

WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

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A. INTRODUCTION

I have decided to write this paper in order to answer questions about my views on homosexuality. My wife Misty Irons has argued that conservative Christians should change their political strategy by adopting a civil libertarian position on same-sex civil unions. She articulated this in a paper titled "A Conservative Christian Case for Civil Same-Sex Marriage." On January 4, 2002, I posted this opinion piece on my www.upper-register.com website as an illustration of how a non-theonomic, common grace approach to civil government might be applied in one particular area. After the controversy erupted, I removed the piece and published a disclaimer on March 11, 2002 ("A Note from Lee Irons on Misty's Article"). Partly because the article was written by my wife, and partly because I do not necessarily endorse every statement made by other authors on the site, many have been left wondering precisely where I stand on the issue of homosexuality. The purpose of this paper is to attempt to answer some of those questions, and to set before my fathers and brothers my views for their consideration.

Many of the views I advocate here, particularly in the area of pastoral care for those who contend with temptation in this area, are advocated not as fixed conclusions, but as starting points for discussion. I have taken this stance because the issue of homosexuality involves more than exegesis – it also involves lives, real human beings who must be ministered to with humility, grace, compassion, and respect. The pastoral dimensions of this subject are such that it cannot be adequately discussed without first hand experience in ministering to those who struggle with this particular sin. Although I have had some counseling experience in this area, I would be the first to admit that my pastoral experience in ministering to homosexuals is limited. I am not putting myself forward as an expert. I am simply attempting to make my views on homosexuality known in light of the questions that have been raised in the wake of the controversy over my wife's essay.

I have chosen to restrict the scope of this paper to the biblical teaching on homosexuality and how that teaching ought to inform the church's pastoral response to those within the church who contend with same-sex attraction. I do not address the central thesis of my wife's article. My own private opinion is that civil government has the right to recognize same-sex civil unions. But as a minister of the Word, I cannot make any authoritative pronouncements either way on this controversial subject, and so this paper is silent on the issue.¹

B. TERMINOLOGY

The topic of homosexuality, like any topic, necessarily involves the use of language. Because of the fluid nature of human language, the very terminology used in this paper has the potential to be a source of confusion and controversy. In an attempt to avoid confusion and lessen controversy, I begin this paper by defining the terms. I do not claim that my definitions are absolute or that they correspond to the usage that others think preferable or correct. I am simply letting the reader know that when I use these words, these are the meanings I intend. I am aware that my proposed definitions of key terms beg many important questions. The substantive issues that lie behind these terms and definitions will be discussed at length in what follows.

¹ Were I to defend my private opinion on civil unions, I would have to enter into contested areas of constitutional law, and I would therefore no longer be writing as a minister of the Word but merely revealing my personal political views.

"Homosexual" (noun) denotes a person who is homosexually oriented, that is, who sustains a predominant and persistent emotional and sexual attraction toward members of the same sex, whether or not the person engages in same-sex sexual activity.

"Homosexual" (adjective) means pertaining to same-sex attractions or activity or both.

"Homosexuality" refers to the homosexual orientation or homosexual activity or both.

"Homosexual activity" includes penetrative same-sex intercourse, oral sex, and all other forms of sexual contact intended to stimulate arousal.

"Same-sex activity" includes the same activities listed under "homosexual activity" above, irrespective of the sexual orientation of the persons involved. For example, there are some who do not possess a homosexual orientation, but who engage in same-sex sexual activity. Although a common slip, it is really incorrect to speak of such same-sex sexual activity as "homosexual activity."

"Abstinence" refers to the totality of the biblical requirements for sexual purity required of all unmarried persons. Abstinence includes avoidance not only of sexual intercourse, but of all sexual contact, as well as other forms of sexual impurity, including viewing or masturbating with pornography, or indulging in sexual fantasies, etc. – in short, all sinful sexual desire, or lust.

"Celibacy" is a related concept but not identical to abstinence. Celibacy is confirmed abstinence, predicated upon a personal resolution to remain unmarried. An unmarried heterosexual person may desire to be married and may be pursuing marriage, and would thus not be considered "celibate." Yet such a person must practice abstinence until he or she is married.

"Chastity" is sexual purity. Whereas abstinence refers to the biblical requirements for sexual purity required of unmarried persons, chastity refers to the biblical requirements for sexual purity required of *all* persons, whether married or unmarried, i.e., "chastity in heart, speech, and behavior" (WSC # 71).

"Lust" refers to sinful sexual desires, that is, desires of an erotic or sexual nature that violate the biblical requirement that all sexual desires and sexual activity are to be confined to heterosexual marriage between one man and one woman. A married person's sexual desires for his or her spouse are not lust – whereas the same desires directed toward another person who is not his or her spouse, would be.

"Sexual attraction" is the human capacity to have feelings of attraction to a person of the gender that one is sexually oriented toward, but which may or may not rise to the level of lust.

"Sexual orientation" refers to the predominant and persistent gender-direction of a person's sexual attraction. This definition does not presuppose any particular theory of the cause(s) of homosexuality, i.e., whether it is caused by genetic, environmental, or familial factors, or even by a combination of factors.²

"Same-sex attraction" is used in this paper to refer to emotional and sexual attraction for others of the same sex. I use it in contexts when I want to be non-committal about whether this attraction is rooted in a more fundamental sexual orientation, and non-committal about whether and to what extent the attraction can be changed and replaced by opposite-sex attraction.

² Jones and Yarhouse defend an interactionist hypothesis in which biological antecedents, childhood experiences, environmental influences, and adult experiences all play a role in the development of homosexuality. Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate* (IVP, 2000), pp. 83-91.

C. SYNOPSIS OF THE FOUR VIEWS

L. R. Holben³ describes six representative viewpoints among professing Christians on the topic of homosexuality. The six views form a spectrum from liberationist celebration on one hand to conservative condemnation on the other. Holben attempts to give a sympathetic treatment to all six views, without (intentionally) revealing his own bias. I found his work to be extremely helpful for getting a bird's eye perspective of the various views. I have taken Holben's six views, reversed the order, and simplified them to four.

1. Affirmation

Affirmation is the official position of the Metropolitan Community Churches. It is also gaining many adherents in the mainline churches. It is the view that is widely held in significant portions of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Methodist Church, and the Episcopal Church. Even some on the evangelical left have adopted this view, such as Ralph Blair and his pro-gay organization, Evangelicals Concerned. Affirmationists jettison the traditional ethical teaching of the church on sexuality for the past two millennia in favor of a view that affirms the goodness and morality of same-sex relationships. Most affirmationists hold that monogamy is the ideal for same-sex relationships. Others have gone a step further and have dropped the traditional moral objections to non-monogamy. Both agree, however, that the primary norm governing sexual relationships is the biblical ideal of justice and love. The traditional rejection of homosexual activity is dismissed as a Levitical taboo that has no more relevance for Christians. Therefore, on this view, same sex-unions ought to receive the church's official blessing in the form of clergy-performed "marriage" ceremonies. Practicing homosexuals are not disqualified from holding ordained office in the church.

Holben identifies the more extreme, non-monogamous view as a separate view which he calls "liberation," but I have chosen to include it under affirmation. Liberationists tend to be more celebratory of their homosexuality, and reject the traditional model of monogamous commitment. But theologically and exegetically, both views unitedly reject the traditional interpretation of the biblical texts condemning homosexual behavior. The differences between these two views are a matter of degree not substance.

2. Accommodation

The next view is identified as "pastoral accommodation" by Holben. This is the view that, while the church can never endorse a homosexual relationship as a moral good, it can accommodate such relationships under carefully prescribed conditions. Accommodation differs from affirmation in its exegetical approach. Rather than attempting to explain away the biblical condemnations of homosexual activity, accommodationists acknowledge that homosexual activity is contrary to God's intention for human sexuality. But proponents of accommodation go on to argue that sometimes it is better for a homosexual Christian to enter a non-ideal relationship than to burn with lust and engage in the even greater sin of promiscuous and irresponsible sex. Heterosexual sex in the context of marriage between a man and a woman is the ideal, but due to the pervasive effects of the fall, the ideal cannot always be attained. The homosexual person who cannot change is therefore encouraged to enter into a committed same-sex relationship as the "most moral" option in a tragic situation. The most well-known advocate of this view is Lewis Smedes, professor of theology and integration at Fuller's School of Psychology.

³ L. R. Holben, *What Christians Think about Homosexuality: Six Representative Viewpoints* (N. Richland Hills, TX: Bibal Press, an imprint of D. & F. Scott Publishing, 1999).

3. Abstinence

Holben's label for this view is "a call to costly discipleship." This is the view that I hold, and which I wish to set before the presbytery in this paper as another orthodox option that should be carefully considered. I have no objection to Holben's label, but I have chosen the more immediately descriptive label "abstinence." The decisive difference that sets this view apart from restoration is that proponents of the abstinence view believe that the distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual activity is legitimate, and that the proper use of this distinction (derived from an Augustinian perspective on original sin) has important implications for those who minister to homosexuals as well as for homosexuals themselves.

Put in the simplest terms, the abstinence view is that there are "only two ethically feasible options for homosexual persons: fidelity within (heterosexual) marriage or abstinent singleness."⁴ This may not seem all that different from restoration, but the difference is the word "or." Unlike restoration, advocates of abstinence do not believe that restoration to heterosexuality is the only valid, biblically responsible option for the same-sex attracted Christian. The other valid option is "abstinent singleness" or celibacy. While the restoration view says that change of orientation is not only possible but *required* (or at the very least expected), the abstinence view by contrast argues that change is desirable, in some cases possible, but not required. The only biblical requirement is sexual purity. The biblical teaching is that the only God-ordained context for sexual intercourse is within the marriage relationship of one man and one woman. This then places upon all unmarried persons – whether they are homosexually or heterosexually oriented, whether they desire to be married or have resolved to remain unmarried – the one uniform standard of sexual abstinence. Whether or not complete healing is achieved is ultimately less important than "the preservation of our own and our neighbor's chastity, in heart, speech, and behavior" (WSC # 71).

4. Restoration

Under what I have called "restoration," Holben actually sees two separate views: "condemnation" and "a promise of healing." Holben uses Greg Bahnsen as the primary representative of the "condemnation" position.⁵ It is unfortunate that Holben chooses the label "condemnation" for this view, since Bahnsen affirms that there is "no condemnation" for those homosexuals who repent of their homosexuality and experience the Lord's transforming grace. However, it is understandable that Holben would pick this label, given Bahnsen's devoting an entire chapter to his view that homosexual acts ought to be treated as crimes by civil government.⁶

The second restorationist view Holben calls "a promise of healing" – a view popular among evangelicals. In a 1983 book titled *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*, Elizabeth Moberly argued that the cause of homosexuality is a childhood emotional deficit in a son's relationship with his father, or a daughter's relationship with her mother. When a child who suffers from such an emotional deficit reaches puberty, the normal need for same-sex affirmation becomes eroticized, and he or she seeks to repair the deficit through ultimately dissatisfying homosexual relationships.⁷ Many evangelical "ex-gay" ministries have sprung up in the last 20 years or so, most of them informed by Moberly's model of homosexuality or

⁴ Stanley Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p. 125.

