

## HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE CHURCH

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*Developments in the secular society in its acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle have put pressure on the evangelical church to respond in some way. Homosexual spokespersons have advocated varying principles of interpretation to prove from the Bible the legitimacy of their lifestyle. They have resorted to either subjectivism, historic-scientific evolving of society, or cultural biases of the biblical writers to find biblical backing for their position. Scripture condemns homosexuality in such passages as Genesis 19; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10; 2 Pet 2:7; and Jude 7. The true biblical teaching on the subject requires the church to condemn the sin of homosexuality, convert the homosexual, confront erroneous teaching, and cleanse itself. The church must be careful not to adopt the customs of the world.*

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Is homosexuality condemned or condoned by the Holy Scriptures? Are homosexuals guilty of practicing a sinful lifestyle, or are they simply living out their God-ordained functions? Are homosexuals to be excluded from the church, or should they be included in the assembly of God's people?

These are questions facing the evangelical church today.<sup>1</sup> Secular society has more or less capitulated to the pressure from the gay and lesbian community to accept homosexuality as a viable and legitimate lifestyle. Aligning themselves with Blacks, Hispanics, women, and the disabled, the homosexual community has won over large segments of society to their side. In fact, as this article is being written, the three big automobile manufacturers in America just voted to recognize gay unions as legitimate for the purposes of granting spousal rights. All this simply puts more pressure on the evangelical church to yield to its secular counterparts.

The evangelical church must take a courageous and intelligent stand on this vital moral issue, and thus halt the erosion of morality in the church. Unfortunately, some evangelicals have already embraced the gay lifestyle. Others have affirmed their right to exist as practicing homosexuals while still claiming to be Christians. The following discussion will describe the manner in which certain pro-homosexual

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<sup>1</sup>James R. Beck, "Evangelicals, Homosexuals, and Social Science," *JETS* 40/1 (March 1997):83-85.

proponents arrive at their conclusions about what the Bible teaches on homosexuality. Then it will examine the key biblical passages dealing with the subject of homosexuality. Following this will come a discussion of the implications both for the homosexuals themselves and for the evangelical church.

## **THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE HOMOSEXUAL MOVEMENT**

Much of the debate which has arisen over the issue of homosexuality comes from the approaches homosexual advocates have used in interpreting the Scriptures. In fact, the battle raging in the church "is really about hermeneutics, about the interpretation and use of Scripture."<sup>2</sup> Various forms of interpretation have been used to arrive at conclusions which support the homosexual lifestyle. However, unless a consistent hermeneutic is applied to the interpretation of Scripture, each interpreter will arrive at his own conclusion. The text will say whatever the interpreter wants it to say. Unless the literal, historical-grammatical approach to the interpretation of the Scriptures is held strictly, the Scriptures will cease to speak and thus cease to be authoritative (cf. 2 Tim 3:15-17). Consider what approaches the homosexual movement uses to arrive at its conclusions.

### ***Subjectivism***

According to homosexual advocates, the reader imparts his meaning into the biblical text, making subjective, personal experience the ultimate test of truth. One gay proponent writes, "Our discussion on whether queers have the Holy Spirit can only be answered by meeting queer Christians, then bringing that information back to the Bible and informing the Bible of truths it may or may not have already known."<sup>3</sup> Another proponent argues that the "basis for discerning what is sexually right or wrong is probably more a matter of intention and responsibility than anything else."<sup>4</sup>

### ***Historic-Scientific***

Others liken the church's position on homosexuality as evolving in the same way as its position on slavery changed. As more information surfaced, the church's attitude changed. Similarly, the anti-homosexual bias is obliterated by the progress of society. Such a view is epitomized by this statement: "What influences lead us to new ways of understanding Scripture? New scientific, social changes, and

<sup>2</sup>Kathryn Greene-McCreight, "The Logic of the Interpretation of Scripture and the Church's Debate over Sexual Ethics," in *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, ed. David L. Balch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 245.

