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# Gay Christians: Living out Faith in the Light of Exegesis and Experience

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**Gay Christians: Living out Faith in the Light of Exegesis and Experience**

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Written under the supervision of Professor Frank Kirkpatrick

## **Introduction**

Christian theology is famously defined as “faith seeking understanding.” It is the business of trying to find a way to understand the workings and rulings of the mighty, sovereign, and loving God revealed in the canonical Scriptures. Theology, however, is more than merely reading Scripture and religious writings and reflecting on them. There is an element of theology that is lived. It is like riding a bicycle. One can read all about bicycles, and in doing so one learns much about a bicycle: how it is built; how it is intended to work; ways to make it work better; and more. Still, after reading hundreds of books about a bicycle, if a person has never ridden that bicycle, there is a certain level of knowledge that is lacking. There is an experiential level of learning that is necessary to the study of bicycles. This analogy holds true of theology. All of the reading of books in the world will not be enough if it is not matched with a living out, with an experience. Faith seeks understanding, and part of the search comes through the living out of each day and relating the words of Scripture and of previous theological thinkers to the reality of daily life. This is true especially when it comes to the discussion of same-sex attraction and the commands of Scripture. This is a topic where theology and reality seem to collide and create uncomfortable explosions of questions and feelings.

There are seemingly endless resources being produced at this time addressing the topic of same-sex attraction. These resources are coming out both in mainstream culture and within the Christian Church. There has been a growing recognition of gay and lesbian people since the Stonewall riots in June of 1969. That marked a turning point in the gay community in Western cultures. Now, each year in June, Gay Pride marches are held to both promote the rights of the gay community and to commemorate that event. The gay community is finally finding its voice and is able to share its experience with the greater culture. This has created an especially tense

situation in the churches. For nearly two millennia the Bible has been interpreted as prohibiting same-sex intercourse.<sup>1</sup> Now people are beginning to question this interpretation. How does such an interpretation match up with the experience of gay and lesbian Christians? How might the moral theology regarding sexual relations and the reality of sexual orientation be reconciled?

Christians have not been hesitant to try to respond to questions by the gay community, but these answers have often come off as condemnatory and lacking any compassion or understanding. Those speaking and writing on this topic seem to be prone to forget that questions of sexuality have the power to touch the deepest parts of a person. When one approaches the moral and theological questions regarding sex, there should be a healthy level of hesitancy, an openness to truly listen to the questions and struggles of the people with whom one is in discourse. This is the hope of the current work: to truly listen to gay and lesbian Christians. In the process of researching this piece, more than 350 gay and lesbian Christians were surveyed, others were interviewed, and other stories were accessed through autobiographies. The voices of these people are important to hear. These individuals should never be forgotten, ignored, trampled, or vilified in the process of discerning correct church teaching on this topic. They must be a vital part of forming and articulating a theology of sexuality as it pertains to sexual orientation, for only these Christians have the experiential element of this theology. To return to a previous analogy, they have ridden the bicycle, and they can tell us something that the books cannot.

In discussing the subject of same-sex attraction, it is important to define one's terms. Many terms have been used in the past few decades, and some have proven to be imprecise and

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<sup>1</sup> Hays, Richard. B. (1994). Awaiting the redemption of our bodies: The witness of Scripture concerning homosexuality. In J. S. Siker (Ed.), *Homosexuality in the church: Both sides of the debate* (pp. 3-17). Louisville, KY: Westminster/J. Knox Press. p 11

others have grown to be offensive to gay people. In the following discussion, the words ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ will be used to refer to a person who is attracted to the same gender as himself or herself. These words only denote an *attraction* and not necessarily *acting upon* that attraction, because many people who are attracted to the same gender choose for various reasons not to act upon their attractions. Therefore, the words ‘homoeroticism’ or ‘gay sex/intercourse’ will be employed in order to signify acting upon same-sex attraction.<sup>2</sup> The authors quoted may use other words to signify the same meanings, but generally it is made clear whether the author is referencing an orientation or a pattern of behavior.

There is also a similar problem in trying to label the various approaches and categories of beliefs regarding the theology of sexual orientation. To say that one side is more conservative or more liberal seems to link this discussion to politics and to polarize it even further. The current work will follow the pattern established by two online platforms that were helpful for the gay community and their family and friends.<sup>3</sup> The general opinions towards gay sex will be labeled either Side A or Side B. These categories will be large umbrellas that encompass many nuanced views and particularities within them, and they will serve as large-scale categories as the discussion proceeds. Side A is the view that homoeroticism, like heteroeroticism, is moral within certain circumstances and with specific motivations. The most popular view within this category is that homoeroticism is moral inside of a loving and committed monogamous partnership equivalent to marriage. Side B is the view that homoeroticism is wrong regardless of circumstances or of motivation. Within this category there are still nuances, like the possibility of non-sexual romance, but it ultimately regards homoeroticism as prohibited.

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<sup>2</sup> The word ‘homosexual’ is being avoided in this work for two reasons: 1) It is imprecise, and it leaves an ambiguity as to whether one is referring to orientation or to action; 2) It has become a loaded term and for the gay community has connotations of condemnation and abuse.

<sup>3</sup> These platforms are Bridges Across the Divide and the Gay Christian Network. The first is no longer active, but the second is a place where thousands of gay Christians and their friends and family interact.

These two sides have suffered under a polarized culture, each one being painted as a caricature by the other. The members of Side A are attacked by outspoken opponents as lacking morals and ignoring or distorting Scripture. The opposition sees them as debauched and as putting human reason above God's authority or even willingly leading fellow Christians astray in order to fulfill their own desires. The members of Side B are attacked as being bigoted, judgmental and calloused jerks who do not care for gay people and are the reason for their being bullied and abused. These caricatures are not productive in a discussion of the theology of sexuality. The reason most compelling for expelling such caricatures from the discussion is that gay Christians belong to *both sides*. There are gay Christians who live in long-term partnerships and believe these are blessed by God and speak of the life-giving power of this experience. There are other gay Christians who abstain from gay sex and speak of the intimacy they have developed with God through this experience. In the process of talking with and surveying numerous gay Christians from both opinion pools, it has become clear that there is a genuine love and respect these individuals have for one another. To a great degree, the vitriolic speeches and writing that one is familiar with between these two sides is not produced by gay Christians themselves but by non-gay members of the Christian community and non-Christian members of the gay community. Those who are both Christian and gay realize how terribly difficult it is to sort out one's orthodoxy and orthopraxy around this topic and tend to be more compassionate and understanding to gay people on any and every side of the fence. Perhaps the greater Christian community could learn from these experience-wizened brothers and sisters.

In an effort to better articulate the experiences of these gay men and women and to put the theological and moral questions within the context of human lives, the current work will begin and end with the lived reality of gay Christians. In the narratives of their lives, these

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individuals do not find themselves first presented with dry academic resources discussing sexuality within Scripture and the interpretive principles that might be used to navigate the Scripture. Rather, these men and women find themselves experiencing a nuanced and unsettling reality inside of which they may turn to these academic addresses for some form of clarity. They also look to other people's experiences for direction. Even after looking at these academic resources or discussions, life still continues on as a messy and ambiguous experience. Therefore, the following pages will imitate this type of pattern. First, the nuanced and question-filled experience of gay Christians will be considered, followed by a scholarly approach to the Scriptures and the theology of sexuality, and finally the continued experience of gay Christians will be considered in response to Scriptural exegesis.

## **Chapter 1: Developing a Question**

The lived experience of gay Christians is one of ambiguity and deep questions. It is one of the elements of life that does not come with a textbook explaining exactly what it looks like, how it works, and what to do about it. Gay men and woman find themselves stepping into an unexplained realm, and this is especially true due to the stigma that still accompanies being attracted to the same gender in religious circles. In deference to the difficulty of this ambiguity in the life of gay Christians, this work will start from the arena of experience and attempt to bring to life the feelings and lived reality of these beautiful men and women.

The following quotations come from an anonymous survey of over 350 gay Christians, books or blogs written by men and women who are gay,<sup>4</sup> or personal interviews with gay people

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<sup>4</sup> One book that will be quoted which is authored by a man who is straight but has lived in Boystown Chicago (the gay neighborhood of the city), for the past five years and describes what he has learned from his interactions with the people there

kind enough to meet individually and share their hearts.<sup>5</sup> These are their words describing their lives as men and women trying to follow God. They deserve to be heard, and more than that, they deserve to be believed. This is their honest revelation of what it has been like to be gay in this world and what impact that has had, if any, on their relationships to God the Father through Jesus Christ.

The pool of opinions represented is quite diverse. It is filled with some people who are convinced of their views, others who are completely bewildered by the questions, and of all of the degrees between these. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to neatly fit every response into a box. In an effort to allow for broader conclusions and understanding to be reached, people were asked to indicate which view was closest to their current belief. Of those who responded to the survey, 52% indicated that they believe gay sex is fully prohibited, the Side B position mentioned above, and 48% indicate that they believe gay sex within a committed and monogamous relationship akin to a marriage is blessed by God, the Side A position.<sup>6</sup> It is hoped that having a response rate so close to 50/50 will increase the accuracy of this work in representing the thoughts, feelings, and conclusions of today's gay Christians. Likewise, the authors of the books and the interviewees represent both a Side A and a Side B approach, as well as those who are not sure whether they even want to take a stance. These people are men and women who are young and old; blue eyed, browned eyed, green eyed, and more; some have thought of this question deeply and with many tears; others are just now beginning their journey of seeking out the answers; and all of them would like to convey to others that they are just as

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<sup>5</sup> All quotations in the following work, unless otherwise noted, come from the anonymous survey or the interviewees. Names of those who interviewed have been changed to protect their identities.

<sup>6</sup> This percentage is slightly off, because when the survey was originally written, the questioning was ambiguous to those in non-sexual romances (a concept which will be discussed later on p. 71), and therefore a small number of those who are currently categorized under Side A might better be ranked as Side B.



loved by God as a person's own mother, father, brother, sister, aunt or uncle. They have a valuable voice to add to the world. Here are their words and their stories.

The experience of being gay begins with a realization of one's same-sex orientation. The majority of gay Christians find themselves becoming aware of their attraction to the same gender simultaneous to when most people begin to experience attraction, in those messy years of puberty. Some are aware of it even earlier, and some come to discover it later; but in the chaos of middle-school, the vast majority of them come to the growing realization that while their peers are now feeling the pull of physical attraction to the opposite gender, there is something extremely different in the way they are experiencing the world. One gay man, Josh Weed, explained it this way on his blog: "It's really as simple as what a girl asked me in junior high... 'So if everyone in this room took off their clothes, would you be turned on by the girls or the guys?' My answer, which I didn't say out loud, was unquestionably the guys. And it was unquestionably *not* the girls. And that is still my answer."<sup>7</sup> This attraction is not something these individuals experience as *chosen*, quite the opposite. Wesley Hill, author of the book *Washed and Waiting*, is a gay man in his twenties who believes that God calls him to celibacy. He says of his gay orientation, "There was nothing...*chosen* or *intentional* about my being gay."<sup>8</sup> In the survey mentioned above, 95.9% of respondents said that their orientation is something discovered rather than something chosen. In fact, most gay teenagers deeply desire that they could be straight instead. One gay man said that while he was a young teen, he would pray continually that he could have his gay desires taken away. He had a calendar on his wall where he would mark an 'x' every day he did not have a gay thought.

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<sup>7</sup> Weed, Josh (2012, June 7). Club unicorn: In which I come out of the closet on our ten year anniversary [Blog post]. Retrieved from The Weed: All Kinds of Real website:

<http://www.joshweed.com/2012/06/club-unicorn-in-which-i-come-out-of.html>

<sup>8</sup> Hill, Wesley (2010). *Washed and waiting: Reflections on Christian faithfulness and homosexuality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. p 29

The evidence for sexual orientation as being innate and even tied to biological factors is fairly strong when one considers twin studies. If biological factors influence a person's sexual orientation, one would expect monozygotic twins, more commonly known as identical twins, to have very high tendencies of experiencing the same sexual orientation. Multiple studies have found this to be true. A study run by Whitam, Diamond, and Martin in 1993 found that out of 38 pairs of monozygotic twins, the twins shared a gay orientation at a rate of 65.8%.<sup>9</sup> These findings supported an earlier study performed by Bailey and Pillard in 1991 which found a 52% rate of shared gay orientation in identical twins.<sup>10</sup> These twins are compared to dizygotic twins, or fraternal twins, who were found in the Whitam et al. study to have a rate of shared gay orientation of 30.4%.<sup>11</sup> Rates for both types of twins are higher than what might be expected based on chance, but the drastic decrease of rate between identical and fraternal twins suggests that sexual orientation is significantly influenced by biological factors. As one study says, "We are left with the conclusion that biological factors are strongly operating in the determination of sexual orientation with the precise nature of these factors yet to be understood."<sup>12</sup>

Some Christians doubt that same-sex attraction is 'discovered' rather than chosen. One man, Taylor, who is currently in college, grew up in a church that held to this idea. He said, "People in my church would still not understand that [being gay is not a choice]. They think people choose to be gay. In fact, my brother thought that before I told him...Being gay is a status, not a choice. It is not an act of rebellion but a real issue, and people need support because of it." It is all-too-common that people from the church do not believe gay people when they try

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<sup>9</sup> Whitam, F., Diamond, M., & Martin, J. (1993). Homosexual orientation in twins: A report on 61 pairs and three triplet sets. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 22(3). Retrieved from:

<http://hawaii.edu/PCSS/biblio/articles/1961to1999/1993-homosexual-orientation-in-twins.html>

<sup>10</sup> Bailey and Pillard (1962) as referenced in Whitam, Diamond, and Martin (1993)

<sup>11</sup> Whitam, Diamond, and Martin (1993)

<sup>12</sup> Whitam, Diamond, and Martin (1993)

to explain this. Many church members seem to feel that acknowledging sexual orientation as not chosen, as something biological or developed in a way that is beyond individual control, would undermine a 'Biblical' stance on sexuality. This is in no way true. Justin Lee is a man who has worked tirelessly to empower the gay Christian community and to bring as many gay people as possible to the knowledge that they are loved by God just as they are. He started the Gay Christian Network, an online community where thousands of gay Christians are able to converse with one another and support one another. He writes of his experience as a gay man, "I hated myself for what I felt, and I was desperate to be rid of it."<sup>13</sup> He speaks of the unremitting grip some Christian factions retain in their insistence that orientation is chosen and cannot be caused by something uncontrollable or innate, like genetics. "Just because an attraction is biological doesn't mean it's okay to act on, so whether a behavior is sinful or not doesn't tell us anything about whether the related attraction has biological roots."<sup>14</sup> Think of it this way: Heterosexual people are naturally attracted to people of the opposite gender, and once a woman is married it does not mean that she will no longer be attracted to men who are not her husband. It is a biological reaction to be attracted to men, but that does not mean she has free reign to go have intercourse with any and all men to whom she feels a sense of attraction. In the same way, an innate attraction to the same gender does not speak to the morality or immorality of acting on that impulse.

