

# **The Illumination of Context:**

# **The Bible and Homosexuality**

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**originally prepared for**

**First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**

**Fullerton, California, U.S.A.**

*Sept. 2014*

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## INTRODUCTION

Can you be Christian and homosexual? Many Americans say "No," and some Christians are conscientious, vocal and insistent about this belief! As a result, many sincere homosexuals have lived in agony, sincerely (though unsuccessfully) trying to reconcile their commitment to Christ with their homosexual orientation by hiding and suppressing something they were helpless to change into "repaired" heterosexuals. Despite their faithfulness to the Lord, they found their fellowships rejecting them and questioning their legitimacy as Christians, forcing them to lead double lives and/or leave the church altogether. In extreme cases, homosexuals have felt so forsaken by God -- because of the harsh judgments of fellow Christians -- that they have committed suicide, seemingly the only sweet release from unrelenting condemnation.

Many of us have grown up in such intolerant churches, and many of us have found a positive, healthy and blessed reconciliation the likes of which we never could have dreamed as young Christians. Though our homosexual orientations did not change to heterosexuality, our Christian commitment and God-given privileges have increased over the years. God proves His love for us, regardless of our sexuality. Most of all, God has given us a desire to reach out to those in our former condition of self-condemnation -- our fellow, sincerely committed believers who recognize the hopelessness in trying to change or suppress their homosexuality.

Those who originally went through the process of self-acceptance have done so only through years of searching for answers, researching the Bible and Biblical culture, and praying and waiting for the Lord's guidance, fresh insight and healing of past wounds. This essay presents much of the collaborative work done by these long-suffering and faithful pioneers. Scripture discloses a God of so much greater compassion and understanding of our needs than we had ever imagined. As a result of these new insights, many of us have been rejected by Christian friends and labeled "heretics," "liberals" or other terms which illustrate the ignorance and fear of the name-caller more than the character of the one so labeled. We do not claim to have any special revelation, but seek to testify how Jesus (through His Word and Holy Spirit) has helped us to better understand Him and His position toward homosexuality. We have asked for God's grace and wisdom as our guide in our study and in presenting these thoughts, dedicating this work to God's glory and the healing ministry He gives to each of us. May it be a blessing to you and the ministry to which God calls you.

It is vitally important for each of us to be very sure that we base our attitudes and actions on the whole Scriptural message. We must understand the specific Scriptures which are presumed to deal with homosexuality, fitting them properly into the total context of the theme of salvation through Christ. For those readers who find that this essay presents an opinion of homosexuality contrary to your current views, I exhort you to rid yourself of your previous prejudices and try to read this as objectively as you can. We will consider the subject in the following, broad

categories: definitions, images of homosexuals, prejudices, attitudes toward Scripture, and the Scriptures concerning sin, salvation, homosexuality and Christian approaches. Then we will consider homosexuals' journeys, and finally, our proper attitudes as loving followers of Jesus.

## **DEFINITIONS -- ORIENTATION VS. LIFE STYLE**

First, the definition of the term "homosexual," for which neither Hebrew, Greek, Latin or any other ancient language had a word [see Note 1]. According to modern literature, "homosexual" is used in various ways. We will here use the definition that defines the fundamental characteristic -- a sexual orientation (natural, constitutional condition) in a person which develops romantic attachments (with the possibility of sexual relations) with another person of the same gender. Heterosexuality involves the same type of condition, but with attachments toward the opposite gender. Furthermore, sexual acts do not correspond to orientation -- prostitution, bestiality, sex in prisons or as a form of punishment in war, etc., do not imply actual attraction to the object used. Current study is divided over the biological or environmental roots of sexual orientation, but it is not a matter of choice and becomes largely established by early childhood and immutable (unchangeable) thereafter. It is vitally important to realize that this definition is confined to one's sexual orientation, not to sexual behavior. Sexual orientation is not a preference, inclination, proclivity, or besetting sin.

Since a 1940s report by Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey, *et al.*, human sexual interest has been measured on a seven-point scale, ranging from a completely heterosexual to a completely homosexual orientation. Americans at the homosexual end of the scale range from 4% to 10%, by most studies. For a homosexually oriented person, romantic relations with a person of the opposite gender would seem unnatural, even repulsive and disgusting -- feelings of revulsion as powerful and innate as the feelings which absolute heterosexuals would have toward sexual relations with someone of the same gender. Our liking or disliking this attitude has no bearing on the validity of that feeling in the mind and heart of a homosexually oriented person.

The difference between sexual orientation and sexual behavior (or "life style") must be clearly understood, for to fail to make this separation is to confuse and misunderstand the entire subject of human sexuality. A person can live a celibate life, a life of fidelity to a partner (even in a marriage or union), a life of serially monogamous but not lasting relationships, or a life of infidelity, promiscuity and/or completely anonymous sexual encounters -- all of which has nothing to do with one's sexual orientation. The question of endorsing or disapproving of one's "life style" (regardless of one's sexual orientation) is a separate issue than homosexuality, and will be addressed in a later chapter. The bulk of this essay will address whether the very condition of being homosexual should be biblically viewed as either sinful or affirmed by God.

## **SEXUALITY AND A TRUSTING DISCIPLESHIP**

Jesus asks us, as disciples, to commit our lives to God and holy service. If we are busy about serving God first, as Jesus taught (Matt. 6:33-34), then our needs will be provided. That means understanding our sexuality as well as every other aspect of our desire to know and serve God. It is especially difficult to wait on the Lord when we are young and want everything in life to happen in a hurry. But life confirms that as we run ahead of the Lord, we usually take a wrong path and make some bad mistakes, often mistakes we learn to regret later. Nevertheless, from these we learn more of God's mercy and forgiveness. And we learn to trust in and lean on God for our salvation and daily guidance. We learn that God answers prayers, delayed as the answers may seem as per our own timing, but such patient discipleship leads to a warm and tender relationship with our Savior. That, in turn, brings both answers to our questions and a healing, trusting bond with a God we are (tragically) often taught to fear (just the opposite of what Jesus lived and died to prove!).

## **APPROACHING THE SCRIPTURES**

First of all, and most importantly, we must base our discussion in the belief that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. And as such, the Scriptures are to be studied and followed as God's instruction in righteousness to us (2 Tim. 2:15 & 3:16-17; 1 Thess. 2:13). The multiple proofs of the Bible's divine inspiration are well documented, to where we will not attempt to include them here. Secondly, the message of Scripture is harmonious when properly understood. We will consider the Bible's inspiration from these two starting points, and both of these aspects are crucial to this study.

Now let's consider what the Scriptures say and don't say about homosexuality. This is a very difficult subject to get clearly in our minds for several reasons. Since the 1200s, Western (European, Judeo-Christian) culture has held negative, "traditional" attitudes against sexual pleasure in general (and homosexuals in particular) which have pervaded almost every aspect of how we view human sexuality, often without any thoughtful consideration or questioning. In addition, most popular religious organizations officially condemn homosexual orientation and conduct -- though some faiths have dissenting minorities which recognize homosexuality as valid. Tolerance toward homosexuals, historically, has been limited or entirely absent from many communities in Western society. Radio, TV and print media are still dominated by the message that heterosexuality is the norm -- a reflection of religious attitudes against "alternative" sexuality. Such culturally ingrained homophobia (defined as a persistent, exaggerated and usually illogical fear or dread of the homosexual) must be consciously fought and set aside if one truly seeks to understand the original intent of the Bible regarding homosexuality.

The thoughtful Bible student distinguishes her/himself from the emotion-based believer by examining Scripture thoughtfully and prayerfully to find in them truth and beauty hidden from the popular religious mind. It is a grave responsibility for both the writer and the reader of Scriptural commentary to be faithful to "the Truth." Now it is time to apply these principles to our consideration of the Scriptures and the subject of homosexuality. We must put aside our preconceived ideas and look as objectively as possible at what the Bible does and does not say. The cultural context of what writers of the Bible saw and condemned must be taken into account before we can claim to understand exactly what was being condemned. We must recognize that, when the Scriptures are not absolutely clear on a subject, we must ask the Lord to give us wisdom (James 1:5-8). If we claim to espouse the Lord's Word, yet misrepresent it because of prejudiced, careless or superficial examination of the Bible or from a failure to seek His wisdom in prayer and meditation, we must assume the responsibility of being unfaithful to Him in that part of our discipleship (Matt. 12:36; Titus 1:9-11; Phil. 2:15-16; 1 Tim. 2:15-16; 2 Cor. 4:1-4). We may thus also find ourselves adopting attitudes of which the Lord disapproves. Depending on our degree of meekness and honesty, He forgives us and will give us experiences to correct us (Ps. 25:9; Matt. 11:28-30). So we can rid our minds of prejudices and ask the Lord to guide our study of His Word and give us His wisdom.

## **HOW GOD DEALS WITH SIN**

Before we go any further, we must consider an important fact. It helps us to see the breadth of the Scriptural message rather than limit ourselves to a narrow, self-righteous view of our Lord's Word -- how vital is the profoundness of God's mercy! God does not just ignore sin (in Greek = *hamartano* = "to miss the mark"), and surely not because we think something feels good while The Word forbids it. God is a realist, both just and loving, showing us our sinful condition realistically. Redemption is ours from Jesus Christ's love for us expressed in His sacrifice in death. God knows each of us (His creation) so well that He understands our weaknesses and tendencies far better than we do, loving us anyway and forgiving us, helping us to learn to overcome our sin (individual and collective). The gospel is one of compassion, restoration and mercy -- God's love to us when we deserve just the opposite.

God knows our differing sexual appetites, psychological drives and fantasies, neuroses and weaknesses associated with our sexual orientation, and while He is merciful and redemptive when dealing with these characteristics in each of us, He does not change our constitutional make-up, our gender, our race, or our sexuality. God also knows our hopes, dreams and needs, and desires to grant us the most lasting and healthy fulfillment of them. Using what we are, in conjunction with the Holy Spirit, God transforms us each into a new creature by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). We will be perfected only at our resurrection (1 Cor. 15:37-44).

