

CALENDAR

Today **Worship 9:00 AM**
Class 10:00 AM

THIS WEEK

Monday	Food Bank – Workers Needed at 7:30 AM & 4:30 PM
Wednesday	Teen Refuge 7 – 9 PM Nichols Building
Wednesday	Mundo de Fe 6 - 8 PM Worship Center

Nurseries Available

During the worship assembly, LRC has nurseries available for children ages birth – two years of age down the Preschool Ministry hallway.

Monday Evening Elder Prayer Time

Our elders meet to pray every other Monday at 6:00 PM. Anyone desiring prayer with the elders may come to the multipurpose room during this time. The elders will meet again for this purpose on August 1.

Jordan Yarbrough, LRC Missionary is now in Huambo, Angola

The team has arrived in Huambo where they will live and work.

Jordan's Blog Address:

<http://www.jordanyarbrough.wordpress>.

Angola Team Website:

<http://www.angolateam.org>

Senior High Mission Trip

Thank you to the group of eleven teens and adults who spent last week in Fort Worth, TX helping in the work of Fortress Youth Development Center.

See Chad's article on page three about all the ways teens from LRC have been serving this summer.

Nancy Chandler Prayer Ministry

We are blessed and grateful for Nancy's ministry of prayer on behalf of our church family. Nancy has always been a tremendous prayer warrior and is focusing on that as a ministry to our body during this season of her life.

As you send prayer requests to the office we will forward them to Nancy.

Little Rock Church Purposes:



Worship



Community



Outreach



Spiritual Formation

Foundations Class Today

Foundations Class will be held this morning at 9:00 AM. We host the monthly Foundations Class to share important information about our church for those considering LRC as a church home. The class will meet in the middle classroom of the multipurpose room and will be led by Lynn Cook.

All-Church Fellowship August 10

Make plans to attend the all-church fellowship scheduled Wednesday, August 10. We are planning a fish fry with all the accouterments from 6 PM to 8 PM.

Women's Ministry Play Day

This week's Play Day is scheduled for Thursday, July 28, at the home of Tracy Williams (1021 Cherry Ridge Road, Alexander) from 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Bring swimsuits, towels and sunscreen.

Enduring Word Seminar

Little Rock Church will host The Enduring Word presented by Rusty Maisel August 20 and 21. The enduring Word is a seminar showing how God's word has come to us over the centuries. Times for the seminar are 6 PM - 8:30 PM Saturday, August 20 and Sunday 10 AM – 11:15 AM and 1 PM – 3 PM

LRC Members Respond to Famine Crisis in East Africa

More Christians in the west are turning prayers toward east Africa, including members of LRC. A crippling drought in the Horn of Africa has affected about 11 million people in a region straddling Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya.

During lunch on Sunday, July 31, some members of LRC will gather in the Nichols building. "Instead of eating out," says Mary Beth Picker, "we'll bring simple sack lunches to share together. The money we save by not eating out we can contribute to help those suffering in the famine." And, of course, those gathering that day will intercede in prayer for Africans to receive relief. Funds collected will be given to World Vision.

For more information on the plans for prayer and gifts for the east African famine, contact Casey and Mary Beth Picker at marybethpicker@gmail.com or caseypicker@gmail.com.



LittleRockChurch
Summer Adult Series
Questions: Growing Our Faith
Through Scripture 10 AM Sunday

Today What does the Bible say about homosexuality and what is a Christian response?

July 31 What is God's Plan for His Money in Your Pocket?

August 7 How do we manage wealth in a way that honors God?

August 14 Christian Charity: Good, Bad or Both?

August 20 and 21 "The Enduring Word" Seminar led by Dr. Rusty Maisel on Trusting the Word of God. Schedule will be coming out soon for this weekend event.

Today

"What does the Bible say about homosexuality and a Christian Response?"

Please note that our class time today will be focused on a discussion of a Christian Response to Homosexuality in our culture. We will NOT take time to review what the Bible says about homosexuality. We are providing material for reading on a Biblical Understanding of Homosexuality this week in two handouts at the back of the auditorium. One is an edited copy of a sermon by Gerald Driskill and Jon Camp at LRC in 2004. We are also making available a booklet from Wheaton College on homosexuality through their Center for Applied Christian Ethics. Please take time to read these two resources. Next week's lesson will assume a Biblical knowledge of homosexuality that is provided in these two resources. You can also download both documents on the LRC website on the bulletin tab at <http://www.littlerockchurch.org/downloads/bulletins/>. If you have questions about the resources, please call the church office.

Lynn

Ron Cook
Cell: 850-9061

Ron@littlerockchurch.org

From Jordan Yarbrough in Angola:

"We are well taken care of with our host family. I am registered with the embassy here in Luanda (the capital city). We had a grand welcome to Angola service hosted by our inviting church that was really very special. Very exhausting, but a great experience. The service started 1.5 late and then went for 4.5 hours. After which they fed us. Long day, but it was so neat to finally be worshipping with Angolan Christians in Angola. We are hoping to leave for Huambo by the end of this week. I want to thank you all so much for your love, thoughts and continuous prayer." For more, go to the Angola Team www.angolateam.org

Your Games, Please. And Your Skill, Too.

Can you provide to LRC your new or gently used card games, dominos and board games (for adults or children)? Would you consider coming to play a round or two of a favorite game?

Every other Monday, during our Food for the Hungry event, over 200 community neighbors visit the Nichols building. Since many arrive early, our ministry provides games for all ages to promote fellowship among our guests and to give LRC members a chance to get to know our guests.

Bring your cards, dominos, or games to the church office, foyer to the auditorium, or near the kitchen of the Nichols building. Also, why don't you bring one of your LRC friends to the Nichols building between 3-5p to play your favorite game with some guests of our Food for the Hungry event?

Our next Food for the Hungry day is tomorrow, July 25.



Chad Nall
Text or Cell: 529-3675
Chad@littlerockchurch.org

Serving Others

Students in grades 7-12 spent much of the summer serving our church family and others. 7-8th graders offered hope to some families in New Orleans. They had a great time doing it, too.

A group of 9-12th graders returned just two days ago from mentoring approximately 40 children. Part of this work included taking children ice skating at the end of the week.

Locally, our students have been helping lead groups in our Summer on the Rock, preschool classes as well as helping in the Food for the Hungry ministry.

It's been a summer of serving others!

We look forward to involving our students in ministry throughout the school year. It's exciting to be a part of our student ministry and serve others. I'm so proud of our teens!

Food for the Hungry

For 7-12th graders. Tomorrow 5-9 PM. Help serve food and drinks, carry boxes. Eat at Purple Cow afterwards and return to building for games until 9 PM. Bring money for dinner. RSVP with Chad July 24 so transportation can be arranged.

Magic Springs

Celebrate the end of summer at Magic Springs on Saturday, August 13. Casting Crowns is in concert that night. Bring the whole family.

Cost is reduced to \$18 for 7-12th graders. It's \$28.50 for adults. We'll leave LRC at 11 AM and return after the concert that night. The deadline to sign up is August 3.

Parent/Teen Refuge

Parents are invited to Refuge Wednesday, August 17 from 7-8:30 PM. The night will include games, worship and students sharing summer highlights. Eat before you come!

Looking Ahead

July 25	Food Bank
Aug. 10	All-Church fellowship
Aug. 13	Magic Springs
Aug. 17	Parent/teen Refuge
Aug. 28	Plug In

Weekly Student Ministry Events

Refuge Wednesday night 7-9 PM

Calling 7-12th graders to become more like Jesus for the sake of others.

Chad Nall or Krissi Fry

Krissi@littlerockchurch.org

Chad@littlerockchurch.org



Perseverance

Life is just plain hard sometimes. It's hard for kids and grown-ups. It's hard for "good" people and those who aren't so good. It's even hard for people who believe in Jesus and have a lot of faith in God. Sometimes people expect life to be great—or at least to be easier—when they become a Christian. But that's not the way life works. Sometimes it requires a lot of perseverance: **refusing to give up when life gets hard.**

Thankfully, God is in the perseverance business. He created it, so no one exemplifies it better, and He instills it in us. He's been helping people through seemingly impossible situations from the very beginning, and He'll help them, too. Who knows what God will do through us when we persevere?

Leading the next generation to become fully-devoted followers of Jesus.

Prayer List



dave@littlerockchurch.org

Home Away from Home Patients	Cabot Church Plant
Roger Bertsche, Carl Duplantis, George Potter, Marvin Winegar, James Loftis, Jame OliVeraz, Doug Ray, Misty Day, Bob Perry Tommy Keen, George Kovacevic, Ivan Szocs, Greg Hilton, Gerald Gordon, Hubert Conwill	Please continue to pray for Spencer and Jennifer Dunlap as they continue their ministry in Cabot.
Vipin Nischal	Mike Harmon
Please continue to pray for Vipin's mother who is ill with cancer.	Please continue to pray for Mike and Gina as Mike pursues healthy treatment alternatives.
Jerry Bryant	Laura Jackson
Please continue to pray for Jerry and his family. He is at home and continuing chemotherapy. If you would like to send a card, his address is 3202 Travis Pkwy, Bryant, AR 72202.	Laura Jackson, former LRC member, will begin treatment for a recurrence of melanoma.
Nancy Chandler	Melvin Young Family
Please continue to pray for Nancy and her family.	Linda Chandler's father, Melvin Young, is in hospice care in Louisville, KY.
Rick Brady	Carolyn Wallis and Shirley Nipps
Rick Brady, father of former LRC member Ritchie Brady, was recently diagnosed with lung cancer.	Larry and Linda Miller have asked for our prayers on behalf of their friends who have been under treatment for cancer. Carolyn is in hospice at this time Shirley's tumors have decreased in size or are gone.
Andrew Vaughan	Bill Oakley
Andrew graduated from basic training, but will be in California for a while, and still would appreciate cards and letters. His address is: Vaughan, Andrew C 1 st BN Delta CO Platoon 1062, 4000 Midway Ave., San Diego, CA 92140	Cindy Stanford's father, Bill Oakley, is recovering from back surgery.
Brenda Graham	Don Lowery
Brenda had surgery last week to remove a tumor on her pancreas. Her doctor determined the malignancy to be inoperable. She began chemotherapy and radiation treatments last week.	Jim Hathcock's, brother Don Lowery, underwent procedures last week to treat prostate cancer.
Lawrence and Dozier Families	Thomas Hathcock
Wilma Lawrence's son, Jimmy Dozier, passed away recently.	Thomas Hathcock, son of Jim Hathcock, is in ICU with complications from an abdominal injury last week.

Serving in the Family

Serving in the Nursery (See Krissi Fry for assistance)	Serving on the Playground & Gym	Serving & Preparing Communion
<u>Today:</u> Infant - Susie Brown and Julie Thompson 18-36 Months - Tracy and Hope Williams	<u>Today:</u> Brian and Adrienne Meachum	<u>Serving July:</u> T. Chandler & Reed HC's
<u>Next Week</u> Sue & Libby White, Joy Wallace and Susan McDonald	<u>Next Sunday:</u> Lynn and Michelle Cook	<u>Preparing in July:</u> Welsh Family

Dear Little Rock Church,

Our family wants to thank you all for all the help you gave us moving in.

You made us feel welcome to Arkansas and transition so much easier. We enjoyed meeting members at the church on Sunday, and are looking forward to next Sunday.

We appreciate all you have done for us.

God Bless,

Matt, Laurie, Allison, Stephen, and Justin Flanigan

Sunday, July 24

Question: What is God's Plan for Human Sexuality?



Notes:

Questions for House Church Meetings This Week:

1. How you heard of any issues coming up in our culture lately around the area of homosexuality? How do you think the church is doing to responding to our culture? How does our culture view the church's response to homosexual issues?
2. How comfortable are you at discussing issues of sexuality and homosexuality in a church setting? Do you see any good coming from such a discussion?
3. Remember the definition of homosexuality had three dimensions: 1) the experience of same-sex attraction, 2) active participation in homosexual acts, and 3) adoption of a gay lifestyle and worldview. Why is making these distinctions important? Discuss the role of choice in each dimension of the definition.
4. Quote from lesson "We realize that the question of genetic predisposition and choice are at the core of the difference between a Christian View of Homosexuality and a view from the World. But, please understand that there has been no research to prove a genetic link to someone being "born gay". Because if we ever say you are "born that way" we will also accept that means you do not have a choice." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
5. Can you remember some of the factors involved in the formation of homosexuality? Is there a gay gene?
6. Read Romans 1:24-27. How does Paul see the homosexual behavior?
7. Read I Corth. 5:9-13. How does Paul think we should respond to those in the world that are choosing homosexual behaviors and acts? How we to respond are is a loving and compassionate way? In what ways would this response be easy and what ways would it be difficult?

For Further Study on Human Sexuality and Christian Teaching:

Authentic Human Sexuality: An Integrated Christian Approach by J. Balswick and J. Balswick. 2nd Edition.

How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex: A lifelong Approach to Sharing Your Child's Sexual Character by Stan and Brenna Jones.

Good Sex: A Whole Person Approach to Teenage Sexuality and God 2nd Edition by Jim Hancock and Kara Powell

Every Man's Battle by Stephen Arterburn.

Every Woman's Battle by Shannon Ethridge and Stephen Arterburn.

Rocking the Roles: Building a Win-Win Marriage by Robert Lewis and Williams Hendricks.

Coming Out of Homosexuality – New Freedom for Men and Women by Dob Davies and Lori Rentzel

A Parents Guide to Preventing Homosexuality by Joseph Nicolosi, Ph.D. and Linda Ames Nicolosi

What the Bible Says and Does Not Say About Homosexuality: A Hand-Out by Jon Camp and Gerald Driskill

Understanding Homosexuality, Part 1, Biblical and Theological Understanding, By Gilbert Bilezikian, Ph.D, Professor of Biblical Studies, Emeritus, Wheaton College

UNDERSTANDING HOMOSEXUALITY

PART I

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

Gilbert Bilezikian, Ph.D.

Professor of Biblical Studies, Emeritus, Wheaton College

The topic will be addressed from three perspectives. First, a summary of the Biblical data on the issue will be presented. Then we will turn to the people who are dealing with the homosexual issue on a personal basis. Finally, we will challenge the rest of the Christian community regarding our attitude toward homosexuality.

THE BIBLICAL TEXTS

The Old Testament Passages. First, the Biblical data. By all rights, the Bible should have been a very short book. It should have had only two chapters, Genesis chapter 1, Genesis chapter 2, period. The Bible begins with an exuberant story of God engaged in the work of creation, the expression of his loving nature. He ordered the world and placed in it human beings made to enjoy him, to enjoy the world, to enjoy life. Those two chapters of the book of Genesis are vibrant with the newness, the beauty, the grandeur of what God was doing in creation. And that should have been the end of the story. Period, nothing more.

But unfortunately, we know differently. We know the miserable story of the creature rising in rebellion against the Creator, assuming upon himself the creatorial rights of God, usurping the sovereignty of God, wanting to be “like God” and, as a result, seditiously opening the back door of creation to allow the slithering intrusion of corruption and death to degrade, to mar, and to destroy God’s design. But fortunately, God is not a quitter. He doesn’t give up. He doesn’t walk away from what he started. So, he initiated the program of redemption. In the midst of death and corruption, he prepared the covenant people, a kind of cradle of righteousness. According to the Bible, this people was to be like a luxuriant garden in the midst of a parched land, so that from them, he could extend redemption to the whole of his creation while they maintained a standard of righteousness, of love and order.

In that privileged environment, God gave the law. The purpose of the law was to keep things together in a modicum of righteousness until Christ came as the Savior of the world. The law addresses many issues, including the issue of homosexuality. Very clearly, in the book of Leviticus, chapter 20, and in a couple of other passages, there is a prohibition against homosexual behavior accompanied with the sanction of capital punishment (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Deut. 23:18). That seems now to be a very severe punishment for the infraction. But then, there were also many other offenses that drew capital punishment in the same law, some twenty of them, such as the sin of profanity. People who blasphemed were supposed to be put to death. That would take care of a good half of the population of the land. Adultery was also punishable by death. That would well take care of the other half of the population. Disobedience or rebellion was punishable by death. Why such radical measures to guarantee righteousness? Because God was interested in safeguarding that garden of righteousness in the midst of a degenerate world population in order for the Messiah to appear and exercise his ministry.

