

Homosexual Partnerships

Biblical and pastoral considerations

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INTRODUCTION

Last week my eldest daughter and her fiancé visited our local government office to register for her planned wedding next summer. The form they were given had two spaces for their full names, both prefixed with 'bride/bridegroom.' It is in line with a law that came into effect here in The Netherlands on 1 April 2001 which states: "A marriage can be contracted by two people of different or the same sex." Once a year the inhabitants of the south of The Netherlands celebrate hold a large carnival. Last year, a number of openly gay men who were also celebrating entered a Roman Catholic church. The priest refused to offer them the communion. What would you have done? This incident hit the headlines for 2 or 3 weeks. Eventually the priest was forced to publically apologize for judging their sexual behavior. The Netherlands does not stand alone on these matters.

During the last half century, much has been said and written about homosexuality. Some explore possible biological and sociological causes of our different sexual orientations, others discuss the legal rights that humans have to express the sexuality of their choice, and others address the moral implications of homosexual behaviour. The arguments have evolved over the decades, and significant attitudinal and legal changes are taking place in many societies. What is good about these changes? Could some of these changes be damaging for society?

As has always been the case, Christian opinion is also changing. Changes that bring us closer to the mind of God should be heartily welcomed and faithfully promoted. Changes that represent a departure from God's revelation should be carefully exposed and firmly rejected.

The following pages are addressed to Christians. Our common ground is that we submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Holy Scriptures. We have chosen to live under the yoke of Christ, which means we accept both the benefits and the restrictions involved in walking with Him, and of submitting to His teaching and authority. We accept a moral standard outside of ourselves. Our heart's desire as we engage in living, is to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).

Does the Bible provide enough evidence to understand God's mind on marriage and on homosexual activity? I believe it does. Perhaps you don't. I would like to warmly invite you to open your mind to consider or reconsider afresh the relevant Scriptures and the answers to contemporary arguments and Biblical interpretations. You may disagree with me here and there, but please continue reading and thinking with me until the end. In this paper I hope to

show that sexual intimacy and sexual intercourse are good and receive God's blessing *only* within the context of a marriage relationship between a man and a woman. Sexual intercourse practised in any other relational context is sin and therefore receives God's disapproval.

This is written, not for those who love controversy, neither for those who seem to need to win arguments. But firstly as an encouragement to those Christians with *pastoral hearts*, who, like God Himself, love, value and seek to help each one of His sheep, regardless of intellectual capacity, financial status, race, age, gender or sexual orientation. Secondly, to *local church leaders*, who are accountable before the Lord to teach the Word, and to encourage decision-making and a lifestyle that is in harmony with that Word. Thirdly, for my dear *fellow believer* who is seeking to live a life pleasing to God while struggling with his or her own sexual orientation.

I openly express my appreciation and indebtedness to many books and websites who have informed and sharpened my thinking and broadened my heart. I am particularly grateful to a number of friends here in Europe and in North and South America who have critically read and commented on earlier manuscripts. I hope and pray that this will be a useful tool not only for Christian communities here in The Netherlands, but also for my brothers and sisters in other parts of the world. The re-defining of marriage that has occurred here can also occur where you live. We need to prepare our minds and hearts to present, in grace, a clear Biblical message.

In the first two chapters we shall explore the context of today's homosexual debate. In chapters 3 and 4 we shall look at the Holy Scriptures for guidance on marriage and homosexual activity. The last two chapters are pastoral in nature, chapter 5 offering encouragement and hope to Christians who struggle with their sexual orientation, and chapter 6 containing some tips for those with warm hearts who seek to help others.

As we progress, may our prayer be like that of David: "Show me the way I should go...Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground" Psalm 143:8,10.

Chapter 1

Understanding the Controversy

In any controversy, it is always useful to take the time to listen carefully to those you think you disagree with. If we love those we disagree with and begin to understand what they really mean, the difference is usually reduced and sometimes even disappears. To start with, let's clarify some basic ideas and expressions.

The 'third sex'

When designing and creating the human race, God could have made just one gender. He could also have chosen for a humanity with 3 or more genders. God chose, however, to make two genders: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). Thousands of years later, Scripture still classifies humanity in the same two groups: male and female (Gal. 3:28). Homosexuality should not be understood as another gender. There is no such thing as a 'third sex.' This terminology only confuses the issues involved. Every human, including those with a homosexual orientation, are either male or female¹. Awareness and acceptance of this fact forms the basis of our sexual identity.

Sexual Orientation

During or after adolescence, a person normally develops a sexual interest in the opposite sex. This attraction expresses itself through our emotions, fantasies and behaviour. Our 'sexual orientation' is whether we find the opposite sex or the same sex as ourselves attractive. Usually sexual orientation is heterosexual, that is, we feel attracted sexually to people of the opposite gender. But sometimes the orientation may be homosexual (gay or lesbian) or bisexual (attracted to both genders). The active lifestyle a person chooses to engage in is referred to as his or her 'sexual behaviour.'

Is homosexual orientation sin?

The Bible references to sexuality prescribe human 'sexual behaviour' and correct sexual misbehaviour. The Lord God does not single out the homosexual practice for specific condemnation, rather, He disapproves of and condemns *all* sexual intimacy and intercourse outside a Biblically defined marriage. Even extramarital sexual fantasies are condemned (Matt. 5:28). The Bible seeks to encourage a healthy sex life, which requires a healthy thought life. The apostle Paul, who maybe never married or was a widower early, also encourages Christians to discipline their minds, writing, "clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Rom. 13:14).

The Bible does not distinguish between 'sexual orientation' and 'sexual practice'. This does not mean that the difference is not real. It is generally agreed that we don't consciously choose our sexual orientation, although our environment and lifestyle choices may influence

¹ Leaving aside the very few medical cases of genetically induced intersexuality.

it. The consciousness of our sexual orientation develops in time. Our sexual orientation could be understood as an internal force, a longing, a pressure, something similar to hunger and thirst. We either please or displease the Lord in the way we allow ourselves to express that force.

We are all tempted in different ways. The intensity of the temptation will also differ between people depending on their own personal characteristics. A homosexual orientation could be understood as a weakness for a particular set of sins. A man with a homosexual orientation will experience a stronger temptation to sin with men than with women. A man with a heterosexual orientation has a weakness for a different set of sins: he will experience a stronger temptation to sin with women than with men. Those with bisexual orientation feel tempted by both genders. Since we are not responsible for the temptations we experience neither are we responsible for our sexual orientation. We are responsible for our sexual behaviour and not for our sexual orientation.

Some see in Romans 1 a reference to sexual orientation: "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another... God gave them over to shameful lusts... men... were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion" (1:24-17). But notice that these "sinful desires" and "shameful lusts" are expressions of a sexual orientation and not the sexual orientation itself. A person with a heterosexual orientation can also experience "sinful desires" and "shameful lusts." Whatever our sexual orientation may be, we are called to resist temptation and "do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:12-14). Remember, we are always responsible before God for what we allow ourselves to think, to believe, to say and to do.

But God made me homosexual

Some say that since God made them gay or lesbian, it is their duty to celebrate the way God made them. Being homosexual is like being left-handed. How can it be wrong for a person to express who he is? Everyone should enjoy the freedom to actively live their God-given sexual orientation – whatever that may be. This line of thinking has two problems.

- (a) The cause of a homosexual orientation is still not known: Current literature and most scholars in the field state that sexual orientation is probably not determined by any one factor but by a combination of genetic, hormonal, family dynamics and other environmental influences. Therefore, with our current state of scientific understanding, it is not possible to affirm with certainty: "I was born with a homosexual orientation."

In time perhaps science will discover some genetic cause for the homosexual orientation. Maybe a genetic link does not exist. The point is that, even if a genetic cause is found, this would not help clarify the moral status of the homosexual

orientation. Evidently we are all born with a different set of good and bad characteristics.

- (b) We are the product not only of God's creation but also of the fall: The Bible makes it clear that the entrance of sin into the world has profoundly affected all of creation. Children are now born with physical as well as mental defects. One of my four children was born with a serious congenital heart disorder. We are very aware that birth defects can cause serious limitations and lead to genuine pain and frustration. It is the sad reality of living in a fallen world. Fortunately, sometimes therapies, medicine or surgical intervention may correct birth defects, or at least improve quality of life or life expectancy. There is also hope for all types of moral defects.

If 'homosexual orientation' is present at birth, it does not follow that it is 'good', neither that God approves that it should be allowed to be expressed sexually. We are born, for example, with a tendency to be selfish but God does not approve of the expression of our selfishness. God does not make a selfish person neither does He make a homosexual person. We are all born with different weaknesses, but we remain responsible for our behaviour. Like selfishness, stubbornness or a hot temper, a 'homosexual orientation' could also be considered a birth defect that requires attention.

Living in a changing culture

During these last 70 or 80 years, those who consider a homosexual lifestyle a valid lifestyle option, have successfully lobbied some governments (1) to decriminalize homosexual behaviour, (2) to legally protect such against any form of discrimination, (3) to promote the homosexual lifestyle in the education system as a natural alternative option, and (4) to obtain legal recognition of the 'same-sex marriage.' Currently some countries and states grant same-sex couples full Civil Marriage rights. Other countries use terms like "Civil Partnership" or "Civil Union" to officially recognize them and to grant them the rights of a Civil Marriage - usually with one or two restrictions. In the appendix you will find more details of these developments.

The homosexual debate has moved from the political arena to the church, and now Christians are required to respond to these social and legal developments. How have Christians reacted? Some have displayed irrational fear of homosexuals. Some express their disagreement with disrespect, even with physical violence. Clearly such 'fleshly' reactions meet the disapproval of the Lord Jesus. Surely there is a correct and an incorrect way of being 'salt' and 'light' in this world (Matt. 5:13-16). That said, it has become more and more difficult for a Christian doctor, Bible scholar or church leader to express any degree of concerns about current developments without being branded 'unloving,' 'intolerant,' 'homophobic' or a 'religious fundamentalist.'

The charge of being homophobic

A person is a *homophobic* if he or she has an irrational fear of homosexual people. Some ill-informed people, including Christians are clearly homophobic. People with any kind of a 'phobia' have a personal problem that needs counselling, therapy or medical treatment. The fact is that many people, Christian and non-Christian, may disapprove of a homosexual intercourse without being at all homophobic. Some brand all opponents of the 'homosexual

marriage' as 'homophobic,' implying that all their opponents have a personal problem that needs counselling, therapy or medical attention. A constructive interchange requires a careful choice of words.

What is the Christian controversy really about?

To engage constructively in this debate, it is important to understand the central point of Christian homosexual controversy.

The traditional Christian position is that sexual intimacy and sexual intercourse are good and receive God's blessing ONLY within the context of a marriage relationship between a man and a woman. Sexual intercourse practised in any other relational context is sin. For example, God strongly disapproves of group sex, casual sex, sex before marriage, adultery, rape, prostitution, child molestation, sex with animals, sex with dead persons and all forms of homosexual sex.

Those in the Christian camp who support 'same-sex marriage' agree *nearly* completely with the traditional Christian position. Observe carefully the difference.