Considering the weight of evidence in support of sexual orientation as discovered and innate rather than chosen or under the control of the individual, it seems that Christians, and all people, would be prudent to approach this topic through this lens. The unchosen status of sexual orientation may not speak to the ethics of acting upon same-sex attractions, but it does have

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<sup>13</sup> Lee, Justin (2012). *Torn: Rescuing the gospel from the gays-vs.-Christians debate*. New York: Jericho Books. 23

<sup>14</sup> Lee 62

powerful implications to how Christians should treat gay people. If this is something out of the control of the individual, it is cruel to condemn a person for experiencing it. This is not a statement about homoeroticism, or acting upon gay impulses, but on the mere attraction itself. Christians should by no means judge a person for being attracted to the same gender, just as one would not judge a married woman for merely finding a man other than her husband attractive. It is innate. Attractions and actions are very different, and people within the church need to be more aware of distinguishing between the two.

The church, however, has done a very poor job of making this distinction, and also a poor job of loving gay people in general, whether they are celibate or in a partnership. A recent survey by Lyons and Kinnaman on perception of Christians by Americans aged 16-29 found that respondents were most likely to say that modern-day Christians are: Anti-gay (91%), Judgmental (87%), and Hypocritical (85%).<sup>15</sup> These percentages are from people who do not attend church regularly, but the perception of Christians as anti-gay was not only a phenomenon found in those outside the church. When people who do attend church were given the same survey, 80% still said that Christians are anti-gay.<sup>16</sup> As Justin Lee says, “The church’s ‘antihomosexual’ reputation isn’t just a reputation for opposing gay sex or gay marriage; it’s a reputation for *hostility to gay people*.”<sup>17</sup> This perception of the church as opposed to gay people in their entirety is fed by outspoken figures such as Jerry Falwell, who two days after the attacks of 9/11 went on the record as blaming gays in part for what he viewed as a sign of God’s wrath on America, saying, “I point the finger in their face and say: you helped this happen.” Pat Robertson

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<sup>15</sup> As discussed in: Marin, Andrew (2009). *Love is an orientation: Elevating the conversation with the gay community*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books. p 100; This survey gave respondents many words they could use to describe the Christian church, both positive and negative. These three stand out as the top three choices, even over positive traits like ‘loving,’ ‘considerate of the poor,’ etc.

<sup>16</sup> Lee 2

<sup>17</sup> Lee 3

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responded, “I totally concur.”<sup>18</sup> Later both of them said they regretted this exchange, but that did not expunge this memory from the gay community. Other groups such as Westboro Baptist Church, with its protest signs boldly proclaiming, “God Hates Fags,” further ingrain the feeling into American culture that Christians oppose the very existence of gay people. These are examples of extremity, but the problem is that thousands of Christians seem to be giving their approval of such actions by their silence on this topic or by continuing to disbelieve the honest reports of gay Christians as to how they feel and what their lives are like in regards to their sexual orientation.

Numerous gay people report interactions with Christians where they were told that their orientation was either a choice or something that could be changed if only they had enough faith. Justin Lee grew up being taught that no one was born gay and that it was a choice.<sup>19</sup> Many Christians told him in various ways, “If you really had faith and trusted God, He wouldn’t allow you to be gay.”<sup>20</sup> That is a devastating message for someone who is already struggling with feelings of self-hate and wishing they could be rid of their sexual attractions. Yet, it is a message that the church continues to send out in one form or another. One man said of his church, “They believe homosexuality can be changed to heterosexuality with fasting and prayer. That homosexuality occurs by choice.” This message begins to eat away at the faith of a gay Christian. A gay person begins to say: ‘Why is my orientation not changing? Maybe God has just rejected me and deemed me unworthy of His grace. My faith must just not be good enough and is never going to measure up to the standard God has set.’ The most extreme version of believing that same-sex attraction is a choice is to believe that even feeling attracted to the same gender is a sin. Another person said, “Most people that I talked to held very traditional beliefs, and

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<sup>18</sup> As reported in Lee 4

<sup>19</sup> Lee 16

<sup>20</sup> Lee 110

therefore told me that even identifying as gay was sinful.” This is the most hopeless message of all. If a gay person has no control over this attraction, telling him that he is condemned by God for feeling this way strips him of any options for living in obedience to God and robs him of his hopes of pleasing his Lord.

Not all Christians believe this. Some are very actively open and embracing of gay people and preach that there is nothing at all wrong with being gay, that God has made<sup>21</sup> people this way intending them for gay relationships akin to heterosexual marriages. Other churches do not say that God blesses gay sex inside of gay unions, but they do believe that gay people are made that way by God and blessed in being gay. They make a distinction between actions and inclinations. These churches, however, seem to be muted by the overwhelming feeling portrayed by other Christians that being gay is in and of itself wrong. Many gay Christians are afraid of coming out to their brothers and sisters for fear of being condemned for their attractions. These fears are often based on either silence or a general feeling in their church of animosity towards gay people. One person says, “In college I felt so alone in my feelings and rejected by the church precisely because of their silence.” Another writes, “I am unwilling to tell many people in my spiritual community, however, because judging from offhanded comments I’ve heard, or from the general impression I get from a number of them, I don’t believe their reaction would be very positive, and I am afraid of their judgment.” A third says, “I have been afraid of how I would be judged, and if I would lose those friendships. I am already lonely enough, and I am terrified of rejection.” When asked about his current church, Taylor said, “Even if I said I’m gay [and nothing about questioning God’s will] I would be ostracized. They would say: This is disgusting;

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<sup>21</sup> Some people prefer to phrase this sentiment as: “God has allowed people to become gay.” They believe that this better represents the reality of a fallen world. This work will speak in terms of God making people knowing they will be gay, for when He formed them, He knew they would be gay. Whether it is biological or environmental or both, God intended that person to be born into that situation and to grow up gay in this world. The implication of this will be addressed in more detail later.

this needs to go.” These Christians feel unable to be honest with their fellow believers because of an expectation of judgment. The irony is that three of these individuals adhere to a Side B perspective and the fourth, though questioning, is currently adhering to abstaining from gay sex as well. They are afraid to speak of being gay even in a situation where they intend not to act upon their attractions. People are often unaware of what their ‘offhanded comments’ or complete silence on this topic is saying to the gay Christians within their fellowship, but these things are of great moment to the person looking for acceptance and love in the midst of deep and sensitive questions.

Individuals who begin to believe that their orientation is in and of itself appalling to God respond with feelings of shame, guilt, and rejection of their faith. Feeling like an unchangeable aspect of oneself is sinful, in many cases, creates a belief inside a person that she is in fact worthless as a human being and should be ashamed of herself. Regardless of whether one chooses to have gay sex or not, one is already condemned just for being attracted to people of the same gender. As one individual puts it, “Most [spiritual leaders] have evoked a sense of shame, confusion, guilt, and frustration because they have continued to tell me that I’m believing a lie about myself or that I am ‘in sin’ when they cannot define how I am ‘in sin’ if I do not act upon my feelings.” Wesley Hill tells us, “I have since learned that many gay Christians wrestle with feelings of isolation, shame, and guilt that lead them to question God’s love for them or simply feel cold and calloused to it.”<sup>22</sup> This sense of shame and unworthiness can lead to extremely hopeless places. One person wrote in, “God hates fags, so I can pretty much do what I want because I’m damned anyway.” Another said, “Their [my spiritual leaders’] teaching influenced me in a negative way; it taught me hate rather than love, that homosexuals were the worst kinds of people, and that they were most certainly going to hell because there was no way God could

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<sup>22</sup> Hill 40

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love such people.” In the face of such teachings, that God only accepts straight people, the gay Christian seems to be faced with two choices: be a Christian or be gay. The two are seen as mutually exclusive.

Justin Lee recently published a book telling the story of his discovery of his sexual orientation and the process of sorting through his feelings and deciding what to do in regards to his attractions. The title of the book is *Torn*, emphasizing this seeming dichotomy that the church creates for its gay members. In it he says:

“Because of belief in the Gay vs. Christian cultural dynamic, gay Christians feel like they can only pick one of these two labels and groups[...]The Christians judged the gays and the gays shunned the Christians, the misunderstanding and resentment fed into itself [...] My depression wasn’t about a chemical imbalance. It wasn’t even about my loneliness. Without realizing it, I had internalized the culture war, and it was tearing me apart inside.”<sup>23</sup>

Thousands of Christians feel the same way Lee did, and they are desperately trying to discover what to do about it and how to overcome these feelings that rip at their very souls. Brad is a young college student who interviewed only a short time after making the decision to come out to his friends. He knows he is gay, but he has no idea what to think about God’s will regarding homosexuality: “I almost stay out of it, because as soon as I pick a moral judgment, I pick a side in a very controversial war. I become labeled as either someone who’s pro-gay or anti-gay. If you are anti-gay the world hates you, and if you are pro-gay the church hates you.” One respondent sums it up succinctly, “Many people feel forced to choose between their sexuality and their Christian faith, and the church really needs to focus on reaching out in love.” This is a false dichotomy created by the church over the years, and it is one that has torn at countless numbers of its members.

Christians who come to believe the rhetoric that says they can only be Christian if they are not gay are known to seek out a sector of Christianity which gay people report to be

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<sup>23</sup> Lee 156, 158, 166



particularly painful. There are a number of ministries built on the principle that a gay orientation is something that can be changed through prayer and faith. These ministries are called exgay ministries, because the leaders and some of the people who go through them claim to no longer be gay. From the witness of numerous participants in these ministries, it is evident that they provide false promises based on false premises.<sup>24</sup> These groups teach that sexual orientation is something that develops as a result of parenting styles and early relationships a person experiences with the same gender. If a person does not have a close enough relationship with the same gender and has too close of a relationship with the opposite gender, he is prone to develop an orientation towards his same sex. They teach, therefore, that developing the right types of relationships, along with approaching God in the right spirit, will lead to ‘deliverance’ from the same-sex attractions. There is also the teaching that many who are gay were abused as children, and this abuse negatively affected their sexuality. Andrew Marin is a man who has spent the last nine years of his life living in Boystown, the gay neighborhood of Chicago. Though he is straight, he has developed deep ties with his gay neighbors in an effort to bridge the divide between the gay community and the church. He writes, “It is much easier to believe that all GLBT people either had a very bad family life or were sexually abused because Christians are then excused from facing the unexplainable reason as to why God would allow someone to be given such a lot in life.”<sup>25</sup> In reality, only 7-15% of GLBT people were sexually abused, the same as the general population.<sup>26</sup> Besides this, gay Christians often report having wonderful relationships with both of their parents, including Justin Lee. He wittily remarks, “If distant fathers and overbearing mothers made people gay, there should be far more gay people in

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<sup>24</sup> Some people who go through these ministries do claim to have become straight. It is the stance of this author that some of these claims are true, but that many are falsely claiming a change in orientation when they have only experienced a change in behavior. This will be addressed in more detail below.

<sup>25</sup> Marin 40

<sup>26</sup> Marin 42

American society than there are.”<sup>27</sup> Regardless of this feedback from gay Christians, exgay ministries persist in preaching this message of the ability and need to change from a gay orientation to being straight.

The main problem with exgay ministries is that in the reported experience of Christians who have tried them, they are unsuccessful. Matthew is a gay man in his twenties who grew up in a very conservative Christian family. His family was already involved in exgay ministries before he reached adolescence and realized that he was himself gay. There was no question that he would be going into ‘reparative therapy’ to return him to his ‘true’ heterosexual self. He joined an exgay team, and soon he told them that he was cured. He was exgay. The difficulty was that he was not telling the truth. He wanted to be exgay, and he was convinced that soon he would be exgay, and so he told people that he *was* exgay. He toured America for two years in his late teens telling gay Christians that they could be like him. They could be exgay and no longer struggle with attraction to the same gender. As he lived and worked with other ‘exgay’ people, he discovered that he was not alone in misrepresenting his orientation. Most of the other people touring with him admitted that they still were attracted to the same sex. They were no longer acting on it and convinced that soon they would truly be rid of it altogether, so it seemed like a white lie to say that they were already exgay. They were just telling people what was soon to be true anyway, right? He said that of all of the people he talked to one-on-one, only one man told him he had experienced true orientation change, merely one man.<sup>28</sup> After those two years, Matthew admitted that he was not actually exgay, and he began again the process of trying to discover what God would have him do about his attractions.