The New Testament Passages. When we come to the New Testament, there are some changes. If you think that the expectations of the Old Covenant were severe in terms of righteousness, they become even more stringent in the New Covenant. In

the Old Covenant, the emphasis was with outward action. Jesus, on the other hand, focused upon the principle that actions stem from the heart, from within, and he demanded that not only our actions be in conformity with the will of God but also our heart condition. It is only those who are pure in heart who shall see God. “If the heart is right,” he said, “then the actions will follow.” Jesus said, “Wash the inside of the cup, don’t just shine the outside.” He said, “Be careful not to be like the Pharisees who are like beautiful sepulchers or ornate tombs. They look tremendous outside, but inside they are full of rot. Clean the inside, give it attention, and the outside will take care of itself.” So Jesus defined sin not only as our actions but more basically as existing in our thought life.

In view of more rigorous expectations in the New Covenant, it seems strange that there is hardly any direct mention of homosexuality in the New Testament. There are three word references—none very explicit. The wording that designates homosexuality is ambiguous. In I Corinthians 6, verses 9-11, it is stated, “Be not deceived, neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers, will inherit the Kingdom of God” (RSV). The reference to “homosexuals” consists of two words. The NIV translates one of them as “male prostitutes” and the other as “homosexual offenders.” The same word for “homosexual offenders” is found also in I Timothy, chapter 1, verse 10, but interestingly it is translated differently there in the NIV (“perverts”) than it is in the Corinthian passage. Obviously, there is a problem with terminology. Why so? The explanation may lie in the fact that the practice of homosexuality was very widespread in the Greco-Roman world. In the Greek world, no moral distinctions were usually made between heterosexual activity and homosexual activity. In fact, in the Greek language—as far as I know—there was no word for homosexuality in the sense of identifying a person with same sex desires or orientation. The word “homosexuality” itself has Latin roots. It seems that the New Testament lacks the very language to speak about homosexuality as an orientation. The above words (I Cor. 6; I Tim. 1) most likely describe same sex sexual *behavior*. But underlying the whole structure of the New Testament, there are some basic themes that rule out the consideration of homosexual behavior as a lifestyle for Christians.

New Testament Themes. Three of those themes will be mentioned. The **first** has to do with **the nature of the church**. The church is God’s new chosen people, and it is to be a distinctive people. The calling of the church is not to conform to the culture, but to be transformed by an influence other than the culture, by the renewing of one’s mind under the impact of the Holy Spirit. Then, on to transform the culture. You see the pattern? Not conforming to a pagan culture, but changing it because of a different ideology. The New Testament severely warns Christians against buying into the values of their culture and conforming to the culture—be those values materialistic, values of greed, of competition, or of illicit sexual practices.

The **second** theme that runs through the New Testament, and which is emphasized by both Jesus and the apostle Paul, affirms that **sexual expression is not essential to personhood**. In other words, sex is not the most important thing in life. Our sex-crazed culture is trying to convince us that there can be no personal fulfillment without sexual expression. The New Testament teaches exactly the opposite. It claims that there are more long-term benefits in self-discipline and self-denial for the cause of the gospel than there are in self-indulgence.

A **third** theme that runs through the New Testament is that **sexual activity pertains to heterosexual union**. Jesus, when questioned on the subject, said that what God had established at the beginning of creation prevails also for redemption, for the community of redemption (Matthew 19: 4-6). When God created humans, he created male and female, both bearing his image, representing something within the being of God, without God being either male or female. God is not a sexual being, but he comprehends both within his being since they reflect his image. Then, he ordained that men and women would join each other to become one flesh. The oneness that God seeks, because he himself is one in a multiplicity, is found in the complementarity of male and female. That’s true sexual union. Jesus emphatically reaffirmed the teaching of Genesis, chapter 2, verse 24, and he defined oneness in terms of heterosexual union in this light. Homosexuality is to be understood as one of the disruptive consequences of the

fall (Romans 1: 24–27).

Because of such considerations, and in view of the fact that the New Testament makes rigorous demands upon us in terms of ethical life, why doesn't the New Testament say anything about capital punishment for people who disobey God's will? Why isn't capital punishment enjoined for homosexuals? Why isn't capital punishment enjoined for adulterers? Why isn't capital punishment enjoined for blasphemers? What about children who are disobedient to their parents? Why is it? There *is* capital punishment, but the point of the New Testament is that *the* capital punishment has already taken place. The Son of God himself died for the crimes of humanity. God is not in the program of killing. He is in the program of redeeming. There is no redemptive value in killing.

THE BATTLE OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION

This takes us then to the consideration of the people who are battling the issue of homosexuality on a personal level. I would like to address such people in three categories. In the **first** are men and women who think they are homosexuals, but who really are not, or not yet. They are people who usually feel no compelling attraction for the other sex, they feel more comfortable with the people of their own gender. They enjoy the company of friends of their own sex. They may have had childhood experiences that they categorize as homosexual, but which are really quite common as the curiosity of children prompts them to explore each others' bodies. But as a result, they become plagued with fear and anguish because they think there is something wrong with them. To those people, I say, "Please don't worry yourself into an obsession. You are probably not a homosexual. An occasional desire for an erotic experience doesn't mean that you are fixated on people of your own sex. However, proceed with caution! Avoid people or situations that would offer the possibility of solicitation or seduction. Cultivate friendships with people of the other sex. Learn to do so, it is fun! Cultivate your spiritual growth, depend daily on God and on his sufficiency. But don't work yourself up into a situation where you push yourself into a homosexual identity."

The **second** category is made of people who know they have a homosexual preference, whether innate or acquired, or both, because they have experimented with homosexual behavior. To those people, we say, "You need to repent and turn around." And we also say that "there is no sin, no repented sin, which is unforgivable for God. In fact, there is no repeated repented sin which is unforgivable for God. The only unforgivable sin is the rejection of divine forgiveness. So, STOP! STOP NOW, while you are in control! Do not allow an overpowering compulsive addiction to develop, to dominate your world, and to blight your life."

In the **third** category are those people who are convinced that they are confirmed homosexuals. As far as I know, you have three options, two of them undesirable. The first option is to come out of the closet, to identify yourself publicly as a homosexual, and to join the gay community. I know that some of your predecessors have done so, and they are leaders in the movement. I think this is the worst solution, because life as a gay is anything but gay. Your unconventional sexual preference becomes your main identity. Before you are anything else, a man, a woman, an American, a Democrat, a Republican, an atheist, a Christian, a computer person, an accountant, a mechanic, a nurse, a secretary, you're first branded, and you have branded yourself as a homosexual. This is wrong theologically because you reduce your personhood in all its variegated splendor to just one of its elements. Such a sin of reductionism is an offense to the creator God. You minimize yourself, you marginalize yourself, you imprison yourself in a gay ghetto.

The second option is not much better. It is to stay in the closet and live a double life in the shadows. You might even get married, hoping that marriage will resolve the problem, and probably find out that it will not. You condemn yourself to a life of fear, fear of detection, fear of rejection, fear of infection with dreaded diseases, and the fear of God.

The third option is the biblical option. Come out of the shadows and seek help. Talk to a trusted friend, a counselor, a pastor, confide to a trained professional, and join a support group. But above all, remember that there is no situation in this life which is hopeless. Because you matter to God, he will never quit loving you. He will never cease to care for you. He will never reject you when you turn to him, because when we are faithless, God remains faithful. He cannot deny himself; he cannot deny his loving redemptive nature.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS OTHERS

And now a word to the rest of us who are not battling homosexuality. I suppose we represent a broad variety of attitudes, from thoughtless unconcern to violent revulsion. Both of these extremes are sinful. The biblical command, regarding our response to a brother or sister who struggles with a problem we do not have is for the strong to help the weak—neither indifference nor rejection, but the extension of God’s redemptive and restoring love. Particularly grievous among Christians is the sin of homophobia—the hatred of homosexuals, a judgmental, censorious spirit expressed in ridicule, queer jokes, impersonation of gay mannerisms, macho stories of gay-bashing.

I would like Christ himself to speak to this kind of attitude as he does in the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 7. “Judge not, that you be not judged.” An absolute, categorical prohibition on the part of Jesus. Can’t we make exceptions in the case of gays? Isn’t that sin bad enough so we can allow ourselves to judge? It’s as if Jesus were saying, “Read my lips! Judge not.” And that is exactly what he means, “Judge not.” In fact, Paul adds to this as he says in I Corinthians, chapter 5, verses 11-12, “Don’t even judge outsiders, because that is God’s business. You are not in the business of judging. You take care of yourself and of your community.” And Christ adds a warning, “So that *you* will not be judged.” In other words, the same harshness that you apply to your judging will be applied to your sins. The Scripture reminds us that judgment is without mercy to those who have shown no mercy. And Jesus gives reasons for his absolute prohibition, “for with the judgments you pronounce, you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you’ll get.” He says there is no double standard with God. With us, there is. We have a tendency to be hard on others, easy on ourselves. Not with God!

The second reason, “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye but do not see the log which is in your eye?” What is your real motivation for judging? It indicates that you have problems yourself and that you are trying to mask them with this kind of diversionary tactic by your attacks on other people. Often most hate-filled critics of homosexuals are people who feel insecure about their own sexuality.

And the third reason Jesus gives for not judging is, “How can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye when there is a log in your own eye?” This question addresses the issue of competency. Are you competent to judge? Do you know what is going on in the soul of that brother or that sister? Can you identify the composites of their background, understand their upbringing, the decisions that have been made in the past, identify with their compulsions, with the intensity of their addictions? Can you understand that? In I Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 5, the apostle Paul tells us that God can do that because he knows the secrets in the hearts of humans. But can you stand in someone else’s shoes, and can you say, “I would have done better under the same circumstances”? What is the proper attitude? Jesus says, “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” He says, “First take care of yourself. Clean up your act, and when you are righteous, you may address your brother. Only then, may you take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” You will not judge but help the person.

And there are different ways of helping the person. There are patterns in the Scriptures for exhorting each other, for rebuking each other on an individual basis first, and then getting the community involved, and confronting in love. When that doesn't work, the offending person becomes to us "like a publican and a Gentile," said Jesus (Matt. 18: 15-17). What does that mean? Jesus loved Gentiles and publicans. He ministered to them, and he died for them. So this doesn't mean we are supposed to reject them. It means that we make the redeeming love of God real to them. We start again from the ground up, from square one. We don't give up. God is not in the business of rejecting people. He wants all people to be saved because they matter to him. Each one of us needs to present himself or herself before God, whether we are struggling with this problem or with another problem which may be just as grievous in the eyes of God as homosexuality.

We need to confess to God that we are all partakers in fallen humanity, and that we are often stuck in our sinful state. Sometimes our sins are flagrant, sometimes they are hidden in the secret places of our souls. We need to confess the sins that pertain to the misuse of our sexuality, one way or the other, even the sins that pertain to our thought life. The apostle Paul put in the same category the sin of homosexuality and those of greed and reviling. Some of us have to confess that by reviling homosexuals we have entered that same category of gravity of offense before God.

We need to come to God as a community but also as individuals. We must ask him to search our hearts and to cause us grief where there is need for repentance. But we need also to remember that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. And yet, if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

This chapter was originally presented in a chapel service to faculty and students of Wheaton College in March 1990, and the text was revised in May 1995.

Dr. Bilezikian is emeritus professor of New Testament and Christian Theology at Wheaton College (IL). He is the author of a number of books and serves on the staff of Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington, Illinois.

UNDERSTANDING HOMOSEXUALITY

PART II THE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE¹

Stanton L. Jones, Ph.D., Provost, Dean of Graduate School,
Professor of Psychology, Wheaton College

Don E. Workman, Ph.D.
Associates in Clinical Care

We live in a time when the church is grappling with the moral status of homosexual behavioral practices and homoerotic orientation, and hence with its pastoral response to homosexual persons. Denominations and other Christian groups are rightly asking the behavioral sciences for insights of relevance to these discussions.

This article reflects our concern that the decision making of the church should reflect an accurate knowledge about what the social sciences can legitimately say on this topic without allowing the church's response on this or any matter to be dictated by the social sciences. In short, we are attempting to establish whether information about homosexuality from the social sciences should commend a change in the historical position of the church vis-à-vis homosexual behavior and homosexual persons. We have chosen to focus upon four questions which we judge to be of importance to the church's decision making on this topic. First, is homosexuality psychopathological? Positions for or against the status of homosexuality as a psychopathology are regularly offered in connection with the response of the church to homosexual persons and behaviors. Second, is homosexual orientation caused by factors beyond a person's voluntary control? This question is raised because positions regarding moral accountability for homosexual acts and/or orientation, as well as ideas about change processes, are based on models of causation. Third, is change to heterosexuality impossible for homosexuals? Again, moral accountability usually presumes the capacity of the individual to act otherwise, and pastoral direction must be informed by the best evidence regarding the possibility of change. Finally, is the overt expression of erotic sexuality essential to psychological wholeness? The answer to this question should inform judgments regarding the benefits of various forms of pastoral guidance. We will review the data relevant to these questions and conclude with an interpretive summary.

By "homosexual behavior," we refer to acts between two persons of the same sex that engender sexual arousal (usually to the point of orgasm). By "homosexual orientation" or "homosexuality," we refer to a stable erotic and/or affectional preference for persons of the same sex. Persons can engage in homosexual behavior without being homosexual; others can have a homosexual orientation without ever engaging in overt homosexual behavior. Since preference and orientation are loose concepts and human experience is quite diverse, there are many persons and acts which are not easily classified by any descriptive system, including this one.

IS HOMOSEXUALITY A PSYCHOPATHOLOGY?

The most simplistic answer to this question is, Of course not! Since the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality from its approved list of pathological psychiatric conditions in 1974, homosexuality is no longer considered psychopathological. Before we accept such an answer, we need to understand a little of the history and context behind the APA's action. First, while the deletion of homosexuality from the DSM [*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*] was in response to a majority vote of the APA, it appears that the majority of the APA membership viewed homosexuality as pathological in spite of the vote. Four years after the vote, a survey found that 69 percent of psychiatrists polled believed that homosexuality "usually represents a pathological adaptation."²

The editor of the journal which published this survey suggested that the 1974 vote "might have been affected by socio-political considerations."³ The vote may have been a demonstration of support for homosexual civil rights and not the views of psychiatrists about the pathological status of homosexuality. Second, the vote was called at a time of tremendous social upheaval and change. The volatility of the social order may itself have been an inappropriate influencing factor in the decision process. Third, the vote was taken under conditions of explicit threats from the gay rights establishment to continue disruptive demonstrations which would impede APA conventions and research. Finally, it was an action taken with such unconventional speed that normal channels for consideration of the issues were circumvented.⁴

The removal of homosexuality from the DSM does not and cannot conclusively decide the issue of the pathological status of homosexuality. We are still left asking the question: "Is homosexuality abnormal?" While there is no absolute standard for judging normality or abnormality, there are four empirical criteria often used to define behavior patterns as abnormal. These are: (a) statistical infrequency, (b) personal distress, (c) maladaptiveness, and (d) deviation from social norms.

Is Homosexuality Statistically Infrequent?

As a lifelong exclusive or near-exclusive orientation, homosexuality is not a common pattern, but neither is it rare. Bieber suggested that 1-2% of the adult male population are exclusively or near-exclusively homosexual, while Hunt put the figure at 2-3%.⁵ Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin found 4% of white males to be exclusively homosexual throughout life after adolescence and a total of 10% of white males to be mostly or exclusively homosexual during at least a three-year period between the ages of sixteen and fifty-five.⁶ The incidence of female homosexuality, on which less research exists, is commonly reported to be less than that for males.

The Kinsey et al. studies cannot be interpreted as saying that one out of ten persons in the general population is homosexual (a common assertion). From Kinsey et al.'s data, we would expect a cross-section of the population at any point in time to show up to 4% of lifetime homosexual males to be actively pursuing their homosexual orientation, and some fraction of the "mostly or exclusively homosexual for at least 3 years" group to be engaged in homosexual practices. Combining these findings with the lower incidence of homosexuality among women, and remembering that Kinsey et al.'s sampling problems overrepresented persons with homosexual experience (e.g., prison inmates), we would expect that a general population estimate for both sexes of much less than 10% exclusive homosexual preference at any point in time would be a current best guess.

