacity, in the very crisis where suffering threatens to issue into sin or actually issues into the same. And thus it becomes to Him the priestly incentive for propitiating the sins that have resulted from the temptation.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Priesthood of Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980).

## **ARGUMENTS: ETHICS**

### **Defending the Outcast and Calling Them into Responsibility**

The Scriptural teaching about sin and grace that needs to inform the whole question of homosexual partnerships will be skewed and stifled if too much of that question is cast in terms of the responsibility of the church to support and defend the weak and the outcast and not be partial or prejudiced against them. While there is that clarion call throughout Scripture, God also warns against an absolutizing of it, a twisting of it that eventually demeans the disenfranchised by excusing them from personal responsibility. This is why Israel is warned that in judicial decisions, not only must witnesses resist capitulating to the pressure of the majority, but they also must not be indulgent with the legal claims of the poor merely because they're poor. A legal witness is not to neglect justice through a failure of nerve in the name of compassion:

When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit. (Exodus 23:3)

An ethic that is faithful to Scripture guards against being an accomplice either to an abuse of power on the part of “the strong” or to an evasion of responsibility on the part of “the weak.” Elders must not allow the true and very sad fact that homosexual people have often been the objects of contempt, hatred, and violence at the hands of the heterosexual majority, to weaken their resolve to call homosexually-oriented brothers and sisters in Christ into the same grateful-yet-painful obedience in the faith, the same count-the-cost loyalty to the Lord that all of us are called to in our own areas of great temptation and weakness.

Though it will be accused of it, the church cannot be justly charged with building its whole case against homosexual sex on the foundation of mere heterosexual prejudice. We do not deny that there has been such prejudice. Too often, to its shame, the church has violated James 2 and allowed itself to be prejudiced against the outcast, the poor, and the marginalized, and yes, the homosexual. The church of Jesus Christ in our day ought to be speaking out and defending homosexual men and women made in the image of God against all forms of hatred and physical or verbal abuse. But there is a difference between blind prejudice and reasoned judgment. On any objective reading, defense of those regarded as socially inferior is not the only thing that God calls us to, nor is it the supreme, overarching, ethical grid in Scripture that governs all and subordinates every doctrine to itself. Calling the marginalized or the sinned-against into responsibility lies side by side with standing in solidarity with them. The fact that the very first exhortation in Jesus’ proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom was the call to repent (metanow) sounds the clear note of the Bible’s anthropology: human beings, however much they may be shaped by biological factors, environment, or the sins of others committed against them, are, first and foremost, those whom God addresses as significant moral agents. In spite of Adam and Eve having been misused and manipulated by Satan’s malicious cunning, their real human character as being accountable, as being more than just victims of their circumstances, is tellingly revealed in God’s question to Adam, “Where are you?”

And particularly with reference to those who struggle with homosexual desire, so many of whom were abused or neglected in childhood, it is our pastoral responsibility to help them hear the gospel of their forgiveness truly as good news by coming alongside them and enabling them to

face the accusations of the Law of God against them for their response to the sins of parents or others: their anger, rejection of a parent, their fear, self-hatred, or pride. A truly pastoral approach to the homosexual person will entail having the courage to say to them, as a fellow sinner:

God’s love is not a pat on the head, but a refiner’s fire—because he honors us in the freedom he bestows upon us as responsible, from the beginning of our growing up to the end of our final chance in this life. This means that every failure along the way to take a step of growing up involves us in moral default.<sup>64</sup>

The various duties God gives us usually do lay side by side, and our calling is to fulfill them simultaneously—even when those duties seem to conflict with one another. The responsibility of supporting those who have been marginalized by society must be held in tension with the responsibility of confronting them with their obligation to obey the Lord, to the point of disciplining them, if need be, even though we may be accused of—and may feel like we are—“rejecting” them. One theologian has expressed well the tensions inherent in Christian duty:

. . . . the very problems which Christian duty requires us to accomplish, is the reconciling in our conduct opposite virtues. It is not difficult (comparatively speaking) to cultivate single virtues. A man takes some one partial view of his duty, whether severe or kindly, whether of action or of meditation: he enters into it with all his might, he opens his heart to its influence, and allows himself to be sent forward on its current. This is not difficult: there is no anxious vigilance or self-denial in it. On the contrary, there is a pleasure often in thus sweeping along in one way; and especially in matters of giving and conceding. Liberality is always popular, whatever be the subject of it, and excites a glow of pleasure and self-approval in the giver, even though it involves no sacrifice . . .<sup>65</sup>

Such a seemingly impossible task of loving and sympathizing with a homosexual brother or sister in the Lord whose struggles may be far more painful than anything we have ever known, while at the same time exercising the “severe mercy” of church discipline toward them if they define themselves too much in terms of their need for sexual fulfillment and refuse to live within God’s boundaries, will shrivel any confidence we have in our own spiritual and moral powers, and cast us in desperation back on the very present power of Jesus Christ in whom holiness and mercy are always at peace with each other.

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<sup>64</sup> “Sex and Homosexuality: A Pastoral Statement,” Bennett J. Sims (Episcopal bishop of Atlanta), p. 11. (Second emphasis added.)

<sup>65</sup> John Henry Newman’s sermon, “Tolerance of Religious Error” in *Newman Against the Liberals*, p. 197.

## **ARGUMENTS: ETHICS**

### **The “Core of the Gospel” Argument**

#### **Argument**

By insisting that a person who willfully and persistently remains sexually involved in a homosexual partnership should be subject to the remedial discipline of the church, we are, in fact, abandoning the hierarchy of what the Scriptures themselves teach is central and what is peripheral. To give this issue a status confessionis, a status that makes it a confessional dividing line where the very core of the gospel is judged to be at stake, is to run roughshod over the diversity of opinion which exists on this matter within the Christian community, to go beyond the written Word of God, and to foment division with the church, undermining the unity of the body of Christ. We should only be willing to risk dividing the body when issues at the core of the gospel are at stake.

#### **Answer**

We do not judge the core of the gospel to be at stake in questions about homosexuality in the sense that we believe the gospel is defined by sexual fidelity or any form of behavior, for that matter. The “core” of the gospel is clear enough in Scripture:

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. (Titus 3:4-8a)

This is the core of the gospel; always the core is the work of God, not our works.

In the previous chapter of the letter to Titus, however, Paul spells out the implications that the gospel of the grace of God has by virtue of its core:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ...(Titus 2:11-13)

In other words, there is an intrinsic theological connection between God's work and our work: a genuine experience of grace will lead to works. Scripture makes clear that the response to his kindness God expects from us is one of gratitude-driven obedience to his will. This was as true under the old dispensation of law as it is under the new dispensation of grace:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.  
You shall have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:2-3)

Preceding the stipulations of what God demanded of his people is the pronouncement of the gospel, the grace of God, upon which the covenant is based. Hence, the motivation for obedience here is clearly gratitude, thankfulness for having been rescued by God from the tyranny of pagan Egypt.

Grace, therefore, does not exclude the idea of covenant obligations, laid upon a glad and not fearful heart. The keeping of the covenant obligations do not save; only the redemptive acts of God save. The keeping of the covenant obligations only confirms that what God has done in his saving acts is not merely external: he has not merely led his people through the Red Sea; he has also turned their hearts toward himself and toward the true meaning and order of his world. The goal of salvation is the restoration of a relationship, a two-way relationship of love and order wherein God loves and rules his people, and they in turn, love and submit to him. Hence, the whole of salvation can be summed up by God himself in relational terms:

I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. (Lev. 26:12)

All this means that the biblical doctrine of grace involves coming to see not two things, but three. God does confront me with my own inability to do his will on my own, and then with the good news that in Christ he demonstrates just how much he loves me by doing for me what I cannot do on my own. Christ's death on my behalf secures forever my status as a son or daughter that God delights in. That is the core of the gospel. But to stop there would be to open ourselves up to the “cheap grace” perversion of the gospel, as Bonhoeffer so aptly puts the phrase. God also confronts me with a third reality: that the costly, tangible, and profound expression of his love demonstrated at the cross obligates me to surrender my whole being to him and his truth—since I know that the boundaries of truth he calls me to live within do not rob me of my life, but on the contrary, give it to me.

This threefold structure of Christian self-knowledge is expressed well in the Heidelberg Catechism, question #2:

Q. How many things must you know that you may live and die in the blessedness of this comfort [of salvation]?

A. Three. First the greatness of my sin and wretchedness. Second, how I am freed from all my sins and their wretched consequences. Third, what gratitude I owe to God for such redemption.

And the third factor is absolutely critical to grasp if we are to have any realistic and faithful understanding of the kindness and severity that we find intertwined in the pastoral oversight of New Testament congregations.

The gospel is to be believed and appropriated by us in acts and dispositions of faith. And when it is, under the power of the Holy Spirit, it teaches us and empowers us to set a new moral direction

for our lives, one characterized (however imperfectly) by righteous behavior, behavior that is reflective of the very image of Jesus Christ (see Colossians 3:5-10) and that flows out of gratitude to him.

In 1 Timothy Paul sets out a list of unholy behaviors which stand “contrary” to the sound teaching contained in the gospel:

We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers--and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which he entrusted to me.  
(1 Timothy 1:9-11)

Hence, to fail to bring forth the fruit of the gospel in our lives at the critical places where we are tempted not to believe its message of the sufficiency of Christ for us and instead to practice what the law of God forbids, is to contradict and thereby compromise the gospel. Paul himself, on occasion, can accuse professing Christians of contradicting the gospel with their behavior when they do things they ought not to do. Here one thinks of Paul's sharp rebuke of Peter for caving in to fear and failing to live openly the gospel's insistence that Gentiles were not under obligation to keep the Mosaic dietary laws:

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all . . . . (Galatians 2:14a)

And in I Timothy 5 Paul specifies that if believers irresponsibly fail to provide for the financial needs of family members dependent upon them, this constitutes a “denial” of the gospel:

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Timothy 5:8)

At the core of the gospel is the saving work of God. But behavior contrary to God's revealed will compromises that gospel by contradicting its ethical imperatives.

The question, then, is not, Do differences about homosexual partnerships constitute a debate about ‘the core of the gospel’? Our behavior is not at the core of the gospel. The question is, rather, “Do committed homosexual partnerships compromise the gospel by involving believers in willful and persistent sexual behavior which contradicts what the apostles teach is supposed to flow out of a *genuine, personal appropriation* of the gospel?” And we believe the answer is, Yes.

Now, of course, all sin, being contrary to the moral norms implied in the gospel, compromises the gospel. In this sense, we compromise the gospel daily in thought, word, and deed. The central question, however, is whether we will accommodate, defend, and allow one another to regularly practice that which the Word teaches is a compromise of the gospel, or whether we will, in fact own as a compromise, renounce it for what is, repent of it in the sure and certain comfort of God's readiness to forgive, and then turn in a direction away from it in the choices we make. Regardless

of the nature of the sin, this is what the justifying grace of God calls all of us to do, whether homosexual in orientation or heterosexual. This is the painful “work” of sanctification, the obligation that the gospel lays on us.

There are two places in Paul’s pastoral correspondence where the “turning away from” element in the doctrine of repentance is put straightforwardly to Christians in the form of a generalized exhortation concerning sexual temptation:

The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Romans 13:12-14, NASB)

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:18, NIV)

So far from following the apostle’s admonition and removing themselves from situations which tempt toward disobedience, homosexual couples who profess faith in Jesus but cultivate and maintain a sexual relationship with each other welcome and plan those situations in the name of an inevitability that sexual desire will overpower their redeemed determination to obey the Lord. Such an accommodation to the power of the appetites in our bodies and emotions is a de facto denial of Christ’s victory at the cross—which was not only over the guilt of sin, but also over its power. Such an accommodation represents a serious compromise of the gospel.

The unity of the body of Christ is never absolutized in the New Testament. The New Testament doctrine of the unity of the church involves the idea that our unity is a fellowship in the truth of Christ. And that means, practically, that Christians can never say, “We must stay together at all costs.” Where the apostolic theological definition of the gospel is threatened, or where the apostolic ethical implications of the gospel are proposed to be set aside, there the church must remember that she is, by definition, “the pillar and support of truth” in the world (1 Timothy 3:15). She must remember that she jeopardizes her very life if she fails to guard that which has been called the first mark of a true church, “the pure preaching of the Word of God.” She must not sacrifice truth in the interest of unity.

Not all issues of truth, to be sure, have the same importance. But there are some truths worth risking the unity of the body in order to protect. What those are cannot be put into simple list form, but the criteria will have to do with how clearly a truth is presented by Christ and his apostles, and with the place they themselves give to it on the scale which moves from the central to the peripheral in the demands of Christian obedience. The mere claim of having an alternative reading of apostolic doctrine or ethics is not enough to warrant protection under the umbrella principle, “tolerance of diversity of viewpoint for the sake of the unity of the church.”

To use an analogy: despite the claim of Catholic exegesis and theological arguments, there is a clarity about justification by faith in the New Testament teaching. The doctrine of justification by faith is both clear and very much at the core of the gospel. Likewise, the main elements of the

norms of sexual fidelity are clear in the New Testament, and very near the center of what are regarded by the apostles as the ethical implications of the gospel that Christians must either submit to or else be found contradicting that gospel. Everywhere in the New Testament sexual fidelity—the giving of our bodies and therefore, our very selves up to the order created and the boundaries set for us by a faithful Father—is a central feature in the call to follow Christ and please him. Only if we can theologically justify a new sexual norm other than the one we have received in the apostolic preaching of Christ should we tolerate diversity of viewpoint on the question of homosexual partnerships: and such a new norm cannot be justified from the Scriptures without twisting them.

## ARGUMENTS: THEORIES OF CAUSATION

### Homosexuality - Constitution or Choice?

*A bird's eye view of the scientific evidence*

Last year it seemed that every few months a new paper was published which claimed to have found the genetic and biological roots of homosexuality. The research may be somewhat more modest in its claims, but from the media one might think that the constitutional nature of homosexuality is settled and is no longer open to debate. However the May 1994 edition of *Scientific American* acknowledged the true nature of the debate by printing two articles side by side, one being a summary of the latest biological research<sup>66</sup> and the other a strong challenge to this evidence.<sup>67</sup>

### The Shrinking Ten Percent

Before we review some of the different areas of research in this field, we need to examine the oft-quoted “Kinsey” figure of ten percent of the population being homosexual. In fact Kinsey, in his 1948 study, estimated that 4% of American males were exclusively homosexual, 10% had been practicing homosexuals for more than three years during their lives, and 27% had had some homosexual experience. It is now well known that many of Kinsey's subjects were prisoners, sex offenders and recruits from his own lectures. A number of other studies in the last 25 years show a much lower figure of 0.2-2% exclusively homosexual over many years.<sup>68</sup>

We have come to think of homosexuality and heterosexuality as an either or situation, when in fact there is considerable evidence of a spectrum of sexual orientation (as Kinsey described with a scale) with, at one end, 0.2%-2% of the population who have never experienced a *heterosexual* desire, fantasy or dream and at the other end, the majority of the population who, apart from a brief phase of pubertal exploration in some, have never had more than a passing *homosexual* desire, fantasy or dream. In the middle there is a significant percentage (perhaps 10-15%) who have some degree of confusion over sexual identity and orientation. In this group there is growing evidence of a movement in and out of both homosexual and heterosexual relationships for a time. The percentage of homosexuality and bisexuality will probably increase with present changes in society. The acceptance of the teaching of homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle will encourage people to experiment with it at some time in their development. With the rise of divorce, one parent families (especially absent fathers), and the extremes of feminism, there will almost certainly be more problems of sexual identity. The presence of this relatively large group of “bisexuals” also demonstrates that it is relatively few “homosexuals” (1-2%) who can make the claim to “constitutionality” in the way that it is commonly understood today, as an either homosexual or heterosexual judgment. As sexual orientation may be described as a spectrum from heterosexuality, through transitory homosexual behavior to seemingly irreversible homosexuality, so may we speak of degrees of constitutionality.

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<sup>66</sup> LeVay S, Hamer D. “Evidence for a Biological Influence in Male homosexuality.” *Scientific American*. 1994, May, 44-49.

<sup>67</sup> Byne W, “The Biological Evidence Challenged.” *Scientific American*. 1994, May, 50-55.

<sup>68</sup> Eg: Seattle study April 1993 1% of 3321 men surveyed considered themselves exclusively homosexual.

We will now look at the influences which shape sexual orientation.

## Genes

In the last 8 years there have been several studies of the families of homosexuals. In 1986 Pillard and Weinrich found that homosexual men were four times more likely to report a homosexual brother than heterosexual men.<sup>69</sup> In 1991 and 1993 Bailey and Pillard found that approximately 52% of identical twins 22% of non-identical twins and 10% of the brothers of homosexual men were also homosexual.<sup>70</sup> For women the figures were approximately 50%, 22%, and 10% respectively.<sup>71</sup> A 1992 study with a smaller number of homosexual men by King and McDonald<sup>72</sup> found significantly lower rates than Bailey and Pillard. Interpretation of these studies is difficult because firstly, in both, the subjects were recruited through homosexually oriented periodicals and therefore may not be truly representative of the general homosexual population. Secondly, both studies assume an equal environment for identical and non-identical twins. No studies of twins reared together will adequately demonstrate the relative contributions of genes and family, of nature and nurture. Research with twins adopted at birth into different families is necessary to throw more light on this question. Thirdly, it is important to note the large proportion of identical and non-identical twins who were not homosexual, despite the same genes and prenatal and family environments. This suggests that other factors are just as important as any possible genetic predisposition.