<sup>3</sup>Chris D. Kramer, "The Apostolic Council of Jerusalem: A Model of Liberation of Queer Christians Today," *Gay Theological Journal* 1/2 (January-April 1998):23.

<sup>4</sup>Tim Phillips, "Why I Don't Believe Romans 1 Is Talking About Homosexuality," *Gay Theological Journal* 1/1 (September-December 1997):37.

personal experiences are perhaps the greatest forces of change in the way we interpret the Bible and develop our beliefs.”<sup>5</sup>

### *Cultural Biases of the Biblical Writers*

Most pro-homosexual theologians argue that the biblical authors were culturally biased against homosexuality. Such proponents would argue that the apostle Paul was a product of the Judaism of his time, and thus had cultural “blind spots,” most noticeably regarding women and gays.<sup>6</sup> John J. McNeill, in *The Church and the Homosexual*, asserts that “the Scriptures are ‘historically and culturally limited’ so that one cannot merely transpose a text of Scripture to the contemporary circumstances of life.”<sup>7</sup> Hence, because the biblical authors wrote from such a distant and culturally irrelevant setting, gay proponent Robin Scroggs concludes, “The conclusion I have to draw seems inevitable: Biblical judgments against homosexuality are not relevant to today’s debate.”<sup>8</sup> “Paul’s arguments,” states Marti Nissinen, “are based on certain Hellenistic Jewish moral codes that are culture-specific and that had their own trajectory of tradition.”<sup>9</sup> In fact, Paul may have needed sexual therapy himself.<sup>10</sup>

The following statement sums up well the revisionist’s view of the biblical teaching on homosexuality:

[S]exuality as we understand it today *is not addressed in the Bible*. It is a modern concept. The Bible treats sexuality only in limited forms of actualization. . . . The terms of Israel’s culturally shaped understanding will not satisfy our present need. *In this field we must look to the ongoing revelation of science and of newly emerging voices of experience.*<sup>11</sup>

The conclusions reached by gay proponents rely upon hermeneutical rules that do violence to the traditional and historic approach to biblical interpretation. As will be seen below, if interpreted by a consistent, literal hermeneutic, the Bible does not condone homosexuality in any of its forms, but in fact condemns it as a deviant

<sup>5</sup>Donald Eastman, “Homosexuality: Not a Sin, Not a Sickness; What the Bible Does and Does Not Say,” *Gay Theological Journal* 1/1 (September-December 1997):12.

<sup>6</sup>Ray Hammond, “Paul’s Use of ΑΡΣΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΗΣ in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10” (ThM thesis, The Master’s Seminary, Sun Valley, Calif., 2000) 19.

<sup>7</sup>John J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual* (Kansas City: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1976) 37.

<sup>8</sup>Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 127.

<sup>9</sup>Marti Nissinen, *Homeroiticism in the Biblical World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 124.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>11</sup>Phylis A. Bird, “The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation Concerning Homosexuality: Old Testament Contributions,” in *Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture* 168 [emphasis added].

and damning sin. With the prospects of sure damnation, the church must with compassionate conviction declare such to be sin, yet a sin which—when repented of—is covered by the grace of God displayed in the propitiatory sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary. The biblical case comes next.

### **HOMOSEXUALITY CONDEMNED IN HOLY SCRIPTURE**

When considered contextually and objectively, the Scriptures are not silent concerning homosexuality. They always treat homosexuality as a violation of the divine order. The major references to homosexuality in Scripture are: Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10; Genesis 19; 2 Pet 2:7 and Jude 7. As expected, pro-homosexual scholars have interpreted each of these texts in such a way as to eliminate its applicability to the current ethical debate on the issue. However, a literal, objective approach yields a much different conclusion.

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

Moses gives two clear prohibitions of homosexuality in the Book of Leviticus:

You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination (18:22).

