

Homosexuality, Gay Marriage, and the Bible

Introduction:

In her Newsweek column of June 9, 2008, Anna Quindlen asked: “[I]s there so much love and commitment in the world that we can afford, as a society, to be contemptuous of some portion of it? If two women in white want to join hands in front of their families and friends and vow to love and honor one another until they die, the only reasonable response to that is happy tears, awed admiration and societal approval.” She further proclaims: “Scream, shout, jump up and down. No matter. The gay-marriage issue is over and done with. The upshot: love won.”¹

I’m afraid Ms. Quindlen may be right, at least as far as our society is concerned. The California Supreme Court has called gay marriage a “basic civil right.” It hasn’t been much of a social battle either. Until the 21st century, no society, in the history of the world, ever recognized marriage as being anything but the legal union between a man and a woman.² Holland was the first country to extend the definition, followed by Belgium in 2003, Spain in 2005, and South Africa in 2006. In the United States, Massachusetts legalized gay marriage in 2004 and California followed suit in 2008.³

The world seems poised to accept homosexual behavior as a legitimate expression of sexuality equal to heterosexuality. It seems ready to accept gay marriage as the legitimate moral equivalent of heterosexual marriage.

But the real issue of importance to Christians is: What should be, and will be, our response?

What the world does is one thing. But Christians are not *of* the world⁴, and our calling and status is, by the grace of God, infinitely higher⁵. We are the light of the world.⁶ We are the pillar and foundation of truth.⁷ We are called to better thinking, and better living.

¹Anna Quindlen, “The Same People” Newsweek (June 9, 2008) p. 70.

²Though websites assure us that “same sex marriage is not new to the 20th or 21st century, nor is it unique to the Western world. Various cultures in the Americas, Africa, and Asia had, or still have the custom of same sex marriage” (<http://www.colorq.org/Articles/article.aspx?d=2004&x=ssmarriage>). The authors never cite the sources for their assertions. This writer has yet to discover one society where same sex unions were regarded as equal to marriage. Louis Crompton (Homosexuality and Civilization) tells of homosexual relationships in Ming Dynasty China when “male couples often lived together in a type of same-sex marriage,” but he goes on to state that it was “still necessary for the men to marry” women. He then cites a contemporary writer of that dynasty who admits that there is no precedent for “two men to live out their lives together” (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) p. 226). Crompton does cite efforts by some to legitimize homosexual relationships through marriage, but such activity was never accepted as normal behavior by the societies in which they occurred (cf. Crompton, pp. 286-287). Again, there are undisputed examples of homosexual relationships, approved by societies, but never as a substitute for or equal to marriage.

³<http://lesbianlife.about.com/cs/wedding/a/wheremarriage.htm>

⁴John 17:16

⁵Ephesians 2:1-7.

⁶Matthew 5:14

⁷1 Timothy 3:15

What will be our response? The purpose of this paper is to look at this issue from a biblical perspective. The Bible is, after all, the ultimate authority for our faith. The world may look at the Bible as the product of a totally human endeavor, but Christians do not have that freedom. Our faith stands, and falls, on the reliability and authority of that book we commonly refer to as “scripture.”⁸

This is the point of this paper: to allow Scripture to inform our thinking and lives regarding the gay rights movement. We will proceed by looking at the texts which address this issue, not only looking at the contextual teaching, but also some of the criticisms that have been voiced against these interpretations. We will end with some observations about the health and wisdom of homosexual relationships in our culture.

Before we begin, allow me to define the issue. When I write about homosexuality, I am not writing about effeminacy – which is a notoriously difficult matter to define.⁹ When I write about homosexuality, I am not talking about men with a taste for decorating or fashion. When I write about homosexuality, I am writing about men who engage in sexual relations with other men, and women who engage in sexual relations with other women. The actions have to do with fondling and foreplay with the intention of exciting each other sexually.

The testimony of Christian history is that we have opposed homosexual behavior throughout our 2000 year history. But should we? Does the Bible address this matter? A few Bible scholars of late have asserted that the Bible says nothing at all about homosexuality. Are they right? Have we missed the truth on this matter for so long?

Here are the issues before us:

- 1) Are homosexuals condemned by the Bible because they are homosexuals?
- 2) Is homosexual sex condemned in the Bible?
- 3) Can homosexual sex be legitimized by gay marriage?
- 4) How should Christians treat homosexuals?