Hamer *et al* found similar figures to Pillard and Weinrich but also extended the research to demonstrate that most homosexual relatives of homosexual men are on the mother's side of the family.<sup>73</sup> They also claim that this finding is explained by the fact that a part of the X chromosome contains a gene, of genes, which influence sexual orientation. Bailey, Hamer and others teamed up to see if this "hypothetical gene" affected androgen hormone synthesizer metabolism.<sup>74</sup> Their results were negative, leaving for future research two other possible modes of action for the "hypothetical gene": 1. Indirectly through personality or temperament, or 2. The influence on the development of the part of the brain which affects sexual orientation.

Even with the methodological problems of such research, it should not surprise us to find that there is some genetic component to sexual orientation. We are biological organisms and all of our behavior is probably affected to some degree by our genes. This fact will no doubt be repeatedly brought to our attention over the next few years as the human genome is being explored and mapped. We need to be reminded that science, by its very nature is looking for causal

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<sup>69</sup> Pillard RC, Weinrich JD. "Evidence for the familial nature of male homosexuality." *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 1986; 43:808-812.

<sup>70</sup> Bailey JM, Pillard RC. "A genetic study of male sexual orientation." *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 1991; 48:1089-1096.

<sup>71</sup> Bailey JM, Pillard RC, Neale MC, Agyei Y. "Heritable factors influence sexual orientation in women" *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 1993; 50:217-223.

<sup>72</sup> King M, McDonald E. "Homosexuals who are twins: a study of 46 probands." *Brit J. Psychiatry*. 1992; 160:407-409.

<sup>73</sup> Hamer D, Hu S, Magnuson V, Hu N, Pattatucci M., *Science*. 1993; 261:321-327. July 16.

<sup>74</sup> Macke J, Hu N, Hu S, Bailey MJ, King VL, Brown TR, Hamer D, Nathans J. "Sequence variation in the androgen receptor gene is not a common determinant of male sexual orientation." *American Journal of Human Genetics*. 1993; 53:4:844-852.

explanations and will inevitably produce a deterministic, mechanistic model of the universe and mankind. In fact, science describes only part of reality, and just because we can describe a predisposing reason for a particular thought or behavior, this does not take away the influence of choice and responsibility.

### Hormones

Extensive research has been done in this area but no correlation has been found between adult sexual hormone levels and sexual orientation. The most influential studies have been those of the influence of prenatal hormones. In 1981 Bell and Weinberg found that female rats exposed to high levels of androgens (male hormone) before birth, developed masculine mating behavior (mounting) and male rats exposed to low levels of androgens prenatally developed feminine mating behavior (lordosis or receptive back arching).<sup>75</sup> There are obvious problems with extrapolating from rats to humans and in equating reflex mating behavior with the complexity of human sexual response, but it is not impossible that prenatal hormones might influence the development of the brain and thus be a factor (among many) which influences sexual orientation. In 1984 Meyer-Bahlburg suggested that if the “prenatal hormonal hypothesis is correct, then one might expect to find homosexuality in a large proportion of males with syndromes involving prenatal androgen deficiency or insensitivity and also in females with syndromes involving androgen excess.”<sup>76</sup> But no consistent results have been found in this area.

### Neuroanatomy

The central contention of this research is that there is a small area of the brain (part of the hypothalamus) which is larger in heterosexual males than in heterosexual females and homosexual males. This area of the brain is associated with sexual behavior. In 1978 Gorski found that, in rats, one nucleus of the hypothalamus was 5-8 times larger in males than females.<sup>77</sup> Gorski and Allen also found a similar area of the human brain that was about three times larger in men than in women.<sup>78</sup> In 1991 LeVay's study (much publicized by the media) provided evidence that this area of the brain was as small in homosexual men as it is in women.<sup>79</sup> His work has been widely criticized for its small sample size, the inadequate sexual histories of the subjects and the fact that all the homosexual men had died of AIDS. The latter fact may have affected the appearance and size of the hypothalamic nucleus. Other claims have been made for parts of the brain being different in men and women but the research is not consistent enough to be reliable.

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<sup>75</sup> Bell AP, Weinberg MS, Hammersmith SK. *Sexual Preference: Its Development in Men and Women*. Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press; 1981.

<sup>76</sup> Meyer-Bahlburg HFL. “Psychoendocrine research on sexual orientation: current status and future options.” *Prog Brian Res*. 1984;13:505-544. Quoted from Byne W, Parsons B, “Human Sexual Orientation.” *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 1993; 50:228-239.

<sup>77</sup> Gorski RA, Gordon JH, Shryne JE, Southam AM. “Evidence for a morphological sex difference within the medial preoptic area of the rat brain.” *Brain Res*. 1978; 148:333-346.

<sup>78</sup> Allen LS, Hines M, Shryne JE, Gorski RA. “Two sexually dimorphic cell groups in the human brain.” *J Neurosci*. 1989; 9:497-506.

<sup>79</sup> LeVay S. “A difference in hypothalamic structure between heterosexual and homosexual men.” *Science*. 1991; 253:1034-1037.

Replication of research in this area is vital before much significance can be attached to them. Too often initial enthusiastic claims have been modified in the light of later studies.

### Psychobiology

It appears that one's gender identity (boy or girl) is established by about three years largely in response to sex assignment and parental attitudes. A similar "critical period" for sexual orientation, influenced by hormones, family, peers, culture and perhaps first sexual experience, is puberty and early adolescence. Byne points out that learned responses at a critical period of development may be as hard to change as genetically shaped behavior. For example, if the white crowned sparrow is exposed to another bird species song at the critical period of learning, it can "neither unlearn that song nor acquire a new one." He comments "Although sexual orientation is not a matter of mimicry, it is clear that learned behavior can nonetheless be immutable." (emphasis mine).<sup>80</sup>

Bell and Weinberg demonstrated an association between gender non-conformity in childhood (for boys—fear of injury, avoidance of physical fights, avoidance of baseball, and preference for girls as playmates) and later homosexual preference.<sup>81</sup> They suggest that this points to an early prehomosexual predisposition. But here we enter the complexities of parent child interaction. For example, a child who is temperamentally more "effeminate" and "sensitive" (by cultural stereotypical norms) and not necessarily "prehomosexual" may be criticized, punished, teased or ignored by parents and peers for showing such gender nonconformity, and this may push them in the direction of identification with homosexuality.

### Psychodynamic and Psychosocial Factors

The earlier research in this area has tended to be overshadowed by the more recent genetic and hormonal studies and because it does not fit the contemporary acceptable view has fallen out of fashion. However a number of psychological studies reported a pattern that many, perhaps a majority, of homosexual men reported in their families. The typical description was of a father who was perceived to be, to a significant degree, passive, ineffective, rejecting, hostile or absent, and a mother who was perceived to be too controlling, anxious, possessive and intimate.<sup>82</sup>

More recently, Elizabeth Moberly has suggested that the common factor in the development of many homosexuals is the disruption in the attachment to the parent of the same sex, which results in ambivalence towards that parent with a combination of self-protective detachment and deep desire for what is missing.<sup>83</sup> If such legitimate longings for love and affirmation are not met in normal ways, then a young person may find that desire met in a homosexual relationship with a peer or older person. The desire at that stage is not so much for a sexual relationship as for a relationship of affirmation with some one of the same sex.

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<sup>80</sup> Byne W. "The Biological Evidence Challenged." *Scientific American*. 1994;May:50-55.

<sup>81</sup> Bell AP, Weinberg MS, Hammersmith SK. op cit.

<sup>82</sup> Bieber et al. *Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytical Study*. New York, NY: Basic Books Inc; 1962.

<sup>83</sup> Moberly E. *Psychogenesis: The Early Development of Gender Identity*. Methuen Press. 1985.

Although there has not been much formal research on these factors it would seem obvious that parental example and attitude to relationships and sexuality, first sexual experiences (especially for someone with doubts about their identity) and experiences of sexual abuse will all shape the direction of sexual orientation.

The combination of being sinned against by one's parents, whether deliberately or by accident or through ignorance, together with the natural self-centeredness, pride, lust and rebellion of the sinful human heart, and then the cycles of self hatred, shame and guilt, produces a heady cocktail of thoughts, emotions, choices and behavior.

### **An Interactionist Model**

Any reductionist model of human behavior which reduces us to mere products of our genes or biochemistry does not do justice to the many factors we have discussed. It is clear that with the present state of scientific knowledge in this area that a model which allows for the interaction of many forces is the most appropriate. In one person the genetic and biological factors may be much stronger than in another for whom the family influences are more strategic. For many it is a subtle interweaving of biological, psychological and social influences combined with thousands of small choices made in response to circumstances and inner thoughts and feelings from day to day that shapes sexual orientation and identity.

An example is the young man with a (presumably to some degree genetic) strong musical gift and keen aesthetic sensitivity who was a profound disappointment to his father who always dreamed of having a son who would be a great football player. His father called him a sissy and gave him little except negative attention. In the American South, 15 years ago, this young man was teased by his peers and eventually found affirmation and “love” in a relationship with a slightly older homosexual musician. What might have happened to this young man’s “predisposition” if he had had a father who really enjoyed his son’s wonderful gifts and who was able to express his approval and affection openly? What might have happened if he had found a good group of heterosexual friends who did not love sport and appreciated music and art?

### **Is Change Possible?**

Most people in the gay community believe that change from a homosexual to a heterosexual orientation is impossible. They claim that homosexuality is as natural as left handedness. They would say that when we present to a constitutional homosexual the false hope that he can be changed we are lying. As we have seen the big question is the significance of the word constitutional. For those in the 1-2% who are on the exclusively homosexual end of the spectrum, change may be very difficult and well nigh impossible, but how we view the possibility of change is, as we will see, critical. There are a number of experts in the field, who believe that change is possible. John Money, a noted researcher on sexual orientation believes that some people do change their orientation and that there is absolutely no harm in trying. Masters and Johnson, experienced sex therapists, claim to have achieved a 60-70% success rate in helping people to change. And there are numerous anecdotal stories from Christian ministries to homosexuals

describing such changes. It seems, from the research and the stories, that change is certainly difficult but is easier if four factors are present: 1) Strong motivation to change, 2) Minimal involvement in homosexual practice, 3) Some successful heterosexual experience (or at least some heterosexual desires, fantasies and dreams at some time) and 4) Youth. It is probably true that if many predisposing and causative factors are present then change will be more difficult.

One study of this process, published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, describes a pattern which seems to emerge from the stories from other Christian ministries. Psychiatrist E. Mansell Pattison and his wife E. Myrna Loy Pattison, write...

When homosexuality is defined as an immutable fixed condition that must be accepted, the potential for change seems slim. In our study, however, when homosexuality was defined as a changeable condition, it appears that change was possible.<sup>84</sup>

The study documented the claimed change in sexual orientation of eleven white males from exclusive homosexuality to exclusive heterosexuality through participation in a Pentecostal Church fellowship. Out of the thirty subjects who claimed change, eleven were interviewed in detail and their information correlated well with information from the staff of the church crisis center through which they had made original contact with the church.

The eleven white men were aged between 21 and 35 years (mean 27). All had developed homosexual tendencies before the age of 15 and most changed to heterosexual orientation by the time they were 22 years old. Nine of the subjects had a Kinsey Rating of 6 (the highest, indicating exclusively homosexual physical and psychical responses before change. Six out of the eleven were happily married at the time of the study. The length of time they had been married varied between two and seven years (mean four years). The change was gradual for all subjects, with homosexual fantasies, dreams and impulses fading slowly over months and years and as their marital relationships developed. The Pattisons describe the process of change very succinctly:

When our subjects came in contact with the church's crisis service for homosexuals, they found a welcome reception as homosexuals. No attempt was made to make them change their homosexuality. Rather they were presented with the invitation to commit their life to Christ and the church. All subjects had an explicit Christian conversion or dedication. They were then invited into small church fellowship groups where they studied the Bible and learned expected Biblical patterns of mature lifestyles.

All of our subjects soon became aware that they were psychologically immature and had poor interpersonal relationships...They were surprised to experience acceptance, non-judgmental evaluation, and non-erotic love from both men and women. These were new relationships. As a result they began to identify with those they considered "mature Christian men and women" and to experience and practise non-erotic relationships with Christian women in the church... (There was

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<sup>84</sup> Pattison EM, Pattison ML. "Ex-gays: Religiously Mediated Change in Homosexuals." *Am J Psychiatry*. 1980; 137:12:1553-1562.

no) immediate change in their homosexual dreams, fantasies, impulses or orientation; rather a gradual maturation into a secure and satisfying identity as a male with high self acceptance...They began to experience non-threatening and satisfying interpersonal relationships with women (resulting in) a steady diminution in their homosexual feelings and a steady increase in their heterosexual feelings.

The process of change was not magical, spontaneous or dramatic. Change was embedded in an accepting, evaluative, and loving, non-erotic social milieu that provided expectations, ideology, and actual interpersonal experiences and thus promoted what they saw as personal growth into heterosexuality.<sup>85</sup>

From this study (and from the reports of many others who have changed) we can see that it is a combination of commitment to Christ, teaching, counseling, prayer, fellowship with members of the same sex, accountability, self-discipline, the work of the Holy Spirit, membership of an alternative family and community, and time which eventually produces the depth of change that is necessary.

Individual counseling will involve dealing with a number of issues which can only be listed here to give a sense of the process (and pain). It may involve uncovering and owning legitimate longings for love and affection, grieving and owning anger (often a mixture of righteous and unrighteous) over inadequate and/or destructive relationships in the past, uncovering sinful strategies for meeting needs in the past and present and repenting of these sins as well as the sins of self-centeredness, pride and lust. It will involve accepting God's gracious love and forgiveness, learning to forgive others and leaving the ultimate justice of having been sinned against in God's hands. It will involve learning to accept and be thankful for one's God-given masculinity or femininity, breaking old habits of thought and behavior, and possibly, for some, it will involve coming to terms with celibacy.

If loving homosexual relationships are accepted within the church as good, or even as the lesser of two evils, then the motive for change is much reduced and the acceptance of celibacy is made much more difficult.

## **Conclusion**

The scientific evidence which we have briefly examined is not necessarily in conflict with the Biblical data about homosexuality. The genetic and biological research does not affect the morality of the situation. What it does not always tell us what ought to be. We cannot tell from the genes, anatomy or chemistry whether this was part of the Creator's original intention or a "bentness" as a result of the fall. If there is a genetic predisposition to alcoholism or violence, and many scientists believe there is, we do not assume that this is a good thing or that people with this propensity should not or cannot be, at least to some degree, held responsible for their behavior. The morality is certainly not decided on the basis of the genes, but the presence of a strong genetic or psychological predisposition does have a very practical consequence in that it should

increase the amount of compassion and patience we exhibit towards those homosexuals for whom the homosexual orientation seems to run deep within their being.

The scientific studies give us a clearer understanding of the many ways we are affected by the fall and the factors which influence the possibility of change. These do not take away our responsibility but help us to see that, in this fallen world, some have a harder time working against sinful tendencies than others. We are responsible, not for the ways in which we have been sinned against, but for our reactions to those sins in the present. In an age where science and psychology consistently find reasons for us to claim sympathy for being victims of our genes, biology and other people's sins we need to recognize some truth in the ways we are shaped by these forces, but at the same time affirm the biblical view of men and women who are made in the image of God with the dignity, significance and responsibility of being choice makers who to some degree shape our destiny within the limits of God's sovereignty. Salvation is both a state and a process. Justification sets us in a right relationship with God, but sanctification involves a process of the Holy Spirit working in us to change us, little by little to be more like Christ. He needs our cooperation and active obedience in working against all of our fallen and sinful tendencies whether in relation to greed, temper or homosexual desires. In some people, for many reasons, these tendencies have deep roots and they need our special love, patience, encouragement and exhortation.

For an excellent and much more extensive review and critique of this research, see "Human Sexual Orientation - The Biologic Theories Reappraised" by William Byne MD, PhD, and Bruce Parsons MD, PhD, in *Archives of General Psychiatry*, Vol 50, March 1993 and the two articles in *Scientific American* referred to above.

## ARGUMENTS: PASTORAL CARE

### Besetting Sins

The Puritans particularly contribute to our understanding of the problem of besetting sins. Sometimes they refer to these sins as “bosom sins” because they are often the most cherished practices or dispositions and therefore that much more difficult to part with. The call to a Christian to battle his or her homosexuality is no different from the call to another Christian to battle his alcoholism, pride, or temper. Every Christian is called to stand against their besetting sin out of love and loyalty to the Savior.

The irritable English pastor in Cambridge, Charles Simeon (1759-1836), struggled with the besetting sins of pride and anger for most of his life. However, he found regular victory over these evils through the grace of friends who were willing to confront and correct him. As a young vicar at Holy Trinity in Cambridge, he wrote to one such friend, Thomas Lloyd, who was five years his junior, saying that whatever is a man’s “besetting sin in a state of nature will most generally remain so when he is in a state of grace; with this difference only, that in the former case it has the entire ascendancy over him—in the latter it meets with continual checks and is not suffered to have dominion.”<sup>86</sup>

Thomas Boston documented his struggle with an undisclosed besetting sin in his *Memoirs*. Several passages are useful for our purposes. One shows us both the torment it was for his soul and his resolve to keep going back to the Lord with it:

The struggle with my own will was most dreadful, so that I was like to sink under it, and say, There is no hope, while it lay on me as a giant bearing down on a little child. I laid down my resolution however always to go to God with it again, as it renewed its desperate attacks on me; and so I did, and found some ease that way; though sometimes both heart and hand were taken from me in this combat, and I was almost swallowed up in despair. I felt the power of the bands of wickedness. The first ease I got was, that it was suggested to me in prayer, that it might be God was letting me fall so low before the victory, that I might see it, when it came, entirely due to his grace.<sup>87</sup>

Boston found particular solace in the Lord's Supper. Seeing the blood of Christ pictured, freed his heart to obey. He found greater resolve to battle his sin--not make concessions to it.<sup>88</sup>

Boston never overcame his besetting sin. He searched his conscience on his deathbed to see if it would disqualify him for heaven. He found five reasons why it would not: 1) he sincerely desired to quit it for Christ; 2) he had sometimes overcome it through spiritual exercise; 3) his loathing of it drove him to Christ; 4) he sincerely desired a “cross of Christ’s choosing” over a “crown of his own choosing”; and 5) he loved God in Christ more than his besetting sin.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Hopkins, Hugh Evans. *Charles Simeon of Cambridge* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977) 100.