If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them (20:13).<sup>12</sup>

Various interpretations are given for the non-applicability of these references to the church today. Some invoke the liberal, multi-source contamination of the passage.<sup>13</sup> Others say that the section is a specific warning against cultic prostitution and the idolatrous practices of the Canaanites.<sup>14</sup> Scroggs suggests that the prohibition may be against the wasting of human semen.<sup>15</sup> Boswell, a popular advocate for homosexuality, argues that the Book of Leviticus is concerned about ceremonial uncleanness, not with moral impurity. He states that

the levitical enactments against homosexual behavior characterizes it unequivocally as ceremonial uncleanness rather than inherently evil. . . . The irrelevance of the verses was further emphasized by the teaching of Jesus and Paul that under the new dispensation it was not the physical violation of the levitical precepts which constituted 'abomination'

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<sup>12</sup>All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

<sup>13</sup>Lindsay Louise Biddle, "Deciphering the Holiness Code," *Gay Theological Journal* 1/1 (September-December 1997):29.

<sup>14</sup>McNeill, *The Church* 57-58; Nissinen, *Homoeroticism* 37-44.

<sup>15</sup>Scroggs, *The New Testament* 13.

(*bdelugma*) but the interior infidelity of the souls.<sup>16</sup>

These arguments receive an adequate answer in asserting that the biblical writers did not divide the prohibitions in Leviticus into ceremonial and moral codes.<sup>17</sup> Impurity in the Old Testament was a violation of God's law and God's holiness. The basis of NT holiness is found in the very moral code stipulated in the OT. The condemnation of incest in 1 Cor 5:1 goes back to Lev 18:18 and 20:11. The list of vices in 1 Cor 6:9-11 and 1 Tim 1:9-11 go back to Leviticus 19-20. The moral separation of the Christian from unbelievers as emphasized in the NT is but an extension of the separation of God's people from the immoral practices of the heathen nations surrounding the nation of Israel. Leviticus forms the basis for Peter's injunction for holy living, "You shall be holy for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16; cf. Lev 11:41; 19:2; 20:7).

The very existence of these prohibitions in Leviticus argues for the existence of these sexual vices in the pagan world which God expressly calls "abominations." Wold concludes that the words used in Leviticus conclusively show that "all same-gender sexual relations are categorically forbidden by the Hebrew terms. The biblical writer leaves no room for compromise. The language is emphatic."<sup>18</sup>

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

The most extensive treatment of homosexuality is found in Rom 1:18-32 in the context of the apostle Paul's argument that the whole world, Gentile and Jewish, is under sin and thus in need of the righteousness of God provided in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 3:9-26). In his description of the sin of the Gentile world, Paul shows God's response to mankind's infidelity. Three times Paul states that God "gave them over" (1:24, 26, 28). God judges sin with further sin. Homosexuality is a consequence of mankind's abandonment of the truth, a just punishment for exchanging the truth for a lie (1:24) and thus a revelation of the wrath of God upon unrighteousness (1:18). The context reveals homosexuality as a further manifestation of the "ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness"(1:18). The matter could not be clearer.

Yet revisionists have found ways to circumvent Paul's assessment of homosexuality as sin and a violation of the ordinance of God. They have offered numerous arguments to explain away the supposed condemnation of homosexuality. The proponents of homosexuality say that Paul is looking at the Gentile world and

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<sup>16</sup>John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University Press, 1980) 101.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995) 90-91.

<sup>18</sup>Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 119.

judging it by what would not be proper according to Jewish law or custom.<sup>19</sup> McNeill asserts, "Because of his Jewish background Paul obviously found rampant homosexuality in Greece very shocking."<sup>20</sup> Others argue that "Paul's description may be intentionally indeterminate. . . . His vague presentations . . . may also be simply a part of Paul's rhetorical strategy. Therefore, it is wise to refrain from drawing detailed conclusions from Paul's terminology about the nature of same sex conduct in Romans 1."<sup>21</sup> Scroggs insists that Paul is not condemning homosexuality, but the infidelity of the Gentile world: "Paul has a major *theological* goal in mind; ethical concerns or abominations lie far from his purposes."<sup>22</sup>