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<sup>27</sup> Lee 61

<sup>28</sup> Matthew feels that these conversations were of a very candid nature and these represent the true experiences of these individuals, including the man who claimed to have experienced full orientation change.

Matthew is certainly not alone in his experience of the exgay culture. Justin Lee reports similar experiences talking to exgay leaders at workshops and conferences. He discovered that ex-gay often, almost always, meant someone who still was attracted to the same gender but had stopped pursuing homoerotic fulfillment.<sup>29</sup> There have actually been numerous instances of well-known leaders of exgay movements ending up in same-sex scandals or admitting to continued attractions to the same gender and leaving the exgay ministry. This is true of Colin Cook from Homosexuals Anonymous; Michael Busse, Gary Cooper, and John Paulk from Exodus International (perhaps the best known exgay group), and George Rekers who was a psychologist quoted by James Dobson in relation to gay Christians.<sup>30</sup> One man wrote of his experience of a scandalous leader of an exgay ministry:

“I once went to a religious place to seek help in overcoming my attraction, and late that first night the leader who was supposedly an exgay minister came to my place and wanted to masturbate together, claiming I needed to learn how to have release for my sexual drives and masturbation was what he suggested and he was going to show me how and then watch me, what a crock.”

Scandals like this show the failings of these ministry efforts. It is not that no people emerge from them having a changed orientation. Some people seem to really experience a change of orientation, but it is a rare event. One survey respondent said that he thinks about it like this:

“One thing that always gives me comfort is John 9.1-5 where Jesus says that the blind man did nothing wrong or his parents. I feel that the ways which God makes us all unique are not abominations but part of His will, [just because] God has the power and ability to change someone doesn't mean He will. Not every blind person who has lived was restored to their vision and so not every GLBT person shall be made straight either.”

If a family has a blind child, they can pray and ask God to give their child sight, but that child is blind, and if vision is not given, they cannot just treat that child like she can see. They need to

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<sup>29</sup> Lee 80

<sup>30</sup> Lee 86

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help her learn how to live a fulfilling and wonderful life as a blind person. It would also be wrong to tell that family that it is a lack of faith on their part or the child's part that is causing this. Likewise, the Apostle Paul speaks of praying three times for a 'thorn' to be removed from his flesh, but God says He will not take it away. This does not mean that Paul lacked faith, but God had plans that were different from Paul's plans. Numerous Christians pray that God will make them straight, but He might have other plans for them. The experience of an unchanging sexual orientation, in the light of the testimony of the Apostle Paul, suggests that these Christians should not be ashamed in any way of their sexuality but are justified in believing that it is God's plan for them.

It is important to note that those who run exgay ministries and who promote them are not doing so out of a sense of malice or ill-will towards gay people. They really believe in the principles they espouse. They see those participants who seem to experience full orientation change, and they believe it is only right to help others experience the same. The dilemma is that the approach they take leaves unreasonably high expectations of the likelihood of full orientation change for those who participate and also promotes feelings of self-hate and shame among the great majority of participants who do not achieve this change. If so many of these leaders are lying to their followers, by presenting behavioral change as orientation change, it is fair to criticize these ministries and to advocate for their reform.

Justin Lee and Matthew are just two of those many Christians who tried to become straight, found the attempt unsuccessful, and turned to look for a better answer to their reality.

Here are a few testimonies from other Christians:

- "I have gone for exgay prayer sessions. They have not worked. I have decided I will not change."
- "I did go [to a Christian counselor] with the intent of being 'cured' of homosexuality, which was a complete failure."
- "I went to many healing type retreats seeking healing for homosexuality but this was to no avail."

The number of people who say that exgay ministries have not changed them suggests that it is not God's will that every gay man or woman be straight. It would appear that God has made them gay, and He has a purpose for them just the way they are. These men and women need another answer to the question of why God made them gay. The message preached by exgay minded ministers and Christians is that a person can change from gay to straight and therefore *should* make this change, and this message destroys the faith and self-esteem of those who fail in the attempt. It makes these Christians feel that their very being is wrong and condemned in God's eyes. One man writes poignantly, "I remember as young as 9 having homosexual feelings and was taught in church that I was despised and hated by God and nothing I could do except just out-right change could reconcile me to God." Another said, "A little more than 20 years ago I sought help from an Exodus associated program. It was a horrible experience that nearly destroyed my life." One man spent ten years in exgay counseling, from the age of 14 to 24. He says that now even at the age of 66 he feels like those years have left him with a life-draining sense of "dirt, danger, and damage." Many people, believing that the only way to follow God is to become straight, find that after trying with all of their heart to be straight and failing in the effort they give up on church and/or faith entirely. A number of these individuals are living completely chaste lives as celibate men and women, and still they feel like they must be unworthy of God because the attraction remains with them. Here are the testimonies of Christians tired of the impossible task of becoming straight and feeling that leaving the church is their only choice since they will never be worthy of God.

- "After a time in an exgay ministry, I left the church totally because my orientation did not change, and I was told that I had no hope of heaven."
- "I couldn't stand my church anymore, especially from what one of the pastors said, which almost led me to killing myself, and so I no longer attend it...I have been so hurt by the very people who were supposed to be there for me, that I can't even stand even one more homophobic comment by them."

- “They insist I change and that I CAN change and that I MUST change if I am to stay in fellowship with them. I CAN’T change and it does not matter to them that I’m celibate and that I basically AGREE with them about homosexuality; I’m viewed as being reprobate and rebellious towards God. Their refusal to even TRY and understand my experience has pushed me from assembling because it’s just too painful.”

These individuals feel like their words are falling on deaf ears. They just want people to understand that they are not *choosing* this. It is not them rebelling or turning from God, it is something they cannot help. Those who communion within churches who teach exgay principles often feel completely failed by the church. As one person said, “My family and faith organization made me feel like less than a slug. My family disowned me and threw me out of my home. I pretty much gave up on God but I did still believe but I figured there was no hope.” Some people will say: But this is only when exgay ministry is done incorrectly. These are all of the human failings, and when it is done right, when you ‘hate the sin but love the sinner’<sup>31</sup> then it can be successful and transformative. What gay Christians want to say and want the church to really soak in is this: Being attracted to the same gender *is not a sin*. It is not a sin, and *God does not want to change all of his gay daughters and sons to be straight*. These gay Christians believe that if the church could soak that in and live it out it would truly make a difference in bringing love to gay Christians and gay people in general who have for so long felt hate and condemnation.

A great number of gay Christians have come to this very realization: God loves them as they are. He loves them with their same-sex attraction, and that is the way He intended for them to be. It is certainly not always easy, but He has good plans for them. They therefore must ask themselves: If God intends for me to be gay for my entire earthly existence, how does He want

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<sup>31</sup> This phrase has become one of the most hated and hurtful phrases heard by the gay community. They say that in their experience it is used to mask hate and rejection in the name of love. I use it here knowing all of its negative connotations but also knowing its prevalence in many segments of Christianity especially pertaining to issues of same-sex attraction

me to live out my attraction to my own gender? There are two general ways that a gay person can see his or her sexuality playing into his or her life of faith in Christ. One way is to conclude that God has intended this person to be gay her whole life, because He intends for her to be open to entering into a gay union<sup>32</sup> just as He has intended His straight children to be open to entering into heterosexual unions. This viewpoint is supported by an exegesis of the Bible that concludes that God does not prohibit gay sex in its entirety, just when used inappropriately, in the same way that He prohibits straight sex when used inappropriately. Another way to see one's sexuality playing into one's life of faith in Christ is to believe that God intended a person to be gay for his entire life because He wanted him to experience God in a special way that only being gay allows. There is something about being gay that is a valuable experience and gives something beautiful and good to the world even in the midst of struggles, and these struggles entail denying one's sexual desires for the same gender. Both of these views embrace the beauty of being gay. They do not deny that being gay is a difficult journey in this world, no matter whether one fulfills one's sexual desires or not, but they believe that it is even in this difficulty that being gay is valuable and is used by God.

Later in this work, the Biblical texts that have traditionally been seen as addressing gay sex will be given a thorough exegesis.<sup>33</sup> There are a number of eminent scholars who have addressed this topic, and these scholars will be considered as well as many other arguments that are pertinent to these passages and the question of God's will regarding same-sex attraction. For now, however, the common arguments provided by gay Christians will be outlined.

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<sup>32</sup> Gay union is used in this sense to mean a same-sex partnership which is loving, committed and monogamous as well as consummated by sex. Any time this word is used, this is the specific meaning it is intended to have.

<sup>33</sup> Genesis 9; Leviticus 18.22, 20.13; Romans 1.26-27; I Cor. 6.9-10; I Tim. 1.8-10

Those who conclude that the Bible only prohibits certain types of gay sex do this on the basis of the historical context in which the Biblical texts were written. The Old Testament passages are in the midst of many laws and practices that are no longer kept by Christians since they are no longer under the law. It is the New Testament's authority that is deemed more pertinent to the Christian life. The most common argument is that in the time of Paul, committed, monogamous same-sex couples did not exist or at least were so rare as to be unknown. The type of gay sex Paul would have been aware of was prostitution, often in an idolatrous temple, or pederasty, an older man using an adolescent boy for sexual pleasure. It is only reasonable that Paul would condemn such forms of exploitative sex, but these uses of sex are worlds apart from a loving, consensual relationship. Also, it is very common to mention that in Paul's time, there was no understanding of sexual orientation. This is only a concept that is very recent in the history of the world. Therefore, Paul would think of a gay orientation as 'unnatural' when really it is innate and quite a natural thing to have. Phillip is a man who has lived in a loving, committed same-sex partnership for six years. He says of the New Testament Biblical passages, "Paul is speaking against homosexuality as it existed in the first century Roman Empire. Homosexuality as it exists today, the idea of homosexuality patterned on heterosexual relationships, seeing them as relationships of commitment and love is a way Paul just would not have encountered. I don't think that existed in that world." Many other Christians echo the same concept:

- "I understand these verses as addressing idol worship and exploitation of teenagers."
- "Clobber passages<sup>34</sup> are about idolatry, sex with angels, and temple prostitution. They do not apply to same-sex relationships."
- "They were written for a particular time and place and are not about modern homosexuality."

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<sup>34</sup> This is the name many gay Christians use for the passages in the Bible that specifically address gay sex, because they feel that they have been used to beat people over the head with hurtful things said in God's name



Others focus primarily on the idol worshipping nature of gay sex. They argue that it was condemned both in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament as something that was used to worship idols, rather than being used as an expression of love in Christ which is a different matter entirely. This is the conclusion of Justin Lee: “The Leviticus and Romans passages had a clear context of idolatry, not committed relationships.”<sup>35</sup> In this way, the passages are seen to be non-applicable to loving and considerate gay unions of the current time.

Another argument people make in favor of God blessing gay unions is in appealing to the greater Scriptural record. They look to the passages that focus on the ‘law of love.’ One person writes, “All things are to be measured against the greater commandment to love God and to love others as you love yourself.” And another says, “Love God and Love your neighbor, these are of much more importance than the man-made rules in Leviticus.” Justin Lee appeals to Rom. 13.8-10 which says:

“Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”<sup>36</sup>

If this is true “then there seems no way to say committed, monogamous same-sex relationships break God’s laws.”<sup>37</sup> The testimony of successful gay partners is looked at as a sign of God’s approval of these couples, because these couples say they feel like God’s grace is present in their relationships. Phillip says, “I think of all the places in my life where I am trying to follow God’s will. This [my partnership] is the clearest. I think when I’m living out my Christian experience at its best, I’m being a good husband to Jacob.” One person says his opinion about God’s will

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<sup>35</sup> Lee 186

<sup>36</sup> All Biblical quotations are taken from the NASB translation

<sup>37</sup> Lee 206

towards gay marriage changed when “I started meeting many same-sex couples who bore good fruit, who were walking in love, generosity, and goodness, trusting God.” Another respondent wrote, “I saw Christians in monogamous life-long, same-sex relationships and realized I had been misled.” These evidences and the appeals to the law of love along with a look at the historical context are therefore the arguments presented in favor of the view that God is well-disposed towards same-sex unions.<sup>38</sup>

Those who believe that God loves gay people just as they are and yet calls them to deny their sexual desire towards the same gender find their support in the texts traditionally considered to address gay sex.<sup>39</sup> They say that the most straightforward reading of these passages leads to a conclusion that they are a full prohibition on gay intercourse. Christopher Yuan converted to Christianity after many years of having gay relationships involving sex. He says that after converting, while “reading [God’s] Word, I couldn’t deny His unmistakable condemnations of homosexual acts.”<sup>40</sup> Another person writes, “A plainly obvious sexual ethic found in these passages and others tells me that homoeroticism is prohibited.” Besides this, Side B Christians argue that the New Testament teaches that Christians should have a high regard for celibacy as a beautiful calling. Celibacy for the sake of God is something that Jesus and Paul spoke of well. Wesley Hill says that Jesus lived a celibate life, and yet Christians teach He was fully human and flourished. “It dislodges our assumption that having sex is necessary to be truly alive.”<sup>41</sup> In addition to an appeal to the status of Jesus as a celibate person and one who spoke highly of

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<sup>38</sup> These are the common arguments given by Side A Christians, with no commentary from the current author. This is a very brief outline, and they will be fully addressed in the exegetical section below.