They hold that sexual intimacy and sexual intercourse are good and receive God's blessing ONLY within the context of a marriage relationship. *This marriage relationship may be heterosexual (if you are heterosexually oriented) or homosexual (if you are homosexually oriented)*. Sexual intercourse practised in any other relational context is sin. They will also passionately agree that God strongly disapproves of group sex, casual sex, sex before marriage, adultery, rape, prostitution, child molestation, sex with animals and sex with dead persons and with all *other* forms of homosexual sex.

Notice that the key difference is the definition of marriage. Does our heavenly Father approve of an exclusively faithful, enduring and loving sexual relationship between two men or between two women? Can two men or two women be considered 'married' before God? Does God also 'join these together' (Matt. 19:6). Does the Bible provide enough guidance for Christians to have certainty about God's mind in this issue?

Room for further study

There are two important and necessary themes which require serious study and discussion, but which go beyond the scope of this paper: (1) Can surgery effectively change the sexual identity of a person? And (2) Should Christians influence government in order to impose their Biblical standard on a non-Christian world?

(1) Effects of surgery: A *transsexual*, is a person who feels she is a woman but has the body of a man, or vice-versa. It is a serious sexual identity problem. This is not the same as a *transvestite*, who experiences some form of erotic pleasure in wearing clothes of the other gender. This was forbidden under the Mosaic law (Deut. 22:5). A *hermaphrodite* is a person who displays both masculine and feminine physical features. In recent years, hermaphrodite and transsexual people have the possibility to define their sexual identity through surgery and hormonal treatments. This treatment will help define with clarity the gender of the hermaphrodite and help the transsexual attain a preferred gender. What is the status when

such marry? Can surgery effectively change the sexual identity of a person? These developments raise a set of difficult but necessary ethical issues.

(2) Law and politics: Unless the laws of the land clearly contradicts God's commands, Christians are encouraged to submit to them. Why? Because the "authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted... for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing" (Rom. 13:1-6). Since the authorities are God's servants, should Christians lobby government to make it illegal to practice certain sins? Which sins? Most would agree that the sin of murder and theft should be punished by the state, but what about blasphemy and adultery? Should Christians oppose laws that allow its citizens the freedom to disobey the Word of God? These and similar useful but controversial questions go beyond the purpose of this paper. Here we seek to explore the Biblical teaching that affects our thoughts, attitudes and behaviour within the Christian community.

Questions for reflection or group discussion:

1. What is the difference between 'homosexual orientation' and 'homosexual practice'? Do you consider this a useful distinction? Explain.
2. If scientist were to discover a genetic causes that explains why some children are born with a 'homosexual orientation,' would that change the way the church should view 'homosexual partnerships'? Why?
3. Explain in your own words the difference between the traditional Christian position on marriage and how it differs from those who support the 'homosexual marriage.'

Chapter 2

Support for the 'homosexual marriage'

Some may ask how can the Bible be used to support homosexual relationships. In this chapter we shall consider a number of reasons put forward in support of accepting, or at least not condemning the 'homosexual marriage.' In this chapter you will find 14 arguments, each followed by a response. Ensure you understand well the argument before you move on to the response.

- (1) We really love each other: "Love comes from God" (1 John 4:7) and is the greatest thing in the world (Mark 12:31). In fact "Love is the fulfilment of the law" (Rom. 13:10). True love can be experienced between two homosexuals. The quality of their relationship can be the same as that between heterosexuals. If God has given that gift of love to two persons of the same gender, how can the church brand it as sin? God's gifts should be received with gratitude.

Love is certainly a gift from God, but it is never the only factor used to determine what is right and wrong. The quality of the relationship does not authenticate it. When Jesus said that loving God and your neighbour was the greatest commandment, He didn't discard all other commandments. A man may experience deep and genuine love towards another man's wife, but this love does not justify adultery. All true love between humans is given by God but the different possible ways this love is expressed is regulated in Scripture. Love needs law to direct it. A Christian may genuinely love many people, and express that love in a number of ways, but the sexual expression of love is restricted to marriage. This sexual expression of love outside the Biblically approved relational context must be resisted.

- (2) The 'homosexual marriage' is a 'disputable matter': Since it is evident that Christian scholars today can't agree on the Biblical position on homosexuality, therefore the whole subject can be labelled a 'disputable matter.' We now should follow the apostolic instructions in Romans 14:1 and "accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters." The Christian community should learn to love and accept all Christians regardless of their personal convictions and practice on this 'disputable matter.'

The reality is that Christian doctrines such as the deity of Christ, the three-in-one nature of God, who will be saved, the existence of heaven and hell, all experience a degree of controversy. It is not correct to suggest that the greater the controversy the less important the doctrine. We cannot label as "disputable matter" a teaching of Scripture simply because it generates controversy. Discussion between sincere Christians is a positive invitation to each one of us to get engaged, to study and reflect God's word, to seek the mind of God on a particular subject. The apostle Paul was involved in a number of controversies. He got involved because he was convinced there was a truth and an error, a right and a wrong. He therefore encouraged Timothy to "reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this" (2 Tim. 2:7).

- (3) God loves and accepts all humans 'just as they are': "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Rom. 15:7). Once a practising homosexual has become a Christian, the church should receive him.

The church is supposed to be "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). Disapproval of a lifestyle is not the same as rejecting a person. True conversion is a change of heart that will lead to a change in lifestyle. The Lord Jesus asked, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). The gospel, the good news is that God the Father condemns all sin but joyfully receives all who come to Him with a repentant heart. The Christian community should exercise the same grace and learn to accept and welcome every repentant sinner, regardless of their past sin. Romans 14 and 15 deal with opinions about certain customs, but don't apply to a sinful lifestyle.

- (4) In Christ there is no male nor female: In the first creation, God made a difference between male and female. But Christians are part of a "new creation," where gender no longer is an issue: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). In Christ it doesn't matter if a person is a man or a woman. In Christ it doesn't matter if a person loves and marries a man or a woman. A Christian is free to love and marry a fellow Christian of the gender that best suits both of them.

The theme Paul is discussing in Galatians 3:26-29 is salvation, not sex and marriage. He is making clear who are "sons of God" (v.26), who have been "baptized into Christ" (v.27), who are "one in Christ Jesus" (v.28), who "belong to Christ... are Abraham's seed" and "heirs according to the promise" (v.29). The apostle's point is that all humans have equal access to salvation. To receive the gift of salvation it does not matter if you are Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. But marriage and sex, like eating, working and resting, belong to God's first creation. As Christians we enjoy the benefits and the limitations of both the first and the new creation.

- (5) Positive Biblical examples: In Scriptures we find some very loving and stable same gender relationships that look very similar to homosexual marriages. The Bible describes them in a positive non-judgemental way. For example, we read of a special relationship between Jonathan and David, such that, "Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself" and "Jonathan was very fond of David" (1 Sam. 18:1, 19:1). When Jonathan died, David opened his heart and said, "Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women" (2 Sam. 1:26). We find also a very special relationship between two women. Ruth says to Naomi, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay... Where you die I will die.. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me" (Ruth 1:16-18).

These same gender relationships show that same gender friendships can be rich, meaningful and edifying. But there is nothing in these stories to suggest that these relationships had a sexual component. Both David and Ruth enjoyed heterosexual marriages. Therefore these Biblical narratives provide no endorsement to homosexual partnerships or homosexual marriages.

- (6) Jesus did not condemn the homosexual practice: The Lord Jesus was very outspoken about the sin he saw around him. But He did not condemn and did not even mention homosexual practice. He accepted the invitation to eat and stay to the home of two men in a town called Emmaus (Luke 24:13-36). This would be a natural setting to say something about homosexuality. But He didn't. The Lord's example of acceptance and extreme restraint should also characterize today's Christians.

The Lord Jesus did speak out against sin, especially those evident in the religious community (Matt. 23:27). It was not the Lord's goal to identify and speak out against every possible form of sin. The Lord Jesus explained His mission when He said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). Furthermore, the four Gospels contain only a selection of everything the Lord Jesus said and did. There are many sins, such as incest and bestiality, which are not explicitly addressed by the Lord Jesus. It may well be that the Lord had no need to condemn homosexuality because the practice was generally considered unacceptable. Similarly, He did not condemn murder or theft. But He did address more prevalent or socially tolerated sins such as greed, adultery and religious hypocrisy. It is dangerous to interpret silence as a sign of approval.

We are told that one of the two disciples who walked to Emmaus was a man named Cleopas (Luke 24:18). Some traditions suggest that both disciples were male. One tradition states that the second disciple was Luke. But the Bible text itself does not approve or disprove such traditions. Among the group gathered in Jerusalem there were both male and female disciples (24:1,9,22). The pair of disciples who were travelling to Emmaus could well have been a husband and wife. The facts we know about these two disciples are: one was male and the other was not one of the original Eleven disciples (24:33).

- (7) Scripture is culturally conditioned: The writers of Scripture were limited in knowledge and wrote within their cultural context. The few scriptures that present homosexual relations in a negative light are a reflection of the culture of the writer. Since today homosexual partnerships and 'homosexual marriages' are accepted by government and culture, the church must also learn to accept them.

It is true that the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of Scripture using the human characteristics of each writer. Cultural expressions are clearly evident in Scripture. But God instituted heterosexual monogamous marriage in the beginning (Gen. 2:24) before cultures began. What God has spoken in the beginning and the Lord Jesus has later endorsed (Matt. 19:4-6) we have no authority to change.

- (8) Movement in progressive revelation: God's revelation in Scripture is clearly progressive. In time, God reveals more of Himself and of His will. For example, the Old Testament seems to accept *slavery*. Later, in the New Testament, Christians are asked to love their slaves and treat Christians ones as their brothers. Today we have moved a step further, following this progression, and abolished slavery completely. The status of *women* is another example: The lot of women had improved between the Old to the New Testament. Jesus, for example, encouraged women to join the men and sit at His feet and learn. He used women as key witnesses of His resurrection. Today women experience equality with men. Similarly, the status of the *homosexual*

relationship continues to change: In Bible times the homosexual relationships involved violence, exploitation, manipulation or were part of some pagan ritual. They were, therefore, strongly forbidden. The New Testament extols the virtues of loving, caring, faithful relationships. Today Christians are learning to follow this movement in progressive revelation by accepting loving, caring and faithful homosexual partnerships while continuing to firmly reject all negative homosexual relationships.

It is clear that God has chosen to reveal Himself and His will to mankind progressively over time. His administration of His interests on earth have also changed over time. But nowhere has God forbidden the abolition of slavery. This development does not encounter resistance in Scripture. Men and woman were created with significant and complementary differences, and yet both equal bearers of God's image (Gen. 1:27). Homosexual activity, as we shall see in chapter 4, experiences God's consistent disapproval: The Mosaic law forbade it for the Israelites, and the New Testament forbids it for the Christian. There is no room for movement or progression.

- (9) Sexual expression is indispensable to humanness: Humans beings are sexual beings. To deny a human the expression of his or her sexual orientation is to reduce the person to something less than human.