<sup>87</sup> Samuel M’Millan. *The Complete Works of Thomas Boston*. Vol. 12 (Richard Owen Roberts, 1980) 222, 23.

<sup>88</sup> M’Millan 226, 245.

<sup>89</sup> M’Millan 399.

Perhaps Boston's besetting sin was something sexual, perhaps not. Whatever it was, though, it appears that resisting it was enormously difficult for him—maybe the hardest thing he ever had to do by faith.

Such testimonies from the Puritans should have at least two effects on us. First, it should humble every Christian for not doing more serious battle with sins that are not regarded with as much seriousness as homosexual sins are, and yet also are called “abominations” by God, like “haughty eyes and a lying tongue” (Prov. 6:16-19). And then secondly, it should encourage Christians struggling to resist homosexual temptation to believe that the species of sin is less important than that they are fighting against it as something evil.

## **ARGUMENTS: PASTORAL CARE**

### **Practical Steps for Pastoral Care**

How can the local church communicate loving acceptance of homosexual people without condoning their sin? The church needs to acknowledge that homoerotic sex is sin, but then also minister to offenders on both the corporate and personal levels.

**Corporate.** I use this term to describe the formal and informal ministry of the church community to those caught up in homosexual behavior. The church must minister to homosexual people from the pulpit by carefully and compassionately interpreting the Word. Two former members of the Metropolitan Community Church, one a former transvestite and another who lived in a “committed relationship” describe their feelings of hope when they heard clear Scriptural teaching for the first time that homosexual behavior is a sin and that there is hope for the homosexual person.<sup>90</sup>

The preaching of the church must be clear in its denunciation of homosexuality so that those committing homosexual sin will be convicted of their disobedience and seek repentance (Col. 1:28; 2 Tim. 2:25). But it must also communicate compassion to the degree that those struggling with homosexuality will feel invited to seek help from the leadership of the church. That attitude among the leadership will be fostered by their honest acknowledgment of their own sinfulness (Gal. 6:1). If the preaching and teaching of the church does not communicate this kind of compassion along with its clear exposition of the biblical call to obedience, the homosexual Christian in the pew may spiral deeper into sin. However, when the church presents this faithful balance, the testimony of many former homosexuals is that it gives them hope for escape from desires and a lifestyle that they really do not want.<sup>91</sup>

[Caution: the following story has limited value in 2017 as John Paulk reclaimed his gay life and now celebrates it] John Paulk, a former transvestite, gives one negative and one positive example of how the church can exercise its prophetic role. In 1986, he was riding in a Gay Pride parade in Columbus, Ohio, as a drag queen. Along the way, he encountered a group of people waving Bibles over their head and yelling “God hates fags” and “Turn or burn.” John's thought was, “Who would want to follow a God like the one they’re displaying?” However, six months later, a minister who had befriended John at the print shop where he worked, invited himself to John’s apartment to “talk about God.” At the end of the evening, in response to the gracious ministry of the pastor, John received Christ.<sup>92</sup>

Brad Grammer tells a similar story. He grew up in an evangelical church but struggled with homosexuality from grade school to college. Finally, he worked up enough nerve to talk with the youth pastor of his church. The minister empathized with his struggle of not fitting into “the

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<sup>90</sup> Sy Rogers, “The Man in the Mirror,” (*The Last Days Newsletter*, Keith Green Ministries) 14,15 and Jami Breedlove, “Once Gay, Always Gay?” (*Focus on the Family*, March 1994) 3.

<sup>91</sup> Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, author of *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality—A New Clinical Approach and Healing the Homosexual* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc. 1991 and 1994(?).) in an interview with James Dobson, Focus on the Family Radio, April 1994.

<sup>92</sup> Bob Davies. “Homosexuals and the Church” (*Moody Monthly*, May 1994) 13, 14.

typical male role.” Then he shared the Gospel with Brad and Brad understood, he says, for the first time “what it meant to be saved by grace.” The youth minister that succeeded the first one also demonstrated God’s grace to Brad and disciple him as a new believer. Today Brad Grammer is the director of Face-to-Face, a ministry to homosexuals in Chicago.<sup>93</sup>

Bob Burns, Minister of Pastoral Care at Perimeter Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, says, “the church is called to hold up a standard of justice and holiness while loving the sinner. In other words, we must love as we disagree . . . or as Francis Schaeffer used to say, ‘We must speak the truth with tears.’”<sup>94</sup>

Not only must the church preach clearly and compassionately, it must offer viable alternatives to the homosexual lifestyle. Joe Dallas, director of Genesis Counseling Services in Orange, California, says that the church must learn the same lesson in ministry to homosexuals that it has learned in the anti-abortion movement—offer alternatives.<sup>95</sup> If the church cannot start its own counseling ministry or support groups, it must develop a reference file for local and national ministries. John Freeman of Harvest, a ministry to homosexuals in Philadelphia, says, “Preaching the gospel entails also helping people find friends, a living place, etc.”<sup>96</sup>

**Personal.** The church must also minister individually to the homosexual believer. The common denominator in most testimonies of homosexuals who have begun to be healed in Christ is that they were looking for unconditional love--and only found it in the Lord through the Lord’s people.<sup>97</sup>

Individuals within a local church can have a powerful ministry to homosexuals without any special training. Brad Grammer says that anyone can invite someone to dinner and share the Gospel with them.

Ken Korver, associate pastor of Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount California, preached a sermon on 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 showing that homosexuality was a sin that could be forgiven. Then he invited anyone struggling with the sin to contact a member of the pastoral staff who would walk through the process of healing with them. He then organized a mentoring program for the homosexuals in his congregation. He held a three hour training session for straight men that wanted to understand homosexuality better. Some 50 men “graduated” from this program. Their names were then given to those who had come out of a homosexual lifestyle for contact if they wanted one of the mentors to be an accountability partner.<sup>98</sup>

The 100 member Church of the Open Door in San Rafael, California, offers a two year discipleship program for people from all over the world, many of whom have never found support in their local churches. At the beginning of each program, participants are introduced to the church during an evening service. Members of the congregation are invited to come forward and

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<sup>93</sup> Karen Beattie. “The Silent Struggle” (*Moody Monthly*, May 1994) 15.

<sup>94</sup> Phone conversation, May 25, 1994.

<sup>95</sup> Davies 14, 15.

<sup>96</sup> William S. Barker. “Reaching Homosexuals in Philadelphia” (*Presbyterian Journal*, February 25, 1987) 9.

<sup>97</sup> Davies 14.

<sup>98</sup> Davies 17.

pray for one or more of the once-practicing homosexual Christians. Prayer cards giving specific suggestions are distributed to the volunteers: “Send the participant a birthday card, invite him to your house for dinner, phone him periodically to offer encouragement, include him on a family outing, have him bring a potluck item to your house for a holiday meal.”

Same-gender small groups are helpful for positive gender identification. Discovery Church in Orlando which provides such groups, and Dr. Joseph Nicolosi who prescribes such interaction for his counselees, both affirm that this is successful.<sup>99</sup>

Davies’ article in Moody Monthly lists several reasons churches have not been successful in reaching homosexuals. First, is the general hardness of heart that exists in conservative churches toward homosexually-inclined people. Churches must recognize that even though Paul teaches us that homosexual sex is a form of immorality “contrary to nature,” nevertheless it is not held up in Scripture as a sin worse than every other kind of immorality. Secondly, church members are concerned about the risk of getting AIDS by casual contact despite assurances from health experts. Churches must be given the facts about the transmission of the AIDS virus: there is no evidence that it can be transmitted by casual contact. Heterosexual Christians must be exhorted to live not in fear, but with the kind of self-sacrificing love and acceptance that Jesus showed toward those regarded as social inferiors. Thirdly, parents are concerned that the homosexual person will molest their children. However, Chuck Therrien, director of ReCreation Ministries in Manchester, N.H., says that most homosexuals are drawn to adults, not children. He also reasons that if they are coming to the church for help, “Why would they recruit someone into a lifestyle they despise and are desperately trying to overcome?” Furthermore, churches should already have safeguards in place to protect against such abuse.<sup>100</sup>

The Church has something to offer the world that no other society or institution has—the genuine, unconditional love of Christ ministered through his people. Homosexual men, women, and youth who are being granted repentance by the Spirit should find in the Church the visible demonstration of true love. John Paulk, the former female impersonator, says about the Church of the Open Door, “They loved me into wholeness.” [But see the 2017 cautionary note regarding John Paulk two pages previous to this one.]

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<sup>99</sup> Davies 18 and Focus on the Family, April 1994.

<sup>100</sup> Davies 18.

## **ARGUMENTS: PASTORAL CARE**

### **The Question of Homosexual Sin and the Westminster Standards**

In any discussion of pastoral care and church discipline, the question soon becomes, Which sins are censurable, and why? And a related question is, At what point in a process of pastoral counsel with someone caught up in a certain sin does censure become warranted, and why?

While the Westminster Standards don't neatly answer all the practical questions we put to them, they do lay out for us, in their general teaching on sin, some principles that are relevant to the issue at hand.

#### **I. The Westminster Standards and Homoerotic Sex** (We use the terms homosexual and homoerotic interchangeably.)

The Westminster Standards clearly regard homoerotic sex as a violation of the 7th commandment—a commandment which, in forbidding heterosexual adultery, codified for Israel God's law of sexual boundary. In its exposition of the 7th commandment, the Westminster Larger Catechism (Question 139) includes the phrase "sodomy, and all unnatural lusts" in its list of things prohibited by the 7th commandment. The Scriptural warrant for this is said to be Romans 1:24, 26, 27 and Leviticus 20:15-16. These prooftexts, like all the prooftexts for the Standards, were debated and formally adopted by the Westminster Assembly and appended to the Confession and Catechisms.

There cannot be any serious dispute what "sodomy" means in the 17th century. In the words of one, William Hitchen, Under-Marshall of London in the early 1700s and himself given to homosexual attachments, "sodomites" are "such as deal with their own sex as well as females."<sup>101</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary gives clear citations for this sense of the word clear back to the early 1600s.

Clearly then, the [Westminster] Standards condemn same-sex sexual involvement. Whether, in fact, Romans 1 and Leviticus 20 can be legitimately be used to rule out all homosexual behavior is a question we have dealt with elsewhere. We are here only trying to establish what the Standards teach, and there can be no doubt that question 139 affirms that homoerotic behavior is a violation of the divine command.

#### **II. The Seriousness of Homosexual Sin According to the Westminster Standards**

But do the Standards shed any light on the question as to whether all sins should be treated alike or whether some are worse than others? And specifically, do the Standards say or imply anything about the relative seriousness of homosexual sin?

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<sup>101</sup> Cited in "The Birth of the Queen: Sodomy and the Emergence of Gender Equality in Modern Culture: 1660-1750," Randolph Trumbach, in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Duberman & Martha Vicinus (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), p. 137.

Sin is defined by the Standards as “any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any law of God . . . .” (WLC #24). The Confession concludes that “every sin . . . doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner” and renders us condemned under the divine wrath (WCF 6.6). This means that in the court of divine justice, gossip is as damnable as sodomy. In fact, the Confession makes a point of saying that the “small” sins are damnable while the “big” sins are forgivable—when repentance follows them (WCF 15.4). And in its exposition of justification by faith, the Confession makes it clear that any that are justified before God are justified only by the merits of Christ and not by their moral track record (WCF 11.1-3). The clear implication is that, before God’s holiness, we are equally humbled, having become, together, the objects of his grace. The Larger Catechism reminds us that one of the reasons we are to keep the pure law of God ever before us is so that, in our awareness of how far short of it we fall, we might learn humility. (WLC, Question 95)

Nevertheless, while our Standards are concerned to defend the biblical teaching that the whole human race stands in solidarity under divine judgment, they do not stop there and simplistically reduce all that the Bible says about sin to this “equality-in-guilt.” Question 150 (WLC) puts this question:

Are all transgressions of the law of God equally heinous in themselves, and in the sight of God?

The answer they give is, "No."

A. All transgressions of the law of God are not equally heinous; but some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God.

And then, in Question 151, there follows a long list of what aggravations make some sins a more serious offense against God. All the aggravations are listed under four headings: 1) the characteristics of the person doing the offending; 2) the characteristic of those offended—whether God or people; 3) the nature and character of the offense itself; and 4) circumstances of time and place surrounding the offense.

Category #3, the nature and character of the offense, is germane to the question of homosexual sin. The following things render a sin more serious:

a) If it is against the light of nature.

Here, Romans 1:26-27 is cited again. This shows that the Assembly regarded homoerotic sex as a more flagrant violation of the will of God because it violates not only the decrees of special revelation (Leviticus 20:15-16; Romans 1:26-27) given to the people of God, but it goes against even the moral insight given by God in creation and in the conscience to all people.

b) If it is against the explicit letter of the law.

If any of the relevant biblical texts on homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22 & 20:15-16; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; I Timothy 1:10) do, in fact, expressly identify homoerotic behavior as a violation of New Covenant commandments, then to disregard this express command of God renders the sin more serious (that is, more serious because more brazen) than if the command was not so explicit but more general. We might well judge that the contemporary practice of gambling is, in fact, a species of the sin of greed. But this is a judgment based on theological inference not on an explicit letter of biblical law. On the other hand, the Old Testament background of the New Testament prohibitions against homosexual behavior is, quite clearly, the Levitical passages with their explicit rejection of homoerotic genital intercourse. Without convincing evidence to the contrary, it would be hard to argue that the New Testament prohibitions represent anything other than a re-promulgation of the explicit letter of the sexual law in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

- c) If it is not only conceived in the heart, but then is carried out in words in actions.

The central question for the church must be, Is homoerotic behavior regarded by the Scriptures as disobedience to the divine commands? Because if it is not, then WLC Question 151 is completely irrelevant to the discussion. But if the biblical testimony compels us to answer in the affirmative, then Question 151 teaches us to counsel those with homosexual desire to resist their inner inclinations, since to follow those inclinations, to self-consciously act them out, renders the sin more offensive because what began as a root, a mere inclination of the heart, was allowed to grow without restraint and mature into an overt act.

- d) If it is done deliberately, willfully...frequently...with delight. and with continuance...

Here again, if the verdict is that the Scripture regards homosexual behavior as a breaking of the commandments, then two Christians of the same sex who do not try to resist sexual temptation, but on the contrary "make their peace" with sexual involvement with each other on the grounds that they can do no better in a fallen world, actually aggravate their moral culpability before God in each sexual encounter because these sexual encounters will be entered into quite deliberately and willfully, and usually will also be frequent and pursued continually (i.e., regularly, as time goes on) as that which brings pleasure and delight.

## **Conclusion**

If the Standards are wrong, and sodomy, or homoerotic sex, does not intrinsically (regardless of the social context) constitute an act of disobedience to God, then the rest of what the Catechism says about gradations of seriousness in our sins is irrelevant to the questions your Session has posed to Presbytery.

But if the Standards are not wrong about homoerotic sex and, in fact, give us a faithful rendering of the law of Christ on the matter, the law which is to govern believers on this side of the cross,

then they clearly imply a course of pastoral care to the believer with homosexual desires: elders must do everything they can to dissuade that brother or sister from acting out that impulse. Not to do this—if we may now draw some implications from Question 151—involves the elders in encouraging (or tacitly accepting) that which they should, for love’s sake, be discouraging and opposing: a deeper and deeper aggravation of that person's sin and rebellion against God. And that sin which elders do not oppose as sin will come, eventually, to be no longer regarded by the flock as sin.

On the other hand, it should be clear from our exposition of the WLC that our pastoral duty to shepherd God’s flock involves not only helping and warning people away from making their peace with homosexual sin, but doing the very same thing for heterosexual sin, indeed, for any sin. All sins that violate a specific command of God and are committed deliberately, willfully, frequently, and continually, call for the same pastoral response: warning, and a humble but firm resistance to the person's acquiescence in the sin.

## **ARGUMENTS: CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

### **Argument**

Excluding people who are in committed gay relationships from the Lord's Supper will only drive them away from the church and away from Christ, and back into the arms of the liberal church or of the radical gay movement. If we accept them and regard their profession of faith as credible, on the grounds that there is evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in other areas of their lives, then in due time they may become persuaded by the Lord that heterosexual marriage is God's ideal and begin to pursue that, or at least break off their sexual relationship. Just as we are to be patient and do not always formally discipline people for their sins, but hope for the Spirit to do his convicting work if they are caught up in besetting sins of one kind or another (gossip, having a critical spirit, laziness, greed, lack of commitment to the body of Christ, etc.) so we should take the same approach with homosexual couples who profess an evangelical faith in Christ.

### **Answer**

We are encouraged and challenged by the example your church has been in reaching out to homosexual men and women, and we recognize that God's Word must be given time to bear its fruit in the hearts of those whom he calls to the gospel. Yet, we believe that Scripture calls us to the practice of discipline as a means of grace to bring about the growth in obedience to God which is the calling of every Christian. Discipline is, of course, chastisement, and is therefore painful, yet, by the power of the Spirit, discipline too is God's ordained instrument to produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness in believers who fall into grievous sin, be it homosexual acts, or any of the other offenses for which the Scriptural teaching demands the practice of discipline.

