

Homosexuality: Clarity & Compassion

Pastor Fred Martin
Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji

Introduction

The issue of homosexuality is one of the most controversial and contentious issues in our society today. There are many different dimensions to the discussion—Biblical, historical, cultural, sociological, ecclesiastical, parental, familial, emotional, and political. Homosexuality is also a deeply personal issue. We must never forget that everything we say on the subject touches the lives of individuals. Words and arguments can offend and injure people who are looking for hope.

In some ways I find it tempting to say nothing at all about homosexuality. I do not want to cause further hurt to anybody who may have already suffered from cruel jokes or physical harassment. Yet I am convinced that ignoring this contemporary issue would not be pleasing to God or helpful to those who are most bewildered by it.

Therefore, I offer the following short studies on homosexuality for your consideration. Two sermons are included. The first one provides the broad outline of what the Bible says about the subject and how Christians should respond. Gay “marriage” is the focus of the second sermon. Following those sermons are four appendices. One addresses the recent interpretations of the Bible which suggest that the church’s traditional understanding of homosexuality has serious flaws. The second and third appendices contain personal statements of believers in Christ who have struggled with homosexual desires and with the church’s treatment of homosexuals. It is a story that needs to be heard in churches today. The final appendix is a brief yet excellent article on why gay “marriage” would be harmful.

My prayer is that these studies will first provide you with a pathway through some of the most pressing aspects of the contemporary discussion over homosexuality. But, second and more importantly, I hope that God might use them to provide hope for those battling with the deeply personal issues that this subject raises.

Pastor Fred Martin
Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
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"That Delicate Balance"

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Of all the instructions that Jesus gives to his disciples, there is one that stands out in my mind as particularly difficult to follow. Jesus says, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." It is hard to be both shrewd and innocent.

Our human tendency is to pull to either one side or the other. Either we are shrewd and have firm convictions on an issue but lack compassion, or we are so innocent and compassionate that we become blind to the ethical issues that are involved. It's that delicate balance between conviction and compassion that we need, and it is that delicate balance that is so hard to maintain.

That's true with many issues in life, and it is certainly true with the issue that we are going to think about today, the issue of homosexuality. In the United States today the topic of homosexuality is one of the most emotional issues around. All it takes is one wrong word, and the whole discussion can explode. I don't want that to happen with this sermon.

There are three groups of people that I hope will listen to what I have to say. First, I want to speak to any man or woman among us who has homosexual desires. In a group this large there is probably someone here who has those desires. I want you to know that I am glad you're here. I also want to ask you for a favor. Please listen to the totality of what I have to say. If I use a word that you find offensive or if I say something that you disagree with, please continue to listen. Please think about my message as a whole and not just one small part of it.

I also want to speak to you who have a brother or a sister, or a son or a daughter, or maybe a spouse who has homosexual desires. I know that there are some in our congregation who are in that very situation. You wonder how you are to love that person in your family and yet at the same time not give approval to the way that your family member is living. I hope that this sermon will give you some help with those questions.

The third group of people that I'm thinking of in this sermon is the church at large. Think about what we have witnessed in just this last year. Matthew Shepard was brutally murdered out west, and who was blamed? There was a strong message that went out over the national media: "If you say that homosexual behavior is wrong--if you even so much as offer to help someone who wants to leave the gay lifestyle, then you are being intolerant. You are creating an atmosphere in which murder of homosexuals is acceptable." That's the message that is being proclaimed today. It seems like we are being presented with just two alternatives. Either you accept homosexual behavior, or you keep your mouth shut.

What we Christians need to do is to study the Scripture carefully. Then we need to speak and act with compassion and with conviction. The last thing that we should do is to allow ourselves to be intimidated into silence.

This morning let's look at two biblical principles, and then let's ask ourselves how we can apply them. First, every human being is created in the image of God and is valuable to him. Genesis 1:27 says that God created human beings in his own image. No other creature on earth is created in God's image. But every single human being is. Therefore, every single human being is to be respected and valued.

Does that apply to the man or woman who has homosexual desires? Yes. Does that apply to your brother or sister who is a practicing homosexual? Yes. Does that apply to someone who is bisexual or who is transgender? Yes! Let's say it again. The most flamboyant homosexuals and lesbians are created in the image of God. They are valuable to God! And if you and I are going to be true to God's Word, then we must respect them as people and treat them as individuals who are created in the image of God.

That's the first principle. There can be no compromise about it. Every human being is created in the image of God and is valuable to him.

You might say, "But, Fred, what about their behavior? What does the Bible say about homosexual acts?" That's an important question. We need to study the Bible carefully on that subject.

There are two ways of approaching what God's Word says about homosexual behavior. One approach is to pull out all of the verses in the Bible that mention homosexuality in any way at all and examine them. That is one approach, but it is primarily a negative approach. [See the appendix #1 for an examination of those verses.]

I want to look at this issue in a different way. What model of sexual behavior does the Bible present to us as proper? Let's not just look at what the Bible says is wrong. Let's look at what it says is right. What is the model for sexual behavior that you and I should be striving for?

Genesis 2 spells it out for us. Adam is alone. He needs a companion and partner. So God creates a woman. Genesis 2:24 says, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." That is God's design. God didn't present Adam with two options. He didn't create a man and a woman and then tell Adam that he could choose either one. God's plan from the beginning was one man and one woman. Heterosexual intimacy within marriage is God's standard.

We find that standard not just in the first book of the Bible. That standard is maintained consistently throughout the entire Bible. Think of the Old Testament book called the Song of Songs. It is eight chapters celebrating sexual pleasure in marriage. But let's note that it is again heterosexual intimacy that is celebrated.

What do we find when we come to the New Testament? I have frequently heard people say that if you look at everything that Jesus himself teaches in the four Gospels, you will not find him saying one single thing against homosexuality. The conclusion that those people draw is that Jesus, therefore, does not think that homosexual behavior is wrong. That sounds pretty convincing when you first hear it. But Jesus doesn't say anything against child abuse either. Does anybody think that

he would approve that? We need to look beyond what Jesus denounces. We also need to look at what it is that he promotes. In Matthew 19 Jesus quotes this passage from Genesis. Here again is the model for sexual behavior. It is heterosexual intimacy within marriage. Homosexual behavior is wrong.

Just as we must say that every human being is created in the image of God and is valuable to him, so we must say with equal conviction that heterosexual intimacy within marriage is God's standard. We say that firmly and without any apologies.

Now comes the hard part. How do we put those two biblical principles into action? How can you and I firmly maintain that homosexual behavior is wrong, but at the same time respect and love the son or the daughter who is a practicing homosexual? To be shrewd and innocent—to have compassion and conviction! God has not given us an easy assignment. I think of five questions that we need to wrestle with as we seek to apply those two principles.

Question #1: Is homosexual sin worse than other sexual sin? Many of us would immediately say yes. There are sinners, and then there are "the homosexuals." But do we find such an attitude in the Bible?

Sometimes Christians will cite Leviticus 18:22. That verse says that homosexual behavior is detestable. The King James Version calls it an abomination. That's true, but if you read all of the eighteenth chapter of Leviticus you will find that all of the sexual sins mentioned in that chapter are called detestable (see Lev. 18:26-30). The heterosexual sins are just as detestable as the homosexual sins.

In the last few weeks I've been reading two books about homosexuality. I'd recommend them to you. One is called Coming Out of Homosexuality, and the other is Someone I Love is Gay: How Family and Friends Can Respond. Both of these books are good, but the thing that hit me as I read them was how unremarkable they are. What I mean is that the advice that they give isn't limited to homosexuality. The principles outlined in Coming Out of Homosexuality could apply to any sinful practice that you are trying to get out of your life. The other one could have been titled Someone I Love is Alcoholic or a Compulsive Gambler. The same principles would apply. Homosexual sin is not a separate category of sin that is unlike any other kind of sin.