Sexuality is an important part of our being, but it is not correct to say that sexual activity is indispensable in order to be fully human. The Lord Jesus was fully human, perfectly human, and yet He did not marry. Both marriage and singleness are a calling from God. As a person lives his calling, his humanness is not in any way enhanced or diminished (Matt. 19:12; 1 Cor. 7:27-40). The hard reality of life is that, for various reasons, many people will never have the opportunity to experience sexual intercourse. Some will have no choice. But we can be fully human without sexual activity.

- (10) Tolerance is required in a fallen world: It is good to aim for the ideal, but in practice we have to be realistic and adapt to the facts of a fallen world. God's original intent was that marriage should last a lifetime, but due to sin, a marriage may terminate with a divorce. In Matthew 19:8-9 Jesus explained the difference between an allowed and a not-allowed divorce. The Bible also disapproves of a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever (2 Cor. 6:14). But not-allowed marriages and not-allowed divorces do occur. The church must express its disagreement with both. But after a number of years, the church no longer insists on separation but learns to accept and receive such non-ideal marriages and their families. Similarly, the church should preach against homosexual relationships, but if a 'homosexual marriage' takes place, and they prove themselves to be a loving, stable and enduring relationship, the church must also learn to receive them.

It is true that we live in a fallen world and that every congregation must learn to respond and build with non-ideal people and non-ideal relationships. The Church of Christ is designed to be and to function as "Christ's body," not in heaven but in this fallen world. The corruptness of fallen humanity has not taken God by surprise. In the Bible He has given instructions on how a local church should handle non-ideal people and non-ideal relationships. When sin is evident, the church should humbly encourage those involved to repent and then change

behaviour and lifestyle. Sometimes the Lord expects radical action. On being forgiven, such believers are “clean,” “sanctified” and “justified” (1 Cor. 6:10-11). The sin should no longer be held against a forgiven believer, but he or she should be restored to church fellowship (Gal. 6:1-2).

Notice that a non-ideal marriage is welcomed into church fellowship not because many years have elapsed, but because they have recognized and repented from a sin, and because a divorce would be even worse than staying together. Genuine repentance has encouraged them to do whatever was in their power to set things right in their past. Their genuine repentance has led to God’s abundant forgiveness. But it is evident that true repentance may not always lead to separation. Sometimes it does. The Spirit of God will give local church leaders the wisdom they need to handle each case. But the comparison between a non-ideal marriage and a ‘homosexual marriage’ is not a valid one. The non-ideal marriage may be sinful but it is “natural” (Rom. 1:26, 27). Even genuine repentance does not transform a homosexual relationship into a ‘natural’ one.

- (11) Sexual abstinence is not a realistic option: The sexual drive that God has placed in every human is so strong, that it is unrealistic to require a person to live his or her whole life in sexual abstinence.

The sexual drive is a positive and powerful instinct shared by both humans and animals. But to suggest that such instinct cannot be controlled is degrading humanity, it reduces humans to the level of animals. It is human to have the capacity to consciously choose between different possible actions. Solomon observed: “Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control” (Prov. 25:28). If God calls a Christian to sexual abstinence He will also provide the power to obey His calling. “Self-control” is described as a “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22-23). The life of faith has always contained that inner struggle between instinct and obligation, between desire and duty, between feelings and God’s revealed will. The Lord Jesus promised all His followers a “full,” an “abundant” life (John 10:10) – but never an easy life. He describes the Christian life as a “narrow gate” and a “narrow road,” but, He promises, that this narrow road is the road that “leads to life” (Matt. 7:13,14). It’s worth it!

- (12) To discriminate against homosexuals is an act of injustice: In the past the church and society in general discriminated against slaves, black people and women. Thankfully in many parts of the world these groups have been liberated. The current battle is to set the homosexual community free. Their rights have been suppressed for too long. The ‘homosexual marriage’ should receive complete approval and treated as normal and equal to the ‘heterosexual marriage’ in every society and also in the Christian church.

The word ‘liberation’ suggests some form of oppression. Slaves, black people, religious minorities and women, for example, have experienced negative discrimination in politics and the market place due to their social status, race, religion or gender. From what form of oppression do practising homosexual men and women need liberating? Christians would strongly agree that homosexuals should be loved and accepted like fellow human beings, and that they should be free from the effects of hostility and homophobia. But the same Christians are in no position to encourage freedom from God’s revealed will. To break free

from what is true or morally right is no genuine liberation. It is confusion. The word 'justice' is not meaningful in this context.

The Bible does not single out the homosexual for special attention. God deeply loves every sinner but deeply disapproves of his sinful lifestyle. All Christians should do the same. God loves the adulterer but strongly disapproves of adultery. Adultery is a sin that may have negative consequences socially and eternally. To accept adultery as good and normal in the name of 'justice' is a misuse of the word 'justice.' If God reveals His will for marriage we have no authority to approve alternative social arrangements. Some may choose to walk the road of departure. Such should not expect the approval of God and the Christian church. Such departure is not an expression of Christian liberty. True freedom is found in submitting and walking under the yoke of Christ.

- (13) God is positively active in gay-affirming churches: The Christian churches that welcome and accept the 'homosexual marriage' as a valid alternative also show clear evidence that God is working among them. People are genuinely saved in those churches, and salvation requires the work of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is answered in such churches. The fact that God has chosen to bless such churches and bless the ministry of actively homosexual Christian ministers, is clear evidence that God also approves of the 'homosexual marriage.'

The God of the Bible is a loving God. He seeks to save every lost sinner because He loves the lost sinner. God is also a Holy God. He disapproves and condemns sin wherever it is found. How can God act in a world so tainted by sin? Are heterosexual Christian ministers free of all forms of sin? Are you 100% free of sinful thoughts and attitudes? Clearly not. And yet, the Lord God desires to use us. It is God's amazing grace that allows Him to use and bless defective humans.

The serious and dangerous error is to try to turn the argument around: the fact that God blesses defective humans does not mean that He approves of their defects. Sin remains sin. God's revealed high standard remains. Consider the following Biblical example: God told Moses the second time to speak to a rock and He promised that water would flow out. Moses disobeyed, he hit the rock! God then responded by splitting the rock and providing a stream of water. God's grace motivated Him to perform this miracle and satisfy the thirst of Israel. The fact is that God blessed Moses' act of disobedience. But notice that we cannot turn this argument around: It is not correct to say that because God blessed, he approved of Moses' disobedience. Moses was personally held responsible for this disobedience. The blessings of God that we may see in a church are no evidence that God approves all its theology or the lifestyle of its leaders. All blessings are only evidence of God's amazing grace.

- (14) The Bible does not condemn 'enduring homosexual partnerships': There are two types of homosexual relationships, the casual affair and the enduring partnership. The Bible only contemplates and condemns the casual affair homosexual relationship. God has designed sexual intimacy to be enjoyed in a loving, caring, faithful and stable monogamous relationship. These 'enduring partnerships' may be heterosexual or homosexual depending on the person's sexual orientation.

The Bible doesn't explicitly address the morality of free market economics, internet pornography or euthanasia. The word of God contains positive principles relating to the use of finances, use of our mind and the sanctity of life. Sometimes, but not always, the Lord states explicitly a couple of prohibitions to illustrate or clarify boundaries. The Bible does not contain an exhaustive list of sins. This is simply not possible. The Christian life does not consist in looking for sins in the Bible and then trying to avoid them. The Christian that desires to please the Lord focuses his attention on that which is positively pleasing to the Lord – he delights in pleasing his Master (Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 5:10, 1John 3:22). If prohibitions exist, he will also take them seriously.

It is true that Scripture does not explicitly address 'enduring homosexual partnerships.' Neither does it explicitly condemn, for example, a loving, caring, faithful, stable and sexual relationship between three humans such as between two men and a woman. But, as we shall see in the following chapter, both of these arrangements enter in conflict with the positive teaching of the Lord Jesus.

Questions for reflection or group discussion:

1. Were any of the 14 arguments new to you? Did you have a problem understanding any of the arguments? Have you heard of another argument? Discuss.
2. In your view, which two of these 14 reasons provides the strongest support for the 'homosexual marriage'? Why?
3. Do you disagree with one or more of the responses? Was there something missing? How could it be corrected or improved?

Chapter 3

Marriage as described in the Bible

The Biblical notion of marriage and sexual intercourse is not defined in term of a collection of prohibitions. They are presented in Scripture in a positive way. They are gifts to be celebrated. The texts that restrict sexual activity to a heterosexual marriage and forbid it in all other relational contexts are given by God to protect something good. They are not arbitrary complications that restrict our freedom and need to be worked out of the way. Walls and fences in the right place are a blessing, they protect and preserve something good.

Moses and the Old Testament

The first two chapters in Genesis point to God's initial design: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (1:27). He made a man first and then a woman, and then God "brought her to the man" (2:22). God's design is that the man should "leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (2:24). Their physical bodies were designed so that they would fit together, complement each other, so that together, in a pleasurable heterosexual union, they would propagate the human race.

In the Mosaic law we find a number of prohibitions that place some boundaries on the expression of sexual desire. We shall look at some of these in the following chapter. Although the Christian church has historically presented sexual activity as a 'necessary evil' even within marriage, this attitude was not based on Scripture. The Song of Solomon describes a husband and a wife finding pleasure in each other's bodies. Clearly sex has to do with procreation, but procreation is not its only function. Notice that reproduction and children are not even mentioned in the Song of Solomon.

The prophets also uphold the heterosexual marriage. Some of them were married themselves; some, like Hosea, had a difficult marriage, but never a same-sex marriage (Hos. 1-3). Malachi reminds his readers that it is God who joins a husband and a wife, and that God expects faithfulness in that heterosexual (note reference to 'offspring') covenant relationship of marriage: "The LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not *the LORD* made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth" (Mal. 2:14-15).

The prophet Isaiah even uses the physical enjoyment experienced between a husband and a wife to illustrate God's delight over His own people: "As a young man marries a maiden... as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Is. 62:5).

Paul and the Apostolic teaching

On the ethics of marriage, the New Testament builds on the moral high ground of the Old Testament. Marriage and sex are presented in a very positive light. Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus was in no way degraded by experiencing sexual intimacy with Joseph after the Lord Jesus was born (Mat 1:24, 25). The apostle Peter had a wife (Mat. 8:14) and so did a

number of the other apostles (1 Cor. 9:5). Among the requirements for elders and deacons in the local church was that, if they were married, they should have a monogamous heterosexual relationship (1 Tim. 3: 2, 8-11; Titus 1:6). Instructions for the Christian households take for granted the presence of a heterosexual couple, giving advice on how husbands should treat their wives and vice versa (Col. 3:18-4:1; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

On two opportunities the apostle Paul devotes considerable attention to the relationship between the husband and the wife within the context of marriage:

(1) 1 Corinthians 7: The apostle is very aware of strength of the sexual desire, and how this can lead to expressions that God disapproves of (1 Cor. 6:9-11) – “He who sins sexually sins against his own body” (1 Cor. 6:18-20). But in the following chapter, sexual intercourse within a heterosexual marriage is presented as the good, positive and God-ordained way to satisfy such strong desires. “But since there is so much immorality, *each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband...* The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other...” (7:2-5). The chapter then lists a number of possible domestic problems, that is, problems between a husband and a wife. Marriage is presented as a heterosexual relationship, in which, “a married man is concerned about... how he can please his wife... a married woman is concerned about... how she can please her husband” (7:33-34). There seems to be a basic assumption that Paul's readers would be married heterosexually.