#### **1. The Lack of Discipline in our Churches.**

We begin this section of our response with the acknowledgment that biblical discipline is either very rarely or very inconsistently or very poorly practiced by late twentieth century American churches, and we also note with sorrow that this includes our own denomination and our own presbytery.

The reasons for this are clear: the centrality of the individual in the nation's life; the unbridled pursuit of a freedom that is defined for oneself; the demand for personal happiness as an absolute right; the sense of need to be true to one's own inner longings and what is perceived as one's own nature. This cultural context militates against the practice of discipline.

An additional factor in the decline of discipline is the lack of stable community in our churches. Discipline, as we shall see, requires community; that is, for truly Biblical discipline to be in place, there must be a context of loving involvement in one another's lives from day to day. Where "church" consists of Sunday worship and occasional meetings without the reality of a deeper corporate life, the practice of discipline loses its force. The social mobility of our culture increases the problem. If our members have little sense of rootedness in a city, and minimal loyalty to a

particular congregation, then again discipline loses its' edge with Christians moving from church to church so easily.

## **2. The “Culture War.”**

Along with these problems many believers who are sensitive to the need for their churches to be involved in reaching out to the “sinners” in our cities are wary of the constant denunciations by notable Christian leaders of various groups involved in the “culture war” of our times: gays and lesbians, drug addicts, AIDS sufferers, prostitutes, husbandless women, fatherless children, teenagers attracted to crime and gang warfare. They feel that these public declarations of hostility toward particular sins and sinners in the name of God do little to serve the cause of the gospel of Christ and the salvation of the guilty people that Jesus died to save.

Consequently, those churches which welcome sinners of every kind to their services may have an additional factor of reluctance to practice discipline. “How can the gospel be preached,” they ask, “if we start disciplining the people who need the gospel most?”

There is also a widespread feeling that certain sins are “unacceptable” and will lead to the cry for discipline: sins such as homosexual practice or drug addiction, and that other sins are “acceptable” and will rarely bring a call for discipline: sins such as dishonest business practice or malicious gossip. Along with this sense of unfair discrimination a further question is asked: “Which of these sins are more widely present in our churches, and therefore more obviously in need of discipline?”

## **3. The Calling of the Church.**

Jesus calls his church into existence to glorify and enjoy the Father with him, to serve fellow believers in love, and to bring his message of salvation to a wicked and desperately needy world.

This calling of the church to the world means that we are forbidden by Christ to curse, revile and insult sinners. Rather we are commanded to pray for them, to bless them and to love them even if they hate us and make themselves our enemies.

A church, therefore is not to be a gathering where only the righteous feel welcome, but rather a fellowship of sinners saved by grace, who welcome other sinners, a gathering of believers who, like Jesus himself, eat and drink with sinners and are servants of sinners. A proper humility before God will always lead to such an attitude and lifestyle. If this humility is not present we will bring on ourselves the denunciation that Jesus spoke to the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14). This man was actually congratulating himself that he was not sinful like other men—he just put it in the form of a prayer.

A church ought to be a body among whom sinners of every kind are welcomed to hear the proclamation of the gospel; a community where those seeking God are given time to repent of

their sins; and a fellowship of supplication where there is urgent and persistent prayer for the Spirit to call sinful men and women to the obedience of Christ and to an increasingly righteous life.

This should not mean that the clear teaching of Scripture announcing the holiness of God is to be muted, nor that the denunciation of sin is to be restrained, nor that there will be no passionate calls to repentance. However, time needs to be given for this message of repentance to take root in a sinner's heart as faith begins to grow there and as the Spirit softens the conscience through the Word.

#### **4. The Purpose of Discipline**

Why should there be church discipline? A simple and sufficient answer is that the Lord of the church demands it. It is however appropriate for us to ask what purposes he has in mind in commanding us.

The *first reason* for discipline is the honor of Christ and of his name before the watching world. The church is called both in its teaching and in its life to uphold the holiness of God before the world. God dwells in unapproachable light, and our Savior was entirely without sin in his life on earth. It is only fitting therefore that the church that bears his name dedicates herself to a life of purity. This is why the Reformers regarded church discipline as one of the marks of the true and apostolic church—whether they distinguished it as the third of the three marks, like Bucer and Knox, or understood it as implied in the first mark, the pure preaching of the Word, like Calvin.

The *second reason* for discipline is the sanctification and salvation of the sinner. We are to discipline in order to bring a brother or sister in the Lord to repentance; and so that the spirit of the disobedient Christian may be saved on the day of the Lord Jesus.

The *third reason* for discipline is to prevent the spread of evil in the church if open sin is not dealt with in obedience to God's Word. A little yeast of undisciplined sin will corrupt a whole church by pervading the life of other believers. If the sin of one is tolerated it will discourage others who may have been struggling faithfully against that same sin. In addition the acceptance of one sin in the body is likely to lead to the expectation of tolerance for other disciplinable sins; for the clear teaching of God's Word and the understanding of that Word by generations of believers will have been cast aside.

#### **5. The Lord's Intervention.**

This demand for discipline which is sounded so clearly by Scripture can be ignored only at our peril, for judgment must begin with the household of God.

If we fail to discipline, we can expect that God himself will bring swift judgment on us. He not only demanded the practice of discipline in his teaching, but also gave us the terrible example of

the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira to demonstrate that he will not tolerate the covering up of serious sin in the life of his church.

In the church at Corinth the Lord disciplined some in the congregation with sickness and death. These believers had openly destroyed the unity of the body which ought to have been celebrated in the Lord's Supper. Another example comes from the church in Thyatira where sexual immorality was publicly taught and therefore practiced by members of the church. Again, Christ threatened sickness and intense suffering if the church itself would not deal with the sin.

We ought to expect sickness, suffering and death in our churches if we teach that it is acceptable to God to practice sin, or if we fail to discipline flagrant sins. This warning from God's Word ought to cause trembling, holy fear and a desire for repentance in every church of this presbytery.

## **6. Disputable Matters.**

We are commanded by the Lord to allow freedom of conscience in disputable matters. In Romans 14 and 15, in 1 Corinthians 8 and in Colossians 2, the apostle Paul tells us to be careful not to judge one another (let alone practice discipline) where there are disagreements among believers over issues of conscience.

The argument has been made that homosexuality should be considered a disputable matter. How homosexual behavior is regarded in Scripture is dealt with elsewhere in this study; suffice it to say here that in Romans 13, the chapter before his discussion of disputable matters, Paul summarizes the second table of the Law as that which is indisputable in governing our relationships of love toward one another. As we will see under section 8 below, sins which are to be disciplined are those which involve actions or teaching which offend against the Decalogue. These fundamental moral laws are indisputable matters and homosexual practice is an offense against them.

What then are disputable matters? The apostle refers to the observance of one day as special, to the dietary practices of believers, to the eating of meat sacrificed to idols. We are not to develop an evangelical Talmud or Mishnah of rules and regulations for the life of believers. This was one of the reasons for Jesus' stringent criticism of the Pharisees. Beyond this, we are to allow freedom of conscience to believers even in some matters where God's Word has been made known. The apostle tells us that he knew what was right in regard to the disputable matters under discussion in Rome and Corinth, and yet, he insists on the withholding of judgment in these matters which do not entail flagrant sin. (See Romans 14:1 - 15:3; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13.)

First he argues that God alone is Lord of the conscience, and is the one Judge over us all. and that therefore we must give one another freedom to answer to God.

Second, he calls us to humility with regard to what we know, or what we think we know. Knowledge, even right knowledge, can very easily lead us to the more serious sin of pride.

Third, once we understand the need for humility about our opinions, we will pursue love for our fellow believers who differ from us on these less than central issues. Who am I, Paul challenges me, to judge my brother or sister for whom Christ died? Ought I not rather to love them as Christ did and give myself up for them?

Fourth, he urges us not to cause believers with a weak conscience to stumble, by practicing before them behavior which they regard as sinful even though their conscience may be misinformed. I must not cause others to sin against their own conscience by leading them into actions that they regard as sin. This is not to be construed as a license for a few legalists to control the life of the church. That would be to violate Paul's prohibition against judgmentally imposing man-made rules on one another.

## **7. The Context of Discipline.**

The church is described by Scripture as a household, as the family of God. The mark of the true church is therefore love: love for God and love for one another. And yet, in the case of the man in Corinth who fell into serious sexual sin, Paul is emphatic that judgment is one of the functions of the love that is to characterize the church of Jesus Christ:

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you." (1 Corinthians 5:12-13)

But how are we to exercise this responsibility of judgment within the church? Once we begin to talk about discipline we are driven to acknowledge the need to be discerning about the doctrine and life of a congregation and of its members. So, what framework can we establish for mutual judgment?

The basic context will be provided by the faithful teaching of God's Word. As sound doctrine and Christian obedience are proclaimed, the people of God will be given a standard by which to judge their own faith and life, and then the faith and life of their brothers and sisters in the Lord. But, when we judge one another how should this be done?

*First*, when we see a fellow believer sinning, we are to ask ourselves if we are doing the same or even worse than the one we want to set straight. Judgment must begin with ourselves.

*Second*, we are to ask whether this is a sin that we should forbear and forgive rather than confront the person. If we deal with every sin in the life of a family or church we would never be silent. Rather, we would bite, devour and consume each other.

*Third*, we are to look into our own hearts to discover the motivation behind our judging. Is our motivation spiritual? Do we desire to restore this fellow believer in love, to build up, or to tear down? Do we go in humility as sinner to a fellow sinner, or do we stand on a pedestal of self righteousness to denounce our brother or sister? Do we pray for them in the longing that the sinner will be turned from their wicked way?

*Fourth*, we have to ask if we have earned the right to go and talk to someone about their sin. Have I indeed been spiritual in my relationship with them up to the present time? Has there been some reality of brotherly love between us? Or would this person be right to say: “You have shown no concern for me before. How come now that you think I am sinning there is this sudden desire to be involved in my life?”

*Fifth*, is there solid evidence for this sin I want to confront, or are my fears based on gossip, in itself a sin which deserves discipline?

*Sixth*, I must be prepared to go directly to the person myself to confront and persuade my brother or sister with regard to their sinful behavior.

*Seventh*, will I help the sinner to bear the load of their sin? This is the context of Paul's command to bear one another's burdens. Am I interested only in exposing sin, or will I follow the example of Christ and devote myself to helping the sinner overcome their sin? This will mean the giving of myself in prayer, in time, in hospitality, in energy, in self-sacrifice.

In the New Testament, church discipline presupposes being involved in each other's lives to a great degree. It presupposes a high level of love, of patience, and tolerance of each other, of sharing one another's burdens. In other words, it presupposes a high level of community within the congregation. In churches not characterized by this kind of living out of the gospel, very often there will be little discipline exercised since within people do not take risks or do very much that truly costs them something in their relationships with the body anyway. Or, if discipline is attempted, it can easily become self-righteous and destructive because the “weight” of discipline will be more than weak relationships can bear, and because a spirit of censoriousness rather than grief and humility will tend to pervade the process.

## **8. Matters which Require Discipline.**

There appear to be three areas for discipline in the New Testament church, with an ascending order of seriousness.

There are practical matters of disobedience which bring discredit on the church, like the refusal to work. Paul tells us that we are not to share our food with an idle brother, that we are to command such a one to settle down and work, that we are not to associate with him so that he might be shamed into action, and yet that we are to warn him as a brother rather than to regard him as an enemy (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15).

There is the issue of divisiveness in the church, where legalists bring havoc to the unity of the church by seeking to impose their own views on all other believers. Such men, says Paul, are always arguing about the law and raising controversies. If we are plagued by such in our churches, we are to warn them once, warn them a second time, and then have nothing to do with them. They are to be silenced.

Then, there are flagrant doctrinal and moral issues which call for full discipline. In the doctrinal area we are commanded to discipline those who are false teachers with regard to the central tenets of the faith once delivered to the saints: The existence, nature and character of God; the person of Christ, his Messiahship, his divinity and his humanity; the work of Christ, his substitutionary death and bodily resurrection from the dead; justification through faith alone. Scripture also gives us grounds for disciplining those who teach that participation in idolatry or the practice of sexual immorality is compatible with a profession of loyalty to Jesus Christ, or who teach that marriage, in principle, is to be rejected by Christians (see Revelation 2:14-16; 1 Timothy 1:3, 4:1).

In the moral area the New Testament appears to follow the Decalogue: The protection of the glory of God (therefore the rejection of idolatry). The protection of the honor of parents (therefore the rejection of disobedience to parents and of slaying one's father or mother). The sanctity of human life and the protection of the physical body (therefore the rejection of drunkenness as well as murder and slave-trading). The sanctity of the marriage bond (therefore the rejection of sexual immorality: fornication, adultery, incest and homosexual practice). The protection of property (therefore the rejection of theft, of withholding just compensation for wages, and other forms of dishonest business practice). The protection of reputation (therefore the rejection of malicious gossip and perjury).

We are not suggesting that this is an exhaustive list of disciplinable sins; it is rather, an attempt to spell out what kinds of offenses merit formal—and, if need be, full—church discipline.

## **9. The Steps of Discipline.**

The first step is to go to the individual one on one, within the guidelines of what was said above about the context of discipline: in humility, out of love, as a caring and already committed brother or sister in the Lord, with clear evidence, in prayer, with a desire to provide personal, practical and pastoral help. The purpose of such a visit is to win the person over, to restore the person to righteousness, to call them from the error of their ways.

This step should be taken by someone who truly has been a “brother.” Therefore we would suggest that as it will be part of an ongoing relationship, there should be a second personal visit to see if there is repentance. In other words, time must be given for the Word, for the Spirit, for the love demonstrated by the “visitor” to work in the heart.

If there is no response but rather a refusal to listen, then we have to move to step two. We are to go to our brother or sister who is unrepentant with one or two others. Again, these ought to be members of the church who know the individual well, who have been close to them, who are spiritually mature, and who will go in love, in concern, in prayer. We suggest that again, time be given for God to do his work in the heart.

If there is still no sign of repentance, but rather a stubborn hardening of the heart, then the third step must be taken. The Session should give the individual a formal warning that their behavior is unacceptable in one who professes to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is precisely because there has been a profession of faith which the church has regarded as genuine that discipline is to be practiced. We do not discipline unbelievers. Nor do we conclude that a professed believer who has strayed into flagrant sin must therefore not be a genuine Christian. Rather, for the honor of Christ, for the sake of the church, and for their own spiritual well-being we take their faith and their sin seriously and institute formal discipline. Again, we suggest that time be given for conviction of sin to come, with perhaps a date set for response.

If there should still be refusal to respond then discipline must proceed to its most serious level. The New Testament expresses this in various ways: “treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Man. 18:17); “do not associate with such a person do not even eat with them” (I Cor. 5:11); “expel the wicked man from among you” (I Cor. 5:13); “put him out of your fellowship” (I Cor. 5:2); “hand this man over to Satan” (I Cor. 5:5; I Tim. 1:20).

These are hard statements and their practice will cause much grief to the church, but the church ought, says the apostle, to be already grieving because it finds the sin that needs the discipline so distressing. This “disfellowshipping” will begin with the exclusion of the unrepentant believer from the Lord’s Supper. Hopefully, this will be enough to wake the person up and they will come to their spiritual senses. But if not, it must proceed to the withdrawal of hospitality by members of the church and to exclusion from the communal love and life of the local body—the umbrella of blessing the church lives under by virtue of being the dwelling place of God. However, the offender must never be treated with disdain or contempt in these actions, but instead must be encouraged to come to public worship where they, like the rest of the congregation, will be under the ministry of the illuminating, convicting, and comforting Word.

The church must believe that God will be at work in all of this, if it is done according to his instructions, and that he will exercise whatever discipline he wills, including perhaps the hiding of his face of love and protection, as the discipline involves the handing of the member over to Satan “for the destruction of the flesh.” (Paul may have in mind with this phrase the power that God gives to Satan to wreak havoc in a person’s life. But even such an extreme action will be a manifestation of God’s grace because his purpose is to use Satan to bring the offender to his senses.)

In conclusion, to institute this kind of discipline will mean involving the whole church in the process. We suggest that the Session should, among them, visit every member or family in the congregation personally to talk with them about the discipline and what it involves (perhaps via the church’s small group structure, if there is one). This must not become a gossip session where the details of sin are spelled out or talked through. Rather such conversations must take place in an atmosphere of confidentiality and of trust in the wisdom of the Session as they seek to obey the call of Scripture. In most cases, of course, flagrant sin is common knowledge, but even if it is not there should be confidentiality wherever possible.

Our advice would be that while the discipline endures one member of the Session (the man with the closest relationship to the person wider discipline), and perhaps one other spiritually mature member of the congregation who is close to the person, should be encouraged to keep up regular contact with the individual to urge them to repentance and to assure them that there is a way back and a warm welcome awaiting their restoration.

If at any time a genuinely repentant spirit is shown, every effort must be made to reincorporate the offender into the full life of the congregation. And then the church must defend them and admonish any members unwilling to forgive. It is very easy for a disciplined person to be overwhelmed with sorrow, just as with a child who has been disciplined by loving parents and who has realized the need to apologize and to change their behavior.

This whole process of discipline needs to be surrounded and undergirded by the faithful prayers of the church, that the Lord might be pleased to bring his healing quickly to the unrepentant one and to the grieving congregation.