<sup>39</sup> Genesis 9; Leviticus 18.22, 20.13; Romans 1.26-27; I Cor. 6.9-10; I Tim. 1.8-10; all of which will be addressed in detail later in the work.

<sup>40</sup> Yaun, C., & Yaun, A. (2011). *Out of a far country*. Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press.

p 186

<sup>41</sup> Hill 77

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celibacy, these Side B Christians also appeal to the witness of Scripture in regards to marriage.

Jesus only spoke of marriage as between a male and a female, and He describes it as a man

leaving his family and being united as one flesh to his wife, quoting the creation account.

Another person says, “Jesus did teach on what marriage is and the importance of celibacy which

I regard as teaching against homoeroticism implicitly by illustrating proper relationships.” Every

time marriage is mentioned in Scripture, it is in the context of a male-female relationship, and

anyone outside of marriage is instructed in the New Testament to be abstinent.

Individuals who believe God is calling gay people to refrain from acting upon their attractions to the same gender also appeal to a long and well-honored tradition in the church. It is one that the New Testament mentions often: the value of suffering as a tool to grow closer to

Christ. Hill says of this, “The Christian story commends long-suffering and endurance as a

participation in the sufferings of Christ.”<sup>42</sup> Christopher Yuan says likewise, “God’s faithfulness

is proved not by the elimination of hardships but by carrying us through them. Change is not the

absence of struggles; change is the freedom to choose holiness in the midst of our struggles.”<sup>43</sup>

Many Christians say that the struggle to refrain from expressing their sexual attractions to the

same gender has led them to grow closer to God and taught them to trust more fully in Christ:

“My current beliefs require complete abandonment to God. Nothing can be held back selfishly or

I would just fall in on myself and the whole Christian life would fall apart.” These testimonies of

growing intimacy with God are seen as evidence that God blesses this life of abstinence that is

His calling for gay Christians.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Hill 70

<sup>43</sup> Yuan 188

<sup>44</sup> As above, these are the common arguments given by Side B Christians, with no commentary from the current author. This is a very brief outline, and they will be fully addressed in the exegetical section below.

These two theologies described above, of Side A and Side B, have been developed in order to help gay Christians come to terms with their innate and unchanging gay orientation. The next section will be a scholarly discourse on the passages which have so often been at the heart of the question of what God's will is towards sex inside of gay relationships. It may get dry and academic, and it is important that even in looking at the passages from a more scholarly perspective the real people behind the question are not forgotten. This inquiry is not just a dry academic matter for them. It is something that touches deep parts of them and affects their lives in profound ways. Therefore, before going into the exegesis, it is fitting to hear from these gay Christians on the force of this question in their lives and the powerful emotions it is able to create in them as they think about their faith and their desire to please God:

- "When I was first coming to terms with what I was feeling, it was a moment of great emotional distress. I was afraid, ashamed, and confused."
- "I grew up being told that if you were gay you were going to hell...I attempted suicide three times before I was aged 15 because society, my family, and even my own church all seemed to hate me. I had lost all hope, and my spirit was completely crushed...It wasn't until I was 22 when I finally plucked up the courage to come out to my parents. I couldn't take it anymore. If I didn't tell them then and there, I would have been another gay suicide statistic. Life was too valuable for me, despite knowing how much hate there is out there for me."
- "Though not perfect, I am prayerful that He will show me the way to His kingdom. I follow His doctrines as best I can. I falter. I humbly pray that my life as a whole is filled with His grace and compassion as I toil through this one big issue and the multitude of others that play on my conscience."
- "I read these verses and hear only hatred, condemnation, and that I am evil and that there is no hope of an afterlife. That I might as well kill myself now, if I'm going to hell anyways."
- "I have come to believe that God loves me although many times I don't feel that rings true. I wonder to myself why I remain alive and [for] what purpose I am here."

One of the greatest illustrations of how powerful this question is comes through the life of Taylor. When he was very young, one of his older brothers died. Then, two years before coming to college, his father passed away as well. He says:

"To this day, I've never felt bitter about it [these deaths]. I've looked to God in it...but if it is wrong for me to express any type of homosexual affection at all, I would be more bitter than anything with my dad or brother. If I carry on believing what I grew up believing and what the

Bible seems to say, then I'd have to live my whole life without experiencing any kind of expression of my feelings of love. It would suck a lot."

That is how deeply these questions can touch a person. As the exegesis unfolds, it is paramount to keep in mind the humanity and therefore the fragility of the people affected by this question of God's will.

## **Chapter 2: An Exegetical Development of Sexual Orientation Theology**

- **Historical and Philological Arguments**

The current debate in the Christian Church about homoeroticism finds its roots in Judaism. This religion out of which Christianity grew still informs Christianity, and a consideration of the morality of gay sex would be incomplete without considering the traditional Judaic view on the matter. Homoeroticism is explicitly addressed in three passages of the Hebrew Bible: Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13 as well as Genesis 9.<sup>45</sup> The two strongest texts are those that are part of the purity code of Leviticus. This is a code that restricts a number of behaviors, and the reasoning given for this restriction is that the Israelites are to be separate from and different than the pagan nations that surround them.<sup>46</sup> Within this code there are two prohibitions of homoeroticism:

"You shall not lie with a male as one does with a female; it is an abomination."  
Lev. 18.22

"If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; They shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them." Leviticus 20.13

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<sup>45</sup> Besides this, there is clear condemnation of male cult prostitution: Dt. 23.17-18; I Kings 14:21-24, 15.12-14, 22.46; 2 Kings 23.7; Job 36.13-14; Rev. 22.15, 21.28 but prostitution of any form is a separate ethical matter than sex within a loving relationship

<sup>46</sup> Lev. 18.1-3

There are a few points that are necessary to understand these passages. First, in both of these passages, the Hebrew word *zakar* is used which translates to ‘male’ and *not* the word *qadesh* which means ‘male cult prostitute.’<sup>47</sup> Some argue that the passage is actually condemning male prostitution, which was a common part of the cultic worship of some of the people of Canaan. However, if the passage had been outlawing cultic prostitution, there was a technical term already available to the author. The general word for male was selected instead, indicating that a full prohibition of homoeroticism is intended. Secondly, in the latter verse, both parties are penalized, connoting consensual activity, since in the case of rape the Hebraic law clearly condemns only the rapist and not the victim.<sup>48</sup> It is also noteworthy that the word *zakar* has no connotations of age, in keeping with a prohibition of male-male intercourse in general rather than of some specific form, such as pederasty.<sup>49</sup>

The other text in the Hebrew Bible that is sometimes seen as condemning of homoeroticism is in Genesis 19 when the men of Sodom seek to have the apparently male guests from Lot’s house sent out so the men can gang rape them.<sup>50</sup> Many look to this text as one which clearly vilifies gay sex. However, the interpretation of this text that is most strongly attested in ancient times is as a breach of hospitality. The prophet Ezekiel as well as two inter-testamental sacred Jewish texts condemns the inhospitality of Sodom and Gomorrah.<sup>51</sup> In those ancient times it was seen as incumbent upon all people, and especially those well-to-do, to be hospitable to the traveler. Travel was long, arduous and dangerous, and it is this high priority on hospitality that

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<sup>47</sup> Gagnon, Robert (2003). *The Bible, the church, and homosexuality*. In Dan O. Via and Robert Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two views*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. p 63

<sup>48</sup> Dt. 22.25-26

<sup>49</sup> Scroggs, Robin. (1983). *The New Testament and homosexuality: Contextual background for contemporary debate*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. p 72

<sup>50</sup> Some argue that the guests are actually angels and therefore the problem with this situation is actually inter-species sex.

<sup>51</sup> Ez. 16.49-50, Ben Sirach 16.8, Wisdom 19.13-17

made travel possible in such an environment. The men of Sodom were violating every law of hospitality and in fact trying to send a strong statement to all future travelers that not only were they not welcome in Sodom, they were in great danger. As in modern cases of rape, it is not a sexual attraction that drives the men of Sodom to seek out these men to gang rape them but a matter of power and abuse. There are passages in the New Testament that seem to associate the sins of Sodom with sexual immorality,<sup>52</sup> and even the passage in Ezekiel mentions Sodom committing an ‘abomination,’ which is a term used elsewhere in the prophet to denote sexual sin.<sup>53</sup> So, the sins of Sodom do include sexual sins, but it is impossible to conclude whether these later passages have in mind rape or homoeroticism or both. Therefore this passage and the similar passage in Judges nine are not particularly revelatory for the current debate on the morality of homoeroticism.

Regardless of whether the story of Sodom is considered or not, the Jewish tradition previous to and for centuries following the life of Jesus fully prohibited gay sex. Based on the verses in Leviticus, the Mishnah concludes that male homoeroticism, active and passive, is condemned.<sup>54</sup> In an interpretation of Lev. 18.3 – in which Moses warns against the Israelites participating in the vices of Egypt and Canaan – one vice the Rabbis attribute to pagans is male and female same-sex marriage.<sup>55</sup> The subject of homoeroticism is mentioned very little in both Hebrew Scripture and in the Hebraic oral tradition, but wherever it is mentioned, it is consistently condemned, and this opposition is based entirely on the act regardless of the

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<sup>52</sup> Jude 7, 2 Pet. 2.7-10

<sup>53</sup> Ez. 16.15, 18.12

<sup>54</sup> Scroggs 78

<sup>55</sup> Sifra Lev. 18.3, Ahare Moth, perek 9, par 8 and perek 13, par 8 as referenced in Scroggs 81

motivation behind it.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps the scarcity of ancient Jewish material on this subject is because the Jews of that time considered this prohibition too obvious to need debate.<sup>57</sup>

Christians of today question whether this ancient proscription of homoeroticism is still binding on the believers of today. After all, the holiness code contains many prohibitions that have been considered non-binding on Gentile believers even since the time of the Apostles. The Jerusalem Council decreed that Gentiles are not required to keep the Law of Moses, and this decree is recorded in Acts.<sup>58</sup> There were some things they were required to avoid, among them is sexual immorality, but it is not spelled out what sexual immorality is, or whether homoeroticism is to be considered sexually immoral. Perhaps the proscription of homoeroticism was a matter of ritual purity, like not having sex with a woman while menstruating or not sowing two types of seed in the same field or wearing clothing of two types of fabric interwoven, which are all things prohibited in the purity code.<sup>59</sup> Only if there are specific prohibitions of homoeroticism in the New Testament would it be apparent that it is still prohibited for the Christians of today to have same-sex intercourse.

The topic of gay sex is rarely addressed in the New Testament just as in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus never mentions the topic, and so it is not possible to make a direct appeal to His words. The subject, however, does appear in three of Paul's letters. It is found in I Corinthians 6.9-10, I Timothy 1.8-10, and Romans 1.26-27.<sup>60</sup> The first two passages include words referencing homoeroticism in vice lists, though it is currently under debate whether these words really are referencing homoeroticism in general or other types of sexual encounters. The passage

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<sup>56</sup> Scroggs 84

<sup>57</sup> Scroggs 98

<sup>58</sup> Acts 15.28-29

<sup>59</sup> Lev. 19.19, 20.18

<sup>60</sup> There is debate over whether I Timothy is actually pseudopigraphical, but whether it is of Paul or of the next generation of church writers would make no difference to the following exegesis of the texts.



in Romans speaks of both male and female homoeroticism as related to idolatry and to human rejection of God and His divine authority. In the Christian community, the debate around these texts is much more heated than that around the Hebrew Bible. This current exegesis will first center around the work of two scholars who have written seminal pieces on the interpretations of these texts, both of whom ultimately conclude that they do not prohibit homoeroticism within the loving, committed gay partnerships of modern society. These authors have been selected for the reason that the arguments developed by these men mark two interpretations that still prove influential and formative for Side A<sup>61</sup> proponents of today. Following the discussion of these interpretations, other arguments for both Side A and Side B<sup>62</sup> will be considered.

The monograph *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* published in 1984 was written by the scholar Robin Scroggs. This work has proved to be one whose views and conclusions continue to inform in a powerful way the interpretations of Side A Christians. His views are intended to incorporate all of the New Testament texts that mention homoeroticism, but they are most pertinent to the vice lists in I Corinthians and I Timothy and will therefore be approached with these two texts in greatest focus. These verses read:

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate [*malakoi*], nor homosexuals [*arsenokoitai*], nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.”  
I Corinthians 6.9-10

“ But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals [*arsenokoitais*] and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.”  
I Timothy 1.8-10

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<sup>61</sup> The position that gay sex is only partially prohibited

<sup>62</sup> The position that gay sex is fully prohibited

The words translated here as ‘effeminate’, *malakoi*, and as ‘homosexuals’, *arsenokoitai*,<sup>63</sup> are the ones pertinent to the discussion of homoeroticism in the New Testament. They have both been considered to be referencing people who participate in homoerotic activity, however, as of now the focus will remain on the second word, *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* will be addressed in a later section.<sup>64</sup> Scroggs analyses *arsenokoitai* thoroughly to find its origin and to try to determine what it might have meant in the first century CE. He also researches the historical milieu in which Paul lived while writing these letters, and in combining these two pursuits, he comes to his conclusions regarding these passages’ pertinence to homoeroticism in the modern period. He eventually concludes that these passages do not speak to sex within the loving unions of today’s gay couples but rather address abusive and exploitative sexual practices which were common in Paul’s time.