On the basis of God's Word we cannot say that homosexual sin is worse than other sexual sins. We simply cannot! That recognition is crucial. If we will let it sink in, it will help us immensely in knowing how to apply what the Bible teaches on this subject. We should think about homosexual sin in the same way that we think about other sins. The Christian approach to sin in general should guide us in our treatment of homosexual sin. Think it through with me.

Question #2: How should we treat someone who is a practicing homosexual?

How do we treat other people who are habitually practicing some sexual sin? How do we treat the heterosexual who is living with a boyfriend or girlfriend? We tell them that their behavior is sinful and that they need to repent and change their living arrangements. But we do not tell them that we hate them or that we never want to see them. We do not shout at them that they had better

not show their face in the church. We tell them that their behavior is wrong. We say that without apology, but then we continue to love them.

Why don't we do the same for the homosexual or the lesbian? Can you imagine Jesus saying to someone, "Get away from me. I don't want anything to do with you." Can you imagine Jesus saying that? How come Christians say that about homosexuals and lesbians? Jesus was never hesitant about calling people to repentance, but along with that call came love. We need to do the same!

Question #3: Is homosexual desire genetically based or is it a learned behavior?

Usually attempts to answer that question come from a scientific perspective. Studies are immediately cited which show evidence of a genetic basis. It needs to be stated that the media has wildly exaggerated the findings that have come out of those studies. The findings of those studies have been seriously questioned.

But let's approach that question not from the scientific angle but from the theological. Can you explain why you are tempted by some sins but not by others? Some people worry all the time; others can go through life never worrying about a thing. Why is that? Some people blow up at the drop of a hat, but others never seem to get angry. Can you explain that? My question is this: Did you consciously choose which temptation would have the most power over you?

The Bible teaches us that sin is a complex matter. Sin according to the Scriptures is not just a person's conscious choice. It is that, but it is so much more. We live in a fallen world. We have been sinned against by others. Sin is a whole network of attitudes, beliefs, and behavior that are ultimately rooted in our alienation from God. The Bible fully recognizes the tragic complexities of sin.¹ God holds us responsible not for our temptations and desires but for how we respond to those desires. That's where choice comes in.

Apply that general teaching to homosexual temptation. Where does homosexual desire come from? It comes from a variety of sin-afflicted sources. It is not just a conscious choice. It is ultimately rooted in humanity's alienation from God. It may have some genetic basis. It has also been nurtured and strengthened by the home environment and early childhood experiences. God does not condemn the homosexual or lesbian for the temptation, but he does hold them responsible for how he or she responds to that temptation. That's where the element of choice comes in.

If you have never felt homosexual desire, please do not scorn the person who does feel it. Remember the struggle that you have with your temptations. We must not condone the behavior, but we must not condemn the person. Compassion not condemnation is what is needed.

Question #4: Is there healing for homosexual desire?

Again, let's start with what we know about sin in general. Is there a healing for other temptations? As Christians we recognize the power of God to change us. Sometimes God

¹ Richard F. Lovelace, Dynamics of Spiritual Life (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 88.

miraculously intervenes and suddenly removes a temptation that has dogged a person for years. God sometimes does that, but he doesn't always. Growing in holiness is most often a process.

How many of us can say that we have been completely victorious over all of our temptations? How many men here can say that they are never tempted by pornography? Perhaps we have learned to resist that temptation, but we know that we could fall back into it without a moment's warning. If sanctification is a process with that sexual sin, then it is the same with homosexual sin.

Is there healing for homosexual desire? Paul addresses that issue in his first letter to the Corinthians.

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.

(Please note in passing how Paul puts homosexual sin right in there with drunkenness and even greed. It's not a separate category of sin.)

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:9-11)

Through Jesus Christ homosexual temptation can be defeated. That needs to be stated. But like every other sin that victory does not necessarily mean that the temptation is gone forever. The struggle may continue.

Listen to the way the authors write about this issue in [Coming Out of Homosexuality](#).

We are well-acquainted with how tough this journey is, too well-acquainted to sit in harsh judgment on friends and counselees who have opted to return to homosexual involvement. Yet we have witnessed solid, substantial healing in so many men and women over so many years that we can say without hesitation, "There is a way out of homosexuality. For the man or woman who truly desires it, there is hope and healing in Christ."²

There is healing available in Jesus Christ. Listen to the testimony of Nancy, a Christian who has written of her own struggles with homosexual desire.

[One night] I surrendered. I said, "God, you know that I'm not willing right now to let you change my life. I'm not even willing to be made willing. But there is something way down deep inside of me that's saying yes to you. So take that little bit of yes, if you will. Take it and do with it as you please. It's all I've got to give."

² Bob Davies and Lori Rentzel, [Coming Out of Homosexuality](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 16.

You know, that's all he was asking for--he's taken that yes and multiplied it a hundred times.³

There's one final question to ask. Question #5: Is there room in the church for the person who struggles with homosexual temptation?

Is there room in the church for people who are struggling with other sins? There had better be. Otherwise none of us would be here!

Why is it that the church has failed to follow our Lord's example and send the proper message to homosexuals and lesbians? A homosexual son of a pastor stated the situation this way. "Christ first said to the adulterous woman, 'I love you.' Then he told her to change. Churches do the opposite. They say, 'Change, then we will love you.'"⁴

He's right. Too often we have sent the message that those who are tempted in this way are not welcome in the church. But where are they supposed to turn for help? We need to repent.

If you have never felt the pull of homosexual desire, will you become someone that another person who has those desires can come to for help? Please ask Jesus to make you into that kind of person. Ask Jesus to prepare you to listen to a homosexual or a lesbian and feel their alienation and their loneliness. Will you cry with that person when he wonders why he is the way he is? Will you assure her of God's care when she feels nothing but hatred for herself? Will you make it your goal to earn the right to tell a homosexual friend about the changing power of Jesus Christ?

³ Nancy. Homosexual Struggle (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 10-11.

⁴ Tom Minnery, "Homosexuals Can Change," Christianity Today, 6 February 1981, 36-41.

Gay “Marriage”: A Good Idea?

Preached on August 31, 2003

Early this month the Episcopal Church voted to accept an openly gay and non-celibate man as a bishop of the church. I was on vacation at the time, and I followed the debate through newspapers in three states--Ohio and Indiana and Wisconsin. As I read those newspapers, I could not help but observe how strongly the editorial pages of those papers endorsed the concept of gay “marriage.” Hardly anybody on the staff of those newspapers questioned the advisability of legalizing such same sex unions.

At our next board of elders meeting I asked the elders if they thought that something needed to be said about this subject in our church. I told them that I wanted to preach on how we as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ should engage this issue. They told me to go ahead. Please understand that this sermon is my sermon. The elders as individuals and as a board may not agree with me on every single thing that I say. But I want you to know that the decision to preach this sermon was not mine alone.

When the subject of homosexuality is raised, there are many different dimensions to the issue. This morning I cannot possibly touch on all of them. I’m going to limit myself to just three.

The Personal Dimension

We must never forget that we are talking about people. We are not talking about an abstract “them” who live in a separate world. We are talking about individuals who have hopes and dreams. Some of us think of brothers and sisters and sons and daughters. These are people with faces. We need to hear their stories and understand their grief and fears.

We also need to remember that there are Christians who struggle intensely with this issue. Here this morning there are no doubt some of us who experience homosexual desire. We have trusted in Christ as our Lord and Savior. We love him. We want to live the way he wants us to. But all kinds of questions go through our minds. Why do I have this desire? Does God hate me for having this desire? What am I supposed to do with this desire? If anybody in the church found out that I struggle with this issue, what would happen to me?

Last year I came across an article written by a believer in Christ who is a husband and a father and a leader in his church. But from the age of nine he has been aware of his attraction to other males.