The apostle is also very aware that there is a struggle associated with sexual purity, that the desires of our body are strong, and that to live according to God's high standard requires focused living: “Run in such a way as to get the prize... Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Cor. 9: 24-27). In this race we shall all experience temptations, some more than others, and the apostle encourages us with a great promise which is based on God's faithfulness: “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

(2) Ephesians 5: This chapter starts by encouraging its readers to “live a life of love” (5:1), to “live as children of light” (5:8) and to “be careful, then, how you live” (5:15). It lists a number of attitudes and activities that are not compatible with Christian living, among them is a reference to sexuality: “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people” (5:3). Then the apostle moves on to describe how this ‘love’ and ‘light’ are to be expressed within marriage: “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (5:22-25). Much has been written about these verses, but here I wish to draw your attention to one obvious fact, namely, that the relationship envisioned in marriage is heterosexual, that of a ‘wife’ and a ‘husband.’

The apostle goes further, and uses that loving, man-woman, non-interchangeable relationship as a picture of Christ and the church. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church” (5:31-32). In the following chapter, children are encouraged to obey their parents, that is, to honour a man and a woman - their ‘father’ and their ‘mother’ (6:1-3).

There can be no doubt that the New Testament speaks openly and positively about marriage and heterosexual intimacy within marriage.

The positive teaching of Jesus

Whatever your view on the teachings of Moses and of the apostle Paul, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ should be defining for all who call themselves Christians. When the Pharisees tried to engage the Lord Jesus in a debate on the technicalities of marriage and divorce, He responded with clear and positive teaching about marriage:

“ ‘Haven't you read,’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate’ ” Matthew 19:4-6.

Notice that the teaching of the Lord Jesus on sex and marriage is built on three fundamental affirmations.

(1) God Himself created two humans, male and female. Here the Lord Jesus is quoting Genesis 1:27. He is answering a current question on divorce by drawing their attention to God’s original design. God did not make three or more genders. He chose to make two genders: male and female. God did not make a number of men and a number of women so that each could feel at liberty as to how they would pair up. He intentionally created only two, one man and one woman.

(2) God Himself invented and instituted marriage. Here the Lord Jesus is quoting Genesis 2:24. He describes a decisive and public moment when the man leaves his parent’s household to form a new unit, a new family. He leaves it in order to cleave to a woman, his wife. He still honours his “father and mother,” but his priority and primary human commitment is now towards his wife. Marriage is God’s invention and not a social human arrangement.

The verse Jesus quotes (v.24) comes towards the end of Genesis chapter 2, in which we are told how God created man out of the dust of the ground (v.7), and then woman out of the rib of Adam (v.22). Some suggest that the verse Jesus quotes is a latter scribal didactic addition, since it is obvious that Adam and Eve had no “father and mother” to leave. Verse 24 is definitely a teaching text and it is also true that Adam had no parents to leave, but, according to the Lord Jesus, the source of this didactic text is not a well meaning scribe but the Creator Himself.

(3) God Himself joins a man and a woman together. In this third affirmation, the Lord Jesus makes it clear that marriage is not merely a human contract or agreement but a Divine act in which God changes its participants: they are no longer two but one flesh. On getting married, they both acquire a set of God-given rights and responsibilities, rights and responsibilities they did not have before getting married. This “one flesh” clearly includes the sexual union of the husband and the wife, but it involves much more. It also includes fidelity. At the decisive moment of marriage, God says that He intervenes and in some way ‘joins’ a man and a woman. This special, unique and Divine ‘joining’ is only mentioned in connection with a man and a woman.

What God has said in the beginning, what the Lord Jesus has endorsed, no Christian, no church, no group of Christians has the authority to change or contradict.

In the following chapter we shall look at the texts in the Bible that have been historically used by Christians to disapprove of all homosexual relationships. But before we explore the prohibition texts, it is very important to take note that the idea of a ‘same-sex marriage’ does violence to these three fundamental affirmations taught by the Lord Jesus. The Christian definition on marriage is based not on prohibitions but on the positive teaching of Scripture.

Questions for reflection or group discussion:

1. Do you agree that the Bible presents a positive view of the physical relationship between a husband and a wife in marriage? Why do you think some Christians view sex as ‘a necessary evil’? Does it matter how a Christian views this? Discuss.
2. The Bible teaches that marriage is not a socially invented arrangement, it is not only a person-to-person contract, but that God ‘unites’ a man and a woman when they marry. What do you think this ‘joining’ means? Is this significant? Explain.
3. In what ways do you consider that the ‘same-sex marriage’ enters in conflict with the teaching of the Lord Jesus?

Chapter 4

Scriptural Prohibitions

The Bible joyfully celebrates sexual intimacy within the confines of a monogamous heterosexual marriage. There are however a number of texts in Scripture that explicitly prohibit or condemn some forms of sexual activity, but their number is small in comparison with the positive teaching about God's plan for sexuality and marriage.

The prohibition Bible texts that are normally used in the Christian homosexual debate may be arranged in five clusters. We shall look at all these restrictive texts, cluster by cluster. After a brief description, we present an 'alternative view,' which some use who believe that the Bible allows or at least does not disapprove of the 'same-sex marriage.' Each 'alternative view' is followed by a response.

(1) Events at Sodom and Gibeah

In Sodom, a gentile city, Lot offers hospitality to two male visitors (Gen. 19:1-1). In Gibeah, a Hebrew city, an old man offers hospitality to some travellers (Judges 19:14-30). In both stories a mob of men arrive at night and demand that the host bring out the male guests so that they may 'know' them. God strongly condemned the actions of the men in both cities.

Alternative view #1: The term 'know' does not necessary mean that these men wanted to have sexual intercourse with these visitors. This word is used 943 times in the Old Testament, and only in 10 of these does it refer to sexual intercourse. The hosts in both Sodom and Gibeah were themselves foreigners to those cities, and by receiving such visitors, they had violated local laws of hospitality or some social custom. This made the local men angry. They demanded to meet these men, to 'know' them, to ensure that they did not present a threat to the city. The sin which God disliked and judged in Sodom was hypocrisy, greed, adultery, violence, godlessness (Ezek. 16:49), and in Gibeah, group-rape.

The term 'know' is used 8 times in Genesis to refer to sexual intercourse. The context determines its usage. In the same story about Sodom we read that the two daughters of Lot had not "known a man," they were virgins (Gen. 19:8; 24:16). The fact that in both incidents women are offered to the men in exchange for the visiting men, suggest that these men desired sexual contact with the visitors. Their demand to 'know' them had a sexual connotation. Furthermore, what these men intended to do was described as "wicked" (Gen. 19:7), "vile" and "disgraceful" (Judges 19:23). The apostle Peter tells us that Lot, who lived in Sodom "was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men... tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard" (2 Peter 2:7,8). Jude, inspired by the Holy Spirit, elaborates on the nature of their sin: "Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion²" (Jude 7).

² The expression NIV translates "perversion" is more literally translated "other flesh" (DBY) or "strange flesh" (NKJV). Some suggest that this is a reference to flesh from angels, that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was that they sought sexual intercourse with these visitors who were angels. The capability of angels to engage sexually with humans is uncertain. The mob did not know that these visitors were

Alternative view #2: The sin of the men of Sodom and Gibeah was most probably sexual in nature. But the texts do not single out the homosexual element as that which was 'wicked.' It was the violent group-rape that is being condemned. These stories do not show that God disapproves of a loving, caring, faithful and stable homosexual relationship. They only show that God condemns sexual violence and, perhaps also, the casual nature of the sexual activity.

This is a valid argument. The problem in Sodom and Gibeah clearly had a homosexual component; but these incidents were more complex because they included the violation of hospitality rules and the intention to group-rape the guests. If the visitors in Sodom had been women, it would have also been strongly condemned. These sad stories illustrate God's disapproval of sexual perversion but do not necessarily prove that the homosexual aspect was wrong. Since the evidence of these two stories is inconclusive, it would be better not to use them in the current homosexual debate.

(2) References to male shrine prostitutes

Canaanite fertility cults included male and female prostitution as part of the services offered to worshippers at their shrines. We read that the corrupt kings of Israel and Judah promoted such practices among God's people and that this was displeasing to the Lord (1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7). We also find this clear prohibition:

Deuteronomy 23:17-18 "No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine-prostitute. You must not bring the earnings of a female prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of the LORD your God to pay any vow, because the LORD your God detests them both."

Alternative view: The context of these texts is pagan worship. The goal of the prohibition is twofold: (a) to stop Israelites engaging in pagan worship rituals, and (b) to stop prostitution. These shrine-prostitute texts are not relevant to the current Christian homosexual debate because: (a) such pagan worship rituals no longer exist, and (b) all Christians agree that prostitution is sin.

This I would consider a valid view. Unless we can show that the role of male and female shrine prostitutes was to offer 'worshippers' gay and lesbian sex, these texts cannot be used to condemn homosexual activity. It is most likely that these shrine prostitutes offered both homosexual and heterosexual services; but in these texts God is clearly forbidding idolatry and prostitution. Homosexual activity is not explicitly stated. Since the evidence of these shrine-prostitute texts is inconclusive, it would be better not to use them in the current homosexual debate.

(3) Prohibitions in the Mosaic Law

The nation of Israel was exposed to the corruptions of Egypt and Canaan, with practices such as idolatry, child sacrifice and a variety of sexual deviations. Among the laws given by

angels. This is, I think, a very unlikely construction. In 1 Corinthians 15:39 we read of a difference between the flesh of humans and that of animals. Jude 7 could be understood as a reference to bestiality. Others translate the expression as "unnatural desire" (ESV) and "unnatural lust" (RSV).

God to Moses, we find a couple of laws that explicitly prohibit some forms of sexual activity. These include a clear prohibition on homosexual practice.

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

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

Alternative view #1: In those days homosexual activity was connected with pagan religion. Even some of the pagan gods engaged in homosexual acts. The book of Leviticus prescribes religious ceremonies designed to organize the Jewish religion and make it something different from the surrounding pagan religions. The goal of the prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20 was to stop the Israelites incorporating pagan religious practices into the Jewish religion. The word translated ‘detestable’ or ‘abomination’ is nearly always associated with God’s condemnation of idolatry and pagan religious practices. Therefore, the Levitical prohibitions should be considered as similar to the prohibitions on male shrine prostitutes. The force of the Levitical texts is to discourage idolatry and do not condemn loving, caring, faithful and stable homosexual relationships.

To equate the Levitical prohibitions with the prohibitions on male shrine prostitutes places an artificial and unjustified restriction on the text. The word translated ‘detestable’ or ‘abomination’ describes God’s displeasure, not just with false religious practice but also with incorrect social sin, such as dishonesty, greed, social injustice (Deut. 25:1-16), lying lips and proud hearts (Prov. 12:22, 1:5). The use of the word ‘abomination’ in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 does not limit the texts to prohibit adultery, incest, bestiality and homosexual acts only when or because they were associated with pagan idolatry.