Scroggs reaches this conclusion by starting with this premise: If Paul is “addressing situations so foreign to our own times, there is no reason to apply these judgments as determinative in our own situation.”<sup>65</sup> Scroggs goes on to argue that in Paul’s time, the only forms of gay sex in recorded use were either prostitution or pederasty. This would mean that Paul would only have been aware of homoeroticism as sex available for pay or as an adult male using a pre-pubescent boy for sexual pleasure. As he says, “Apart from certain exceptions of an adult male prostitute...I know of no suggestion in the texts that homosexual relationships existed between same-age adults.”<sup>66</sup> The only exception he recognizes to this is when males were in a stage transitioning from youth to adult and one male was beginning to experiment with becoming the dominant partner in a pederastic relationship by exploring sex with another male in the same

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<sup>63</sup> The change in this word’s ending seen throughout the text is in keeping with Greek grammar rules.

<sup>64</sup> See p 38

<sup>65</sup> Scroggs 11

<sup>66</sup> Scroggs 35

transitional category.<sup>67</sup> All of these pederastic relationships, and even these sexual encounters during the transitional stage, were marked by their impermanence, as they would end when the younger partner changed in age.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, Scroggs makes it clear how common male prostitution was in the Roman world, where there were males both slave and free available for sex at a price, and many of these prostitutes were adolescents.<sup>69</sup> In fact, prostitution was so prominent in Augustan Rome that it was taxed, and boy prostitutes were granted a public holiday once a year.<sup>70</sup> It would be perfectly reasonable and expected that the early Christian Church would condemn such practices as male prostitution and pederasty.

Scroggs writes that within this historical milieu Paul looks for words to condemn such abusive and exploitative forms of sex. Since these sexual practices involve male-male sex<sup>71</sup>, Paul would grab hold of the words from the Jewish tradition which proscribe homoeroticism, since he was raised as a Jew. The word which Paul settles upon – and in fact it is the first time in Greek literature that this word is seen, so perhaps Paul even coined it – is the word *arsenokoites*. The words *arsen* and *koite* are the two roots of this compound noun that appears in both I Corinthians and in I Timothy. Scroggs shows that the Greek Septuagint translation of Leviticus 20.13 translates, “And whoever lies with a male [*arsen*] the intercourse [*koite*] of a woman, both have

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<sup>67</sup> Scroggs 34

<sup>68</sup> Scroggs 37

<sup>69</sup> Scroggs 38,42

<sup>70</sup> Boswell, John. (1980). *Christianity, social tolerance, and homosexuality: Gay people in Western Europe from the beginning of the Christian era to the fourteenth century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p 70

<sup>71</sup> The texts in the Bible are weighted heavily towards discussing males rather than females. This is true throughout the Bible, and especially in regards to homoeroticism. The passage in Romans seems to be the only one that mentions female-female sex. Therefore, much of the discussion will focus on male oriented words.

done an abomination; they shall be put to death, they are guilty.”<sup>72</sup> Paul clearly was referencing this passage when he condemned the actions of the *arsenokoitai* of his time.<sup>73</sup>

Besides its obvious connection with the standard Greek translation of Leviticus, it is also most likely a translation of the quasi-technical term Palestinian Jews employed to speak about homoeroticism: *mishkav zakur* ‘lying with a male.’<sup>74</sup> This word *arsenokoitai*, then, would have the very literal translation: “Men who lie with males.” Scroggs presents the theory that though Paul is using a word that comes from a passage condemning all male-male intercourse regardless of age or motivation, Paul is not using it in the same fashion, since he was only aware of male-male sex in exploitative and abusive relationships. The scholar argues: “The likelihood is that Paul is thinking only about pederasty...There was no other form of male homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world which could come to mind.”<sup>75</sup> Later he says as well: “What [Paul] would have said about the contemporary model of adult/adult mutuality in same-sex relationships, we shall also never know.”<sup>76</sup> He uses the same argument to say that Paul must necessarily be talking about pederasty in Romans chapter one as well,<sup>77</sup> and so he finally concludes that these passages cannot be used as a basis for church teaching of today as far as gay sex is concerned.

This argument seems perfectly plausible, and it has informed many scholars and practitioners of the Christian faith, including gay Christians who use it as the basis of living in loving gay unions and expressing their love for their partner through intercourse. While there may be other arguments for not considering these passages as authoritative for Christians today, the argument of Robin Scroggs is not such a reason. His argument is based on the idea that Paul

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<sup>72</sup> Scroggs 86

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Scroggs 108

<sup>75</sup> Scroggs 116

<sup>76</sup> Scroggs 122

<sup>77</sup> Scroggs 114

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was unaware of any loving, committed gay partnerships between consenting adults. If it could be proved that he was very likely aware of such relationships, Scroggs' argument would have no foundation.

The scholarship by John Boswell that forms part of his argument in his book *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, which was published a number of years before Scroggs' monograph, proves Scroggs to be wrong in saying that Paul would only have been aware of homoeroticism employed for prostitution and pederasty. When speaking of the sexual tendencies of the Greco-Roman world during Paul's age, Boswell goes so far as to say: "In the majority of instances homosexual relations are described as occurring between fully grown persons, and no disparity in age is implied or stated."<sup>78</sup> He also says that by the time of the early empire, when Paul was living, "many homosexual relationships were permanent and exclusive."<sup>79</sup> At present it will be shown that there were enough cases of gay adult partnerships that it is highly likely Paul would have been aware of them.

There are numerous evidences of committed gay unions in the Greco-Roman world near Paul's time as well as less committed yet still mutually desired adult homoerotic relationships. Cicero, who was living about 70 years before Paul was born, writes to Curio the Elder to persuade him to pay the debts his son acquired on behalf of Antonius, to whom this son had been "united in a stable and permanent marriage, just as if he had given him [Antonius] a matron's stola."<sup>80</sup> One might argue that Paul could have been unaware of such words of Cicero, but it is extremely unlikely that he was not aware of at least some of the gay relationships of Caligula, who reigned from 37 to 41 CE, right in the prime of Paul's life. Caligula was said to have attached himself to Lepidus as both lover and beloved, i.e. as both the active and passive partner,

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<sup>78</sup> Boswell 30, in a footnote

<sup>79</sup> Boswell 82

<sup>80</sup> Cicero, *Phillipic* 2.18.45 as quoted in Boswell 69

signifying a high level of consensual and mutual agreement to the relationship.<sup>81</sup> Besides this, Caligula was famous for having numerous gay sexual partners. Additionally, there is the evidence of Nero's gay love affairs. Though most scholarship points to Paul meeting his death before the end of Nero's reign, it is illustrative of the culture of Paul's time that just 2-5 years after his death, the emperor Nero entered into marriage with a man. In fact, this emperor married two men in succession. Both ceremonies were public, and they were honored by the Greeks and Romans. One of the men, Sporus, was even known to accompany the emperor to public functions such as the games and would embrace Nero affectionately.<sup>82</sup>

The literature written near Paul's time shows multiple references to men marrying men, and even to women marrying women.<sup>83</sup> Juvenal and Martial, both poets active in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century, wrote of young men being married to one another; Juvenal mentions a man in full wedding veil being given in marriage to another man, and Martial mentions two different male-male marriages.<sup>84</sup> Martial even points out that both men were thoroughly masculine, calling one 'bearded' and the other 'rugged', and he mentions that they were married under the same law that regulated marriage between a man and a woman.<sup>85</sup> In addition to these references to male-male marriage, "permanent and exclusive homosexual relationships appear in [popular Greek novels] without any suggestion of oddity."<sup>86</sup> This would indicate that such relationships were common enough to be presented in popular culture with no extra explanation.

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<sup>81</sup> Smith, M. (1996). Ancient bisexuality and the interpretation of Romans 1:26-27. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 64(2), 223-256. p 236

<sup>82</sup> Boswell 82

<sup>83</sup> There is no reason to believe that these marriages are anything less than the equivalents of the male-female marriages of the day. From the earlier example in Cicero, it is clear that the two partners were considered to be contracted into a permanent relationship and even responsible for one another's debts

<sup>84</sup> Juvenal Satires 2.117-42 and Martial 1.24 and 12.42 as referenced by Smith 237

<sup>85</sup> Boswell 82 referencing Martial 11.24

<sup>86</sup> Boswell 87

Other evidence also suggests that even if prostitution was extremely common in the Roman Empire, pederasty was not. By the time of Paul, the Romans considered pederasty to be the ‘Greek vice’ that true Romans reviled.<sup>87</sup> With this weight of evidence, it is safe to conclude that, in opposition to the opinion of Scroggs, the well-traveled and highly educated Paul would have been familiar with loving, committed adult gay unions.

If Paul was aware of these couples, then the fact that he chooses to use the word *arsenokoitai* to speak of actions that are considered sinful becomes more meaningful than just a word grabbed from a Jewish education. The Greco-Roman world did not lack for specific words to denote pederasty or prostitution.<sup>88</sup> Since Paul chooses not to use any of those words in favor of a word that is linked to a text from the Hebrew Bible proscribing all male-male intercourse, this would seem to be a statement by which he is affirming the earlier proscription. Consequently, it is not possible to rule out the prohibitions of homoeroticism in Paul’s epistles in the way Scroggs attempts.

It is of note that the conclusions of Scroggs are challenged by the scholarship of John Boswell, a man who also makes a scholarly argument in support of Side A. Boswells’ work predates Scroggs and has been extremely popular as a text consulted in the study of the theology of sexuality within Christianity. Therefore it seems unusual that Scroggs did not mention these findings by Boswell in his own work on the topic.

Boswell argues along with Scroggs that the prohibitions written by Paul are not proscriptions against sex within the loving, committed gay relationships of today, but he comes at it from a very different direction. As discussed above, he is more than willing to recognize that there were noticeable numbers of loving, committed adult gay unions in the time of Paul. What

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<sup>87</sup> Smith 233

<sup>88</sup> Scroggs 64

Boswell asserts is thus: “The persons Paul condemns are manifestly not homosexual: what he derogates are homosexual acts committed by heterosexual persons.”<sup>89</sup> Boswell tries to make the claim that Paul’s writing in Romans chapter one that speaks of people going against nature is about a person going against his or her innate sexual orientation. If this could be shown, it would mean that a gay person participating in heterosexual intercourse rather than having sex with a gay partner would actually be the true sin. It is a bold claim Boswell tries to flesh out with his scholarship.

First, Boswell looks to the passages already discussed above from I Corinthians and I Timothy. He evaluates the words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. The former is a plural adjective which means literally ‘soft.’<sup>90</sup> Boswell notes, “In a specifically moral context, it very frequently means ‘licentious’, ‘loose’, ‘wanting in self-control.’”<sup>91</sup> A little later in his work he says, “The word is never used in Greek to designate gay people as a group or even in reference to homosexual acts in general.”<sup>92</sup> The LSJ Greek-English Lexicon confirms Boswell’s commentary on this word. In a moral context it provides the definitions of ‘cowardly,’ ‘morally weak’, and ‘lacking in self-control.’<sup>93</sup> For these reasons, Boswell is right in saying that the word *malakoi* does not have a bearing on the discussion of sexual orientation theology.

Boswell would also like to discard the word *arsenokoitai* as it pertains to the discussion of the prohibition of sex within gay unions. He says, “The best evidence, however, suggests very strongly that it [*arsenokoitai*] did not connote homosexuality to Paul or his contemporaries but

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<sup>89</sup> Boswell 109

<sup>90</sup> LSJ Lexicon

<sup>91</sup> Boswell 106

<sup>92</sup> Boswell 107

<sup>93</sup> The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon. Retrieved from:

<http://www.tlg.uci.edu/ljs/#eid=1&context=lsj>



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meant ‘male prostitute.’”<sup>94</sup> He does not, however, give any evidence to substantiate this claim.

As discussed above, the best evidence suggests that Paul derived the word from a Jewish context, and as such it would very much have been viewed as referencing homoeroticism in general rather than any specific type of homoerotic sex. If Boswell could supply literary evidence for the use of *arsenokoitai* as a word for male prostitution specifically, it would lend credence to his ultimate conclusions.

After briefly discussing these words, Boswell commits most of his energy to an exegesis of Romans 1.26-27 which reads:

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

For Boswell, the correct exegesis of this passage is built on an accurate perception of what Paul meant by ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural.’ Is Paul making a statement about a nature that is common to all of humanity, or is it a more personal nature? Boswell argues for the latter: “For Paul ‘nature’ was not a question of universal law or truth but, rather, a matter of the *character* of some person or group of persons.”<sup>95</sup> If this is the case, some people might have a gay orientation as part of their natures. To exchange that nature for one which is ‘unnatural,’ or a more literal translation of the Greek ‘against nature,’<sup>96</sup> would be to turn from that gay orientation and instead have sex with someone of the opposite gender. Likewise, for the naturally heterosexual person to turn from that heterosexual nature to have sex with someone of the same gender would be against nature.

In addition to arguing that the nature Paul speaks of is individualized, Boswell argues that going ‘against nature’ in this area is not condemned by Paul as sinful but only as extremely

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<sup>94</sup> Boswell 107

<sup>95</sup> Boswell 110

<sup>96</sup> The Greek here reads *para physin*

disgraceful and shameful. When Paul speaks of people exchanging what is according to nature for what is against it, he speaks of turning away to ‘degrading passions’ and ‘indecent acts.’<sup>97</sup> Boswell notes that the words used here are not necessarily ones which denote sinfulness, only shamefulness. Perhaps turning away from one’s natural sexuality is similar to eating dirt; it is shameful and indecorous but not immoral.<sup>98</sup> If this reading is correct, then even if Paul was discussing a universal nature that homoeroticism is against, he would be derogating it as disgraceful rather than as immoral.