## **ARGUMENTS: CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

### **The Spiritual Psychology of Church Discipline**

The question has been asked, What are we really trying to accomplish in church discipline? Our Book of Church Order makes clear that church discipline is for, among other things, “the keeping and reclaiming of disobedient sinners” (BCO 27-3). The next paragraph goes on to say this:

The power which Christ has given the church is for building up, and not for destruction. It is to be exercised under a dispensation of mercy and not of wrath. As in the preaching of the Word the wicked are doctrinally separated from the good, so by discipline the church authoritatively separates between the holy and the profane. In this it acts the part of a tender mother, correcting her children for their good, that every one of them may be presented faultless in the day of the Lord Jesus. (BCO 27-4)

But if church discipline is designed to effect change in the person caught in sin and not only to separate off the impure from the pure, how does it do this? How does it work? When it fails to produce repentance and a determination to walk in a different direction, why does it fail? When it succeeds, why does it succeed? The ultimate answer to this last question is, of course, that God grants repentance to some (see 2 Timothy 2:25). But God uses means. And it is church discipline as a means, as a human process, in the hand of God that we want to explore.

Church discipline is concerned with the roots of sin. The goal is not merely the ceasing of some action, but a correction in the bent of the soul at a deeper-than-surface level. Fundamentally, church discipline seeks a change in the attitude of heart, in the believing soul's vision of God and what is good. It can be protective in the sense that the honor of Christ and the integrity of his body, the church, may need to be vindicated, but it is never only protective. It is always remedial or reformatory in that it seeks to rework or recreate something at the deep level of moral vision in the person out of which all behavior flows. Even in 1 Corinthians 5, where Paul instructs a rather swift excommunication for the sake of the spiritual integrity of the congregation, his salvation is still in view.

In almost all situations where church discipline is exercised, there is an immediate—and sometimes sustained—negative reaction on the part of the offender to the discipline. They feel betrayed, looked down upon, and self-righteously judged by other Christians. They feel discipline and interpret it only as punishment, vindictiveness, and the hostility of the majority against an easy-target minority.

Now since we never act in perfect purity and humility, it may be true that some of what the offender feels is hurtful and sinful self-righteousness on the part of the majority. But it is essential to understand that vindictiveness in those administering discipline is not the most basic cause of anger or hurt and a sense of rejection in the person being disciplined. The most basic dynamic at work in New Testament church discipline is the "cause pain to prevent pain" principle set out in Old Testament wisdom literature in two well known proverbs:

Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. (Proverbs 27:5-6)

This principle of “hurting in order to heal” we find God practicing toward his people during the age of the Old Testament prophets. The “wounds” that God inflicts as Israel’s faithful friend come in the form of providential afflictions:

Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the husband of her youth. Grain offerings and drink offerings are cut off from the house of the LORD. The priests are in mourning, those who minister before the LORD. The fields are ruined, the ground is dried up; the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the oil fails. Despair, you farmers, wail, you vine growers; grieve for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed. The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered; the pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree—all the trees of the field—are dried up. Surely the joy of mankind is withered away. Put on sackcloth, O priests, and mourn; wail, you who minister before the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God; for the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the house of your God. (Joel 1:8-13)

“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.” (Joel 2:12-13)

“Now give careful thought to this from this day on—consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the LORD’S temple. When anyone came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty. I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not turn to me,” declares the LORD. “From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the LORD’S temple was laid. Give careful thought: Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit.”

From this day on I will bless you. (Haggai 2:15-19)

“I have surely heard Ephraim’s moaning: ‘You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the LORD my God. After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.’ Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him,” declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 31:18-20)

They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave. Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unflinching

love and his wonderful deeds for men. Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy. (Psalm 107:18-22)

Two things are apparent in such passages—passages which could easily be multiplied: 1) the motivation in the “confrontation” is love, and 2) what that love does is truly painful to the person on the receiving end of the confrontation.

Now the “wounds of a friend” may be faithful, but nevertheless they are wounds. They hurt. These wounds are words or actions that come in the form of judgment and criticism designed to break up and challenge the security of the self so that the web of rationalization and blindness will not be able to envelop it without a fight—even a fight waged by those outside the soul on behalf of it.

Church discipline is one form of thus wounding a friend for their good. But as all of us shrink from pain, we should not be surprised that the brother or sister does not welcome the discipline at first as something helpful; in fact, discipline will usually incite them to take offense.

But the primary reason the offender takes offense at the discipline and feels it as nothing other than hostility and rejection is because they have persuaded themselves that they are not guilty of anything so serious as what they have been accused of. They do not believe they have compromised themselves or their brothers and sisters in the Lord, or Christ himself. The end or goal of the process is to get them to change their mind about this, but we should have no illusions about what will commonly happen at the beginning of the process, and should not let ourselves be intimidated when we are accused by the offender of playing God, being loveless, or acting hypocritically. Part of the very redemptive character of discipline is this jarring antagonism set up between the offender’s moral vision and the church’s. All of us do only whatever our will decides is good. Therefore, when an offender is confronted, their judgment of what is good is, in fact, being attacked as evil. We would expect such an attack to be fought off and castigated as loveless since the offender sees it as nothing less than an attack on their person, their very being, because we are rejecting something they have judged to be good and made their own. The aim of church discipline is to restore moral judgment and to energize the will to follow that judgment. But this comes precisely through the painful conflict between the offender’s and the church’s judgment of what is good. All of us experience mental pain, anguish, and a kind of personal vulnerability when ideas and convictions are criticized and rejected by others—especially by those close to us. But in discipline situations we must realize that this pain and profound sense of personal crisis—maybe even a sense of impending destruction of the self—is part of the trauma that God intends to use to break up something in the offender: the consolidation of the will, emotions, and intellect in the determination to call evil good.

Hence, our goal in discipline cannot be to spare the offender all pain, and at all costs to avoid jeopardizing the very fragile sense of self and the self’s security that all fallen people live with. Church discipline is the willingness, for love’s sake, to cause pain, in order to free the person from the potentially far greater pain of a deeper and deeper entrenchment in what is false. It rejects—not the person, but the person’s moral judgments—in order that in due time we may again embrace.

When church discipline fails, if it is not on account of self-righteousness, arrogance, or carelessness on the part of the church, it will be on account of the offender's hardness of heart and moral blindness. They will be persuaded by what is wrong, and will continue to choose it as their own. This should be cause for tears and sadness within the church. But the church must be careful not to take responsibility for that which God will hold the offender responsible.

But where church discipline succeeds, it will be because God has taken up the pain and trauma of confrontation as a tool in his hand by which he ploughs the soil of a hard heart. And the happy result will be a new sense in the offender of the loyalty of God, and a new confidence that his laws are the boundaries within which we find ourselves:

I know, O LORD, that your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me. May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant. Let your compassion come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight. (Psalm 119:75-77)

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**FAITHFULNESS TO GOD'S STANDARDS:  
THE LORD'S CALLING TO HOMOSEXUALLY-INCLINED CHRISTIANS**

**Part 3: Appendices**

On June 20, 1994, at a specially called meeting, the Missouri Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America adopted: a recommendation “to commend to the Session **the Appendices** [attached to this report] as useful information for their consideration.”

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## APPENDIX 1

### THE ANALOGY OF FAITH AND SLAVERY

#### 1. BOTH TESTAMENTS CONDEMN THE SLAVE TRADE.

- Exodus 21:16. "And he who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death."  
1 Tim 1:10. andrapodistes. In property catalogues animals are tetrapoda (four-footed) and slaves are andrapoda (human-footed).  
Rev 18:11-13. The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over [Babylon] because no one buys their cargoes any more—cargoes of... cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; bodies and human souls."

#### 2. THE OT PROHIBITED THE ENSLAVEMENT OF ISRAELITES; THE NT AFFIRMS THE SAME PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE AND LIBERTY.

- Lev 25:39-43. "If one of your countrymen of yours becomes poor among you and he sells himself to you, do not make him work as a slave. He is to be treated as a hired worker or a temporary resident among you; he is to work for you until the Year of Jubilee. Then he and his children are to be released, and he will go back to his own clan and to the property of his forefathers. Because the Israelites are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt, they must not be sold as slaves. Do not rule over them ruthlessly, but fear your God." See also Exod 21:2-11 and Deut 15:12-18.  
Lev 25:47-55. "If an alien or a temporary resident among you becomes rich and one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells himself to the alien living among you or to a member of the alien's clan, he retains the right of redemption after he has sold himself... Even if he is not redeemed in any of these ways, he and his children are to be released in the Year of Jubilee, for the Israelites belong to me as servants. They are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God."  
Col 4:1. "Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven."  
1 Cor 7:23 "You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters."

#### 3. THE OT PROVIDED HAVEN FOR ESCAPED SLAVES; THE NT IS LIKEWISE "SUBVERSIVE."

- Deut 23:15-16. "If a slave has taken refuge with you, do not hand him over to his master. Let him live among you wherever he likes and in whatever town he chooses. Do not oppress him."  
Philemon 12-16.

#### 4. THE OT PERMITTED THE PURCHASE OF FOREIGN SLAVES DUE TO GOD'S SPECIFIC CALLING OF ISRAEL IN REDEMPTION HISTORY; THE NT REMOVES THE RATIONALE.

- Lev 25:44-46. "Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves. You may also buy some of the temporary residents living among you and members of their clans born in your country, and they will become your property. You can will them to your children as inherited property and can make them slaves for life, but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly."  
Gal 3:28. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

## APPENDIX 2

### CALVIN'S ECCLESIASTICAL ADVICE

Calvin's advice to congregations and individuals regarding theology, ethics, worship, politics, economics, and church practices has been collected by Mary Beaty and Benjamin Farley into a work called *Calvin's Ecclesiastical Advice*.<sup>1</sup> Our interest here is in his practical advice regarding excommunication. His theology of communion is of course finely worked out in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, but his theology in practice is found in his letters.

In one letter to a pastor who had been accused of "excessive zeal" in his attempts to reform the communion practices of his church, Calvin urges him to steer a careful course between "excessive strictness" and "inexcusable permissiveness." Calvin demonstrates a pastoral sensitivity to the life situation of a church. He urges balance, not legalism; balance, not antinomianism. In his letter, Calvin alludes to Augustine's opinion that though drunkenness was rampant in Africa, "flexible remedies" should be applied rather than excommunication which "weakens the whole church." Calvin does not agree with him, but he sympathized with Augustine's premium being placed on the health of the church and not on developing a law. In sum, Calvin counsels a gradual progression toward obedience and then assures "God will find a remedy for those incurable evils" (87-89).

Calvin's principle is applicable to a church dealing with homosexuality. Clearly the sin must be confronted. And just because all sins are not being confronted consistently does not mean that all efforts to discipline the obvious ones should cease. At the same time, great care must be taken while moving toward greater consistency to maintain, as much as possible, the health of the church.

In another letter, Calvin articulates the purposes of excommunication: "to remove scandalous behavior, restrain evil, and correct wrong action" (111). Later, he adds, "The safety of the church rests on nothing but the power of excommunication to cleanse it, to restrain evil desires, to remove shameful behavior, and to correct wrong ways of acting. Anyone who does not accept a moderate use of excommunication, especially when he has been admonished, shows that he is not of Christ's flock" (112).

In other words, the only power the church has been given is spiritual. Therefore, the only action it can take to turn a member from sin and restrain its spread is spiritual. And the ultimate spiritual power that Christ has given the church is the right to warn a member persistently practicing what is wrong that they are excluded from the blessings and privileges of the visible church (except from public preaching of the Word) until they return to the Lord with repentant hearts. Calvin implies, however, that such excommunication will result in the repentance of a Christian and expose the non-Christian. So the power is great.

On the question of what to do when someone returns to sinful practices ("idolatries") after participating in the Lord's Supper, Calvin proposes an "orderly procedure." His pastor's heart is revealed when he says, "we do not want to be so strict as to discourage the weak." Therefore, he proposed denying the Supper for the first offense and then increase the severity for the second or third in order not to nurture evil or condone their activity and mock the name of God (153).

Here we see his balance again. But we also see a realism. He wants to be faithful to God's Word, but he also wants to avoid driving away the weak Christian. So he thinks in terms of stages, which also acknowledges that someone can fall into the same sin a number of times. Discipline is a lifelong commitment by both the Session, and the members.

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin. *Calvin's Ecclesiastical Advice*. Trans. Mary Beaty and Benjamin W. Farley (Louisville: Westminster, 1991).

## APPENDIX 3

### HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE BIBLICAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN LAW AND GOSPEL

A recent article in Lutheran Quarterly entitled, “The Bible and Sexual Boundaries,” discusses the debate about homosexual partnerships taking place within the Lutheran churches. It says the following under the heading, “Law and Gospel:”

Discussion of sexual boundaries is skewed when law and gospel are equated with condemnation and acceptance. This can leave the mistaken impression that we have two options: either to condemn people and what they do, or to accept people and what they do. Yet reducing the gospel to the notion of acceptance obscures its saving and transforming power, the power of the God who found human bondage to sin unacceptable, and who sent his Son to free women and men from its grasp. Moreover, construing law only as condemnation overlooks its role in establishing structures necessary for community life. Faith in the gospel brings freedom, but it does not immunize Christians against sin and its effects. Christian life is lived where the power of God battles with the power of sin, at the point where the gospel brings liberation and sin seeks to re-enslave. The weak in our communities need protection against the strong, and everyone needs protection against the effects of their own sin and the sins of others. Since sin remains a force to be reckoned with, we need the law to bring about restraint as well as repentance, and community life requires structures and boundaries for its life and well-being.<sup>1</sup>

We concur with this conclusion, and find it a most important point, that we simplistically distort Scripture if we equate law and gospel with condemnation and acceptance. It is, as the article points out, a mistaken impression that we only have two options: “either to condemn people and what they do, or to accept people and what they do.”

Lutheran pastor, Bruce Foster, in criticizing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America report “The Church and Human Sexuality,” (abbreviated as CHS) faults the report for confusing law and gospel, for attempting to base a biblical sex ethic on the gospel rather than on the law of God. After citing the report’s statement, “When God’s purposes are not being served, boundaries and structures may need to be reinterpreted or changed,” Foster says,

The sum of this argument is that “the Gospel” removes the fixed nature of “legalistic” moral codes and replaces them with a general command to love. Jesus’ own ministry gives us an example of how boundaries are redefined for the sake of neighbor. And CHS then feels free to go and do likewise, especially, as we shall see, with regards to the boundary of marriage as the only context for sexual expression.

At the most fundamental level CHS doesn’t know what the Gospel is, or at least has forgotten the confessional concern for distinguishing between law and gospel. Melancthon’s classic definition of the Gospel is this: “The Gospel is, strictly speaking, the promise of forgiveness of sin and justification because of Christ” (Apology, IV, 43).

It’s very hard to see how the Gospel as sheer promise can be the basis of a specifically Christian sexual ethic . . . . Even supposing homosexuality is morally acceptable, the Gospel wouldn’t tell us that but the Law. The Gospel doesn’t make moral judgments; the Gospel announces the forgiveness of sins.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Lutheran Quarterly* 7 (1993), pp. 376-77

<sup>2</sup> “You Know Neither the Scriptures Nor the Power of God” Bruce Foster, *Lutheran Forum*, February, 1994, pp. 45-46.

The Scriptures do not teach that the general “law of love” preached by Jesus and expressed so well by Paul in Romans 13 is given to us in the interest of relativizing specific commandments. Paul says there,

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:8-10)

But as Foster rightly argues and the NIV rightly interprets in the above translation,

Paul is not substituting “love of neighbor” for moral laws. Rather he is telling us that the comprehensive principle which leads to (rather than relativizes) these commands is the law, “love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>3</sup>

Martin Luther, the great champion of the doctrine of grace who was continually insisting that Christians are called to live in the happy freedom of the gospel, no longer under the condemnation of the law and no longer seeking refuge in their own moral purity, also became concerned that his emphasis on the grace of the gospel over against a legalistic interpretation of Christian existence was leading believers to moral laxity. He became concerned that Christians not neglect the law as that which—even after coming to Christ—has a rightful place in striking fear into our hearts *in order to drive us to the gospel*, into the waiting arms of a Savior who is eager to receive and forgive again and again the repentant who are filled with sorrow that they have displeased their heavenly Father.

The historical setting of Luther's defense of the law for Christian life is the so-called “Antinomian Controversies” that disturbed the Reformation movement from 1527 on, especially in Wittenberg. A summary of the disputes and parties can be found in Luther's Works. Vol. 47, pp. 101ff.

In 1538, defending himself against the charge that he was abandoning his earlier emphasis on the gospel and relying too much on the law, Luther wrote:

True it is that at the early stage of this movement we began strenuously to teach the gospel and made use of these words which the Antinomians now quote. But the circumstances of that time were very different from those of the present day. Then the world was terrorized enough when the pope or the visage of a single priest shook the whole of Olympus, not to mention earth and hell, overall which that man of sin had usurped the power to himself. To the consciences of men so oppressed, terrified, miserable, anxious, and afflicted, there was no need to inculcate the law. The clamant need then was to present the other part of the teaching of Christ in which he commands us to preach the remission of sin in his name, so that those who were already sufficiently terrified might learn not to despair, but to take refuge in the grace and mercy offered in Christ. Now, however, when the times are very dissimilar from those under the pope, our Antinomians—those suave theologians—retain our words, our doctrine, the joyful tidings concerning Christ, and wish to preach this alone, not observing that men are other than they were under that hangman, the pope, and have become secure, froward, wicked violators—yea, Epicureans who neither fear God nor men. Such men they confirm and comfort by their doctrine. In those days we were terrorized so that we trembled even at the fall of a leaf. . . . But now our softly singing Antinomians, paying no attention to the change of the times, make men secure who are of themselves already so secure that they fall away from grace. . . . Our view hitherto has been and ought to be this salutary one— if you see the afflicted and contrite, preach grace as much as you can. But not to the secure, the slothful, the harlots, adulterers, and blasphemers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “You Know Neither the Scriptures . . . .”, p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 47, pp.104-105

Later in 1538 Luther wrote Against the Antinomians, setting out the ongoing importance of the law of God for Christian life. Below are some important quotes from it:

To be sure, I did teach, and still teach, that sinners shall be stirred to repentance through the preaching or the contemplation of the passion of Christ, so that they might see the enormity of God's wrath over sin, and learn that there is no other remedy for this than the death of God's Son. This doctrine is not mine, but St. Bernard's. What am I saying? St. Bernard's? It is the message of all of Christendom, of all the prophets and apostles. But how can you deduce from this that the law is to be cast aside? I cannot find such a deduction in my logic textbook. I should like to see or hear the master who could demonstrate it.