Even with a lower estimate of incidence than public perception might indicate, we still have no absolute cutting score for judging pathology by statistical infrequency. No one has been or will be able to define pathology or health on the basis of population norms and statistical frequency alone. Choosing a cut-off point is inherently arbitrary.

Does Homosexuality Always and Inherently Involve Personal Distress?

Contemporary research has shown that homosexuals as a group are not more emotionally disturbed by current standards than are heterosexuals.⁷ Bell and Weinberg did document higher rates of depression and loneliness, as well as “more paranoia and psychosomatic symptoms” among their homosexual sample. Further, they found that 18% of white homosexual males reported attempting suicide at least once, compared to a rate of 3% among heterosexual respondents.⁸ Additionally, Kus documented elevated substance abuse rates in this population.⁹ It seems that some behaviors indicative of distress are more common among homosexuals in these studies. While there are studies which have demonstrated a correlation between homosexuality and neurotic behavior,¹⁰ it cannot be generally concluded that remarkable levels of personal distress are a consistent part of the homosexual experience. Most homosexuals in the Bell and Weinberg study (which was not a random sample) did not regret being homosexual and were not judged to exhibit psychopathological symptoms.

It is common for many researchers and writers in this area to attribute elevated levels of distress among homosexuals (e.g., depression or suicidality) not to any inherent or necessary discomfort produced by the orientation itself, but rather to the interaction of homosexuals with a rejecting and punitive society. They liken these responses to those of any persecuted or rejected minority. While this explanation is typically a post hoc interpretation of research, there is an important point here; few heterosexuals know the stress of living under persecution for their erotic feelings. Social hostility toward homosexuals is therefore bound to be an influencing factor in any comparative measure of emotional stability.

Is Homosexuality Maladaptive?

This can be answered with reference to a number of standards. Focusing on the most uncontroversial dimensions of “personal harm,” we come up with a mixed report. Positively, homosexuals have been prominent among those who have contributed to our society and culture: artists, scientists, literary figures, educators, and so forth. Homosexuality itself does not seem to prevent a person from being a productive and functional member of society. We note, however, that this is an argument by association. One could argue against homosexuality by associating it instead with the perverse acts committed by specific homosexual individuals. Clearly, neither argument provides any useful information about adaptiveness.

On another level, the biological adaptiveness of homosexuality has been questioned. Scientists have suggested that homosexual behavior does not contribute to the propagation of the species and hence is abnormal. This view is not often voiced today, as sociobiologists now suggest that under some circumstances (such as overpopulation) homosexuality can contribute to overall species enhancement by having a subpopulation removed from contributing to further propagation.

Another area of controversy concerning the adaptiveness of homosexuality involves relational stability. Here the crux of the matter is again the question of definition. While it appears that lesbians show a capacity to form such long-term relationships in a manner comparable to that of heterosexuals, male homosexuals as a population show a greatly reduced capacity for such relationships and a clear propensity for promiscuous practices. Bell and Weinberg found in a nonrandom but large sample that only 10% of male homosexual respondents could be classified as existing in “close couple” relationships, and that these relationships could only be characterized as “relatively monogamous” or “relatively less promiscuous.”¹¹ In the same study, 28% of white homosexual males reported having had 1,000 or more homosexual partners at the time they were interviewed, while only 17% reported having had fewer than fifty homosexual partners (thus, 83% of white homosexual males had had sexual relations with fifty or more partners in their lifetimes). In addition, 79% of white homosexual males reported that more than half of their sexual partners were strangers.¹²

Fidelity to and stability within monogamous relationships used to be a prominent feature in definitions of emotional health, but it is rarely emphasized today.¹³ If one presupposes that the capacity to form stable monogamous erotic relationships is an essential adaptive capacity, then real difficulties for male homosexuals emerge. If the psychological community deemphasizes relational stability among its criteria of adaptiveness or healthy emotional adjustment, then promiscuity in the male homosexual community does not constitute maladjustment.

Finally, we could judge the adaptiveness of homosexuality by whether or not homosexuals achieve what we understand to be wholeness and health. That is, we could judge adaptiveness by our model or theory of normal human development. It is on this basis that conventional psychoanalytically oriented practitioners continue to judge homosexuality as representing a fixation or regression in development.¹⁴ Heterosexuality is presumed to be the natural teleology or endpoint of growth for individuals in the traditional psychoanalytic model; homosexuals do not reach that endpoint and therefore their condition is judged maladaptive. Unfortunately, developmental models are always open to dispute—which is why the psychological and psychiatric communities have collectively retreated from the use of such models to formally judge normalcy.

Does Homosexuality Violate Societal Norms?

Unquestionably homosexuality violates American societal norms. Recent studies of public opinion show that 73% of the general public view all instances of homosexual behavior as immoral.¹⁵ The majority of Americans are exclusively heterosexual, and there is unquestionably a strong social stigma attached to being homosexual within a predominantly heterosexual culture. In a recent study, Nevid documented increased levels of negative affect (anxiety and hostility) in heterosexual subjects when exposed to homoerotic stimuli.¹⁶ Interestingly, rather than discussing potential negative implications for the homosexual community, he concluded by talking about the defensive role negative affect plays in heterosexuals' denial of "homosexual tendencies."¹⁷ In the case of homosexuality, rather than reflecting the majority view, the mental health establishment seems to have committed itself to revising the predominant public response—to normalizing behavior which is clearly rejected by the public. This stance is especially puzzling in light of the recent national survey of mental health professionals conducted by Allen Bergin. Bergin reported that 57% of surveyed mental health professionals agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that having "preference for a heterosexual sex relationship" was an important criterion for mental health.¹⁸

Conclusion on Homosexuality as a Psychopathology

Determining whether or not homosexuality is inherently pathological is a difficult and unresolved task. Homosexuality is infrequent in the larger society, but without an absolute cut-off point, this empirical finding is not decisive. The empirical evidence is also inconclusive regarding whether homosexuality is itself strongly correlated with personal distress, though the weight of evidence suggests it is not. The arguments regarding maladaptiveness are also inconclusive, given the varying standards by which we might judge maladaptiveness. Finally, it is clear that homosexuality violates societal norms. This is a mixed scorecard, reflecting the confusion and disagreement in the field today about the pathological status of homosexuality.

IS A HOMOSEXUAL ORIENTATION CAUSED BY FACTORS BEYOND A PERSON'S VOLUNTARY CONTROL?

This question plumbs the troubled depths of research into causes of homosexuality. Among the factors complicating research into the causes of homosexuality is the diversity of persons to whom this description applies. The major causes for a homosexual orientation that have been proposed include genetic, prenatal hormonal, postnatal hormonal, and psychological factors. We will briefly summarize the evidence for each of these.

Genetic Factors

John Money concluded that “according to currently available evidence, the sex chromosomes do not directly determine or program psychosexual status as heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual.”¹⁹ In other words, research showing greater concordance for homosexuality in monozygotic twins as opposed to dizygotic twins or other siblings can be explained, in Money’s opinion, by psychosocial influences possibly interacting with prenatal hormonal factors.

Prenatal Hormonal Factors

In humans, fluctuations in hormone levels induced by drugs ingested by the mother during periods of fetal development have resulted in various forms of hermaphroditism and pseudohermaphroditism, with their concomitant disruptions of physical and psychosocial development.²⁰

Does this research suggest a prenatal hormonal cause of homosexuality? Ellis and Ames have proposed that human sexual orientation is largely determined between the second and fifth month of gestation due to fetal exposure to testosterone, its primary metabolite estradiol, and other sex hormones.²¹ Their theory is challenging, and they surveyed an impressive array of research to support their ideas, the majority of which comes from laboratory animal studies.

Their logic, however, is debatable. Their argument is that (a) it is possible to produce sex inversions, including homosexual erotic preference, by prenatal hormonal manipulations in *animals*; (b) there is no conclusive evidence showing that postnatal hormonal or psychosocial factors cause *human* homosexual orientation, and (c) human epidemiological studies of the incidence of homosexuality are not incompatible with their theory; leading them to conclude that (d) *human* erotic inversion is prenatally determined. While their conclusions are thought-provoking, they are not compelling.

Two implications of their theory are worth specific mention. In the majority of the animal research they survey, the development of homosexual orientation in the studied animals is precipitated by highly abnormal variations in maternal hormone levels and is usually associated with other indisputable alterations in gender-typical behavior patterns. Their view suggests that if homosexual orientation is a response to an abnormal maternal hormonal environment, then homosexuality is abnormal in itself (a “birth defect” of sorts?). Secondly, it is worth noting that in the past, one defense of the essential normalcy of the homosexual has been the assertion that erotic preference is the only difference between the homosexual and the rest of the population. Ellis and Ames’s theory would link homosexual object preference with other gender “inversions,” clearly distinguishing homosexual persons from the rest of their gender group.

In contrast to Ellis and Ames’s ideas, John Money has concluded quite explicitly: “There is no human evidence that prenatal hormonalization alone, independently of postnatal history, inexorably preordains. . . [homosexuality]. Rather, neonatal antecedents may facilitate a homosexual . . . orientation, provided the postnatal determinants in the social and communicational history are also facilitative.”²² In other words, prenatal influences may provide a push in the direction of homosexuality, but there is no conclusive evidence that this push is powerful enough to be considered determinative, and there is no evidence that this “push” is present for all homosexuals. Money went on to say that postnatal, psychological influences may result in a homosexual orientation without the operation of any predisposing prenatal influences whatsoever.

Money's conclusions were more broadly based on the findings in the field than those of Ellis and Ames, who essentially dismiss the corpus of psychosocial research on the etiology of homosexuality. It seems most reasonable to conclude that prenatal hormonal influences may be a facilitating or contributing cause of homosexual orientation in some individuals, but that those influences cannot be considered operative in all homosexuals and cannot be considered to be determinative. There is no clear basis for the suggestion that homosexual orientation is completely determined before birth through genetic or hormonal channels, though it may well be that prenatal hormonal factors are part of the causal pattern for some individuals.

Postnatal Hormonal Factors

There have been a variety of intriguing and contradictory findings in this area—and many failures to replicate earlier dramatic findings. The general consensus has been that there are no major hormonal or physiological differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals.²³ In any case, the literature consistently concludes that nonextreme hormone level variations have little impact on sexual interests and choices in humans. Human beings are so complex and so responsive to their social world that there is very little pure biologic determination of their behavior and preferences.

Psychological Factors

Psychoanalytic Theory. According to Bieber, “In every case I have examined, studied, or treated, homosexuality was the consequence of serious disturbances during childhood development.”²⁴ Homosexuality, according to Bieber, is due primarily to a profound disturbance in parent-child relationships. A boy may have a father who is distant, cold, unavailable, or rejecting and a mother who is overly warm, smothering, and controlling. As a result of the rejection of the father, the boy's desire to identify with the father is frustrated, and the seeds of both fear and longing for closeness to a male are planted. The smothering relationship with the mother further decreases the likelihood of the boy establishing a complete male identity.

Bieber and others have argued that heterosexual activities are avoided due to fear of the aggressiveness of other males with whom the boy is competing. At the same time, the boy is attracted by other men because of his longing for closeness to another male. There is some evidence that similar dynamics are present for lesbians as well, where the major disturbance seems to be in the relationship with the mother. Lesbians report greater than expected frequencies of rejecting and negative relationships with their mothers.²⁵

Bieber's theory is based on clinical work and research with nearly one thousand homosexuals. His research meets with varying responses in the mental health community, ranging from outright dismissal to total acceptance. Judd Marmor seemed accurate when he says that “boys exposed to this kind of family background have a greater than average likelihood of becoming homosexual”;²⁶ that is, this background probably facilitates development of the homosexual orientation but does not determine it and is not the only causal factor. Socarides, Moberly, and many others offer different psychoanalytic interpretations of homosexuality.²⁷ Friedman rendered the balanced judgment that psychoanalytic scholars have not offered compelling evidence for their theories but do have something to offer in the understanding of the phenomenon.²⁸

Learning Theories. Behavioral hypotheses regarding the development of homosexuality suggest that early erotic and other early learning experiences shape erotic orientation. For example, a boy with troubled family relationships and a preexisting tendency

toward effeminate behavior may experience his early erotic experiences in a homosexual fashion.²⁹ These experiences provide the basis on which subsequent experiences are pursued. A child who is homosexually seduced may use that experience as the basis for subsequent sexual fantasy and dreaming and, by beginning to define himself as homosexual, may selectively choose subsequent homosexual interactions even when heterosexual options are available.

Other Psychological Factors

Two final bodies of evidence suggest that the causation of homosexuality is neither exclusively genetic nor biological. First, homosexual behavior occurs often in the animal kingdom. Denniston concluded from his review of research in this area that homosexual behavior “occurs in every type of animal that has been carefully studied . . . it has little relation to hormonal or structural abnormality. . . . It is behavioral conditioning that is directive, with hormones playing a permissive or generalized activating role.”³⁰ In other words, hormones don’t force the behavior, but experiences of homosexual pleasure or social conditioning do play a role. It further seems that most homosexual behavior in the animal kingdom occurs in the context of interaction between dominant and subordinate animals, under conditions of unavailability of other-sex sexual partners, or under such stressors as crowding. While homosexual behavior in animals is not uncommon, stable, lifelong homosexual orientation is quite unusual, though not unknown.³¹

Second, homosexual behavior occurs to some extent in all known human cultures, but the form it takes varies from culture to culture, suggesting that the view given homosexual behavior in the culture is a prominent influence on the behavior itself. One important point to draw from this research is that while homosexual behavior seems to exist in all societies, the concept of homosexual orientation as a lifelong and stable pattern does not, and is in fact rare in preindustrial societies.³²

Many cultures have a prescribed place for homosexual behavior, and the cultural view seems to channel human experience. For example, Stoller and Herdt describe the practices of the Sambia tribe of New Guinea, where all males are taken from their families around the age of seven to live communally with the older single men of the tribe.³³ In that company, prepubertal boys are expected to perform oral sex on the postpubertal single men, as they believe that boys can only grow to be men when fed on the “milk of men.” When the boys reach puberty, they switch roles to be the ones on whom oral sex is performed. Finally, when they reach marrying age, they are expected to take wives and function exclusively as heterosexual married men. The Sambia males achieve this switch almost without exception, a striking change given the extent of juvenile homosexual experience.

Carrier has summarized many cross-cultural studies by saying that homosexual behavior seems to occur for two main reasons: either lack of available other-sex partners or as part of a culturally defined ritual.³⁴ Neither of these causes can be invoked for understanding homosexual orientation in our society, but it does seem clear that the view of behavior embraced by a society shapes subsequent behavior. This is one reason the decisions of the church on this matter are important; these decisions participate in the shaping of our culture.

Conclusions on Causation

There is a general if informal consensus today that no one theory of homosexuality can explain such a diverse phenomenon. It certainly seems that there is no completely determinative genetic, hormonal, or psychological cause of homosexual orientation. Rather, there appear to be a variety of facilitating influences which provide a push in the direction of homosexuality for some persons. It seems to be the personal influences (psychological, familial, and cultural) which are most important. We concur with the conclusion of John Money that, while homosexuality can develop without genetic or hormonal factors being operative, it generally does not develop without the influence of learning and socialization.³⁵

IS CHANGE TO HETEROSEXUALITY IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE HOMOSEXUAL?

We are disturbed by the promulgation of notions that change is impossible for the homosexual. The evidence here is clear: First, change is possible for some. Bieber, for example, reported a 33% success rate for conversion to heterosexuality.³⁶ Masters and Johnson reported a 50-60% cure or improvement rate for highly motivated clients.³⁷ Socarides reported a success rate in achieving full heterosexual functioning of almost 50%.³⁸ Perhaps these modest success rates were obtained from unusually committed clients, but in a curious logical nonsequitur, opponents of such therapies often use the statistics about modest cure rates to argue that no cure is possible. Every study of conversion therapy in the literature reports some successes.