⁸So that you will not miss my point, let me state it plainly: The Bible is the ultimate source book for Christianity and informs all that we believe and hold dear. It claims, nearly 6000 times to contain the word of God. Either the statements are true, or they are lies. If lies, then the Bible is fiction to the core and no credible basis for Christianity. In fact, if the Bible is not the Word of God and authoritative for our lives, then Christianity itself is a delusion unworthy of our notice.

⁹In fact, I cringe when I hear the term. I’ve known lots of little boys who would have rather cooked alongside their mother than go to a football game. There’ve been lots of others who walked more like what we *think* is a girl’s walk, and others with a higher, sweeter voice. These differences make the world a diverse place. It is cruel and mean to look at these differences and define males as effeminate because of them and frankly, Christians ought to be ashamed for doing so. Growing up, I’d have much rather been around girls than boys. Girls were softer, nicer, and smelled better. I never cared for sports, and while I enjoy shooting a gun now and then, hunting involves getting up too early and too much boredom for me to be enticed. As a result, some *might* have thought me effeminate, but it’s really just a nasty term used to marginalize folks who are different.

(I)
The Biblical Perspective – An Overview
Is homosexual sex condemned in the Bible?

Historically, Christianity has opposed homosexual relationships. Clement of Alexandria, a late second century Christian writer in Alexandria wrote condemning such activities¹⁰ as did his contemporary Tertullian. In Homosexuality and Civilization, Louis Crompton acknowledges that though homosexuality was widely practiced in the Greek and Roman world, it wasn't without its critics. Yet the greatest opposition to homosexual practice came when Christianity triumphed during Constantine (4th century AD). He writes:

The consequence was a drastic shift in the moral climate. Love between men had been a significant element of Greek civilization – in civic and military life, in education, art and literature – at least since the time of Solon. From now on Christianity, which first dominated and then suppressed paganism, would assert its anti-homosexual bias through imperial laws and in time reshape popular morality.¹¹

The point I wish to make here is that Christianity has historically *never* approved of homosexual relationships.

Ever.

Arguments against homosexuality from scripture focus on the following passages:

1) The Story of Sodom – Genesis 19

The standard argument is that God destroyed the city of Sodom because it was filled with homosexuals, as is indicated by the fact that when the Lord's messengers arrived, and were welcomed into the home of Abraham's nephew Lot, "all the men from every part of the city of Sodom --both young and old--surrounded the house. They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."

And so, the argument goes, the men of Sodom were obviously homosexuals and so God killed them.

In Hebrew, the last sentence reads "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we might 'know' (Heb. "yadah") them.

Seeking to blunt the force of this argument, some modern interpreters have noted that the word "yadah" means "to get to know." Their argument is that the Sodomites *didn't* want to have sex with these men, they just wanted to "get to know" them. They go further and state that the sin was a lack of hospitality on the part of the men of Sodom.

Prior to Genesis 19, Moses wrote that the "men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord" (Genesis 13:13). God complained that the "outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin is so grievous . . ." (Genesis 18:20). As the Bible story progresses, we learn some of the specifics of their sins: Isaiah lists them as violence, evil deeds,

¹⁰Clement, The Instructor 2.10.

¹¹Louis Crompton, Homosexuality and Civilization (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) pp. 129-130.

murders, and oppression of those least able to help themselves¹², and the fact that they lived that way and were proud of it.¹³ Jeremiah wrote of Israel, likening them to Sodom: “And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah” (Jeremiah 23:14). Ezekiel wrote, again likening Israel to Sodom: “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy” (Ezekiel 16:49).

These are the sins of Sodom, but not the only ones. In the Genesis story, her sinfulness is capped by the Lot story and that story includes the sexual. It is true that the verb “yadah” in all its forms occurs 948 times in the Old Testament. It is also true that it occurs in the sexual sense only fifteen times, but the Sodom episode cannot reasonably be excluded from that list. In the first place, the context demands a sexual meaning. The men of Sodom want to “yadah” Lot’s visitors. Lot understands that what *they* mean by “yadah” is *not* hospitality, but a “wicked thing.” He offers his own two daughters who have never “yadah” (known) a man.¹⁴ Clearly, in context, the sexual is intended by “yadah.”

When New Testament writers referred to this event, they understood it as a sexual matter. Jude wrote: “Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion.” It wasn’t *just* a sexual matter, but it *was* sexual.