The devil knows very well too that it is impossible to remove the law from the heart. In Romans 2 [: 14-15] St. Paul testifies that the Gentiles who did not receive the law from Moses and thus have no law are nevertheless a law to themselves, being obliged to witness that what the law requires is written in their hearts, etc. But the devil devotes himself to making men secure, teaching them to heed neither law nor sin, so that if sometime they are suddenly overtaken by death or by a bad conscience, they have grown so accustomed to nothing but sweet security that they sink helplessly into hell. For they have learned to perceive nothing in Christ but sweet security. Therefore such terror must be a sure sign that Christ (whom they understand as sheer sweetness) has rejected and forsaken them. That is what the devil strives for, and that is what he would like to see.

Preach that sinners must be roused to repentance not only by the sweet grace and suffering of Christ, by the message that he died for us, but also by the terrors of the law. For they are wrong in maintaining that one must follow only one method of preaching repentance, namely, to point to Christ's suffering on our behalf, claiming as they do that Christendom might otherwise become confused and be at a loss to know which is the true and only way. No, one must preach in all sorts of ways—God's threats, his promises, his punishment, his help, and anything else—in order that we may be brought to repentance, that is, to a knowledge of sin and the law through the use of all the examples in the Scriptures. This is in accord with all the prophets and the apostles and St. Paul, who writes in Romans 2 [:4]: "Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"

Dear God, should it be unbearable that the holy church confesses itself a sinner, believes in the forgiveness of sins, and asks for remission of sin in the Lord's Prayer? How can one know what sin is without the law and conscience? And how will we learn what Christ is, what he did for us, if we do not know what the law is that he fulfilled for us and what sin is, for which he made satisfaction? And even if we did not require the law for ourselves, or if we could tear it out of our hearts (which is impossible), we would have to preach it for Christ's sake, as is done and as has to be done, so that we might know what he did and what he suffered for us. For who could know what and why Christ suffered for us without knowing what sin or law is? Therefore the law must be preached wherever Christ is to be preached, even if the word "law" is not mentioned, so that the conscience is nevertheless frightened by the law when it hears that Christ had to fulfill the law for us at so great a price. Why, then, should one wish to abolish the law, which cannot be abolished, yes, which is only intensified by such an attempt? For the law terrifies me more when I hear that Christ, the Son of God, had to fulfill it for me than it would were it preached to me without the mention of Christ and of such great torment suffered by God's Son, but were accompanied only by threats. For in the Son of God I behold the wrath of God in action, while the law of God shows it to me with words and with lesser deeds.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>*Luther's Works*, vol. 47, pp 101-113.

If one studies Luther's commentaries on the biblical texts that touch on homosexuality, it becomes quite clear that the great defender of grace and enemy of self-righteousness simply cannot be enlisted in the effort to make homoerotic sex—even in the framework of a committed relationship—compatible with loyalty to Jesus Christ and his gospel. In his Genesis commentary on the story of Lot and his visitors, Luther makes it quite clear what he objects to in homoerotic relations: not merely rape or violence or even promiscuity, but rather the perversion of heterosexual desire into homosexual desire. This ethical distortion is the result of spiritual apostasy:

The heinous conduct of the people of Sodom is extraordinary, inasmuch as they departed from the natural passion and longing of the male for the female, which was implanted into nature by God, and desired what is altogether contrary to nature. Whence comes this perversity? Undoubtedly from Satan, who, after people have once turned away from the fear of God, so powerfully suppresses nature that he blots out the natural desire and stirs up a desire that is contrary to nature.<sup>5</sup>

Nothing could be clearer from Luther's great treatise, “The Freedom of a Christian,” that the note of freedom from sin, death, the devil (as well as the demands of other people) sounded in the good news of the unconditional love of God, obligates a believer to a lifelong battle—in the name of the gospel!—of subduing and restraining bodily appetites and desires. That “work” of sanctification proceeds out of the believer’s desire to please God in gratitude for having been rescued from all failure to please him. Luther sums up the sometimes-slippery relationship between justification and sanctification in this little sentence:

The commandments must be fulfilled before any works can be done, and the works proceed from the fulfillment of the commandments....<sup>6</sup>

What Luther means here by “the fulfillment of the commandments” is the New Testament doctrine that Christ in his life and death has himself fulfilled the law *on our behalf*. That sets our guilty consciences free, and motivates us to lay hold of the Spirit’s power, and to work with energy—even with pain—to bring forth the deeds of righteousness God calls us to in his Word.

A finer exposition of law and gospel and of the relationship between justification and sanctification than the one Luther sets out in the following words could hardly be found:

Although, as I have said, a man is abundantly and sufficiently justified by faith inwardly, in his spirit, and so has all that he needs, except insofar as this faith and these riches must grow from day to day even to the future life; yet he remains in this mortal life on earth. In this life he must control his own body and have dealings with men. Here the works begin; here a man cannot enjoy leisure; here he must indeed take care to discipline his body by fastings, watchings, labors, and other reasonable discipline and to subject it to the Spirit so that it will obey and conform to the inner man and faith and not revolt against faith and hinder the inner man, as it is the nature of the body to do if it is not held in check. The inner man, who by faith is created in the image of God, is both joyful and happy because of Christ in whom so many benefits are conferred upon him; and therefore it is his one occupation to serve God joyfully and without thought of gain, in love that is not constrained.

While he is doing this, behold, he meets a contrary will in his own flesh which strives to serve the world and seeks its own advantage. This the spirit of faith cannot tolerate, but with joyful zeal it attempts to put the body under control and hold it in check, as Paul says in Rom. 7 [22-23], “For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin,” and in another place, “But I pommel

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<sup>5</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 3, p.255.

<sup>6</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, p. 353

my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” [I Cor. 9:27], and in Galatians [5:24], “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

In doing these works, however, we must not think that a man is justified before God by them, for faith, which alone is righteousness before God, cannot endure that erroneous opinion. We must, however, realize that these works reduce the body to subjection and purify it of its evil lusts, and our whole purpose is to be directed only toward the driving out of lusts. Since by faith the soul is cleansed and made to love God, it desires that all things, and especially its own body, shall be purified so that all things may join with it in loving and praising God. Hence a man cannot be idle, for the need of his body drives him and he is compelled to do many good works to reduce it to subjection. Nevertheless the works themselves do not justify him before God, but he does the works out of spontaneous love in obedience to God and considers nothing except the approval of God, whom he would most scrupulously obey in all things.

In this way everyone will easily be able to learn for himself the limit and discretion, as they say, of his bodily castigations, for he will fast, watch, and labor as much as he finds sufficient to repress the lasciviousness and lust of his body.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, pp. 358-59

## APPENDIX 4

### **Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies: The Witness of Scripture Concerning Homosexuality**

By Richard B. Hays, Professor of New Testament, Duke University Divinity School,  
in *Homosexuality in the Church*, ed. Jeffrey Siker, John Knox Press (1994)

#### **SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE**

Gary came to New Haven in the summer of 1989 to say a proper farewell. My best friend from undergraduate years at Yale, he was dying of AIDS. While he was still able to travel, my family and I invited him to come visit us one more time.

During the week he stayed with us, we went to films together (*Field of Dreams* and *Dead Poets Society*), we drank wine and laughed, we had long sober talks about politics and literature and the gospel and sex and such. Above all, we listened to music. Some of it was nostalgic music: the record of our college singing group, which Gary had directed with passionate precision; music of the '60s, recalling the years when we marched together against the Vietnam War—Beatles, Byrds, Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell. Some of it was music more recently discovered: I introduced him to R.E.M. and the Indigo Girls; he introduced me to Johannes Ockeghem's Requiem (*Missa pro defunctis*). As always, his aesthetic sense was fine and austere; as always, he was determined to face the truth, even in the shadow of death.

We prayed together often that week, and we talked theology. It became clear that Gary had come not only to say goodbye but also to think hard, before God, about the relation between his homosexuality and his Christian faith. He was angry at the self-affirming gay Christian groups, because he regarded his own condition as more complex and tragic than their apologetic stance could acknowledge. He also worried that the gay subculture encouraged homosexual believers to “draw their identity from their sexuality” and thus to shift the ground of their identity subtly and idolatrously away from God.

For more than twenty years, Gary had grappled with his homosexuality, experiencing it as a compulsion and an affliction. Now, as he faced death, he wanted to talk it all through again from the beginning, because he knew my love for him and trusted me to speak without dissembling. For Gary, there was no time to dance around the hard questions. As Dylan had urged, “Let us not talk falsely now; the hour is getting late.” In particular, Gary wanted to discuss the biblical passages that deal with homosexual acts. Among Gary's many gifts was his skill as a reader of texts. After leaving Yale and helping to found a community-based Christian theater group in Toronto, he had eventually completed a master's degree in French literature. Though he was not trained as a biblical exegete, he knew the difference between sensitive readings and tendentious ones. He had read hopefully through the standard bibliography of the burgeoning movement advocating the acceptance of homosexuality in the church: John J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual*; James B. Nelson, *Embodiment*; Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*; John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. In the end, he came away disappointed, believing that these authors, despite their good intentions, had imposed a wishful interpretation on the biblical passages. However much he wanted to believe that the Bible did not condemn homosexuality, he would not violate his own stubborn intellectual integrity by pretending to find their arguments persuasive.

The more we talked, the more we found our perspectives interlocking. Both of us had serious misgivings about the mounting pressure for the church to recognize homosexuality as a legitimate Christian lifestyle. As a New Testament scholar, I was concerned about certain questionable exegetical and theological strategies of the gay apologists. Gary, as a homosexual Christian, believed that their writings did justice

neither to the biblical texts nor to the depressing reality of the gay subculture that he had moved in and out of for twenty years.

We concluded that our witnesses were complementary and that we had a word to speak to the churches. The public discussion of this matter has been dominated by insistently ideological voices: on one side, gay rights activists demanding the church's unqualified acceptance of homosexuality; on the other, unqualified homophobic condemnation of homosexual Christians. Gary and I agreed that we should try to encourage a more nuanced discourse within the community of faith. He was going to write an article about his own experience, reflecting on his struggle to live as a faithful Christian wracked by a sexual orientation that he believed to be incommensurate with the teaching of scripture, and I agreed to write a response to it.

Tragically, Gary soon became too sick to carry out his intention. His last letter to me was an effort to get some of his thoughts on paper while he was still able to write. By May of 1990 he was dead.

This article, then, is an act of keeping covenant with a beloved brother in Christ who will not speak again on this side of the resurrection. I commit it to print sorrowfully aware that it will outrage some. At the same time, I commit it to print praying that it will encourage others as Gary was encouraged and that it will foster compassionate and carefully reasoned theological reflection within the community of faith.

### **WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?**

A theological discussion of homosexuality must proceed through a series of widening circles. Beginning at the center, we must consider the biblical texts that explicitly say something about homosexuality. Then we must consider how these texts are to be assessed within a wider biblical framework and in relation to other factors (scientific evidence, changing social realities, etc.). Finally, we must ask what the church should do in light of scripture and in response to the issues confronting us.

The Bible hardly ever discusses homosexual behavior. There are perhaps half a dozen brief references to it in all of scripture. In terms of emphasis, it is a minor concern, in contrast, for example, to economic injustice. What the Bible does say should be heeded carefully, but any ethic that intends to be biblical will seek to get the accents in the right places. (Would that the passion presently being expended in the church over the question of homosexuality were devoted instead to urging the wealthy to share with the poor! Some of the most urgent champions of "biblical morality" on sexual matters become strangely equivocal when the discussion turns to the New Testament's teachings about possessions.)

#### **Genesis 19:1-29**

The notorious story of Sodom and Gomorrah—often cited in connection with homosexuality—is actually irrelevant to the topic. The “men of Sodom” come pounding on Lot's door, apparently with the intention of gang-raping Lot's two visitors, who, as we readers know, are actually angels. The angels rescue Lot and his family and pronounce destruction on the city. The gang-rape scenario exemplifies the wickedness of the city, but there is nothing in the passage pertinent to a judgment about the morality of consensual homosexual intercourse. Indeed, there is nothing in the rest of the biblical tradition, save an obscure reference in Jude 7, to suggest that the sin of Sodom was particularly identified with sexual misconduct of any kind. In fact, the clearest statement about the sin of Sodom is to be found in an oracle of the prophet Ezekiel: “This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy” (Ezekiel 16:49).

#### **Leviticus 18:22; 20: 13**

The few biblical texts that do address the topic of homosexual behavior, however, are unambiguously and unremittingly negative in their judgment. The Holiness Code in Leviticus explicitly prohibits male homosexual intercourse: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Leviticus 18:22). In Leviticus 20: 10-16, the same act is listed as one of a series of sexual offenses—along with

adultery, incest, and bestiality—that are punishable by death. It is worth noting that the *act* of “lying with a male as with a woman” is categorically proscribed: motives for the act are not treated as a morally significant factor. Quoting a law from Leviticus, of course, does not settle the question for Christian ethics. The Old Testament contains many prohibitions and commandments that have, ever since the first century, generally been disregarded or deemed obsolete by the church, most notably rules concerning circumcision and dietary practices. Some ethicists have argued that the prohibition of homosexuality is similarly superseded for Christians; it is merely part of the Old Testament's ritual “purity rules” and therefore morally irrelevant today.

The Old Testament, however, makes no systematic distinction between ritual law and moral law. The same section of the Holiness Code also contains, for instance, the prohibition of incest (Leviticus 18:6-18). Is that a purity law or a moral law? Leviticus makes no distinction in principle. In each case, the church is faced with the task of discerning whether Israel's traditional norms remain in force for the new community of Jesus' followers.

### **1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10**

The early church did, in fact, consistently adopt the Old Testament's teaching on matters of sexual morality and on homosexual acts in particular, in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10, we find homosexuals included in lists of persons who do things unacceptable to God.

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul, exasperated with the Corinthians—some of whom apparently believe themselves to have entered a spiritually exalted state in which the moral rules of their old existence no longer apply to them (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:8, 5:1-2, 8:1-9)—confronts them with a blunt rhetorical question: “Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God?” He then gives an illustrative list of the sorts of persons he means: “fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, *malakoi*, *arsenokoitai*, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers.”

I have left the terms pertinent to the present issue untranslated, because their translation has been disputed recently by Boswell and others. The word *malakoi* is not a technical term meaning “homosexuals” (no such term existed either in Greek or in Hebrew), but it appears often in Hellenistic Greek as pejorative slang to describe the “passive” partners—often young boys—in homosexual activity.

The other word, *arsenokoitai*, is not found in any extant Greek text earlier than 1 Corinthians. Some scholars have suggested that its meaning is uncertain, but Robin Scroggs<sup>1</sup> has shown that the word is a translation of the Hebrew *mishkav zakur* (“lying with a male”), derived directly from Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 and used in rabbinic texts to refer to homosexual intercourse. The Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) of Leviticus 20:13 reads, “Whoever lies with a man as with a woman (*meta arsenos koiten gynaikos*), they have both done an abomination.” This is almost certainly the idiom from which the noun *arsenokoitai* was coined. Thus, Paul's use of the term presupposes and reaffirms the Holiness Code's condemnation of homosexual acts.

In 1 Corinthians 6:11, Paul asserts that the sinful behaviors catalogued in the vice list were formerly practiced by some of the Corinthians. Now, however, since they have been transferred into the sphere of Christ's lordship, they ought to have left these practices behind: “This is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” The remainder of the chapter (1 Corinthians 6: 12-20) counsels the Corinthians to glorify God in their bodies because they belong now to God and no longer to themselves.

The 1 Timothy passage includes *arsenokoitai* in a list of “the lawless and disobedient,” whose behavior is specified in a vice list that includes everything from lying to murdering one's parents, under the rubric of actions “contrary to sound teaching according to the glorious gospel.” Here again, the Old Testament prohibition is presupposed, but the context offers little discussion of sexual morality as such.

### **Romans 1:18-32**

The most crucial text for Christian ethics concerning homosexuality remains Romans 1, because this is the only passage in the New Testament that places the condemnation of homosexual behavior in an explicitly theological context.

*Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator. . . . For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their own error (Romans 1:24-27).*

(This is, incidentally, the only passage in the Bible that refers to lesbian sexual relations.)