I have no regrets about my commitment to begin and maintain my faithfulness in heterosexual marriage. . . . But I am sometimes angry about the effort required, and I am frequently angry that I have had to do this on my own, without the support of friends or of a caring Christian community. . . .

Why haven't I told my story to my church friends? . . . Because, despite all the claims by my heterosexual friends to "love the sinner but hate the sin," I do not trust

them. I do not believe that they could know this about me and still want me to be their congregational president, their youth-group leader, their sons' coach. I wish I could believe it, but I don't. Perhaps I'm hypersensitive in not trusting, but I've overheard too many jokes, seen too many expressions of hate directed at homosexuals, to believe that these same people could be my friends if they *knew*.⁵

We need to hear this man's story and take it to heart. We must never lose sight of the personal dimension of this issue.

The Biblical Dimension

What does the Bible actually say about homosexuality? For this morning let's think about the Biblical dimension of this issue not by investigating what the Bible specifically says about homosexuality. Instead let's think about the model of sexual behavior that the Bible says that you and I should be striving towards. Genesis 2 spells it out for us. Adam is alone. He needs a companion and partner. So God creates a woman. Genesis 2:24 says, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." That is God's design. God didn't present Adam with two options. He didn't create a man and a woman and then tell Adam that he could choose either one. God's plan from the beginning was one man and one woman. Heterosexual intimacy within marriage is God's standard.

We find that standard not just in the first book of the Bible. That standard is maintained consistently throughout the entire Bible. Think of the Old Testament book called the Song of Songs. It is eight chapters celebrating sexual pleasure in marriage. But let's note that it is again heterosexual intimacy that is celebrated.

What do we find when we come to the New Testament? Jesus never calls the Old Testament teaching about marriage into question. On the contrary, he always endorses it. In Matthew 19 Jesus quotes from Genesis 2 as the model for sexual behavior. It is heterosexual intimacy within marriage. That is what the Bible teaches. Despite the creative efforts of some to interpret the Bible differently, that is still what the Bible teaches.

The Public Policy Dimension

At this point there are some people who will say to me, "Ah-ha! You believe that heterosexual intimacy within marriage is God's standard for behavior. That's your religious belief. By trying to make our nation's laws fit that standard you are imposing your religion on others. The Constitution guarantees the separation of church and state. You have no right to make other people live according to your religion."

That is a charge that we frequently hear on talk shows and that we read in newspapers and magazines. When you first hear it, it does seem to carry a lot of weight. But let's take some to think about it. Our society is quick to react and slow to reflect. Something can sound very convincing when it is first stated, but its persuasive power can quickly evaporate under closer

⁵ "No Easy Victory," Christianity Today, 11 March 2002, 50. See Appendix 2 for the complete article.

examination. So what about this charge that limiting marriage to male and female is the establishment of religion?

Let's think about the public policy dimension of this issue. The first question we should ask is what religion is being established. Is the belief that marriage should be heterosexual in nature something that is unique to Christianity? Through the centuries Judaism has defined marriage that same way. What about Islam? That religion also limits marriage to male-female union. Among Hindus and Buddhists there may be different ideas about the morality of homosexual behavior, but there has been no endorsement of the idea that two men or two women can get married. The major religions of the world are united in defining marriage in heterosexual terms.⁶ This is not some narrow sectarian belief⁷ (Marriage Law Project 2000). Therefore, we have to ask the question to those who protest our present laws saying that they are the unjust and unconstitutional establishment of religion. We have to ask them, "What religion is being established?" Western civilizations built upon a Judeo-Christian ethic have defined marriage in heterosexual terms, but so have the eastern civilizations built on Islam and Hinduism and Buddhism.⁸

Someone may respond by saying that it doesn't make any difference what specific religion is being referred to. The fact that any religion has such a belief about marriage automatically disqualifies it from being enacted into law. Once again that may seem to make sense when it is first proposed, but let's take some time to think about it. Would anyone really want to say that every prohibition that can be derived from a religious belief must be removed from the law? What about the religious belief that says "Thou shalt not murder. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not give false testimony against your neighbor." I realize that some people in our society do oppose any public recognition of the Ten Commandments, but that is not the issue here. Would anybody really suggest that we should allow murder and stealing and lying under oath? Should we automatically take those laws away just because they are found in the Bible?

The whole question of church and state is a complicated issue. My purpose this morning is not to sort out all the legal technicalities of church and state relationships. But at the very least, we should recognize that our Constitution does not limit the making of public policy to atheists. People with religious convictions also have a right to vote their conscience. Let's not be intimidated into thinking otherwise.

I can imagine someone agreeing with me on what I've said so far about this public policy dimension of the issue. But now they raise another question: "Why shouldn't we broaden our understanding of marriage? Marriage should be a private matter between two consenting adults.

⁶ The observation that marriage has been understood in heterosexual terms for centuries by all major religions and in all major civilizations calls into question the propriety of using such a term as *gay marriage*. Since *gay* means "homosexual" and *marriage* means "a legal heterosexual union," then *gay marriage* means "a legal homosexual heterosexual union." Such a definition is self-contradictory. That is the reason that this paper places quotation marks around the word *marriage* when using the phrase *gay "marriage."*

⁷ Marriage Law Project. 2002. Major World Religions on the Question of Marriage. The article can be found at http://marriagelaw.cua.edu/major_world_religions_on_the_que.htm.

⁸ John Jefferson Davis. 1985. *Evangelical Ethics* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1985), 108.

If two men say that they love each other, why should we question that? If they are willing to commit themselves to each other, why should anybody prohibit them from doing that? Let people be free to do what they want as long as their behavior does not infringe on somebody else's rights." Isn't that the argument that we often hear today? And at first it does sound reasonable, doesn't it?

Let's think about it. *Marriage should be a private matter between two consenting adults.* Let's ask some questions about that assertion. Why limit it to adults? Isn't it true that people mature at different rates? Don't you know of some fifteen year olds who are more mature than some twenty-two year olds? Why should there be any restrictions placed on that mature fifteen-year-old's freedom? How can you legislate maturity?

And who is to say that a boy might not benefit from a sexual relationship with a loving older male? He might learn to be more open about sex in such a nurturing relationship. Please don't think that I am making that up! There are people in our society today who are advocating that very thing. "Let's not use that word *pedophilia*," they say. "That makes it sound dirty. Instead we should use the non-judgmental expression like 'male intergenerational intimacy.'"⁹

While we are at it, let's go one step further. Why should marriage be limited to *two* individuals? Why not three or four? If marriage is a purely private matter, then why should the government stop a man from having two or three wives as long as they say that they love each other? How dare the government judge the legitimacy of a person's love! That's none of the government's business! What if a father wants to marry his daughter or a brother and sister want to get married? It's a private matter!

The point is that once a society opens the door to gay "marriage," the door logically stands open to any conceivable relationship that someone wants to label as a loving relationship.

I can hear people say, "Fine. Let's open the door. Let's give people that freedom. Let people do what they want. After all, it's just between them." But is that true? Is marriage something that is just between two people and that has no implications for others?

The media regularly portray homosexual relationships as parallel to heterosexual relationships. It's two men or two women instead of a man and a woman, but beyond that everything else is the same.¹⁰ The fact is that homosexual relationships are not the same as heterosexual relationships. I will highlight just one difference. There are others¹¹, but I will

⁹Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight & Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 59-63; Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 111.

¹⁰ Schmidt, *Straight & Narrow*, 105.

¹¹ Research has found higher rates of depression and loneliness among male homosexuals. But the validity of this research has been questioned (and perhaps rightly so in part) by suggesting that the distress is caused by the way that homosexuals are treated in society (Stanton and Yarhouse 2000, 105-106).