But for now, when we as Christians fail to live up to God's will for us and the divine standard of righteousness, God forgives us and corrects us, regardless of our weaknesses or natural characteristics. Homosexuals are not excluded from fellowship with Christ; therefore, since Jesus forgives us our failures, we also must develop an attitude of mercy, compassion and restoration toward others -- even our heterosexual or closeted homosexual detractors. They don't have any worse characteristics than we do. Our zeal must be directed toward copying God in restoring our fellow believers, not condemning and excluding them because they may differ from us and/or view us differently (Matt. 23:23; Rom. 10:4-12; 1 Cor. 13:1-8; Heb. 3:6-14 & 10:18-25; James 5:11; 1 Peter 3:8-9; 1 John 3:11-18 & 4:20-21).

## **PREJUDICES**

Another point we must remember is to examine Scripture for the definition of sin. 1 John 3:4 says sin is disobedience to God's law. More literally, sin is to miss the target when we strive to obey God's Law of Righteousness. So, in order to label homosexual orientation and/or conduct as sin, we must find Scriptures which say either or both are sin. Our examination of the Bible must be careful and prayerful if we expect to have God direct our study and conclusions. If we do not find God defining something as sin (in this study, homosexual orientation and/or conduct), then we must not define it as a sin, either, even if this means rejecting the "traditional" views of our society. This may be very difficult, if we allow our prejudices to influence our study, since our prejudices will play tricks with our God-given reason.

Prejudices can lead us to condemn as sinful anything different from us, even though it is not a sin Scripturally. Or they allow us to read into the Bible concepts and interpretations which are not part of the Lord's Word, in order to rationalize (falsely justify) our personal beliefs or feelings. We must neither ignore Scriptures which contradict our preconceived definition of sin, nor discount valid Scriptural scholarship with which we do not want to agree. Prejudices may also do the opposite, allowing us to rationalize something about ourselves (including intolerance) which the Scriptures say is sinful. So we must rid ourselves of the handicap of prejudice when we seek God's view of homosexual orientation and/or conduct -- otherwise we ignore God's warnings about dealing with His Word deceitfully (Jeremiah 9:7-9; Ps. 52:1-9; Prov. 11:18-19).

## **WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY?**

Now let's consider what the Scriptures say about homosexual orientation and conduct. It will be difficult to be totally exhaustive and thorough, without exhausting the reader. But basically,

there are four Old Testament references considered by some as opposed to homosexuality: Genesis 19, Leviticus 18 & 20, and Deuteronomy 23. The similar New Testament references are in Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and 1 Timothy 1. Notice that in each of these sets of verses, the Bible does not even mention (much less condemn) homosexual *orientation*. Neither does it refer to *all* kinds of sexual *conduct*. It only mentions certain acts in specific situations between two people of the same gender (remember the definition separating "orientation" from "life style").

## **GENESIS 19 -- SODOM'S STORY**

Since the 1200s, Christians in Western Europe have interpreted the story of Sodom in Genesis 19 as one of destruction due to homosexuality. But such a medieval misinterpretation is not Scriptural. Forty Scriptural references to Sodom state the city was destroyed due to its indiscriminate indulgence in general wickedness, adultery, lying, its lack of appropriate hospitality to strangers, its pride, hedonism, laziness, lack of caring for the poor and needy, haughtiness, and abominations (ungodly religious practices) before God (see, for example, Is. 1:9-10 & 3:9; Jer. 23:14; and Ezek. 16:48-50). The prophets all omit any suggestion that homosexuality was one of Sodom's sins which caused its destruction. Likewise, we also must learn from them not to proclaim that it was a cause of Sodom's destruction.

Many religious commentators insist that homosexual rape was the primary sin which caused Sodom's destruction. The word "sodomy" has derived (since the 1400s) from this assumption -- but the Scriptures do not specify it. At best, it is a deduction based on the expression, "that we may know them" (Hebrew verb *yadha* for "to know") in Gen. 19:5. *Yadha* is used 943 times in the Old Testament. 933 of those times, it is used in a non-sexual connotation. Only 10 times does it appear in the sense of sexual knowledge/relations between two people, and only *twice* does it appear in a potentially homosexual connotation. The first of these is in Gen. 19:5.

In ancient times and throughout history, anal rape was one way by which men showed themselves superior to male subjects or victims. While usually omitted from today's history books, the fact remains that armies throughout history have used rape to enforce their conquest, either by terrorizing women or even raping male prisoners of war. The deposed English King Edward II was murdered in 1527 by having a flaming-hot iron poker inserted into his "fundament" until he died in agony – a fitting punishment, in the eyes of his enemies, who accused him of homosexual acts. As recently as the First World War (Turks against Greeks), soldiers have used rape as a visceral means of forcing a conquered army to accept subject/dominated status. From the context of military history, therefore, it is evident that the leaders of Sodom [see Note 2], who are labeled Lot's "comrades" (*'ach* in Hebrew [Gen. 19:7], also meaning "friends" or "brothers") – should have offered hospitality to the visitors. Instead, they sought to vulgarly and violently demonstrate their physical and social power over (i.e. rape)



men they saw as foreigners. Fellow-foreigner Lot had invited these visitors into the protection of his house, in an era of great suspicion, warfare and fear of spies (see Gen. 14). Furthermore, if the Sodomites had been homosexual, why would Lot further insult the already hostile crowd by offering (Gen. 19:8) his two virgin daughters?

Scripture tells us that rape of any kind -- heterosexual, homosexual or other kind -- is an ungodly violation of each victim. If rape were part of Sodom's sins, it could certainly be one of the kinds of iniquity Isaiah and Ezekiel had in mind. But since homosexuality (as distinguished from heterosexual rape of presumed spies) is not mentioned as one of Sodom's sins, we must not insist that it was (again, keeping sexual orientation and sexual practice separate in our minds). The attempt by the men of Sodom to anally rape the angelic visitors (who could have been scouts from an enemy camp) thus could have been their crude effort to prove their own superiority to them. Such an effort would be consistent with the picture of the Sodomites given us by the prophets (see above-cited verses). Today, rape is recognized as a crime of sexualized violence, heterosexual or homosexual, which no one considers proper. Modern historical accounts have generally sanitized wars of these sexual details, so we tend to lose the political or military aspects that rape once included. Yet why have so many recitations of the Sodom story continued to focus on the sexual act? Remember that God decided to destroy Sodom *long before* the attempted rape occurred. The angels were sent to warn Lot of God's previous decision, which was thus not based on anything the men of Sodom wanted to do to the angels, but on the overall, longstanding attitude of the city.

Indeed, a virtually identical story in Judges 19 led to God's condemnation of that community, as well, and gives us the 2<sup>nd</sup> and final usage of *yadha* in a potentially sexual connotation. This time, however, the story ends with a young woman actually being raped (to the point of death) as a replacement for a male visitor. Were the men of Gibeah "bisexual," therefore, because they raped the visitor's concubine instead of the man, himself? Is heterosexual sex to be condemned since God destroyed Gibeah? The Gibeans' rape shows how ridiculous the presumption of "homosexual Sodomites" is. The point of both passages (Gen. 19 & Judges 19), therefore, is not the specific type of sexual act, much less sexual orientation. The sexual abuse is merely part of the city-hosts' larger, fatal attitudes of inhospitality and flagrant rebellion from God.

## **LEVITICUS 18 & 20: LAWS FOR ISRAEL'S WORSHIP OF GOD**

The Old Testament book of Leviticus laid out 613 specific rules that the Hebrew people (the nation Israel) were commanded by God to follow – not just whichever laws a Hebrew chose to follow, but all of them in their entirety. Culturally and historically, the Hebrew people had just emerged from slavery in Egypt and had been led in to the “Promised Land” then occupied by Canaanites. Both Egyptians and Canaanites practiced religions that incorporated worship of

pagan deities (gods) in the belief that one's act could appease the gods from punishing us. In Lev. 18:3, 22 & 30, God gives Israel specific laws to keep them from the corruption in the religious laws and ordinances of their previous captors and of their new neighbors. One of the most common pagan deities was a fertility god/goddess (pictured with both male and female attributes) whose temple worship involved ritualized prostitution -- both male and female -- as well as sacrificing children to Molech (Lev. 18:21). Idolatry, therefore, was the point of the Leviticus chapters, not sexual acts *per se*.

These idolatrous religious practices, as sacrifices to a pagan deity, were unacceptable to God, who warned Israel against incorporating such prostitution into His worship. The Hebrew word *to'ebah* (traditionally mistranslated "abomination" but more accurately used as a noun form of the verb *ta'ab*, "to loathe or detest") originally distinguished Israel's type of worship from that of pagan cultures. Later, its meaning expanded to include the thought of being ritualistically unclean or contaminated (as it is used 43 times by Ezekiel, 20 times in Proverbs and once each in Psalms and Malachi). In verse 30, the expression "detestable customs" thus comes from the Hebrew words meaning ritualistically unclean worship laws or ordinances. *To'ebah* refers to God's attitude toward the practice, not the persons committing them. Those who insist that *to'ebah* refers to homosexuals must equally kill those who work on the Sabbath (Ex. 35:2). It was permitted, however, for a man to sell his daughter into slavery (Ex. 21:7), which was not *to'ebah*. Women who remarry, as Deut. 24:4 condemns them, are to be executed as *to'ebah*, though the man was not included in this penalty if he had not previously married. Since those who quote the Law must obey it to the letter, they must carry out the Law's penalty of death to those whom they presume to be lawbreakers. Modern homophobes would hardly have the consistency of applying their condemnation of homosexuals, and the subsequent expulsion of them from the church, to remarried women!

Culturally, as well, for an Israelite man, to "lie with another man as with a woman" (the phrase used in both Lev. 18:22 & 20:13) would have been completely inappropriate. Women were considered property, not the equal of man; romance was not a requirement of marriage in pre-modern societies. A man allowing another man to anally penetrate him [see Note 3] would not have been a sexual act meant to please each partner (as can be the situation today), but would have been considered rape -- a humiliating relinquishment of the man's dominant position in society. Israelites were not allowed to enslave other Israelites (Lev. 25:39-44), a parallel to the sexual submission implied in anal penetration.