Probably the most accepted pro-gay explanation of homosexuality in Romans 1 comes from Boswell who states that Paul is not condemning homosexuality but homosexual acts committed by heterosexual persons.<sup>23</sup> He explains away "against nature" or "unnatural" (*παρὰ φύσιν*, *para physin*, v. 26) as not referring to natural law as God's original purpose for mankind, but as the natural character of the heterosexual pagan. Boswell argues for the existence of inverts (those who are by nature homosexuals) and perverts (heterosexuals who commit homosexual acts). Hence, he concludes that *para* does not mean "against," but rather "more than," or "in excess of."<sup>24</sup> Thus "beyond nature" does not mean "immoral."<sup>25</sup> This leads him to redefine the explicit terms where "dishonoring passions" must have very broad interpretations, where "error" is a mistake and never moral turpitude, and where "indecent" is merely not making a good appearance.<sup>26</sup>

Wold and Hays have made a formidable rebuttal of Boswell's thesis.<sup>27</sup> Wold shows that the use of *physin* in Rom 11:1-14 and 1 Cor 11:4 cannot be imported into Romans 1. The contexts are totally different.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, *para physin* occurred commonly in Hellenistic Jewish usage to speak of that which was against the divine design.<sup>29</sup> Hays concludes that

though he offers no explicit reflection on the concept of 'nature,' it is clear that in this

<sup>19</sup>McNeill, *The Church* 55.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Nisseinen, *Homoeroticism* 110-11.

<sup>22</sup>Scroggs, *The New Testament* 109.

<sup>23</sup>Boswell, *Christianity* 109.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 112-113.

<sup>27</sup>Wold, *Out of Order* 114 ff.; Richard B. Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1986):190.

<sup>28</sup>Wold, *Out of Order* 185.

<sup>29</sup>Hays, "Relations" 193.

passage Paul identifies ‘nature’ with the created order. The understanding of ‘nature’ in this conventional language does not rest on empirical observation of what actually exists; instead, it appeals to an intuitive conception of what ought to be, of the world as designed by God. Those who indulge in sexual practices *para physin* are defying the creator and demonstrating their own alienation from him.<sup>30</sup>

Although the main thrust of Romans 1 is the sin of Gentile infidelity, the discussion of homosexuality is not a mere illustration. Rather, it is a symptom of their problem, which is the sin of idolatry.<sup>31</sup> One therefore cannot dismiss this reference to homosexuality as unimportant. Furthermore, the world of Paul knew nothing of classes of people distinguished as “inverts” and “perverts.”<sup>32</sup> Paul is not singling out a particular class of pagans. Rather he is showing the consequences of idolatry upon their persons, even though all do not practice the same sin. Paul is showing that homosexuality is revolting because “it epitomizes in sexual terms the revolt against God. It is sinful because it violates the plan of God, present from creation, for the union of male and female in marriage.”<sup>33</sup>

It is difficult to understand how one can read Romans 1 and not conclude that homosexual behavior is wrong and antithetical to the divine order. Paul, like Moses in Leviticus, clearly uses terms and expressions which leave no doubt as to what he means. He states that God has given the Gentile world over “in the lusts of their hearts to impurity” (1:24). In this he identifies both lesbianism and the gay lifestyle. The list of expressions used for these vile affections clearly condemns homosexuality:

- “dishonored among them” (1:24)
- “degrading passions” (1:26)
- “exchange the natural function” (1:26)
- “unnatural” (1:26)
- “burned in their desire” (1:27)
- “indecent acts” (1:27)
- “penalty of their error” (1:27)
- “worthy of death” (1:32)

Perhaps what homosexual advocates do with Romans 1 is what Peter meant when he condemns those who take Paul’s letters and “distort, as they do also the rest of Scripture, to their own destruction” (2 Pet 3:16; cf. Rom 1:32).

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 194.

<sup>31</sup>Marion L. Soards, *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1995) 21.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>33</sup>Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow* 85.



