

GOD’S WORD ON HOMOSEXUALITY: THE TRUTH ABOUT SIN AND THE REALITY OF FORGIVENESS

John MacArthur
President and Professor of Pastoral Ministries

Through following a distorted meaning of “love,” some in the present day have condoned homosexual practice, without realizing that biblical love excludes homosexuality because of its sinfulness. Christians can best share the gospel with homosexuals by calling their lifestyle what the Bible calls it—sin. Genesis 1–2, Matthew 19, and Ephesians 5 describe clearly the way that God has instituted marriage as a monogamous, heterosexual relationship. Genesis 19, Jude 7, and 2 Peter 2 illustrate how the Fall almost immediately eroded the purity of human sexuality, including a devastation of the divine institution of marriage. Leviticus 18 and 20 and Romans 1 lay out very plainly God’s instructions about how repulsive homosexuality is in God’s sight. Yet Isaiah 56 and 1 Corinthians 6 make plain God’s plan for homosexuals to find freedom and forgiveness through a life-changing faith in Jesus Christ. The door is wide open for homosexuals and lesbians to accept God’s invitation.

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“All you need is love.”

So said the Beatles. If they had been singing about God’s love, the statement would have a grain of truth in it. But what usually goes by the name *love* in popular culture is not authentic love at all; it is actually a deadly fraud.

Far from being “all you need,” the world’s distorted view of love is something Christians desperately need to avoid. The apostle Paul makes that very point in Eph 5:1-3. He writes, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”

The simple command of verse 2 (“walk in love, as Christ loved us”) sums

up the whole moral obligation of the Christian. After all, God's love is the single, central principle that defines the Christian's entire duty.

This kind of love really is "all you need." Romans 13:8–10 says, "The one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments . . . are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Galatians 5:14 echoes that selfsame truth: "The whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Jesus likewise taught that all the law and the prophets hang on two simple principles about love—the First and Second Great Commandments (Matt 22:38-40). In other words, "love . . . is the bond of perfection" (Col 3:14, NKJV).

When Paul commands believers to walk in love, the context reveals that in positive terms, he is talking about being kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving to one another (Eph 4:32). The model for such selfless love is Christ, who gave His life to save His people from their sins. "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). And "if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11).

In other words, true love is always sacrificial, self-giving, merciful, compassionate, sympathetic, kind, generous, and patient. Those and many other positive, benevolent qualities (cf. 1 Cor 13:4-8) are what Scripture associates with divine love.

But notice the negative side as well, also seen in the context of Ephesians 5. The person who *truly* loves others like Christ does must refuse every kind of counterfeit love. The apostle Paul names some of these worldly forgeries. They include immorality, impurity, and covetousness. The passage continues:

Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 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 associate with them (vv. 4–7; unless otherwise noted, biblical quotations are from the NASB).

Immorality is perhaps our generation's favorite substitute for love. Paul uses the Greek word *porneia*, which includes every kind of sexual sin. Popular culture desperately tries to blur the line between genuine love and immoral passion. But all such immorality is a total perversion of genuine love, because it violates both the Great Commandment (Mark 12:29-30) by disobeying God's Word, and the Second Great Commandment (Mark 12:31; cf. Rom 13:9-10) by seeking self-gratification rather than the spiritual good and sanctification of others.

Impurity is another devilish perversion of love. Here Paul employs the Greek term *akatharsia*, which refers to every kind of filth and impurity. Specifically, Paul

has in mind “filthiness,” “foolish talk,” and “crude joking,” which are the peculiar characteristics of evil companionship. That kind of camaraderie has nothing to do with true love, and the apostle plainly says it has no place in the Christian’s walk.

Covetousness is yet another corruption of love that stems from a narcissistic desire for self-gratification. It is the exact opposite of the example Christ set when He “gave Himself up for us” (v. 2). In verse 5, Paul equates covetousness with idolatry. Again, this has no place in the Christian walk, and according to verse 5, the person who is guilty of it “has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

Such sins, Paul says, “must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints” (v. 3). Of those who practice such things, he instructs his readers to “not associate with them” (v. 7), but rather to “expose” their deeds of darkness (v. 11). Christians, then, are not showing authentic love unless they courageously speak the truth about all the popular perversions of love.

Most of the talk about love these days ignores that principle. “Love” has been redefined as a broad tolerance that overlooks sin and embraces good and evil alike. But that is not love; it is *apathy* mixed with *compromise*.

God’s love is not at all like that. Remember, the supreme manifestation of God’s love is the cross, where Christ “loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (v. 2). Thus Scripture explains the love of God in terms of sacrifice, atonement for sin, and *propitiation*: “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). In other words, Christ made Himself a sacrifice to turn away the wrath of an offended deity. Far from dismissing our sins with a benign tolerance, God gave His Son as an offering for sin, to satisfy His own wrath and justice in the salvation of sinners.

That is the very heart of the gospel. God manifest His love in a way that upheld His holiness, justice, and righteousness without compromise. True love “does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor 13:6). That is the kind of love we are called to walk in. It is a love that is “first pure, then peaceable” (cf. Jas 3:17).¹

The Loving Truth about Homosexual “Love”

If true love demands the courage to confront false love and its fruits, then homosexuality must be graciously yet firmly condemned for being exactly what it is—sin. Though homosexual advocates claim that their motivation is *love*, the Bible identifies all such attractions and passions as counterfeit love, a perversion of God’s intended design for intimacy and procreation. The immorality, impurity, and

¹The introduction to this article is adapted from my article in *Pulpit* magazine entitled, “The Kind of Love You Don’t Need” (April 19, 2007), online at <http://www.sfpulpit.com/2007/04/19/the-love-you-dont-need/>, accessed 9/27/08.

covetousness (lust) discussed in Eph 5:4-7 each describe an aspect of the kind of “love” that fuels homosexual desire. As for the conduct that flows out of that desire, “it is disgraceful to even speak of the things which are done by them in secret” (v. 12).

The truth about homosexuality, as evidenced from the Scriptures, is that such behavior is neither natural nor normal; and it is certainly not morally neutral. It is, instead, a distortion of God’s created order and a violation of His revealed will—making it as profoundly sinful as it is disgraceful and bizarre. Christians who advocate an attitude of tolerance and acceptance toward the homosexual lifestyle, often in the name of love, are in fact exhibiting anything but true, biblical love.

Churches and Christian leaders who, in the name of love, defend homosexuality and affirm gay and lesbian ministers and “marriages” not only degrade God’s moral standard but also lead others to sin. But condoning sin has no part in true love. Authentic love for others does not excuse their wickedness, but rather encourages them to do what is right. “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments?” (1 John 5:2–3). To love Christ is to obey Him (John 14:15); and to love others is to encourage them to do the same (cf. Heb 10:24).