Second, change is difficult. No study suggests that change comes from willingness to change or some simple set of procedures. There seems to be a consensus of opinion that change is most likely when motivation is strong, when there is a history of successful heterosexual functioning, when gender identity issues are not present, and when involvement in actual homosexual practice has been minimal. Change of homosexual orientation may well be impossible for some by any natural means.

Third, there are a number of Christian groups (e.g., Evangelicals Concerned) who claim change is impossible or *highly* unlikely and who seek to have Christians accept their homosexuality. But there is also a growing movement of Christian ministries attempting to help the homosexual change, many being represented by the umbrella Exodus International organization and/or using the methods of Homosexuals Anonymous. These groups offer a variety of approaches but generally agree that change is a difficult and painful process of renouncing sinful practices and attitudes and reaching out to grasp the promise of God's help. These groups suggest that struggling with homosexual attraction is a lifelong task but that the person who takes on that struggle can expect gradual change. Unfortunately, these groups have not systematically studied their success rates. The 1980 Pattison and Pattison study is one of the few which documents change through purely "spiritual" means, but they do not document success rates—only that some success is possible through these means.³⁹

IS EXPRESSION OF EROTIC SEXUALITY ESSENTIAL TO WHOLENESS?

There are many ways to consider this question and many facets to this issue. Are those who counsel change or abstinence interfering with human wholeness in suggesting that those homosexuals who cannot become heterosexual remain chaste, refraining from overt physical expressions of their erotic urges for the rest of their lives? Obviously the homosexual person is not being asked to do something that is easy or that most heterosexuals would relish.

Psychology has no uniform answer to this question. In looking for solutions, one confronts a babel of voices, each crying out a different answer. It seems popular in our sexually charged society to claim that sexual gratification is somehow fundamental to human happiness. Unfortunately, there is no empirical research directly bearing on this question. In fact, each of the major personality theories puts sexuality in a different place in the life of the person. Some place it in the core of the person (e.g., psychoanalytic theory), and others put it on the periphery (e.g., social cognitive theory). However, none of the major theories in academic psychology asserts that the expression of genital erotic urges is essential to human well-being.

CONCLUSION

The behavioral sciences do not hold the answers to church deliberations about the morality of homosexual behavior, the ordination of homosexual persons, and other related questions, but there is much of value that the church can learn about

homosexuality from the behavioral sciences. Let us recapitulate what we judge to be the major implications of our survey.

Is homosexuality a psychopathology? As psychologists, we are committed to minimalist and conservative criteria for defining psychopathology. Because of this stance, we do not regard homosexuality to be a psychopathology in the same sense as schizophrenia, depression, or phobic disorders. But as Christians, we believe that genital homosexual acts are immoral and, in a normative sense, that immorality is an abnormal (unintended by God) condition for humanity.⁴⁰ Further, we feel it undeniable that a Christian understanding of persons commits one to regarding heterosexuality as the optimal goal of human sexual and affective fulfillment, much in the way we described earlier in discussing models of optimal personal development. Thus, homosexuality must be regarded as a problematic erotic orientation which contemporary social science can help to understand and hopefully to change. Rather than regarding homosexuality as a pathology per se, it may be helpful to develop an alternative designation such as “developmental abnormality.”⁴¹ Such a move must not, however, be used to assert that homosexual individuals are disordered in all aspects of their being; many homosexuals are loving, creative, compassionate people of great wisdom and insight. This leads us, for example, to support the ordination of celibate persons of homosexual orientation who are otherwise suited and called to the ministry.

Is homosexuality developed involuntarily? It appears that the diverse range of human dispositions which might be labeled homosexual are the products of a host of causal factors. Causal patterns unquestionably vary from person to person. The literature often seems to imply that the human being is passively buffeted about by external causal influences. Such a view of human passivity seems sub-Christian, but a Christian view of persons is certainly not committed to denying that external factors operate to influence or shape a person’s life. Perhaps the Christian view would suggest that we respond to these external influences with small or large responsible acts of our own, thus adding *our own choices* to the host of causal factors that shape our personalities. We often fail to see the impact of our choices because the decisions that shape our lives are often not the grand, climactic ones but the small, cumulative ones which result in us being kind or cruel, envious or affirming, or idolatrous or godly.

It could be that the process of becoming a homosexual for many is composed of a host of deceptively small decisions which interact with influences over which we have no control, with the final result being homosexual orientation. We cannot, on the basis of scientific evidence, rule out at least partial human accountability for our sexual orientations any more than we can give up our responsibility for manifesting other problems in living.

In support of this argument, we point out again that genetic and hormonal explanations of homosexuality at most indicate that these factors facilitate or allow the development of homosexuality. Psychological theories do not prove and do not uniformly suggest that homosexual preference is determined in early childhood—though this is the majority opinion. The learning explanation obviously focuses on sexual experiences around and after puberty, and even the psychoanalytic model, usually associated with early childhood causes, leaves open the possibility that later influences could have a significant impact. Psychoanalyst Robert Friedman concludes that “the final sexual orientation may not consolidate until after puberty.”⁴² If consolidation of the orientation does not occur until after puberty for some, then *partial* human responsibility is defensible as an operative factor in some cases.⁴³ It is possible, on the other hand, that some individuals are the helpless victims of powerful influences (hormonal, familial) which primarily shape their orientation in its original form. God unquestionably allows some of his children to bear the heavy consequences of externally operating events for which they are not responsible at all (e.g., the quadriplegic injured in a church bus accident).

Beyond sorting through one’s “life story,” establishing responsibility for sexual orientation may have little relevance for the homosexual adult, except that knowledge of etiology can guide treatment efforts and pastoral guidance and can have implications for possible prevention and education efforts with families. On the other hand, partial responsibility for the adult state may have no relevance whatsoever for change efforts, in that some conditions which we are partially responsible for developing may be irreversible once fully developed (e.g., culpable development of a drug addiction may lead to irreversible effects, including lifelong craving and

danger of relapse).

Even if it were to emerge conclusively that homosexual orientation develops due to factors totally beyond the individual's control, we would still need to debate moral guidelines and responsibility for acting upon that preference; that is, to differentiate between responsibility for homosexual orientation versus responsibility for homosexual acts. By analogy, an adult child of an alcoholic *may* have a biological predisposition to respond positively to alcohol intake but must face the responsibility of choosing whether or not to indulge that predisposition. Certainly homosexuals addicted to compulsive sexual acting-out are manifesting diminished responsibility and should be assisted in redeveloping control. But noncompulsive homosexuals must be seen as responsible agents vis-à-vis the specific acts in which they engage.

Is change possible? It certainly is for some, but the success rates are modest at best. If the Christian church judges homosexual behavior to be nonproblematic on ethical grounds, its pastors would be ill-advised to urge change efforts on the homosexual. If the behavior is deemed immoral, then change efforts are warranted in spite of the difficulty of such pursuits. However, if change is not forthcoming, is it contrary to the well-being of the person to commend abstinence? There is no basis in behavioral science or Christian theology to suggest that abstinence is detrimental to human welfare or that expression of genital eroticism is necessary for wholeness. Genital expression was and is intended to occur within marriage, and many of us never have the opportunity for or forgo the opportunity for overt interpersonal sexual gratification (e.g., Jesus). It seems inconceivable that God would create us with a drive that *must* be expressed for wholeness and at the same time put up a wall stifling its expression. Surely our sexuality is central to our personhood, but is it a force in our lives which must be genitally expressed for us to be whole? We find this idea unacceptable.

One issue that is probably foundational here is our understanding of the Christian faith. A vision of the faith that emphasizes salvation asserts that though we are good in many ways there is something wrong with us. This view assumes that our faith will involve the diagnosis of that which is faulty in us (sin) and will involve prescriptions for ameliorating the flaws (redemption). In the process, we will be called to become that which we are not (sanctification)—to act *against* our natures. On the other hand, a vision of faith that emphasizes self-realization would emphasize our naturally positive tendencies and seek to enhance them; this view of faith would emphasize affirmation rather than repentance, growth rather than change, and enhancement rather than sacrifice.

We have embraced a position that gives priority to the former view without denying the latter. We mention this because it is important to decide: (a) whether the diagnosis of defect and fault (sin) rightly requires change even if this might involve discomfort or suffering, and (b) whether this is rightly expected of redeemed human persons according to our Christian view of life. Ultimately, these considerations, which emerge out of our understanding and experience of Christian faith and the life of the church and *not* from the findings of the behavioral sciences, must dictate the stance of the church toward homosexual persons and actions.

Homosexual and heterosexual persons are created in the image of God and for this reason deserve unremittingly the greatest love, wisdom, and fairness which the earthly church is capable of giving. As St. Paul teaches us, love is kind and not self-righteous, it is not easily angered and does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth (I Corinthians 13). In this context, we have tried to clarify the insights which the behavioral sciences can offer to the church in its theological, ethical, and pastoral deliberations about Christian persons and their sexual orientations and behaviors.

ADDENDUM

Stanton L. Jones

My 1989 article, written with Don Workman, was completed in mid-1988. I still stand by the arguments and conclusions that we advanced. In the intervening years, some major additions have been made to the empirical literature on the topic, a few of which I will discuss below.

The findings, supposed findings, and theories of the behavioral and medical sciences seem to be having more of an impact upon the moral debate about homosexuality and the church today than they had five years ago. Though the author of the companion piece to this one, Chandler Burr, has not previously contributed directly to church ethical debates, his is a common position on how scientific findings should affect these moral debates. In his *Atlantic* article, he states, “Five decades of psychiatric evidence demonstrates that homosexuality is immutable, and nonpathological, and a growing body of more recent evidence implicates biology in the development of sexual orientation. Some would ask: How can one justify discriminating against people on the basis of such a characteristic? And many would answer: One cannot.”⁴⁴ In other words, homosexuality is no longer a moral issue.

I disagree with Burr; the impact which scientific and supposedly scientific findings on the moral debate is unwarranted. These findings are not decisive in the Church’s moral and ecclesiastical struggles over homosexuality. Just as we argued in 1988, scientific findings about prevalence, pathology status, causation, and capacity for change do not decide the moral issue for the church.

The *prevalence* of a particular behavior pattern has no clear relevance to the moral evaluation of that pattern; whether patterns are common (e.g., greed, pride, lust) or extremely unusual (e.g., cannibalism, necrophilia) bears no necessary relationship to its status as a moral evil. To call homosexuality *immutable* is to ignore or call fraudulent every study that has ever reported change from homosexual orientation, as we argued in our original article.⁴⁵ Further, Christian morality does not require that a homosexual become a heterosexual; rather, it requires that a person live by the Christian sexual ethic, which is for unmarried persons to live a life of fulfilled chastity, not partaking in full sexual intimacy outside of marriage. The *nonpathology* issue is indecisive, as Christians call certain things sins that the worldly disciplines do not call abnormal (pride, selfishness, idolatry) and have no moral position on other things the world does call abnormal (depression, schizophrenia). Finally, the *causes* of our impulses or attractions towards certain types of sins have little importance apart from reinforcing the traditional concept of original sin. Contemporary behavioral science has found genetic predispositions toward and environmental causes of drunkenness, violence, ill-temperedness, and many other problems that the scriptures call sin. Homosexual persons are not subhuman robots; they are moral agents who inherit tendencies from biology *and* environment and share in shaping their character by the responses they make to their life situations. Like all of us, they must ask, “This is what I want to do, but is it what I *should* do?” Proving that particular factors, even biological factors, contribute to a behavior pattern or predispose us to make certain choices does not render human choice nonexistent.

To bring our article at least partially up to date, I will briefly reflect on the two biggest changes that have occurred in the scientific research: the decreasing estimates of the prevalence of homosexuality and the increasing estimates of the supposed role of biological factors in the etiology of homosexual orientation.

PREVALENCE

We went out on a limb in 1988 in claiming that the prevalence of homosexuality in the general population was much less than the commonly claimed 10%. Even today, some are still claiming the 10% figure to represent true prevalence. For example, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Majority Report on Sexuality stated, “Research . . . indicates that at least 10% of the American population, or approximately 22 million persons, are predominantly gay or lesbian.”⁴⁶

We now appear to be much closer to a true understanding of homosexual prevalence. The horrible sample biases of the original Kinsey et al. study samples (on which the mythic 10% figure was erroneously based) are increasingly recognized.⁴⁷ Nearly all of the recent studies suggest figures around 2% for males. For example, Fay, Turner, Klassen, & Gagnon examined previously unanalyzed Kinsey survey data from 1970 on the sexual behavior of 1,450 men.⁴⁸ They found that only 3.3% reported having homosexual experiences either “occasionally” or “fairly often” *at any point* in adult life, and that between 1.6% and 2% reported having had some homosexual experience in the previous year. Billy, Tanfer, Grady, and Klepinger found that only 2.3% of American males had engaged in any homosexual relations in the last 10 years, and 1.1% had engaged in exclusively homosexual relations in that period.⁴⁹ Several other excellent studies have produced even lower estimates of male homosexual behavior. A recent phone survey of a national probability sample found that only 0.8% of the sample had sex exclusively with another male(s) in the last five years, with an additional 0.6% having had sexual relations with both men and women.⁵⁰ While most studies focus on sexual behavior, one recent study focused on male sexual orientation as measured by reported sexual attraction, and found that only 2.4% of a true national probability sample of men described themselves as homosexual.⁵¹

The rate of homosexuality as a stable life orientation in our culture is certainly not 10%. There is good evidence to suggest that less than 3%, and perhaps less than 2%, of males are homosexually active in a given year. Female homosexuality, which continues to be less frequently studied, is still estimated at substantially less than the male rates; it probably occurs at half or less the frequency of male homosexuality. So when the genders are combined, homosexuality almost certainly characterizes less than 2% of the population.

BIOLOGICAL FACTORS

Genetic factors

In our 1989 article, we followed the prevailing view which suggested that the genetic hypothesis had been largely discredited. Since that time, the genetic hypothesis has been vigorously reasserted. In terms of sample size and sophistication of methodology, the Bailey and Pillard studies of male and female homosexuality are surely the most significant studies ever published in this area.⁵² Bailey and Pillard reported a 52% concordance rate for homosexual preference among male monozygotic twins, a 22% concordance for dizygotic twins, a 9.2% rate for nontwin brothers, and an 11% rate between adoptive brothers. Bailey, Pillard, Neale, & Agyei reported a 48% concordance rate for homosexual preference among female monozygotic twins, a 16% concordance for dizygotic twins, a 14% rate for nontwin sisters, and a 6% rate between adoptive sisters. Their statistical conclusion for both studies was that genetic factors, “heritability,” explain the majority of the variance of sexual orientation.

I would raise several concerns about these studies. First, the best other recent studies of the genetic hypothesis have not produced comparable results. King and McDonald reported concordance rates for male and female homosexuals mixed together to be about half those reported by Bailey and Pillard.⁵³ Second, and of greater concern, is the sampling method of the study. Subjects for the study were recruited through openly homophobic magazines, tabloids, and through general advertisement in the gay community. Volunteer bias could have dramatically affected the results of the study. Finally, the base rates of homosexual preference in these studies was not discussed by the authors. If the real prevalence of homosexual orientation is around 2% for men and 1% for women,

then why did the authors (or the media) fail to note that the rate of homosexuality in these families, even among adoptive siblings, was approximately five times the national rates? If the findings of both studies can be summarized as finding 50% concordance rates among monozygotic twins and a 10% among unrelated adopted siblings, and the if true population base rates are below 2%, then each factor, genetics and environmental factors, appears to have contributed to etiology to a similar degree.