Under scrutiny, Boswell’s exegesis proves unstable. First, his concept of Paul referring to a nature intrinsic to each person rather than a universal nature does not fit within the context of the chapter. Paul is making a lengthy argument about humanity’s rejection of God and fall into idolatry and sinfulness. He is painting a picture of how humans all turn from the knowledge of God to embrace the things of the earth, and in so doing they deny God the honor and glory to which He is due. Before Paul speaks of exchanging natural sex for sex against nature, he has already spoken twice of a different exchange. “Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”<sup>99</sup> Humanity as a whole has turned from God.

Against Boswell’s claim, Paul *does* appear to be appealing to a universal law that demands that creatures acknowledge and honor their Creator, and humans have rejected this law. Paul seems to be using gay sex as one symptom among many that leads to the diagnosis that human beings are in rebellion against their Creator.<sup>100</sup> Paul is looking to humanity as a whole

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<sup>97</sup> *Pathes atimias* and *aschemosyne* respectively

<sup>98</sup> This analogy was provided by Professor Frank Kirkpatrick of Trinity College, CT

<sup>99</sup> Rom. 1.22-23 and similarly 1.25

<sup>100</sup> Hays 8

and placing all humans in the same category. He summarizes his argument in the third chapter of the epistle: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”<sup>101</sup> No human is honoring God perfectly. All humans are rejecting Him. Paul’s broad categories here support the conclusion that Paul is indeed speaking generally of men and women exchanging the way sex is intended by the Creator for other forms of sex. This rebellion is no worse and no better than all of the other types of rebellion Paul sees in humanity. To him, they are all different forms of the same practice: idolatry.

Another reason that Boswell himself highlights makes it highly unlikely that he is correct in saying that Paul is condemning *only* heterosexual men and women for turning to gay sex. Paul lives in a world that has no concept of some people being gay and others being straight. The vast majority of the evidence suggests that people in the Roman Empire in Paul’s time perceived all people as being bisexual. As one scholar has stated, “Paul nor anyone else in the ancient world had a concept of sexual orientation.”<sup>102</sup> In more than one place in his work, Boswell agrees with this evaluation of the ancient world.<sup>103</sup> Yet, he says that “whether or not he was aware of their existence, Paul did not discuss gay *persons* but only homosexual *acts* committed by heterosexual persons.”<sup>104</sup> In saying this, Boswell leaves his argument extremely tenuous. He is explicitly saying that Paul did not know about sexual orientation and yet distinguished the morality of people’s actions based on each person’s orientation.

Finally, let us consider the hypothesis asserted by Boswell that Paul’s wording indicates that sex against nature is not immoral but is indecorous and disgraceful. This distinction is based

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<sup>101</sup> Rom. 3.23

<sup>102</sup> Via, Dan. O. (2003). *The Bible, the church, and homosexuality*. In Dan O. Via and Robert Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two views*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. p 15

This sentiment is also given multiple times by Smith: 243,244

<sup>103</sup> Boswell 59, 73

<sup>104</sup> Boswell 109

on the difference between the wording regarding these sexual encounters and the wording in the next verse that introduces a long vice list where it says: “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper.”<sup>105</sup> The New American Standard Bible does a great job of rendering this verse into the English. Paul says that God gave people over to do “things which are not proper,” and then it goes on to list things such as murder, envy, boasting, and greed. Clearly, Paul is listing a number of sins. Boswell says that these things described as ‘not proper’ are sinful, while the sex in verses 26 and 27 is termed rather ‘disgraceful’ or ‘indecent.’ This distinction is not very powerful. In other translations, verse 28 often describes the vices as ‘things which ought not to be done.’ When translated thus, it does seem possible that sex against nature is being grouped into a different moral category than the following vices. The NASB, however, is closer to the idea conveyed by the Greek. The Greek word Paul uses is *kathekontas* which means ‘meet, fit, or proper.’<sup>106</sup> It is a very similar idea for something to be proper or fitting and for something to be decent or decorous. Therefore, the best explanation is that Paul is using a variety of similar words all intended to convey the same idea. All of these things are rebellions against God, and so all of them bring disgrace upon the creatures that do them.

The works of these two scholars, Robin Scroggs and John Boswell, represent two of the most powerful and influential interpretive frameworks for looking at the New Testament passages on homoeroticism as non-authoritative for the gay Christians of today. Both scholars are talented and capable men who have influenced numerous scholars and Christian believers in the years following the publications of their monographs. They should be applauded for being willing to look at these passages in new ways and to think outside of the hegemonic theology of

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<sup>105</sup> Rom. 1.28

<sup>106</sup> LSJ Lexicon

their time. They were willing to re-evaluate what the Bible is really saying in regards to homoeroticism and to present the challenging but realistic possibility that the Church may have gotten its teaching wrong on this topic based on hundreds of years of misinterpretation. The Church is in great need of scholars and practitioners who sincerely search out the Scriptures and are willing to ask the hard questions and to challenge existing structures. However, the conclusions drawn by Scroggs and by Boswell have been shown to be unsubstantiated. When it comes to the philological and historical critical approaches to these New Testament verses addressing gay sex, the evidence falls in support of a Side B view of God's guidelines for sex.

- **Illumination from other Biblical Passages**

The Bible is seen as a union of distinct parts. Each and every part informs the whole, and no section of the Bible is to be understood in complete separation from the rest. For this reason, the passages on homoeroticism must be considered in light of the rest of the Biblical record. Perhaps other sections of the Bible might reveal something about these prohibitions that would be impossible to know by looking at each prohibition in isolation. This technique is called content criticism by Biblical scholars.<sup>107</sup>

The first passages that are important to consider are those that have to do with love; for one great purpose of sex is as an expression of love. The Bible clearly shows that the highest form of love is one which is not self-seeking, but is concerned with the good of another. As Jesus says: "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."<sup>108</sup> There are multiple New Testament exhortations to love others more than oneself.<sup>109</sup> Those who are on Side

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<sup>107</sup> Via 3

<sup>108</sup> John 15.13

<sup>109</sup> I Cor. 10.24, 33, 13.5; Phil. 2.4; I Thess. 5.15

A say that a loving gay union can express this self-giving love just as much as any male-female union. “The love between two lesbians or two homosexuals, assuming that it is a constructive human love, is not sinful nor does it alienate the lover from God’s plan, but can be a holy love.”<sup>110</sup> Many gay and lesbian relationships, especially those that have lasted for decades, have been opportunities for each partner to give sacrificially of himself or herself to his or her partner.

In addition to this, there are Biblical passages that indicate that motivation matters to God far more than an action in and of itself. Jesus says, “Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside of the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile him.”<sup>111</sup> Also, near the end of Romans Paul writes, “I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.”<sup>112</sup> Verses of this nature would seem to indicate that sex in and of itself has no power to defile or to be wrong, but it is the motivation of the people having the sex which makes it moral or immoral, clean or unclean.

A third segment of Scripture that may have bearing on the question of homoeroticism is the friendship of David and Jonathan. Some believe that the love and covenant of friendship between these two men was in reality a love made complete with homoerotic sex. In one passage it says, “Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself... Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.”<sup>113</sup> After the death of Jonathan, David sings a funeral song for him in which he says, “I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have

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<sup>110</sup> McNeill, John.J. (1994). Homosexuality: Challenging the church to grow. In In J.S. Siker (Ed.), *Homosexuality in the church: Both sides of the debate* (pp. 49-60). Louisville, KY: Westminster/J. Knox Press. p 151

<sup>111</sup> Mark 7.14-15

<sup>112</sup> Rom. 14.14

<sup>113</sup> I. Sam. 18.1,3

been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful than the love of women.”<sup>114</sup>

These are very strong statements, which some interpret as euphemistic ways of recording a gay romance between these two men that would have been consummated with sex.

These three arguments are supportive of the Side A viewpoint, but they are not definitive reasons to consider the prohibitions of the New Testament as non-binding. Though the love of a gay couple may give opportunities for self-giving and generosity of heart and action, this does not automatically make the sex within it something that is ordained by God. There are many situations in life where people make sacrifices for others which are laudable, but the relationships in which they make those sacrifices are not healthy or good. So, the sacrificial love of many gay and lesbian relationships is not a strong enough reason to certify that they are approved by God. The motivation of the heart is indeed more important to God than actions, but if the reading of Paul is correct that suggests that homoerotic sex is against the Creator’s intent, then fulfilling a gay attraction through sex would ultimately be rebellion against the Creator. The same idea applies here as applied to the verses about love: self-sacrificial love can be mixed with other motivations, for love is a messy business. Finally, to interpret the friendship of David and Jonathan as one that incorporated sexual intercourse is to go beyond the words of Scripture. It certainly could have been a romantic love, one that was deep and abiding and full of passion for one another. Yet, romance can exist without sex. In a later section, non-sexual, gay romance will be explored as one option pursued by gay Christians who possess Side B beliefs. Additionally, there can be friendship as deep as and perhaps even more fulfilling than a romantic love that incorporates sex, and David and Jonathan may be a prime example of that type of deep and abiding friendship.

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<sup>114</sup> 2 Sam. 1.26

There are also passages in the greater canon of Scripture that support the Side B interpretation. One could appeal to the multiple passages that mention marriage, and that state it to be a male-female union.<sup>115</sup> There is not even one mention in Scripture of a marriage between two men or two women. A lack of something certainly does not necessitate it as being forbidden by God, but considering there are multiple prohibitions of gay sexual union, the repeated affirmation of male-female union becomes more meaningful. In opposition to the opinions of modern culture, Scripture also holds in high esteem those who live a celibate life. In fact, Jesus praises those who live celibately for the kingdom of heaven.<sup>116</sup> This is not to say that if there is a full prohibition on homoeroticism it would be Scriptural to approach gay Christians with the mindset of, “O, what a blessing that must be to be celibate.” That would be facile, and the person with such an attitude would be ignoring all of the intense struggling that accompanies a celibate life. However, what these passages do suggest is that those Christians who are practicing celibate lifestyles for the glory of God, gay and straight alike, should be respected rather than pitied.

- **Informative Comparisons for Consideration in Church Teaching**

There are other Scriptural passages that may prove informative in the process of interpreting the New Testament verses that address homoeroticism. Since the proscription of gay sex is a matter of church teaching, then it is fair to evaluate how other passages that address issues of church teaching have been interpreted and put into practice to see whether these methods of interpretation and application might have bearing on the topic of homoeroticism. There are a number of passages that fall into this category, and they will be addressed below in no particular order. All of them are detailed topics worthy of much time and discussion. The following section will only be able to look at them in brief and with less vigorous scholarship

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<sup>115</sup> Gen. 2.20-25, Mk. 10.2-9, I Thess. 4.3-8, I Cor. 7.1-9, Eph. 5.21-23, Heb. 13.4

<sup>116</sup> Mt. 19.10-12



than has been given to the Biblical passages dealing specifically with homoeroticism. Still, it is hoped that the evaluations given to these comparisons might provide illumination for the topic at hand and insight into how the interpretation and application of the verses on these topics does and does not overlap with that of the verses concerning same-sex intercourse.

The first topic to be evaluated for the sake of comparison is that of women working as ministers and leaders in the churches. There are two New Testament passages that explicitly state that women should not be leaders in the church and especially not as teachers of men.<sup>117</sup> Yet, even in light of this, there are hundreds and thousands of Christian churches around the world that have females preaching, teaching, and leading other believers of both genders and all ages. Are these churches allowing female leadership even though Scripture seems to prohibit it? Would this then be a precedent for reconsidering church teaching regarding the prohibition of homoeroticism? The teaching on females in ministry leadership is not a strong comparison to the teachings on homoeroticism because there are numerous passages in the Biblical record that speak positively of women acting as prophets, teachers, and leaders, and therefore the Bible itself provides the precedent for churches of today to employ female leaders.

In the Hebrew Bible, the best example of a female leader is Deborah serving as a judge over all of Israel.<sup>118</sup> In this position she serves as both a political and spiritual leader over men and women. The Hebrew Bible also mentions other women as being prophets, as does the New Testament.<sup>119</sup> The verses in the New Testament that label females as prophets are especially important, since Paul ranks prophecy as the highest spiritual gift.<sup>120</sup> Women, however, do not just function as prophets in the New Testament; they also play the role of teachers and of

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<sup>117</sup> I Timothy 2:11-15; I Cor. 14:34-36

<sup>118</sup> Judges 4.4-5

<sup>119</sup> Ex. 15.20; 2 Kings 22.14-20; Luke 2.36-38, Acts 2.17-18, cf Joel 2.28-32; Acts 21.9; 1 Cor. 11.5

<sup>120</sup> 1 Cor. 12.28

deacons. The married couple Priscilla and Aquilla are both said to have taught Apollos the way of Christ,<sup>121</sup> and both of them are called ‘fellow-workers’ – a title given to other church leaders such as Timothy, Apollos, Mark, Epaphroditus, Luke, and Philemon.<sup>122</sup> Another woman, Pheobe, is explicitly called a ‘deacon’ of the church at Cenchrea<sup>123</sup> This word is the exact same word that is used in I Timothy 3.8 where the requirements are described for any person who might serve as a deacon in the church. Clearly, there is marked Biblical evidence for women serving as leaders and teachers in the church, so the Biblical texts themselves are mixed in their teachings. This is entirely different from the prohibitions on same-sex intercourse that find no counter-examples of positively viewed gay unions in the witness of Scripture.<sup>124</sup> As one scholar phrases it, “”There are a number of precedents in Scripture for putting women in leadership roles. There are no such precedents for endorsing homosexual behavior in the Bible.”<sup>125</sup> It is therefore fair to conclude that the practice of having women in ministry leadership is not one that should inform correct teaching regarding homoeroticism.