It is true that Leviticus deals with ceremonial aspects of the Jewish faith but it also aims to regulate the social life among the people of God. It contains, for example, instructions on how to avoid epidemics, how to maintain good levels of hygiene and how to regulate good social behaviour within the nation of Israel. They were told how to treat foreigners, slaves, the elderly, children, parents. Sexual activity was also regulated to encourage a healthy society.

Leviticus 18 describes close to twenty different forbidden sexual relationships. The only act of pagan idolatry mentioned in this chapter is to offer one’s son to Moloch through fire (18:21). Leviticus 20 describes the punishments for a number of forbidden acts, including over a dozen forbidden sexual encounters. Again, the only act of pagan idolatry mentioned in this chapter is to offer one’s son to Moloch through fire (20:1-5). The list of incorrect and immoral acts described in these two chapters are presented not primarily as a warning against pagan religion, but as warning against pagan culture, ‘practices’ and ‘customs’ (18:3; 20:23) which God’s people should not imitate. God did not want Israel to imitate the idolatry and pagan religious practices they encountered in Egypt and Canaan (18:3). Acceptable social behaviour was also to be different in Israel. In these chapters, acts of homosexuality receive the same degree of disapproval as acts of adultery, incest and bestiality.

Alternative view #2: Leviticus and other Old Testament books describe the Law of God for the nation of Israel and not for the Christian church. The Old Testament contains a number of prohibitions that Christians throughout the ages have considered 'not for them.' For example, should a Christian farmer not reap to the very edges of his field? (Lev. 19:9); should he not plant his field with two different kinds of seed? (Lev. 19:19); should he let his farm rest one year every seven years? (Lev. 25:3-4). On relational matters, is sexual intercourse still forbidden by God during menstruation? (Lev. 18:19); is it always wrong for a divorced couple to get married to each other again? (Deut. 24:1-4); should someone who curses his father or mother be put to death? (Lev. 20:9). Since the selection of applicable and non-applicable restrictions is rather arbitrary, the homosexual prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20 should not be used to influence the Christian debate.

This is weighty objection which requires serious thought. It deals with the way the Christian learns from the Old Testament. We know that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2Tim. 3:16) and we are told that, "everything that was written in the past was written to teach us" (Rom. 15:4). Through the Old Testament narratives we learn about God, about His greatness, His love and interest in human beings, His holiness and moral values, His amazing grace in dealing with His inconsistent and stubborn people. But, what about the law with its clearly prescribed punishments? Clearly the arrival of Christ has made a significant difference. There are now two distinct bodies: the nation of Israel and the Church of Christ. "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached" (Luke 16:16). Something about the law has changed. We are told that "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4).

In seeking a solution, some Christians split the Old Testament law in three parts: the ceremonial, social and moral law. They then suggest that the ceremonial law is fulfilled in Christ, the social law is currently suspended because the nation of Israel no longer exists in its theocratic form, and that the moral law, because it is based on who God is, remains valid today. This classification may sometimes prove useful, but it has two weaknesses: (a) the Bible itself does not provide a rule to classify the law, and (b) some laws cannot be easily classified as ceremonial, social or moral. Some laws may comfortably fit in two of these boxes. For example, are the Levitical laws that condemn homosexual activity part of the social or the moral law? Some would say that this classification method reduces but does not eliminate the arbitrariness in deciding which laws do and which don't apply today. But uncertainty remains.

Other Bible students would agree that Christians are not under the law; they are dead to the law. "So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God... But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law

had not said, 'Do not covet'." (Rom. 7:4-7). The Mosaic law is useful to the Christian in that it points him to God's moral values and wisdom, but, as this and other New Testament texts confirm, the Christian is dead to Mosaic law.

For more than twenty years I have lived in Colombia. During those years I was under the law prescribed by the 380 articles of the Colombian Political Constitution. We now reside in the Netherlands and are no longer under the Colombian law. This does not mean that the Colombian constitution is wrong or defective. In fact, it contains much wisdom. Today my wife and I try to be good citizens and we try to avoid breaking the local speed limits... not because of the Colombian Constitution but because of the Dutch law. A Christian wants to "live a life worthy of the Lord" and seeks to please Him in every way, wants to honour marriage and seeks to keep the marriage bed pure... not because he is under the Mosaic law that commands it, but out of a genuine desire to please the Lord (Col. 1:10; Heb. 13:4). Paul refers us to the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). James describes this as "the perfect law that gives freedom" or the "law of liberty" (James 1:25; 2:12).

In other words, Christ has abolished "in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations" so that we may now serve Him "in the new way of the spirit" (Eph. 2:15; Rom. 7:6). It is in the New Testament that God speaks directly to the Christian, it is there that He unfolds his plans for the Church, the new community. Since God always has a good, loving and sometimes educational reason behind all His requirements, it is not surprising that, after discovering God's moral standards in the New Testament, the Christian will spot some clear similarities with that expressed in the Old Testament. God's requirements in both Testaments are never capricious. He will also discover that the motivation to obey is different between the Testaments, and that the moral standard in the New Testament is higher. Let's turn now to the New Testament texts.

(4) The 'unnatural' relations in Romans 1

In the first chapter of Romans, the apostle Paul describes the pagans of his day. They were aware of God as creator but suppressed the measure of truth they had in order to live wickedly and without external restrictions. We are told that God gave them over to think and practise perversion, including 'unnatural' sex. This 'unnatural' behaviour, together with a list of other sins, is strongly condemned by God.

Romans 1:24-32 "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another... God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged *natural* relations for *unnatural* ones. In the same way the men also abandoned *natural* relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed *indecent acts* with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their *perversion*... they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these things but also approve of those who practise them."

Alternative view #1: These and a couple of other difficult verses reflect the personal opinion and bias of the apostle Paul. The other New Testament authors, such as Luke and the apostles John and Peter, do not consider the homosexual theme significant

enough to mention it in their writings. Even the Lord Jesus does not speak out and condemn it. The church should also downplay these odd verses.

The apostle Paul saw himself as “a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1). He was aware of his task to promote God’s word and not his own opinions. The apostle Peter also defended the validity and authority of the Paul’s writings (2 Peter 3:15-16). These verses form part of the ‘Scriptures,’ and “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). If some texts are set aside, how would we objectively know which to retain? Instructions are included in Scripture because they are necessary, and no Christian is free to ignore or downplay them.

Alternative view #2: The homosexual activity described in Romans 1 is idolatry-related homosexuality. Verse 24 and 25 read: “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator.” The apostle Paul is only condemning homosexual acts in the context of pagan religion.

If the apostle Paul is concerned here with idolatry and its associated sexual disorder, why do the following verses only refer to the homosexual acts between women and between men? Why doesn’t he also condemn promiscuous idolatry-related heterosexual sex? Clearly the apostle’s concern goes beyond only idolatry-related homosexual acts.

The apostle’s line of argument is that when we replace a God-centred life for a self-centred one, when ‘God’s rights’ are replaced with ‘human rights’ or ‘my rights,’ our lifestyle departs from what God designed it to be. Incorrect thinking leads to incorrect behaviour. When society rejects God and His external objective moral standard, it loses its moral bearings and begins to drift into moral decadence. Homosexual acts, together with other forms of “sexual impurity” (v.24) are simply some of the various possible expressions of “godlessness and wickedness” (v.18). The apostle then refers to all homosexual activity as “unnatural” and tells us that it is sinful (vv.26, 32).

Alternative view #3: The ‘nature’ of a heterosexual person encourages him or her to be attracted to the opposite sex. It is ‘natural’ for a heterosexual person to have sex with someone from the opposite gender, and ‘unnatural’ to have sex with someone from his or her own gender. Similarly, it is ‘natural’ for a homosexual to have sex with someone from his or her own gender, and ‘unnatural’ to have sex with someone from the opposite gender. What this Bible text condemns is the engaging in sexual activity that is incompatible with your own sexual orientation, that is, contrary to your own nature. Notice that the activities that are referred to as ‘degrading,’ ‘shameful’ and ‘perversion’ are sexual activities carried out by those who have ‘exchanged’ or ‘abandoned’ their own ‘natural’ relations. This text does not prohibit all forms of homosexual activity. It only condemns those men and women who engage in sexual activity that conflicts with their sexual orientation.

The meaning of the word 'natural' is explained by the apostle Paul himself in verse 27: "Men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another." A 'natural' sexual relation is what is carried out between a man and a woman. It does not refer to something personal or subjective but to the way God made humanity. What is 'natural' is not determined by how you or I feel about things, but how God designed and created nature. It is not an individual thing but a universal thing. It is the way God designed His creation to function. God made man and woman with their different physical bodies, and these bodies have a natural way of interacting with each other. This 'natural sex' is the only way possible for human beings to propagate. It is the natural way to produce children. The heterosexual desire that leads to this is a 'natural' desire. All forms of homosexual intercourse are "unnatural."

Alternative view #4: The apostle Paul here is expressing God's disapproval of casual and irresponsible sexual activity, perhaps pederasty (homosexual acts between men and boys) or even orgies. This Bible texts do not condemn homosexuals who enter into a loving, caring and stable homosexual relationship.

In Romans 1 the apostle Paul is describing different activities that are associated with "godlessness and wickedness" (v.18). These activities go against God's initial design – God's created order. God had made humans to worship Him, but these people "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images" (v.23). God revealed His will so that we may obey Him, but these people "exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (v.25). God intentionally created man and woman, He gave them bodies and souls that adapt well to each other, He brought the woman to the man, and blessed them with the gifts of heterosexual intimacy and marriage. But these people "exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones" (v.26).

Take careful note of the following: (a) The sin in view is not pederasty but that of men engaging in sin with men. (b) The sin in view is not violent or forced but by mutual agreement, since they "were inflamed with lust for one another" (v. 27). (c) Nothing in this chapter suggests the sins in view were of the 'occasional or irresponsible' type. In this chapter the apostle Paul refers to all lesbian and homosexual activity as "unnatural" regardless of its relational context, and tells us that it is sinful.

In time, local cultures may change, public opinion may change, the law of the land may change, but homosexual intercourse will remain 'unnatural;' it will remain a deviation of God's creation order. It will remain, therefore, a sinful act. The apostle ends the chapter with a serious warning, not only for those who "continue to do these very things" but also for those who "approve of those who practise them" (v.32). May we humbly take these words to heart. They are part of God's Word, and are written for you and for me.

(5) Activities that are contrary to Christian conduct

The New Testament provides us with two lists of ugly activities that conflict with the normal and healthy Christian behaviour. Both these lists include a reference to homosexual activity. In a homosexual relationship there is an active and a passive partner. Both were accepted in the Greek educational system *and were not necessarily related to idolatry*. They are distinguished by two different Greek words, and both are mentioned in Scripture.

- (a) Malakos: Literally “soft of touch.” It has been translated “effeminate,” “those who make women of themselves,” “male prostitutes.” Among the Greeks it referred to the male who played a passive role in homosexual intercourse.
- (b) Arsenokoites: Literally “male in bed.” It has been translated “sodomites,” “abusers of themselves with men,” “homosexual offenders,” “perverts”. Among the Greeks it referred to the male who played the active role in homosexual intercourse.