A recent study in the pages of *Science* has taken the genetic hypothesis a step further in reporting to have found actual chromosomal markers associated with homosexual orientation.⁵⁴ First, this study has not yet been replicated, and similar claims have recently failed replication. Second, the study only examined shared genetic material between gay male siblings and did not check to see if discordant siblings shared the exact same material. Finally, the study begs the question of whether the chromosomes in question actually cause homosexual orientation, are necessary but not sufficient to cause it—or perhaps if they actually discovered markers for temperamental or other variables that simply make homosexuality more likely to occur.⁵⁵

Brain studies

Researchers have argued that the brains and/or neurohormonal systems of male homosexuals are different from their heterosexual peers. The most direct evidence for this hypothesis are the reports that three areas of the brains of homosexual males are, on average, more like those of heterosexual females than heterosexual males: the suprachiasmatic nucleus, the interstitial nucleus of the anterior hypothalamus 3, and the midsagittal plane of the anterior commissure.⁵⁶ Each of these findings await replication, and similar studies in the past have failed replication.⁵⁷ Further, causation cannot be firmly established from these findings, as behavior both affects and is affected by brain structure and function. If these differences actually exist, they may be the result of direct genetic factors, of prenatal hormonal factors (either dependent or independent of genetic control), or of adult behavior patterns that can themselves alter brain structure and functioning. Byne and Parsons offer a thorough discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of this research.⁵⁸

CONCLUSION

Space forbids addressing many other empirical findings of interest to this debate, such as the very low incidence of sexual monogamy in gay couples⁵⁹ and the good evidence for familial influence in the development of homosexuality.⁶⁰

Findings about homosexuality in the sciences are still in flux, and these findings will not in any case prove decisive in the church's moral debate. The real issues are biblical, theological, ethical, and ecclesiastical; they are not scientific. With regard to the broader moral issues at stake in this debate, I would refer the interested reader to my recent article in *Christianity Today* where I outlined the crucial moral objections to homosexual behavior from a Christian perspective.⁶¹

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What should be the place of the social sciences, especially psychology and sociology, in theological reflection? What does it mean for the church to use the social sciences as tools?
2. How secure are the findings of the behavioral sciences?
3. Is homosexuality psychopathological? Is it significant that the American Psychological Association removed homosexuality from its diagnostic manual as a disorder? Why or why not?
4. Is homosexuality a preference one chooses or an orientation one discovers about oneself? What difference does this distinction make?

5. To what extent does it matter whether the causes of homosexuality can be determined? What is the moral significance of the findings of the social sciences?

NOTES

1. This article by Stanton Jones and Don Workman was originally published in 1989 in the following format: S. Jones and D. Workman, "Homosexuality: The Behavioral Sciences and the Church," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 17, 4 (1989): 213–225. The addendum that follows was prepared to accompany the reprinting of the original article in the following: *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, ed. J. S. Siker (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 93–115. Since the publication of these two studies, we have published yet further up-dated reports on the scientific evidences related to homosexuality: S. Jones and M. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: Research Within the Bounds of Reason* (working title), (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, in press). S. Jones and M. Yarhouse, "The Use, Misuse, and Abuse of Science in the Ecclesiastical Homosexuality Debates," in *The Bible and Sexual Ethics*, ed. D. Balch (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, in press). S. Jones and M. Yarhouse. "Science and the Ecclesiastical Homosexuality Debates," *Christian Scholar's Review* 26, 4 (1997): 446–477.
2. R. Bayer, *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 167.
3. Bayer, *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry*, 167.
4. See Bayer, *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry*.
5. See I. Bieber, "A Discussion of Homosexuality: The Ethical Challenge," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 44 (1976): 163–66; and M. Hunt, *Sexual Behavior in the 1970's* (Chicago: Playboy, 1974).
6. A. C. Kinsey, W. B. Pomeroy, and C. E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1948).
7. M. Ross, J. Paulsen, and O. Stalstrom, "Homosexuality and Mental Health," *Journal of Homosexuality* 15 (1988): 131–52.
8. A. P. Bell and M. S. Weinberg, *Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity Among Men & Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 207, 450.
9. R. Kus, "Alcoholism and the Nonacceptance of Gay Self," *Journal of Homosexuality* 15 (1988): 25–42.
10. E. M. Pattison and J. Kahan, "The Deliberate Selfharm Syndrome," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 140 (1983): 867–72.
11. Bell and Weinberg, *Homosexualities*, 346.
12. Bell and Weinberg, *Homosexualities*, 308.
13. See the way D. P. McWhirter and A. M. Mattison treated relational stability in "Treatment of Sexual Dysfunction in Homosexual Male Couples," in *Principles and Practice of Sex Therapy*, eds. S. R. Leiblum and L. A. Pervin (New York: Guilford, 1980), 321–45; see also J. Prochaska and J. Prochaska, "Twentieth Century Trends in Marriage and Therapy," in *Marriage and Marital Therapy*, eds. T. Paolino & B. McCrady (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1978), 1–24.
14. For example, E. Moberly, *Psychogenesis: The Early Development of Gender Identity* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).
15. J. Davis and T. Smith, *General Social Surveys (1972–1984): Cumulative Data* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).
16. J. S. Nevid, "Exposure to Homoerotic Stimuli: Effects on Attitudes and Affects of Heterosexual Viewers," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 119 (1983): 249–55.
17. Nevid, "Exposure to Homoerotic Stimuli," 254.
18. A. Bergin, "Three Contributions of a Spiritual Perspective to Psychotherapy and Behavior Change," in *Behavioral Therapy and Religion: Integrating Spiritual and Behavioral Approaches to Change*, eds. W. Miller and J. Martin (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988): 25–36, 32.
19. J. Money, "Genetic and Chromosomal Aspects of Homosexual Etiology," in *Homosexual Behavior: A Modern Reappraisal*, ed. J. Marmor (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 59–74, 69–70.
20. See J. Money, "Genetic and Chromosomal Aspects of Homosexual Etiology."

21. L. Ellis and A. Ames, "Neurohormonal Functioning and Sexual Orientation: A Theory of Homosexuality-Heterosexuality," *Psychological Bulletin* 101 (1987): 233–58.
22. J. Money, "Sin, Sickness, or Status? Homosexual Gender Identity and Psychoneuroendocrinology," *American Psychologist* 42 (1987): 384–99, 398.
23. R. Friedman, *Male Homosexuality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); G. Tournay, "Hormones and Homosexuality," in *Homosexual Behavior: A Modern Reappraisal*, ed. J. Marmor, 41–58.
24. Bieber, "A Discussion of Homosexuality," 164.
25. C. Wolff, *Love Between Women* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).
26. Marmor, *Homosexual Behavior*, 10.
27. C. Socarides, *Homosexuality* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1978); Moberly, *Psychogenesis*.
28. R. Friedman, "The Psychoanalytic Model of Male Homosexuality: A Historical and Theoretical Critique," *The Psychoanalytic Review* 73, 3 (1986): 79–115; R. Friedman, *Male Homosexuality*.
29. R. Green, *The "Sissy Boy" Syndrome and the Development of Homosexuality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).
30. R. Denniston, "Ambisexuality in Animals," in *Homosexual Behavior*, ed. J. Marmor, 25–40, 38–39.
31. P. Tyler, "Homosexual Behavior in Animals," in *The Psychology of Sexual Diversity*, ed. K. Howells (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 42–62.
32. J. Carrier, "Homosexual Behavior in Cross-Cultural Perspective," in *Homosexual Behavior*, ed. J. Marmor, 100–122, 118; W. Masters, V. Johnson, and R. Kolodny, *Human Sexuality*, 2d ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1985), 635.
33. R. Stoller and G. Herdt, "Theories of Origin of Male Homosexuality: A Crosscultural Look," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 42 (1985): 399–404.
34. J. Carrier, "Homosexual Behavior in Cross-Cultural Perspective."
35. J. Money, "Genetic and Chromosomal Aspects of Homosexual Etiology" and "Sin, Sickness, or Status? Homosexual Gender Identity and Psychoneuroendocrinology."
36. Bieber, "A Discussion of Homosexuality."
37. W. Masters and V. Johnson, *Homosexuality in Perspective* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1979).
38. Socarides, *Homosexuality*.
39. E. Pattison and M. Pattison, "Ex-gays: Religiously Mediated Change in Homosexuals," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 137 (1980): 1553–62.
40. J. J. Davis, *Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today*, 2d ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1993).
41. J. Harvey, *The Homosexual Person: New Thinking in Pastoral Care* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987).
42. R. Friedman, "The Psychoanalytic Model of Male Homosexuality," 85.
43. See also E. Johnson, "Sin, Weakness, and Psychopathology," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 15 (1987): 218–26.
44. C. Burr, "Homosexuality and Biology," *The Atlantic Monthly* 271, 3 (March 1993): 47–65, 65.
45. See more recent work in J. Nicolosi, *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1991).
46. *Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Majority Report on Sexuality* (Office of the General Assembly: Louisville, KY, 1991), 49.
47. For example, J. A. Reisman et al., *Kinsey, Sex and Fraud* (Lafayette, La.: Huntington House, 1990).
48. R. Fay et al., "Prevalence and Patterns of Same-gender Sexual Contact Among Men," *Science* 243 (1989): 338–48.
49. J. O. Billy et al., "The Sexual Behavior of Men in the United States," *Family Planning Perspectives* 25 (1993): 52–61.
50. J. Catania et al., "Prevalence of AIDS-related Risk Factors and Condom Use in the United States," *Science* 258 (1992): 1101–6. See also P. Aldous, "French Venture Where U. S. Fears to Tread," *Science* 257 (1992): 25.
51. J. Harry, "A Probability Sample of Gay Males," *Journal of Homosexuality* 19 (1990): 89–104.
52. J. M. Bailey et al., "Heritable factors influence sexual orientation in women," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 50 (1993): 217–23.
53. M. King and E. McDonald, "Homosexuals Who Are Twins: A Study of 46 Proband," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 160 (1992): 407–9. See also E. Eckert et al., "Homosexuality in Monozygotic Twins Reared Apart," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 148 (1986): 421–25.
54. D. H. Hamer et al., "A Linkage DNA Markers on the X Chromosome and Male Sexual Orientation," *Science* 261 (1993): 321–27.

55. For a fine discussion of such an “interactionist” theory, see W. Byne and B. Parsons, “Human Sexual Orientation: The Biologic Theories Reappraised,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 50 (1993): 228–39.
56. See D. Swaab and M. Hofman, “An Enlarged Suprachiasmatic Nucleus in Homosexual Men,” *Brain Research* 537 (1990): 141–48; S. LeVay, “A Difference in the Hypothalamic Structure Between Heterosexual and Homosexual Men,” *Science* 253 (1991): 1034–37; and L. Allen and R. Gorski, “Sexual Orientation and the Size of the Anterior Commissure in the Human Brain,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science USA* 89 (1992): 7199–7202, respectively.
57. For example, Byne & Parsons, “Human Sexual Orientation”; D. Swaab & M. Hofman, “Sexual Differentiation of the Human Hypothalamus: Ontogeny of the Sexually Dimorphic Nucleus of the Preoptic Area,” *Developmental Brain Research* 44 (1988): 314–18.
58. Byne and Parsons, “Human Sexual Orientation.”
59. D. McWhirter and A. Mattison, *The Male Couple* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1984).
60. B. Gladue, “Psychobiological Contributions,” *Male and Female Homosexuality: Psychological Approaches*, ed. L. Diamant (Washington: Hemisphere, 1987), 129-54.
61. S. Jones, “The Loving Opposition: Speaking the Truth in a Climate of Hate,” *Christianity Today* 37, 8 (19 July 1993): 18–25.
-

Adapted and used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press, April 1995.

PART III
THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO HOMOSEXUALITY

Stanton Jones, Ph.D., Provost, Dean of Graduate School,
Professor of Psychology, Wheaton College

WHY ARE HOMOSEXUAL ACTS WRONG?

When asked why they think homosexual behavior is wrong, many Christians reply simply, “Because the Bible says it is!” The Bible does indeed condemn homosexual acts every time they are mentioned. But many Christians are unprepared for the revisionists’ arguments for rejecting all the major biblical texts as either irrelevant or misunderstood.

This is a thumbnail sketch of what one will hear from critics of the traditional view: They argue that Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, and Deuteronomy 23:18, which condemn male homosexual behavior, are irrelevant because they do not address today’s homosexual lifestyles. These passages occur in the midst of a discussion of God’s disapproval of the fertility cults in the pagan communities surrounding the Israelites. The only kind of homosexual behavior the Israelites knew, it is argued, was homosexual prostitution in pagan temples. That is what is being rejected here and not the loving monogamous gay relationship of persons of homosexual orientation today.

The Genesis 19 story of Sodom and Gomorrah is alleged to be irrelevant because it is a story of attempted gang rape, which was an indicator of the general wickedness of the city. The homosexual nature of the gang rape is seen as an irrelevant detail of the story.

Romans 1 is often reduced to being a condemnation solely of heterosexual people who engage in homosexual acts. They rebel against God by engaging in what is unnatural to them. This passage has no relevance today, it is argued, because modern homosexuals are doing what is natural to them and thus not rebelling against God.

In I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10, the Greek words that are often translated as referring to homosexual practices are said to be unclear and probably describe and forbid only pederasty, the sexual possession of an adolescent boy by an older adult man of the elite social classes.

Some of these criticisms have an element of legitimacy, but most evangelical biblical scholars concur that every one of them goes too far. The critics are right, for instance, in dismissing the view that homosexual preoccupation was the most heinous sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. Ezekiel 16:49–50 says, “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them” (NIV). Materialistic America in general, and not just the gay community in particular, is uncomfortably similar to this description of Sodom’s sins. We are quick to condemn those we are uncomfortable with but slow to judge ourselves.

But Leviticus, Romans, I Corinthians, and I Timothy are relevant and binding. Archaeological studies confirm that the ancient world knew of homosexual desire and practice, even if the concept of a psychological orientation was not present. Thus it is striking that every time homosexual practice is mentioned in the Scriptures, it is condemned. There are only two ways one can neutralize the

biblical witness against homosexual behavior: by gross misinterpretation or by moving away from a high view of Scripture.

Important as they are, these passages are not the cornerstone of the Christian stance that homosexual action is immoral. The core of Scripture's negative assessment of homosexual practice is the positive biblical vision of sexuality—which applies equally to homosexual persons and to heterosexual, men and women, adults and children.

To have a truly Christian view of our own sexuality, we must understand the four great acts in God's drama, the epic poem of God's saving work. We destroy our understanding of the script if we mix up the order of the acts. Act 1 is the Creation. If we do not understand ourselves *first* as divine handiwork, created in God's image, everything else will be distorted. Act 2 is the Fall, the reality of which much contemporary liberal scholarship denies. The Fall twists and ruins everything but does not destroy the imprint of Creation. Act 3 is Redemption in and through Christ. Christ is at work in those who love, redeeming them and the world. The final act is Glorification, the expected final consummation, the blessed hope.

The Christian view of sexuality must be understood within this biblical drama. For instance, in I Timothy 4:1–5 Paul deals with the sexual views of a protognostic group whose teachings denied Creation, exaggerated the Fall, and distorted the proper view of Redemption. In particular, they despised marriage because they saw sex as evil.

To this, Paul said: “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain food, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.”

From this, we can get Paul's understanding of marriage and sex. Paul's grounding is that God created marriage and sex. Everything God created is good (Act 1). But notice that what God created to be good has to be cleaned off; it has been dropped in the mud—that is, the Fall (Act 2). Through Christ, sex can be redeemed (that is what *consecration* means) by being received with thanksgiving through “the word of God and prayer” (Act 3). We must start with Creation, recognize the Fall, and participate in Redemption.

The heart of Christian sexual morality is this: God made sexual union for a purpose—the uniting of husband and wife into one flesh in marriage. God uses sexual intercourse, full sexual intimacy, to weld two people together (I Cor. 6:16). God has a big purpose in mind for sex because He has a big purpose for marriage—something bigger than simply a means for us to get our sexual needs met, have fun, have kids, and not have to be lonely.

In Ephesians 5, we learn more of what this bigger purpose is. According to Paul, marriage is to model concretely here on earth what God wants in the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church. Jesus is one with the Father, and He tells us that we can be one with Him. We are utterly different from God, but He wants to unite with us (I Cor. 6:17). This reality can be uniquely modeled on earth through the union of two different kinds of human beings, male and female. Marriage is a living parable, a concrete symbol, that models for the world the mystical union of Christ and His people. According to God's original design, marriages have grand, even cosmic, meaning. And this meaning remains regardless of how pathetically short we fall of that grand design.

Interestingly, the scientific evidence supports this. If it is God's intent that sexual intercourse is to bond two people together for life in marriage, what would we expect the effect of premarital sex and cohabitation to be? Those actions should make marriage less likely to work. And that is what the facts show (especially in a recent study reported by Andrew Greeley in his book *Faithful Attraction*). The more premarital sex people have, the more likely they are to have affairs in marriage; the less likely they are to have

optimal sexual relationships in marriage; and the less likely they are to be satisfied with their marriages. Numerous studies over decades have shown that people who cohabit before marriage are more likely to divorce. All of the ways we humans foul up God's design have long-term negative consequences.