Leviticus 20 also provides penalties for violating God's holy ordinances for Israel's worship of Him. Verse 13 indicates that, for Israelites, the penalty for ritually unclean male-male conduct was death. Again, most biblical scholars tell us that Lev. 18 & 20 describe ceremonial laws and their penalties -- not laws which applied to the daily life of Israel. Unfortunately, some biblical commentators will pick and choose from these prohibitions, insisting that a select few of these laws apply to cultist worship and the rest of these laws apply to everybody. Such a separation,

however, is not consistent with the Scriptures, whose laws condemn ritualistically unclean worship.

Note that nothing is said about female activity, an imbalance today's homophobes cannot explain. If God were anti-homosexual, surely female-female sex would also be condemned in this verse, as well.

We must acknowledge, in an effort to be fair, that some scholars insist that the requirements of Lev. 18 & 20 were not just for Israel's forms of worship but applied to the nation's daily life (see next section on this topic). But we believe the weight of evidence from Scripture and scholarship support the belief that these two chapters applied solely to Israel's forms of worship, not to moral absolutes for personal, daily behavior. We believe that we would be dealing wrongly with the Scriptures and unfairly with those who listen to us if we were to insist that Lev. 18 & 20 apply to the constitutional homosexual or to a person's daily life.

### **LACK OF PARALLEL IN THE MORAL LAW**

The second part of the law, that applying to Israel's daily behavior, begins with the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1 and continues throughout Deuteronomy. But we do not find in these moral or ethical laws for personal behavior any prohibition against being homosexual any more than being heterosexual. Nor do we find any laws requiring homosexuals, male or female, to deny their sexuality and become celibate. To illustrate more specifically, a list of ritual-worship practices in Lev. 20 is paralleled in Deuteronomy in every instance except male-male acts:

<i>Leviticus 20</i>	<i>Deuteronomy</i>
vss. 3-5, sacrifice to Molech	12:31
vs. 6, mediums & wizards	5:7 [included in "all other gods"]
vs. 9, cursing father & mother	27:16
vs. 10, adultery	5:18, 22:22
vss. 11, 12 & 14, incest	20:20, 23

vs. 13, "homosexual" temple prostitution

not repeated anywhere

vss. 15 & 16, man or woman committing bestiality 20:21

Although Lev. 18 & 20 prohibit personal conduct which seems morally wrong also, Lev. 18:3 & 30 make it clear that God is talking about rituals of worship, not personal behavior, in these chapters. The Septuagint translation of the Old Testament reinforces the understanding that chapters 18 & 20 refer to ceremonial law, not moral or ethical law. Virtually all Biblical commentators classify these chapters in Leviticus as ceremonial proscriptions, not ethical or moral prohibitions for Israel's general, daily behavior. What the Lord warns Israel against in Lev. 18 & 20 is conduct which must not be part of their religious worship. Worshipful prostitution (offering one's body or seed to a deity) as a form of religion was unacceptable to the God of Moses and Abraham. These Scriptures say nothing about an average person or about his or her daily life and relationships aside from religious worship.

### **DEUTERONOMY 23: CULT PROSTITUTION**

Deut. 23:17 is a reference to cult (or religious) prostitution, using the Hebrew word *kadesh/qadesh*. The King James (KJV) version erroneously translates the original Hebrew word *kadesh* as "sodomite," which should only refer to "people from Sodom." The New American Standard (NAS) translation is much more accurate, reading "None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a cult prostitute." Verse 18 (NAS) reads, "You shall not bring the hire of a harlot [female prostitute] or the wages of a dog [male prostitute] into the house of the LORD your God for any votive offering, for both of these are an abomination [*to'ebah*] to the LORD your God." [Recall that *to'ebah* means ritually (but not necessarily morally) unclean.] The Hebrew words for male and female in these verses refer specifically to actors in cult prostitution [see Note 4]. The words are not nouns referring to a person's sexual orientation or sexual practices outside of those connected to religious services.

One should not interpret, therefore, that heterosexual practices between a husband and wife were forbidden in these verses because of the verses' prohibition against a man or a woman committing heterosexual acts in a fertility-cult temple of prostitution. Neither should the prohibition be extended, by the same logic, to all homosexual acts. We must guard against inaccurately applying a seeming blanket prohibition in one case but not the other.

## **"BORN EUNUCHS" -- HEBREW HOMOSEXUALS?**

Throughout history, there have been men who, for various reasons, were not considered fully male -- see how male soldiers and eunuchs were considered a different group of people, almost a third sex, in Jeremiah 41:16. Castration was occasionally a form of punishment, or the result of enslavement or royal duty. Many kings ensured the loyalty of male advisors by literally removing their possibility of fathering heirs to a new dynasty, should they try to usurp the throne. In a section above, we have also seen that self-castration was common among men in the fertility-cult temples of Canaan. Until the early 20th century, as well, exceptionally gifted boy singers in Europe became *castrati* to maintain their high, pure voices past puberty.

Men who could no longer sexually reproduce have thus not been rare in history. The Bible refers to such men as "eunuchs." Some are called "made eunuchs" since they were castrated against their will, "made" that way by others. This also included men whose testicles became mangled or injured in some way, to the point to where the men could not bear children -- vital in a patriarchal society where heirs were a requirement for power. Others were called "born eunuchs" -- either born without testicles (rare), or men without a natural sexual interest in women (what we would call "homosexual orientation" today). [See Note 5]

How did God view Hebrew eunuchs, as expressed in Old Testament Scripture? Traditionally, eunuchs were not allowed into the Temple, yet God promised eunuchs an eternal inheritance (to compensate for their childlessness) more than that of other Hebrews (Isaiah 56:3b-5). A eunuch (*saris* in Hebrew) who rescued Jeremiah was recognized as righteous (Jer. 38:7-13, 39:16); in Daniel 1:7-9, God even used the attraction of Nebuchadnezzar's chief eunuch to guide the prophet Daniel, who himself may have been castrated, since he also served in the king's court. Apocryphal writings further clarify the "natural" condition of eunuchs. Statements like "Embracing a girl makes a eunuch grow with nausea" and "A eunuch has no more desire to lay with a girl than a righteous man to use violence" (Ecclesiasticus 20:4 & 30:20) would hardly be necessary if the writer were referring to castrated males who could still have sexual feelings for women (and even erections, though not ejaculation). [See Note 6] Clearly, men who felt no natural inclination for women were the subject, and they are in no way condemned.

## **OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES: CONCLUSIONS**

Old Testament Scripture refers to certain types of male-male sexual acts, each in specific circumstances. In the case of Sodom, the most we can accurately read from the Bible is that God destroyed Sodom for its listed sins, which do not include any reference to homosexual

orientation. The specific instance in Gen. 19 was that of anal rape. In the Lev. & Deut. references, the Lord is rejecting "detestable" pagan methods of worship, in instructing Israel how to properly worship. Cult prostitution and fertility-deity worship, as practiced in Egypt and Canaan, was not acceptable as service to Him.

None of these Scriptures (including any in the moral section of the Law) refers to the sexual orientation or average, daily homosexual practices of the Hebrews. So, no matter how we may feel personally about homosexual orientation or how a homosexual expresses his/her sexuality in daily life, these Old Testament verses do not support condemnation of them as abominations before God or rejection of the homosexual person.

### **NEW TESTAMENT: CHRISTIANS AND THE LAW OF MOSES**

It is vital to recognize and apply to ourselves and others the freedom from the Mosaic Law that we have in Christ (Gal. 2:14-20, 3:10-13 & 3:24-29). Any Christian who condemns another Christian based on one aspect of the Mosaic Law (no matter how one understands the subject) fails to recognize the liberty in Christ. Such a Christian would also be very inconsistent in applying Scripture, if he or she would not also personally insist on and observe all the other aspects of the Law, including food, holidays, clothing, etc. Do we eat ham or bacon (Lev. 11), use the Sabbath for anything other than rest and worship, and celebrate the Jubilee (Lev. 25), hybridize cattle and crops, or wear clothing of mixed fibers, such as wool and linen (Lev. 19), or stone rebellious sons (Lev. 21)? If we do, then we are violating God's law for Israel's daily life.

If we say that part of the law is a requirement for someone but, at our discretion, say that another part of the law does not apply to us (regardless of the reasons we use), we deceive ourselves. Once we insist on our own interpretations in applying the law, in order to be consistent and avoid hypocrisy, we must allow the same latitude to others. When people use Old Testament Scriptures to support our hatred or even dislike of homosexuals, they show that they love their own views above their professed love of God's word. Over and over, Christ condemned the Pharisees for interpreting the Law inconsistently and as they pleased. And He warns us against being guilty of the same sin, the leaven of hypocrisy (Matt. 16:1-12).

Matthew 5:19 has been used to teach us as Jesus' disciples to keep the law, or at least try to. And though all of us know that we are incapable to keep it to the letter, the moral and ethical aspects of the law do offer a good guide to personal conduct for us all. When we consider what the law tells us to do, we must recognize the division in the law. Part of it applies to Israel's worship of

God (ritual or ceremonial law) and the other to Israel's personal and social behavior (moral or ethical law). The O.T. verses we have discussed applied to Israel's worship of God, and interestingly, almost none of these requirements are followed in today's Christian churches or religious services (see, for example, Lev. 8 & 16). Additionally, as has been seen in an earlier section, there is no parallel condemnation of male-male sex in the moral section of the Law as from the ceremonial/ritual section of the Law.

So when we as Christians presume to live up to the Law of Moses, let's be sure we use it as God intended it. Let's not insist, out of personal biases, that Old Testament ceremonial prohibitions are guides for personal behavior. It is difficult enough to try to live up to God's standards as they were intended, let alone try to live up to portions of the Law that were never intended for daily, moral or ethical behavior.