Compassionately but firmly speaking the truth to unsaved sinners, whatever their predominant sin might be, is a primary part of what it means to love the lost with a true love. Unless the sinner recognizes his sin, understanding the fact that he is under God’s wrath, he will not see his need for a Savior. And until he sees his need for a Savior, crying out for mercy and trusting in Christ, he cannot be saved. Thus, the loving evangelist is called to confront sin—showing sinners what Scripture says about both their current guilt before a holy God and their future condemnation if they do not repent.

If the goal is to reach homosexuals with the gospel, Christians must begin by showing them from God’s Word that homosexuality in all its forms is an abomination in the eyes of the Lord. The Bible never commends or condones homosexual behavior on any level. Rather, it consistently and repeatedly condemns it as that which God hates and promises to punish. Until homosexuals understand that the lifestyle that defines them is inherently and unnaturally sinful, they will never desire the forgiveness God offers to them (and to all sinners) if they will forsake their iniquity and embrace Jesus Christ.

The Bible and Homosexuality

On the issue of homosexuality, God’s Word is neither silent nor unclear. Sadly, the contemporary church has been so inundated with pro-homosexual literature and advocacy, that it has in many cases lost both the ability to discern such disgraceful iniquity and the resolve to fight against it. Pro-homosexual Christians contend that the biblical injunctions against such behavior are either too ambiguous

or too tied to ancient culture to remain relevant today. But the issue is not really a lack of clarity—since the biblical commands are straightforwardly clear; nor is it a change of culture—since the moral rule of Scripture is founded in the unchanging character of God. The real issue, as with most moral compromises in the modern church, is a love of sin, and an idolatrous desire for cultural acceptance mixed with an arrogant disdain for the authority of Scripture. In spite of the fact that homosexuality has never been embraced or affirmed by God's people in the history of either Israel or the church, contemporary Christianity has done little more than muddy the waters with unwarranted ambiguity and controversy.

Thankfully, God's Word speaks directly to the issue of homosexuality in both the Old and New Testaments. In so doing, it establishes the divine design (or institution) for proper human sexuality, provides divine illustrations of God's wrath against such sexual perversion, and sets forth divine instruction directly prohibiting homosexuality. Yet, significantly, it also offers a divine invitation of redemption to any and all who will repent of their sin and embrace Jesus Christ in faith.

The Divine Institution

Genesis 1–2; Matthew 19; and Ephesians 5

The biblical case against homosexuality begins with the first few chapters of Genesis where God, on the sixth day of creation, established the sacred institution of marriage as that which only one man and one woman can rightly enjoy together. Genesis 1:27-28a states that, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it.'" In the Hebrew, the words "male" and "female" are in the emphatic position, giving the sense of "the one male and the one female." Only one man and one woman existed in the beginning, and for a very important reason, nothing other than monogamous, heterosexual marriage was possible. Therein lies God's perfect paradigm for marriage, as that which involves one partner from each gender.²

Based on the paradigm that was established at creation, the rest of Scripture strictly forbids any sexual activity outside marriage—including all fornication (cf. Acts 15:29; 1 Cor 6:9; Heb 13:4), adultery (cf. Exod 20:14; Lev 20:10; Mark 19:18), bestiality (cf. Exod 22:19; Lev 18:23; 20:15-16; Deut 27:21), and homosexuality (cf. Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26-27).

Genesis 2:24 underscores the divine plan for marriage with these words:

²Gordan Wenham (*Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987] 33) notes regarding Gen 1:28, "Here, then, we have a clear statement of the divine purpose of marriage: positively, it is for the procreation of children; negatively, it is a rejection of the ancient oriental fertility cults." The rest of Scripture indicates that marriage was instituted to procreate mankind, to raise up children to fill the earth (Gen 1:28). It is also for the purpose of companionship, so that man would not be alone (2:18) and for the purpose of sexual fulfillment and pleasure (1 Cor 7:4–5; cf. Heb 13:4).

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” Commenting on this verse, Kenneth Matthews writes, “Without question 2:24 serves as the bedrock for the Hebrew understanding of the centrality of the nuclear family for the survival of society. Monogamous heterosexual marriage was always viewed as the divine norm from the outset of creation. [On the flip side,] homosexual behavior was a confusion of sexual identity between men and women.”³ Homosexual unions (no matter what society may label them) cannot rightly be called “marriages,”⁴ since they involve only one gender, possess no ability to procreate,⁵ and cannot provide the kind of sexual companionship that God intended.⁶

Lloyd R. Bailey summarizes the case for heterosexuality based on the opening chapters of Genesis with these words:

A biblical case for exclusive heterosexual contact can (and has) been made on the basis of the creation stories in Gen 1–3. Part of God’s grand purpose was the creation of “male and female” (1:27) that would “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth . . .” (1:28). Furthermore, the proper complement to the male that God had created, in order to relieve his sense of estrangement from the rest of creation (2:18-20), was the formation of a fitting female sexual partner (2:20-24). Of course, other partners are possible (both lower animals and human males) . . . but such activity falls outside the intended design. Thus

³Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996) 224. Noting the Christian continuation of the Jewish perspective on homosexuality, Matthews writes, “Christian expectations for sexual behavior were the same and were a given among Jewish converts, but the Gentile world did not follow such norms. It was against the customary practices of the Greco-Roman world that Paul urged sexual restraints (e.g., Rom 1:24-28; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Thess 4:3-7).”

⁴R. Kent Hughes (*Genesis* [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2004] 63) underscores the importance of the Genesis account on the topic of homosexuality: “Now the obvious thing must be stated: Monogamous heterosexual marriage was always viewed as the norm from the time of creation. The account is about Adam and Eve; there is no Adam and Steve! Legislators who would legitimize same-sex marriage, giving it the putative status of heterosexual marriage, are attacking a creation ordinance and are reproaching God himself. What unmitigated Dante’s terror awaits such presumption. God will not be mocked!”

⁵Daniel Block (*Judges Ruth*, New American Commentary [Nashville: Broadman & Holmann, 1999] 544) notes the short-sighted selfishness inherent in homosexuality. “Within the context of the Old Testament, since one lives on in one’s progeny, sexual activity takes on added significance in securing one’s future. Homosexual activity thinks only of the present.”