If marriage occupies this place in God's plan, and if sex is so important to God's plan for marriage, we can see the vital importance of obedience to God's standards for sexuality. Sex is a gift, but it is a gift we can abuse. God's intent is that sex be used rightly inside and outside of marriage. Inside of marriage, its proper use is for pleasure, procreation, and as something to be shared lovingly and with gratitude to build up the unity of the couple. Outside of the marriage of a man and woman, the proper use of sex is to honor God by costly obedience in living a chaste life. Through this difficult commitment, we learn to value obedience over gratification and to serve God instead of serving our own lusts. Heterosexual or homosexual, the call of Christ is the same: if you find yourself unmarried, God wants you to live a chaste life.

But isn't this unfair to the homosexual person? The heterosexual single at least has the chance of marriage. The person with homosexual longings has no such chance. He did not choose to have the feelings and inclinations he does. Is it fair to such a person to argue that God is calling him to a life of chaste singleness? Is it fair to a woman with homosexual desires to suggest that God would have her forgo motherhood because she is not married?

First, let us acknowledge that few people choose to have homosexual inclinations. The evidence suggests that genetic factors, possibly operative through brain differences, may give some a push in the direction of homosexual preference. Disordered family relationships that leave people confused at a deep level about their sexual identity seem also to play a major role. In addition, early homosexual experiences of seduction or abuse may play a role. And many lesbians, especially, seem to have been the targets of sexual abuse by men earlier in life, leaving them with deeply impaired abilities to trust or feel close to men later.

But the existence of inclinations, orientations, or preferences have little to do with God's moral call upon our lives. Social science is finding many powerful factors that shape character and influence morally laden choices. Alcoholism, anxiety-proneness, ill-tempereness, and even the propensity to violence are made more likely by the presence of genetic and family variables. Is it unfair, then, for God to hold up sobriety and moderation, trust and faith, self-control and patience, restraint and respect, as moral values?

No, because God is the Maker, the one who sets the design. And though God is perfectly just, He never promised to be fair by human standards. We are saved by grace, but in the race that Paul talks about—the race to press on to the high calling of Christ—some of us start further back in the pack than others, further back from the ideal. But that does not make the goals that God ordains illegitimate or nonbinding.

While one ideal, heterosexual marriage, is not an option for the homosexual Christian without a large dose of divine healing, the other ideal, chaste singleness, is open and accessible. And that ideal of chaste singleness holds out the possibility for true integrity and beauty, as the models of Jesus Himself, Paul, and many other saints show. The fact that such chastity is difficult for homosexual persons is of little moral consequences, as it is also difficult for heterosexuals. The difficulty should be dealt with pastorally, not by changing the moral standard.

And so, the Christian vision for sexuality and marriage is our foundational reason for rejecting homosexual action as a legitimate moral option. A warning, though: Many gay Christians will simply deny that this is the binding Christian view. Many advocates of a liberalization of the church's ethical stance suggest that the only element of the Bible or of the Christian tradition that is binding upon all people is the general call to manifest in any relationship the kinds of loving characteristics that are described as being important in

marriage—sacrificial love, honesty, and so forth. Gay relationships, it is argued, can do this as well as straight.

The first problem with this argument is that it does not truthfully reflect the Christian tradition. It is ultimately irrelevant whether or not homosexual couples can be just as loving, faithful, or monogamous as heterosexual couples. God has a distinctive purpose for sex and for marriage, a purpose that necessitates a heterosexual union.

Second, the revisionist's argument simply does not match reality. For example, male homosexuality tends to be strongly associated with promiscuity: The famous Bell and Weinberg study (*Homosexualities*) suggested that about a third of gays have had over 1,000 sexual partners in their lifetimes. Very few gays are in committed, long-term relationships; Bell and Weinberg found that less than 10 percent of gays are in such relationships. Those who are in stable relationships do not tend to be sexually monogamous. McWhirter and Mattison (*The Gay Couple*) found that 0 percent of the 100 stable male couple they studied were sexually monogamous after being together for five years. The authors of that study, themselves a gay couple, said that to be gay is to be nonmonogamous, and that monogamy is an unnatural state that some gay men attempt because of the internalized homophobia; so when you finally grow to accept your own gayness, you shed monogamy like a butterfly sheds a cocoon.

It may be that the homosexual community cannot embrace monogamy because homosexual sex can never produce what God made sex for. They turn instead to promiscuity and perversions to create sexual highs. The gay community calls these perversions “high-tech sex.” Many know of oral and anal sex, but fewer know of commonly, though not universally, practiced activities such as sadomasochistic practices of inflicting pain on a partner during sex, group sex of all kinds, and more extreme distortions. When sex outside of God's will does not do what God made it to do, many people, gay and straight, search for some way to make sex deliver an ever bigger electric charge, the elusive ultimate orgasm, that can somehow make up for the absence of what sex was meant to create: unity.

In summary, persons of homosexual inclination are under the same moral call as we all are—to respond to the offer of divine mercy and forgiveness through the gift of Jesus Christ, to offer our lives as the only gift we can give in return. If we love Him, we will obey His commands. And His will with regard to our sexuality is either that we live chaste lives of dependence upon Him, or that we strive to build a marriage that models Christ's love for the church before the watching world, aided by the uniting gift of sexual intercourse. All of us should strive anew to live by this holy standard.

WHY IS THE ISSUE IMPORTANT?

Homosexual acts are like every other sin: They violate God's express will and distort God's creational design. Just as much fire from our pulpits should be aimed against greed, pride, racism, lack of compassion, and spiritual lukewarmness as against homosexual behavior. The best estimates today suggest that 1 to 3 percent of the population engage in homosexual acts (*not* the 10 percent that badly biased research once suggested). In this light, why should homosexuality be a special concern for the church?

There are three reasons why this issue is important, and none of them has anything to do with homosexual people being especially bad or disgusting.

First, the church's historically high view of the authority of Scripture is threatened by efforts at revising the church's position on homosexuality. The only way to neutralize the biblical witness against homosexual behavior is either grossly to misrepresent the Bible or to undermine its authority. The apologists for the “gay Christian” movement tend to do both.

While claiming to be staunchly within the Christian tradition, revisionist terribly distort biblical sexual ethics. In his book *Come Home! Reclaiming Spirituality and Community as Gay Men and Lesbians*, Presbyterian minister Chris Glasser says that *fidelity* does

not mean being sexually exclusive and monogamous; *fidelity* really means only keeping your promises. So if a gay Christian companion promises to have only five other lovers per year, he is being faithful if he stays within those limits.

Episcopal biblical scholar William Countryman, in his book *Dirt, Greed, and Sex*, adopts a biblical theology that allows for homosexual practice, but he at least has the courage to admit that his method of interpretation also makes prostitution and sex with animals legitimate options for Christians (as long as such acts are done in love).

In her book *Touching our Strength*, Carter Heyward, an Episcopal ethicist, suggests that heterosexual marriage enslaves women. She calls instead for loving sexual friendships; and there is no reason to limit these life-giving “goding” relationships to only one person or to one sex.

The majority group of the Presbyterian Special Committee on Sexuality, which authored *Presbyterians and Human Sexuality, 1991*, claimed that God’s Word to us is those parts within the Bible that are just and loving, that liberate people and make them more satisfied and fulfilled; the rest is simply not God’s Word. Therefore, since the prohibition against sex outside of marriage oppresses and frustrates single people and denies their sexual rights, the committee argued, then this could not be God’s Word.

The second reason why homosexuality is an important issue is that what the Bible treats as an isolated *act* to be condemned (namely, people of the same gender having sex), our society treats as a fundamental element of personal *identity*. In this view, the people who describe themselves as gay are not people who engage in certain acts or who have certain inclinations. Rather, they *are* homosexuals—gays and lesbians. Their sexual inclinations define most deeply who they are. If a sexual desire defines a person, then acting on that desire is essential to personhood. If we buy this logic, then to suggest that God does not want them to engage in homosexual acts is to insult their innermost beings.

The Christian response is to deny the legitimacy of defining a person by his or her sexual desires—or by any other fallen element of one’s nature. In Christ, our identities are based on our status as God’s adopted children. This is the foundation for understanding who we most truly are.

Paul teaches in Romans 6:16 that we do not just find or discover ourselves; rather, we build a moral and personal momentum by the choices we make. We are either becoming more a slave to sin or a greater slave to Christ. If what you mean by saying you are a homosexual is that you experience homosexual desire, that is reality. If what you mean by saying you are a homosexual is that your identity is defined by your gayness and that living out those sexual leaning is essential to your very nature, then your identity is misplaced; you are trying to build an identity on shifting sand.

It is for this reason that Christians must continue to strive to love the sinner but hate the sin, even though this saying drives the gay Christian community crazy. We can say and strive for this because we refuse to make homosexual behavior or preference the core of anyone’s identity.

The third reason this issue is vital today is that there is unrelenting pressure on the church to change its historic stance. The revisionist present it as a simple issue: The church has evolved in rejecting slavery, racism, and sexism, and now it is time to stop its most deeply entrenched bigotry—homohatred, heterosexism, and homophobia.

But again we encounter a problem: We can only change our position on homosexuality by changing our fundamental stance on biblical authority, by changing our core view of sexuality, and by changing the meaning and character of Christ’s call on our lives. The first two have already been addressed above; but we need to say more about the nature of Christ’s call on our lives.

Christ is our perfect model of love and compassion, and we have much to learn from His love for sinners and participation in

their lives. But He did not just ooze warm fuzzies; Christ also had the gall to tell others how to live their lives, to insist that His truth was the only truth, and to claim that He alone was the way to God. In short, Jesus was what many people today would call a narrow-minded bigot.

And we, the church, have been entrusted with proclaiming the message that we have received from Him. When we do, we risk being called rigid and narrow-minded. We must face the reality that Christianity “discriminates.” It says one path is the right way. Christians make a ridiculous set of claims: that an omnipotent God bothered to create and love us; that He let us and our forbears spit in His face in rebellion; that He chose a peculiar and unsavory primitive tribe to be His conduit for blessing; that He actually revealed what He wanted these people to believe and how they were to live; and that this God actually became a person and died for us to conquer sin and death on our behalf. That is a most unlikely story! But Christians are supposed to spread the news that this is *the* story, the only true story.

The church has, in each generation, been faced with new challenges, which are really new twists on old issues. The current movement to see gay persons as a social group that must be loved and accepted as they are is the latest form of an old challenge—the challenge to diminish the authority of God’s revelation, to understand people on their own terms rather than by God’s view of them, and fundamentally to amend the nature of Christ’s call to take up our crosses and follow Him.

WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

In this difficult time, there are two things that we must do. They are two things that do not naturally go together. We must exhibit the very love and compassion of Jesus Christ Himself. And we must fearlessly proclaim the truth that Jesus Christ Himself proclaimed and embodied.

The key to compassion is to see ourselves in another, to see our common humanity. This is what many of us cannot or will not do. A certain degree of natural revulsion to homosexual acts per se is natural for heterosexuals. All of us should be thankful that there are at least some sinful actions to which we are not naturally drawn. But a revulsion to an act is not the same as a revulsion to a person. **If you cannot empathize with a homosexual person because of your fear of, or revulsion to, them, then you are failing our Lord.** You are guilty of pride, fear, or arrogance. And if you are causing others to stumble, you are tying a millstone around your own neck.

The homosexual people I know are very much like me. They want love, respect, acceptance, companionship, significance, forgiveness. But, like all of us sinners, they choose the wrong means to get what they want.

We, the church, have the opportunity to demonstrate, in our words and in our lives, God’s love for the homosexual person. If we truly love, we will act on that love. We must start by eradicating our negative responses to homosexual people. Stop the queer jokes and insults; they hurt others. We must deal with our own emotional reactions; we must decide to love. We must repudiate violence and intolerance toward persons of homosexual orientation. We must change the church so that it is a place where those who feel homosexual desire can be welcomed. The church must become a sanctuary where repentant men and women can share with others the sexual desires they feel and still receive prayerful support and acceptance.

Are you willing to pray with, eat with, hug and comfort, share life with a woman or a man who has homosexual feelings? Frequently, we already do but do not know it. Just as we share meals with gluttons, shop with the greedy, share compliments with the vain, and vegetate with the slothful—and as others share life with us without knowing our hidden sins—so we share life, knowingly or

unknowingly, with the homosexual. But we need to do so knowingly and lovingly.

Now the second part of our call—to speak the truth. If we truly love, we will not shrink from speaking God’s view of homosexual behavior. Do not be deceived: increasingly today we are defined as unloving solely for viewing homosexuality as immoral, regardless of the compassion we exhibit. Nevertheless, we must strive to be loving when we voice our opposition. Compassion in no way entails an acceptance of the gay lifestyle any more than it entails affirming an adulterer’s infidelity.

As people of homosexual inclination follow our Lord down the narrow road, they can pray and hope for healing. There are two prevalent distortions about healing today. The first is the conservative Christian myth that a quick, sincere repentance and prayer for healing will instantly change the person. Thankfully, few spread this damaging myth today.

The more prevalent myth is that there is no hope for healing. Anyone who says there is no hope is either ignorant or a liar. Every secular study of change has shown some success rate, and persons who testify to substantial healing by God are legion. There is hope for substantial change for some in this life.

But while our ultimate hope is secure, we do not have certainty about how much healing and change is possible for any particular homosexual person. Some will never be healed in this life. We need to balance a Christian triumphalism with a theology of suffering, a recognition that we are a hurting and beaten-down race. We must not believe the world when it tells us there is an easy answer to everything, even when the speaker is a Christian. There is dignity and purpose in suffering. The Christian homosexual’s witness is not invalidated by pain and difficulty; Christians trust that there is always a deeper purpose in suffering.

Mark, my Christian brother who still longs for healing while he lives a celibate life, and many like him, needs to be assured by the church of the meaningfulness of his pilgrimage. We need to remember that Christians witness to their faith not just in their strength and triumph, but also in their brokenness. We can be Christlike in how we bear our sufferings. We all want to be triumphant ambassadors for Christ, but few of us are. Our homosexual brothers and sisters who follow our Lord in costly discipleship have much to teach all of God’s people.

While challenges are nothing new for God’s body on earth, they are nonetheless real challenges. This is an important moment for the church, with many denominations and institutions debating whether to change the church’s traditional teaching on homosexuality. Those of us involved in the debate must remember that we can fail in two directions.

First, we can fail by compromising (and thus undermining) God’s authoritative Word, rejecting God’s view of sexuality, and embracing a human-centered notion of costless acceptance. The challenge here is to resist the pressure and courageously articulate God’s truth regarding sexuality.

Second, we can fail by saying the right things but in the wrong way. Too many Christians have let hate slip into their rhetoric on this issue. The challenge here is to be the loving opposition, to imitate our Lord, who chases down his sinful creatures with aggressively open arms while all the while saying no to our sins. We all need to repent of our arrogant and intolerant attitudes toward those whose struggles are different from ours. Our goal must be to become a community that embodies the welcoming grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Adapted and used by permission from an original article in **Christianity Today**, July 19, 1993.

UNDERSTANDING HOMOSEXUALITY

PART IV HOMOSEXUALITY, PLURALISM, AND INCLUSIVISM

Dallas Willard, Ph.D., Professor of Philosophy
University of Southern California

Pluralism urges us to regard alternative ways of being and acting as equally acceptable. But does the idea of pluralism make any sense as applied to morality? Or does pluralism become an issue only so far as morality is *not* at issue?

Recently a member of the armed forces who had been discharged because he admitted his homosexuality stated on national television that to discriminate against homosexuals was like discriminating against eye-color. This is an intriguing argument, for it presupposes that if being homosexual *did* make a significant difference in life—as being blue-eyed does not—then it might be justifiable to discriminate against the homosexual.