⁵ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical View* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978).

⁶ Holben may or may not have been aware that Bahnsen advocated the death penalty for homosexual acts in his other writings. "Bahnsen, curiously enough, while devoting an entire chapter to the argument that homosexuality is not only a sin but a crime, never states what the penalty for that crime should be" (p. 257, note 42).

⁷ Elizabeth Moberly, *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic* (Greenwood: Attic Press, 1983; reprinted by Lutterworth, 1997). Not having Moberly's book, I have relied for this summary on Edward T. Welch's booklet, "Homosexuality: Speaking the Truth in Love," (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2000), pp. 27-29.

something similar. One well-known author in this area is Andrew Comiskey, a professed former homosexual, who now runs the Vineyard's Desert Stream ministry to homosexual strugglers.⁸

In contrast with Bahnsen's position, which tends to view homosexuality as nothing more than a behavioral problem, healing ministries have come across as being more compassionate and sensitive to the homosexual struggler, since homosexuality is regarded as a deeply rooted psychological malady that requires a lengthy, perhaps life-long, process of healing. However, both views tend to be suspicious of the act/orientation distinction as applied to homosexuality. In both, homosexuality is not viewed as a fixed orientation over which a person has little or no control. At its core, the sinful desire for same-sex relationships is a *spiritual* problem that can be overcome by the power of the gospel. For this reason I have chosen to combine Holben's views one and two together, and to call this combined position "restoration," since they both agree that conversion and progressive sanctification can and ought to result in significant restoration to normal heterosexual desire, and preferably heterosexual marriage.

Admittedly, the labels "restoration" and "abstinence" do not fully capture the differences between these views. I have chosen these labels in order to identify the standard or goal that each view holds out for the homosexual person who is the object of pastoral care and discipline. There is a well-defined view which holds that the proper biblical counsel to homosexuals is to pursue "restoration" to heterosexuality as their ultimate goal. And there is an equally well-defined view which teaches that the appropriate biblical counsel is "abstinence" or sexual purity, regardless of where the same-sex attracted person ends up on the spectrum of change.

D. AFFIRMATION

For those who hold to the authority, inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency of Scripture, the first view (affirmation) is clearly outside the pale of orthodoxy. To affirm the moral goodness of homosexual relationships requires a radical reinterpretation of biblical teaching on the subject of homosexuality that would reverse the historic consensus of the church for the past two millennia.

At this point, I am going to go through the major biblical texts, setting forth some of the principal arguments of the affirmationist camp, together with a critique. This is by no means an exhaustive exegetical critique, merely a sketch for the purpose of affirming my commitment to orthodoxy in the area of sexual ethics.

Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-25

Perhaps the most important passage in Scripture with regard to the question of God's will for mankind in the area of sexuality is the biblical creation account itself. Although homosexuality per se is not referred to in this passage, the creation account nevertheless establishes certain norms regarding human sexuality that continue to have relevance after the fall.

The first thing we learn about human sexuality is found in Genesis 1:26-28, where we are taught that the male-female distinction is a distinction ordained by God himself, and rooted in some way in man's identity as the image of God. Furthermore, we learn that the male-female distinction is blessed of God and is part of God's commission to mankind: "God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it'" (verse 28). The blessing is in the literary form of a command, implying that God himself will bless the procreative efforts of the man and the woman by making their union a fruitful one that will be used of God for the fulfillment of his good plan for creation. This

⁸ Andrew Comiskey, *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness: How Jesus Heals the Homosexual* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1989).

arrangement then receives the divine stamp of approval: "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (verse 31).

Theologically, then, we must conclude that God's will for mankind as established at creation is that sexual union be between a man and a woman, for the purpose of procreation. Homosexual unions are thereby ruled out, since they violate the ideal of male-female complementarity, as well as the procreative purpose of that complementarity.

In chapter 2 we are given additional insight into the nature of the complementarity of man and woman. The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18). Then the LORD brought to Adam every beast of the field, and every bird of the sky, to see what he would call them. "But for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him" (verse 20). Therefore, the LORD caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, and he took one of Adam's ribs and He fashioned a woman from the rib that He had taken from the man.

One thing that stands out from this narrative is the fact that the woman was made for man in order to deal with a problem: "It is not good for the man to be alone." The divine provision of the woman for man is God's solution to the problem of man's being "alone." Human beings naturally desire intimacy, an emotional and sexual bond with another human being. The only divinely approved provision for the satisfaction of that desire is the ordinance of marriage between one man and one woman.

Another element that we see in the text is the fact that the woman is a "helper suitable" for the man. The Hebrew phrase is *ezer knegdo* (verses 18, 20). The word *ezer* means "helper." The prepositional phrase *knegdo* (literally, "like what is in front of him") is more difficult to translate. Wenham writes: "It seems to express the notion of complementarity rather than identity."⁹ Some translate the phrase as a whole, "a helper corresponding to him." The woman corresponds to the man, not by being identical to him, but by being distinct from him and yet not alien to him as the birds and the beasts among whom no "suitable helper" was found. The woman is therefore made from the man's side, so that she would be distinct and yet the perfect complement to the man. This is highlighted by the pun that Adam makes when he gives his new companion her name-identity: "She shall be called *Isshah* (Woman), for she was taken out of *Ish* (Man)" (verse 23).

Moses then adds an important editorial comment: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh" (verse 24). Moses provides his inspired commentary on the theological significance of the foregoing account of the formation of the woman and her being given to the man as his companion. Moses, speaking on divine authority (as Jesus states – cp. Matt. 19:4-5), sees in this account the ground for the ordinance of marriage. And since Moses is writing to an Israelite audience, we are compelled to interpret the account as having normative significance even after the fall.

On the whole, affirmationists tend to ignore the implications of the creation account and spend most of their efforts reinterpreting the more explicit texts. This is particularly the case for those affirmationists who present themselves as evangelicals professing submission to the authority of Scripture. If they can simply reinterpret the explicit texts, then the Bible is silent on homosexuality – so the evangelical affirmationists blithely assume. Those affirmationists that hold a non-evangelical or liberal view of Scripture are less squeamish in their rejection of the normativity of the creation account and its relevance for the debate over homosexuality. One liberal professor of Old Testament, for example, flatly states: "The creation texts ... are products of an ancient patriarchal society and may not be absolutized ... They do not prescribe any behavior or institution."¹⁰

⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), p. 68.

¹⁰ Phyllis A. Bird, "The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation concerning Homosexuality: Old Testament Contributions," pp. 142-76, in *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, ed. David L. Balch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). See pp. 165, 167.

We have examined the foundational creation account and we have derived the implications of that account for a divine perspective on homosexual unions. We must now turn to the passages that explicitly condemn homosexual activity.

Genesis 19:1-9

Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw *them*, he rose to meet them and bowed down *with his* face to the ground. 2 And he said, "Now behold, my lords, please turn aside into your servant's house, and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way." They said however, "No, but we shall spend the night in the square." 3 Yet he urged them strongly, so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he prepared a feast for them, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. 4 Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; 5 and they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may *know* them." 6 But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, 7 and said, "Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly. 8 "Now behold, I have two daughters who have not *known* a man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof." 9 But they said, "Stand aside." Furthermore, they said, "This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them." So they pressed hard against Lot and came near to break the door.

The traditional interpretation of Genesis 19 focuses on the fact that in verses 5 and 8, the word "know" is used in what appears to be a sexual sense. The men of Sodom, having seen that Lot had brought two men (actually angels) into his house, cry out, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may *know* them" (Gen. 19:5). The NAS translates the verb *yada*, "that we may have relations with them." It is clear that the LORD is highly displeased with the wicked behavior of the men of Sodom, including presumably their desire to have relations with the angels whom they assume to be men. The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah had become so great that God was preparing to destroy the city (Gen. 18:20; 19:13). The enormity of the sin of Sodom is indicated by the severity of the divine retribution.

The traditional interpretation has been challenged by the affirmationists on the ground that it misreads the social context. According to this view, Lot was a resident alien (*ger*) in Sodom, so he is already suspect in the community. Inviting two strangers into his house at night raised fears of the citizens that they might be spies preparing for a raid. The demand of the townspeople that the two men be brought out was not overtly sexual, but for the purpose of interrogation. On this view, the preferred translation of verse 5 would take *yada* in a non-sexual sense: "Bring them out to us that we may get to know them." Therefore, the sin of Sodom was a violation of the sacred law of hospitality, still seen in many Arab cultures today. A guest who has been brought into someone's home is virtually untouchable, even if he is suspected of a crime. Even if the intention of the men of Sodom was to commit homosexual acts with Lot's guests, it was an attempted gang rape, and so has nothing to say about the moral legitimacy of loving, consensual same-sex relationships.

One major problem with the non-sexual interpretation of *yada* in verse 5 is that it makes nonsense of Lot's response: "Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly. Now behold, I have two daughters who have never *known* [had relations with] a man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof" (verses 7-8). If in verse 5, the verb is to be interpreted in a non-sexual sense, Lot's use of the same verb with an overtly sexual meaning in verse 8 makes little sense. The sexual dimension of the sin of Sodom cannot be completely removed from the text.

On the other hand, the sexual dimension is not the whole of the sin of Sodom. Subsequent biblical allusions to Sodom focus on other sins. E.g., Ezek. 16:49ff (in a spiritual identification of the southern kingdom as "Sodom") lists arrogance, failure to help the poor and needy, and "committing abominations" (probably in reference to Judah's apostasy and idolatry) as characteristic sins. Even if there is a homosexual component, it does not seem that this *alone* is what prompted God's judgment. The only other canonical reference to Sodom that hints at homosexuality is Jude 7 (cp. 2 Peter 2:6-10), which states that the men of Sodom "indulged in illicit sexual relations (*ekporneusasai*) and went after other flesh (*sarkos heteras*)." The use of the verb *ekporneuo*, although not limited to homosexual activity, clearly supports the traditional view that the sin of Sodom was at least partly sexual in nature, and provides strong evidence against any view that would attempt to read the passage in a non-sexual way. However, it is not clear what is meant by "going after other flesh." Some scholars argue that this refers to their attempt to have sexual relations with angels. However, the men of Sodom probably were unaware that Lot's guests were angels, so their intentions must have been to engage in sex with the guests.¹¹ In spite of the exegetical difficulties of Jude 7, the sexual dimension cannot be ignored.

Leviticus 18:22; 20:13

You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination . . . If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.

Proponents of the affirmationist view argue that the context of this prohibition deals with ceremonial laws pertaining to uncleanness. Since Jesus abrogated the OT laws concerning purity, the restriction on homosexual intercourse is also thereby lifted. William Countryman argues that the Old Testament sexual ethic was based on the two principles of purity and property.¹² For example, adultery is regarded in the OT as a property violation (e.g., "you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" Exod. 20:17). Homosexuality, Countryman argues, is a purity violation, and that is why it is listed along with other purity violations in Leviticus, such as the prohibition against sleeping with a woman during her menstrual impurity (Lev. 18:19). Jesus and the apostles abrogated the purity laws of the OT and substantially altered the property principle by replacing patriarchy with an egalitarian ethic expressed in the Christian fellowship.