Even though the popular media present stories about homosexuals in long-term relationships, studies have shown that even homosexuals who claim to be in committed relationships are highly promiscuous. Two gay researchers, McWhirter and Mattison, studied 156 stable and committed male homosexual couples. They learned that none of those couples that had been together for more than five years had been sexually exclusive. The authors argue that

emphasize just this one. I need to warn you that I am going to be blunt. I have tried all week to figure out a way to put this in a less direct manner, but I haven't come up with any. Furthermore, considering the seriousness with which our society is now thinking about idea of gay "marriage," this is no time to mince words. What I am going to say to you is not something that you don't already know, but for obvious reasons no one wants to come right out and say it. The fact is that the human anus and rectum are not made to receive a penis but a vagina is. Again I apologize for having to be so blunt, but please think about the implications of that statement.

When the human body is forced to do something that it is not made to do, the inevitable result is physical damage. That's what happens in male homosexual intimacy. Over time the functioning of the digestive system is impaired. The tissues of the rectum tear and become open to infection. Sexually transmitted diseases are easily passed along. That's why health problems are rampant among the homosexual population.¹²

Nobody wants to talk about this. You don't hear about this on TV. But it's true. And it's sad. It's sad first because we are talking about people. Please don't forget the personal dimension of this issue! Individuals are hurting their bodies and opening themselves to all kinds of infections because of homosexual practices. That is sad. But it's also sad that our nation is being asked to endorse those practices. We're being asked to put a legal stamp of approval on practices that we know spread disease. Our society will bear the cost. This is not something that is "a private matter between consenting adults." More will be required from our health care system. The government and insurance companies will be required to pay those expenses. In addition to all of that--if our laws are changed to allow for gay "marriages," then our schools are going to be forced to teach the acceptability of practices that are medically unhealthy.

Please keep in mind that none of what I've just said to you depends on religion or politics. It doesn't make any difference whether you are a born-again Christian or an avowed atheist. It doesn't make any difference whether you are a liberal Democrat or a conservative Republican. The human body will be damaged if it is forced to do something that it is not made to do.

Conclusion

Gay marriage is not a good idea.

As Christians we need to respond. First, we need to respond with love and compassion to those who are drawn to homosexual relations. I cannot over emphasize how important that is. Read "No Easy Victory" [Appendix 2] and listen to this brother in Christ and let your heart be

"for male couples, sexual monogamy is just a passing stage of internalized homophobia, and that many homosexual males distinguish between emotional fidelity and sexual exclusivity. What matters for male couples . . . is emotional, not physical faithfulness" (Stanton and Yarhouse 2000, 110).

There is also the question of the impact on children of being raised by two homosexual parents. This is an important issue worthy of extended research.

¹² Davis, Evangelical Ethics, 112-114; Schmidt, Straight & Narrow, 116-122.

broken. The doors of the church of the Jesus Christ must always stand open to anyone with any problem who comes and says, "I need help."

The second thing we need to do is to let our elected representatives know that we do not believe that gay "marriage" is in the best interest of our nation. Write letters. Send emails. Make phone calls. And pray for our public officials. We're being asked to redefine marriage. Marriage has been defined as heterosexual throughout recorded history and in every major civilization. Don't underestimate how significant this change would be. This is not the time to sit back and be quiet.

It may well be that our efforts will fail. There are strong forces taking our society in the wrong direction. I'm not talking about the political power of the gay community. I'm talking about radical individualism. The idea that an individual should be allowed to do *anything* that he or she wants is built deep into our American mindset. We should also recognize that in our society today the reigning virtue is not truth but tolerance (Schmidt 1995, 13). If you and I dare to say that some kinds of behavior are wrong, we will be immediately charged with arrogance. People will say, "How dare you claim to know the truth or dare to say that there even is such a thing as truth!"

The battle looms before us. God does not ask us, however, to be successful. He calls us to be faithful. So let us reach out in love no matter what kinds of insults and accusations are thrown back at us. Let us also calmly but firmly take a public stand for what is healthy and in our society's best interests.

Appendix 1: An Examination of Recent Interpretations of What the Bible Says about Homosexuality

In 1955 D. Sherwin Bailey wrote a book entitled Homosexuality and the Western Tradition. That book has had a large impact on the discussion of this subject in the Christian community, and his arguments have been repeated and refined by many others. Bailey and his followers have challenged the centuries old Christian tradition that homosexual behavior was wrong.

The challenge should be welcomed. Christians should respond with enthusiasm whenever anyone asks them to re-examine what the Bible teaches. Cultural traditions have been read into the Bible. Could it be the case that Christians have done the same with their understanding of homosexual activity?

Traditionally Christians have understood the sin of Sodom in Genesis 19 to be homosexual behavior.

Before they had gone to bed, 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." (Gen. 19:4-5)

Bailey and those who follow his reasoning point out that a literal translation of verse 5 would read "Bring them out to us so that we can know them." What does *know* mean in this sentence? It has traditionally been understood as sexual intercourse. But the verb is used 943 times in the Old Testament, and only 17 times does it refer to sexual intercourse.

Perhaps here the verb means "to get acquainted with." Westerners think of getting to know someone as a light and informal matter, but in the Eastern world the rituals of hospitality carry more weight. The sin of Sodom, therefore, could very well be a breach of Eastern customs of hospitality. Such an interpretation sounds plausible.

There is one major flaw to it, however. One of the fundamental rules of interpreting literature is that the meaning of a word is determined by its context. Are there any clues given in the context to tell us what *know* means in verse 5? The word is also found in verse 8.

Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof." (Gen. 19:6-8).

The New International Version translates *know* in verse 8 as "slept with a man." "Look," Lot says, "I have two daughters who have never known a man." In that verse the word *know* does not mean "to get acquainted with." All interpreters understand it to mean sexual intercourse. And if that is what the word means in verse 8, then the word should be interpreted to mean the same thing in verse 5. The new interpretation of the passage does not hold up under investigation.

Homosexual behavior was certainly not the only sin of Sodom (see Jer. 23:14; Ezek. 16:49). But some interpreters have so emphasized the other aspects of Sodom's sin that they have, in effect, said that the homosexual aspect is insignificant. Jewish writers, however, did not ignore the sexual element. Both Philo (*Life of Abraham* 133-41) and Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* 1.194-95, 200-201), two of the most prominent Jewish writers of the first century A.D., interpreted the Old Testament account of Sodom as referring directly to homosexual acts. The New Testament book of Jude also recognizes the sexual aspect of Sodom's sin. Jude writes, "In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion" (Jude 7).

The precise sexual sin of Sodom was homosexual rape. Someone may say, therefore, that this passage teaches nothing about homosexual behavior between two consenting and committed partners. It is that latter situation that is being advocated today so the account of Sodom and Gomorrah is not really relevant to today's debate.

What does God's Word have to say about contemporary homosexual practices in general? Look at the teaching of the Mosaic Law in Leviticus. "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable. . . . If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable" (Lev. 18:22; 20:13). Those verses seem clear at first reading, but we might be asked whether we have interpreted them in their context.

The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the Lord your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices.'" (Lev. 18:1-3)

This chapter, it could be said, is aimed at guarding the Israelites from the fertility worship of the Canaanites. They practiced sacred prostitution, but Moses teaches here that it was to have no part in the worship of the God of Israel. What is being forbidden then is not homosexual behavior in general but only homosexual behavior in the service of idols.

Closer study of the passage reveals that there are actually two underlying principles at work here. One is the separation of the Israelites from anything connected to idol worship. A more fundamental principle should not be overlooked. The Old Testament teaches in the opening chapters of Genesis and in the Ten Commandments that sexual intimacy was intended for and should be limited to the heterosexual marriage relationship. Any other form of genital sexual intimacy was forbidden by God. The teaching of Leviticus 18 is not just a response to the idol worship of the Canaanites; it is also a reiteration of Genesis 1 and 2. Even D. Sherwin Bailey recognized that. He wrote, "It is hardly open to doubt that both the laws in Leviticus relate to ordinary homosexual acts between men, and not to ritual or other acts performed in the name of religion."¹³

¹³ Quoted in D. Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (Harlow, England: Longmans, Green, 1955), 4; quoted in John R.W. Stott, *Homosexual Partnerships?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 10.