Here is an important point to keep in mind in current discussions of pluralism or “inclusivism.” No one really supposes that we ought to take an “inclusive” attitude toward what is morally wrong—least of all, perhaps, those who argue that it is morally wrong to be socially and morally “exclusive.” Pluralism only applies on the assumption that the behaviors or life-styles concerned really are morally indifferent. Of course there remain possible disagreements over how someone who *is* immoral shall be treated. But these are not the ones which come into play in our usual discussions of pluralism today.

It is now generally agreed in this country that differences of sex, race or religion, for example, are not *inherently* moral differences. Thus they do not automatically imply differences in the human worth or moral standing of persons involved. A Hindu, for example, is not, as such, better or worse, as a human being, than a Christian or Muslim, nor is a woman better or worse than a man. It is therefore wrong to treat the one as if he were somehow more deserving or more to be favored than the other.

But is one who is financially dishonest to be “discriminated” against in employment, housing or social preferment, in favor of those who are scrupulously honest? Would it be an offense against pluralism or inclusivism to decline to rent an apartment to someone who has had to be legally removed from his last three residences, for non-payment of rent or vandalism, in favor of someone with an impeccable report from the credit agencies and shining personal references? Very few would think so. Is it “insensitivity” not to allow a convicted child molester to baby-sit your children? Hardly!

Pluralism simply is not an issue so far as *admitted* moral distinctions are concerned. Morally evil and irresponsible persons *are* to be treated differently in contexts where things of value are at risk. That is, simply, a part of what it means to be an evil or irresponsible person—which of course does not mean that such persons are “fair game” for whatever may be inflicted upon them.

This makes clear the *deceptive character* of the most common discussions of pluralism or inclusivism today. They are not really about pluralism at all. Rather, under the guise of a discussion about pluralism—which most people can be counted to favor—some

morally questionable behavior or style of living is seeking to authenticate itself as morally acceptable.

For example, “illegitimate” sex, abortion, and active homosexuality are now widely practiced. They have, for most purposes, been decriminalized today—at least so far as enforcement is concerned—and we have moved as a society a great distance toward outright government support for them through various tax and welfare arrangements. They are also “celebrated”—which is by no means too strong a word—in our popular culture, and endorsed by the intellectual system that rules our society. In elite society today, no one would think of marking someone as morally corrupt merely for discrete adulteries, abortions, or same sex sex.

But that is not enough. Those who engage in such sexual behavior, traditionally—and sometimes literally—branded as evil, want to be explicitly recognized as morally on a par with everyone else. And if you refuse so to recognize them, you will very likely be *morally* attacked as a bigot and as someone opposed to tolerance, pluralism and cultural inclusivism. The assumption of these attacks is that you are drawing a moral distinction between persons where in fact there is none, and that you therefore must be opposed to pluralism. Which means that you are most likely also a racist and a sexist.

That, however, just begs the very question at issue. Are those who engage in these sexual practices truly as good morally, everything else being equal, as those who do not? We cannot settle this question by shouting about who is or is not a bigot, for whether or not one is a bigot here largely depends on the moral status of the fornicator, abortionist or homosexual. If they are indeed morally reprehensible, one is not a bigot for saying so and treating them accordingly. Just as, if it truly is morally wrong to condemn homosexual behavior, one is no bigot for applying “homophobe” and other terms of moral condemnation to them.

Now in today’s context we will very likely find that those defending or attacking the moral status of a certain practice do not have any clear idea of what it is, in general, that makes acts right or wrong, or persons good or bad morally. Indeed, a part of the weight back of the push to “pluralism” is the widely accepted view that moral distinctions are “in the eye of the beholder,” or at least that no one can claim to know what is *really* right or wrong. Thus your mere suggestion that some practice is wrong is enough to draw the charge that you are “imposing” your values on others—*imposing* because moral judgments are acts of will, not expressions of knowledge.

Accordingly, even to pretend to know that a certain action is wrong, or that a certain type of person is evil, marks you for some today as presumptuous and bigoted. That you are so “intolerant” as to presume to judge something or someone morally wrong will leave no doubt in the minds of many that you would be against pluralism and inclusiveness.

But the effect of this is, quite simply, to defend pluralism, not as the moral position to take, but at the expense of morality in general, and to lose all grounds for regarding exclusivism and anti-pluralism as immoral. Only if moral distinctions are real and knowable will we be able to advance moral grounds for pluralism. So far from urging that the moral and the immoral be equally tolerated and accepted, it makes the moral point that people should not be assigned a different status and worth as persons because of factors in their lives which are morally indifferent.

Dr. Willard has been professor of philosophy for many years at the University of Southern California. He has authored numerous books and articles and is considered a leading expert on the 19th Century philosopher, Hegel.

This essay was originally written for **Discernment** (Winter 1994) and used here by permission of the author.

UNDERSTANDING HOMOSEXUALITY

PART V MINISTRIES OF HELP AND HOPE

Judy-Rae Karlsen

I would like to share a glimpse of what somebody struggles with when they have a “struggle with homosexuality.” Homosexuality is a personal issue that must be addressed in a person’s life. It can only be ignored for so long, and then it starts to take over. That’s a problem.

FOUR TYPES OF STRUGGLERS

I want to talk about both sides of the issue, the excitement and the pain that goes along with homosexuality, the confusion and the shame that one goes through. There is not one ‘typical’ person struggling with homosexuality. I wouldn’t call myself typical. Yes, I do have a background of homosexual involvement. It is extensive. I am not typical, though, of all women, nor am I typical of what men go through. Overcomers classifies four different types of people with homosexual struggles.

The Silent Sufferer. This is the person who struggles internally, who vows *never* to share. A person who would rather die than disclose their torment. This individual does not have permission or the freedom to say, “I’ve got this struggle with homosexuality,” or “I think I’m gay.” They just close off on the inside, and they will do everything possible to appear “normal.” In later life, they might even marry to convince themselves that this struggle is not real. They secretly hope and pray that it will go away at some point in their life. The silent sufferer often times will never have a sexual experience, although their sexual identity is in major turmoil. As a result of their inner isolation, they have difficulties with intimate relationships and continue to secretly struggle for years and years.

The Dabbler. This is the man or woman who will strive at any length to appear and to pass as normal on the outside, but who secretly knows on the inside, that they, in fact, are gay. They dabble. Their homosexual life has its own world. They may get involved in pornography, have homosexual fantasies, or anonymous sexual contacts, but it is all a secret. They learn how to lead and maintain a double life. Remember that these are men and women who are drawn to members of the same sex at a very young age, five or six, seven, eight, ten, fifteen, twenty. They start to find out they are not like the rest of their

they’re attracted to men. While the “Silent Sufferers” may never ever have a sexual contact, either heterosexual or homosexual, the “Dabbler” does, and that power begins to grow in their life. The “Dabbler” also may end up with compulsive masturbation problems or sexual addictions because it becomes so secretive that the expression just continues to grow in the darkness of secrecy. They try to set limits on their behaviors, and there is a certain way of justifying things that are happening in their life so long as no one else knows. Christian people who struggle as “Dabblers” often think that if God knows, that’s enough. But for some reason or another, two years down the road, they start to realize that, “Well, God knows, and he hasn’t answered my cry, he hasn’t pulled me out of this pit, he hasn’t healed me; this must be the way I am,” and they stop asking questions. The “Dabblers” will certainly pay the emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual consequences for their double life.

Special Relationship People. These persons are men and women who find a special friend with whom they fall in love. It may not begin with any sexual overtones, but in some cases it does become sexual. This special friend is the answer to everything that they lack in themselves. “Special Relationships” bond emotionally first. Then the emotional bond becomes eroticized, and often leads to sexual expression. Special relationship-type people don’t usually go out seeking homosexual involvements. Often they find themselves in relationships which bring great fear, confusion, and turmoil. A good example of this is when their best friend becomes a sexual partner. Sometimes they will share what’s happening, but people in the Christian community often times do not. They’re best friends, they’re special friends, they are the closest of friends. Very few people will question women who fall into this category, because so much physical contact is allowed between women. But men who seem to fall into this category often find themselves humiliated or fearful and will even block their best friend from coming close to them because of what could seem to be labeled as homosexual. As that special relationship continues, they may become what you might hear in the pro-gay world as monogamous. The pro-gay churches are now affirming special-relationship type homosexual relationships as monogamous. That kind of justification leads you into a very distorted belief system. Your theology has dramatically shifted when you think that God would bless a homosexual relationship.

Homosexual Community People. Finally, there are men and women who are involved in the homosexual community, have wrapped all of its resources around them, and use that for their safety, for their support, for their comfort, for their nourishment, and for their protection. In type four, **sexuality becomes their identity.** Now, for most of us, that’s not an issue. When we look in the mirror, we think, “Well, I’m a student, I’m an artist, I’m fun to be around, I’m a good friend, I like chocolate cake, I overeat, and once in a while I watch too much television, but I’m basically a pretty good person.” Men and women in this group will identify themselves based on their sexuality, and the first thing they will tell you is, “My name is Sally, I’m gay.” “My name is John, I’m a homosexual.” That is the single most driving force in their life. It begins to dominate their lives; it starts to encroach in everything about them.

These are four different types that span the entire range. When we minister to people who are struggling with homosexuality, we work with city people and suburban people. Homosexuality spans the entire socio-economic spectrum. It hits pastors, missionary kids, pastors’ wives, Sunday school teachers, college students. It hits everybody. As you read this, some of you may think that you are the only one who’s struggling with homosexuality, that’s probably because you haven’t shared it and sought help. That’s why we need to refrain from participating in homophobic and gay comments. If your friend is secretly struggling, something that you say, just one caustic remark, may keep them bound in fear, and they may vow not to share their hurts, confusion, and needs for the rest of their life. Sadly, that’s happened.

A PERSONAL PILGRIMAGE

I ended up in type four. I was very involved in the homosexual community. While my brother and sister went to Wheaton College, I decided that I was going to look at the world from a different angle, so I applied and was accepted at Northwestern. I grew up in a Christian home. I learned the high value of Christianity. I learned that God’s love was amazing, that his grace was sufficient, that problems could be prayed about, and that God answered prayer. But I also learned the high value of secrecy. We had our problems, but they were not to be discussed. I can smile about this today, but I grew up thinking my family was the “perfect” Christian family. And I think many of you probably think the same thing. When I got a little bit older, I started to see things from a different perspective. I saw a lot more of reality.

I found the Lord when I was six or seven. I remember getting “saved” about a thousand times. I never really thought I was saved. So every time I would hear an altar call, I would ask Jesus into my heart. I realize now the deep sense of insecurity I had in my life. I see this quite often in the men and women who have come through Overcomers. They are so affirmed for what they *do*, what they are good at, but the person on the inside, the hurting person, is never touched. That was the case in my life. I had some very good qualities. I was an athlete. I got a lot of affirmation from my athletic skill, but no one noticed my hurts or needs on the inside. So I stuffed them away and believed that my inside hurts were of no importance. I didn’t know where to go to get those hurts healed, or who would care to listen.

I had a very screwed-up gender identity. When I was growing up in the seventies, our role model for women was Farah Fawcett. When I compared myself to Farah Fawcett, I had all the same biological features that she did, but something about me was *different*. She was more woman, she walked different, she looked different, men found her attractive. I looked at her and I thought, “I’ve got everything, but it doesn’t fit the same way, it doesn’t look the same way, it doesn’t match up, something’s wrong with me.” And when I looked at my peers, I always had that pervasive sense within me that something was different. I found out what was different when I got to college. Now, I did not go out seeking homosexuality; it seemed to find me. And this is the case in almost everybody’s life to whom I have ministered. Homosexuality finds them. The confusion begins, the labels start happening, and then all a sudden, all that difference is summed up and explained with one simple answer, “I must be gay.”

I found my first girlfriend at Northwestern University, at an InterVarsity meeting! I went looking for the Lord, but I found the world. I also discovered for myself what the world offered—drugs, the alcohol, and sex. It was tremendously exciting to discover all that the world offered. When I was growing up, I heard all the don’ts—don’t drink, don’t smoke, don’t mess around, don’t use drugs, good girls don’t, don’t get pregnant, don’t flunk school, don’t do this, don’t do that—and I knew all the don’ts. In the world, I found all the dos. I didn’t come to realize until much later that the dos had a hefty price tag. The price tag has been an awful one to pay. It has been a process of really working and really struggling and really seeking the Lord. I had found the dos. When I searched for a way out—my last year of college, my first year of working downtown—there was *nobody* offering hope. The thing that I heard was, “Judy, you are crazy. You are gay. Why would you want to change? We will help make it better; we’ll seek something else.” I had found everything. I had what every person wants—I had the best looking friend, I had an apartment, I had my independence. The one thing I had lost, though, was my relationship with the Lord. As far as I was concerned, he was completely gone. I believed he had completely erased me from the Book of Life. I was doomed to live and to make the best of my life—what was left of it—as a homosexual. Believe me, that was not a happy thought.

How did I arrive at that kind of understanding when I grew up in a Christian home? None of the Christian people around me were helpful. One woman, in particular, during my college years would come up to me periodically and say, “Judy Karlsen, you are a lesbian, and you are going to hell.” I used to think that God had sent her to make my life more miserable. She really would scare me when she pointed her finger in my face, and said, “You are going to hell.” But it didn’t help me to know that. Her condemnation only pushed me further away. Finally one day I got smart, and I said, “Well, *you* must be going there too, because Jesus didn’t come to condemn the world but to give us grace, and you are not giving me any.” That was the last time she bothered me.

I thought, though, that most Christians believed the same thing, and she was speaking for God. I was so far away from him, I had no idea where to even turn to find him. I was always listening for “hope” and looked for someone to talk to, but after a few years, I had come to believe that God didn’t care about me anyway. So I went deeper in the gay community and got involved with the gay and lesbian association. There I was liked, accepted, and surrounded by others just like me. I avoided discussions about Jesus, Christianity, and religion. It was a terrifying thing to know that God was there for everybody else but me. I had to work things out for myself, and I came to believe that he really wouldn’t take me back after all that I had done. I was on my own again.

When I was involved in homosexuality, I couldn’t shake the feeling that there was something that was not quite right with the

Lord. I couldn't understand how a relationship with another person that was so exciting could bring such confusion and that ultimately, when it was coming to an end, that there was so much pain. I didn't know what to do with the shame of my homosexual involvements and my shattered identity. Shame is not something you can get rid of all by yourself. Someone needs to help you come out of your own world and into the presence of the Lord. Often, those of us who have messed-up badly don't know how to get into his presence, we are so afraid of him. The people that were there for me were the church, my Mom and Dad; my whole family had a struggle with my homosexuality. There were Sundays that I would sit at Wheaton Bible Church, where we attended, and feel like a complete fake—a *complete fake*. Even after coming back to the Lord, I sat there and I thought, "Now I belong, but I still don't feel a part." I still felt isolated. I still felt afraid. I was still closed down. Still nobody knew who I was on the inside. My shattered identity terrified me. I didn't want anyone finding out what I had done. I was so afraid of rejection. I heard many homophobic remarks from my new Christian friends and they confused and frightened me. At that time, nobody had guessed my homosexuality, and, as far as I was concerned, they would never know. It reminded me again of the things that I had done for which there was obviously no answer.

What I did find, though, when I talked with my parents, was an interest on their part to find me a counselor. I needed counseling, and that sounded like a good idea, but I didn't want to go to just any counselor. I wanted to talk to someone who knew what homosexuality was like. I mean, I really wanted somebody who knew when I was crying, what I was crying about. When I said my guts were ripping on the inside, my heart was breaking, and I was full of shame, I needed someone who knew what those feelings were like. It took some searching, but finally I found that person. She shared her testimony with me and filled me with a new hope for my future. She told me that no matter what I had done Jesus still loved me, and he wanted me back. She told me things I already knew in my head, but I couldn't experience them in my heart.

Jesus began stripping off the layers of shame with his loving patience, forgiveness, and acceptance of me.

My walk in my newly found identity has been a journey. I did not get instantly delivered. I do not have a 700 Club testimony. I often wished I did for it would have been a lot easier. But through this process of coming back unto the presence of the Lord, I have found out things about myself that I never knew. I never knew how important I was to the Kingdom of God. I never knew that he would forgive every sin I ever committed and still love me. I never knew that I could be sanctified, washed clean, and freed from the shame of the past, that he cared that much about me to keep coming after me. I've experienced the power of Jesus' great love which washes away the stain of sexual brokenness and settles the fears and confusion, and fills the voids, heals the hurts, and restores my true identity. I didn't know that Jesus could be my best friend, I never knew that! I mean, I knew he was God, I knew he was Lord, I knew he had died and had been resurrected from the dead. But I didn't know that he and I could have a relationship that would be meaningful every day of my life. I didn't know that. But it is so true!