### **JESUS' COMMENTS ON HOMOSEXUALITY: Matthew 8:5-13**

Christians who condemn homosexuality must go to great lengths to explain away a vital *omission* in the Bible. Jesus is recorded as having said *nothing* about homosexual acts during His entire ministry. Surely, if homosexuality were as evil and perverse as those who condemn it claim, our Lord and Savior would have given clear guidelines -- especially since the practice existed widely throughout the Roman Empire of His day (including in Judea). This lack of comment suggests that Jesus was familiar with homosexual relationships and did not see fit to condemn them.

Jesus reminded his disciples that sin comes from feelings, decisions and attitudes, not from any particular, outer act one could commit (Matt. 5:27-28, 15:17-20), further indicating He would see sexual orientation and acts as different categories. He did not condemn the Samaritan woman living with a man outside of marriage (John 4:7-26) when He revealed Himself to her as Messiah. Jesus did condemn the unrighteous and/or self-righteous, including a woman who was caught in adultery (John 8:3-11). [See Note 7] Even here, though, He condemned the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, rejected the Mosaic Law's demand that the woman be stoned to death, and urged her to live a healthy life. Nowhere, to no group of people, did He suggest the castigation, vilification and expulsion practiced by some homophobic churches today.

Jesus even neglected to condemn the possible homosexuality of a Roman centurion (a God-fearing man, though not loved by the Hebrews) who approached Jesus in Capernaum and asked that He heal his "servant" who lay paralyzed and suffering at home. In the more formal account in Luke 7:1-10, the Greek word for a common servant, *doulos*, is used, though this servant was

*entimos* [7:2, "dear to him" or "highly valued"]. In the more colloquial account in Matt. 8:5-13, the Greek word used is '*o pais*'. This word appears throughout ancient literature to mean either "my boy-servant" and/or "my boy-lover" (in a Greco-Roman society where men frequently had adolescent male lovers). Most modern concordances do not admit the latter variant, however. They prefer to admit only a paternal aspect such as "little one" or "child" instead of the more accurate, endearing intent common to the original Greek in 8:6, 8 & 13 [see Note 8].

The use of *pais*, therefore, indicates that the centurion could have had no compunction against publicly admitting that he had a homosexual lover who was also his servant. The centurion claimed (vs. 8:9) he would give orders to the many soldiers and servants [*doulos*] under his authority, without regard to their feelings, but why so concerned about a servant? More importantly, had God intended to condemn homosexuality in His Word, why would the Holy Spirit have allowed Matthew to use a potentially sexual (or at least a sexually ambiguous) word such as *pais*? [See also [http://wouldjesusdiscriminate.org/biblical\\_evidence/gay\\_couple.html](http://wouldjesusdiscriminate.org/biblical_evidence/gay_couple.html)]

Like the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, Jesus also differentiated between "born eunuchs" and those who had been castrated -- and condemned neither group (Matt. 19:11-12). [See Note 9] The Holy Spirit also led a royal-court eunuch to become the first baptized Christian in Ethiopia (Acts 8:27-39). Jesus made these comments at a time when Roman Law protected the status of eunuchs who could not procreate, versus those who were anatomically deprived [see Note 10]. Like Roman Law, the Jewish law saw the "eunuch of the sun" [that way from when the sun first shown on him] as distinct from man-made eunuchs (Talmud, Yebamoth 8). The second-century Christian theologian Clement of Alexandria commented about (but did not condemn) what we would call homosexual orientation, warning Christian men not to trust a wife to the "eunuch by birth" since this "true eunuch" was "not the one not able, but the one not desiring to make love" with women; such a remark would not have been necessary, were eunuchs always castrated males. Only in medieval Europe did the Christian Church begin to conflate "Sodomites" and "natural eunuchs" who acted upon their sexual orientation. Indeed, some men in the latter category were castrated as punishment for not having remained celibate, a requirement of priests after the 12th century.

If Jesus did not accept -- much less condone -- potentially homosexual relationships, would He not have rebuked the man for such an immoral request? On the contrary, Jesus did not condemn either "born eunuchs" or those who were "made eunuchs." He sided with the outcasts of His day -- surely, a quality today's Christians should challenge themselves to share, especially recalling that complacency and inhospitality were the true "sin" of Sodom. Furthermore, Jesus made a positive example of one, potentially homosexual man's faith in Jesus' authority to heal the *pais* without having to physically go to him. The nature of the Roman centurion's relationship with his "dear boy-servant" appears irrelevant to Jesus.



## **ROMANS 1: PAUL'S FIRST ADMONITION**

In considering possible New Testament references to homosexuality, three Scriptures are cited as condemning homosexual orientation or practice. The first of these is found in Romans 1:26-27. A fast reading of the KJV translation seems to condemn all homosexual conduct and orientation. However, upon closer scrutiny, we discover some points which help us to understand accurately what the apostle was really condemning. Verse 26 starts out, "For this cause." This tells us that the preceding verses of that chapter are a vital part of Paul's discussion, and must be included as part of the thoughts in vss. 26 & 27. The whole chapter is dealing with corrupt religious worship -- pagan idolatry.

Like the situation faced by Hebrews in Moses' era, Christians in Paul's time were often converts from or at least lived in Greco-Roman cultures where cult prostitution was officially promoted (and much evidence exists as to the details of these religious sub-cultures). Priests and priestesses of these pagan temples would submit to sexual acts as "sacrifices" upon the request of worshipers who came to the fertility deity's temple with gifts -- including, for men, the "gift" of their "seed" in a sex act. The worshiper could request the favors of a person of the opposite gender (a female cult prostitute) or of the same gender (the more honored, male prostitute who had demonstrated his devotion to the cult by the permanent "offering" of his testicles, via castration; he would "receive" the "seed offering" of the male worshiper in the form of anal sex).

Rome, Corinth and other major cities were flooded with such fertility worship. As Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul had to help Christian converts in these cultures see the distinction between their old habits and customs of pagan worship of false gods, and the new requirements of the proper, non-sexual worship of the One True God in Jesus Christ. Those people -- who were still trying to worship a god in the old, pagan way -- were new Christians, like those, earlier in Romans 1, whom Paul refers to as having degraded the worship of the true God in other ways. Paul is addressing Christian believers who have turned away from their newfound faith *back* to their old practices of temple prostitution, a degradation of their faith (vss. 25-27). This corruption also had led them to take the formerly honorable step of changing their natural affections into unnatural acts. Scripture does not say exactly what the unnatural acts were. Verse 27 refers to men engaging in sex with men, and Verse 26 talks about the women who were led to become obsessed with sexual activity, beyond the "natural" inclination. If this meant what we would today call "lesbianism," then why does God choose to start condemning lesbians only here in the New Testament, but never in the Old? (see previous section on Leviticus)

Let us now consider what Paul meant when the KJV translates his words "against nature." From the Greek *para phusis*, the phrase is found elsewhere in the New Testament and in numerous other ancient Greek texts to mean something in excess of an individual's natural powers. The emphasis is on what is natural or normal for that individual. Paul was thus not discussing a question of universal law or truth. He is not insisting that what is natural for one person is

universally natural for everyone else. Some people feel that Paul was referring to the arrangement of Adam and Eve as natural, and they thus insist that any homosexuality is God's condemnation for "corruption." But this argument does not apply to a person who is constitutionally or "naturally" homosexual, because a person's sexual orientation is not the result of that person's lack of love for God, as we have noted earlier.

Neither was Paul discussing a general, moral issue. He was not stating that what is natural for a person is automatically right and what is unnatural is automatically wrong. In fact, God Himself commits an unnatural, *para phusis* act (offering the Gospel to the Gentiles) in Romans 11:24, which is morally right! Romans 1:26 & 27 refer to sexual activities relative to religious worship and unnatural to the persons involved. Castration, for example, would not be a natural act for any male, homosexual or heterosexual, in the course of normal, everyday sexual life. Heterosexual acts, for a homosexual, would also be "against nature" and thus "missing the mark" (sin).

Verses 26 & 27 are thus not addressing people who are homosexual by nature, or their sexual activity outside of religious worship. Paul discussed only those homosexual acts unnaturally committed by normally heterosexual people, condemning such acts by such people in connection with cult prostitution to pagan gods. Such prostitution is prohibited in the worship of Christ.

It is important to recognize, when considering these verses, that the natural homosexual has not chosen to be homosexual. Nor has his/her homosexual orientation resulted from disrespect for God or from moral degeneracy. Often a person's sexuality is obvious to oneself before one turns serious attention to the worship of God; sometimes it becomes obvious only after years of devout service to Christ (we will consider this subject further in a following section). Paul referred to the sexual practices of pagan religions as pagan, neither natural to the participants nor acceptable to God as part of the new Christian worship. Therefore, it is vital to see that Paul did not condemn the natural homosexual's orientation or daily way of life in Romans 1.

## **1 CORINTHIANS 6:9 -- PAUL'S SECOND ADMONITION**

The second reference in the New Testament is found in 1 Cor. 6:9. Again, the Bible student will examine the words of this text in context, in order to ascertain an accurate meaning of the Apostle's instruction. We will consider two expressions which at first glance may seem to condemn homosexuals as being unfit for the Kingdom of God [see Note 11], but which under closer examination apply to only certain, specific situations. Here, centuries of translation errors have also built up, to where the first English-language versions of the Bible gave a distorted

impression of what exact practices – some involving homosexual acts – that St. Paul was condemning.

The first of these expressions is the Greek word *malakos*, originally translated into English as "effeminate." The noun *malakos* and its adjectival form *malakoi* are very common in Greek, meaning "soft." Jesus referred to *malakoi* clothing (often translated "fine" or "rich") in Matt. 11:8 (twice) and Luke 7:25. When referring to people, *malakoi* meant one who would not stand up for what he or she believed, along the lines of "spineless" today. The King James (Authorized) Version translates translation "effeminate" for *malakoi* in 1 Cor. 6:9 as "effeminate" – not necessarily implying homosexuality, but commenting more on a man's character or culturally perceived failures thereof. Scholars in 1611 found the word "effeminate" poetically pleasing (one of their goals in translation) and were subtly using it to slander the character of the very king authorizing and financing their translation effort, since King James was then rumored to be (yet not universally condemned as ) homosexual.