In response, I believe this argument is weak, because there are other laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 that are grounded in moral principles and not limited to cultic matters. For example, the prohibition against sleeping with "your father's wife" (Lev. 18:8) is repeated by Paul in 1 Cor. 5:1ff. Adultery and child-sacrifice (Lev. 18:20-21) are also listed immediately before the prohibition of homosexual sex, and most affirmationists would acknowledge that these are violations of the abiding moral will of God. The intermingling of purity laws and laws founded on the moral will of God is a literary phenomenon common to the Torah.

How do we know which is which? I offer the following approach for discerning what is of continuing validity and what is not. There is a sense in which none of the statutes of the Mosaic Law are binding on the new covenant community today, because the Mosaic covenant has been abrogated by the death of Christ. However, many of the Mosaic statutes are rooted in God's holy nature which does not

¹¹ Judges 19:22-26 contains many interesting parallels to Genesis 19. In both passages, the intent of the men seems to have been to engage in forced anal penetration in order to show their dominance over the strangers in their midst and thus to humiliate them. It is therefore unlikely that the men of Sodom or Gibeah were constitutional homosexuals. Guenther Haas, "Exegetical Issues in the Use of the Bible to Justify the Acceptance of Homosexual Practice," *Christian Scholar's Review* 26:4 (1997) 389; Stanley Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming*, pp. 38-39.

¹² William L. Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

change, and so many of those statutes have their counterpart in the Adamic covenant of works (which remains binding on all men outside of Christ) and in the new covenant (binding on all who are in Christ). One way (though not the only way) that we can discern which aspects of the Mosaic Law have a normativity that transcends the particular circumstances of Israel's covenant is by comparing the Mosaic precepts with the ethical requirements of these other covenants (Adamic covenant of works; new covenant in Christ).

Let's apply this to Lev. 18:22; 20:13 and see what we discover. First, we look retrospectively to the Adamic covenant. As we have seen, the creation narrative is quite concerned to explore the gender distinctions established by God at creation. Leviticus 18:22 seems to be referring back to the creation narrative, since the terms "male" and "female" are used rather than "man" and "woman." "You shall not lie with a *female* as one lies with a *male*." Second, we look prospectively to the new covenant. As we will see in a moment, Paul in 1 Cor. 9:10 employs the term *arsenokoitai* to refer to "men who lie with men," language derived from Leviticus. These retrospective and prospective links create a line of continuity from creation to the Mosaic Law to the new covenant, thus distinguishing this particular prohibition in Leviticus as a moral precept, unlike the temporary requirements that were bound up with Israel's cult and culture.

However, even a moral precept may be clothed in a form that is adapted to Israel's old covenant circumstances. Thus I do not believe that the death penalty for those who practice homosexuality, although mandated by Moses, is required of civil governments today, since the judicial punishments of the Mosaic Law were not intended to be a guide for modern lawmakers. They were intrusions of the eschatological wrath to come. The curses of the covenant have been fulfilled by Christ's death and are no longer applicable today (only in hell for the unbeliever, whether homosexual or heterosexual).

Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12

And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 5 and said, FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

Many affirmationists claim that Jesus said nothing about the issue of homosexuality. There is even a tract with the cover title, "What Jesus Said About Homosexuality." When one opens the tract, one finds that the inside pages are all blank. Although Jesus did not specifically address the issue of homosexuality, he did address the issue of God's intent for human sexuality. In Matthew 19:3-9 (and the parallel text, Mark 10:2-12), Jesus derived great theological significance from the creation account.

In answer to the Pharisaic argument that Moses permitted divorce, Jesus draws together the two texts – Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 – and concludes that God's will for mankind is the one-flesh union of a man and a woman in the bond of marriage that is not lightly to be set aside. Even though the issue of divorce is not specifically addressed in the creation account, Jesus appeals to the creation order as the basis for a theological argument prohibiting divorce for any reason other than marital unfaithfulness. The theologically loaded statement that Jesus makes to introduce the Genesis 2:24 quote is significant: "He who created them from the beginning *made them male and female*, and said ..." The combination of the quotation from Genesis 1:27 with 2:24 is suggestive with regard to the issue of homosexuality, because it seems to imply not only that the creation ordinance of marriage is (ordinarily) indissoluble – the immediate point that Jesus is scoring against the Pharisees – but that the creation ordinance of marriage is also to be between a male and a female.

Romans 1:26-27

26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

The key question is what does Paul mean when he states that practicing homosexuals have exchanged "the natural use for that which is contrary to nature" (*ten phusiken chresin eis ten para phusin* - verse 26), and "have abandoned the natural use of the female" (*ten phusiken chresin tes theleias* - verse 27)? What is meant by Paul's repeated appeal to "nature" (*phusike, phusis*) in this passage? The traditional view is they have abandoned that use which is in accordance with the order of creation, i.e., heterosexuality.

One frequently employed challenge to the traditional interpretation claims that the term *phusis* refers to one's innate sexual orientation. Thus, Paul is merely condemning heterosexuals who violate their heterosexual *phusis* by pursuing same-sex intercourse.¹³ But the text does not say, "men abandoned their own *phusis*" (i.e., their own heterosexual nature). Rather, "they abandoned the natural *use of the female*." This affirmationist interpretation is exegetically impossible.

A more recent approach analyzes Paul's critique of homosexuality by setting it in the context of Greco-Roman philosophical and moralistic attitudes toward sexual conduct.¹⁴ Utilizing the work of Michel Foucault on the history of sexuality, as well as recent scholarship in the area of sexuality in classical and late antiquity, David E. Fredrickson has argued that Paul's critique of homosexuality is not that it violates creation norms relating to gender distinction, but passionate lust: "Men abandoned the natural use of the woman and *burned in their desire* toward one another" (verse 27). Examining the philosophical context of the term "use" (*chresis*) in relation to sexuality, Fredrickson concludes that "the natural use" is that use of sexual pleasure which is characterized by control of passion. The problem with homosexual sex for Paul is not the gender of the persons having sex, but the shameful and dishonor of excessive erotic passion ("passions of dishonor" - verse 26). Paul is therefore drawing on the Greco-Roman philosophical/moral tradition that portrays lack of sexual self-control as a shameful thing. Fredrickson also attempts to tie the shameful of erotic passion with the abusive practice of pederasty.¹⁵ Through lack of self-control, the hybristic pederast demeans others and thus commits injustice by means of his uncontrolled sexual passion.

Although Fredrickson's argument is quite learned, it ultimately fails to convince. He does not address the obvious problem posed by the statement in verse 27: "In the same way also the men abandoned *the natural use of the female* and burned in their desire toward one another, *men with men* committing indecent acts." If Paul's concern were limited to the problem of excessive erotic passion, why does he go out of his way to raise the issue of the gender of those having the sex ("men with men")? And why does he set this same-sex activity in contrast with "the natural use of the female"? If the issue of gender is irrelevant to Paul's argument, why does Paul make gender distinctions so prominent in the text? In verse 26 Paul addresses homosexual conduct on the part of women ("their women exchanged the natural use for that which is contrary to nature"), and then in verse 27, he describes the same type of conduct on

¹³ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 107-114. See Richard B. Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14:1 (Spring 1986) 184-215.

¹⁴ David E. Fredrickson, "Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24-27: Paul and the Philosophic Critique of Eros," pp. 197-222 in *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*.

¹⁵ Fredrickson is building here upon the groundbreaking work of Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). Responses to Scroggs include: David F. Wright, "Review of *The New Testament and Homosexuality* by Robin Scroggs," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38 (March 1985); Mark D. Smith, "Ancient Bisexuality and the Interpretation of Romans 1:26-27," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64:2 (Summer 1996) 223-56.

the part of men ("in the same way also the men ..."). The violation of the creation order concerning gender is Paul's *primary* moral concern; uncontrolled erotic passion is secondary.

Fredrickson's exegesis also ignores the parallel that Paul draws between the self-evident shamefulness of "gender exchange" and the more fundamental sin of "deity exchange" described earlier in the passage (see verses 23 and 25 for the use of the same verb "exchanged" in the context of idolatry). Paul's use of homosexuality in the context of his argument about mankind's rejection of the Creator in favor of worshipping and serving the creature must be carefully weighed. Homosexuality was not a randomly chosen example of pagan wickedness. As Richard B. Hays points out:

Rebellion against this Creator who may be "understood and seen in the things that he has made" is made palpable in the flouting of sexual distinctions that are fundamental to God's creative design. The reference to God as Creator would certainly evoke for Paul, as well as for his readers, immediate recollections of the creation story in Genesis 1-3, which proclaims that "God created humankind in his own image ... male and female he created them," charging them to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:27-28) ... Thus the complementarity of male and female is given a theological grounding in God's creative activity. By way of sharp contrast, in Romans 1 Paul portrays homosexual behavior as a "sacrament" (so to speak) of the antireligion of human beings who refuse to honor God as Creator. When human beings engage in homosexual activity, they enact an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality: the rejection of the Creator's design. Thus Paul's choice of homosexuality as an illustration of human depravity is not merely random: it serves his rhetorical purposes by providing a vivid image of humanity's primal rejection of the sovereignty of God the Creator.

The language of "exchange" plays a central role in this passage, emphasizing the direct parallelism between the rejection of God and the rejection of created sexual roles ... The deliberate repetition of the verb *metellaxan* forges a powerful rhetorical link between the rebellion against God and the "shameless acts" (1:27) that are themselves both evidence and consequence of that rebellion.¹⁶

Rejection of the Creator expresses itself in rejection of the Creator's design for human sexuality. On Fredrickson's interpretation – that Paul's critique of homosexuality in verses 26-27 is targeted only against excessive erotic passion – the rhetorical function of verses 26-27 in the context of Paul's critique of mankind's rejection of the Creator would be obscured.

Although I find the affirmationist exegesis of Romans 1:26-27 to be unpersuasive, we must also be cautious how we use the text. There is no warrant for using Romans 1 as evidence that homosexuality is God's judgment upon individuals. True, Paul says that unrestrained homosexual lust and practice are part of God's judgment upon idolatry. But it is a corporate judgment described in apocalyptic terms across the stage of world history. There is no basis in the text to assume that every individual who is afflicted with same-sex attraction is being judged for idolatry. There are many Christians who are attempting to deal with their same-sex attraction in an ethically responsible way. And it is not the orientation itself that is regarded as divine judgment, but giving oneself over to it.

Nor would it be valid exegesis to appeal to this text in an attempt to demonstrate that homosexuality is always a chosen lifestyle and never an orientation. The statement that they "*exchanged* the natural function for that which is unnatural" cannot be interpreted as a conscious, willful act in the life history of each individual homosexual, any more than the statement that the pagans "*exchanged* the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man" (verses 23, 25) can rightly be interpreted as teaching that each pagan made a personal decision to stop worshipping the Creator and to worship idols instead.

¹⁶ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), pp. 386-87.