OVERCOMERS MINISTRY

The ministry of Overcomers advocates that hope and freedom are possible. But this truth needs to be desired. It is never forced. We have a policy at Overcomers that very basically says this: "You don't have to be perfect; you have to be honest." For those of us who have lived double lives, who struggle with very deep things, it is easy to appear perfect. Everyone can appear perfect for an hour. For some of you, it would be very difficult to get honest about what is really happening on the inside. Some of you don't even know. My very first counselor told me things about myself that I thought God must have revealed to her. She told me that I was broken, she told me that I was angry. Now, I was a "fun" person. I wasn't angry. At least, I didn't appear to be angry. She told me that I didn't trust God, that I was angry at him. And it made sense. I *was* very angry at God. First of all for my body. You know in Psalm 139 it says, "Thank you, Lord, I have been fearfully and wonderfully made." I agreed with the definition of *fearful*. I never saw the

wonderful part. I praise him today that I can start to see the wonderful parts, and that is just the beginning. The support of other Christian people has been an amazing gift from the Father to me.

Overcomers has a special message. We are all men and women who have struggled with homosexuality. We can share about the transforming power of Jesus Christ like few Christians today know. We see miracles happening everyday. It is absolutely a miracle that somebody who struggles with such a deep gender identity confusion can have it resolved, can be reconciled back into the Christian family where he or she belongs. That's what Jesus offers. The healing process is an incredible transformation of the inner person. It is not just stopping behavior; it is a transforming of you from the inside out. It is not just *doing* the right things. It's *being* all that God intended you to be. Few of us know the Father's plan for us when we are in our 20's. We don't even know it when we are in our 30's or our 40's, but that process of moving and growing is dynamic. And it is only found in the body of Christ and in the Lord's presence.

If you are interested and want to look into Overcomers as a resource, I encourage you to call. We'd be happy to talk with you. When you call us at Overcomers, it is always kept confidential. All of our group meetings are confidential. Your name will never be shared with anybody else. You won't be asked to share your testimony. We just want Christian people who are hurting to have the option of being healthy. We want you to know that you don't have to sit in silence or struggle alone. That's a dead end. You are invited to join us.

There is no shame in getting healthy. No matter how deep the need, no matter how deep the hurt, God's love is deeper still.

This chapter was originally presented in a chapel service to faculty and students of Wheaton College in April 1990, and the text was revised in May 1995. When Ms. Karlsen delivered this, she was director of Overcomers, Chicago, Illinois.

UNDERSTANDING HOMOSEXUALITY

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, and ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Suggested Readings

- Atkinson, David John. *Homosexuals in the Christian Fellowship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981.
- Barnhouse, Ruth Tiffany. *Homosexuality: A Symbolic Confusion*. New York: Seabury Press, 1977.
- Bergner, Mario. *Setting Love in Order: Hope and Healing for the Homosexual*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995.
- Bieber, Irving. *Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic Study of Male Homosexuals*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1988.
- Byne, William, and Parsons, Bruce. "Human Sexual Orientation: The Biological Theories Reappraised," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 50 (1993): 228–59.
- Comiskey, Andrew. *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness: How Jesus Heals the Homosexual*. Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1989.
- Consiglio, William. *Homosexual No More*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1991.
- Dallas, Joe. *Desires in Conflict*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1991.
- _____. *A Strong Delusion*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996.
- Davies, Bob and Rentzel, Lori. *Coming Out of Homosexuality*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
- Foster, Richard. *Money, Sex, and Power*. New York: Harper & Row, 1985, 106-113.
- Grenz, Stanley. *Sexual Ethics*. Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1990.
- Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996, 379-406.
- _____. "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14, 1 (1986): 184–215.
- Jones, Stanton. "Homosexuality According to Science," *Christianity Today*, 18 August 1989, 26-29.
- _____. and Workman, Don. "Homosexuality, The Behavioral Sciences and the Church," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 17, 4 (1989): 213-225.
- Keyser, Charles. *What You Should Know About Homosexuality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979.
- Lovelace, Richard F. *Homosexuality and the Church (Crisis, Conflict, Compassion)*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1978.
- Moberly, Elizabeth R. *Homosexuality: A New Christian*. Cambridge, England: James Clarke, 1983.
- Nicolosi, Joseph. *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*. New York: Jason Aronson, 1991.
- Payne, Leanne. *The Broken Image: Restoring Personal Wholeness Through Healing Prayer*. Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1981.
- _____. *Crisis in Masculinity*. Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1985.
- _____. *The Healing of the Homosexual*. Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1978.
- Rekers, George A., ed. *The Journal of Human Sexuality*. Carrollton, TX: Stanley and Lewis, 1996.
- Satinover, Jeffrey. *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House, 1995.
- Schmidt, Thomas. *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995.
- Soards, Marion L. *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.

- Stafford, Tim. *Sexual Chaos*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Stott, John R. W. *Same-Sex Partnerships?: A Christian Perspective*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1998.
- Van Den Aardweg, Gerard. *Homosexuality and Hope: A Psychologist Talks About Treatment and Change*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1985.
- White, John. *Eros Defiled*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977.
- _____. *Eros Redeemed*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993.
- Williams, Don. *The Bond That Breaks: Will Homosexuality Split the Church?* Los Angeles: BIM, Inc., 1978.
- Wold, Donald J. *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998.
- Wolfe, Christopher W., ed. *Homosexuality and American Public Life*. Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 1999.
- Worthen, Anita. *Someone I Love is Gay: How Family and Friends Can Respond*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- Wright, D. F. "Homosexuality," In *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, edited by E. Ferguson, 435–36. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990.
- _____. "Homosexuals or Prostitutes?" *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984): 124–53.
- Yamamoto, J. Isamu, ed. *The Crisis of Homosexuality*, Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990.

HAND OUT:
“WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS AND DOES NOT SAY
ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY”
Summer Series 2011: Questions: Growing Our Faith through Scripture

I. This material was first presented in July 2004 at Little Rock Church in a teaching series led by Gerald Driskill and Jon Camp. We are reusing their edited material with permission. We will NOT cover this material in the Sunday morning class in the current series. Please study this at home and we will make application from this lesson the following week.

II. Homosexuality in the Larger Context

A. Placing the Issue in Context

1. The Bible says much more about the unjust treatment of the poor.
2. If we were to give proportionate attention to issues of injustice as we are to the issue of homosexuality, then we would spend the next decade talking about poverty. In other words, we want to be fair, God calls homosexuality as sin, but it is one sin among many and his concerns, if we weigh scripture, are not just with this sin.
4. In short, if you are a visitor, if you have a family member struggling with homosexuality or in the gay community, or if you yourself have some degree of homosexual orientation, we want to be clear-- this church is not about elevating one sin over another.

B. But the issue of homosexuality is treated in the Bible, is a hot topic in our culture, and therefore deserves our attention for a few weeks.

C. Again, our goal in this process is to be a church that is better equipped to be who God has called us to be--full of grace and truth or as our mission statement from Jesus says, a church that loves God and our neighbor. Since there are people in our culture and in the church who struggle with this sin, we should not avoid discussion.

III. What does the Bible say and not say about Homosexuality?

There are 6 passages that address this topic, but it is critical before we begin discussing these texts to understand our reasons for looking at each passage.

1. First, we believe the Bible is clear in counting homosexual behavior as sinful and not God's will or ideal for human kind. However, for most of us, we have just heard one or two scriptures mentioned, we want to cover all of them.
2. Second, as we cover each text, we want to be sure you understand when and where there are different interpretations of each text. Why? We want to prepare you to respond and have dialogue with someone who has heard a different view point. Let me give you an example. Let's say someone in our body, let's name him Thomas, who struggles quietly with homosexuality has heard homosexuality condemned, a few passages mentioned and that is all. And then, Thomas is talking to someone from a gay church or someone with a different interpretation. What might happen if that person offers a different interpretation that makes it seem like the church has not provided full information? Or at worst, Thomas

hears a different interpretation and then feels lied to them about what the scriptures actually say? In short, we want to be sure you understand fully what is being talked about with each passage. We are not going to just give you just one interpretation and stop there.

3. Third, we believe that some of these passages are clearer than others on the prohibition against homosexual behavior. In short, after our study, we accept that we have at times taken a passage out of its original context and not taken time to really study it. We hope you will appreciate the greater level of honesty and integrity...in short reverence for God in approaching the Word. Yes, the scripture is clear on homosexuality as a sin, but the scriptures are more complex than I realized.

4. The Text Covered in this presentation are:

A. The Old Testament:

1. Genesis 18-19
2. Leviticus 18:22
3. Leviticus 20:13

B. The New Testament

4. Romans 1:26-27
5. 1 Corinthians 6:9
6. 1 Timothy 1:10

1. Genesis 18-19: The Story of Sodom and Gomorrah

1. Read Text.

2. This is how we get the terms “sodomy” and “sodomites”

3. The issue here is homosexual gang rape, which was a common practice in the ancient world to shame an enemy, treating them “like women.” We see hints of this in the Iraq prisoner-abuse scandal.

4. Did God destroy Sodom and Gomorrah just because of their homosexual activity? Well....

a. Ezekiel 16:49: “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.”

b. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of their total depravity, of which homosexual gang rape was just a part.

5. This text certainly stands against any sexual activity that is abusive, but to be fair to the biblical text, it really does *not* address the issue of homosexual activity between consenting adults. Do you see what is critical here as a believer seeking to be honest with God's word? There is a type of sexual behavior that is being condemned it is not about whether someone is acting on their homosexual desires, it is about gang rape. Thus, if you have a gay friend or family member who says, "I heard that the story in Genesis is really not about consenting adult homosexuals, you can say, "yes," you are correct. It is not. God hates abuse and certainly rape. Yet, you could go on to say, that Genesis 18 is not the whole story of God's word on homosexuality and his will for our sexual life.

2. Leviticus 18:22 and 3. 20:13

1. Read texts
2. Have you ever heard of homosexuality referred to as an “abomination”? This is where we get those terms, from the King James Bible.
3. The context: Old Testament Purity laws. “You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices.”
4. Scholarship is divided over how these texts should be applied.
 - a) Some liberal scholars claim that what’s at stake is pagan idolatry. They say that these texts do not condemn homosexuality per se, but condemn the kind of homosexuality that was practiced as a part of idol worship, which was very common in the ancient world.
 - b) More conservative scholars point to the inadequacy of this position, saying that it ignores the other practices in the text, such as incest and bestiality. Are these practices condemned only for their association with idol worship?
 - c) Here we see a tension in Biblical scholarship that is present with every text under consideration here. On one extreme, you have liberal interpreters who say that the Biblical injunctions against homosexuality have nothing to do with the loving, consensual relationships that some homosexual people share today. Rather, the biblical injunctions are actually against pagan idolatry. On the other extreme, you have the interpreters whose philosophy is: “The Bible says it; I believe it that settles it.” There are problems with both extremes, as we will see later on in our discussion today. In all, I believe if we come to the text not trying to prove anything, we are more likely to hear what God is saying that is for all times. The two extremes are not really about hearing what God has to say, but about proving a position that someone already holds.
5. **Yet, with this text, comes a key question:** Since these texts refer to homosexual practice as a “detestable” (NIV) or an “abomination” (KJV), does that mean that it is a worse sin than others? Well... consider that there are other “abominations” in Scripture:
 - a) Covetousness (Deut. 7:25). Have you ever been greedy?
 - b) Dishonest business transactions (Deut. 25:16). Have you ever fudged a little bit on your income taxes, even by just a little bit?
 - c) Six things the Lord hates, seven that are “abomination” (KJV): 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, and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers. (Prov. 6:16-19).
 - d) The point is, let’s be careful when we start comparing ourselves to others.

- e) In my time at LRC, one thing I have come to value is that this body seeks to be a community of healers, of those who do want to give grace and truth. We have heard confessions of sexual immorality, drug addiction, overeating, and if you have been here long you have seen that as a body we do realize that sin is sin and that all of us have some struggle. I really believe that in general, someone coming to this body struggling with homosexuality would not be treated differently than the person struggling with any other sin problem and indeed our prayer in this series will encourage us even more to be that kind of place.

The New Testament Passages:

4. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:10. These texts are similar and so we'll treat them together. We'll save Romans 1 for the last.

I Corinthians 6:9 – 11 (NIV) – “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 offender nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the Kingdom of God.”

I Timothy 1:10 (NIV) – “For adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.”

1. These verses occur in a sin-list, which Paul typically used to contrast life before conversion to life after conversion. Notice in 1 Cor. 6:11—“that is what some of you *were*.”
2. According to the NIV's rendition of 1 Cor. 6:9, the two words denoting homosexual activity are translated as “male prostitutes” and “homosexual offenders.”

- a) Now, the problem is, there is debate about what these words mean. The first word is “*malakoi*” and the second word is “*arsenokoitai*” Here's where we need to get a bit technical.
- b) “*Malakoi*” was a common term in Paul's day that had different meanings. The word literally means “soft” or effeminate. Now, it's certainly not saying that it is sinful to be effeminate. But that was a term that was used to describe the *passive* partner in homosexual activity, or the one who *received* the intercourse. But the term also referred to a male temple prostitute, who was hired for sex as an act of worship to certain pagan gods.
- c) The second word, “*Arsenokoitai*,” is unknown. It doesn't occur anywhere else in the Bible, nor does it occur in any ancient Greek manuscript. It appears to be a word that Paul put together from two other words: “*Arsen*”—meaning “man” and “*koites*”, meaning bed. So, some kind of homosexual activity is in mind here. Scholars think that this term refers to the active partner in homosexual intercourse. Whether that refers to homosexual activity in general or to one who solicits the services of a male prostitute is unclear.

- d) Because this passage refers to homosexual behavior and activity that occurs as apart of temple worship, some in our culture today will caution it's use in our current culture to condemn all homosexuality. This is important to note because this point is often made by those that want to accept homosexual behavior in our culture.
- e) We do know that Paul wanted to remind the believers in his day that some had left sexual practices that God did not approve and that these practices had to do with sexual contact between individuals of the same sex.
- f) Again, let me remind you that digging into these actual words is critical. For the sake of redundancy, think of what would happen to a person in our body who gave up on the church and gave into to homosexual practices because they learned outside of this body that these scriptures really just refer to temple prostitution. Our hope is that you hear from us that these passages do address homosexual practices, but if we are true to the text, we are not completely clear about all of the NT context and what Paul had in mind.
- g) Yet the next passage is clearer.

D. Then we come to Romans 1:26-27. Paul doesn't leave much room for ambiguity here.

1. Romans 1:26-27 (NIV) – “Because of this God gave them over to their shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 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 and received in themselves their due penalty for their perversion.”
2. What is striking about this passage is that Paul is making it clear that same sex relationships are against the way God intended things to be. .
3. In all, yes, the Bible does make it clear what God's will is in this area-- a grace and truth approach suggests we have reason to be empathetic full, of grace and mercy as we seek to share God's truth in love.

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS:

A. HOMOSEXUALITY IN ALL ITS FORMS IS OUTSIDE GOD'S WILL FOR HUMAN SEXUALITY, FOR THE FOLLOWING FOUR REASONS:

1. Larger Will of God for Human Sexuality – It is clear in scripture (Beginning in Genesis and reaffirmed by Jesus Christ) that God intended the marriage relationship between a man and a woman over a lifetime to be the only setting for the sexual union. Any form of sexual activity outside of this setting, is against God's will including homosexual activity.
2. Scriptural Teaching - In both the Old and New Testament the practice is condemned as sinful and harmful.

3. Church Tradition - Throughout almost 2000 years of Christian church tradition, the majority interpretation has been against the practice of homosexuality.
4. Theological Anthropology - God created male and female to be sexual complementary. In other words, there's a natural "fit". This idea finds its base in Genesis 1-2 and Jesus' statements on marriage.