The very idea that the sin of Sodom in this text was simply a lack of hospitality is ludicrous. If “yadah” simply meant “to get to know better,” inhospitality surely wouldn’t have been the sin of Sodom, but the sin of Lot! Lot refused to introduce his guests to the people of the city.

Defenders of homosexuality more legitimately look at this passage and say: ‘This is not just sex, but gang rape! Even heterosexual gang rape would be wrong!’

And they are correct. I believe God is emphasizing the heinous nature of the sins of Sodom in two ways: first, homosexual sex, which Israel would recognize as detestable in the sight of God (we will see this in the next section), and gang rape, which would include violence, another sin often condemned in scripture.¹⁵

I have had the privilege of coming to know a number of gay and lesbian people. All of them have appeared to me to be honest, hard working, caring people. All of them would look at this passage and say: “This does not describe the homosexuality I practice.” They refer to a monogamous committed relationship. I cannot argue with their point. All I can say is that when God chose to describe specifically the sinfulness of Sodom, he did so by linking same-sex sex

¹²Isaiah refers to Israel and calls them “Sodom and Gomorrah.” He accuses them of having hands full of blood, performing “evil deeds,” and being “unjust.” He writes “Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow” (Isaiah 1:10-17 in context).

¹³Again, speaking of Israel, God says: “The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves” (Isaiah 3:10).

¹⁴The NIV translates this as they “have never slept with a man.”

¹⁵“Violence” was the reason God destroyed the earth by a flood (Genesis 6:11-13). Note also Ezekiel 7:23; 12:19; Hosea 12:1; and Jonah 3:8 to cite just a few texts.

with violence. The link may not be coincidence. As I will document in part 4 of this paper, the statistics on violence in homosexual relationships is astounding. We cannot ignore this text.

2) The Holiness Code of Leviticus of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

These passages read as follows:

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

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

I do not know how to say it any plainer than God says it here, so let’s move to the objections to these passages.

Peter Gomes, former Pastor of The Memorial Church at Harvard University and currently a “Professor of Christian Morals” at that school does not believe these texts have anything to do with 21st century people or Christian behavior. Because he *is* a Harvard professor, a former pastor, *and* because he is himself gay, we will let him make the arguments:

First, he writes:

These rules are designed for a very particular purpose and in a very particular setting. Their purpose is nation building; their setting is the entry into a promised but very foreign land. These are fundamental laws for the formation of a frontier community. . . These and many other actions are condemned because they defy purity and weaken the cultural identification of the children of Israel; and so great is the principle of ritual and ethnic purity that to violate it is in most cases to warrant the sentence of death. . . We have, however, long since ceased to live as God’s frontier folk in the promised land.¹⁶

We wonder however, why such laws would be important for a frontier community and not for an established one. Did the Israelite community *ever* cease being a frontier community? Old Testament history will cover a thousand more years, and for the whole period, God is still complaining that his people are not living like He has asked them to live, but more like the nations around them. God never, ever, stops calling His people to live differently. In the New Testament Paul writes: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2). Later he wrote: “ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more” (Ephesians 4:17-19). The writer of Hebrews urges Christians to go “outside the camp,” the place of the social outcast (Hebrews 13:13).

Second, Gomes says that homosexuality belongs only to “ritual” impurity, not something “intrinsicly” evil.

The word ‘abomination’ [“detestable” in the NIV - mt] is by definition what the

¹⁶Peter Gomes, The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart (New York: William Morrow/Harper Collins, 1996) pp. 153-154.

Gentiles do, but that in and of itself is not necessarily evil or a violation of the commandments. Thus homosexuality is an abomination in Leviticus not because it is inherently evil but because the Gentiles do it, and it is therefore ritually impure.¹⁷

Gomes is correct in asserting that these were behaviors characteristic of the gentiles. God makes that point. But he assumes that the only reason the behavior was an abomination was that the gentiles were doing it and God wanted his people to be unique. In other words, the practice would have been ok with God except that the gentiles were doing it and God wanted his people to be different. The text does not say that. God says the practices were simply detestable in his sight. They were forbidden to those who would be *His* people. Note the following from Deuteronomy 18:10-13 where the same word is used:

Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and ***because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you.*** You must be blameless before the LORD your God. [Emphasis mine - mt]

It was the *practice* of these things God found detestable and it was their *practice* that made those people detestable to God. God determined to drive the gentiles out of the land *because of their practices*. It is disingenuous to assert that there was nothing “inherently” wrong with the practice. God thought there was.