⁶*Ibid.* Block continues, “Beginning with Gen 1:27-28, the Scriptures are consistent in affirming only heterosexual marriage. The intimacy described in Gen 2:24-25 is natural, good, and holy, and it remains so even after the fall. Within the context of marriage, through sexual activity a husband and wife express physical intimacy to complement their emotional and spiritual union. Although this form of intimacy is celebrated in Scripture as beautiful and good, according to Lev 18:22 and 20:13, the same kind of intimacy between two males is condemned in the sharpest of terms as [being] ‘an abomination,’ as on a par with adultery and incest, as a capital crime. Accordingly, homosexual activity is not only ‘against nature’; it is a crime ‘against God,’ another expression of ‘doing what is right in one’s own eyes.’”

a modern commentator has put it succinctly: "Even though an evaluation of same-sex intercourse is not the point of the text, legitimization for homosexuality requires an entirely different kind of creation story." This is precisely what later Jewish and Christian writers had in mind when they condemned same-sex intercourse as "contrary to nature."⁷

The NT reiterates the paradigm established in Genesis 1–2 through the words of both Christ and the apostle Paul. In Matt 19:4-6, and its parallel in Mark 10:4-8, Jesus affirmed the fact that "from the beginning" God made human beings "male and female" and that the sexual union represented in marriage involves a man being "joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." Christ's words (taken from both Gen 1:27 and 2:24) underscore the fact that heterosexual marriage has always been God's intention, in spite of man's attempts to distort, deny, or disregard it. "The implication is that God instituted marriage by the creation of humans in two genders, male and female, and that the woman was created for the man just as, in a corresponding way, the man was given to the woman."⁸ Thus, homosexuality is not simply another option for two consenting adults; it is instead a perversion of God's design for the procreation, pleasure, and preservation of the human race. As Christ affirmed, "[O]ur sexuality is of divine ordinance; it is intended to be exercised in monogamous relationships."⁹

The apostle Paul also cites Gen 2:24 in Ephesians 5, in which he gives instructions on marriage and also uses marriage as an illustration of Christ and the church. When marriage is properly lived out, according to the way that God purposed it from creation, it not only brings great joy to the husband and wife, but also serves as a picture of Christ's love for His bride, the church.

In 1 Tim 1:9-10, Paul denounces "immoral men and homosexuals" as among those who are "lawless and rebellious" and "contrary to sound teaching."¹⁰ The word he uses for homosexuals, *arsenokoitai*, literally means "males in the marriage bed," and "seems to have been coined using the terminology of LXX Lev 18:22 [and]

⁷Lloyd R. Bailey: *Leviticus-Numbers* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys 2005) 255. Internal citation from Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001) 61-62.

⁸James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) 2:401. To this point, Michael Green adds, "Marriage was meant to be complementary: God 'made them male and female' ([v.] 4). It is not a unisex world. There is a God-ordained difference and complementarity between the sexes. That is so obvious that it only needs to be stated today when homosexual relationships have come to be seen as an equally valid alternative to marriage. The basic trouble about it is that it contravenes the complementarity that God has built into the sexes" (*The Message of Matthew, The Bible Speaks Today* [Wheaton, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000] 202 [emphasis in the original]).

⁹Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 481.

¹⁰William Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000) 38, notes of these two words that "[t]he first word refers to male fornicators, and the second to sexual relations with the same sex." Both were, in Paul's mind, a violation of the seventh commandment.

20:13.”¹¹ The term underscores the fact that Paul viewed any homosexual acts as a sinful perversion, as Knight explains:

The word Paul uses is composed of two components. . . . The former is the specific word for male [*arsein*] with “strong emphasis on sex” (BAGD). The latter means generally “bed” and is a euphemism for sexual intercourse (BAGD). The word does not refer, as some writers have alleged, only to sex with young boys or to male homosexual prostitutes, but simply to homosexuality itself (so Paul explicitly in Rom. 1:26, 27 . . .). Paul writes elsewhere that the consequence for continued and unrepentant involvement in this, and other sins listed here, is exclusion from the kingdom of God and that deliverance from this, and the other sins, is an integral part of the gospel of Jesus Christ as Lord through the power of the Spirit of God (1 Cor 6:9-11).¹²

Scripture, in both Testaments, views marriage as a sacred institution and any sexual activity with someone other than one’s spouse is strictly forbidden by God (Heb 13:4; cf. Gal 5:19). This not only includes fornication and adultery, but also any form of homosexuality—since such runs contrary to the divine design established at creation.

The Divine Illustration

Genesis 19; Jude 7; and 2 Peter 2

The Fall, with its corrupting effects (Genesis 3), began to erode the purity of human sexuality immediately; and God’s perfect paradigm for marriage was quickly assaulted. Polygamy first appears in Gen 4:19; demonic sexual perversion in Gen 6:2; lewdness in 9:22; adultery (or near adultery) in 12:15-19; fornication in 16:4; incest in 19:36; rape in 34:2; prostitution in 38:15; and sexual harassment in 39:7. To this list, Genesis 19 adds the sin of homosexuality.

God’s strong opposition to homosexual behavior is perhaps most graphically illustrated in His response to the despicable behavior of the men at Sodom. In Gen 19:4-7, during an angelic rescue mission to save Lot from the city, the inhabitants of Sodom demonstrated the dreadful extent of their lust.

Before they [the angels, who had taken the appearance of men] lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; and they called to Lot and said to him, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them.” But Lot went

¹¹Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 88. The authors further note that “there is little to be said lexically for confining the meaning of *arsenokoitai* to [merely] ‘male prostitutes’ or ‘call boys.’”

¹²George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 86.

out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, and said, "Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly."

The savage mob, coming from every part of the city, was so consumed by immoral lust that even after being blinded, they continued to grope for the doorway (vv. 10-11). Lot, of course, recognized their homosexual passions as inherently wicked (v. 7). God did too, so much so that He utterly destroyed them for their great iniquity (cf. 18:20-33; 19:23-29).¹³

Some have attempted to argue, unsuccessfully, that homosexual behavior is not in view in this passage.¹⁴ But passing the incident off as simply a violent breach of ancient hospitality laws goes against the context.¹⁵ The mob did not want "to know" (v. 5) Lot's guests in a social way; they had no intention of befriending them or of sharing common interests. Their intentions were entirely sexual, as evidenced by both Lot's condemnation in verse 7 (where he calls their actions "wicked") and

¹³Though Sodom was also guilty of other sins (Isa 1:10; 3:9; Jer 23:14; Ezek 16:49, 58), it was the sin of homosexuality for which the city was primarily known. By the intertestamental period, it was almost exclusively remembered for sexual debauchery (cf. Jub 16.5,6; 20:5; T. Levi 14.6; T. Naph 3.4; 2 Enoch 10:4; 34:1-2; Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1.11). Jude 7 and 2 Pet 2:6-7 affirm this intertestamental understanding. Of course, Genesis 19 makes the issue self-evident in the context. As E. A. Speiser (*Genesis*, Anchor Bible [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1964] 142) points out, "[I]t was the city's sexual depravity, the manifest 'sodomy' of its inhabitants, that provided the sole and self-evident reason for its frightful fate." Richard F. Lovelace (*Homosexuality and the Church* [Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1978], 100-101) suggests that the other sins of Sodom fit the paradigm of Romans 1 regarding the wholesale perversion of pagan societies.