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

Two other references in the NT make explicit condemnation of homosexuality: 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10. The pro-gay advocates main contention from these two texts lies with the interpretation of the word ἄρσενοκοῖται (*arsenokoitai*), and with the accompanying terms μαλακοί (*malakoi*) in 1 Cor 6:9 and πόρνοις (*pornois*) in 1 Tim 1:10.

They argue that the term “homosexual” is a modern word coined by Karoly M. Beakert in 1869 for people erotically oriented toward the same sex. As an invention of the nineteenth century, it should not be read into *arsenokoitai*.<sup>34</sup> The three other main arguments against the condemnation of homosexuals in these texts follow two lines of reasoning. One is that Paul is not condemning all homosexual activity but only that behavior which abuses the body, whether done by homosexuals or heterosexuals.<sup>35</sup> However, that Paul is not speaking of excesses (for how can covetousness be done in moderation?) but of that which is in itself “unrighteous” is obvious.

The other line of reasoning falls in the interpretation of the term itself. Boswell asserts that it should mean “male prostitute,”<sup>36</sup> whereas Scroggs argues for the interpretation “pederasty.”<sup>37</sup> Boswell contends that *arsenokoitēs* is never used for homosexuality either before or after Paul. He also argues that ἄρσην (*arsēn*) is used adjectivally, describing the person engaged in the sexual activity. Hence, a male prostitute.

Scroggs’ reason for translating the word “pederasty” is its close association with *malakos*, which is an effeminate call boy, and thus the active partner is the *apsenokoitēs*.<sup>38</sup> In this interpretation *arsēn* is adverbial. Thus Paul is not against homosexuals but against the abuse of the younger partner.<sup>39</sup> Hence neither text contains a modern-day application of Paul’s warning to homosexuality.

The views put forth that *arsenokoitēs* cannot refer to a homosexual fail both historically and linguistically.<sup>40</sup> Homosexuality was not something new in Paul’s day but was prevalent in the ancient world. The rare use of the word may be due to the coining of the word by the apostle Paul himself. The reading of the LXX shows the use of *arsēn* and *koitai* in the prohibitions of Leviticus 18. Wold states,

When the question of homosexuality came up for him in the church at Corinth, we can

<sup>34</sup>Hammond, “Paul’s Use of ΑΡΣΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΗΣ” 81.

<sup>35</sup>David E. Malick, “The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9,” *BSac* 150 (October-December 1993):480-81.

<sup>36</sup>Boswell, *Christianity* 107.

<sup>37</sup>Scroggs, *The New Testament* 83.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 36-37.

<sup>40</sup>See Wold, *Out of Order* 189-96; Malick, “The Condemnation of Homosexuality” 482-92.

accurately suppose that Paul's understanding would be influenced by the Old Testament homosexuality law. And it is on this basis that he uses the term *arsenokoitai*, because it accurately reflects the Hebrew of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, Paul's use of  *pornos* and *malakos* lends credence to the view that Paul had homosexuals in mind when he wrote *arsenokoitēs*.<sup>42</sup>

Paul is condemning sins and vices practiced by the unbelieving world, which should not be practiced by God's people. These are characteristics of the "unrighteous" (1 Cor 6:9) and the "lawless and rebellious" (1 Tim 1:9). In light of what some have done to these texts, the Holy Spirit's warning, "Do not be deceived!" (1 Cor 6:9), is understandable.

### **Genesis 19; 2 Peter 2:7; Jude 7**

The last set of texts to examine involve the description of homosexual behavior in Genesis 19 with the commentaries given in 2 Pet 2:7 and Jude 7. The revisionist argues that the Sodomites were not punished for their homosexuality but for their *inhospitality*.<sup>43</sup> The fivefold thesis of Boswell's argument is: (1) "know" in Genesis 19:5 cannot refer to homosexual relations; (2) the offering of Lot's daughter was a bribe with no sexual overtones; (3) the story of Judg 19:22-30 is also inhospitality; (4) the LXX uses an expression without carnal knowledge; and (5) the reference to Sodom in Ezek 16:48-49 does not list the sin of homosexuality.<sup>44</sup> Each of these arguments has been adequately refuted by Wold in *Out of Order*. He rightly shows that "know" *is* used in Genesis 19:5 as sexual relations because in 19:8 the same word is used unquestionably for sexual relations. In addition, Ezek 16:50 refers to the abominations of Sodom, which in Ezek 16:27 and 16:58 are clearly sexual sins (cf. Lev 18:22; 20:13). Wold concludes that the LXX rendering of Gen 19:5 *does* include sexual intercourse.<sup>45</sup>