Third, Gomes writes

Not only is the cultural context markedly different, but so for Christians is the theological context. Indeed, to what extent can Christians be said to be bound by these rules of the Holiness Code when even Saint Paul, himself a Jew and an heir of this very code, says that the Gentiles, that is, the non-Jewish Christians, have the gift of the Holy Spirit without the necessity of the Law of Israel.

In other words, that old law was for the Jews, but we are not under that law now, so it doesn't apply. Interestingly, Paul never makes the point Gomes attributes to him. In fact, Paul specifically says “it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous” (Romans 2:13).

Paul often encourages his readers to specific behavior simply because the Law requires it.¹⁸

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¹⁸Note these texts for example:

* Romans 12:17-20 – Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord [a citation from Deuteronomy 32:35 - mt]. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." [a citation from Proverbs 25:21-22 – mt].

There is a **fourth** argument used to blunt the force of these passages which Gomes does not mention until his discussion of New Testament texts. It is, that these passages refer to homosexual acts *outside* the bonds of marriage. ‘Of *course* these homosexual acts are sinful,’ the critics cry. ‘It is because there was no way in the ancient world for these people to be married and sexual acts between them, like all sexual acts outside of marriage, are forbidden. But they would be alright if the couple was married.’

Here, one needs to note the entirety of the texts involved. Note a few of the prohibitions:

“Do not dishonor your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother; do not have relations with her. ”Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would dishonor your father. ”Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere. ”Do not have sexual relations with your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter; that would dishonor you. . . .

”Do not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter. Do not have sexual relations with either her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter; they are her close relatives. That is wickedness. . . Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion.

Our text on homosexual behavior occurs in this same chapter. Might we say that sex would be alright with a “close relative” or with an animal as long as we get married first? The Old Testament plainly shows that marriage between close relatives was possible (Abraham married his half-sister). Why give this law if the force of it could be blunted by marriage?

3) Paul’s Writings

Romans 1:21ff.

In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he addresses Christians, some of whom have substituted a ritual religion for righteous living. While their lives may seem religious, because they devote themselves to religious scruples (like observing holy days, dietary laws and circumcision), their lives have turned decidedly pagan. Speaking of these Christians, Paul writes:

[A]lthough they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. . . . God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their **women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones**. In the same way the **men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another**. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

* Galatians 5:13-14 – You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. 14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself" [a citation from Leviticus 19:18].

Gomes says this passage “does not describe the conduct of homosexuals, but rather of heterosexual people who performed homosexual acts. . . Paul did not discuss gay persons but only homosexual acts committed by heterosexual persons.”¹⁹ His reasoning is that such action would be “unnatural” for a heterosexual person and that’s what Paul has in mind.

But notice that Paul says what prompts this behavior is “lust.” “Inflamed” lust. If a heterosexual man found himself lusting after another man, why wouldn’t that make that man gay? How would you know the difference? His reasoning just doesn’t make sense.

Others have argued that Paul meant male prostitution²⁰ but there is no evidence for that within the text. Still others have argued that Paul meant sex between men and boys (pederasty), but the text says ‘men with men.’

Paul’s argument is that such relations are “against nature” and he uses a specific phrase: *paraV fuvsi*. Paul’s contemporary, Josephus, uses the same phrase to refer to homosexual practices.²¹ There is nothing in the text that would warrant any of these interpretations sanctioning homosexual acts in any way.

The variety of interpretations shows the desperation of those who would like to do away with the plain meaning of this text. Victor Paul Furnish is more honest when he dismisses the whole text by saying Paul just didn’t know what he was talking about.²²

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor **male prostitutes** nor **homosexual offenders** nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Timothy 1:8-11

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. 9 We also know that law {9} Or that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, 10 for adulterers and **perverts**, for slave traders and liars and perjurers--and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine 11 that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

Two words are of importance here (note the bolded type): those translated “male prostitutes” (μαλακοι´) and “homosexual offenders” or “perverts” (αρσενοκοιται).

The first word, μαλακοι´ (male prostitutes), occurs in an adjective form twice in the New Testament, both referring to those who dress in “soft” or luxurious clothing. Jesus asks, concerning John the Baptist, “what did you go out to see? A man dressed in *fine* clothes

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²⁰R. Scoggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983) pp. 101-109.

²¹*Against Apion* II.275

²²Victor Paul Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul: Selected Issues* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1985) pp. 79-80.