The first list is found in **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**, it includes both Greek words, and describes those who “will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes [*malakoi*] nor homosexual offenders [*arsenokoitai*] nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

The second list is found in **1 Timothy 1:9-10**, it includes “arsenokoitai,” and describes such behaviour that is “contrary to the sound doctrine.”

“We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts [*arsenokoitai*], for slave traders and liars and perjurers, and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.”

Alternative view: When the apostle Paul used the Greek word “malakoi” (meaning “soft of touch”) he probably had in mind young boys. By using both words “malakoi” and “arsenokoitai,” what the apostle is most probably condemning is the sexual exploitation of young boys by older men, a common pattern of homosexual behaviour in the classical world. This is an example of ‘abusive sex’ which is clearly contrary to Christian conduct. However, these two lists do not include a loving, caring, faithful and stable homosexual relationship. It is therefore incorrect to affirm that a ‘homosexual marriage’ is contrary to Christian conduct.

The Greek word “malakoi” does not refer exclusively to young boys. To restrict its application to a particular type of homosexual activity is an artificial and unjustified restriction. The two Greek words together confirm that God disapproves of both the active and the passive partner in a homosexual intercourse – irrespective of its relational context.

According to these texts, those who engage in homosexual activity are not singled out for special attention but rather are classified together with the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers, lawbreakers, rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, those who kill their fathers or mothers, murderers, slave traders, liars and perjurers. Complete forgiveness is God’s response to every repentant sinner. But those who persist in living in a lifestyle that is “contrary to the sound doctrine” and refuse to repent and turn away from their sin, will stand among those

who “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” This strong disapproval of homosexual practice in the New Testament follows its strong condemnation in the Old Testament (Leviticus 18 and 20). It has always been disapproved by God. Clearly our loving heavenly Father takes sin seriously. So should we.

Questions for reflection or group discussion:

1. Why is it not wise to use the events at Sodom and Gibeah as proof that God disapproves of homosexual activity?
2. Based on the verses in Romans 1, what do you think is ‘natural’ about heterosexual sex and what is ‘unnatural’ about homosexual sex?
3. Of the five clusters of Bible texts explored in this chapter, which for you most clearly affirms God’s standard for Christian behaviour in connection with homosexual intercourse. Explain.

Chapter 5

Good News for the Homosexual

It is a sad reality that over the years many Christian congregations have been characterized by homophobia, that is, Christians have been afraid of homosexuals, lesbians and bisexuals and they have treated them with hostility, even revulsion. For many homosexuals the message they hear is that they are hated by Christians and their God, that they are not welcome in the church, that there is no hope for them. We Christians need to repent of any judgemental or hostile attitude towards any group of sinners. The gospel is for all! Jesus also passionately loves homosexuals as much as anyone else. He came to seek and save them. This is good news for the homosexual!

This chapter is included as a message of hope for you. You may be participating in a sexual union that is not approved by God, you may be struggling with a sinful habit or lifestyle, or you may sometimes feel frustrated with yourself and even rejected by God. There is really good news for you!

(1) Good news of a new beginning. The Bible makes it clear that we are all sinners. Sometimes the sins of others look worse than our own, but we are all equally condemned! The good news is that Jesus carried our sin on the cross. True and full forgiveness is now offered freely to all repentant sinners, irrespective of the type, the gravity and the duration of our sin. We are told that “the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Once you repent and give your life to Jesus, you receive His forgiveness, you are born again. You have a new beginning!

(2) Good news of a new life. With the new birth comes a new life, a new lifestyle. The Lord Jesus comes to live inside you and desires to change your attitudes, your sinful habits, your way of relating to God and to others. You are now different person, you are a new creation, you are a light designed to shine in a dark world. Every new Christian is sanctified, that is, he is set apart to be useful to the Lord. At Corinth, for example, some of the Christians used to be “sexually immoral.. idolaters... adulterers... male prostitutes... homosexual offenders... thieves... greedy... drunkards... slanderers... swindlers...” but Jesus came into their lives and changed them! They began to live a new life! “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:6-11). If you are a Christian, you too are washed and sanctified. We are called to live a different life.

(3) Good news of a new source of power. The Lord knows that we are unable to live the new life in our own strength. The Lord never asks us to do something that is not possible. It may well be impossible for us without Him, but not with Him. When we give our lives to the Lord Jesus, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). The Holy Spirit will always be inside the Christian. We are now never alone. The Lord will limit the temptations we face (1 Cor. 10:31) and give us the necessary inner power to resist temptations and carry out His will (Eph. 3:20). The apostle Paul said: “To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Col. 1:29). That power, that energy is also available to you and me.

(4) Good news of a new community. As a Christian you form part of a new community, the Christian church. You belong to a new family, the family of God! Be patient and take the necessary time to get involved in a local church. Your choice of friends will help or hinder your Christian experience. In a local church you will find support, you will be encouraged to leave behind any sinful past and you will be motivated to rise to God's standards. No local church is perfect, but every local church should be welcoming and loving to all, regardless of race, education, social position or sexual orientation. We are all equally valuable in God's sight. Furthermore, each local church should teach the Word of God, it should encourage what God approves and disapprove of what He condemns. Expect to be accepted, loved, challenged, corrected and stretched. These are necessary for your growth.

(5) Good news of a new world. Some Christians give testimony of having experienced a change in sexual orientation, some instantly, some gradually. Others have stopped their homosexual lifestyle to please the Lord Jesus, but continue to experience a homosexual orientation. Temptations and internal struggles remain. Regardless of your particular struggle, remember that the Lord knows the pain you are going through. You are not alone. Even as Christians we experience the pain of living in a fallen world. Some have lost a loved one in a silly accident. Others have lost a limb or their eyesight. Some live with a husband or wife is now confined to a wheelchair or a bed. Others are exhausted doing their best to raise a handicapped child. Life contains many 'unfair' or 'inexplicable' painful frustrating limitations. Why doesn't the Lord intervene and change all this now? We are not told.

But we have been told about a new world. What is it like? "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'" (Rev. 21:3-5). The good news is that our struggle with sin will come to an end! With our pain and through sometimes tearful eyes we see a new world, a new home – a home that the Lord Jesus Himself has gone to prepare for us, where the frustrating effects of sin shall no longer be felt, where our hearts will never again be troubled, and where we shall enjoy the Lord for ever (John 14:1-4).

Questions for reflection or group discussion:

1. If a homosexual person truly repents and gives his life to the Lord Jesus, will his or her homosexual orientation be transformed into a heterosexual orientation? Explain.
2. Is it realistically possible for someone to live all their life holding back the expression of their sexual orientation? Is the church unkind or expecting too much?
3. Some heterosexual singles and widows long to get married but never find a suitable partner. In what ways do the frustrations and temptations of homosexual-oriented Christians differ from theirs?
4. Do you think men and women with a homosexual orientation feel welcomed and accepted in your local church? Should something change? Discuss.

Chapter 6

Some Pastoral Considerations

Only a few people like the tension caused by confrontation. Some suggest that our Christian life is a private matter and that no Christian is in a position to judge another. Jesus Himself said: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matt. 7:1). Is it best to remain silent on this issue of homosexuality? Should Bible teachers, Church leaders and Christian councillors present the application of these Biblical texts as matters of personal conscience and private interpretation?

When the Lord Jesus told His disciples not to judge, he was not telling them to "mind your own business." He was correcting their attitude as they sought to help or instruct others. After telling His disciples not to judge, He told them how to help an offending brother. He said, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, *first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye*" (Matt. 7:2-5).

"First take the plank out of your own eye"

When counseling those who are struggling with their homosexual orientation, there are some very obvious planks that must be first removed from our own eyes. Here are some:

- (a) A cold heart. We say that we love the sinner and reject his or her sin, but in reality we despise both the sinner and their sin.
- (b) Inconsistency: We assume that same-sex lust is more displeasing to God than other-sex lust. All sexual activity outside marriage should be lovingly, but equally and consistently exposed as sin.
- (c) Fear: We can be afraid of what they might do to us or to members of our congregation. Care and caution are needed, as with all who struggle with a particular set of temptations. But we should not be afraid.
- (d) Anger: The sins of others usually look worse than our own. Our impatience can easily lead to expressions of carnal anger.
- (e) Guilt: Perhaps you carry the guilt of your own sinful sexual behavior. Confess it to the Lord. Set the matter right. Perhaps you have been the victim of another's sexual sin. Forgive the offender with all your heart. You must be free before you can help others.
- (f) Disbelief: We don't really believe that God can transform a homosexual or a confused sexual orientation into a heterosexual orientation.
- (g) Cowardice: We choose silence. We don't address the topic to avoid a controversy that might affect harmony in the church, generate bad publicity or reduce our potential for church growth.

"Then you will see clearly"

We are not better than those who struggle with a homosexual orientation. Remember what we have in common: we are all human, we are all made in God's image, we all have sexual desires, we are all sinners saved by grace, we all struggle with temptation. Homosexuals and

heterosexuals alike struggle to submit to the Lordship of Jesus in our daily life. Even when someone has failed, continue to be humble and gentle in your choice of words. “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

Ask and then listen carefully to their life story

Sometimes homosexual inclination is connected with painful experiences in the past, particularly some unhealthy relationship in the formative years. Identifying, exposing, rejecting their past, and forgiving those involved, will be necessary in the healing process. Depending on circumstances, personal guidance and accountability by a married couple or some professional Christian counsellor may be required.

Healing, listening and prayer by experienced and wise soul-carers may be necessary to find causes of possible difficulties with self-acceptance, self-esteem and wrong (co)dependencies developed in the past, especially those that may originate from lack of confirmation and acceptance by their father or mother. Sometimes, as in other deep-rooted problems, the presence, the bondage or the influence of demons may need to be addressed in the all-powerful name of Jesus.

Unconverted people cannot live the Christian life

Pay special attention to his or her conversion account. Without genuine conversion the Holy Spirit does not indwell (Rom. 8:9), there is no power for change (Col. 2:6-7), and no deep desire to submit to the authority of the Word of God (Phil. 2:13). Explain the gospel message clearly. Encourage complete surrender to the Lordship of Christ (Gal. 2:20).

“To remove the speck from your brother’s eye”

Isn’t every Christian responsible for his own life? We are all sinners, so why should one sinner judge another? A speck in an eye is no asset! It may be painful to remove, it may take some time, but it *is a positive act*. It is a friendly and a loving act. The eye and the whole body will benefit. To ignore it would be unkind.

Repentance and conversion are personal matters. But at conversion we become part of a family, a body, the church of Christ. We acquire a responsibility to care for the physical and spiritual wellbeing of others. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Gal. 4:10). Of course there are some disputable matters, areas where freedom of conscience should be encouraged (Rom. 14:4-10, Col. 2:16). A day will come when each human will give account of himself to God (2 Tim. 4:1, Heb. 13:4, James 4:12). Before that day, one of the tasks delegated to the church of Christ is to teach and encourage healthy Christian behaviour and correct deviations. We are not to judge motives (2 Cor. 4:5), only behaviour (2 Cor. 5:12). The objective is not to condemn but to heal, not to remove the eye, but to remove the speck and allow the eye to heal and function normally – for the benefit of the eye and of the whole body.