¹⁴For example, Walter Brueggemann (*Genesis* [Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1982] 164) contends that there is "considerable evidence that the sin of Sodom was not specifically sexual." Later he concludes, "It may be that sexual disorder is one aspect of a general disorder. But that issue is presented in a way scarcely pertinent to contemporary discussion of homosexuality" (*ibid.*). For other examples, see D. S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, 1955), 4ff.; and J. J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual* (Kansas City, Kans.: Sheed, Andrews and McMeel, 1976) 42-50.

¹⁵Lloyd R. Bailey (*Leviticus-Numbers* 249) responding to those who suggest hospitality is primarily in view, writes, "Too much is being made of violation of the rules of hospitality when some modern interpreters discuss this episode. After all, no biblical guideline to proper behavior commands that 'Thou shalt be hospitable.' This later societal value, operative throughout the Muslim Near East, is being over-emphasized here and 'read into' the Bible." For an example of what Bailey is critiquing, note the comments of Robert G. Boling on Judg 19:22, "As in Gen 19, the initial and determinative offense is a violation of the law of hospitality" (*Judges*, The Anchor Bible [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1975] 276). K. Lawson Younger, Jr., responds to such interpretations of Judg 19:22 with these words, "[Some] overstress the inhospitality problem so that the horde's attempt at homosexual rape is reinterpreted as purely a matter connected to the inhospitality issue. Behind this is an effort to argue that the Scriptures do not condemn homosexuality as sin. This interpretation is untenable in light of Judges 19:24-25, where the host offers the Gibeonites the concubine and his daughter as alternatives (with rather obvious sexual overtones), and the men reject his offer and attempt to press home their desire for the man" (*Judges/Ruth*, The NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002] 359).

the offer of his daughters in verse 8 (where the same verb “to know” is used).¹⁶ Though their violence alone was worthy of condemnation, it was the homosexual nature of their lust that made it particularly despicable to God (a point which both Jude 7 and 2 Pet 2:6-7 make certain). Thus, it is not merely violence or even homosexual rape that is being condemned. Rather it is any type of homosexual act or lifestyle. Such a conclusion is not only confirmed by considering later passages (in Leviticus and the NT), but can also be defended from the passage itself. As Hamilton explains:

We see at least four problems with the view that the prohibition here is only on [homosexual] rape. First, nowhere in the OT does the verb *yāda'* [“to know”] have the nuance of “abuse” or “violate.” Second, the OT uses unmistakable language to relate rape incidents. Thus the Shechemites “seized” and “lay with” and “humbled” Dinah (Gen. 34:2). Amnon “forced” and “lay with” his half-sister Tamar (2 Sam. 13:14). Similarly, the biblical laws about rape also use these terms: “seize,” “lie with” (Deut. 22:25–27). Third, this interpretation forces one meaning on “know” in v. 5 (i.e. “abuse”) but a different meaning on “know” three verses later (i.e., “have intercourse with”), for it is unlikely that Lot is saying: “I have two daughters who have never been abused.” Fourth, such an interpretation forces these incredible words in Lot’s mouth: “Do not rape my visitors. Here are my daughters, both virgins—rape them!” Clearly, then, the incident frowns on homosexual relations [in general] for whatever reason.¹⁷

Hamilton concludes his case by noting that in the similar account of Judg 19:22 the concubine and daughter are offered with the statement “and sexually mistreat them.” Whereas, by contrast, Lot avoids the use of any verb that would necessitate sexual aggression.

A strong case, then, can be made from this text itself that a kind of homosexual conduct is in view—as the object of God’s outpoured wrath and manifest fury. In fact, the obvious truth is strengthened in the effort to answer the lame misrepresentations of pro-homosexual advocates. Because the Sodomites were so perverse, the Lord destroyed the entire city, burying it under fire and brimstone. The term *sodomy*, coming from this incident, refers to such homosexual behavior as was

¹⁶The same verb, “to know,” is used elsewhere in Genesis to speak of sexual intimacy (cf. 4:1, 17, 25; 24:16). See Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis 18–50* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 33–34 for a full lexical treatment of this verb, including the number of times it appears in the OT.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 34–35.

notoriously practiced by the Sodomites.¹⁸ A “sodomite” was a homosexual, so called because the sin of Sodom was homosexuality.¹⁹

As noted earlier, both Jude 7 and 2 Pet 2:6 refer back to the calamitous judgment on Sodom, removing any doubt as to fact that sexual perversion was a primary characteristic of the city—and the main reason it was subjected to the judgment of God in such a uniquely devastating way. Jude writes of “Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them” which “indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh.” By using the term “gross immorality” (a compound word in Greek), Jude indicates that their homosexual behavior was especially despicable in the eyes of God. The “strange flesh” that they pursued refers to Lot’s angelic guests, whom the men of the city thought were male visitors (as indicated by their demands in Gen 19:5). “Virtually all commentators agree that this [passage] refers to the incident in Gen 19:4-11, and most believe that this means the attempt at homosexual relations,” explains Peter H. Davids. “[It was] a violation of the laws of purity which prohibited the mixing of things, even between the sexes (Deut 22:5, 9-11). Thus seeking sexual intercourse with a person of the same sex would be seeking a different type of flesh than that which one was supposed to seek.”²⁰ The debauched behavior of the Sodomites, in seeking sexual pleasure from those outside God’s design (in this case, individuals whom they thought were fellow males), serves as a lasting illustration of the utter abomination that homosexuality is in the eyes of God.

The apostle Peter, like Jude, writes that Sodom and Gomorrah were characterized by “the sensual conduct of unprincipled men” and therefore “condemned . . . to destruction” (2:6-7). Lot, on the other hand, is regarded as righteous because, although he lived among them, “his righteous soul [was] tormented day after day by their lawless deeds” (2:8).²¹

Though Lot and his daughters were spared, everyone else in Sodom and the surrounding cities was destroyed by incineration and asphyxiation. The word translated “destruction” speaks of complete overthrow and ruin. In fact, the devastation was so complete that the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah remain

¹⁸W. Sibley Towner (*Genesis*, Westminster Bible Companion [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001] 172-73) explains, “The entire episode serves to underscore how corrupt the Sodomite culture was.”