The prohibitions in Leviticus are often dismissed or ridiculed today as irrelevant. After all, it is said, should we also put practicing homosexuals to death as Leviticus 20:13 teaches? And should we prohibit the wearing of clothes that are made from two kinds of material as Leviticus 19:19 says? Such arguments may enable the defenders of homosexual practices to score debating points, but they do not do justice to the teaching of Leviticus or the Bible as a whole.

The same sections of Leviticus forbid stealing, lying, and fraud (Lev. 19:11-13). Should those ethical principles also be dismissed? And what about the teaching of Leviticus 19:18 in which we are told to “love your neighbor as yourself”? Since Jesus quotes that passage and labels it as the second greatest commandment (Matt. 22:39), we should be hesitant before we dismiss the entire Levitical law as antiquated and irrelevant.

Issues of interpretation and application involving the laws in Leviticus are complex. The New Testament demonstrates that the coming of Christ changes the application of some of them (see Mark 7:14-22), but the New Testament also endorses the Old Testament law’s abiding relevance. How do we account for both the continuity and discontinuity between Old Testament law and New Testament teaching? We should be careful before we quickly dismiss the sexual ethics found in Leviticus 18 and 20. Do we find theological principles in the New Testament that would lead us to conclude that the fundamental principles of those chapters still apply?

The best-known New Testament passage addressing the issue of homosexual practices is found in Paul’s letter to the Romans.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for the unnatural ones (*para physin*). 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. (Rom. 1:26-27)

A question can be raised over the use of the word *natural*. “Even their women exchanged natural relations for the unnatural ones” (Rom. 1:26b). What about people who have no “natural” attraction to the opposite sex? The man who is “naturally” attracted to other males is not being described here, is he? Couldn’t this verse be interpreted to mean that it is sinful for a person who is “naturally” heterosexual to abandon that “natural” desire and engage in homosexual activity? Isn’t that what the passage is teaching? In fact, doesn’t this passage seem to imply that those who “naturally” have homosexual desires should not abandon their “natural” desires and try to be something that they aren’t?

Again that interpretation seems convincing, but there are three major reasons to believe that *natural* cannot be understood in this way. First, we have evidence from the first century writers Philo and Josephus. Both of them used the same Greek expression that Paul did. For example, Josephus wrote, “The law recognizes only sexual intercourse that is according to nature (*kata physin*), that which is with a woman” (*Against Apion* 2.199). Josephus uses *nature* to refer to that which God has created, not to what comes “naturally” to a human being. Since that is the way that Jewish writers of the first century used the term, there must be compelling reason to think that Paul used the term in a different way.

Second, the immediate context in Romans must be considered because words are only properly understood in their literary context. Verses 26 and 27 follow Paul's mention of creation in verse 25. "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen." Therefore, *natural* in the following two verses should be understood to refer to God's original plan for nature. "Even their women exchanged natural relations for the unnatural ones" (Rom. 1:26). The women exchanged the natural relations--that is, the heterosexual relations which God had originally intended--for unnatural ones--that is, lesbian relations.

There is a third problem inherent in the proposed revised interpretation. If such reasoning applies to homosexual behavior, it should also apply to other behaviors that are mentioned in this passage. "They have become filled with envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice" (Rom. 1:29). If those actions arise from desires that come naturally to a person, does that make them ethically appropriate? Imagine someone saying, "I don't know where my desire to lie comes from. It's been a part of my thinking for as long as I can remember. It's just the way I am." Would anyone suggest that for the person who reasons that way, lying is acceptable? Neither can it apply to the homosexual actions described in verses 26 and 27. To reason in such a manner robs Romans 1 of all its moral force.

Homosexual relationships are also mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6:19 and 1 Timothy 1:10. Translations vary in the way that the pertinent Greek words are translated. *Malakoi* may be translated as "male prostitute" or "effeminate" or "pervert." *Arsenokoitai* may be translated as "homosexual offenders" or "sodomites." Those advocating a new interpretation of the Bible's teaching on homosexuality often state that *malakoi* refers to the younger passive male in homosexual intercourse while *arsenokoitai* refers to the older active male in homosexual intercourse. They then go on to point out that such a pederastic relationship in which a youth was sexually exploited by an older male was the only kind of homosexual relationship known in the ancient world. Since the apostle Paul did not know of a consensual and committed sexual relationship between two males, his teaching cannot be applied to today's homosexual relationships.

This teaching requires some careful examination. First, it is doubtful that we should restrict the two terms to partners in a pederastic relationship because there were established Greek terms for those partners. If Paul had intended to single out pederasts, he could have easily used the term *paidēastes*. But Paul chose not to use that accepted term. Doesn't that indicate that he probably had something else in mind?

Second, what do *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* actually mean? The word *malakoi* means "the soft ones." It may well mean the passive partner or the one who played the female role in homosexual intercourse, but we cannot be sure of that. The New Testament is the first ancient document to use the term *arsenokoitai*. The term comes from two Greek words meaning "male" and "bed." But what is the precise meaning of the combined words? Recent studies convincingly demonstrate that Paul probably coined the term from the Septuagint or Greek translation of the Levitical passages that forbid homosexual acts. In the Septuagint, Leviticus 18:22 reads *meta arsenos ou koimēthēsē koitēn gynakios* and Leviticus 20:13 reads *hos an koimēthē meta arsenos koitēn gynaikos*. The underlined words in the Greek transliterations show how Paul took terms from those Levitical passages in order to make his new term. The Levitical passages themselves do not

specify any one kind of homosexual behavior; therefore, it is unlikely that Paul had only a pederastic relationship in mind when he coined his new word. Furthermore, Paul's coining of a term by combining expressions from the Levitical passages that prohibit homosexual practices demonstrates his familiarity with those passages. He recognized the abiding ethical truth found in those Old Testament prohibitions and relied upon them in order to give instructions to the early Christians.¹⁴

Third, it should also be questioned whether Paul was only knowledgeable of exploitative homosexual relationships. Plato's *Symposium*, which was written around 416 B.C., includes several speeches extolling loving relationships between a youth and an older male. For example, Plato records Aristophanes as saying, ". . . they are both so intoxicated with affection, with friendship, and with love, that they cannot bear to let each other out of sight for a single instant. It is such reunions as these that impel men to spend their lives together, although they may be hard put to it to say what they really want with one another, and indeed, the purely sexual pleasures of their friendship could hardly account for the huge delight they take in one another's company" (192c). Since this teaching appeared in Greek culture at least four hundred years before Paul's time, it can hardly be maintained that the ancient world knew nothing of loving homosexual relationships. But Paul made no differentiation between various kinds of homosexual relationships; he was opposed to all of them.

Some advocates of the new interpretation cap off their reasoning by pointing out that very few passages in the Bible even address the issue of homosexuality. The so-called "Clobber Passages" from Genesis, Leviticus, Romans, 1 Corinthians, and 1 Timothy should not be given such prominence. Obviously, they say, the Bible doesn't care that much about homosexual behavior. Why then should Christians get so worked up over it?

Making it appear that the Bible's teaching on homosexuality can be limited to just a few verses overlooks the obvious. The Bible does more than say that homosexual practices are wrong. It also presents a positive model for human sexuality starting in Genesis 1. The account of Adam and Eve teaches that God's plan is for sexual intimacy to take place in a marital relationship between a man and a woman. Furthermore, the Song of Songs endorses heterosexual marriage. In fact, throughout the Old Testament heterosexual marriage is presented as God's model for sexual intercourse.