The comments of 2 Peter 2:7 and Jude 7 refer back to the sin of homosexuality in Genesis 19. There is no doubt that Peter and Jude are referring to the sins much more grievous than pride and inhospitality.

The expression, "in the same way," points to the violation of the divine order by the angels in Jude 6, and so the men of Sodom trespassed their divine order. That sexual sin is at the root of Sodom's condemnation is proven by the expressions, "indulged in gross immoralities," "went after strange flesh," and "the sensual conduct of unprincipled men." Bauckham's conclusion that the Sodomites sin was their desire to have relations with the angels is reading into the text what the

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<sup>41</sup>Wold, *Out of Order* 193.

<sup>42</sup>Malick, "The Condemnation of Homosexuality" 497.

<sup>43</sup>Boswell, *Christianity* 341-42.

<sup>44</sup>Wold, *Out of Order* 80-81.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 87.

Sodomites never knew.<sup>46</sup>

The sin of Sodom is everywhere described as impudent and shameless. According to Gen 13:13, the Sodomites “were wicked exceedingly and sinners before the Lord.” In Gen 18:20, the LORD said, “The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave.” They were by no means “closet homosexuals” (cf. Isa 3:9). Jenkyn aptly writes,

The sin of these miscreants abhorred secrecy; they blushed not, though the sun was a blushing witness of their filthiness. They gloried in their shame because they had outsinned all shame. Their hands were the organs and their tongues the trumpets of wickedness. Would any but a company who had more of monsters than men in them, have made such a demand in the open streets, as is mentioned in Gen. xix. 5, “Bring them out to us, that we may know them”<sup>47</sup>

### THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH

Every debate on Christian ethics must end with the implications for the church. All truth must lead to moral action. This discussion on homosexuality has some very serious and challenging implications for the evangelical church which appears to be stalling in the mire of debate. These implications are four in number.

#### **The Church Must Condemn the Sin of Homosexuality**

In an age of religious pluralism and philosophical tolerance, for the church to concede its duty to stand for truth is easy, but then it will be the proverbial trampled spring and polluted well, which symbolizes the righteous who give way before the wicked (cf. Prov 25:26). The church cannot behave as though it did not possess a blueprint for life, as though it too was subject to the changing winds and waves of ideas. The church has a sure word of truth which is not only able to save, but also able to equip for every facet of life (cf. 1 Tim 4:15-17; 2 Tim 3:16-17).

The church must take a stand on the divine order stated in the opening chapters of Genesis and affirmed throughout the rest of the Scriptures whenever the Holy Spirit endeavors to teach on marriage and family. The Lord Jesus Himself referred to the divine order when asked about the legality of divorce and the permanence of marriage: “Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh’?” (Matt 19:4-5). The Lord referred back to the divine order not only for its permanence, but also for its sexual nature: a man for a woman!

The Scriptures clearly condemn any violation of the divine order, whether

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<sup>46</sup>Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, vol. 50 of *WBC* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1983) 54.

<sup>47</sup>William Jenkyn, *Exposition Upon the Epistle of Jude* (reprint; Minneapolis: James and Klock, 1976) 139.

through divorce (cf. Matt 19:6-9), through immoralities (cf. 1 Cor 6:16-20; 1 Thess 4:1-8; Heb 13:4), through violation of God's ordained roles (cf. Eph 5:21-33), or through perversion of the sexual roles (cf. Rom 1:18-32; Lev 18:27; 20:13). "Have you not read" is not a mandate for the church to adjust its theology of sex and marriage to the opinion polls of the godless masses or the conflicting and prejudicial scientific conclusions of depraved minds.<sup>48</sup>

Homosexuality is a perversion of the divine order. Period. There is no way biblically or naturally to arrive at a different conclusion. True, man is fallen. Man is depraved and beset with many infirmities, but "from the beginning it has not been this way" (Matt 19:8). It should be the creature's goal to live life the way the Creator intended it.