The translation of *malakoi* as "effeminate," therefore, in 1 Cor. 6:9 does not refer to a person's sexuality. This Scripture would apply equally to heterosexuals and homosexuals who are figuratively "spineless." Many heterosexual people might be considered spineless in this context, and thus not fit for the Kingdom of God.

The second mistranslated word in 1 Cor. 6:9 is one word, *arsenokoites*, in the original Greek. This appeared as "abusers of themselves with mankind" in the King James Version (KJV), an expression translated from. In line with the KJV translation of *malakoi* as implying homosexual, modern-day, authoritative concordances like Young and Strong both define *arsenokoites* as "lying with a male" and "Sodomite." Vine's Expository Dictionary does not define the word, simply noting that it occurs also in 1 Tim. 1:10. Thayers and Arndt-Gingrich do not help much beyond suggesting that the word refers to male homosexual acts. Liddel and Scott also analyze the word from its components to mean "male" (*arseno*) and "coitus" (*koites, koitein*), again suggesting the male sex act.

But none of these define the word precisely. The most reputable modern scholar on the topic, John Boswell, notes that *arsenokoites* is rarely found in ancient Greek literature, and that the word was a most likely a slang term used solely by the Corinthians of that era. St. Paul's use of it was the first time it appeared in the Bible. Only in the 4th century (the time of the theologian Augustine) did it become confused with several words condemning types of sexual activity, and only gradually, over subsequent centuries, was it equated with homosexuality [see Note 12]. The rare use of *arsenokoites* in secular literature of that era leads us to view it within the cultural context of 1<sup>st</sup>-century Corinth, one of the Greek world's great centers of pagan fertility cults. The reference is thus to the temple cult-prostitute, in this case a prostitute committing homosexual acts in the course of fertility-deity "worship."

It is important to recognize in the definitions given by all our authorities that they believed the word referred to heterosexuals involved in idolatrous, male-male sex acts, not to the natural sexual orientation of a homosexual. Secular Greek literature of Paul's time clarifies that definition as an act connected to religious worship. The early church in Corinth was having the same problem with pagan, temple-worship rituals that the church in Rome had. So Paul was trying to show them that the pagan practices for worship in Corinth were not acceptable in the new Christian forms of worship. Corinthian Christians were not permitted, therefore, to engage in any type of old-style, sex-based worship of the old, fertility deities; indeed, both the Old and New Testaments consistently reject any form of sex acts in the worship of Jahweh or Christ. Imagine various church elders and ministers engaging in sex with parishioners during a Christian church service today – *this* is what Paul was condemning, far above the issue of homosexual or heterosexual acts!

Boswell also points out that another, quite common word existed in the Greek language of Paul's time for a person naturally oriented toward homosexuality. That word was *arrenokoites* -- it differs from *arsenokoites* only in its third letter. But *arrenokoites* is never used in the Scriptures. Liddel & Scott suggest that the two words are just different dialectic forms of the same root word, therefore meaning the same thing. But Boswell points out that, though the words are very close in spelling and derive from the same root word, literature of Paul's era clearly uses them for distinctly different purposes -- such as today's words "plain" and "plane" (from the Latin root *planus*) where "plain" refers to simplicity or smoothness, while "plane" refers to a flat surface (of a carpenter's tool or an airplane's wing). The way the words are used in our time makes the difference, not the root-word derivation. The same is true of *arsenokoites* and *arrenokoites* in Paul's time -- *arrenokoites* referred to the natural homosexual, and does not occur anywhere in Scripture, while *arsenokoites* referred to the temple prostitute, and is used in Scripture. If Paul wanted to condemn all homosexual acts, then he – like Jesus with the centurion (see section on Matt. 8, above) – failed to use a very common word to condemn them. If the Holy Spirit inspired Scripture, therefore, anti-homosexual Christians must imply God failed to include a blanket condemnation of homosexuals, here. Surely Paul was more inspired, and more precise, in his specific use of *arsenokoites* and not *arrenokoites*.

Unfortunately, translators of the Revised Standard Version (1946) compounded the culturally driven homophobia of their era by combining that *malakoi* and *arsenokoites* into one, English word, "homosexual." This word had only appeared in the English language in 1892, after being invented in 1869 as a German word for any individual committing homosexual acts. So much for an accurate translation of two, separate Greek words – now the sexual implications of both words were lumped together. Furthermore, the RSV translation gave in to the implication that a person could be judged and identified solely on the basis of what type of sex act he or she engaged in.

Suggestions since the 1970s by Christians of the "ex-gay" movement that *malakoi* and *arsenokoites* refer respectively to the "passive" and "active" partners in homosexual acts, likewise, commit two logical fallacies which, ironically, pervert and distort their predetermined, anti-homosexual interpretation. First, since the word *malakoi* was not used in Greek to define a person's sexual nature, these interpreters display more about their own, modern biases than anything about the meaning of *malakoi* in Paul's day. Secondly, each noun in verses 9 & 10 (with no punctuation or verse numbers in the original Greek) is connected with a word usually translated "nor" in English, indicating a string of nouns listed together in one sentence, but which are not necessarily connected in meaning [see Note 13]. By this logic, connecting the meanings of *malakoi* to *arsenokoites* would mean the interpreter would have to also connect *malakoi* with the previous word in the list ("adulterers") and *arsenokoites* with the next word in the list ("thieves"). Should all thieves and adulterers therefore be considered homosexuals? Should not those who condemn homosexuals also note that verse 10 includes a warning that "slanderers" and believers who sue each other in court shall not inherit the Kingdom of God?

1 Cor. 6:9, therefore, is not talking about the natural homosexual. Paul here condemns spinelessness, and prostitution (by heterosexual or homosexual people) as a form of religious worship to pagan deities. The verse condemns neither homosexuality as a part of a person's nature, nor does it condemn or approve of homosexual acts outside of religious services.

### **1 TIMOTHY 1:10 -- PAUL'S THIRD ADMONITION**

The last New Testament reference used by some people to condemn homosexuals is 1 Tim. 1:10. Here, again, is the same, vague Greek word *arsenokoites*, which early English translators misphrased as "those who defile themselves with mankind." As discussed in the previous section on 1 Cor. 6:9, Paul here referred to male temple prostitutes committing sexual acts in connection with the worship of a deity. Timothy was later known as the first Bishop of Crete, whose culture was heavily influenced by Corinth and other centers of fertility-cult worship. Such religious prostitution (homosexual or heterosexual), Paul declared, cannot be acceptable to God; it is condemned along with all other lawless acts as against the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Apostle was not talking about natural homosexuals or their everyday lives.

### **GALATIANS 3:28 -- PAUL'S CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH**

The Apostle Paul did not leave us with negative statements regarding certain sexual practices common to his day. God also used his Epistle to the Galatians to challenge the church there --

and, by extension, us today -- to view sexuality in a very different light, one that Christians have largely failed to comprehend over the subsequent centuries. In Gal. 3:28, Paul wrote that there is "neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, *nor male and female* " since we are all one in Christ Jesus. The first two word-pairs involve a first-class and second-class group (according to Jewish thought of the time); the third couplet is a negation of the term "male and female" [see Note 14]. Living in a society where Jews & Greeks, slaves & non-slaves, men & women were seen as distinct groups (in law as well as by custom), Paul challenged the church to move beyond existing boundaries. At the Holy Spirit's urging, he had already insisted that Jewish Christians accept Gentile/Greek converts as full brethren (Acts 15:7-9). In his epistle to Philemon, Paul also exhorted the church to give up slavery -- and Christianity eventually helped abolish slavery throughout the Roman Empire. Paul's questioning of the entire gendered system in Gal. 3:28, however, seems to have fallen on deaf ears, until recently. But his exhortation to the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:10-11) holds true for us today. If men and women are equal in God's eyes, are divisions over sexuality likewise outside of God's inclusive vision for all people?

### **SUMMARY OF PAUL'S ADMONITIONS**

Paul condemned the unnatural sexual practices of pagan religions. He did not condemn the natural homosexual in any of his writings to the church at Rome and Corinth, or to Timothy. As an aside, it is interesting, for self-examination, to read the rest of the list of corrupt practices which Paul condemns as degrading the worship of God, in Romans 1:28-32. Sadly, it has been a common practice among many who claim to worship Christ to resort to some of these listed practices in defaming others who worship and serve the One True God but who are (suspected of being or known to be) homosexuals or who have been willing to take the Scriptural position of defending the homosexual. Paul warns that such people -- who resort to the listed practices such as evil speaking, inventors of evil, unmercifulness (or, in Old Testament terms, lack of hospitality, or "sodomy" in its most accurate form) -- have severe judgments in store for them. Furthermore, he challenged the church to move beyond social and moralized divisions regarding gender. God's vision for the church is larger than some Christians (in their humanness) are willing to accept, at first.

### **NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES -- CONCLUSIONS**

So what does the New Testament say about homosexuality? Nothing definite. First, Jesus healed a young man who may have been the lover of a Roman centurion, whom He commended for his faith. The potentially sexual nature of the centurion's relationship with his *pais* was irrelevant to the Great Physician, who gave His life to save us all from alienation from God.

Second, epistolary references only condemn prostitution in connection with the worship of God. Paul's inspired writing does not condemn a person who is homosexually oriented any more than it condemns a person who is heterosexually oriented. It does not condemn a person practicing his/her sexuality within a committed relationship.

God's standard of virtue and righteousness outlined in the Bible should be a part of our personal standards. When an aspect of our life is not covered specifically in the Scriptures, we should seek God's wisdom in watchfulness and prayer. Then we must wait for God's direction. God shows us the truth. One of the problems with our society today is the disregard of God's standards directing our lives.