Because the passage is often cited and frequently misunderstood, an examination of its place in Paul's argument is necessary. The aim of Romans 1 is not to teach a code of sexual ethics; nor is the passage a warning of God's judgment against those who are guilty of particular sins. Rather, Paul is offering a *diagnosis* of the disordered human condition: he adduces the fact of widespread homosexual behavior as evidence that human beings are indeed in rebellion against their creator. The fundamental human sin is the refusal to honor God and give God thanks (1:21); consequently, God's wrath takes the form of letting human idolatry run its own self-destructive course. Homosexuality, then, is not a *provocation* of “the wrath of God” (Romans 1:18); rather, it is a *consequence* of God's decision to “give up” rebellious creatures to follow their own futile thinking and desires. The unrighteous behavior catalogued in Romans 1:26-31 is a list of *symptoms*: the underlying sickness of humanity as a whole, Jews and Greeks alike, is that they have turned away from God and fallen under the power of sin (cf. Romans 3:9). When this context is kept clearly in view, several important observations follow:

1. Paul is not describing the individual life histories of pagan sinners; not every pagan has first known the true God of Israel and then chosen to turn away into idolatry. When Paul writes, “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie,” he is giving a global account of the universal fall of humanity. This fall is manifested continually in the various ungodly behaviors listed in vv. 24-31.

2. Paul singles out homosexual intercourse for special attention because he regards it as providing a particularly graphic image of the way in which human fallenness distorts God's created order. God the creator made man and woman for each other, to cleave together, to be fruitful and multiply. When human beings engage in homosexual activity, they enact an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality: the rejection of the Creator's design. They *embody* the spiritual condition of those who have “exchanged the truth about God for a lie.”

3. Homosexual acts are not, however, specially reprehensible sins; they are no worse than any of the other manifestations of human un-righteousness listed in the passage (vv. 29-31), no worse in principle than covetousness or gossip or disrespect for parents.

4. Homosexual activity will not *incur* God's punishment: it is its own punishment, an “anti-reward.” Paul here simply echoes a traditional Jewish idea. The Wisdom of Solomon, an intertestamental writing that has surely influenced Paul's thinking in Romans 1, puts it like this: “Therefore those who in folly of life lived unrighteously [God] tormented through their own abominations” (Wisdom of Solomon 12:1).

Repeated again and again in recent debate is the claim that Paul condemns only homosexual acts committed promiscuously by heterosexual persons—because they “*exchanged* natural intercourse for unnatural.” Paul's negative judgment, so the argument goes, does *not* apply to persons who are “naturally” of homosexual orientation. This interpretation, however, is untenable. The “exchange” is not a matter of individual life-decisions; rather, it is Paul's characterization of the fallen condition of the pagan world. In any case, neither Paul nor anyone else in antiquity had a concept of “sexual orientation.” To introduce this concept into the passage (by suggesting that Paul disapproves only of those who act contrary to their individual sexual orientations) is to lapse into an anachronism.<sup>2</sup> The fact is that Paul treats *all* homosexual activity as *prima facie* evidence of humanity's tragic confusion and alienation from God the Creator.

One more thing must be said: Romans 1:18-32 performs a homiletical sting operation. The passage builds a crescendo of condemnation, declaring God's wrath upon human unrighteousness, using rhetoric characteristic of Jewish polemic against Gentile immorality. It whips the reader into a frenzy of indignation against others: those unbelievers, those idol worshipers, those immoral enemies of God. But then, in Romans 2:1, the sting strikes: “Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.”

We all stand without excuse under God's judgment. Self-righteous judgment of homosexuality is just as sinful as the homosexual behavior itself. That does not mean that Paul is disingenuous in his rejection of homosexual acts and all the other sinful activities mentioned in Romans 1; all the evils listed there remain evils. But no one should presume to be above God's judgment; all of us stand in radical need of God's mercy. That warning must temper the tone of our debate about homosexuality.

### **THE WIDER BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK**

Though only a few biblical texts speak of homoerotic activity, all of them express unqualified disapproval. In this respect, the issue of homosexuality differs significantly from matters such as slavery or the subordination of women, concerning which the Bible contains internal tensions and counterposed witnesses. No theological consideration of homosexuality can rest content, however, with a short list of passages that treat the matter explicitly. We must consider how Scripture frames the discussion more broadly. To place the prohibition of homosexual activity in a canonical context, we should keep in mind at least the following factors in the biblical portrayal of human existence before God.

1. *God's creative intention for human sexuality.* From Genesis 1 onwards, scripture affirms repeatedly that God has made man and woman for one another and that our sexual desires rightly find fulfillment within heterosexual marriage (see, for instance, Mark 10:2-9; I Thessalonians 4:3-8; I Corinthians 7:1-9; Ephesians 5:21-33; Hebrews 13:4). This picture of marriage provides the positive backdrop against which the Bible's few emphatic negations of homosexuality must be read.

2. *The fallen human condition.* The biblical analysis of the human predicament, most sharply expressed in Pauline theology, offers a subtle account of human bondage to sin. As great-grandchildren of the Enlightenment, we like to think of ourselves as free moral agents, choosing rationally among possible actions, but Scripture unmasks that cheerful illusion and teaches us that we are deeply infected by the tendency to self-deception. Romans 1 depicts humanity in a state of self-affirming confusion: “*They became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools. . . . They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die- yet they not only do*

*them but applaud others who practice them*” (Romans 1:21-22, 32). Once in the fallen state, we are not free not to sin; we are “slaves of sin” (Rom. 6: 17), which distorts our perceptions, over- powers our will, and renders us incapable of obedience (Romans 7). *Redemption* (a word that means “being emancipated from slavery”) is God’s act of liberation, setting us free from the power of sin and placing us within the sphere of God’s transforming power for righteousness (Romans 6:20-22, 8:1-11, cf. 12:1-2).

Thus we must reject the apparently common-sense assumption that only freely chosen acts are morally culpable. Quite the reverse: The very nature of sin is that it is not freely chosen. That is what it means to live “in the flesh” in a fallen creation. We are in bondage to sin but still accountable to God’s righteous judgment of our actions. In light of this theological anthropology, it cannot be maintained that a homosexual orientation is morally neutral because it is involuntary.

3. *The eschatological character of Christian existence.* The Christian community lives in a time of tension between “already” and “not yet.” Already we have the joy of the Holy Spirit; already we experience the transforming grace of God. But at the same time, we do not yet experience the fullness of redemption: we walk by faith, not by sight. The creation groans in pain and bondage, “and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23). This means, among other things, that Christians, set free from the power of sin through Christ’s death, must continue to struggle to live faithfully in the present time. The “redemption of our bodies” remains a future hope; final transformation of our fallen physical state awaits the resurrection. Consequently, in the interim some may find disciplined abstinence the only viable alternative to disordered sexuality.

4. *Demythologizing the idolatry of sex.* The Bible undercuts our cultural obsession with sexual fulfillment. Scripture, along with many subsequent generations of faithful Christians, bears witness that lives of freedom, joy, and service are possible without sexual relations. Indeed, however odd it may seem to contemporary sensibilities, some New Testament passages (Matthew 19:10-12; I Corinthians 7) clearly commend the celibate life as a way of faithfulness.

## **BIBLICAL AUTHORITY AND OTHER VOICES**

But what about the authority of the Bible? Are Leviticus and Paul the apostle trustworthy guides on sexual ethics? We must still consider how the Bible’s teaching is to be weighted in relation to other sources of moral wisdom. An adequate discussion of this problem would be very long indeed. For the present, I offer only some brief reflections as places to start the discussion.

1. *The Christian tradition.* Far more emphatically than scripture itself, the moral teaching tradition of the Christian church has for more than nineteen hundred years declared homosexual behavior to be contrary to the will of God. Only within the past twenty years has any serious question been raised about the church’s universal prohibition of such conduct. If anything, a passage like Romans 1 might serve to moderate the tradition’s harsh judgments. (John Chrysostom, for example, a brilliant and influential theologian of the fourth century, declared that homosexual intercourse was a sin worse than fornication, worse even than murder. Surely the biblical passages give no support to such a claim.) In any case, it is impossible to construct an argument for acceptance of homosexuality by juxtaposing the authority of tradition to the authority of Scripture. The result of the juxtaposition is to strengthen the Bible’s prohibitions.

2. *Reason and scientific evidence.* Here the picture is cloudy. Some studies have claimed that as much as 10 percent of the population is inclined to same-sex erotic preference, and some theorists hold that homosexual orientation is innate (or formed by a very early age) and unchangeable. This is the opinion espoused by most advocates of full acceptance of homosexuality in the church: If homosexual orientation is a genetically determined trait, so the argument goes, then any disapproval of it is a form of discrimination analogous to racism.

Others, however, regard homosexual orientation as a form of developmental maladjustment or “symbolic confusion.” Some therapists claim significant clinical success rates in helping homosexual persons develop a heterosexual orientation; others challenge such claims. A major cross-cultural study recently published by David F. Greenberg<sup>3</sup>, professor of sociology at New York University, contends that homosexual identity is socially constructed rather than inborn. According to Greenberg, the “essentialist” view of sexual orientation is a fallacy.

In one sense, however, the etiology of homosexual orientation is not a significant factor for the formation of normative Christian ethics. We need not take sides in the debate of nature versus culture. Even if it could be shown that same-sex preference is somehow genetically programmed, that would not necessarily make homosexual behavior morally appropriate. Surely Christian ethics does not want to hold that all inborn traits are good and desirable. The analogy of alcoholism, while only an analogy, is perhaps helpful: A considerable body of evidence suggests that some people are born with a predisposition to alcoholism. Once exposed to alcohol, they experience an attraction so powerful that it can be counteracted only by careful counseling, community support, and total abstinence. We now conventionally speak of alcoholism as a disease and carefully distinguish our disapproval of the behavior associated with it from our loving support of the person afflicted by it. Perhaps homoerotic attraction should be treated similarly.

The argument from statistical incidence of homosexual behavior is even less useful in normative ethical deliberation. Even if 10 percent of the people in the United States should declare themselves to be of homosexual orientation (and that figure is a doubtful one), that would not settle the *normative* issue; it is impossible to argue simply from an “is” to an “ought.” If Paul were shown the poll results, he would reply sadly, “Indeed, the power of sin is rampant in the world.”

3. *The experience of the community of faith.* This is the place where the advocates of homosexuality in the church have their most serious case. Scroggs argues that the New Testament's condemnation of homosexuality applies only to a certain “model” of exploitative pederasty that was common in Hellenistic culture; hence, it is not applicable to the modern world's experience of mutual, loving homosexual relationships. I think that Scroggs's position fails to reckon adequately with Romans 1, where the relations are not described as pederastic and where Paul's disapproval has nothing to do with exploitation.

But the fact remains that there are numerous homosexual Christians—like my friend Gary and some of my ablest students at Yale—whose lives show signs of the presence of God, whose work in ministry is genuine and effective. How is such experiential evidence to be assessed? Should we, like the earliest Jewish Christians who hesitated to accept “unclean” Gentiles into the community of faith, acknowledge the work of the Spirit and say, “Who are we to stand in the way of what God is doing” (cf. Acts 10:1-11:18)? Or should we see this as one more instance of a truth that all of us in ministry know sadly about ourselves: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels?” God gives the Spirit to broken people and ministers grace even through us sinners, without thereby endorsing our sin.

In view of the considerable uncertainty surrounding the scientific and experiential evidence, in view of our culture's present swirling confusion about gender roles, in view of our propensity for self-deception, I think it prudent and necessary to let the univocal testimony of Scripture and the Christian tradition order the life of the church on this painfully controversial matter. We must affirm that the New Testament tells us the truth about ourselves as sinners and as God's sexual creatures: Marriage between man and woman is the normative form for human sexual fulfillment, and homosexuality is one among many tragic signs that we are a broken people, alienated from God's loving purpose.

## **PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES: LIVING UNDER THE CROSS**

How then shall we respond in the church to the pastoral and political realities of our time? Having said that we cannot condone homosexual behavior, we still find ourselves confronted by complex problems that demand rigorous and compassionate solutions. Those who uphold the biblical teaching against homosexuality must remember Paul's warning in Romans 2:1-3: We are all "without excuse;" we all stand or fall under God's judgment and mercy. The second thing to be said—as a presupposition for all that follows—is that the church is called to be a fellowship of committed believers, knowing itself to have an identity and vocation distinct from the world.

In what follows, I pose several key issues and venture some discernments. These opinions—based on the exegesis and theological reflections already set forth in this essay—should be taken as proposals offered to the community of faith, to be judged in light of Scripture and the community's prayerful corporate wisdom.

1. *Should the church support civil rights for homosexuals?* Yes. Any judgment about the church's effort to influence Caesar's social policies requires complex reasoning. There is no reason, however, for the church to single out homosexual persons for malicious discriminatory treatment. Insofar as Christians have done so in the past, we must repent and seek instead to live out the gospel of reconciliation.

2. *Can homosexual persons be members of the Christian church?* This is rather like asking, "Can envious persons be members of the church?" (cf. Romans 1:29) or "Can alcoholics be members of the church?" Unless we think that the church is a community of sinless perfection, we will have to acknowledge that persons of homosexual orientation (granting, as I am willing to do, that there is such a thing) are welcome along with other sinners in the company of those who trust in the God who justifies the ungodly (Romans 4:5). If they are not welcome, I will have to walk out the door along with them, leaving in the sanctuary only those entitled to cast the first stone.

3. *Is it Christianly appropriate for homosexual Christians to maintain a homosexual lifestyle?* No. The only one who was entitled to cast a stone instead charged the recipient of his mercy to "go and sin no more." It is no more appropriate for homosexual Christians to persist in a homosexual lifestyle than it would be for heterosexual Christians to maintain a lifestyle of fornication or adultery. (Insofar as the church fails to teach clearly about heterosexual chastity outside of marriage, its disapproval of homosexual coupling will appear arbitrary and biased.) Unless they are able to change their orientation and enter a heterosexual marriage relationship, homosexual Christians should seek to live lives of disciplined sexual abstinence.

Despite the smooth illusions perpetrated by American mass culture, sexual gratification is not a sacred right, and celibacy is not a fate worse than death. Here the Catholic tradition has something to teach those of us raised in Protestant communities. While mandatory priestly celibacy is unbiblical, a life of sexual abstinence can promote "good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord" (I Corinthians 7:35). It is worth noting that I Corinthians 7:8-9, 25-40 commends celibacy as an option for everyone, not just for a special caste of ordained leaders. Within the church, we should work diligently to recover the dignity and value of the single life.

My friend Gary, in his final letter to me, wrote urgently of the imperatives of discipleship: "*Are homosexuals to be excluded from the community of faith? Certainly not. But anyone who joins such a community should know that it is a place of transformation, of discipline, of learning, and not merely a place to be comforted or indulged.*" The community demands that its members pursue holiness, while it also sustains the challenging process of character formation that is necessary for Jesus' disciples. The church must be a community whose life together provides true friendship and emotional support for persons seeking an alternative to the gay subculture, as well as for heterosexually oriented single persons.

In this respect, as in so many others, the church can fulfill its vocation only by living as a counter community in the world.

4. *Should the church sanction and bless homosexual unions?* No. The church should continue to teach—as it always has—that there are two possible ways for God’s human sexual creatures to live well-ordered lives of faithful discipleship: heterosexual marriage and sexual abstinence.

5. *Should homosexual Christians expect to change their orientation?* This tough question must be answered in the critical framework of New Testament eschatology. On the one hand, the transforming power of the Spirit really is present in our midst; the testimonies of those who claim to have been healed and transformed into a heterosexual orientation should be taken seriously. “He breaks the power of canceled sin; he sets the prisoner free.” If we do not continue to live with that hope, we may be hoping for too little from God. On the other hand, the “not yet” looms large; the testimonies of those like Gary who pray and struggle in Christian community and seek healing unsuccessfully for years must be taken with no less seriousness. Perhaps for many the best outcome attainable in this time between the times will be a life of disciplined abstinence, free from obsessive lust. (Exactly the same standard would apply for unmarried persons of heterosexual orientation.) That seems to be the spiritual condition Gary reached near the end of his life: *“Since All Saints Day I have felt myself being transformed. I no longer consider myself homosexual. Many would say, big deal, you’re 42. . . and are dying of AIDS. Big sacrifice. No, I didn’t do this of my will, of an effort to improve myself, to make myself acceptable to God. No, he did this for me. I feel a great weight has been lifted off me. I have not turned ‘straight.’ I guess I’m like St. Paul’s phrase, a eunuch for Christ.”*<sup>4</sup>

6. Should homosexuals be ordained? I save this question deliberately for last, where it belongs. It is unfortunate that the battle line has been drawn in the denominations at the question of ordination of homosexuals. The ensuing struggle has had the horrible effect of reinforcing a double standard for “clergy” and “lay” morality; it would be far better to articulate a single set of moral norms that apply to all Jesus’ followers. Strictures against homosexuality belong in the church’s moral catechesis, not in its ordination requirements. It is arbitrary to single out homosexuality as a special sin that precludes ordination. (Certainly the New Testament does not do this.) The church has no analogous special rules to exclude from ordination the greedy or the self-righteous. Such matters are left to the discernment of the bodies charged with examining candidates for ordination; these bodies must determine whether the individual candidate has the gifts and graces requisite for ministry. In any event, a person of homosexual orientation seeking to live a life of disciplined abstinence would clearly be an appropriate candidate for ordination.

We live, then, as a community that embraces sinners as Jesus did, without waiving God’s righteousness. We live confessing that God’s grace claims us out of confusion and alienation and sets about making us whole. We live knowing that wholeness remains a hope rather than an attainment in this life. The homosexual Christians in our midst may teach us something about our true condition as people living between the cross and the final redemption of our bodies.

In the midst of a culture that worships self-gratification and a church that preaches a false Jesus who panders to our desires, those who seek the narrow way of obedience have a powerful word to speak. Just as Paul saw in pagan homosexuality a symbol of human fallenness, so I saw conversely in Gary, as I have seen in other homosexual friends and colleagues, a symbol of God’s power made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Gary knew through experience the bitter power of sin in a twisted world, and he trusted in God’s love anyway. Thus he embodied the “sufferings of this present time” of which Paul speaks in Romans 8: living in the joyful freedom of the “first fruits of the Spirit,” even while groaning along with a creation in bondage to decay.