Hence, to stand and condemn homosexuality in all its forms as a perversion of the divine order is not a symptom of homophobia, heartless prejudice, or narrow-minded bigotry. It is to stand on the side of righteousness and truth and to obey the One who said, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). For the church, God is the only One to please.

### **The Church Must Convert the Homosexual**

The church is not an agent of condemnation alone, but it is primarily an agent of change, for it is the vehicle by which God shares His love, mercy, and grace with a sinful world. This is the Great Commission. The church is to preach the gospel to the whole world, including the homosexual. That is what Paul purposed to do in the Book of Romans. He is commissioned to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles because the gospel alone is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom 1:15-17).

Evangelism involves a number of steps. First, evangelism implies preaching repentance from sin, which includes an admission of guilt and the awareness of the need to be forgiven. To be saved, one needs to be in danger of perishing (John 3:16). To be found, one must be lost. That is the thrust of Paul's polemic in Romans 1-3, that "every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:19, 23). That includes homosexuals.

In evangelizing homosexuals, the church must be careful to warn them, as any other sinners, of the danger they face if they do not repent of their rebellious lifestyle. The Scriptures are very unwavering in pronouncing that unconverted homosexuals will not inherit the kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor 6:9-10; Rev 21:27; 22:15). Although homosexuality is no worse than lying or other sins, it damns just as certainly. The church does the homosexual no favor when it condones his behavior based on some ingenious interpretation or on some sentimental relationship

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<sup>48</sup>See Helmut Thielicke's incorrect conclusions on homosexuality in *The Ethics of Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) 261-91, where he argues that homosexuality is abnormal, "but in the same way that disease, suffering and pain are abnormal" (282-83).

it has with him. Homosexuals do not deserve a weakened spirituality, much less a sentimental pity. They need raw honesty from the church about their doomed state unless they come to repentance and faith in Christ.

Much rhetoric is wasted on the inverted nature of homosexuals and of their inability to change their lifestyle. The truth is that no sinner can change his or her life apart from the power of God displayed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are all “dead in our trespasses and sins and by nature children of wrath,” and the only solution is to be born again by faith in the provision made at the cross of Christ Jesus (Eph 2:1-6). The gospel alone has the power to transform lives, to transfer a sinner from the power of darkness into the kingdom of Christ, and to empower people totally for a life no longer lived for the lust of the flesh but for the glory of God (cf. 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 5:24). Inability to change behavior is *never* a reason to condone such behavior. Inability simply humbles the sinner before God, declaring his or her absolute dependence upon God’s grace and power to convert (cf. Matt 22:29).

Such is Paul’s loving reminder to the Corinthians who were redeemed out of the vileness of Gentile unbelief when he states, “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). He does not say, “such *are* some of you,” but “such *were* some of you”! There is hope, mercy, grace, forgiveness, and a new life for homosexuals. But such is found only in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. If homosexuals wish to be forgiven, they can be. If homosexuals wish to be changed, they can be. But they must come by way of the cross.

The church must see in its task of evangelizing the homosexual the importance of helping those who convert to become full and integral disciples of the Lord in the local church. Unfortunately some do make homosexuality an unpardonable sin, or at least a sin forgiven but not forgotten. The church must extend a compassionate hand to those who would be saved by the power of God, and disciple them into the fullness of their inheritance in Christ and in the fellowship of the saints. Conversion to Christ has many attractions which should not be withheld from converting homosexuals. The added scourge of AIDS demands from the church an extra portion of compassion, energy, and wisdom. After all, the church has always been and always will be the vanguard in dealing with humanity’s griefs and sorrows. We dare not do less.