What do we find in the New Testament? Jesus and the apostles consistently reinforce the importance of heterosexual marriage. Sometimes it is said that Jesus didn't say anything about homosexuality; therefore, he must not have thought that it was wrong or that it was important enough to address. Such an argument from silence proves nothing. Jesus didn't say anything about incest either, but that doesn't mean that he would approve of it. Is there anything in the New Testament that would suggest that Jesus thought that the Old Testament teaching on heterosexual marriage needed to be expanded to include same-sex relationships? On the contrary, Jesus consistently reinforced Old Testament sexual standards.

Seen against the positive teaching that the Bible gives on heterosexual intimacy, the passages that specifically prohibit homosexual practices become even clearer. They are not a

¹⁴ Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight & Narrow?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 95-96.

few obscure Bible passages that Bible-thumping fundamentalists use to clobber homosexual advocates. Rather, they are commandments that naturally arise from the positive teaching that the Bible gives on human sexuality.

Some advocates of a new approach toward homosexual practice have recognized that the proposed reinterpretations of the Bible will not stand up under scrutiny. They have decided to take a different tack. They readily acknowledge that the Bible consistently disapproves of homosexual practices. For example, one writer admits that “the biblical texts that deal specifically with homosexual practice condemn it unconditionally.”¹⁵ But they then say that broader principles of Bible teaching should encourage us to take a different stand on the issue. For example, Jesus’ teaching about loving and caring for others should take precedence over any negative commands. If Christians were to care truly for those with homosexual orientations, the church would work hard to make sure that all people regardless of their sexual orientation can enjoy God’s good gift of sexual intimacy. The demands of justice also require a new stance toward homosexual practices.

While such reasoning is popular and initially persuasive, it too needs to be examined. What is love? Does love mean simply approving of whatever anyone wants to do? Does Jesus’ teaching on love amount to nothing more than the modern notion of tolerance? Such an approach to love hardly accounts for the totality of New Testament teaching. Jesus did not harshly and mercilessly condemn people caught in sin. But neither did he approve of all kinds of behavior and affirm people in whatever they wanted to do. In regard to sexual sin Jesus was not hesitant to call people to repentance and to tell them to “go and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11). Jesus urges his followers to “seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). To be faithful to Jesus’ example, Christians today need to practice compassion while they simultaneously affirm God’s unchanging standards for sexual behavior.

An Old Testament proverb aptly describes the current debate: “The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him” (Prov. 18:17). D.S. Bailey and others who have followed his revised interpretation of the Bible’s teaching on homosexual practices do make what seems to be a convincing case. If someone has not carefully studied the biblical teaching on this subject, it may appear that the Bible says nothing negative about contemporary homosexual practices. But once that new interpretation is investigated, it fails to be persuasive. “The doubt created by Dr. Bailey has traveled more widely than the reasons he produces for it. Not one of these reasons, it may be suggested, stands any serious scrutiny.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Dan O. Via and Robert A.J. Gagnon, Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 93.

¹⁶ Derek Kidner, Genesis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 137

Appendix 2: No Easy Victory

A plea from a Christian husband and father who, day by day, resists his homosexual desires.
Anonymous

I am a business executive, congregation president, youth-group leader, athletic coach, happily married man for more than 25 years, and proud father of a couple of teenagers. Oh—and I'm gay. My admission requires some explanation, and perhaps some supporting evidence. You see, except for some experimentation during adolescence, I have not acted on my desires. From the outside I've usually looked and acted like a "normal" heterosexual male.

I was raised Conservative Baptist (emphasis on *conservative*). From as early as I can remember, I knew right from wrong, white from black, good from evil, righteousness from sinfulness. There was no moral gray, no ambiguity. I felt irreparably condemned by what I knew.

When my wife and I were ready to choose our own theological home, we became part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The message of grace alone was, and still is, what attracted me to Lutheranism. Unfortunately, we Lutherans are not all that good at living in and sharing that grace, and sometimes I still feel condemned by what should be good news.

On the inside—in my psyche, feelings, and attractions—I'm as certain of my gayness as I am of my sex. I first became aware of my sexual orientation when I was about 9 or 10 years old, at church summer camp. At that time, I had no idea what sex was, but I was nonetheless aware of an overwhelming emotional attraction I had developed to another boy of my age. It was an experience that would repeat itself over and over again. As I entered adolescence, it would take on a more sexual nature.

By the time I was in high school, I had experienced a number of serious crushes on other young men. Most of these came to nothing but teenage friendships, but in a couple of instances, they did take on some physical expression. The physiological and emotional drive to be intimate with another person of my own sex was almost overwhelming. So was the guilt associated with my succumbing to this drive.

While my high school peers were bragging about their heterosexual exploits, I was trying desperately not to have the homosexual encounters that my nature inexorably seemed to draw me toward. For all of us, admittedly, adolescence carries some degree of alienation (from others and from self), but for me the sense of aloneness and self-loathing was almost more than I could bear. I developed a variety of "coping mechanisms"—alcohol, drug abuse, heavy smoking, and forced heterosexual encounters—but they proved ineffective in distracting me from my urges. By the time I was a high school senior, I was frequently depressed and given to serious thoughts of suicide.

A Strange Normality

At 19, in the summer between my first and second year of college, I became a Christian. Obviously, given my Christian family background, I had known about Christ and the offer of

salvation for many years. Nonetheless, I had never been able to make a meaningful connection between the conservative theology of my family and my inner turmoil. But at 19, when I found myself in the throes of suicidal depression, Christ seemed to be my best choice of last resort.

I thank God that much about my life changed as a result of that choice. I recovered from my depression, got my drinking under control, quit smoking (eventually), and straightened out my sexual life enough to begin a healthy relationship with a wonderful woman. In time this led to my marriage to a person who *knows* and has supported me more than I could ever deserve. But, as great as all this was, my sexual orientation did not change; I still was not then, nor am I now, "normal."

And that's what I wish I could be: normal. I've tried to change, tried to become heterosexual, tried just about *everything* to do so! Counseling, therapy, prayer, healing—you name it. But for all my trying, all I've managed to do is control the behavioral manifestations of my sexual orientation. God has given me the power to live a fulfilling heterosexual life, together with the grace to live with the fact that I'm still homosexual. It hasn't been an easy victory. There are times when maintaining this dichotomous life is nearly overwhelming.

Over the years I've continued to struggle with emotional attractions and attachments to other men that have torn away at my insides and eroded my confidence in myself and in God. I continue to struggle from time to time with thoughts that my wife and sons would be better off if they didn't have to deal with such a moody husband and father—especially his recurring bouts of almost suicidal depression.

Yes, mine is a victory in the sense that I have managed to maintain life, love, and fidelity in my marriage, but it is a victory that has required almost daily battle, and one that comes at considerable psychological cost to me and to my family.

I have no regrets about my commitment to begin and maintain my faithfulness in heterosexual marriage. Nothing has taught me more, nothing has been a greater source of joy, than the relationships I have with my wife and sons. But I am sometimes angry about the effort required, and I am frequently angry that I have had to do this on my own, without the support of friends or of a caring Christian community.

The Shroud of Silence

Christian literature on homosexuality is full of polarizing rhetoric. One side says that we should welcome our gay brothers and sisters into Christian fellowship; that we should recognize this is how God made them and therefore it must be how God intends for them to live. The other side recites the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, uses words like *abomination*, and gives us anecdotal evidence of people being changed. From the perspective of my experience, I cannot help but conclude that both positions are naïve.

My position on homosexuality—while it may be realistic and grounded in true experience—seems to offend many and please almost no one. My fervent belief that God intends us to live in heterosexual and monogamous fidelity offends the liberals who think I should accept

and live out my supposedly God-given sexual nature. At the same time, my experience that grace may abound but that it doesn't necessarily "fix" me or make it easy for me to live the "straight" life offends the conservatives who preach and demand a clearer "victory" over my sinful nature. Rhetoric seldom provides us with an accurate representation of reality. My story is a reality. I believe it is a reality shared by many more than just me, but disclosed by few.