(μαλακοῖς ἱματίοις ἠμφιεσμένοι)? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces.”²³ It occurs as a noun once in 1 Corinthians 6. It does occur in ancient Greek writings with a variety of meanings: ploughed earth is “soft” as are those who are “faint of heart” (cowardly) and music that has a decidedly feminine tone.²⁴ It is also used of “men and boys who allow themselves to be misused homosexually.”²⁵

One writer says the word refers *exclusively* to boys who imitate feminine styles and ways and thus “walked the thin line between passive homosexual activity for pleasure and that for pay.”²⁶ In 1 Corinthians 6, it occurs between “adulterers” and “homosexual offenders.” These are two serious sins, both of which are condemned as capital crimes in the Old Testament. It is simply foolish to assert that the meaning refers to some loose, ill-defined effeminacy (“limp wrist”) or decadent living. While the writer cited above would rather confine it to boys who engage in homosexual activity, there is nothing in Greek literature nor the Bible to confine it to that meaning. Philo, who wrote, in Greek, about the time of Paul, uses the word to refer to those who play the part of a woman in a sexual relationship. There is something serious about this term in the New Testament, and it is sexual in its content. It might be best to refer to it as the one who plays the “submissive” role in the sexual relationship (ie. the one penetrated). But what about the other partner, the one who is not “passive”?

This brings us to the other word, ἀρσενοκοΐτης, translated “homosexual offenders” and “perverts.” This is a word that first appears on the human stage in the New Testament and, as far as we know, Paul is the first, though not the last, person to use it. Where did he get this word? What did it mean?

Perhaps Paul took the term from the Greek texts of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. The texts read as follows:

“Do not lie with a **man** as one **lies** with a woman; that is detestable.” (καί μετα’ ἄρσενος οὐ κοιμηθήσῃ **κοίτην** γυναικός βδέλυγμα γάρ ἐστίν).

“If a man lies with a **male** as he **lies** with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood [shall] [be] upon them.(καί ὃς ἂν κοιμηθῇ μετα’ ἄρσενος **κοίτην** γυναικός βδέλυγμα ἐποίησαν ἀμφότεροι θανατούσθωσαν ἔνοχοί εἰσιν)

I have highlighted the relevant words, “male” or “man” (ἄρσενος) and ‘to lie with’ (κοίτην). Put them together and you get, in context, ‘a man who has sex with a man.’ or an ἀρσενοκοΐτης.²⁷ When Paul coined this word, he likely had the prohibitions of Leviticus in

²³Luke 7:25; See also Matthew 11:8.

²⁴For other examples see those suggested by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, “μαλακός, ἤ, ὄν” in A Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford, England: Oxford, 1925, reprint ed. 1968) p. 1076-1077.

²⁵μαλακός, ἤ, ὄν in William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christians Literature (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957) p. 489-490.

²⁶Robin Scroggs, The New Testament and Homosexuality (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983) p. 106.

²⁷See the discussion in David F. Wright, “Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of of Arsenokoitai” in Vigiliae Christianae 38 (1984) pp. 125-153.

mind. This is important for three reasons: First, the word plainly refers to homosexual sexual activity and is a plain, New Testament statement forbidding it. Second, the Levitical texts do not narrow their address to sex between an older partner and a younger one (pederasty); it's just any male having sex with another male. To make it refer to pederasty (as do some, like Robin Scoggins) narrows the meaning of the word too much.

Third, the huge argument, that the Levitical texts are non-binding because they are "Old Testament" or "Old Covenant" or a part of the "purity laws" and therefore no more binding than the other purity laws Jesus did away with falls flat. Paul plainly brought the prohibition against this behavior into the New Covenant without any qualifiers. He simply had in mind, sex between men.

*After the time of Paul, the word ἀρσενοκοίτης is used to refer, in general, to homosexual sex.*²⁸

The biblical evidence is plain. Homosexual relationships are forbidden. Yes, there are a few scholars who would hedge on this conclusion. But very few. The arguments they have advanced (most of which I have covered) often conflict with one another as if they cannot get a consensus. The point is, they are trying to justify a behavior which contradicts the plain sense of scripture. When you seek to find a way around what is patently taught, you will have the kind of confusion these folks evidence throughout their writings.

(II)

Homosexuality and Nature

In Romans 1, Paul writes that among those who have rejected God are those who have exchanged or abandoned "natural" relations for unnatural ones.