### **SCRIPTURAL SUMMARY (O.T. & N.T.)**

Nowhere in Scripture is a natural homosexual condemned as a sinner because of his/her sexual orientation. Nor do the Scriptures indicate that a natural homosexual's "life style" is sinful anymore than the "life style" of a natural heterosexual is sinful. What the Bible indicates that God does not desire, and will not accept as a blessed form of worship, are sexual acts of any kind. Hebrews in the Old Testament and Christians in the New Testament received clear guidelines against thinking like the pagans around them. Sexual "offerings" -- heterosexual or homosexual -- are not acceptable to God. The Bible also recognizes the situation of eunuchs, men who are always addressed in either positive or neutral terms. "Born eunuchs" were entirely different from those men who allowed themselves to be castrated for the purposes of ungodly, fertility-cult prostitution. Eunuchs are promised an inheritance in heaven and face no different requirements for following Jesus Christ than other men -- namely, faith alone.

### **TRANSLATION AND THE BIASES OF CULTURE IN HISTORY**

We have seen plenty of examples, by now, of how various words have been mistranslated over time. Fortunately, today's scholars have the benefit of being able to compare more recent translations with several examples of the earliest-surviving texts. Scriptural segments survive from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Centuries, A.D., so we can now make only *one* translation, from the original Greek to modern English, and avoid the problems of cultural biases.

In modern times, one can see the biases of culture in the evolution of words like "gay." The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) first included "gay" in its 1599 edition, to mean greatly happy or festive; American newspapers used it this way into the 1940s, when "a gay time would be had by all" at a party of celebration. No sexual implications existed. By the time of the 1868 OED, however, "gay women" could also refer to prostitutes. The 1941 OED noted usages like

“gone gay” in reference to portrayals of overly joyful, exuberant or emotional individuals, especially in Hollywood films. By the late 1950s, “gay” was starting to be used for homosexual men and women, and by the 1970s, almost exclusively for homosexual men, after many homosexual women began preferring “lesbian” as their self-identifying term. The early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, however, saw a transition away from a directly sexual connotation for the word. Adolescents, especially, would condemn something in expressions like “that’s so gay” to mean lame, boring, out-of-fashion, stupid. Just like with our previous discussion of *malakoi*, there is some insinuation that “gay” means weak, effeminate or cowardly. Perhaps it implies homosexual, but perhaps not.

Historically and in church doctrine, a similar cultural bias is most evident in the derivation of the word “sodomy.” By the 1400s, it became the legal term to condemn homosexual acts in most Western European cultures; in 1533, English King Henry VIII first instituted the death penalty for sodomy. However, the evolution of “sodomy” provides a sharp warning to those who, today, would assume they know “what the Bible says” about homosexuality. Scholars John Boswell and Louis Crompton have provided the most comprehensive studies on how “sodomy” changed, over the centuries, from referring to a person from Sodom to a person who committed homosexual acts. Even so, the exact type of homosexual act would vary from century to century, and country to country, with some including oral sex, with all including anal penetration (often of either a man or woman) by a man.

Starting with Augustine in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, as previously mentioned in the section on 1 Cor. 6, church leaders gradually began seeing Paul’s 1<sup>st</sup>-century condemnation of homosexual acts within the context of fertility-cult worship as a general proscription against homosexuality in any form. Specifically, the rape-like violation of a man penetrated against his will, in what one today would call anal sex, became seen as the epitome of depravity by someone so sexually charged that he would attempt to violate a fellow male this way. Note the assumption that the “victim” (or “passive” partner to those who would translate *malakoi* this way) was not a willing participant. The focus was not on the sexual orientation – a concept derived only in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century – but on the sex act itself, a performance of one’s predetermined gender role. Men were expected to play/perform the “male” or insertive/assertive role in sex, while women were expected to play the “female” or passive/receptive role.

This focus on a demanded, bipolar division of gender roles had increased in European societies since before the fall of the Roman Empire. 3<sup>rd</sup>-Century B.C. Greek scholars known as “Stoics” theorized that all creation had a “natural” order based on function, so that it was possible to determine good or evil based on reason and observation. Since homosexual acts did not lead to procreation of children, they were extraneous at least and wasteful at worst. Passion in sex, to the Stoics became the focus of condemnation. Church leaders over the centuries gradually internalized these secular arguments about “natural law” tradition into church law. Augustine (4<sup>th</sup>-Century A.D.) promoted what became the church doctrine of “original sin.” By the 13<sup>th</sup> Century A.D., church leaders like Thomas Aquinas had so fully internalized this condemnation



of erotic passion that even heterosexual acts within marriage were expected to be devoid of any passion, distorting it into a joyless, dutiful act committed purely for the function of procreating children. Any sense of sex as a loving bond between two adults was lost. The gaunt, sorrowful portrayal of Christ and religious leaders, in art during this period, reflects this insistence that all emotion was somehow evil. This same period – not surprisingly lambasted as the “Dark Ages” by secular critics – also saw the Roman Catholic Church banning ministers from marrying, extending the condemnation of erotic passion to the priesthood. Homosexual acts, therefore, were doubly condemned, as both a sinful “surrender” to evil passion, and a refusal to limit sex to the duty of procreation.

Aquinas’s reasoning was not challenged until the 1700s-1800s, when thinkers asked if there could be other functions for sex beyond procreation. The “Renaissance” of thought allowed for the possibility of love within marriage, and sex for the sake of bonding, well before any possibility of procreation. Should married couples stop having sex merely because they lived beyond child-bearing age? By the 1890s, psychologists and medical doctors started to view the *object* of one’s sexual fantasies and desires as the true basis of sexuality, not the male-female sex act one committed. Sexual *orientation* became seen as an immutable, unchanging part of one’s being, not a sinful *choice* or evil act committed by a depraved individual. Homosexuality could thus be seen as a natural, albeit numerically a minority, expression of human sexuality.

Even within the Roman Catholic Church, debates have raged since the early 1960s, when Pope John XXIII initiated the Vatican II reforms before he died in 1963. An authorized papal commission of Bible scholars met for several years and concluded, by the late 1960s, that the “natural law” tradition was not scriptural and therefore no longer valid as basis for church law. The commission’s majority recommended the adoption of a new paradigm of thinking, whereby human sexuality could include all responsible, loving forms of expression, including homosexual and non-procreative heterosexual acts. John’s successor Pope Paul VI, however, rejected the commission’s majority view and instead proclaimed the minority view that supported the old, natural-law paradigm. Since that time, the Roman Catholic hierarchy has refused to consider changing the medieval laws banning priests from marrying, women from the priesthood, and homosexuals from full church participation.

Western culture, in contrast, has, by and large, accepted the new paradigm rejected by Paul VI and has embraced a post-functional view of sexuality. Is this “cultural relativity”, as some critics would call it? If culture changes to accept homosexuality, are Christians obligated to change with the times? No. The larger church’s acceptance of homosexuality is based on a more perfect understanding of the meaning of the Bible’s condemnation of certain sexual acts, both homosexual and heterosexual. Once we study the context of the verses examined above, we can apply the specific condemnation to practices today. And since there are no churches that promote rape and/or sex acts of any kind, in the name of appeasing fertility gods, one must look to the broader meaning of Scripture to gain a framework on how to judge sexuality today.

## **CHRISTIAN HOMOSEXUALS AND THEIR JOURNEYS**

A person's sexual orientation is not a matter of that person's choice. Nor is the sex drive an inconsequential part of a person's nature. No valid study has established how or when a person's sexual orientation is determined. Many, well intentioned people have offered some wise-sounding but ill-informed opinions, such as a child's having a weak father or strong mother. This is sad. There is specific, scientific evidence that no such influence applies to homosexuals any more than to heterosexuals (remember to distinguish orientation from life style). Many natural homosexuals wanted to be, and still would prefer to be heterosexual or "normal" in today's society -- who would be so masochistic as to *choose* to be "abnormal" in a homophobic society? But more than that, they wanted to walk honorably with God. They had been convinced by a superficial reading of the Bible, as well as by some very determined people in the church, that they were an abomination to God and unfit for the kingdom because they were naturally homosexual. They did not want to be an abomination to God for being something over which they had no choice. They did not want to be rejected, because of their orientation, from the privileges of Christian fellowship and service open to heterosexuals, and from the hope of being with God for eternity. And so, often unknowingly, they set out on a journey to find the reality of who and what they were, and how they really could be part of God's loyal family.

The journey many Christian homosexuals have traveled, and many are still traveling, starts with the effort to be accepted as a homosexual and as a Christian. Their efforts to find and remain loyal to God within their Christian denominations, sects and independent fellowships are often met with rejection. Sadly, this rejection is due to prejudice and an incorrect understanding of Scripture. So the journey may continue through low self-esteem into despair and, for some (like some distraught heterosexuals), to compulsive sexual behavior (pornography, bars, bathhouses, street pick-ups, one-night stands, etc.). There are well documented cases where homosexual Christians so desperately wanted to know they could be acceptable to God that they sought to "change" their orientation that they engaged in months if not years of agonizing prayer and fasting, choosing to marry a person of the opposite gender (with the hope that heterosexual activity would "make" one "straight"), undergoing "reparative therapy" with an "ex-gay" Christian ministry, or even seeking castration.

This all adds shame, confusion and deep feelings of guilt, frustration and helplessness before God. Only outward appearances changed. A person's double life involves a crushing sense of pain and agony, despair and anger in the hearts of these sincere people. Single people in this situation know that one "slip" and their world would come crashing down around them. One or both of the partners in a "reparative" marriage would pray and plead with God to change the homosexual orientation. But it did not change. Often the added burden of trying to keep a marriage together when it is so unnatural for the homosexual (husband or wife) is too much, leaving the marriage to break up in acrimony and further disillusionment. Each Christian (single or married) would seek to realize their acceptance with God while protecting -- yet seeking to avoid the rejection of -- a spouse, children, parents, siblings and those they love. In some cases,

their "closeted" status may also be the basis of their job, adding financial and social-status pressure to the desire to deny their homosexuality.