Why haven't I told my story to my church friends? Why is my identity anonymous? Because, despite all the claims by my heterosexual friends to "love the sinner but hate the sin," I do not trust them. I do not believe that they could know this about me and still want me to be their congregational president, their youth-group leader, their sons' coach. I wish I could believe it, but I don't. Perhaps I'm hypersensitive in not trusting, but I've overheard too many jokes, seen too many expressions of hate directed at homosexuals, to believe that these same people could be my friends if they *knew*.

To be honest, I myself sometimes have a hard time loving the sinner while hating the sin. Sometimes this takes the form of self-hate, but more often I struggle with hating promiscuous heterosexual men, because they seem so self-justifying and because some people—even some Christians—seem so accommodating of that sin while so condemning of mine. Just last week I was talking with a Christian friend about concerns I had for members of our youth group. His response was something like, "Well, you know, with all those hormones..." I don't get it. Do young male heterosexuals benefit from some sort of special dispensation? Why is their giving in to their urges so understandable while my giving in to mine would be such an abomination?

The debate on homosexuality is tearing at the fiber of almost every mainline Christian denomination, while also leaving many of us who actually *are* homosexual feeling misunderstood, marginalized, and ignored by the "dialogue."

I am not trying to argue in favor of my homosexuality, but to simply acknowledge the reality of my condition. I am broken, and I acknowledge my homosexuality as a manifestation of this brokenness. But I do not believe I am any *more* broken than the person who sits in the pew next to me. The greedy, the liars, the drunkards, and the single yet sexually active heterosexuals—they all share in equal portion with me in this brokenness.

Sin is sin, and grace is grace. We are all sinners and we all—whether heterosexual or homosexual—are offered the same grace. Ours is no easy victory. It would be a whole lot easier if our churches would try to understand, and accept, those like me who claim victory nonetheless.

The author lives in the western United States.

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Appendix 3: Cheated by the Affirming Church

Contrary to what some churches teach, it is homosexuality—and not its suppression—that enslaves people like me.

I feel cheated. Cheated by those who say that they love me and are trying to help me. Yet, if things were left up to them, I would still be in a prison of my own making—enslaved by homosexuality and without hope.

Like many other Christians, I have struggled for years with same-sex attraction. By God's grace I know freedom from a way of life that still holds too many others captive. Yet many within the so-called affirming church would deny us that freedom. They say homosexuality is God's plan for our lives, even though the Bible clearly says that homosexual behavior is a sin. It is not my intention to prove it; many conservative theologians have already done so. Instead, let me highlight, on a practical level, the negative effects of affirming this sin.

Does God gain some mysterious personal benefit by prohibiting homosexual practice? My exposure to homosexuality convinces me of a far more basic rationale for the biblical prohibition: Homosexuality is bad for me.

First, there is the all-too-common problem of sexually transmitted diseases. As I pondered the recent deaths from aids of a member of my extended family and his domestic partner, I couldn't help an involuntary shudder over the obvious implications. When I entered college, I had already decided that I would withhold no homosexual pleasure from myself. God, in his great mercy, acted before I could carry out my plan. Had Jesus not changed my life one fall Sunday in 1971, I would have likely become another STD statistic by now.

But the area where the affirming church cheats people the most is not health. It is relationships. You don't hear the affirming church discuss the lasting damage this sin inflicts on homosexuals and their loved ones.

Twenty-five years ago, God blessed me with the gift of being attracted to the wonderful woman who is now my wife. Because of fear and lack of faith, I hid my struggle from her for 23 of those years. I am told by many of my ex-gay friends that I am "lucky." While I had two boyfriends in my teen years, God, in his grace—not to mention my fear of discovery—kept me from engaging in explicit homosexual activity. My experience was limited to simple physical affection and the indulgence in homosexual pornography.

But I don't feel lucky. I wanted to believe the message of the affirming church—that I was born this way, that I couldn't be happy without accepting my homosexuality, and that I couldn't change. I had the occasional fall to gay porn bought at an "adult" shop on business trips. Then I discovered online pornography. Suddenly, I could indulge myself whenever I wanted. Unlike many of the "straight" porn sites that charge fees, many gay sites operate at no charge. I was quickly hooked.

I spent several years in bondage to lust. Over and over, I would quit, shamed beyond measure. But the message that I should embrace my identity as a "gay Christian" continued to entice me, and I would return to my self-made prison. My sin separated me from God, and I lost the joy of my salvation. My conscience didn't side with the affirming church.

After so many years of stimulation, my senses became dulled. I no longer could get the rush I needed so badly. Encouraged by the message of the affirming church, I was "embracing" my homosexuality. But as I fell deeper into sin, my marriage grew increasingly boring, and my wife's love seemed more and more distant.

The affirming church had a bigger lie for me: I had been "guilted" into a heterosexual marriage by a church that lied to me about my orientation. I listened to the lie and decided to call a gay friend for sex.

But as I sat there, receiver in hand, listening to the dial tone, I realized that I was about to throw my whole life away. It didn't feel like freedom; it felt like I was about to be further enslaved. I simply could not complete the call; I decided to get help.

An article by a fellow struggler, "[No Easy Victory](#)" (CT, March 2002), gave me the courage to come clean to my wife. By confessing my sin to God, my wife, and a few others within my local church, I began the journey to true freedom. In the end, I was set free thanks to a combination of accountability and an internet course called Door of Hope at www.settingcaptivesfree.com.

I unlearned the lies that the affirming church propagates. I admit my responsibility for believing them, and for my actions based on them. But the damage continues to reverberate.

I'm still in the process of rebuilding my relationship with my wife. She lost her trust in me, and why not? When she finds me at the computer, she wonders if I have again become ensnared by porn. To alleviate her concerns, I have made my computer use an open book to her and my accountability partner.

My wife lives with embarrassment that is not of her making, and never knows how friends will react if they find out about my past. She must deal with the damage I have done to her self-image. After all, what does a woman think about herself when her husband has desires for men? You never hear this question raised by the affirming church.

Free to Overcome Temptation

But the Lord has brought us healing. Even though we still have our ups and downs, our commitment to each other has grown in ways that I could not have imagined before all of this. Most of all, each of us has grown in our relationship with Christ.

It's not easy to escape the slave ship of homosexuality. But according to Exodus International communications director Randy Thomas, there are tens of thousands of people who

would identify as ex-gay, and several times more who have never identified as gay in the first place, having moved beyond their same-sex attractions entirely.

My pastor likens affirming Christians to the doctor who examines her patient and discovers life-threatening, but treatable, cancer. However, knowing that the patient cannot bear the thought of the painful treatment, she sends the man home with the "good news" that there is nothing wrong with him. Instead, the good doctor tells her patient that the symptoms of cancer are something "quite natural" that he should "accept."

In the same way, I've had Christians tell me that homosexuality is "natural," that I was "born this way," and I should "accept" the way I am. They have said that my marriage was a mistake; I should divorce my wife and affirm my gay identity. But I have heard countless stories of men and women who came out from affirming churches because they realized that they were not being who God wants them to be.

Believers can act like the false physician, telling people tempted by homosexuality that same-sex orientation is part of their identity and that they should accept it. Or, we can act as judge, jury, and executioner, driving them away from the Savior who loves them. Either way, we risk the same result: spiritual death.

Or we can respond like Jesus would, with grace and truth: "Come unto me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Those words called to me, weary and heavy-laden with sin, several years ago. Shouldn't all Christians bear that message of freedom and hope?

The author has decided to remain anonymous in order to honor his wife's request.