That Paul has in mind sexual relations is not challenged. The issue has to do with the meaning of "natural."

We've already dealt with and dismissed the idea that Paul had in mind heterosexuals engaging in homosexual sex (or vice-versa), but we need to address more completely the matter of what is "natural."

Sex is not *just* for procreation, but that IS its function. Unless there are biological reasons to the contrary, or unless preventative steps are taken, heterosexual relations will result in pregnancy. This is the natural order of things. Homosexual sexual relations will NEVER result in pregnancy. I read an article in Oprah's "O" magazine recently about two lesbians who wanted to have children. While they engaged in in-vitro fertilization, the fact of the matter was, neither could have EVER had a child without *some man somewhere somehow*. It is the natural way.

The penis and the vagina were made for sexual activity. The penis and the rectum were not. On the health portion of Western Washington University's web site, the following question appeared: "Is anal sex dangerous?" The answer was as follows (emphasis on some phrases is mine):

This is a complicated question to answer as there are many people for whom anal intercourse is a regular and enjoyed sexual activity. **But it is medically risky behavior** nevertheless, even if condoms are used as a barrier for STDs.

²⁸See the discussion in Robert A. J. Gagnon, The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Text and Hermeneutics (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001) pp. 312-332.

The anal sphincter muscle is not anatomically designed to comfortably admit external objects--it is designed to relax and stretch when stimulated internally by rectal fullness from stool. The automatic reflex is for it to contract and tighten when pressure is applied externally. So relaxation of the sphincter for external penetration is learned over time because otherwise it is very uncomfortable, and must only be done with gentle continual pressure, and lots and lots of lubricant. The risks, even with gentle insertion, are laceration of the anal tissue, and rectal mucosa, resulting in pain, bleeding, and difficulty passing stool comfortably.

Any presence of blood **can potentially expose the insertive partner to bloodborne STDs like Hep. B, Hep. C, and HIV**. In addition, exposure to stool **can result in urethral infections** in a male insertive partner.

The receptive partner is **at more risk for contracting STDs** if there is trauma (even microscopic) to the anus or rectum due to the potential presence of virus in semen, if ejaculation takes place in the rectum. Human papilloma virus also is likely to be spread anally due to this trauma to the anal and rectal tissue, and some of the most difficult persistent HPV infections we see are chronic anal warts, both external and internal to the anal sphincter and they are exceptionally difficult to treat, often requiring surgery to remove.

Aside from the traumatic and infectious risks, **there is the risk of sphincter tone (tightness) loss over time** due to repeated dilation for insertive intercourse. Many receptive partners experience stool incontinence (leaking of stool or poor control) when they have anal sphincter tone decrease. This, needless to say, is very bothersome and uncomfortable and has to be surgically corrected if it becomes chronic.

Lastly, there is **increased risk of spreading gastrointestinal pathogens through anal contact**--whether it is bacterial infections like salmonella or E. Coli, or parasitic infections like Giardia.²⁹

Paul did not have access to all this medical information, but he understood the unnaturalness of homosexual sex. Those who insist that such attractions “feel” right for *them* will, eventually, have to deal with the side-effects of the un-natural nature of this activity.

(III) Homosexual Behavior and the Good of Mankind

For all the advertising that has portrayed HIV/AIDS as a disease that affects us all, the plain truth is that such a depiction is a deception at the very least, and, more likely, a bold faced lie.

HIV/AIDS is not a virus that can be caught like a cold. Not just anyone can get it. Not just anyone is even at risk. It requires intimate contact. Among monogamous, heterosexual people, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is negligible – usually present only because of tainted blood used in a transfusion. The Center for Disease Control reports that 68% of all cases of men living with HIV/AIDS are men who have engaged in homosexual sex. Homosexual men account for

²⁹http://www.wvu.edu/chw/ask_the_doc/post/1-1000/0513.html

71% of all HIV/AIDS cases in this country.³⁰ Incidentally, the same source reports that the remaining 30% of HIV/AIDS cases are from IV drug users.