We must remember too that Romans 1 is the first part of Paul's larger argument in the Epistle to the Romans. At this stage in the argument, he is dealing with the revelation of God's wrath and man's inexcusableness before God. He has not yet reached the point in his argument dealing with the revelation of God's righteousness in Jesus Christ and the ethical implications of that revelation for the redeemed. Therefore, it is inappropriate to use Romans 1 to condemn all same-sex attracted persons without qualification. The calling of Jesus Christ to the same-sex attracted person is something that will have to be determined in light of other texts and theological considerations.

Nevertheless, in spite of those caveats, it is very difficult – if not impossible – to get around the teaching of this crucial passage that homosexual activity is contrary to God's intention for man as established at creation. Paul appeals to the creation account, just as Leviticus does, by using the terms male and female. According to Romans 1, then, both same-sex desire and same-sex behavior are "contrary to nature" (verse 26), that is, contrary to the divinely established order of creation. Homosexuality is a serious violation of God's moral will, and its presence among the pagans is an indication of God's righteous wrath toward mankind, and is itself the just object of that wrath.

1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:10

1 Corinthians 6:9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor *malakoi*, nor *arsenokoitai*, 10 nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

1 Timothy 1:8 But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9 realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers 10 and immoral men and *arsenokoitai* and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, 11 according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.

Robin Scroggs interprets these terms in light of classical Greek pederasty. According to Scroggs, *malakoi* refers to effeminate call boys, i.e., teenage male prostitutes who through dress, removal of body hair and sometimes even castration would make themselves girlish and soft for older men. *Arsenokoitai* are the older men who were the customers of the call boys. Thus Paul is not condemning all homosexual activity, but a specific, exploitative form thereof known as pederasty.¹⁷ John Boswell takes a different tack. He interprets the *arsen-* prefix adjectivally rather than as the direct object, so that *arsenokoitai* would then be translated "male prostitutes."¹⁸

However, scholars have shown that the term *arsenokoites* was derived from the LXX text of Leviticus 18:22 ("a male who lies with a male as with a female"). In fact it seems that Paul, taking his cue from the LXX, has merely translated the standard Rabbinic Hebrew phrase (*mishkav zakur*) for male homosexual intercourse into Greek.¹⁹ Since Leviticus does not distinguish between pederastic and non-

¹⁷ Scroggs defines pederasty as an erotic/sexual relationship between an older adult, who played the role of active partner, and a younger boy who always assumed the passive role. Because of the age inequality, as well as the younger boy's being used to gratify the older man without enjoying sexual pleasure himself, Scroggs argues that these relationships tended to be destructive and dehumanizing.

¹⁸ Boswell, pp. 106-7, 337-53.

¹⁹ Surprisingly, Scroggs himself acknowledges this (pp. 106-8). For a more comprehensive treatment of the lexical issues surrounding *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, see P. D. M. Turner, "Biblical Texts Relevant to Homosexual Orientation and Practice: Notes on Philology and Interpretation," *Christian Scholar's Review* 26:4 (Summer 1997) 435-45; and especially David F. Wright, "Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of *arsenokoitai* (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (June 1984) 125-53. Wright's work on the lexical issues is a devastating critique of Scroggs' and Boswell's lexical proposals.

pederastic homosexuality, and instead grounds the prohibition in the fact that same-sex relations violate the creation pattern of opposite-sex relations, it follows that Paul's condemnation of homosexual practice is a blanket condemnation of same-sex relations, irrespective of its various cultural manifestations.

It is extremely important to point out, however, that "homosexuals" is a serious mistranslation of *arsenokoitai*.²⁰ The word "homosexual" in English identifies a type of person rather than a behavior. A homosexual is someone who possesses the homosexual orientation, regardless of whether he acts on it or not. *Arsenokoitai*, by contrast, refers to those who engage in same-sex sexual activity, irrespective of orientation. Failure to recognize this translation error has encouraged some conservative Christians to say that even celibate homosexuals are excluded from the kingdom unless they repent of their orientation.

Other affirmationist arguments

Affirmationists tend to discredit the biblical restrictions regarding sexual behavior as reflecting a sub-Christian ethic. They appeal instead to the teaching of Jesus, which, it is argued, places a higher emphasis on the *quality* of our human relationships rather than on the rules governing sex. A committed, loving relationship involving sexual expression is not rejected, even if it literally transgresses the letter of the law. Homosexual acts are not to be evaluated in isolation or simply as behavior to be approved or condemned, according to affirmationists. Rather, they must be evaluated contextually in terms of the quality, nature, and intention of the relationship. Such relationships ought to be consensual and non-exploitative, and characterized by mutual commitment to faithfulness. Same-sex love that meets these criteria is said to be morally equivalent to opposite-sex love.

A prominent example of this approach is the 1991 majority report of The Special Committee on Human Sexuality of the Presbyterian Church (USA).²¹ The majority report starts out with the assumption that the biblical teaching on human sexuality is composed of numerous conflicting witnesses. This demands, then, that ethical and theological norms must be brought to bear as a hermeneutical grid for sifting the wheat from the chaff among these inconsistent witnesses in Scripture. The majority report argues that the twin concepts of "justice" and "love" ought to serve as these hermeneutical norms in the area of sexual ethics. "Justice" is defined as the ideal of human relationships characterized by equality. It is the absence of claims to power in order to subjugate or control others. "Love" is that which aids personal self-actualization and fulfillment of one's need for embodied, genital love. Having established justice and love as the criteria (together called "justice-love"), the authors of the majority report dismiss many specific biblical injunctions and teachings in the area of sexuality as inconsistent with these norms and hence not binding.²²

In addition to the more obvious hermeneutical flaws that stem from a liberal/modernist conception of the nature of biblical authority, the majority report does not define justice and love in a biblical manner. Biblical justice has little to do with the absence of power structures in human relationships, but is the eschatological revelation of the righteousness of God as revealed in these last days in the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:21ff). Love is also defined in Christocentric terms as self-abnegation and self-sacrifice for the spiritual good of another. Biblical love is the opposite of the modern narcissistic notion of self-actualization and personal fulfillment. These ideas are rooted in the wisdom of the world which has always found the cross to be a stumbling block. Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny

²⁰ W. L. Petersen, "Can *arsenokoitai* Be Translated by 'Homosexuals'? (1 Cor. 6.9; 1 Tim. 1:10)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 40 (1986) 187-91.

²¹ Special Committee on Human Sexuality, *Presbyterians and Human Sexuality* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 1991). The majority report was rejected by the General Assembly.

²² Jones and Yarhouse, pp. 177-78.

himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it" (Luke 9:23-24).

Another affirmationist argument is that the biblical writers were living in a prescientific age that assumed all humans to be ontologically heterosexual. They therefore condemned homosexual behavior as a willful and perverse transgression of one's innate heterosexuality. Since we now know that the homosexual orientation actually exists, Paul's blanket condemnation is simply outdated and no longer valid for modern people, according to this argument. We cannot assume that the biblical writers, had they been aware of the scientific evidence that homosexuality is a fixed orientation, would not have endorsed committed same-sex relationships.

This argument assumes that the biblical writers were limited by the horizon of their own understanding and cultural experience. But we hold that the ultimate author of Scripture is the Holy Spirit speaking in and through the human authors. Although the Bible has a very real human dimension and shows evidence of the time-bound cultural context of the human authors, it nevertheless constitutes God's authoritative revelation. The Bible clearly promulgates universal ethical norms that are not culturally relative. This is especially true in the area of human sexuality, which is an essential component of God's creation-design, and which is so closely related to man's spiritual and moral nature.

To be sure, when there is an apparent conflict between science and Scripture, science can play a legitimate role as a warning flag, causing us to go back and reexamine our exegesis. But having reexamined our exegesis on internal grounds, we can never set aside the clear teaching of God's Word simply because it is contradicted by science. In the debate over how the church ought to deal with the apparent conflict between modern science and the biblical creation account, I made the following statement:

Given two possible interpretations – one that conflicts with certain scientific claims but is exegetically well supported, and another that does not conflict with science but is exegetically forced – which should be adopted? We believe that presuppositional priority should be accorded to Scripture despite the potential difficulties of harmonization with science.²³

So here in the debate over homosexuality. Scripture has presuppositional authority over the fallible findings of psychological research – a field which is even more prone to "data infection" due to the worldviews and biases of the researchers. Besides, no amount of scientific data concerning homosexuality can dictate moral conclusions. "Ought" can never be derived from "is."²⁴ Although I disagree with much in Bahnsen's book, I heartily endorse the following statement made in the context of his critique of the use of the act/orientation distinction to qualify the biblical condemnation of homosexuality:

Without a doubt modern science can help us to understand our world better and thereby help us apply God's norms to life; however, science cannot establish ethical norms or alter those delivered by God the lawgiver.²⁵

E. ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation is a compromise position. It is more orthodox than affirmation but in practice not significantly different. On paper, accommodationists acknowledge that the Bible defines homosexual

²³ Lee Irons with Meredith G. Kline, in *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*, ed. David G. Hagopian (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux Press, 2001), p. 295. See also pp. 180-82.

²⁴ Jones and Yarhouse deal with some of these flaws, both in the research itself and in the use of science in moral argumentation. See also their article, "A Critique of Materialist Assumptions in Interpretations of Research on Homosexuality," *Christian Scholar's Review* 26:4 (1997) 478-95.

²⁵ Bahnsen, p. 66.

behavior as abnormal and not fulfilling the creation ideal for human sexuality. For these reasons, a same-sex relationship can never receive theological legitimization. But in practice, accommodation seeks a pastoral response to the homosexual in the church that would permit a homosexual who is living in a same-sex relationship to remain in the church's fellowship without censure or discipline. Essentially, accommodationists have an unorthodox ecclesiology.

Lewis Smedes may be one of the earliest evangelicals to advocate accommodation. Smedes affirms the biblical teaching that God's intention for mankind is sex within a heterosexual marriage union:

It seems utterly clear to me that the Bible from beginning to end views the heterosexual union as God's intention for sexuality. From the beginning "he made them male and female" so that they might become "one flesh."²⁶

Homosexuality is an abnormal condition due to the Fall. Smedes states that in his estimation homosexuality is an unchosen condition, the causes of which are not clearly understood. Not only is the condition of being a homosexual unchosen, but it is not a blameworthy condition. Given these assumptions, what is the homosexual person's responsibility toward his own sexuality? Smedes outlines four steps for a responsible, Christian confrontation with one's homosexual condition.

First, the homosexual Christian must recognize that while he is not to blame for his homosexual drives, he is responsible for what he does with them.

Second, the homosexual person ought to seek to change. While healing therapies are statistically not promising, there are many testimonies of same-sex attracted Christians who have changed.²⁷

But what if after lengthy therapy change of orientation appears unlikely? In other words, what if a person is a "constitutional homosexual"? The third step, then, is to attempt to pursue celibacy. Although extremely difficult, Smedes believes that celibacy can be achieved with the help of behavioral modification techniques.

What if the homosexual Christian does not have the gift of celibacy? In this tragic situation, Smedes urges, as a fourth step, "the optimum moral life within his sexually abnormal practice." In other words, if restoration and abstinence have been attempted without success, constitutional homosexuals ought to live in committed and faithful monogamous relationships with each other. However, Smedes makes it clear that this counsel does not imply acceptance of homosexual practice as morally commendable. "It is, however, to recognize that the optimum moral life within a deplorable situation is preferable to a life of sexual chaos." Since we live in a fallen world, the church must be willing to live with ambivalence. So goes Smedes' accommodationist argument.