So the journey continues, searching for God and His affirmation of wholeness and solace. It often includes rejection (by friends, family and church), frustration and disappointments. The personal disciplines, punishments and heart floggings are only a small key to their agony. Their river of tears before God, behind closed doors or with personal confidants, are uncontainable. Without an expression of these efforts, a person can believe that homosexual orientation can be changed by belief in methods such as continual spiritual rebirth, fasting and prayer, exorcism and "faith-healing." But such a belief is innocent and naive. It is also dangerous because of the false hopes it offers to the sincere believer. It has left many "untransformed" homosexuals (especially those who have tried "ex-gay" Christian ministries) with a growing sense of condemnation since they have "failed" to change their orientation. And what is more tragic is that some of these have lost their faith altogether, believing they had somehow failed God. The most deplorable result of harsh condemnation of a homosexual who could not change his/her orientation is suicide. Well documented cases of people resorting to suicide stand as witness against the unchristian persecution of the natural homosexual in the Divine Court of Justice.

Fortunately, the Christian homosexual's journey may also include calls to gay/lesbian hot lines for help, professional counseling, meeting with other homosexual Christians in support groups, discovering and seeking Christian fellowships which willingly accept homosexuals in their fellowship. Many homosexuals realize that the Scriptures do not condemn them for their sexual orientation. God does accept them as valid believers, even though much of Christendom does not. God wants and helps them to live up to every requirement of holiness required of all Jesus' disciples, be they homosexual or heterosexual. But the persecutions of the journey can draw a meek and submissive Christian closer in fellowship with Jesus if that Christian allows God to heal his/her image of God as wrathful and punishing toward homosexuality, and relies on God for daily strength, renewal and peace. You are not alone, even with the painful rejection of family and friends. The joy of sweet acceptance in God's love is approval enough to outweigh the rejections of others. But that does not excuse other Christians for rejecting a sincere believer. Learning the expansiveness and inclusiveness of God's love is very difficult for all of us, regardless of what our attitudes, our orientation, or of what minority we are. But the journey can, indeed, lead to the Lord.

### **“WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?”**

So what is the proper attitude for us toward homosexuality in the light of the Scriptures? May we reject, persecute, slander or exclude a homosexual, or one who supports the true Scriptural position toward homosexuality? According to the Scriptures, we must not condemn a person

who is a homosexual for his/her sexual orientation. Scripturally, we believe, to be homosexually oriented is not a sin. The Scriptures do prohibit promiscuous sexual relations, homosexual or heterosexual (see section below).

Such a committed relationship is an individual matter and must be settled before the Lord in the heart of each believer. God will direct the conscience of the two partners as each searches for wisdom in that relationship. God has not authorized us or any other group of people to define what that relationship should be. Therefore, as we want to copy God, we should not judge or condemn them. We should encourage them to live by every standard of virtue which the Scriptures give us -- and leave the judgment to God's wisdom.

As Christians, it is not our business to inquire what goes on in the privacy of a home, whether the occupants are homosexual or heterosexual. The partners in a home are accountable to the Lord, and only to the Lord, for their conduct. God has said, "Be ye holy for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44; Eph. 1:4; 1 Peter 1:15-16). That is an instruction for all God's people, to consult God directly when the Scriptures do not specify certain conduct. It is not for us to dictate to others how they should live their lives when the Lord doesn't give us specific direction for them to grant us the authority to judge them. And so we should leave the matter where the Lord leaves it, in God's capable hands.

### **CHRISTIAN POLYGAMY OR MONOGAMY?**

As we have seen, the Bible does not condemn two homosexuals living together in a responsible relationship. But before two homosexual Christians consider becoming partners, they should go to the Lord for His guidance in their lives and committing themselves to mutual discipleship before the Lord, just as two heterosexual believers should before they marry. And then they should watch for God's answer to their prayer (Col. 4:2). God calls all of us to perfection in our hearts and in our conduct (Matt. 5:48). All of us fail to meet God's standards in our conduct. God has provided salvation through Jesus Christ for these failures. So we must watch our hearts. We can, and must, reject willing consent to unrighteousness (Matt. 5:8).

Like in 1st-century Corinth, today's sexually permissive culture challenges Christians (regardless of sexual orientation) to conduct our lives based on self-centeredness and a lack of self-control. Such pressures and temptations are not unusual for followers of Christ; sin is often the *excess* of activities ordained by God as potentially healthy and good (gluttony vs. eating, drunkenness vs. drinking, etc.). How can we discern Biblical wisdom as sexually active Christians? Some might say that "as long as each person agrees" or "there is love" then "open" relationships or "serial

monogamy" in dating might be acceptable means for the "modern" Christian. Keeping in mind the crucial difference between God's *permissive will* (what He allows us to do, if we insist, not seeking His blessing) and God's *positive will* (what He has demonstrated can be blessed), let us examine various verses.

Within Old Testament Scripture, God makes a telling differentiation. God did not condemn Solomon for having 700 wives & 300 concubines (quite a leap from David's 4 wives, and Jacob's 2 approved wives and 2 slave wives). It was Solomon's practice of having "foreign" wives, however, that turned his heart away from God to the wives' pagan idols (1 Kings 11), though even God used a "foreign" marriage for Samson for the good (Judges 14:4). In the New Testament, such a warning is repeated in 2 Cor. 6:14. Argument over the concept of "unequal" in 2 Cor. 6:14, however, cannot overlook the basic concept of "yoked" -- the metaphor of pairing oxen of equal strength together under the same ox-yoke so as to not have one ox pulling the weaker in a different direction. The idea of monogamous commitment ("yoking") was thus taken for granted. The warning for believers is therefore how not to let a partner's lack of Christian faith adversely affect one's own relationship with Christ, reflecting the situation Solomon found himself in with his idol-worshipping harem. Each Christian must prayerfully discern whether an unbelieving partner would seriously detract from her/his faith.

New Testament Scripture, in contrast to Old Testament, never mentions instances where God even remotely condones polygamous situations. Eph. 5:28-30 refers to the direct connection between partners as a necessarily mutual expression of exclusive sexual love. 1 Tim. 3:2 & 12 (and the larger scope of 1 & 2 Tim. and Titus in general) refer to the necessity of a Christian leader being monogamous.

Christians (not Old Testament Hebrews) are exhorted in numerous verses of a sacredness of sexuality that makes contemporary promiscuity pale in comparison; three sets of verses -- 1 Cor. 6:12-7:4; 2 Cor. 6:16; & Rom. 12:1-2 -- refer to the Christian's body as a "temple of the Holy Spirit" and therefore something not to be casually joined with that of an unbeliever. 1 Cor. 7:5 recognizes that people are sexual beings and should not be denied the opportunity to fulfill this expression. Despite Paul's personal preference that all Christians be celibate in order to preach the Gospel (1 Cor. 7:6-9), in 1 Tim. 4:1-3, he even labels the denial of marriage a form of apostasy, something those who oppose same-gender unions (or "gay marriages") should take to heart.

Today's Christians, therefore, can proceed with their lives confident that the Bible clearly supports expression of human sexual activity (regardless of one's sexual orientation) within the optimal context of a loving, committed, monogamous and lifelong relationship of mutual respect and integrity between two adults. We encourage all Christians toward this goal (which we support and promote within our community of faith), though we understand individual circumstances may not always be optimal. Christians can support the possibility of abstinence

(for example, during a period of emotional or physical healing), celibacy (as a calling from God, not a dictate from homophobic branches of human society and the church), as well as healthy, respectful and integrity-focused dating. The details and levels of this, however, is up to each partner (heterosexual or homosexual) to prayerfully decide.

Remember that one does not select one's sexual orientation any more than one selects our ethnic background, one's left- or right-handedness (the former, once taught in the church as an evil "choice"), one's eye color or one's gender. God accepts us as we are, and desires to show us how we can use our sexuality for divine glory rather than for self-centered gratification. As we search for God's direction and try to maintain a holy, Christ-focused standard in our sex lives, we will undoubtedly make mistakes. Our fantasies and actions may overstep God's desire for righteousness (this is true for heterosexuals as well as homosexuals). Sometimes we learn from life's circumstances and conflicts, sometimes from Scripture directly. But God will not give up on us as long as we try to obey, patiently teaching us how to glorify the name and gospel of Jesus Christ without denying our sexual orientation, as per 1 Cor. 7:7 & Matt. 19:11-12.

### **HOW WOULD YOU REACT?**

Let us consider three hypothetical situations which might confront us. What would your reaction be in the light of what you have learned from this essay to far?

The first of these concerns a father in our church fellowship, his son and his son's friend. The father complains about his rebellious son. He also complains that the two boys' love for each other goes beyond what a man would have for a woman. As a result of what the son felt was his father's unjust attitude, he has both rebelled against his father and betrayed him. How would you feel about that son's and his friend's relationship?

The second situation regards two women. They are bound by a very strong love for each other, even though one is a generation older than the other. Widowed, the older woman decides to leave her home and move hundreds of miles away to be near other family members. The younger woman cares for her friend so much that she decides to make the move with her, even though she knows no one in the new city. She leaves her family, friends, and the security of her past just to be with her friend. They always come to your fellowship together. Would you feel their love for each other was right? How would you feel about accepting them?

The third situation involves two men who love each other very much. They attend church together. Their close, bonding love is obvious in their conduct. One evening, your church has a very special service. As part of the service, you all have dinner together. At the dinner, the pair demonstrate their affection for each other, even to the point of the younger man leaning his head on the older man's shoulder. How would you feel about these men and their conduct? Would you accept them and their love for each other as right? Or would you be offended, feeling that such love and its expression was indiscreet, or more than that, against Scripture and therefore sinful?

Based on what we find in the Scriptures, we can accept these three situations, and others like them, as appropriate relationships of love. God did, and even sanctified similar situations. Our first situation parallels the account in 1 Samuel 18:1-4 & 20:1-42 where King Saul was possessed by an evil spirit which rejected Jonathan's and David's love for each other [see Note 15]. God apparently accepted and sanctified that loving relationship (which the Bible does not specify clearly enough to where we can know for sure was heterosexual or homosexual in nature). God did not reject it as sinful. As a result of it, David's life was spared, and he became Israel's most beloved king (though he did suffer the consequences of marital unfaithfulness). David also received promises from God that the Messiah would be born from his family line, and that God's mercies to all people would derive from the promises God made to David.