## NOTES

1. Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 106-08.
2. The expression *para physin* (“contrary to nature”), used here by Paul, is the standard terminology in dozens of ancient texts for referring to homoerotic acts. Readers interested in technical details and citations of pertinent ancient sources should see my article “Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1,” in the *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14/1 (Spring 1986): 184-215.
3. David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
4. Actually, Gary’s phrase rather elegantly conflates 1 Corinthians 4:10 with Matthew 19:12.

## APPENDIX 5

### Minutes of the 158<sup>th</sup> General Synod of the RPCES held at Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, Washington, July 4-10, 1980.

#### Report of the Study Committee on Homosexuality

The Rev. Egon Middelmann presented the following report as amended by synod  
(see ACTION taken below, p. 7)

#### PASTORAL CARE FOR THE REPENTANT HOMOSEXUAL

Fathers and brethren:

The study committee on homosexuality is pleased to report to the 158th General Synod. As I had indicated in my letter to the 157th General Synod, the committee was concerned to provide aid to our denomination in the area of pastoral care for those struggling in the area of homosexuality in and outside of our congregations. We have purposefully restricted our discussion of the biblical data. There are many good books and articles dealing with the pertinent biblical texts and there seems little dispute within our denominations.

#### I. Theological Considerations

(For your own study on the subject of homosexuality you might consult the following passages: Gen. 1:26ff, Gen. 18:20, 19:4f, Lev. 18:22, 20:13, 1 Sam. 18:3f and 20:41, Rom. 1:26f, I Cor. 6:9ff, I Tim. 1:8ff).

##### A. *Some Theological Reflections on Romans 1:18-32:*

In any discussion of the issue of homosexuality, the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans will be important as a guideline for our thinking and acting. Paul reminds us that mankind stands under the wrath of God due to the theological chaos caused by man's unwillingness to acknowledge "God's invisible qualities" and man's desire "to suppress the truth by their wickedness." Man responds to the wrath of God in self-pity in that finite man creates his own gods (22f). By falling down before them, man tries to come to grips with who he perceives himself to be justifying his fallen existence with regret. We frequently see sinful man sadly admitting to himself and to others that he is who he thinks he has to be.

At the end of the chapter, v. 32, we see man's response to the wrath of God take a different form, that of defiance and pride. "They not only condone to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them." In this context fallen man will seek to justify his behavior by calling upon psychology, situation ethics, and sociology in an attempt to assert not merely the inevitability but also the beauty of his lifestyle.

Into this climate of self-pity and defiance the church has to speak about the work of propitiation and expiation in Jesus Christ. Only if we trust that the wrath of God is borne by Jesus Christ we are able to call man out of his response of despair and hardness of heart. On the basis of the gospel of the atoning work of Jesus Christ, sinful man can learn to define himself again in terms of his creator. This concern Jesus expressed in Matthew 19:4ff. Jesus wanted the Pharisees to return to the original intent of God's creation. "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning" (19:8). In light of man's renewed confidence in God, he can see himself as created as "male

and female,” reflecting the image of God. Scripture sees in the polarity and correspondence of male and female, the original image of God.

Jesus can also speak of other forms of human existence, “for some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by man; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven” (19:12). There can be significant and beautiful relationships between members of the same sex (1 Sam. 18:3ff and 20:41) or members of the opposite sex. But Scripture does not perceive these to find their fulfillment in sexual union. It is at this point where homosexuals misunderstand their own identity. They have to be challenged to grow and to define themselves again according to their creator.

### *B. Theological Chaos Leads to Ethical Chaos*

Having stated the reasons for the wrath of God being poured out on all mankind, Paul points to the ethical outworkings of man’s rebellion. In verses 24, 26, 28 of Romans 1, Paul reveals the judgment of God manifesting itself in His giving man over to his sinful desires. We find a progression in the text from a generalized indictment of the Gentile world all the way to a total ethical chaos. Having “exchanged the truth of God for a lie” they are handed over “to sexual impurity” (25).

Romans 1:26ff zeroes in on homosexual practices as a major manifestation of sinful man’s attempt to distort the creator’s intent. But homosexuality is not singled out as the worst of all manifestations of sin as we can see in Jesus’ indictment against the unbelief of Capernaum (Matt. 11:23).

Finally, in Romans 1 :28ff we see the ultimate outcome as total breakdown of ethical norms. Paul reminds us that whenever man bows before the imaginations of his heart, he inevitably ends up in a chaotic ethics. It is important to note that sinful man does not necessarily consciously conspire the ethical chaos. He might well perceive his ethical choices as inevitable and logical outgrowth of being “human.” But Paul uncovers this “inevitability” as the judgment of God calling to repentance.

### *C. Call to Repentance*

Paul’s reasoning in Romans 1 points to man’s responsibility and God’s desire for man to return (*metanoia*). As we relate to sinners in general and to homosexuals in particular it is important to remember that God, even after the Fall, relates to us as those who are able to respond to him, as responsible people. While psychological insight will be helpful to understand, care for, and help the homosexual, it must not lead us to deny his responsibility for his “unnatural” desires and actions. Psychologists, and many Christian psychologists would agree, believe that the homosexual inclination is a response to very early learning experiences. It would be misleading, therefore, to think of the homosexual as necessarily having made “conscious choices” in favor of the homosexual inclination. But the gospel reminds us that God addresses man as responsible human beings not merely on the level of “conscious choices.” David, in his heterosexual promiscuity, is an encouraging example in that he not merely confesses his responsibility for his conscious choice as far as Bathsheba is concerned. He takes full responsibility for himself, even for his sinfulness “from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). Instead of excusing his sin on the basis of the predisposition from the time of birth, he responds to the mercy of God by accepting his whole existence as his own. Only if the homosexual can understand the vast mercy of God can he discover the responsibility for his total life. The mercy of God will allow him not to seek refuge in self-pity of [*sic or?*] defiance, but in the renewing grace of God. In sanctification we want to see healing in our misdirected desires as well as actions. But as with other sins, like heterosexual promiscuity, coveting and greed, the homosexual cannot be expected to see his desires changed immediately or totally. Along with the homosexual we all will recognize ourselves in the words of Paul: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

#### *D. Call to Obedience*

The repentant homosexual brother or sister has to be encouraged to join the rest of us to follow Jesus who “though he was a son, learned obedience from what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8) and to realize that even Jesus learned obedience by offering up “prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death” (Hebrews 5:7). Obedience is essential to our growth. It will begin with refraining from acting out our desires. It will not rest until ultimately even our sinful desires are transformed into restored humanity at Christ’s return. In the meanwhile we and our brothers and sisters will encourage one another in exploring the depth of the promise “In all things God works for the good of those who love Him” (Romans 8:28).

### **II. The Repentant Homosexual Brother-and-Sister in our Congregation**

A. Our sensitivity to the holiness of God can easily become a problem to us if it overshadows our relating to one another as sinners saved by grace. It will be important to be aware of the danger of creating an atmosphere in which the individual member finds it more and more difficult to reveal himself as one in need of the grace of sanctification. A helpful balance is struck in our confession as it speaks of sanctification:

1. . . . “having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, [they] are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified, and they are more and more quickened and strengthened, in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”
2. “This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part . . .” (WCF, XIII, 1 and 2).

Our congregations have to be encouraged to grow in the grace of God by accepting themselves as those needy of daily repentance and of a “continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ” (WCF, XIII, 3). In the context of our concern for the homosexual in our congregation this emphasis on growing in grace is all the more important as we frequently neglected setting before him a realistic hope, solidarity in sanctification, and promise of acceptance. In the political/ethical climate of our time, our congregations have at times acted more out of fear and lack of compassion than offering long term friendship, care, and openness, necessary for encouragement of those who struggle along with the rest of us in this long and never-ending path of sanctification.

#### *B. Problems the Homosexual Faces*

In order to be helpful to our churches and to their ministry towards the homosexual it might be helpful to be aware of the following difficulties our brothers and sisters are facing.

1. Loneliness: to the extent that sexuality is a primary aspect of humanness, there can easily be a feeling that an important aspect of oneself has been “cut out” of one’s life. As God’s image is reflected in the male/female correlation, the deepest human relationship seems “denied” to the homosexual. The isolation is also accentuated by feeling unable to share the problem and therefore being locked up in a central area of one’s life.
2. Fear: as a result of the loneliness and the prevalent climate as perceived by the homosexual an oppressive sense of fear can manifest itself: the fear of “coming out” or being “found out,” the fear of loss

of job, reputation, the fear of any close relationship with those of the opposite sex caused by a sense of “inevitable” failure, the fear of developing close friendships with persons of the same sex.

3. Bitterness: a sense of frustration towards God as God’s commands are frequently perceived as being arbitrary.

4. Confusion: even if a brother or sister is growing in sanctification, it is not clear to him how he or she can be used in our congregation.

### *C. How Our Congregations Might Be of Help*

(Apart from or in addition to professional resources)

1. “Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers” (Hebrews 2:11). We have to learn to accept one another as sinners saved by grace. It will not be helpful to focus primarily on the particular manifestation of sin in our brother or sister. We have to persistently help him to rediscover himself from God’s perspective. We all are responsible for our desires and actions. At the same time God loves us on the basis of the free, inexhaustible, and all-embracing sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The lack of appreciation of the core of the good news of Jesus Christ is the root of our lack of faith, hope and therefore joyful obedience.

2. As our sins reflect actual and/or perceived unfulfilled desires and hurts we have to encourage our brothers and sisters in the grace and power of the sanctifying Spirit. Those who have opportunity to be of help have to identify as those who are on the same road of sanctification. He who knows that he transgressed the 10th commandment will want to live in a solidarity of sanctification with him who transgressed the 7th commandment:

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation

and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways. (Psalm 5 1:11-13)

3. We cannot presume to know in what way God is going to help our brother and sister grow in grace. But we do have the confidence that God desires our growth in grace and holiness. We should not, therefore have fixed ideas in what way sanctification will express itself in any particular person. Change from homosexual desires to heterosexual attraction is only one possible expression of sanctification. 2 Corinthians 12:9 indicates one other way in which God might show his strength in our weakness (cf. also Matthew 19:12 and the promise of Isaiah 56:3-5).

4. We have to understand sexuality in the broader context of agape and eros and not exclusively in the context of the sex act itself. The homosexual brother and sister has to learn how to relate with individuals of the same sex (friendship) and the opposite sex. In both cases he has to learn how to relate with agape and eros and therefore as a total human being. He has to learn that the sex act is not a necessary expression of humanness. Jesus’ relationship to Mary Magdalene (John 11:2, 12:3) and David’s to Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:41) are positive role models of affectionate and loving relationships.

5. We have to help him or her who might easily feel excluded from God and the fellowship of Christians to be a regular part of our congregation. Our brothers and sisters need friendship, trust, and discipline.

Only with prayer, fasting and the means of grace of word and sacrament can they with the rest of us grow into a more and more obedient and fulfilled life. Friendship is all the more important as we will frequently have to ask our brothers and sisters to separate themselves not only from a certain pattern of behavior but from a total and all-determining lifestyle.

6. If he who once was involved in homosexuality is growing in grace to such an extent that he can “walk with exemplary piety before the flock” there ought not be any reason for a generalized exclusion from church office. Judgment must be made in individual cases by the session and/or presbytery, keeping in mind those aggravations that make some sins more heinous than others (cf. LC 151 as quoted by the 152nd General Synod in its report on divorce and remarriage as it applies to church office, p. 136.)

7. We have to publicly and privately protect those struggling with homosexuality in and outside of our congregations “in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered, . . . to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever” (WCF XIII,3).

Especially, misconceptions and distortions about the supposed impact of homosexuals on our society, however popular they might be, have to be corrected by us who try to be representatives of the God of Truth.

### **III. Thoughts on Political Issues Concerning Homosexuality**

Over the last few years the gay rights movement as well as several conservative political action groups have focused on the “political/legal rights” of the homosexual. In order to help sessions and congregations to think through their possible involvement in these questions, this study wants to provide three different ways of approaching the subject.

*Model A.* The Christian should not get involved in this particular political question in order not to prejudice his active personal evangelistic and friendship outreach to the gay community.

*Model B.* Christian moral values are God-given and true and since Christians are committed to that truth and have an obligation to be the salt of the earth in a corporate sense, Christians should attempt whenever possible to have their ethical system established in the legal structure of society. Since homosexuality is clearly wrong it must be legislated against.

*Model C.* Christian morals are God-given and true and Christians do have a corporate obligation to be involved in social and political action and cannot simply retreat into an individualistic witness approach (*contra* Model A). But at the same time Christians should make a distinction between public law in its concern for limiting the results of the Fall and the holiness of God as represented in the biblical teaching. (cf. the relationship of God’s stance against divorce and the public law in the Old Testament permitting and regulating divorce, Matt. 19:19:1ff).

Those who would think along the lines of Model B will have to ask themselves why they would strive to impose biblical morality on the activity of homosexuals and not pursue with even greater vigor the much more prevalent immorality of divorce, child abuse, wife beating, etc. Should political expediency be a major motivating force, then Christians would be open to the charge that they only legally pursue those who are a minority.

Those thinking along the lines of Model C would have to be concerned to find ways to assure the freedom for the public teaching and living of biblical norms while they, at the same time, would be committed to protecting the homosexual from harassment in the area of his political, economic and social life.

#### IV. Resources

A. Bibliography (this is deliberately only a very select list of books. If one is interested in further study one might want to consult the bibliographies in most of the books mentioned).

Davidson, Alex, *The Return of Love*, London: Inter-Varsity Press; 1970. Helpful insights into the emotional life of Christians struggling with homosexuality.

Lovelace, Richard, *Homosexuality and the Church*, Old Tappan, N.J.: F. H. Revell, 1978. A very helpful book written by the floorleader of the biblical view on homosexuality in the UPCUSA debate on this issue.

McNeil, Father John, *The Church and the Homosexual*, Kansas City: Sheed Andrews McMeel, Inc., 1976 (also paperback). An insightful presentation of a gay activist position with extensive discussion of the biblical material.

Schonauer, Betty, et al. *Healing for the Homosexual*, Oklahoma City, Presbyterian Charismatic Communion, Inc., 63 p., 1978.

Thielicke, Helmut, *The Ethics of Sex*, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1964 (also paperback).

Weltge, Ralph W., "The Paradox of Man and Woman", in *The Same Sex: An Appraisal of Homosexuality*, Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969.

White, John, *Eros Defiled: The Christian and Sexual Sin*, Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill., 1977. Not merely concerned with homosexuality.

#### B. Articles

*Christianity in Crisis*, "Homosexuality and the Christian Tradition," No. 34, August 1974.

*Consultation on Homosexuality*, An Evangelical Perspective, Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns, 50 Buckwalter Road, Spring City, PA.

*Eternity*, "A Christian View of Homosexuality," August, 1972.

*Healing for the Homosexual*, Presbyterian Charismatic Communion, Inc., Oklahoma City, OK 73112, 1978.

*HIS*, Monthly Magazine of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, February, 1978, Vol. 38, No. 5.

*Joy! A Homosexual Search for Fulfillment*, Correspondence between Barbara Evans (the subject) and Pat Boone. Carol Stream, Ill: Creation House, 499 Gunderson Drive, 60187.

*The Bulletin*, Publication of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies, Livonia, MI., Vol. 4, 1978.

*The Other Side*, A Magazine of Christian Discipleship. "The Gay Person's Lonely Search for Answers," Issue 81, June, 1978.

*The Reformed Journal*, Vol. 28, Issues I and 5.

#### C. Organizations

Exodus International P.O. Box 4272 Minneapolis, MN 55414	Coordinates local ministries by ex-gays to the gay community. The organization is willing to be of help to local congregations in their attempt to reach homosexuals.
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Members of the study committee have had contact with the following local ministries:

*King's Ministries*  
Bill Pruessing  
30 West Bayaud  
Denver, CO 80223

*Jesus Outreach*  
704 Country Club Rd.  
Fairmont, WV 26554

*Outpost*  
P.O. Box 4222  
Minneapolis, MM 55414

*Spatula*  
Barbara Johnson  
2230 Lake Forest Circle  
LaHabra, CA 90631  
(SPATULA ministers to parents and loved ones of gays).

*Theophilus*  
P.O. Box 592  
Las Vegas, NV 89101

*Come Out and Live (COAL)*  
c/o New Life Evangelistic Center  
1411 Locust  
St. Louis, MO

*AID Ministries*  
P.O. Box 135  
Fairfield, OH 45014  
(513) 721-5755

**V. RECOMMENDATION:** That Synod commend the above study to our sessions and congregations as an aid for their ministry to those struggling with homosexuality.

I would like to thank the other members of the study committee, Dr. Robert Reymond, Dr. Gene Holeman, and Dr. Jack Van Der Silk, who gave me good advice both in writing and in person. I was encouraged by helpful letters and comments written by members of several of our presbyteries and congregations.

Respectfully submitted,  
Egon A. Middelmann, Chairman

The orders of the day were called for and the meeting was recessed at 12:15 with prayer by the Rev. Robert Auffarth. The afternoon meeting was called to order by the moderator at 1:30 p.m. and opened with prayer by the Rev. Paul Doepke.

***ACTION:***

After several motions to refer or to table the report, the recommendation was adopted, as amended, to read “that the synod commend the above study, entitled ‘Pastoral Care for the Repentant Homosexual,’ with the deletion of Section III, to our sessions and congregations as an aid for their ministry to those struggling with homosexuality.”

The assembly sang the hymn, “We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations,” and was led in prayer by the Rev. Al Lutz.

This is the end of the 1994 report.