Another form of accommodation is "*de facto* accommodation," as distinct from Smedes' more principled approach. *De facto* accommodation stops short of encouraging the homosexual to enter into a committed same-sex relationship – the church can never endorse such unions, even in a qualified sense. Nevertheless, practicing homosexuals are permitted to remain members in good standing and are not subject to church discipline. This tended to be the position of the mainline Protestant denominations in the 1970s until the more recent battles over gay ordination.²⁸ In the Roman Catholic Church, *de facto*

²⁶ Lewis B. Smedes, *Sex for Christians: The Limits and Liberties of Sexual Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976; revised edition, 1994), pp. 48-59, 238-43.

²⁷ E.g., Bob Davies and Lela Gilbert, *Portraits of Freedom: 14 People Who Came Out of Homosexuality* (IVP, 2001).

²⁸ E.g., Marion L. Soards, *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995). In this brief but helpful volume, Professor Soards advocates that the Presbyterian Church (USA) should retain the stance on homosexuality as set forth in the report, "The Church and Homosexuality," adopted by The United Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1978. Church membership for practicing homosexuals would be continued, but ordination would not. "While the church cannot offer approval of homosexual activity, the church can also not deny the validity of faith in less-than-perfect humans ... If there is no

accommodation is also prevalent, based upon "the principle of gradualism." The official counsel of the Roman magisterium to its homosexual members is sexual abstinence. However, the principle of gradualism permits practicing homosexuals to remain in the church as long as they are striving toward abstinence and make frequent use of the sacrament of penance.²⁹

My critique of both types of accommodation is that they fail to take seriously the third mark of the church, viz., church discipline. Paul lists *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6:10 as among "the unrighteous [who] will not inherit the kingdom of God." The ESV translation of both terms together as "men who practice homosexuality" is correct. Therefore, the practice of homosexuality is among the types of behavior that are unacceptable for Christians and which, unless accompanied by repentance, disqualify a person from inheriting the kingdom of God.

This text is particularly relevant, since the immediate context in which it is found (1 Corinthians 5-6 as a whole) deals with the issue of church discipline. Paul rebukes the Corinthian church for failing to exercise proper church discipline in the case of a man who was sleeping with his father's wife (5:1). Paul rebukes the Corinthians for becoming arrogant, when they ought to have mourned instead, "so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst" (verse 2) – clearly referring to church discipline. He then goes on to say that he has already delivered the man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (verses 3-5). Paul then states:

6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10 I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. 11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler – not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? 13 But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES (Deut. 13:5).

Notice the large degree of overlap between the two sin lists in 5:10-11 and the sin list in the following chapter (6:9-10). The italicized words in the second list are the only new items added, and the items in the first list have been rearranged to match the order of the second list:

1 Cor. 5:10-11	1 Cor. 6:9-10
sexually immoral	sexually immoral
idolaters	idolaters
covetous	<i>adulterers</i>
drunkard	<i>men who practice homosexuality</i>
reviler	<i>thieves</i>
swindlers	covetous
	drunkards
	revilers
	swindlers

demand for approval of homosexual activity, there is no reason to deny church membership to the homosexual ... The concern of the church is with a person's faith in Jesus Christ, not with sexuality" (p. 76).

²⁹ See Gerald D. Coleman, *Homosexuality: Catholic Teaching and Pastoral Practice* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), pp. 86-88.

The two lists are similar enough to suggest that the second list intentionally links back to the first. In that case, the discussion of church discipline that surrounds the first list colors the second as well. Furthermore, both lists lead off with the term "sexually immoral" (*pornoi*), which is a catch-all term in Greek covering all forms of sexual immorality, including incest (as the context shows), adultery, fornication, homosexual intercourse, and other sexual sins. Therefore, Paul's injunction in 5:11, "I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is sexually immoral," implicitly includes a command to the Corinthians to remove from the church so-called brothers who are living impenitently in the sexual sins stated in 6:9-10.

It is one thing for the church to have among its members those who contend with same-sex attraction, and even those whose strivings against actual sin in this area fall short of the ideal pattern of progressive sanctification. It is another thing altogether for the church to allow those who have resigned themselves to a life of homosexual activity without any serious effort to turn from it. I do not believe that church discipline is appropriate for the homosexual struggler who, in reliance on the grace of God, is pursuing sexual abstinence, and is manifesting the marks of genuine faith and repentance in his or her life. But I do believe that church discipline is both appropriate and necessary for those who have decided to pursue a same-sex relationship.

F. ABSTINENCE

Since affirmation and accommodation are biblically unacceptable, we are left with the remaining two options. In terms of the church's practical ministry to the same-sex attracted Christian, we do not need to choose between restoration and abstinence. The Christian who contends with same-sex attraction ought to be counseled to seek healing and restoration to heterosexual desires, and in the meantime to be committed to sexual abstinence.

But what about the homosexual person who, after unsuccessfully seeking restoration, has concluded that the underlying same-sex disposition is unlikely to change by ordinary means? Advocates of restoration are uncomfortable with the idea of being resigned to this possibility. Advocates of abstinence, by contrast, are prepared to acknowledge that, for some, homosexuality is an essentially fixed condition.

Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse, both trained psychologists, have written a recent book critiquing the misuse of scientific studies in an effort to change the church's moral stance against homosexual behavior. In their conclusion, they adopt the abstinence position, which they describe as follows:

It appears to us that profound change of orientation occurs infrequently. But again, this is irrelevant to the call of the gospel because conversion to heterosexuality, while a testimony to God's grace, is nevertheless not required for faithful discipleship. The change minimally demanded by the gospel is not conversion to heterosexuality but chastity in one's state of life. And that call, costly though it may be, stands as a possibility for any of us.³⁰

I have referred to the person whose same-sex attraction is so deeply rooted as to be an "essentially fixed condition." It would be a mistake, however, to say that such a person's sexual orientation is "immutable." God is not bound. The Spirit is able to do surprising and unexpected things. But apart from a miracle, there are many Christians whose sexual orientation appears to be essentially fixed in the sense that the ordinary means of grace and progressive sanctification have not resulted, and are not likely to result, in

³⁰ Jones and Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate*, p. 182. Note the positive review of this book in a recent issue of *Modern Reformation* magazine (vol. 11, July/August 2002, pp. 44-46). The reviewer writes, "This very important book will strengthen the hand of all who seek to witness within the churches to a traditional ethic concerning homosexuality."

the more fundamental change of re-orientation to heterosexuality and the complete absence of same-sex attraction. The abstinence view accepts the testimony of many homosexuals that this is indeed the case with them. Acceptance of this testimony is in no way meant to deny the testimony of others who claim that they have been successful in achieving heterosexual normalcy. Advocates of abstinence simply wish to provide a biblical and pastoral approach for ministering to the homosexual whose attempts to change have proven unsuccessful, but who continues to profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and desires to remain faithful to the biblical norms governing sexual behavior.

An important element of the abstinence view is the act/orientation distinction. Although this distinction is widely regarded with suspicion in our circles, due to the abuse of that distinction on the part of affirmationists and some accommodationists, I believe it is nevertheless possible to formulate the distinction in a theologically sound manner.

We must first define the terms "act" and "orientation." To begin with, the term "act" is ambiguous. Does it refer only to penetrative intercourse? Or does it refer to other forms of sexual contact that may fall short of intercourse? I want to define "act" comprehensively to refer to all homosexual activity, including penetrative intercourse, oral sex, and all other forms of sexual contact intended to stimulate erotic arousal.

Before we attempt to define orientation, we must first set the stage by distinguishing between lust and sexual attraction. I defined "sexual attraction" at the outset as the human capacity to have feelings of attraction to a person of the gender that one is sexually oriented toward, but which may or may not rise to the level of lust. An example of this would be the "chemistry" that a straight married man can have with a woman who is not his wife. Such feelings are clearly sexual in nature, even though they may not necessarily involve physical arousal or lustful desires. The line is extremely hard to draw, and it is potentially dangerous to get too close to that line. But the fact remains: there is a difference between sexual attraction and lust.

What, then is the definition of "orientation"? Sexual orientation refers to the predominant and persistent gender-direction of a person's sexual attractions. Essential to the concept of orientation is the idea that gender preference (in many cases) is so deeply rooted as to be a *predominant* and *persistent* disposition. A homosexually oriented person may experience occasional sexual attraction toward a person of the opposite gender. Likewise for heterosexuals. Yet such occasions of alternative gender attraction would not necessarily prove that an underlying change in sexual orientation had occurred.

Having carefully defined our terms, "the act/orientation distinction" itself needs to be addressed. You would think that the definition of terminology would make the distinction immediately transparent. But this is not the case. Up to this point, our definitions have not included any moral evaluations. We have been simply describing the nature of human sexuality. But now we must enter the realm of moral reasoning. And when we do so, it turns out that there are various ways in which the act/orientation distinction can be (and has been) used in order to draw certain moral conclusions.

For example, many affirmationists employ the concept of orientation in an improper manner when they make the following common argument:

Homosexuality is simply a natural variant occurring consistently throughout history and cultures, much like left-handedness. Therefore, a homosexual orientation can be understood by the Christian who discovers himself or herself to be gay as yet another gift of God, with the confidence that God only gives good gifts ... It would make as much sense to question the "morality" of having green eyes or a genetic predisposition to baldness.³¹

God so created humans that they develop with a great variety of both gender identities and sexual-object choices. Consequently, the attempt to force humans into narrow heterosexist categories of

³¹ Holben, describing the affirmationist view, pp. 175-76.

what it means to be a man or a woman can destroy the great richness and variety of God's creation. Always and everywhere a certain percentage of men and women develop as homosexuals or lesbians. They should be considered a part of God's creative plan. Their sexual orientation has no necessary connection with sin, sickness, or failure; rather, it is a gift from God to be accepted and lived out with gratitude. God does not despise anything that God has created.³²

Notice the key assumption that homosexuality as an orientation is part of God's good creation. But this assumption fails to take into account the central biblical teaching concerning the fall of man. Even though God originally made man good, after the fall not all of man's desires, dispositions, and orientations are good. Indeed, the doctrine of total depravity teaches that, apart from grace, man's most fundamental orientation is toward that which is contrary to God's will and ought not to be fulfilled. Furthermore, according to this reasoning, since the orientation is a normal variation in God's creative plan – and therefore has no necessary connection with sin – it is morally right to act upon one's orientation, to live out what God has made one to be. In the affirmationist approach, then, homosexual orientation and homosexual activity are not so much distinguished as they are inextricably linked. The goodness of the orientation logically implies the goodness of the act. Clearly, any moral reasoning that fails to take the fall into account is seriously flawed.