Our second situation parallels Naomi's and Ruth's relationship, as recorded in Ruth 1:1-18. Scripture indicates nothing as to whether or not they (or any women in the Bible) were sexually involved, but God obviously sanctified their beautiful commitment to each other. Ruth was foreign by birth, and thus prohibited from enjoying any of the blessings of Israel. But God made her the grandmother of Israel's King David and one of the progenitors of our Lord and Savior, Jesus!

The third situation parallels the relationship of Jesus and the Apostle John (John 13:1-25). Both God and Jesus approved of this intense and unusual love between these two men. And they approved of the public display [see Note 16]. God sanctified it by approving it in the Scriptures, for our instruction (2 Tim. 3:16-17). God again sanctified it by giving John a position as an apostle of the Lord and a leader of the early church.

In your response to these three hypothetical situations, were you as wise as God? How will you react if these or similar situations confront you tomorrow or some day afterward?

Our hearts and hands should be open to all who confess the name of Christ and are trying to live up to that commitment, regardless of their sexual orientation. If we exclude any person from equal membership and office of service in the Church because that person is a homosexual, we

take on our own shoulders the responsibility for the exclusion. The Scriptures do not give us such a right. In fact, they warn us against such unfair exclusion. The Scriptures direct us to include all Christians in our fellowship without any consideration of their sexual orientation (Rom. 15:1-3; Gal. 3:27-29 & 5:4-15; 1 Cor. 10:16-17 & 12:12-13). Likewise, while qualifications for the offices of elder and deacon are very specific, they do not include any requirement that a leader be heterosexual and not homosexual. If a man is married, Scripture requires that he have only one wife. This emphasizes the importance of commitment and fidelity in his personal relationship. But it does not insist that a church leader must be married. The author of much of the New Testament, Paul, was not married. Therefore, we must not insert a sexual-orientation qualification, either (1 Tim. 3:1-3; Titus 1:5-9). Every right and privilege of communion and office of service in the Christian church afforded to the heterosexual person must be open equally to the committed homosexual person trying to live up to the same standard of holiness.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

We have considered several aspects of being a Christian and a homosexual, and have covered the definitions and today's image of the homosexual. We have considered how to fit any message in the Scripture into the context of the whole. We have examined how God deals with sin. Then we considered how we must deal with our prejudices and preconceived notions about homosexuality. We searched the Scriptures for their discussion about homosexual conduct and orientation both in the Old and New Testaments. Then we considered some very practical experiences of Christians who were also homosexuals, and their journey to wholeness. We examined Scripture for guidelines as to how Christian homosexuals can live their lives and conceive of godly relationships. Finally, we considered our proper attitude as a result of the foregoing considerations.

May this all help you understand what many now believe is the correct, the Scriptural position on homosexuality. Homosexuals in today's society are still often thought of as ill or perverse. This is partly due to negative images of them in history and church tradition, since the Middle Ages. It is also partly due to bad public press, not due to any fault of the majority of homosexuals, but from indiscretions by a very small percentage of their number -- though such indiscretion may be driven, in part, by the pressures of living in a society and church fellowships which can harshly or subtly reject them as whole and healthy human beings. Thus homosexuals are a maligned and handicapped group of people. But the idea that they are somehow a sick or perverse people does not derive from Scriptures. Homosexuals need love, compassion, understanding and acceptance as much as the rest of humanity, or perhaps more. And they receive it much less than others. Their wounds are deep. They are an opportunity for love,



acceptance and a healing ministry by those of us who truly appreciate the message of salvation, and who have experienced its need and blessing in our own lives.

May God give us wisdom in our attitude toward homosexuals as well as toward all people. We all need help. Only God sets the standard and direction for wisdom about Christian homosexuality. The Divine attitude and practice is one of compassion, redemption, and nurturing in righteousness. And ours can be too!

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## **ENDNOTES**

[1] The word was coined in German in 1869 and English in 1892, from the Greek root *homo* for "same" and the Latin root *sexualus* for sex (an improper mixture of roots, but it stuck!).

[2] The phrase "men of Sodom" is not accurate, since all throughout Gen. 13-19, the Hebrew word usually translated in English as "men" is really *enowsh*, meaning any mortal person -- male, female, servant, stranger, person, etc. The specific Hebrew terms for men only, '*adam* or '*iysh*, are not used here at all [see Strong's Hebrew 582, 120 & 176 respectively].

[3] Oral sex -- in any ancient society before bodily hygiene improved -- was considered beneath even the lowest of street prostitutes. Male-male sex, therefore (as extensively demonstrated in ancient Greek & Roman writing and images), would have meant either anal penetration or manual manipulation of the penis.

[4] *Qadeshim* [plural form, "male cult prostitutes"] are also condemned as *to'ebah* in 1 Kings 14:24, 15:12 & 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; and Job 36:14.

[5] On this subject, see the work of the Faris Malik, research scholar of eunuchs and ancient conceptions of sex and gender identity, at <http://www.well.com/user/aquarius/contents.htm>

[6] *Saris* indicated the general term for a castrated male, while *rab-saris* indicated a title for those eunuchs who were court officials (see Jer. 39:3 & 13 for such a Babylonian & 2 Kings 18:17 for such an Assyrian eunuch-officer). More recent translations like the NIV inaccurately omit Ebed-Melech's label as a eunuch (Jer. 38:7). Jer. 29:1-2 & 52:25 specify eunuchs as Hebrew royal court officials but the NIV incorrectly replaces the original *saris* with "an official" and "officer in charge." In Daniel 1:7, Nebuchadnezzar's "prince of the eunuchs" [KJV, vs. NIV's sanitized "chief official"] gave the four Hebrews their Chaldean names. God caused this eunuch [1:9] to show "favor and tender love" [KJV, vs.

NIV's less accurate "favor and sympathy"] to Daniel. Thanks to Doayne Mitchell for these translations; apocryphal translations courtesy of Faris Malik.

[7] Scholars have noted that most of the earliest manuscripts do not contain John 7:53-8:11.

[8] While detractors may point to the centurion's use of the word *païs* in Matt. 8:6 & 8, the Gospel writer himself used the same word in his commentary in 8:13. On homosexuality in ancient Greece and Rome, see K.J. Dover, Greek Homosexuality (1978; New York: MJF Books, 1989).

[9] Once again, more recent translations like the NIV mask the explicit original: those who "made themselves eunuchs" for the kingdom of heaven [Matt. 19:12, KJV, accurately reflecting the Greek] becomes those who "renounced marriage." On early church fathers' interpretations of this verse, see German scholar Walter Bauer's 1914 article "Matth. 19:12 und die alten Christen," cited in with further comment by Faris Malik, "Born Eunuchs: Homosexual Identity in the Ancient World," fn. 7, available at <http://www.well.com/user/aquarius/thesis.htm>

[10] See Faris Malik, "The Ancient Roman and Talmudic Definition of Natural Eunuchs," July 1999 paper presented at "'Neither Woman Nor Man': Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond" conference, Cardiff University, Wales, available at: <http://www.well.com/user/aquarius/cardiff.htm>

[11] The term "Kingdom of God" (*theos*) does not always means "Kingdom of Heaven" (*ouranos*) in the Bible; those who use this verse to say that homosexuals are not going to Heaven misread the warning. Christians who commit the acts listed here are at risk of losing the benefits of living a healthy life under God's grace and guidance here on earth (Luke 10:9, 17:21), not their salvation.

[12] From John Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), 107. Even "ex-gay" ministry leader Joe Dallas has admitted the lack of meaning in ancient Greek literature for *arsenokoites*; see Royce Buehler, "Whosoever: A Defense Theory. An Analysis of Six Critical Texts Used To Condemn Homosexuality," available at <http://www.whosoever.org/v2i5/defense.html>

[13] Some 20th-century translations even lump the two terms together into "homosexuals." Michael E. England, The Bible and Homosexuality, 4th ed. (Gaithersburg, MD.: Chi Rho Press, 1993), 44, condemns such translators who arrive at "entirely unjustified translations which choose to ignore the fact of the two separate words."

[14] Editor's emphasis. Most English-language versions incorrectly repeat the "neither ... nor" pattern, mistranslating the original Greek's switch to a negation of

both "male *and* female" -- a specific change made for a specific reason, since the two words were meant to be seen as a single concept.

[15] More recent translators of the Bible have been reluctant to admit the physically affectionate (though not necessarily sexual) relationship between Jonathan and David, in a culture where men kissed on the mouth in public as a respectful greeting (still common in the Middle East, today). The *Living Bible* replaces the two men "kissing each other" with "shaking hands" in 1 Sam. 20:41; "both of them were in tears as they embraced each other and said goodbye" appears in the *New Living Translation* (Tyndale, 1997). For those willing to consider the nature of Jonathan and David's affectionate relationship, 2 Sam. 1:26 does not use the masculine form '*ahab*' of the word love (normally used for friendship) but the feminine form '*ahabah*', reserved for intimate (including sexual) expressions of love.

[16] Again, Bible paraphrasers have denied the physically affectionate (though not necessarily sexual) relationship between Jesus and John, often replacing the phrase "laying [his head] on Jesus' breast [chest]" with "leaning back on Jesus" (John 13:25).

### **Some Web Resources**

<http://gladalliance.org/oa.html> = GLAD (Gay, Lesbian and Affirming Disciples Alliance, Inc.)

[www.GCN.org](http://www.GCN.org) = Gay Christian Network (GCN), the successor group to Evangelicals Concerned With Reconciliation (1980-2012), the nation's first Christ-centered, Bible-based yet non-fundamentalist & non-homophobic organization. This site contains several links discussing homosexuality and Christianity. GCN is primarily dedicated to helping the homosexual person reach a positive integration of her/his sexual orientation and faith (both personal and collective), and to assisting the church-at-large to realize that this is the appropriate means to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the 21st century.