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Appendix 4: **Speaking Out: Why Gay Marriage Would Be Harmful**

Institutionalizing homosexual marriage would be bad for marriage, bad for children, and bad for society.

By Robert Benne and Gerald McDermott

Now that the Massachusetts Supreme Court has ruled that marriage be open to gays and lesbians, it is time to consider the question that pops up more than mushrooms after a spring rain. How would the legalization of gay marriage harm current and future heterosexual marriages?

The answer at first glance is that it wouldn't, at least not in individual cases in the short run. But what about the longer run for everyone?

It is a superficial kind of individualism that does not recognize the power of emerging social trends that often start with only a few individuals bucking conventional patterns of behavior. Negative social trends start with only a few aberrations. Gradually, however, social sanctions weaken and individual aberrations become a torrent.

Think back to the 1960s, when illegitimacy and cohabitation were relatively rare. At that time many asked how one young woman having a baby out of wedlock or living with an unmarried man could hurt their neighbors. Now we know the negative social effects these two living arrangements have spawned: lower marriage rates, more instability in the marriages that are enacted, more fatherless children, increased rates of domestic violence and poverty, and a vast expansion of welfare state expenses.

But even so, why would a new social trend of gays marrying have negative effects? We believe there are compelling reasons why the institutionalization of gay marriage would be 1) bad for marriage, 2) bad for children, and 3) bad for society.

1. The first casualty of the acceptance of gay marriage would be the very definition of marriage itself. For thousands of years and in every Western society marriage has meant the life-long union of a man and a woman. Such a statement about marriage is what philosophers call an analytic proposition. The concept of marriage necessarily includes the idea of a man and woman committing themselves to each other. Any other arrangement contradicts the basic definition. Advocates of gay marriage recognize this contradiction by proposing "gay unions" instead, but this distinction is, we believe, a strategic one. The ultimate goal for them is the societal acceptance of gay marriage.

Scrambling the definition of marriage will be a shock to our fundamental understanding of human social relations and institutions. One effect will be that sexual fidelity will be detached from the commitment of marriage. The advocates of gay marriage themselves admit as much. "Among gay male relationships, the openness of the contract makes it more likely to survive than many heterosexual bonds," Andrew Sullivan, the most eloquent proponent of gay marriage, wrote in his 1996 book, *Virtually Normal*. "There is more likely to be a greater understanding of the need for extramarital outlets between two men than between a man and a woman. ... Something of the gay relationship's necessary honesty, its flexibility, and its equality could undoubtedly help strengthen and inform many heterosexual bonds."

The former moderator of the Metropolitan Community Church, a largely homosexual denomination, made the same point. "Monogamy is not a word the gay community uses," Troy Perry told *The Dallas Morning News*. "We talk about fidelity. That means you live in a loving, caring, honest relationship with your partner. Because we can't marry, we have people with widely varying opinions as to what that means. Some would say that committed couples could have multiple sexual partners as long as there's no deception."

A recent study from the Netherlands, where gay marriage is legal, suggests that the moderator is correct. Researchers found that even among stable homosexual partnerships, men have an average of eight partners per year outside their "monogamous" relationship.

In short, gay marriage will change marriage more than it will change gays.

Further, if we scramble our definition of marriage, it will soon embrace relationships that will involve more than two persons. Prominent advocates hope to use gay marriage as a wedge to abolish governmental support for traditional marriage altogether. Law Professor Martha Ertman of the University of Utah, for example, wants to render the distinction between traditional marriage and "polyamory" (group marriage) "morally neutral." She argues that greater openness to gay partnerships will help us establish this moral neutrality (Her main article on this topic, in the Winter 2001 *Harvard Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Law Review*, is not available online, but she made a similar case in the Spring/Summer 2001 *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy*). University of Michigan law professor David Chambers wrote in a widely cited 1996 *Michigan Law Review* piece that he expects gay marriage will lead government to be "more receptive to [marital] units of three or more" (1996 *Michigan Law Review*).

2. *Gay marriage would be bad for children.* According to a recent article in *Child Trends*, "Research clearly demonstrates that family structure matters for children, and the family structure that helps the most is a family headed by two biological parents in a low-conflict marriage." While gay marriage would encourage adoption of children by homosexual couples, which may be preferable to foster care, some lesbian couples want to have children through anonymous sperm donations, which means some children will be created purposely without knowledge of one of their biological parents. Research has also shown that children raised by homosexuals were more dissatisfied with their own gender, suffer a greater rate of molestation within the family, and have homosexual experiences more often.

Gay marriage will also encourage teens who are unsure of their sexuality to embrace a lifestyle that suffers high rates of suicide, depression, HIV, drug abuse, STDs, and other pathogens. This is particularly alarming because, according to a 1991 scientific survey among 12-year-old boys, more than 25 percent feel uncertain about their sexual orientations. We have already seen that lesbianism is "chic" in certain elite social sectors.

Finally, acceptance of gay marriage will strengthen the notion that marriage is primarily about adult yearnings for intimacy and is not essentially connected to raising children. Children will be hurt by those who will too easily bail out of a marriage because it is not "fulfilling" to them.

3. *Gay marriage would be bad for society.* The effects we have described above will have strong repercussions on a society that is already having trouble maintaining wholesome stability in marriage and family life. If marriage and families are the foundation for a healthy society, introducing more uncertainty and instability in them will be bad for society.

In addition, we believe that gay marriage can only be imposed by activist judges, not by the democratic will of the people. The vast majority of people define marriage as the life-long union of a man and a woman. They will strongly resist redefinition. Like the 1973 judicial activism regarding abortion, the imposition of gay marriage would bring contempt for the law and our courts in the eyes of many Americans. It would exacerbate social conflict and division in our nation, a division that is already bitter and possibly dangerous.

In summary, we believe that the introduction of gay marriage will seriously harm Americans—including those in heterosexual marriages—over the long run. Strong political measures may be necessary to maintain the traditional definition of marriage, possibly even a constitutional amendment.

Some legal entitlements sought by gays and lesbians might be addressed by recognizing non-sexually defined domestic partnerships. But as for marriage, let us keep the definition as it is, and strengthen our capacity to live up to its ideals.

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RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate, by Thomas E. Schmidt, 1995. Writing with both an evangelical Christian perspective and a profound empathy, the author addresses what the Bible says about homosexuality, the health effects of homosexual behavior, and whether people are born with homosexual orientations. This book is thoroughly researched and up to date.

A Parent's Guide to Preventing Homosexuality, Joseph Nicolosi and Linda Ames Nicolosi, 2002. This book offers a refreshingly different message than the one broadcast in the media. The authors explain homosexual tendencies among young boys in a calm and compassionate manner and give specific advice to parents on how to help their boys grow into masculinity. The book also contains an insightful chapter on lesbianism.

Someone I Love is Gay: How Family & Friends Can Respond, by Anita Worthen & Bob Davies, 1996. Anita Worthen shares her struggle with her son's homosexuality, and Bob Davies writes out of both his personal experience and his ministry in Exodus International. This book will help you handle your feelings and learn how to respond appropriately to your loved one.

Coming Out of Homosexuality: New Freedom for Men & Women, Bob Davies & Lori Rentzel, 1993. This is a practical book for people struggling with same-sex desires. It tells the stories of other Christians and their failures and successes. You will learn strategies that work because they have been developed and used by real people.

Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate, Stanton L. Jones & Mark A. Yarhouse, 2000. How prevalent is homosexuality? What causes it? Is it a psychopathology? Can it be changed? Science is often appealed to in order to answer these questions, but how reliable is the scientific research? The authors carefully examine what the evidence actually reveals. They then discuss how relevant that evidence is to the moral debate over the issue.

The Bible and Homosexual Practice, Robert A.J. Gagnon, 2001. This 493-page book offers an exhaustive study of what the Bible teaches on the subject of homosexuality.