Another misuse of the act/orientation distinction is that found in accommodationists like Lewis Smedes. Smedes argues as follows:

No homosexual, to my knowledge, ever decides to be homosexual; he only makes the painful discovery at one time or another that he is homosexual ... He is the product of forces over which he had no control. He merits blame for being homosexual no more than a mentally retarded child does for being retarded ... He should refuse to accept a burden of guilt for his condition. He is a victim either of biological accident or someone else's folly.³³

Smedes does not go as far as the affirmationists and call the homosexual orientation positively good. For Smedes, homosexuality is a result of the fall and fails to live up to the ideal pattern for human sexuality established at creation. Nevertheless, Smedes clearly denies that being homosexual is morally blameworthy. The condition itself is a result of the fall, but since "he is the product of forces over which he had no control," he does not merit blame for having it. Smedes appears to have imbibed the Pelagian premise that a person can only be held responsible for freely chosen acts. The logical implication of such thinking is a denial of the doctrine of original sin.

Another danger inherent in Smedes' reasoning is as follows: if the orientation is morally neutral, then on what basis can we say that acting on such a morally neutral orientation is sinful? Smedes wants to say that homosexual relationships cannot be given moral approval. But on what basis? In fact, it is interesting that he never explicitly says that such relationships are sinful. Smedes' interpretation of homosexual orientation as morally neutral leads him to an overly benign evaluation of homosexual activity.

There is one more interpretation of the act/orientation distinction that must be examined, and that is the position of the Roman Catholic Church. In his 1986 "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," Cardinal Ratzinger states:

Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder. Therefore special concern and pastoral attention should be directed

³² John J. McNeill, "Homosexuality: Challenging the Church to Grow," in *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, ed. Jeffrey S. Siker (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), p. 50.

³³ Smedes, pp. 54-55.

toward those who have this condition, lest they be led to believe that the living out of this orientation in homosexual activity is a morally acceptable option. It is not.³⁴

In like manner, The Catholic Catechism states:

Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered." They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life ... The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. They do not choose their homosexual condition; for most of them it is a trial ... Homosexual persons are called to chastity.³⁵

This approach to the act/orientation distinction is an improvement on that of Smedes'. *Both* the orientation and the activity are "disordered" because they violate "natural law," that is, the central Catholic dogma that all sexual acts must be open to procreation. All homosexual acts are "acts of grave depravity." And the orientation itself is a "strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic evil." However, just as Smedes argued, the inclination of the homosexual person is unchosen and therefore "not a sin." Why does the Catholic Church take this position? Because of its faulty doctrine of original sin and the related doctrine of concupiscence:

Although it is proper to each individual, original sin does not have the character of a personal fault in any of Adam's descendants. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it; subject to ignorance, suffering, and the dominion of death; and inclined to sin – an inclination to evil that is called "concupiscence."³⁶

Concupiscence is sometimes also called the *fomes peccati*, the tinder for sin. Concupiscence flows to us from Adam's first sin, it unsettles our moral faculties, and inclines us to commit actual sins, but it is not itself a personal offense. It is left in the believer even after baptism as something to wrestle with, but "it cannot harm those who do not consent but manfully resist it by the grace of Jesus Christ."³⁷ The Roman Catholic understanding of original sin downplays man's moral culpability and regards it as a wound by which our faculties are unsettled and inclined toward sin. It is a semi-Pelagian doctrinal formulation.

This semi-Pelagian conception of original sin underlies the moral evaluation of homosexuality as an orientation. Just as original sin is a disturbance or a disorder but is not sinful in itself, so the homosexual orientation is a disturbance or a disorder, but not sinful in itself. The only added element that makes homosexuality worse than original sin is that it violates natural law, since it is an impulse to engage in sexual activity that is not open to procreation.

In contrast with these faulty formulations of the act/orientation distinction, I believe that homosexuality as an orientation is *sinful* because it is a result of original sin. Since my conception of original sin is neither Pelagian nor semi-Pelagian but Augustinian and Reformed, my conception of orientation is likewise neither Pelagian nor semi-Pelagian. The homosexual orientation is sinful in the sense that it is contrary to the creation order, is a result of the fall, and is therefore an objectively sinful condition tending toward actual sin. It stands under the same divine judgment that original sin stands under. It is "an abomination" in the sight of our holy God (Lev. 18:22; 20:13), not only because it is contrary to God's will,

³⁴ This letter was approved by the pope and is one of the key documents in which the Roman Catholic magisterium has defined its position on homosexuality. For the text, see *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, Jeffrey S. Siker, ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), p. 39-47.

³⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), §§2357-59.

³⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §405.

³⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§1264, 1426, 2515.

but because (unlike most other sexual sins) it violates the order of gender complementarity established at creation.

Although homosexuality as an orientation is sinful in all of these ways, I do not believe it is to be regarded as morally equivalent to *actual homosexual sin*. As the Shorter Catechism teaches, original sin must be distinguished from actual transgression:

Q. 18. Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?

A. The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin; together with all *actual transgressions* which proceed from it.

Actual transgressions "proceed from" original sin, but are not to be equated with it. This distinction is important because it affects our understanding of what it means for a homosexual to "repent of homosexuality." Certainly, repentance must include turning from homosexual activity and lust. But can a person repent of his or her sexual orientation? Joe Dallas, head of Genesis Counseling in Orange County (a ministry approved by Exodus International), thinks not:

Of course, you can't repent of *having* those desires. You can't rip them out and abandon them, and you can't just will them away. Repentance applies only to acts of the *conscious will*, whether they are outward actions or inward indulgences. So you are not trying to repent of *homosexuality per se* but of *conscious homosexual expressions*.³⁸

I have reservations with Dallas' limited conception of repentance. "You can't repent of having those desires." If by desires he means lustful desires, then he would be contradicting his own stand on the need to fight against and repent of homosexual lust. I assume, then, that he means, "You can't repent of having homosexual inclinations." There is some truth to that statement. However, I do think a homosexual Christian can and ought to repent of his or her homosexual inclination in the same way that we ought to repent of original sin. In other words, we ought to acknowledge our own personal moral culpability for our sinful corruption inherited from Adam. We ought to recognize that we ourselves have said, "Yes!" to Adam's sin and that, even apart from any actual sins that we have committed, we are guilty before a holy God and in desperate need of the righteousness of Christ and his once-for-all atonement.

The Westminster Confession teaches that we are personally guilty for original sin and liable to eternal judgment because of it:

WCF 6.6 Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.

If we are culpable for original sin, then there is a sense in which repentance for it is appropriate. Biblical repentance involves three elements: (1) acknowledgment of sin, (2) sorrow for sin, and (3) turning from sin to God "with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience" (WSC # 87). The first two elements are appropriate responses on the part of a homosexual toward his sinful same-sex attraction. He or she ought to acknowledge the sinfulness of same-sex attraction, and seek God's grace to have biblical sorrow for it. These two things are crucial for striving against sin and pursuing progressive sanctification in this area of temptation.

³⁸ Dallas, *Desires in Conflict* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1991), p. 54. Dallas defines "conscious homosexual expressions" more broadly than actual homosexual intercourse. Repentance is also required for all sexual contact, erotic noncontact behavior (e.g., exhibitionism, telephone sex), pornography, as well as indulging in sexual fantasies and lust.

But what about the third element of repentance – turning from sin to God with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience? It is easy to see how this third element applies to repentance for homosexual acts and lust, but how does it apply to repentance in relation to one's orientation? It may be tempting to argue that it simply does not apply. But the third element *must* find expression. John the Baptist warned against going through the motions of repentance, and exhorted the Pharisees to "bear fruits in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3:8). I believe that the biblically appropriate way for a repentant homosexual to "bear fruits in keeping with repentance" is to turn from his homosexuality by pursuing sexual purity and sanctification according to God's standards. *And the only God-ordained standard concerning sexual holiness is chastity in heart, speech, and behavior* – whether that takes place in the context of heterosexual marriage or in abstinent singleness, irrespective of one's sexual orientation.

Joe Dallas provides a helpful pastoral summation of the abstinence position:

These feelings [toward the same sex] may be noted before or after conversion to Christianity; if they are apparent prior to conversion, it is often assumed they will vanish following a commitment to Christ, and if they are noted after conversion, they may be thought to indicate a flaw in the believer's integrity ... Idealism often leads to premature claims of "healing" of homosexuality when, in fact, erotic desires have simply abated ... When homosexual tendencies reemerge ... the disappointment is shattering. "What went wrong?" the believer asks, assuming he or she has erred or not tried hard enough. Despite the pat answers too commonly given – such as "It's Satanic attack" or "Just pray harder" – the fact is, nothing wrong has been done. Expectations simply need revision ... Holding up transformation (complete and permanent absence of homosexual desire) as the determinant of success is cruel and senseless; anyone who responsibly stewards sexual behavior is a success, regardless of temptation toward that behavior ... When dealing with homosexuality, the goal endorsed by the church should be one of obedience, which is within the reach of all of us, rather than change, which is not easily or willfully attained and which varies from person to person.³⁹

G. RESTORATION

Although there are various emphases among advocates of restoration, I have chosen Greg Bahnsen as the representative scholar for this view, since he is Reformed and his views are widely influential in our circles. He advocated restoration in its strongest form, thus rejecting completely the idea of homosexuality as an orientation:

If Scripture does not distinguish between orientation and act, the distinction is not morally relevant ... If it were crucial to our moral judgments that we distinguish between innocent inversion and culpable homosexual acts, then certainly God would be aware of that distinction and bring it to light in His inspired Word for us.⁴⁰

Bahnsen decries the counsel of abstinence as a "cruel" position that "straddles the moral fence":

Homosexuality is not a cross to be born, but a pattern of behavior to be thrown off with the old man and his lusts. Any Christian discussion of the act/orientation distinction or the cause of homosexuality that suggests that the inner desire is involuntary and perhaps irreversibly

³⁹ Dallas, "Another Option: Christianity and Ego-Dystonic Homosexuality," pp. 137-44 in *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, Jeffrey S. Siker, ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

⁴⁰ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical View* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), pp. 65-66. In the immediate context, Bahnsen is arguing against a particular *use* of the act/orientation distinction, namely, the affirmationist argument that since the biblical authors were unaware of the distinction, their condemnation of homosexuality need not be taken as morally binding today. Bahnsen could have simply argued against this hermeneutical *misuse* of the distinction, but he goes further and rejects the distinction itself.

determined, and thus immune from responsibility, is contrary to the scriptural portrayal. Further, any such discussion that goes on to say that, although this inversion is unavoidable and permanently fixed in his disposition, nevertheless any outward expression of his homosexuality in overt acts is sinful and condemned, straddles the moral fence and is cruel to the sinner.