¹⁹“Sodomite” is a much better term to describe someone practicing homosexuality than a term like “gay.” The term “gay” is preposterous and misleading, because it implies happiness. But the sad reality is that it is a word coined by people who experience massive guilt, massive loneliness, no future, no hope, severe pain, and impending death. It is a word that is coined to describe an illusion. Homosexuals are the most pained, troubled, hopeless people there are—because they are seeking pleasure outside God’s design and are under God’s wrath. The term “Sodomite” is better because it is a biblical term and it clearly identifies homosexuality as a sin, like the behavior of Genesis 19.

²⁰Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 52.

²¹Peter’s terminology speaks to the same “sphere of moral debauchery” as described by Jude (cf. D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude* [Greenville, S.C.: Unusual Publications, 1989] 104).

undiscovered. It is possible, though archaeologists do not know for sure, that the cities are buried under the mineral-dense waters of the Dead Sea.

The precedent set by Sodom establishes a critical truth: depraved men cannot pursue sensuality and ungodliness and escape God's judgment (cf. Matt 25:41; Rom 1:18; 2:5, 8; Eph 5:6; 1 Thess 2:16; 2 Thess 1:8; Heb 10:26-27; Rev 6:17). The rest of Scripture refers back to Sodom and Gomorrah over twenty times as an illustration and warning to those who might also choose to live ungodly lives (cf. Matt 10:14, 15; 11:23, 24; Luke 17:28-32). It is an example that those in the homosexual community today would do well to heed.

The Divine Instruction

Leviticus 18, 20; Romans 1

What the book of Genesis implies (though quite plainly) about homosexuality, through its discussion of the institution of marriage and the illustration of Sodom, the Mosaic legal code makes explicitly clear: homosexuality is detestable in the sight of God. The words of Lev 18:22 are straightforward and direct: "You [men] shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination." And the consequences are equally clear, "For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do so shall be cut off from among their people" (v. 29). The prohibition is reiterated a couple chapters later with these words: "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). No Israelite would have questioned what God thought about homosexuality. Though the surrounding Canaanite cultures indulged in such perversions, the people of God knew to avoid all such conduct.²²

Significantly, the sin of homosexuality is listed in Leviticus 18 and 20 in the context of other sexual sins, indicating the categorical timelessness of the prohibitions given in this section. The prohibition here was not limited to the civil or cultural life of OT Israel, a point which both the immediate context and the rest of Scripture confirms.²³ As Roy Gane explains,

In Leviticus 18 and 20 the prohibition of homosexual activity (18:22; 20:13) appears within the same legal framework that also covers incest, adultery, and bestiality. Adultery is independently excluded by the seventh of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:14; Deut.

²²In addition, cross-dressing (Deut 22:5), sex changes (cf. Deut 23:1), and male prostitution (Deut 23:18) were also strictly forbidden.

²³Walt Kaiser (*Toward Old Testament Ethics* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983] 114) contends, "To prohibit homosexuality today, some would argue, would be like forbidding unclean meats. It is admitted, of course, that there is a category of temporary ceremonial laws, but I do not agree that homosexuality is among them. Nothing in its proscription points to or anticipates Christ, and the death penalty demanded for its violation places it in the moral realm and not in temporary legislation."

5:18), all of which, according to the New Testament, have ongoing application for Christians, whether they are Jewish or Gentile and live inside or outside the holy land (Rom. 7:7, 12; 13:9; James 2:11; Cf. Matt. 19:18-19). If these moral laws given to the Israelites are universal and timeless, why would the moral laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 not be the same?²⁴

Thus, homosexuality is viewed in Leviticus as morally equal to sins such as adultery, incest, and bestiality. As noted earlier, such sins are wrong in any age and in any culture, because they violate the design for marriage that God established at creation. As John Walton explains,

[A]s with adultery, incest, and bestiality, it [homosexuality] is wrong because of the nature of the sexual partner. An illicit sexual partner may be married to someone else (adultery), may be a close relative (incest), may be an animal (bestiality), and may be someone of the same gender (homosexuality). Monogamous homosexual relationships are no more acceptable than only committing adultery with one person.²⁵

Some commentators, in an effort to minimize the extent of this instruction, argue that the command itself extends only to OT Jewish men. Thus, it is suggested that the Bible does not prohibit females or non-Jewish males from participating in homosexual acts.²⁶ But such fanciful attempts to defend lesbianism and modern homosexuality ultimately fall flat. For starters, it was because God hated the homosexual perversions of other nations (specifically the Canaanites) that He gave this instruction to the Hebrews.²⁷ Thus, to argue that homosexuality outside Judaism

²⁴Roy Gane, *Leviticus-Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004) 328. Gane continues by citing Acts 15:20, 29 to show that the apostles saw these sexual prohibitions as extending to the Gentile church, under the category of "immorality." He notes that "The New Testament explicitly condemns incest (1 Cor. 5:1), male homosexuality (Rom. 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10), and lesbianism (Rom. 1:26) practiced by any human beings. If we accept the biblical evidence, Christians everywhere are just as accountable to God for avoiding the practices listed in Leviticus 18 as the ancient Israelites were when the legislation was first given. The divine penalty for Israelites was to be "cut off" (18:29), which goes beyond death, and according to 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 the penalty for Christians also goes beyond death."

²⁵John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) 490.

²⁶Jacob Milgrom (*Leviticus* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004] 196) argues that the prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20 apply only to Jewish men and not to non-Jewish men or to women of any ethnicity. He writes, "To those who argue that the Bible enjoins homosexuality, a careful reading of the source text offers a fundamentally different view. While the Bible never applauds homosexuality, neither does it prohibit most people from engaging in it."