Another topic that some have used as being precedent setting for orthopraxis in the light of blanket prohibitions is the proscription on divorce. Jesus says of divorce, “I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”<sup>126</sup> And similarly, “And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits

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<sup>121</sup> Acts 18.26

<sup>122</sup> Rom. 16.21; 1 cor. 3.9; Col. 4.10; Phil. 2.25; and Philemon 24, respectively

<sup>123</sup> Rom. 16.1

<sup>124</sup> This is in distinction from positively viewed same-sex couples who are non-sexual. As mentioned above, David and Jonathon show a godly, very emotional, same-sex relationship, but do not indicate one consummated by sex.

<sup>125</sup> Gagnon 46

<sup>126</sup> Mt. 5.32

adultery.”<sup>127</sup> These seem very clear in saying that the only situation that allows divorce is one in which one partner has been sexually immoral. Would the Church then condemn the woman who divorced an abusive husband? If any church teaching would allow a person to divorce their spouse on the grounds of abuse, the reasoning behind that allowance may be informative for and applicable to the way the Church could address the question of a loving, committed gay couple. One must ask the question: what reasoning allows space in church teaching for divorce in the case of abuse?

There is of course a level of human reasoning and compassion that enters into the discussion of abusive marriages. If a person is in danger from his or her spouse, why would God call them to still be in a marriage covenant with this spouse? On an intellectual and emotive level, this makes sense as a justification for the allowance of divorce in this case: God is a God of compassion, and He would not require a person to live in this marriage relationship when he or she is in danger from the very person who is supposed to be his or her protector and helper. If this is the only basis for allowing divorce in these cases, then it is strongly similar to the case of committed, loving gay couples. God is a God of compassion, and He would not force two people who love one another dearly and only desire the best for one another to never be able to express that love in consensual and mutually desired intercourse. This would appear to be a parallel case that would require any Christians who believe divorce in the situation of abuse as moral to also reconsider the issue of sex within a loving and committed gay relationship.

However, the intellectual and emotive argument based on a belief in God's compassionate nature is not the only reason for allowing divorce in the case of an abusive marriage. Historical criticism of the text on divorce as well as a comparison to other Scripture

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<sup>127</sup> Mt. 19.9 ESV

reveals that there are stronger, Biblically based reasons for considering divorce a moral response to an abusive marriage. In Jesus' time and in Jewish society, women had very little power or ability to protect themselves. They were in large part at the mercies of the men in their lives. The Law of Moses allowed for a man to divorce a woman without naming a specific reason, but merely by writing a certificate of divorce.<sup>128</sup> The Mishnah allows a man to divorce his wife for practically any reason, focusing on the line in Deuteronomy that says, 'it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes;' on these grounds it gives permission to divorce a wife for the simple reason that a man has found another woman whom he believes is more beautiful.<sup>129</sup> This type of interpretation of the Mosaic Law precipitated a situation by the time of Jesus where a woman who was getting older could be in fear of being divorced in favor of a younger woman or for a myriad of other reasons, leaving her unprotected and lacking provision in a patriarchal society. Jesus is reacting against this practice by protecting women and insisting that there must be true fault, sexual immorality, before a husband could divorce his wife. In doing so, His message is reminiscent of the prophet Malachi who also speaks out against men divorcing their wives heedlessly, "The LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant...'For I hate divorce,' says the LORD."<sup>130</sup> Jesus is endorsing the message of God sent through that prophet: wives should not be cast away recklessly and for selfish reasons. Jesus is protecting women with this message.

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<sup>128</sup> Dt. 24:1ff

<sup>129</sup> Mishnah, GiTTin, 14 10 as referenced by Davies, W.W. Divorce in the Old Testament. In *NET Bible*. Biblical Studies Press. Retrieved from:  
<http://classic.net.bible.org/dictionary.php?word=Divorce%20In%20The%20Old%20Testament>

<sup>130</sup> Malachi 2.14, 16

If Jesus is giving women increased protection in a situation where they greatly needed it, the thought follows that He would be supportive of the woman or man who leaves a marriage because he or she is in danger. He is protecting the spouse who has less power from abuse and exploitation by the one with greater power, and that is exactly what divorce in an abusive situation is accomplishing. It is also notable that in the Jewish culture of Jesus' time, there was no option for a wife to divorce her husband. "The common term used in the Bible for divorce is *shilluach 'ishshah*, 'the sending away of a wife' (Dt 22:19,29) One never reads of 'the sending away of a husband.' The feminine participle, *gerushah*, 'the woman thrust out,' is the term applied to a divorced woman. The masculine form is not found."<sup>131</sup> So, there is no way of knowing what Jesus would have actually said to women who were desiring to divorce abusive men. Still, based on the context to which Jesus is speaking with His comments regarding divorce, there is a strong indication that He would be in support of protecting the weaker partner. This means that the New Testament verses regarding divorce are not perfect parallels to those regarding gay sex, and orthopraxis regarding divorce does not have much bearing on orthopraxis regarding sex for a gay couple.<sup>132</sup>

Slavery has also been a topic that has been brought up over the years as something that might be held parallel to the prohibition of gay sex. The New Testament accepts slavery and makes no attempt to prohibit it. In fact, in his letter to Philemon, Paul indicates that he is sending back the runaway slave Onesimus to his master Philemon.<sup>133</sup> He hints strongly that Philemon should consider freeing Onesimus and even offers to pay any debt the slave might have

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<sup>131</sup> Davies

<sup>132</sup> There is a small parallelism in that gay people should be considered with compassion, as people who are often marginalized by society as women were in the New Testament times. However, compassion for gay people does not have direct conclusions for what should be correct church teaching regarding gay sex.

<sup>133</sup> Philemon 10-14

outstanding,<sup>134</sup> but still he leaves it up to the master whether he will or will not release this slave. Similarly, when Jesus heals the slave of a Centurion, He does not make any reference to or request for the freeing of this slave.<sup>135</sup> The New Testament approach to slavery is to give guidelines for how masters should treat their slaves<sup>136</sup> and how slaves should treat their masters.<sup>137</sup> The Hebrew Bible also gives guidelines for how slavery should work rather than outlawing slavery as a practice. It has an entire code of slavery ethics.<sup>138</sup> If this is the case, how can Christians who actively work to free modern slaves justify their efforts? Or what about the Christians who in antebellum America helped facilitate slaves' freedom by running the Underground Railroad? Are they to be considered immoral based on the Scriptural record?

When considering the morality of those who work to free slaves and to abolish slavery, it should be remembered that Scripture never mandates slavery; it only gives guidelines to what already exists.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, the person who is actively working to abolish slavery is in no way acting contrary to the edicts of Scripture. Even the person who helps free slaves can make a stand upon Scripture for support. For example, the Mosaic Law specifically says that if a runaway slave arrives on your property, you should not return him to his master but allow him to live freely in your land.<sup>140</sup> This law elicits questions as to why Paul sent Onesimus back to his master. This topic is much too large to be covered in its entirety in the current work, but it will be considered in its larger details in order to determine its applicableness to the current discussion.

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<sup>134</sup> Philemon 17-21

<sup>135</sup> Luke 7.1-10

<sup>136</sup> Col. 4.1; Eph. 6.9; 1 Pet. 2.18-21

<sup>137</sup> Eph. 6.5-9, I Tim. 6.1-3

<sup>138</sup> For example Ex. 21 and Lev. 25.47-55

<sup>139</sup> Gagnon 45

<sup>140</sup> Ex. 23,15-16

First, one must consider whether Scripture takes into account differing standards for a debtor-slave as opposed to one who is a slave by birth or through captivity, and perhaps Paul's actions may be informed by this difference. There are a number of passages which deal specifically with slaves who have become such through debts they have acquired. Even Jesus uses a debtor-slave as an illustration in some of His parables.<sup>141</sup> It is very possible that the slave who is running away from debt is taken in a different light than the runaway slave of Dt. 24.1. This is something that cannot be proven or disproven in the current work, but is worth greater investigation in the future. It may show to be very profitable to the Church in helping inform teaching and orthopraxis concerning slavery worldwide and also be informative for the debate about the prohibition of gay sex.

Another consideration worth mention at the current time is that the world is full of debtors even today, and that the man or woman who is in debt is living in a way that could have been labeled slavery in the ancient world. The person who is in debt must give a portion of his working hours to the person who holds his debt until such a time as that debt is paid off or forgiven. This fits very well the description of a debtor-slave given in Lev. 25:47-54. Finally, it also pertinent that the New Testament clearly sees slaves as equally valued in the eyes of God and that freedom is the ideal state.<sup>142</sup> The strongest conclusion that this work is able to draw at this time is that the acceptance of slavery in the Bible does not seem to be quite strong enough of a parallel to the prohibition of gay sex as to make it one that could set precedence for church teaching, though it is certainly a field worthy of more research. The main difference regarding these two topics is that slavery is merely accepted rather than mandated while homoeroticism is prohibited rather than merely discouraged.

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<sup>141</sup> Mt. 18.25

<sup>142</sup> 1 Cor. 12.13; Gal. 3.28; Col. 3.11, and 1 Cor. 7.21

Perhaps the strongest point of comparison within the canon of Scripture that lends itself towards a Side A interpretation is the eating of meat which has been sacrificed to idols. At the Council of Jerusalem, mentioned above, the leaders of the Church based on the leading of the Holy Spirit determined that Gentile converts to Christianity did not have to keep the whole Law of Moses in order to be Christians. Even yet there were four things they were required to avoid. Of these, one was to abstain from sexual immorality and another was to abstain from food sacrificed to idols.<sup>143</sup> Yet, even though this council clearly prohibits the eating of meat sacrificed to idols, in a letter written to the Corinthians sometime after this council, Paul says of food sacrificed to idols, “But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.”<sup>144</sup> Later in the same letter addressing the same topic, he writes: “Eat anything sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience’ sake...If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience’ sake.”<sup>145</sup> Paul is here giving license to eat food that has a likelihood of being sacrificed to idols, since animals often passed through an idol’s temple on the way to a meat market.<sup>146</sup> Rather than saying they should assiduously determine that all the meat they consume has never been sacrificed to idols, Paul gives permission to consume it, even though it might very well have been sacrificed to an idol before being brought to the market or to the table. The only time they should not eat it is if someone voluntarily informs them that it was part of a cultic sacrifice, but even then, the abstention is for the sake of the other person’s conscience, not the conscience of the Christian.<sup>147</sup> Paul argues that really there is only one God, and therefore all

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<sup>143</sup> Acts. 15.28-29

<sup>144</sup> 1 Cor. 8.8

<sup>145</sup> 1 Cor. 10.25,27

<sup>146</sup> Barton, J., & Muddiman, J. (2001). *The Oxford Bible commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p 1152

<sup>147</sup> 1 Cor. 10.28-30



idols are only imaginations of humans.<sup>148</sup> Therefore, the Christian who eats meat sacrificed to an idol, since he knows an idol to be nothing, is not doing anything wrong. It would only be wrong if someone was participating or being wrongly influenced who did believe in idols and thought them to be something real.<sup>149</sup>

Therefore, Paul in this instance is mitigating an earlier prohibition and changing it to be only a partial proscription rather than a full proscription. If one reconsiders the nature of an idol, then it makes it clear that eating meat sacrificed to an idol, which is not real, is no different than eating any other meat, or so Paul claims. This pattern of thinking seems like it could potentially influence the interpretation of the passages prohibiting same-sex intercourse. Perhaps it is a matter of the way one approaches the act rather than the act itself that is determinative of its morality or immorality. Perhaps if a person approaches a gay relationship with thankfulness to God for the love shared and for the beauty of God's creation which is expressed in the other person as well as the beauty of God's nature shining through that human, perhaps this way of approaching such a relationship would cause it to be like the food sacrificed to idols. Thinking about the idol in a different way changes how one approaches eating food sacrificed to it.

This argument has potential, and is thus far the strongest comparison to the matter at hand. It is the only example that this author knows in the New Testament where a requirement from the Council of Jerusalem is re-evaluated and partially mitigated. However, even this comparison is imperfect and does not seem to have enough substance to support a mitigation of the full proscription of homoeroticism. The one significant difference between Paul's instruction on eating meat sacrificed to idols and gay sex is that he is allowing freedom of ignorance, which

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<sup>148</sup> 1 Cor. 8.4

<sup>149</sup> 1 Cor. 8.7

is not applicable to same-sex intercourse in the great majority of cases. Paul is giving Christians the freedom to eat meat *as long as they do not know* it has been sacrificed to an idol. A good comparison of today would be buying products from a large company. If that company has very bad ethics and cruel and unfair practices towards its employees, the Christian buying from that company is not sharing the guilt of those unethical practices as long as this Christian does not know they are happening. However, if this Christian was informed about the unethical actions of this company and continued to buy their products, now the Christian is sharing in the guilt.