Since he rejects the concept of orientation, Bahnsen speaks of "homosexual desires and deeds" instead, and argues that both are "willful sins." This is considered to be "overwhelmingly important" in order to provide proper biblical counsel to the homosexual. "When responsibility for homosexuality is removed, hope for homosexuality is also destroyed." Having established the theoretical framework, Bahnsen draws out the logical implication: "Because homosexuality is sinful, there is divinely guaranteed hope for its reversal."⁴¹ He then argues that abstinence is "a half-way house" and that heterosexual marriage is the "final goal":

It will be especially necessary in this day to lay to rest the myth of constitutional homosexuality. When the Christian pastor or the new believer listens to this myth and takes it seriously, he is in danger of becoming deaf to the Bible's own teaching on the subject and substituting secular advice for the prescription of the Great Physician. In so doing he deprives the homosexual convert of needed hope. Moreover, the pastor and congregation of the church in which the converted homosexual seeks fellowship must make clear that his sanctification is not simply a matter of sublimating and being frustrated by his desires; such a half-way house is not where God intended to leave the homosexual when He delivered him from his sin. Since the homosexual has obviously not been given the gift of sexual abstinence, his restoration by God should eventually bring conformity to the creational order and a regaining of heterosexual desires. His final goal is God's ordained context and direction for sexual gratification – heterosexual marriage.⁴²

The primary text cited in support of the notion that homosexuals can and ought to change not only their behavior but their orientation, is 1 Corinthians 6:9-11:

Because a person is homosexual by will, and not by constitutional necessity, he can be changed and can reform his life. Having listed homosexuality among the things that exclude a person from God's kingdom, Paul says, "And some of you were these things" – but now they are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of God. Therefore, on inspired and infallible grounds, the Christian can say that it *is* possible to turn from homosexuality and leave it behind.⁴³

My objection to this interpretation is that it is based upon one of several English versions that misleadingly use the modern term "homosexual." Here is a sampling:

NASB: "nor effeminate, nor homosexuals ... Such were some of you"

NKJV: "nor homosexuals, nor sodomites ... And such were some of you"

RSV: "nor homosexuals [alternate reading: sexual perverts] ... And such were some of you"

NIV: "nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ... And that is what some of you were"

As a noun, the word "homosexuals" in the English language typically refers to persons who have a homosexual orientation, whether or not they act on it.⁴⁴ Logically, then, when Paul says "such *were* some of you," one might draw the inference that Paul is teaching that some of the Corinthians were

⁴¹ Bahnsen, pp. 82-83.

⁴² Bahnsen, p. 97.

⁴³ Bahnsen, pp. 82-83.

⁴⁴ *The Supplement To the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford 1976) defines the noun "homosexual" as "A person who has a sexual propensity for a person of his or her own sex; esp. one whose sexual desires are directed wholly or largely towards people of the same sex." Quoted by William L. Petersen, "Can *arsenokoitai* Be Translated by 'Homosexuals'?" *Vigiliae Christianae* 40 (1986) 189.

homosexually oriented but are such no longer. But this inference, as logical as it is in English, is unwarranted in Greek. The most accurate English translation of this verse that I am aware of is the recent English Standard Version:

ESV: "nor men who practice homosexuality⁴⁵ ... And such were some of you"

Notice the radical difference this more precise translation makes. Some of the Corinthians were men who practiced homosexuality; by the transforming grace of the gospel, they practice this sin no longer. How different this is from those translations which seem to imply that the Corinthian homosexuals who converted to Christ were the first ex-gays in history! If Bahnsen had consulted the original Greek text, he would have realized that his pronouncement that, according to Paul, homosexuals can be restored to heterosexuality has no exegetical foundation whatsoever.⁴⁶ The most that can be derived from 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 is that, by grace, it is possible for a homosexual person to cease *practicing* homosexuality. The text says nothing about turning from homosexuality as an orientation. Each of the other terms in this text plainly refer to sinful activities or patterns of behavior: fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, covetous⁴⁷, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers.

Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse, two evangelical scholars whose work I have profited from greatly, make the following insightful comments on 1 Corinthians 6:9-11:

When the apostle Paul said "that is what some of you were" (1 Cor. 6:11), we have no assurance that he meant that the former "homosexual offenders" were all fully converted to heterosexuality and happily married. Paul himself was a celibate single man, called his condition a blessed one and wished his condition on others. Is it too much to believe that what Paul had in mind for the former homosexual offenders was chastity in singleness and freedom from their former sexual enslavement to sin?⁴⁸

Alcoholism may be parallel in some ways to homosexuality. Both are deeply rooted dispositions that cannot be easily willed away or removed by behavior modification techniques. However, a person is responsible for how he responds to and acts upon his or her predisposition. Paul's inclusion of "drunkards" in the list of things that grace can change, does not mean that the predisposition to alcohol abuse will be removed for all Christians who struggle with that particular sin. Paul rejoices in the justifying grace of the gospel, by which those who may have that disposition are no longer reckoned as "drunkards" (or alcoholics) in God's eyes. He rejoices also in the transforming power of grace to break the dominion of sin as a pattern of behavior. But nowhere does he state that the underlying dispositions will necessarily be done away prior to the resurrection.

Another reason I question restoration is that many restorationists admit that complete restoration to heterosexuality is difficult and unlikely. Many in the so-called "ex-gay movement" have testified to this painful reality. Andrew Comiskey (a former homosexual who is now married) freely acknowledges that the process of restoration that he advocates and counsels is not easy and may not be entirely complete in this life. He speaks of "the homosexual struggler" throughout his book, not in reference to pre-conversion struggles, but "homosexual strugglers who have truly submitted to the healing process" and even "the

⁴⁵ The ESV adds in a footnote: "The two Greek terms translated by this phrase refer to the passive and active partners in consensual homosexual acts."

⁴⁶ Ironically, Bahnsen's exegesis presupposes that the concept of sexual orientation is implied in 1 Cor. 6:10. But then he can no longer argue that the concept of sexual orientation is nowhere taught in Scripture.

⁴⁷ Translating *pleonektai* as "covetous" is a bit tepid and does not capture the active nature of the sin involved. It means "one who desires to have more than is due, a greedy person." The verb form *pleonekteo* means "to take advantage of, exploit, outwit, defraud, cheat." The noun *pleonexia* means "greediness, insatiableness, avarice, covetousness." In Eph. 5:5 Paul states that a *pleonektes* is an idolater. BDAG, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT* (3rd ed.), p. 824.

⁴⁸ Jones and Yarhouse, pp. 149-50.

healed struggler" who can take "the gift of woundedness" and use it to minister to others. Comiskey also states that perfect heterosexual responsiveness is "a static psychological ideal," and that the goal is merely "to become *whole enough* in this lifetime to sustain fulfilling, heterosexual relationships." Comiskey acknowledges that he himself – as a mature Christian and church leader running a major ex-gay ministry – is sometimes overwhelmed with longing for distinctly masculine love and that he has struggled with addiction to gay pornography and masturbation.⁴⁹

Testimonies such as Comiskey's suggest that the more realistic goal for the homosexual Christian is the goal of sexual purity in heart, speech, and behavior – the same goal that all Christians must strive for, regardless of their orientation. Such testimonial evidence on the part of those most motivated to claim a greater degree of success suggests that homosexual inclinations are more deeply ingrained than most restorationists are willing to admit. In my opinion, the best evidence of the reality of the homosexual orientation is the existence of those ex-gays who oppose the concept and who believe that full restoration to heterosexuality is God's plan for all homosexuals. For if this group – the group most highly motivated to change – acknowledges their ongoing temptations and call themselves "healed strugglers," then perhaps we are hitting up against something very real, namely, the reality that same-sex attraction is, for many of these Christians, something so deeply rooted and so difficult to change that it is an essentially fixed orientation. Striving for sexual purity is hard enough without having the added burden of being told that you must also be freed from your same-sex disposition and make a complete conversion to heterosexuality. Do we tell heterosexual Christians that in addition to striving to conform their behavior to the sexual standards of Scripture, they must also eradicate the *propensity* to have sinful sexual desires?

One of the unintended potential dangers of placing man-made requirements upon the shoulders of the sheep is that the sheep may begin to resent the biblical requirements too. A Christian who contends with same-sex attraction, and who is repeatedly told that if he is a genuine Christian he will change his orientation and achieve stable opposite-sex attraction, is very likely to become discouraged when he finds that goal to be out of reach. Thus discouraged with the counsel he is receiving from the conservative church, he may begin to entertain the arguments of affirmationists whose exegesis is far more congenial.

Another common scenario is the ex-gay who prematurely enters into a marriage, knowing that he has not fully eradicated his same-sex desires, but in the hopes that marriage will complete the process of restoration to full heterosexuality. The church may also have encouraged the marriage, and the spouse may be fully aware of the situation and willing to do his or her part in the healing process. But what happens when after 10 years of marriage latent desires still remain, or when gay pornography becomes a problem? The restorationist counseling model has the potential to create tremendous spiritual disillusionment. If the bar of "success" is set higher than God's Word requires, failure to achieve man-made goals presented as God's will can have devastating consequences, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Although the power of God ought not to be limited, and God certainly can remove this affliction in an instant if he wills, same-sex attracted Christians have no more biblical warrant to demand such complete healing than do terminally ill cancer patients. The biblical timetable for total deliverance from all forms of suffering is eschatological – i.e., the resurrection of the body. Prior to that time, however, those whose sinful nature inherited from Adam finds expression in the form of homosexual tendencies and desires should be prepared to follow the path of costly discipleship.

⁴⁹ Comiskey, pp. 183-92.

H. OBJECTIONS

Objection # 1

*"The Catechism teaches that sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed **in the whole man** after the image of God (WSC # 35). Doesn't your position presuppose a low view of sanctification?"*

I affirm that sanctification reaches the whole person. Sanctification is not to be limited to mere behavioral change, but reaches to deeper levels of our being, including our emotions and desires. It is, at its deepest level, a transformation of the heart. I am *not* advocating the idea that lustful thoughts and sexual fantasies are acceptable as long as a person does not act on them. Our holy God demands sexual purity in heart, speech, and behavior. But in the psychological nexus prior to lustful thoughts and fantasies, each of us possesses a sexual nature such that we are capable of being sexually attracted to others. Married heterosexuals, for example, are capable of experiencing sexual attraction to someone who is not their spouse. Such attraction is often sinful; at the very least it tends toward sin. Nevertheless, the fact that we are sexual beings, capable of responding sexually to others besides our spouses, is not sinful in and of itself. It is possible to nip those feelings in the bud before they give birth to sinful fantasies or actions. Would we want to say to the heterosexuals in the church that not only must they nip those feelings in the bud, they must also eradicate their sexual nature which makes them capable of having such feelings in the first place? If sanctification produces greater conformity to the *only* biblical standard concerning sexuality – which is sexual abstinence for unmarried people, and chastity in heart, word, and behavior for all of us – then how can it be argued that this is a low view of sanctification? All Christians, whether married or unmarried, must discipline their sexual impulses and desires to meet this uniform biblical standard of sexual purity. Sanctification is not directed toward removing our sexual impulses or our capacity to be attracted sexually to others, but toward increasing our ability to control our impulses and to channel our capacity for sexual attraction in ways that are pleasing to the Lord.

Objection # 2

"How can a homosexual person who is burning with lust have the gift of celibacy?"