²⁷John D. Currid (*A Study Commentary on Leviticus* [Webster, N.Y.: Evangelical Press, 2004] 244) notes, "Not only is homosexuality to be shunned because it is immoral, but it was also a common practice of the Canaanites (see Gen. 19). Even pagan priests are known to have practiced it (see Deut. 23:18; 1 Kings 14:24). The Old Testament condemnation of all sorts of homosexual practices is unique in the

is acceptable to God runs contrary to the very reason God gave such commands to His people. Moreover, although lesbianism is not specifically mentioned in the OT, the Jews understood that it was included in this prohibition—being condemned in the Talmud. It is also directly prohibited in the NT (Rom 1:26-27). Rabbi Jakobovits explains the Jewish understanding of the OT teaching with these words:

Whereas the more liberal attitude found in some modern Christian circles is possibly due to the exaggerated importance Christians have traditionally accorded to the term “love,” Jewish law holds that no hedonistic ethic, even if called “love,” can justify the morality of homosexuality any more than it can legitimize adultery, incest, or polygamy, however genuinely such acts may be performed out of love and by mutual consent.²⁸

God’s utter hatred for homosexual behavior is brought home by the word “abomination,” which describes what God thinks of it, and any other violation of His intended plan for heterosexual marriage. The word occurs repeatedly in this context (18:22, 26, 27, 29, 30; 20:13) and is also “a term especially frequent in the Book of Deuteronomy, [which] refers to an act that is abhorrent or repugnant, such as idolatry and inappropriate worship of God (see Deut 7:25; 27:15; 17:10; 12:31; 18:9-14).”²⁹ In the same way that idolatry is a perpetual offense to God’s moral character, subject to His wrath and condemnation, so also is any perversion of His design for marriage.

The apostle Paul reiterates the prohibition of Leviticus in Rom 1:26-27, where he writes,

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

Both male homosexuality and lesbianism are in view in this passage, with God’s judgment falling on both because they involve unnatural acts (so defined because they violate the design of God for nature).³⁰ The word translated “function” (*chrēsis*)

ancient Near East.” See also Gordon Wenham, “The Old Testament Attitude to Homosexuality,” *ET* 102 (1991):359-63.

²⁸I. Jakobovits, “homosexuality,” *EncJud* 8:961-62. Cited from Mark Rooker, *Leviticus*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000) 247.

²⁹Mark Rooker, *Leviticus* 246.

³⁰Douglas Moo (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996] 115) observes, “In keeping with the biblical and Jewish worldview, the heterosexual desires observed normally in nature are traced to God’s creative intent. Sexual sins that are ‘against nature’ are also, then, against God, and it is this close association that makes it probable that Paul’s appeal to ‘nature’ in this verse include appeal to God’s created order.”

was a common way to speak of sexual intercourse, and in this context can refer to nothing other than homosexual acts. Such behavior stems from “degrading passions”—*passions*, because in reality they are driven by selfish lust and not by true love; and *degrading* passions, because they are a twisted expression of God’s creative design. When man forsakes the Author of nature, he inevitably forsakes the order of nature.³¹

In spite of the clarity of this passage, homosexual advocates have made various attempts at explaining away its force. At least three arguments are advanced:

First, it is claimed that the passage is irrelevant, on the ground that its purpose is neither to teach sexual ethics, nor to expose vice, but rather to portray the outworking of God’s wrath. That is true. But if a certain sexual conduct is to be seen as the consequence of God’s wrath, it must be displeasing to him.³²

Second, it is sometimes suggested that Paul is not referring here to homosexuality in general, but to *pederasty* (homosexual conduct involving an adult male and an adolescent or pubescent youth). Yet, nothing in the text indicates that the term should be limited to such behavior.³³ Moreover, homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world was not limited only to pederasty,³⁴ nor would Paul’s Jewish background have allowed for homosexuality of any kind.³⁵

Third, homosexual advocates argue that Paul is speaking of an individual’s sexual orientation (rather than the created order) when he uses the term “nature.” Thus, for homosexuals, “their relationships cannot be described as ‘unnatural’, since

³¹James Dunn (*Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary [Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1988] 74) points out that “Paul’s attitude to homosexual practice is unambiguous. . . . Homosexuality is seen as a passion which is ‘worthy of no respect.’ Homosexual practice is characterized with the emphasis of repetition as ‘unnatural,’ where Paul uses very Greek and particularly Stoic language to broaden the appeal of the more characteristically Jewish rejection of homosexuality, and where he in effect appeals to his own readers’ common sense to recognize that homosexual practice is a violation of the natural order (as determined by God).”

³²John R. W. Stott, *Romans* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994) 77.

³³Ibid. Stott dismisses this argument with one sentence: “All one can say in response to this suggestion is that the text itself contains no hint of it.”

³⁴Robert Jewett (*Romans*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007] 178-81) demonstrates the widespread nature of homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world, and not just pederasty. For more on this, see the discussion of 1 Corinthians 6 below.

³⁵Hans Conzelmann (*1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] 106) underscores the Jewish view of homosexuality. “The Jewish verdict on the latter is unequivocal.” In the corresponding footnote (n. 35), he writes, “Homosexual intercourse is punished by stoning. For the Jew it is one of the most abhorrent vices of the Gentiles.”

they are perfectly natural to them.”³⁶ However, such far-fetched interpretations are easily refuted (both from the context in Romans and from the way *kata physin* [natural] and *para physin* [unnatural] were used in ancient times).³⁷ Moreover, the thought of “sexual orientation” would have been completely foreign to Paul, and represents an anachronistic attempt to read modern conventions into the biblical text.³⁸

So then, we have no liberty to interpret the noun “nature” as meaning “my” nature, or the adjective “natural” as meaning “what seems natural to me”. On the contrary, *physis* (“natural”) means God’s created order. To act “against nature” means to violate the order which God has established, whereas to act “according to nature” means to behave “in accordance with the intention of the Creator”. Moreover, the intention of the Creator means his original intention. What this was Genesis tells us and Jesus confirmed. . . . God created humankind male and female; God instituted marriage as a heterosexual union; and what God has thus united, we have no liberty to separate.³⁹

Thus, both the general revelation of nature and the special revelation of Scripture bear out the fact that homosexuality goes contrary to God’s intended plan.

To be sure, all human beings are born in sin, and individual people can sometimes have varying tendencies and temptations toward certain sins. But no one is born a homosexual, any more than anyone might be born a thief or a murderer. Those who engage in a lifestyle of unrepentant theft, murder, adultery, or homosexuality do so of their own choice.⁴⁰ And they have only themselves to blame when they

³⁶Stott, *Romans* 77. As an example, Stott cites John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 107ff., who alleges that “the persons Paul condemns are manifestly not homosexual: what he derogates are homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual people” (Boswell, 109).

³⁷Richard Hays (“Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* [Spring 1986] 192) demonstrates that the two terms were “very frequently used . . . as a way of distinguishing between heterosexual and homosexual behaviour” (cited from Stott, *Romans* 77-78).

³⁸*Ibid.*, 200. Hays writes, “[T]o suggest that Paul intends to condemn homosexual acts only when they are committed by persons who are constitutionally heterosexual is to introduce a distinction entirely foreign to Paul’s thought-world.”

³⁹Stott, *Romans* 78. Internal citation from C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975) 1:125.