Help them to embrace their true identity in Christ

Through salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit, Christ can empower them to live according to His design and standards for sexuality. He offers the grace to accept their true identity –

not as gay, lesbian, or gender-confused – but as His sons and daughters, embracing their biological reality as male or female.

Help him or her develop Scriptural convictions

Study the Scriptures together. Until a believer is convinced from Scripture that a certain behaviour is sin, he will remain tolerant of such behaviour in his heart. King Solomon observed that when God's people have no vision, prophecy or revelation, when they do not recognize the authoritative Word of God, they "cast of restraint." But blessed and happy "is he who keeps the law" (Prov. 29:18). Without submission to the authority of Scripture, without personal conviction, without dependence of the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we cannot live victorious Christian lives. Our choice of lifestyle is very important. Our actions today have an impact on eternity (Matt. 6:20, 1 Cor. 6:10, 2 Cor. 5:10).

Encourage them to flee temptation

Failure is not inevitable. But Scripture makes it clear that our struggle against temptation is not easy. Jesus said: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Mark 14:38). There are places, friendships and situations that make us weak in the face of temptation. We should all be radical. For some, obedience to the Lord will involve financial loss, loneliness, suffering and even death. Others may be called to remain unmarried (Matt 19:12, 1 Cor. 7:37). Whatever the temptation we face, we may be sure that the Lord Jesus sympathizes with our struggles (Heb. 4:15) and that He limits the force of the temptation so that, with His help, we may live victoriously (1 Cor. 10:13).

Provide loving support to all repentant sinners

We all need to feel loved and accepted. This holds equally true for both homosexual and heterosexual oriented Christians. Christians who have repented from homosexual activity and are seeking to live a life pleasing to the Lord should also be warmly accepted and supported by both Christian men and women. They should be treated like every other growing believer, making room for each to use their gifts to serve the Lord and help build up the Body of Christ.

Be clear on goal and limits

God disproves of all sexual activity outside marriage. "Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Heb. 13:4). This includes homosexual intercourse. We are called to love and help all humans, "especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10). We are called to show compassion, seek lost sheep and heal hurting sheep. Christ saves but also changes peoples' lives (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Our doors should remain always open for all sinners.

Once a person testifies that they have become a Christian, in time certain changes are to be expected. Biblical guidance and Godlike patience will be necessary, but if some serious changes don't occur, at some point Scriptural boundaries will be met: "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother" (2 Thes. 3:14-15). This will most likely be uncomfortable and painful for all concerned. But it is the way the Lord would have it in His church. "I have written to you in my letter not to

associate with sexually immoral people - not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat" (1 Cor. 5:9-11). At some point, when a Christian persist in refusing Scriptural correction, a church will be required to distance themselves socially from such a person. Scripture does not specify the timing. Each church will require the guidance of the Holy Spirit as to when this becomes necessary and how to implement these apostolic guidelines. If this procedure is practiced – and it is recorded in Scripture for that purpose – it should be implemented consistently between people and consistently between the sins listed. But an active local church is more like a 'hospital' than a 'legal court,' it's a dispensary of Christ's abundant grace. As Christians we all need that grace to survive. Under serious conditions, even hospitals temporally isolate some patients – while longing for healthy signs of recovery. Such a temporal period of isolation can also be understood as an expression of God's abundant grace.

Questions for reflection or group discussion:

1. In practice, do you think it is possible to accept a active homosexual without approving his or her behaviour? Explain.
2. If the Christian church chooses to be 'politically correct' and does not clearly express God's disapproval of homosexual intercourse, what effect do you think this will have:
 - (a) On homosexual-oriented Christians?
 - (b) On the Christian community at large over the next 20 years?
3. If a couple in a 'homosexual marriage' come to church and, after serious Bible study and counselling, continue to think their relationship does not conflict with the Word of God, how would you respond? How should the church respond?

CONCLUSION

Our 'sexual orientation' is the direction of our sexual interest. If this attraction is exclusively towards persons of the opposite gender, it is referred to as a 'heterosexual orientation' and if it is exclusively towards its own gender, a 'homosexual orientation.' There is a continuum between these two sides, since it is possible to feel varying degrees of attraction for both genders. Those who find themselves close to the middle, equally attracted to both genders, are said to have a 'bisexual orientation.' The Bible prescribes the correct relational context for 'sexual behaviour' but is silent as to 'sexual orientation.' God holds humans responsible for their behaviour, including their sexual behaviour. Those with different sexual orientations will experience their own particular set of sexual temptations.

All Christians agree that occasional, irresponsible, violent or forced forms of sexual activity should be firmly rejected, both heterosexual and homosexual. Historically all Christians have held that God firmly disapproves of all forms of homosexual activity. During this last half century, a growing number of Christians believe that the Word of God does not disapprove of homosexual activity in the context of a stable, loving, enduring partnership, such as in a 'homosexual marriage.'

The Bible presents marriage and sexuality in a positive way. In both the Old and the New Testaments marriage is presented as a unique bond between a man and a woman, *united* by God Himself when a man "leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife." Since the standard for Christian behaviour is found in the New Testament, Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1 are the key texts to be studied in connection with seeking God's will regarding homosexual practice. We conclude that sexual intimacy and sexual intercourse are good and receive God's blessing *only* within the context of a marriage relationship between a man and a woman. Sexual contact in any other relational context is sin and receives God's strong disapproval.

Christians who agree with this historic interpretation of Scripture carry the guilt and stigma of a Christian church that has frequently singled out this particular sin for special condemnation. Homosexual lust is not worse than heterosexual lust. Both are sin. The Bible lists homosexual offenders in the same category as the greedy, drunkards, slanderers and adulterers. Once that is understood and assimilated, the Christian community still faces the challenge of how to help such men and women find Jesus and live in a way that pleases Him. Jesus loved and accepted all sinners but also exposed and confronted sinful acts and lifestyles. He still saves and transforms lives today.

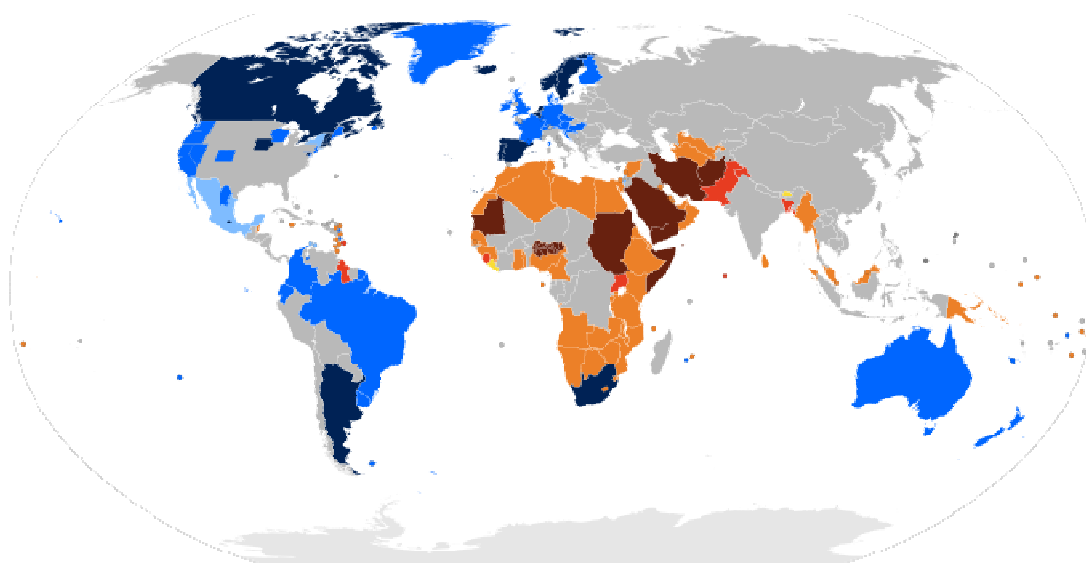
If we are to follow our Master's good example, we must first remove the planks from our own eye, planks of fear, guilt, inconsistency and disbelief. Then we shall be able to see these men and women, including those with same-sex orientation, as God sees them. Only then shall we be in a position to be used by the Lord to remove the speck from their eye.

Appendix A

World Overview on Laws regarding Same-Sex union

We are living in changing times. This appendix consist of an extract from www.wikipedia.org which briefly describes the state of law towards the end of 2010. An update and further useful research may be obtained by searching with the key words 'same-sex' and 'marriage'.

“Although homosexual acts were decriminalized in some parts of the Western world, such as Poland in 1932, Denmark in 1933, Sweden in 1944, and the United Kingdom in 1967, it was not until the mid-1970s that the gay community first began to achieve limited civil rights in some developed countries. On July 2, 2009, homosexuality was decriminalized in India by a High Court ruling. A turning point was reached in 1973 when the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, thus negating its previous definition of homosexuality as a clinical mental disorder. In 1977, Quebec became the first state-level jurisdiction in the world to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. During the 1980s and 1990s, most developed countries enacted laws decriminalizing homosexual behavior and prohibiting discrimination against lesbian and gay people in employment, housing, and services. On the other hand, many countries today in the Middle East and Africa, as well as several countries in Asia, the Caribbean and the South Pacific, outlaw homosexuality. In six countries, homosexual behavior is punishable by life imprisonment; in ten others, it carries the death penalty.”



Homosexuality legal

- Same-sex marriage
- Other type of partnership (incl. cohabitation)
- Foreign same-sex marriages recognized
- No recognition of same-sex couples

Homosexuality illegal

- Minimal penalty
- Large penalty
- Life in prison
- Death penalty

Appendix B

What do others say? Some Quotes

Here you will find a number of public and freely available quotes. I have chosen them in order to illustrate, using the words of people known to a wider Christian readership, the conclusion of this book, namely, that the Bible forbids homosexual activity.

This is not a Reformed, Evangelical, Roman Catholic, or Charismatic position. It has been the standard orthodox Biblical interpretation down the centuries. The authors here quoted may well have significant theological differences, but they share this conclusion. I say 'illustrate,' because this conclusion is based on the study of Scripture itself, and does not need these quotes to support it. In some places I have added *italics* to highlight an important statement.

C S Lewis

British author and Christian apologist

Source: Letter from C. S. Lewis regarding homosexuality, quoted in Sheldon Vanauken's "A Severe Mercy," pp. 146-148, in response to a question about a couple of Christian students of Vanauken who were homosexual and had come to him for advice.