But how do we explain that the figures are more balanced in other countries? AVERT, an international AIDS charity says that world-wide, women account for half the number of AIDS cases.³¹ That would seem to make it a disease that affects men and women equally. But authorities assert that the reason figures are so high has to do with the sexual behavior of sub-Saharan Africans where the highest incidence of HIV/AIDS internationally occurs. Homosexual behavior is present, but denied. The incidence has to do with multiple partners, the male dominance of and mis-treatment of women, and the high incidence of sodomy.³² South Africa has more people living and dying of AIDS than any other country. In Botswana, nearly 24% of all adults have the disease.³³

North Africa has escaped the AIDS epidemic, with most authorities conceding that it is because of their “strict rules governing sexual behavior.”³⁴

In Asia, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is of recent origin. The incidence is still small with adult prevalence being under 1%. AVERT notes that “the epidemic is centered among particular high-risk groups, **particularly men who have sex with men** [emphasis mine - mt], injecting drug users, sex workers and their partners.”³⁵

Here’s my point: this very devastating disease has its highest incidence among those who engage in sex that is neither monogamous nor heterosexual and in all countries but South Africa, its highest incidence is within the homosexual population. Homosexuals are not the only ones who have AIDS. Drug users and heterosexual people who have multiple partners also get the disease. But *all* of this behavior stands contrary to the will of God and contrary to His created order. The result is a pandemic. The cure for AIDS is not in a test-tube. It is in changing behavior.

(IV) Gay Marriage Not A Solution

There are those who assert that if we allow gay unions and give gay marriage the same legitimacy as heterosexual unions, we will promote loving monogamous relationships and decrease disease. But gay marriage is not an answer nor a panacea.

The hue and cry from the gay community has been ‘we couldn’t mess up marriage any more than the heterosexual community has.’ That, of course, remains to be seen. As I wrote earlier, on the world stage, gay marriage is a *very* recent phenomenon. But, in countries that have accepted such unions, some alarming trends have been noticed. Same sex “civil unions” have

³⁰Figures as of 2007. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/msm/index.htm>

³¹<http://www.avert.org/worldstats.htm>

³²S. Brody and J.J. Potterat, “Assessing the role of anal intercourse in the epidemiology of AIDS in Africa” in International Journal for the Study of AIDS 2003;14(7):431-6.

³³<http://www.avert.org/aroundworld.htm>

³⁴ibid.

³⁵ibid.

been available in Sweden for several decades (but, as of 2008, these are not called “marriages.”). These unions are broken by legal “divorce.” In Sweden, the only country for which same sex unions of any kind have been going on long enough to do a study, gay couples were found to get a divorce at a rate 50% higher than heterosexual couples, and lesbian unions were broken at a 200% higher rate.³⁶ Gay unions had fewer reasons to fail. The study showed that gay unions in Sweden were typically among people who were older, better educated, more likely to live in the national capitol (i.e. more affluent) and less likely to have children (not much of a surprise there). The gay community is right: heterosexuals have done an awful job of honoring the institution of marriage. Perhaps it’s too early to tell, but at least now, according to the research we have, legitimizing same sex unions will only degrade the institution of marriage. In Sweden, living together is more common than marriage, 55% of all births are outside of marriage, and 53 out of every 100 heterosexual couples divorce. The open attitudes of the Swedes have not preserved nor enhanced the institution of marriage. In a world where children need to see commitment – for better or for worse – modeled by parents, we are heading down a path that will only serve to make that less likely to happen.

Additionally, in communities where there is a large gay population, a 2002 study published in the American Journal of Public Health (December, 2002, Vol. 92, No. 12)³⁷, the first of its kind, showed acts of violence among gay couples “significantly” higher than among heterosexual couples. Thirty-nine percent of those studied reported at least one type of battering by an adult partner over the previous five years. This compares with only 7.7% of heterosexual men over their *entire lifetime*. My point here is that, contrary to those who, in defense of gay unions, say they are simply promoting more wholesome loving relationships, gay unions are, statistically and decidedly, neither.

Conclusion: Final Questions

Can Homosexual sex be legitimized by marriage?

I do not know if people are born homosexuals. It would seem that the evidence is still out on that. But whether they are or not, homosexual behavior is forbidden in the Bible. Additionally, homosexual behavior is not natural. And finally, homosexual behavior cannot be made holy OR natural through same sex unions (marriage). There is no scriptural warrant for that position. Louis Crompton, whom I have cited throughout this paper agrees: “Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstances. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any other Jew or early Christian.”³⁸

How shall the Christian community treat homosexuals?