⁴⁰Craig L. Blomberg (*1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994] 123) writes, “Under no conceivable circumstances can the Bible be made to defend the often-heard allegation that God created homosexuals that way. What genetic component may contribute to homosexual predispositions remains to be determined but, like inherent predispositions to alcoholism, violence, or various diseases, such a component, if demonstrated, would be an offshoot of the fall, not of creation. Equally crucially, genetic predispositions never exempt humans from biblical standards and accountability before God for moral or immoral behavior.”

receive “in their own persons the due penalty of their error.” Not only will they be judged in the next life, as those who will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9); but they also subject themselves to the grotesque physical consequences that come with homosexuality—including sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS and a much higher likelihood of criminal sexual violence.

The Divine Invitation

Isaiah 56, 1 Corinthians 6

Although homosexuality is sharply condemned throughout Scripture, it is important to end any discussion of it by offering hope to those enslaved to such sexual sin. A divine invitation has been extended to all sinners, including homosexuals, and it is this: *You can find freedom and forgiveness at the Cross*. Those who sincerely repent from their sin and lovingly embrace Jesus Christ as their Savior will be forgiven and granted eternal life.

God's willingness to forgive sexual aberrations is seen in the OT, perhaps most clearly with regard to males who had become eunuchs. The Mosaic Law was very clear that God did not approve of eunuchs. “No one who is emasculated or has his male organ cut off shall enter the assembly of the LORD” (Deut 23:1). Whether by his own choice or by the decision of his parents, men who had undergone such a procedure were an abomination to the LORD.⁴¹

Yet, in Isa 56:3-5, the LORD indicates that the eunuch still has hope if he will submit himself to the ways of God. (Of note in this passage is the fact that the eunuch, though incapable of procreating, will be given an everlasting name if he chooses to please the LORD.)

Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say,
 “The LORD will surely separate me from His people.”
 Nor let the eunuch say, “Behold, I am a dry tree.”
 For thus says the LORD,
 “To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths,
 And choose what pleases Me,
 And hold fast My covenant,
 To them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial,
 And a name better than that of sons and daughters;
 I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off.”

Though outside God's plan for his own sexuality, the eunuch who came to God in genuine repentance could be restored to His Creator. This divine invitation is further illustrated in the NT in Acts 8, when the Ethiopian eunuch came to saving faith in

⁴¹In ancient times, parents would sometimes crush the organs of their small boys at the age of ten or so because they thought it would appease the deities.

Jesus Christ through the ministry of Philip (cf. vv. 26-38). Though this man stood condemned under the letter of the Mosaic legal code, he experienced God's grace when the Spirit saved him through the preaching of the gospel.

Salvation hope for homosexuals, extended to them through the divine invitation of the gospel, is made even more explicit in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. In 1 Cor 6:9, the apostle again establishes the fact that homosexuality is, without question, a sin—a behavior that is detestable in the eyes of God. Among his list of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God, Paul includes both the "effeminate" and the "homosexuals."

By the time Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians (in the mid-50s A.D.), homosexuality had been part of Greek and Roman culture for centuries. It has been claimed that both Socrates and Plato were homosexuals, along with fourteen of the first fifteen Roman emperors. Nero, the ruler under whom Paul was eventual martyred, reportedly had a boy named Sporis castrated in order to make him his "wife," in addition to his natural wife.⁴²

So the Corinthian believers were no strangers to homosexuality, having at least a secondhand knowledge of the widespread sexual perversion that permeated the Roman culture. Some of them, due to their pagan pasts, were even more intimately acquainted with the sins of their day. They also understood, per Paul's instruction here, that such lifestyles were utterly unchristian and that those who practiced homosexuality (or any of the other sins in Paul's list) showed themselves to be outside of the kingdom of God.⁴³ Commenting on this verse, Barnett explains,

⁴²Though it is true that pederasty was practiced in the Greco-Roman world (as in this example) we need not assume that Paul had only pederasty in mind when he denounced homosexual practice. Richard Oster (*1 Corinthians*, The College Press NIV Commentary [Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1995] 138-39) gives three reasons why: "1. The historical record is quite clear that homoerotic activity was not confined only to pederasty in the classical world. Homosexual practices also took place between adult men and between adult women. 2. To focus Paul's concern on the sole issue of pederasty reflects, I suspect, modern convictions about the abhorrence of sexual activity (of any kind) with minors. It is very improbable that Paul would have had any theological or cultural problems with sex between adults and minors within the context of marital heterosexuality. Generally speaking, Greek, Roman, and Jewish (first) marriages in Paul's day involved marriage between an adult male and a pubescent girl, usually half the age of her husband. The concept of lawful sex with minors was not the oxymoron that it is perceived to be in modern Western culture. 3. Paul's argumentation against homoeroticism elsewhere [as in Romans 1] makes it clear that it is homoerotic behavior itself, and not just some form of it, that is contrary to nature."

⁴³Gordon H. Clark (*First Corinthians* [Jefferson, Md.: The Trinity Foundation, 1991] 89), commenting on v. 9 states, "Homosexuality is most definitely forbidden, both here and in Romans 1:27. There is also the Old Testament, to which Paul appeals as much as he does to his own apostolic authority." A few sentences later, responding to a liberal interpreter who wishes to dismiss the idea that homosexuality is forbidden in this text, Clark writes, "It is incredible how ridiculous liberals can be."

The biblical norm for sexual expression is clear. It is *either* abstinent singleness *or* heterosexual marriage. This is precisely the teaching of Jesus the Christ (see Matt. 19:3–12) which the Apostles to the Gentiles followed closely (see [1 Cor.] 7:1–40). Anything else is *porneia* / “fornication,” and is not sanctioned by God. . . .

Paul's list is explicit and detailed. He warns, ‘Don't be led astray’ (verse 9), suggesting that among them were those who saw no problem with these activities. They have counterparts today, including some church leaders who sanction behaviour condemned by the Bible. Yet the ‘Holiness Code’ as echoed here by Paul remains as a permanent standard. . . . Those who practice these things will find no place in the kingdom of God.⁴⁴

Yet, though clearly condemning homosexuality as sin, this passage again emphasizes the divine invitation of salvation that extends to homosexuals and to all sinners. Whereas v. 9 explains the bad news—that those who practice homosexuality are on a path toward hell—v. 11 exclaims that such sinners can be saved and cleansed from their sin. The fact was that some of the Corinthian believers had been characterized by such behavior before their conversions. But God in His grace had transformed their lives.