Quote: "I have seen less than you but more than I wanted of this terrible problem. I will discuss your letter with those whom I think wise in Christ. This is only an interim report. First, to map out the boundaries within which all discussion must go on, *I take it for certain that the physical satisfaction of homosexual desires is sin. This leaves the homosexual no worse off than any normal person who is, for whatever reason, prevented from marrying.* Second, our speculations on the cause of the abnormality are not what matters and we must be content with ignorance. The disciples were not told why (in terms of efficient cause) the man was born blind (Jn. IX 1-3): only the final cause, that the works of God should be made manifest in him. *This suggests that in homosexuality, as in every other tribulation, those works can be made manifest: i.e. that every disability conceals a vocation, if only we can find it, which will 'turn the necessity to glorious gain.'*

Of course, the first step must be to accept any privations which, if so disabled, we can't lawfully get. The homosexual has to accept sexual abstinence just as the poor man has to forego otherwise lawful pleasures because he would be unjust to his wife and children if he took them. That is merely a negative condition. What should the positive life of the homosexual be? I wish I had a letter which a pious male homosexual, now dead, once wrote to me - but of course it was the sort of letter one takes care to destroy. He believed that his necessity could be turned to spiritual gain: that there were certain kinds of sympathy and understanding, a certain social role which mere men and mere women could not give. But it is all horribly vague and long ago. Perhaps any homosexual who humbly accepts his cross and puts himself under Divine guidance will, however, be shown the way. *I am sure that any*

attempt to evade it (e.g. by mock or quasi-marriage with a member of one's own sex even if this does not lead to any carnal act) is the wrong way."

John Piper

Theologian. Founder of 'Desiring God Ministries'

Source: "Discerning the Will of God Concerning Homosexuality and Marriage", August 8, 2004.

Quote: "We will continue to say what the world, by and large, will not believe, namely, that it is possible to describe homosexual behavior as sinful, perverse, abnormal, and destructive to persons and culture while at the same time being willing to lay down our lives in love for homosexual persons. In fact, we say something even more radical and unbelievable to the world, namely, that you *must* believe homosexual behavior is sin and harmful in order to love homosexual persons. Because God tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:6, "[Love] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth." *If you deny the truth that homosexual behavior is sin, but instead approve of it or rejoice in it, what you bring to the homosexual person will not be love – no matter how affirming, kind, or tolerant.* Our aim is the biblical combination of *conviction* in God's truth and *compassion* for God's creation.

Source: "The Other Dark Exchange: Homosexuality, Part 2." October 11, 1998.

"A few words to those among us who have homosexual desires:

1. Acknowledge the presence and pain of a disordered sexuality, with all the ambiguity of where it came from – much like other disorders and disabilities – and do not define your God-given personhood by your disordered sexuality.
2. Put your faith in Christ alone for the forgiveness of all your sins and for the gift of God's righteousness and for the fulfillment of all his promises to you (Romans 1:16-17). The only sinner who can successfully battle his sins is a justified sinner. In other words, you fight against sexual sins from relationship, not for a relationship.
3. Begin to reorder your entire life around the centrality of the glory of God as your highest treasure. Homosexual sinning, like all other sinning, is an echo of exchanging the glory of God for other things. So restore the sun of God's glory to its place at the center of your soul and all the planets of your desires will begin to return to their God-given orbit.
4. Resolve to live a chaste and, if necessary, celibate life by the power of God's Spirit, with the confidence that if God does not heal now, he will in the age to come; and all the patience of purity of will be worth it (Romans 8:18). May God grant all the single [Christians] (and married!) a passion for purity.
5. Seek wholesome friendships with both sexes, especially in groups... The more we do things in groups rather than pairs, the more opportunities we create for wholesome non-sexual relationships.
6. There are ministries... that have insights and experience and encouragement and Biblical counsel from a depth of awareness that goes beyond what most of us can bring. This may be something God would use in your life.
7. Take a bold and compassionate stand for truth... and hold up God's purposes for human sexuality, namely, as an expression of Christ's love for the Church dramatized in the covenant love of marriage between one man and one woman."

Chuck Colson

Christian leader, cultural commentator, and former Special Counsel for President Richard Nixon. Founder of the Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview, US.

Source: "Manhattan Declaration: A call of Christian conscience," 2010.

Quote: "In Scripture, the creation of man and woman, and their one-flesh union as husband and wife, is the crowning achievement of God's creation... The impulse to redefine marriage in order to recognize same-sex and multiple partner relationships is a symptom, rather than the cause, of the erosion of the marriage culture. It reflects a loss of understanding of the meaning of marriage as embodied in our civil and religious law and in the philosophical tradition that contributed to shaping the law. Yet it is critical that the impulse be resisted..."

"We acknowledge that there are those who are disposed towards homosexual and polygamous conduct and relationships, just as there are those who are disposed towards other forms of immoral conduct. We have compassion for those so disposed; we respect them as human beings possessing profound, inherent, and equal dignity; and we pay tribute to the men and women who strive, often with little assistance, to resist the temptation to yield to desires that they, no less than we, regard as wayward. We stand with them, even when they falter. We, no less than they, are sinners who have fallen short of God's intention for our lives. We, no less than they, are in constant need of God's patience, love and forgiveness."

Joyce Meyer

Charismatic Christian author and speaker, St. Louis, US.

Source: Interview With Joyce Meyer, CNN Larry King Live, May 19, 2005.

Quote: KING: Do you -- what are your thoughts when you say you love all people? What are your thoughts about -- you mentioned earlier judge not lest you be judged. Do you judge homosexuality?

MEYER: Well, I knew you'd ask me this, too.

KING: You knew something I didn't know, because I never know what I'm going to ask.

MEYER: But I kind of watch what you've been asking, those questions. *Obviously, Larry, if I believe the Bible, then I don't believe that a gay lifestyle or a homosexual lifestyle is the right way to choose to live.* I believe that there's something so much better."

John MacArthur

Pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church, California, US.

Source: "God's word on Homosexuality: The truth about sin and the reality of forgiveness" The Master's Seminary Journal, 19/2 (Fall 2008).

Quote: "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."

John R. W. Stott

Rector emeritus of All Souls Church, London, UK. Anglican.

Source: "Issues Facing Christians Today," 1984, revised and updated 2006.

Quote: "Thus Scripture defines the marriage God instituted in terms of heterosexual monogamy. It is the union of one man with one woman, which must be publically acknowledged (the leaving of parents), permanently sealed (he will 'cleave to his wife') and physically consummated ('one flesh'). And Scripture envisages no other kind of marriage or sexual intercourse. For God provided no alternative.

Christians should not therefore single out homosexual intercourse for special condemnation. The fact is that every sexual relationship or act which deviates from God's revealed intention is *ipso facto* displeasing to him and under his judgment." p.311.

"The alternative is not between the warm physical relationship of homosexual intercourse and the pain of isolation in the cold. There is a third option, namely a Christian environment of love, understanding, acceptance and support. I do not think there is any need to encourage homosexual people to disclose their sexual orientation to everybody; this is neither necessary nor helpful. But they do need at least one confidante to whom they can unburden themselves... He [God] intends each local church to be a warm accepting and supportive community. By 'accepting' I do not mean 'acquiescing', any more than in rejecting 'homophobia' I am rejecting a proper Christian disapproval of homosexual behavior. No, true love is not incompatible with the maintenance of moral standards. There is, therefore, a place for such discipline in the case of members who refuse to repent and willfully persist in homosexual relationships. But it must be exercised in a spirit of humility and gentleness (Gal. 6:1f)." pp.321-322

Tim Keller

Founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, US.

Source: "The Meaning of Marriage," 2011.

Quote: "It needs to be said therefore that this Christian vision for marriage is not something that can be realized by two people of the same sex. That is the unanimous view of the

Biblical authors, and therefore that is the view that we assume throughout the rest of the book, even though we don't directly address the subject of homosexuality" Introduction, p.16.

"A second issue has to do with same-sex marriage. Here the Biblical texts are much less debatable. The Bible strongly endorses heterosexuality and prohibits homosexuality. Indeed, as we will see, one of the main purposes of marriage according to the Bible is to create a deep cross-gender companionship." Notes, p.246.

Erwin W. Lutzer

Senior pastor of Moody church in Chicago, US.

Source: "The truth about same-sex marriage," 2010.

Quotation:

"Sex binds two people together not just physically, but also in the soul and spirit even apart from marriage...Same-sex marriages fall outside the boundaries of a one-man, one-woman relationship, and so are alien bonds, intruders that desecrate the body and pollute the soul... of necessity all alien bonds are cut off from God's intentions and thus violate the original marriage charter." pp.63-65.

"Those who say that they can be in a homosexual relationship with God's approval deceive themselves. They forget that God's desire for us is costly discipleship that finds fulfillment whether or not we are involved in an intimate sexual relationship... Gods gives us all a higher calling. For singles it is one calling, for married people another. But all true believers will pursue the high moral ground. We must be committed to holiness no matter how imperfectly attained. Sexual sin cannot be part of that commitment." pp.97-98.

Commenting on 'eunuchs' referred to in Matthew 19:12... "But there is a first category: those who were born that way.' They are not called to Marriage and family, regardless of which gender they are attracted to. God has other things in mind. It is not too strong to say that we have made an idol of marriage... we must stand against this insistence that marriage, with its sexual pleasures along with parental responsibilities, is best for everyone. We must realize that God Himself might have a calling for those who are single, either by necessity or by choice. We must celebrate singleness." p.110.

James Dobson

American evangelical Christian author, psychologist, and founder of Focus on the Family

Source: "Counseling for unwanted same sex attraction," 2008.

Quotation: "Focus on the Family is dedicated to defending the honor, dignity and value of the two sexes as created in God's image – intentionally male and female – each bringing unique and complementary qualities to sexuality and relationships. Sexuality is a glorious gift from God – meant to be offered back to Him either in marriage for procreation, union and mutual delight or in celibacy for undivided devotion to Christ. *Homosexual behavior violates God's intentional design for gender and sexuality...* Just as there are many paths that may lead a

person to experience same-sex attractions, there are likewise multiple ways out. Thus, individuals and their helping professionals are called to discern and pursue the most appropriate approach that best enables them to steward their sexuality in alignment with their chosen values.”

Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth. Chief Rabbi of the British Orthodox synagogues.

Source: “Judaism and Homosexuality – An authentic Orthodox View” by Rabbi Chaim Rapoport. 2004. Foreword, p.viii-ix

Quotation: “It need hardly be said that there are few aspects of Judaism more out-of-step with today’s radically individualistic culture than its view of sexual ethics. That however, has always been the fate of one or other element of Jewish life. To be Jew has always involved being willing to challenge the idols of the age, whatever the idols, whichever the age... Today’s secular culture resists the idea that there may be boundaries to the life we may legitimately pursue. It finds it difficult to understand that the logic of ‘I ought’ is quite different to that of ‘I feel’ or ‘I want’. At such times, Judaism’s ethics become counter-cultural. To live by the call of Torah is not an easy undertaking. At times it is short of heroic.

This is particularly so for those with a homosexual orientation. The Torah forbids homosexual activity as such: that much is clear from the testimony of both biblical and post-biblical literature. It does not condemn a homosexual disposition, because the Torah does not speak about what we are, but about what we do. It does, however, ask of one who has such a disposition to suppress or sublimate it and act within the Torah’s constraints.”

“Just as the Torah asks of the homosexual to wrestle with his or her sexual desires, however, so too it asks of the rest of us to understand his or her plight, caught between two identities and two cultures.”