³⁶Maggie Gallagher & Joshua K. Baker, “Same Sex Unions and Divorce Risk: Data From Sweden” located at <http://www.marriedebate.com/pdf/SSdivorcerisk.pdf>

³⁷Gregory L. Greenwood, PhD, MPH, Michael V. Relf, PhD, RN, Bu Huang, PhD, Lance M. Pollack, PhD, Jesse A. Canchola, MS, and Joseph A. Catania, PhD, “Battering Victimization Among a Probability Based Sample of Men Who Have Sex With Men” in American Journal of Public Health (December, 2002, Vol. 92, No. 12) found at <http://www.ajph.org/cgi/reprint/92/12/1964>.

³⁸Louis Crompton, Homosexuality and Civilization (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) p. 114).

A Plea for Christ-likeness

To in any way mistreat these people because they have feelings we believe inappropriate is unchristian. The only issue is whether they are allowed to *act* on those feelings. My belief is that homosexuals *will* act, just like some heterosexual men will struggle with deviant and addictive sexual practices. But one sexual sin is no worse than another. A man who has sex with another man is no more a sinner than a man who has sex with a woman not his wife. Biblically, the sin and the penalty was the same.

We ought to remember Jesus at the well with the Samaritan woman. She had been married five times. She was now living with a guy. Jesus knew it. But Jesus still talked with her and treated her with kindness – though he pointedly told her he knew how she was living. She is the one who changed the subject. No one should imagine Jesus approved of her lifestyle. I'm not sure *she* approved of her lifestyle. But it was what it was. Jesus, without approving – I don't think you can read the story without seeing some disapproval – ministered to her and pointed her to God. We have to find the balance to do exactly the same thing with those who wrestle with homosexual attraction.

An old saying goes: You cannot keep the birds from flying overhead. You *can* keep them from building a nest in your hair. To a great extent, we cannot keep thoughts and feelings that are inappropriate from happening to us. A man I know quit smoking several years ago. I asked him recently: "Do you ever still want a cigarette?" He replied: "Every day." We *can* work on and, with God's help, keep from acting on those thoughts and feelings. Heterosexuals cannot keep inappropriate thoughts and feelings from happening, but we don't have to act on them, and we don't have to feed them. The same goes for homosexuals. It is homosexual *activity* that is addressed in scripture, not homosexual thoughts and feelings. We *must* keep that in mind as we consider this topic, and think about how we will act and react toward those who wrestle with these temptations.

In the church where I minister, over the past several years, two young men have come to worship with us, both looking for a church home. Each time we had a guest speaker, and each time, the speaker made a derogatory remark about "homosexuals." The young men never came back. Not all homosexuals are sinners – only those who follow their desires and sin. The Church must find a way to be home for all who struggle with sin, a place where they can find redemption and encouragement and support. As a struggling gay man said to me recently: "no one should have to deal with this alone." He's absolutely right.

The gay community will avow that they are born homosexual. The evidence is frankly, not overwhelmingly in favor of either side of this issue. I have, for purposes of this paper, taken the position that the gay community is right. People are probably to some extent, born either gay or with a disposition in that direction. I very much view this as I do susceptibility to alcohol. My family is disposed to alcoholism. It is why I don't drink the brew. After 35 years of ministry, counseling more people than I've been able to count, more often than not on sexual issues, my observation is that all people are born somewhere on a line that, to the far left, is sexually deviant and to the far right is totally asexual. We'd like to think everyone is born in the middle, but I doubt that's true and we'd probably argue over where the middle is. But as adults, we are all, somewhere, on that line. Life experience can move us one way or the other and it is easier to move left of center than it is to move right. Ask anyone who is struggling with sexual addiction and he will tell you that's true.

All of this is to say that *being* a homosexual and engaging in homosexual *activities* are two different things. Some heterosexuals find themselves sexually insatiable. Some find themselves wholly unfulfilled with just one partner. Others find themselves attracted to those much younger than they – others to those much older. Some find themselves aroused by inanimate objects. Some cannot find fulfillment sexually without pain or being degraded.

My point is, again, everyone struggles sexually. Homosexuals are people whose sexual attraction is for those of the same sex. That's what defines them sexually. But just because they have these feelings does not make them sinners. Perhaps that's why the Bible never mentions the word "homosexual" (or "heterosexual" for that matter). It is not the attraction that is addressed, but the action. They are simply and solely strugglers, just like the rest of us. The "feeling" is not condemned.

So here I answer my first question: Are homosexuals condemned by the Bible because they are homosexuals? The answer is "no." We are not condemned because we wrestle with temptation. We are condemned when we give in.