In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul discusses the topic of marriage at length. He begins by stating that "it is good for a man not to touch a woman" (verse 1), and most commentators hold that "touch" here is a euphemism for marriage. This seems supported by the next verse, where Paul says, "But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband" (verse 2). He then exhorts husbands and wives to fulfill their marital duties, to not deprive one another, except by agreement for a set time for the purpose of prayer. At this point, the next five verses are significant for understanding the gift of celibacy:

5 ... And come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 But this I say by way of concession, not of command. 7 Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift (*charisma*) from God, one in this manner, and another in that. 8 But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. 9 But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

In verse 7, when Paul says that he desires "that all men were even as I myself am," the context demands that he is referring to his unmarried status. This is made explicit in verse 8, where he exhorts the unmarried and widows to "remain even as I." Having stated his preference for the unmarried state, he adds a concession: "However, each man has his own gift (*charisma*) from God, one in this manner, and another in that." In some cases, it may be that God's *charisma* to an individual is that he or she should *not* remain

unmarried. As an illustration he raises the example of the person who lacks self-control. In their case, Paul counsels, "it is better to marry than to burn with passion."

This passage is sometimes appealed to against the abstinence position and in favor of either restoration or accommodation. An accommodationist like Smedes, for example, would argue that whereas God may grant the gift of celibacy to some homosexuals, those who do not have this gift ought to find the most moral option, namely, a monogamous same-sex relationship.

But restorationists too have used this text. For example, Bahnsen argues:

Since the homosexual has obviously not been given the gift of sexual abstinence, his restoration by God should eventually bring conformity to the creational order and a regaining of heterosexual desires. His final goal is God's ordained context and direction for sexual gratification – heterosexual marriage.⁵⁰

The problem with this argument is that Bahnsen has not considered the possibility that possessing an essentially fixed homosexual orientation may itself constitute evidence that God has given such a person the gift of sexual abstinence. Paul does not say that anyone who has normal sexual drives can be automatically assured that he or she does not possess the gift of singleness and ought to get married. What Paul says is that the person who is burning with lust and lacks self-control, ought to consider the possibility that God's call for him or her is marriage. But this general "rule of thumb" only applies to those who are capable of bonding with a person of the opposite gender. Although it is not explicitly stated in the text, we may infer it from the near context, since in the previous chapter Paul has clearly stated that those who engage in homosexual practice will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Thus, according to the logic of the passage taken as a whole (1 Cor. 6-7), if a person cannot bond with a person of the opposite gender, and he or she possesses the normal sexual drives, then the call of Paul in this text would be "to exercise self-control" (*egkrateuomai* - 1 Cor. 7:9).⁵¹

As David Atkinson points out:

One of the ways in which God's "gift" and calling may be discerned is by the circumstances of a person's life and personality, environment and background. As a parallel, therefore, to the call to celibacy "given" to those heterosexual "eunuchs" who may well not have chosen it ("from birth", "made so by men") as well as to those who voluntarily "made themselves" such for the sake of the Kingdom, so the realisation by a person of his or her homosexual disposition may be understood as evidence of a calling from God to a life of celibacy, and the existence of the calling implies the presence of the gift.⁵²

Objection # 3

"Isn't the idea of homosexual orientation a modern psychological notion? Doesn't your reliance on this extra-biblical concept deny the sufficiency of Scripture?"

Greg Bahnsen argues that the distinction between orientation and action is invalid on the ground that this distinction is not taught in Scripture:

⁵⁰ Bahnsen, p. 97. Ed Welch writes similarly: "In some cases God gives grace to be celibate. But since marriage is a good gift, and God's pleasure is toward Christian marriage, former homosexuals whose mind and hearts are renewed will find pleasure in the same thing that God does." Welch, pp. 35-36.

⁵¹ The verb *egkrateuomai* means "to keep one's emotions, impulses or desires under control, control oneself, abstain ... esp. of sexual continence" (BDAG, p. 274).

⁵² David Atkinson, *Homosexuals in the Christian Fellowship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 113.

[T]he primary Author of Scripture was God Himself, who is omniscient, and therefore does not need to have His revealed will in Scripture replaced or qualified by modern psychological guidance. Surely God knows man's inner life and the truth about his psyche ... He does not distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable aspects of homosexuality in Scripture, and in Scripture is to be found everything sufficient for "training in righteousness that the man of God may be fully equipped for every good work." ... If it were crucial to our moral judgments that we distinguish between innocent inversion and culpable homosexual acts, then certainly God would be aware of that distinction and bring it to light in His inspired Word for us. Without a doubt modern science can help us to understand our world better and thereby help us apply God's norms to life; however, science cannot establish ethical norms or alter those delivered by God the lawgiver. The utility of modern scientific research cannot be understood in such a way as to ignore the omniscience of God and the sufficiency of Scripture.⁵³

Bahnsen thus appeals to the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. Since the Scripture is sufficient for "training in righteousness," containing everything needed for making proper moral judgments, the silence of Scripture – its failure to make the act/orientation distinction – is evidence that the distinction is invalid. Bahnsen appeals as well to the omniscience of God. If this distinction were valid, God surely would have known about it and would have recorded it in Scripture.

Consider the form of the argument in the abstract. Bahnsen argues as follows: "The Bible is silent about condition X. Therefore, condition X is irrelevant to our moral judgments. If it were crucial to our moral judgments to know about condition X, since God is omniscient, God would have revealed condition X in his Word." But there are many things that the Bible is silent about that are quite relevant to our moral judgments. For example, the Bible is silent about all kinds of mental disorders, such as clinical depression and schizophrenia, both of which can easily be misdiagnosed as simple sin issues. Were a counselor to approach such cases with the assumption that the clinically depressed person or the person suffering from schizophrenia "just needs to repent and start trusting God," it is possible that great harm could be done, and the pastoral needs of the individual would not be properly met.

The problem with Bahnsen's appeal to the sufficiency of Scripture is that he has seriously misunderstood the doctrine to begin with. That doctrine does not state that the Scripture is sufficient for the accomplishment of every conceivable task, but specifically for the faith and life of the covenant community – in other words, Scripture is sufficient for the covenant people of God to determine "what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man" (WSC # 3).⁵⁴ No one can tell another person that he must believe such-and-such a doctrine or that he has a moral obligation to such-and-such a duty, unless the doctrine or duty can be demonstrated from Scripture.

It turns out, then, that it is the *restorationist* who violates the sufficiency of Scripture. For it is the restorationist who places upon the consciences of homosexual Christians the demand, wholly unsupported by Scripture, that they must be restored to heterosexuality. To add to the biblical standard of sexual chastity the further requirement of restoration is to bind the conscience with a man-made tradition. Our Form of Government and Confession of Faith teach that the conscience of the Christian is bound only by the Word of God and is therefore free from all man-made requirements:

All church power is only ministerial and declarative, for the Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice. No church judicatory may presume to bind the conscience by making laws on the basis of its own authority; all its decisions should be founded upon the Word of God (FG III:3).

⁵³ Bahnsen, pp. 65-66.

⁵⁴ T. David Gordon, "The Insufficiency of Scripture," *Modern Reformation* 11:1 (Jan.-Feb. 2002) 18-23; with clarifications and follow-up in 11:3 (May-June 2002) 6, 46-49.

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to His Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also (WCF 20.2).

In other words, as Charles Hodge put it so succinctly: "Nothing can rightfully be imposed on the consciences of men as truth or duty which is not taught directly or by necessary implication in the Holy Scriptures."⁵⁵

Objection # 4

"Is it wise to tell adolescents who are struggling with same-sex attractions and emotions that it is okay if they are homosexually oriented, as long as they don't act on it? Shouldn't adolescents be counseled to seek change?"

Stanley Grenz, an advocate of abstinence, sympathizes with the concern of this question (as do I):

While cautiously affirming its utility, we dare not overlook the dangers that lurk in the use of the contemporary language of sexual orientation ... [U]sing this language may encourage a significant group of people to construct, perhaps prematurely, their personal identity (the self) on the basis of these socially based cognitive tools. One important potential group is today's adolescents. Research in the human sciences suggests that adolescents often move through a stage in their development in which certain same-sex activities are present. The grammar of sexual orientation may lead certain youths to assume on the basis of such experiences that they are constitutionally homosexual.⁵⁶

I am in agreement with Grenz's caution and concern. My counsel to an adolescent who might approach me with the concern, "I think I might be gay," would be as follows. First, we would have to discuss the reasons why the person thinks he or she is gay. It may be that the person had a momentary same-sex attraction or experience, but is clearly heterosexual.

Second, if it appears that the person is truly struggling with same-sex attraction at a more fundamental level, I would encourage the person to seek out a counselor who specializes in restoration-type counseling.⁵⁷ Since the individual is young, and has presumably not had homosexual sex, there is a high degree of probability that restoration therapy could have a positive outcome. Jones and Yarhouse are realistic about the difficulty of change. But they describe the types of candidates for whom change is most likely. One characteristic of such candidates is that their involvement in actual homosexual practice has been minimal.⁵⁸

Third, I would not simply "refer" the person to an expert and leave them be, but I would make sure that I maintained a close pastoral relationship with them all along the way. Of course, I would also include the family in the process, and would instruct them how to treat their child with compassion and love. One of the main things I would be sure to do is to educate both the adolescent and his or her family

⁵⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), vol. I, p. 183. Quoted by Gordon.

⁵⁶ Stanley Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming*, p. 123.

⁵⁷ It would be important to me to select a counselor who is a committed Christian and who submits to the biblical teaching on homosexuality. In other words, the counselor must not have any hidden affirmationist or accommodationist tendencies. On the other hand, the counselor must not regard the outcome of life-long abstinence or celibacy as a failure. My preference, then, would be an ex-gay ministry such as Joe Dallas's Genesis Counseling (www.genesiscounseling.org) that focuses on progressive sanctification in the area of sexual purity.

⁵⁸ Jones and Yarhouse, *Homosexuality*, p. 148.

concerning the biblical teaching that I outline in this paper – that even if orientation change does not occur, the biblical standard is abstinence. I would also discourage the adolescent from adopting an identity centered upon his or her sexual orientation, and to see themselves as justified in Christ. I would also teach the individual the biblical teaching concerning progressive sanctification. I would exhort him or her to a diligent use of the means of grace – the preaching of the Word of God, the sacraments, and prayer. There will also be a need for accountability and supervision, as well as the prayers and support of the congregation.

Fourth, if time proves that the person is indeed a constitutional homosexual, and it looks like life-long abstinence or celibacy lies in his or her future, then it will be necessary to prepare that person to use their life situation in a constructive way to serve others. C. S. Lewis, in a letter to Sheldon Vanauken on the topic of homosexuality, counseled celibacy and added:

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.⁵⁹

Fifth, in order for the type of pastoral care that I am envisioning to work properly, it is absolutely essential that the local congregation be informed of the biblical issues. The congregation must be taught that homosexuality as an orientation is not a legitimate basis for excluding someone from their fellowship and love. In many ways, the embrace and support of the community of fellow believers is perhaps the most significant element, from the point of view of human means, in the total package of a successful management of the many spiritual and emotional problems associated with same-sex attraction. If a person feels that they must bear their burdens in silence, or if they feel ashamed to make their same-sex struggles known to others for fear of being rejected or condemned, it is unlikely that the abstinence approach will do much good. But in the context of the loving support and fellowship of the body of Christ, such costly discipleship will yield great spiritual fruit.

NOTE: The views expressed in this paper are exclusively those of the author, and are not the official position of the Presbytery of Southern California, or of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Jones and Yarhouse, p. 153.

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