In order to emphasize the change that had taken place in their hearts, Paul uses the strongest Greek adversative particle three times when he says, “*But* you were washed, *but* you were sanctified, *but* you were justified.” What they had been before salvation no longer mattered. What mattered now was that they had been set free from sin through faith in Christ. They were now “washed,” meaning regenerated and cleansed by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; cf. 2 Cor 5:17); “sanctified,” made inwardly holy such that they could now live pure and Spirit-filled lives (cf. Gal 5:16, 22-23); and “justified,” having been clothed in the righteousness of Christ Himself (Rom 3:26; 4:22-25). Put simply, they had experienced total transformation from the inside out, made possible because of the grace that was theirs through the cross.

Conclusion

Without question, any sexual conduct outside heterosexual marriage is clearly forbidden by Scripture. This includes both male homosexuality and lesbianism. Such homosexual unions violate the natural design of marriage as God's holy institution which He established at Creation. God's attitude toward homosexual conduct is demonstrated in His wrath poured out on Sodom; and it is made explicit in His instruction on the subject in both Leviticus and Romans.

Nonetheless, the gospel invitation extends to every sinner—including the homosexual—offering salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life to all who will embrace Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. As He Himself promised: “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). And in

⁴⁴Paul W. Barnett, *1 Corinthians* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000) 96-97.

another place, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out” (John 6:37). Countless former homosexuals, even in recent history, have been changed by the truth of the gospel. They are trophies of divine grace, living proof that the love of God can save sinners from even the most enslaving counterfeits.

Addendum: A Pastoral Perspective on the Gay Agenda⁴⁵

If you’ve been watching the headlines over the last couple years, you may have noticed the incredible surge of interest in affirming homosexuality. Whether it’s at the heart of a religious scandal, political corruption, radical legislation, or the redefinition of marriage, homosexual interests have come to characterize America. That’s an indication of the success of the gay agenda. And some Christians, including some national church leaders, have wavered on the issue even recently. But sadly, when people refuse to acknowledge the sinfulness of homosexuality—calling evil good and good evil (Isa 5:20)—they do so at the expense of many souls.

How should you respond to the success of the gay agenda? Should you accept the recent trend toward tolerance? Or should you side with those who exclude homosexuals with hostility and disdain?

In reality, the Bible calls for a balance between what some people think are two opposing reactions—condemnation and compassion. Really, the two together are essential elements of biblical love, and that’s something the homosexual sinner desperately needs.

Homosexual advocates have been remarkably effective in selling their warped interpretations of passages in Scripture that address homosexuality. When you ask a homosexual what the Bible says about homosexuality—and many of them know—they have digested an interpretation that is not only warped, but also completely irrational. Pro-homosexual arguments from the Bible are nothing but smokescreens—as you come close, you see right through them.

God’s condemnation of homosexuality is abundantly clear—He opposes it in every age, including the patriarchs (Gen 19:1-28); the Law of Moses (Lev 18:22; 20:13); the Prophets (Ezek 16:46-50); and the NT (Rom 1:18-27; 1 Cor 6:9–10; Jude 7-8).

Why does God condemn homosexuality? Because it overturns God’s fundamental design for human relationships—a design that pictures the complementary relationship between a man and a woman (Gen 2:18-25; Matt 19:4-6; Eph 5:22-33).

⁴⁵This is excerpted from an article published on *Pulpit* magazine a couple years ago (“God’s Plan for the Gay Agenda,” October 4, 2006, <http://www.sfupulpit.com/2006/10/04/gods-plan-for-the-gay-agenda/>, accessed 9/29/08). Though it repeats some of the points made above, it provides a condensed approach to this issue from a more pastoral perspective. We trust it will prove helpful to those in ministry.

Why, then, have homosexual interpretations of Scripture been so successful at persuading so many? Simple: people want to be convinced. Since the Bible is so clear about the issue, sinners have had to defy reason and embrace error to quiet their accusing consciences (Rom 2:14-16). As Jesus said, "Men loved the darkness rather than the Light, [because] their deeds were evil" (John 3:19-20).

As a Christian, you must not compromise what the Bible says about homosexuality—ever. No matter how much you desire to be compassionate to the homosexual, your first sympathies belong to the Lord and to the exaltation of His righteousness. Homosexuals stand in defiant rebellion against the will of their Creator who from the beginning "made them male and female" (Matt 19:4).

Don't allow yourself to be intimidated by homosexual advocates and their futile reasoning—their arguments are without substance. Homosexuals, and those who advocate that sin, are fundamentally committed to overturning the lordship of Christ in this world. But their rebellion is useless, for the Holy Spirit says, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9-10; cf. Gal 5:19-21).

So, what is God's response to the homosexual agenda?

Certain and final judgment. To claim anything else is to compromise the truth of God and deceive those who are perishing.

As you interact with homosexuals and their sympathizers, you must affirm the Bible's condemnation. You are not trying to bring damnation on the head of homosexuals; you are trying to bring conviction so that they can turn from that sin and embrace the only hope of salvation for all of us sinners—and that's through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Homosexuals need salvation. They don't need healing—homosexuality is not a disease. They don't need therapy—homosexuality is not a psychological condition. Homosexuals need forgiveness, because homosexuality is a sin.

I don't know how it happened, but a few decades ago someone branded homosexuals with the worst misnomer—"gay." Gay used to mean happy, but I can assure you, homosexuals are not happy people. They habitually seek happiness by following after destructive pleasures. There is a reason Rom 1:26 calls homosexual desire a "degrading passion." It is a lust that destroys the physical body, ruins relationships, and brings perpetual suffering to the soul—and its ultimate end is death (Rom 7:5). Homosexuals are experiencing the judgment of God (Rom 1:24, 26, 28), and thus they are very, very sad.

First Corinthians 6 is very clear about the eternal consequence for those who practice homosexuality—but there's good news. No matter what the sin is, whether homosexuality or anything else, God has provided forgiveness, salvation, and the hope of eternal life to those who repent and embrace the gospel. Right after identifying homosexuals as those who "will not inherit the kingdom of God," Paul

said, "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).

God's invitation to those in homosexual sin is that they repent and turn to Christ for salvation. Former homosexuals were in the Corinthian church back in Paul's day, just as many former homosexuals today are in my church and in faithful churches around the country. With regenerated hearts, they sit in biblical churches throughout the country praising their Savior, along with former fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, coveters, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers. Remember, such were some of you too.

What should be your response to the homosexual agenda? Make it a biblical response—confront it with the truth of Scripture which condemns homosexuality and promises eternal damnation for all who practice it. What should be your response to the homosexual? Make it a gospel response—confront him with the truth of Scripture that condemns him as a sinner, and point him to the hope of salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Stay faithful to the Lord as you respond to homosexuality by honoring His Word, and leave the results to Him.