### **The Church Must Confront Error**

Although the church is God’s primary instrument in evangelism, it also serves as the salt of the earth, to preserve the truth of God and defend it against error (cf. Matt 5:13; 1 Tim 3:15). The Scriptures teach that error will come from within (cf. Matt 13:37-43; Acts 20:29-30). Some would perceive the church as some passive institution floating along the river of history, awaiting its apocalyptic end. Yet the Scriptures everywhere reveal a militant church, not in the sense of conquering human kingdoms, but of confronting error and destroying human speculations and philosophies (cf. 2 Cor 10:3-5; Col 2:8-10). Jude admonishes,

“Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3). According to Jude, false teachers will distort the truth to promote a licentious lifestyle (Jude 4). Deviant behavior is never far from deviant doctrine. Furthermore, God does not guarantee all will respond to His grace and repent. Many will reject the truth and proceed to further lawlessness, and on these believers should “have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh” (Jude 23). Peter likewise exhorts the church to be on guard so as not to be carried away by the error of unprincipled men and thus fall from its steadfastness (cf. 2 Pet 3:17).

The church does not become heretical by itself. It is deliberately led astray by the devil and his emissaries (cf. Gen 3:1; 2 Cor 11:13-14). Satan’s agents dressed as angels of light (i.e., theology professors, pastors, the Metropolitan Community Church, etc.) harass the true character of God through deception (cf. 1 Cor 6:9), through distorting God’s Word (cf. 2 Pet 3:16), through perverse and persuasive arguments (cf. Acts 20:30), and through a libertine and licentious lifestyle (cf. 2 Pet 2:2, 4; Jude 4, 8).

Thus the church of the present is following in the steps of the apostolic church when it contends for truth by opposing those who would teach that homosexuality is a lifestyle fully acceptable to God. The church has always stood against every form of immorality and will continue to do so because it can do no other. It is the guardian and defender of truth. The coming out of homosexuality in America is but one facet of the sexual revolution of the 60s and 70s. Other immoralities are pounding at the church’s door, such as pornography, pedophilia, cohabitation, abortion on demand, and rampant divorce (i.e., legalized adultery). Should the church give way before these because the populace approves them?

### **The Church Must Cleanse Itself**

The interesting feature about Paul’s teaching on homosexuality in 1 Cor 6:9 is that it is found in a section dealing with the Corinthian church’s problem with immorality in its ranks, as well as the relationships Christians should have with the professing believer who is indulging in sins, and with pagan unbelievers. The church at Corinth is told to rid itself of fornicators within its ranks with the practice of church discipline or excommunication (cf. 1 Cor 5:1-8, 13). The church is under strict restrictions not to fellowship with professing believers whose lifestyles are anything but Christian (cf. 1 Cor 5:9-13).

The implications for the church are obvious. The solution to the problem of homosexuals in the church is not dialogue or toleration, but excommunication and separation. Granted, there is a need today to educate the rank and file of the evangelical church, but having done this, the church must insist on the biblical mandate of separation from professing Christians who endorse the homosexual lifestyle for themselves. This obviously precludes the inclusion of homosexual churches into denominations or ecumenical unions. The church’s unwillingness to clean up its ranks will simply hasten its moral decline, for “a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough” (1 Cor 5:6).

Implied in this text is also the responsibility of the church not to abandon

the homosexual community. The Christian needs to befriend and witness to the homosexual with such love, compassion, and wisdom that such will respond to the saving grace of God. Militant homosexuals should be handled with gentleness, praying that God may grant them forgiveness and deliverance from the snare of the devil (cf. 2 Tim 2:24-26).

Finally, the church must be careful not to adopt the customs of the world. What it tolerates today, its children will practice tomorrow. In an age of accommodation and compromise, when churches are more interested in numbers than genuine conversions, the church is in danger of ceasing to make holiness and truth the motivation for its existence. The words of the apostle Paul are a fitting conclusion to this debate on homosexuality:

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are children of light in the Lord; walk as children of light. . . . Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret (Eph 5:6, 8, 11-12).