In Paul's time, it was a possibility that an animal had been sacrificed to a pagan god before making it to the meat market.<sup>150</sup> Paul is freeing the Christians from the need to investigate thoroughly the origins of all of the meat they purchase. In a way, it is a principle that might provide great relief to the morally conscientious Christian, allowing the Christian to move about in the world free from obsessing over whether each and every action is possibly immoral. These words of Paul's indicate that if something comes to light, the believer is expected to respond in a God-honoring fashion, but he or she is not responsible to always be looking behind the most casual actions of life for possible sinful association. Very rarely is it possible for someone to have sex with a person of the same gender and be unaware of doing so. Perhaps in such a case where one or both of the partners was somehow unaware of their sharing the same gender, it would fall under the category of moral ignorance, but as a general principle same-sex intercourse would still be prohibited under these guidelines because it is done in full knowledge.

Finally, one last topic of comparison will be discussed, but this last topic is distinct in that it is used in support of the Side B interpretation rather than of Side A. The prohibition of same-sex intercourse could possibly be compared to the prohibition of incest. It is another form of sex

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<sup>150</sup> Barton and Muddiman 1152

that is condemned in the purity code of Leviticus. In fact, it is condemned in the same chapter as homoeroticism, and therefore is also condemned as something the pagan nations do but that Israel should not.<sup>151</sup> It is a detailed prohibition, not just proscribing sex with one's closest blood relatives such as parents, grandparents, and siblings; it also proscribes intercourse with one's stepmother or aunt by marriage. Also, similar to the proscription of gay sex, this prohibition is sustained in the New Testament. Paul berates the Corinthians when he hears "that someone among you has his father's wife."<sup>152</sup> This wording is a way of saying that the man is in a sexual relationship with his stepmother. Paul strongly exhorts the Corinthians to turn this man out of their fellowship until such a time as he is no longer participating in this relationship.<sup>153</sup> Paul does not ask if these two people love one another or if their relationship is one of self-giving and generosity of soul. He condemns it purely because it is ranked among those prohibited as incestuous.

These two people are unrelated by blood, and they may love one another dearly, but they are still not allowed to be in a sexual relationship.<sup>154</sup> Why should a nephew not be able to marry his non-genetically related aunt after the death of his uncle, especially if a deep and abiding love has grown up between that woman and that man? The scholar Robert Gagnon points out, "In a functional sense, persons with repressed incestuous desires may find themselves in the same position as a person with repressed homoerotic desires: unable to enter a committed sexual relationship with the person they love."<sup>155</sup> Yet, the Bible insists that these incestuous

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<sup>151</sup> Lev. 18.6-18

<sup>152</sup> 1 Cor. 5.1

<sup>153</sup> 1 Cor. 5, 13

<sup>154</sup> There is no clear statement whether the father in this case is still alive or whether there was divorce involved. It is possible that it may be also an issue of adultery. Yet Paul never mentions the father, only the son and step-mom.

<sup>155</sup> Gagnon 49

relationships are prohibited, regardless of motivation or level of commitment, just as it seems to proscribe same-sex intercourse no matter the level of love behind it. Of course, this is not a perfect comparison on an experiential level, for a person who is attracted to a relative could potentially go on to be attracted to a different person who is not a relative. For the person who is sexually oriented to the same gender as herself, there is not a realistic hope in the future that she will find herself attracted to the opposite gender and therefore be able to eventually consummate a romantic love. Still, on the level of Biblical comparisons, the prohibition of incestuous sex is in many ways very similar in nature to the proscription of same-sex intercourse.

- **Natural Law**

A discussion of the debate on gay sex would be incomplete without at least a brief mention of Natural Law. The present work has chosen to place Natural Law as the last topic to be considered in this debate, because it is the opinion of the author that Natural Law is a very weak foundation for any form of church teaching and should only ever be considered of secondary importance compared to the Biblical record. Natural Law “is a tradition that places a strong emphasis on the ability of human reason to discern the good and the right.”<sup>156</sup> This tradition believes the Eternal Law of God governs the universe and that these laws are reflected in the Natural Law. All creatures have a tendency to follow this law, though they can reject it, and humans have the special ability to rationally acknowledge and assent to this law that has been set in place by God.<sup>157</sup> The ‘good’ is whatever is in accordance with the natural ends and purposes of the creature.<sup>158</sup> The church, especially the Catholic Church, has made the argument

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<sup>156</sup> Messer, Neil (2006). *Christian Ethics*. London: SCM Press. p 43

<sup>157</sup> Messer 45

<sup>158</sup> Messer 46

in the past that the natural end of sex is procreation.<sup>159</sup> If that is the case, then to have sex in any way that excludes the possibility of procreation is in violation of Natural Law and therefore also of Eternal Law. Same-sex intercourse has no possibility of procreation, and under the previously stated line of reasoning, that makes gay sex a violation of Eternal Law because it is a violation of Natural Law. It is also argued that the sexual organs and male and female genitalia are obviously complementary and that mere observation of this fact should lead to the conclusion that they are to be used together.<sup>160</sup> Not only are they meant to be used together, but also they are meant to be used exclusively as a pair, with sex not occurring in any way that does not include the penis penetrating the vagina and semen being released into the vagina during the act of penetration.<sup>161</sup>

This is the current stance of the Catholic Church, and based on this it not only declares same-sex intercourse to be wrong but any form of sex that would exclude procreative possibility – such as sex with some form of birth-control or contraceptive involved or anal or oral sex. Cardinal Ratzinger, later to become Pope Benedict XVI, said of the gay orientation that it is a “disordered sexual inclination,”<sup>162</sup> agreeing that it is against the natural design for humans. Now, it is true that Paul says that some things God has made evident in the creation, but he says very specifically that what God has made apparent to all people through creation is that God is eternally powerful and divine. This leaves humans no excuse for not worshipping God as God rather than idols.<sup>163</sup> Some people have conflated this idea of God’s making his divine status apparent in creation and the statement of Paul that same-sex intercourse is *para phusin* or

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<sup>159</sup> Messer 50

<sup>160</sup> Via 26

<sup>161</sup> This conclusion does not necessarily follow, and that will be discussed below.

<sup>162</sup> Ratzinger, Joseph.A. (1994). Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the pastoral care of homosexual persons. In J.S. Siker (Ed.), *Homosexuality in the church: Both sides of the debate* (pp. 39-48). Louisville, KY: Westminster/J. Knox Press. p 42

<sup>163</sup> Rom. 1.20-21

‘against nature,’<sup>164</sup> as being one and the same idea. This is partly due to the fact that in English creation is also called nature, but that is not the case in Greek. The word *phusin* can mean: 1) “the natural form or constitution of a person or thing as the result of growth;” and also 2) “the regular order of nature.”<sup>165</sup> The second definition does have an idea of the laws of nature, but that is not the same as Natural Law. Yes, Paul is saying that these people are having sex that goes against that way things are naturally ordered, but that does not mean that he is saying, as he does in Rom. 1.20, that they are knowingly rejecting God and God’s decrees in doing this. In fact, he makes the claim that God Himself has given them over to these passions as an illustration of a broken creation.<sup>166</sup> As has been mentioned before, Paul is giving this as a symptom of a broken humanity and as one of many that show the need of humans for the redemption of God.

What does this mean? While sex between a male and a female may indeed be what is in accord with God’s design for humankind and especially for their propagation around the world, it is not something that could be said to be readily apparent to all humanity as the exclusive way in which sex should be used. How is one human to know what is natural to all humans and what is not? The vast majority of gay people report their orientation being something discovered rather than something they chose for themselves. For these people, they experience homoeroticism as something that is in keeping with their natural composition.<sup>167</sup> It is not convincing to appeal to the compatibility of the male and female sex organs and genitalia as an exclusionary guide for sex. There are other ways of having sex which function for mutual pleasure and stimulation, and

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<sup>164</sup> Rom. 1.26-27

<sup>165</sup> LSJ Greek-English Lexicon

<sup>166</sup> Rom. 1.26

<sup>167</sup> Wink, Walter. (1999). Homosexuality and the Bible. In Walter Wink (Ed.), *Homosexuality and Christian faith: Questions of conscience for the churches* (pp. 33-49). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. p 36; see also Via 26

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sex has a purpose as an instrument of bonding and intimacy in a relationship as well as something that may lead to procreation. If a church allows any form of contraception, even the rhythm method, it is acknowledging this principle: that sex has power, efficacy, and legitimacy in a relationship even when it is not leading to procreation. If this is true, then it is not readily apparent based on the observation of the natural world that heteroeroticism is the only form of sex that should be allowed.

Perhaps it is best to illustrate this with an analogy. A person may create a tool with a specific purpose. It is made to be used in a certain way to produce particular results. If another person comes into possession of this tool and begins to use it for a different purpose and in a different way, but it is still proving effective for this purpose and used in this way, is the person wrong to use it thus? This analogy falls short, because God as the Divine Creator of the entire world has full liberty to design something to be used in a specific way and to prohibit all other uses. In fact, based on the witness of Scripture, this does seem to be what He is doing in regards to sex. An observation of sex in the natural world – sex being the tool in this analogy – does not conclusively show that using sex in a gay relationship for bonding and expressing love is not a valid way to use this tool. Therefore, as God is the designer of sex, rather than looking primarily to sex in the natural world one must look primarily to Scripture for an indication of whether God has prohibited sex as used within a gay relationship. It is not reasonable to argue that the people using sex in a different way should know based on observation alone that sex is mandated for only heterosexual relationships. A person might point to the natural build of humans as fitting based on God's laws revealed in Scripture, but the anatomical design in and of itself is not a strong case for the prohibition of same-sex intercourse and should not be expected to stand on its own as a moral authority.

### Chapter 3: Lives in Response

After a long consideration of the passages related to homoeroticism and the greater canon of Scripture, it seems that the evidence more strongly supports a view that God has fully prohibited gay sex than that He blesses sex inside of gay unions. If this is the case, how can a gay Christian respond? How should a gay Christian think about his or her sexuality in relation to his or her faith in Jesus Christ and to this prohibition?<sup>168</sup>

The witness of gay Christians in the light of Scripture shows that the most important thing is for the gay Christian to realize that his or her gay orientation is actually something beautiful as God is able to use it. It is necessary to emphasize again the conclusions from much earlier in this work that God is in no way calling gay Christians to become straight. Christopher Yuan came to realize this powerful truth and says about it, “I felt I somehow had to become straight to please God. So when I realized that heterosexuality should not be my goal, it was so freeing.”<sup>169</sup> Henry is a man who spent 43 years trying to hide his sexuality from everyone. He has finally found release by embracing his orientation as something given by God. He believes that God blesses gay unions, yet his realization he describes applies to all gay Christians and perhaps especially to those trying to abstain from gay sex: “I realized God was maybe just waiting for me, watching me feeling so horrible about myself for having these gay feelings, but He was waiting for me to love myself as He loved me, as gay and everything else.” It may be that many people in the world and in the church see a gay orientation as a problem, and certainly

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<sup>168</sup> As the author, I have been fully aware of my own heterosexuality in preparing this discussion and in putting it down on paper. It is only with great humility that I approach this topic, ever aware that my own conclusions may be proved untrue. I am lacking the experiential side of this discussion, and that is why so many other people have been asked for their thoughts, feelings, opinions, and experiences. It is hoped that this piece pays respect to all of their input, especially to the input of those with whom this work disagrees.

<sup>169</sup> Yuan 187



it does come with its fair share of hardships and struggles, but it is something that God gave to each gay man and woman intentionally and with a plan to use it in a glorious way.

Remember Paul's prayer that the 'thorn' in His flesh would be removed? Three times he implored, but then he wrote: "And [God] has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me."<sup>170</sup> A same-sex orientation may be a 'weakness' in the eyes of so many in the church, but in the eyes of God, it is where His power is made clear in the life of a gay Christian. It is where that person has the opportunity to learn more about God and to see the world in a way that the majority of the people on earth will never see. A gay man is able to see a beauty in men that other males cannot see. He has a valuable insight to bring to the table, and the same is true for lesbian women who see a beauty in women that other females do not see. Just as there is a difference between art expressing the beauty of the nude human form and pornography, there is a difference between appreciating and loving the beauty both of the physical and spiritual form of one's own gender and lusting after that form or expressing that love sexually. Perhaps one of the callings God has for gay Christians is to share this love and appreciation and to help others see the beauty in their own gender.

There are countless ways that God can use gay Christians abstaining from gay sex. Gay Christians believe it is time for the church to discover more of these ways and to embrace them more fully. As one person wrote, "I used to be fearful, anxious and depressed. I knew what NOT to do, according to the church, but I didn't know what TO do, regarding my relationships with other people." Another respondent said that the church needs to give gay Christians more "yes's," more ways to go out and live in the world and express their orientation in good and productive ways. A man wrote, "To view such a thing as a calling to a closer relationship with

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<sup>170</sup> 2 Cor. 12.9

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God as opposed to a prohibition has made all of the difference.” If one sees a gay orientation as a calling from God, then one could believe that He will reveal to each Christian with this calling ways to glorify Him with it. The church should be actively helping gay Christians discover their callings.

The reason this affirmation of being beautiful to God *as a gay person* is needed is because gay Christians have the tendency to feel unlovable or less than human because of their sexual attractions. This is a feeling that has often been precipitated by the people of the church. The pain of these individuals is evident in their words:

- “It is hard to believe myself to be lovable or desirable.”
- “I think they [my beliefs and practices] often make me feel like less of a man, certainly, and sometimes less of a human being.”
- “My current beliefs make me feel worthless, not needed, and like I am a disappointment.”
- “I struggle feeling alone, unwanted, rejected, and dehumanized because of my attractions.”

Those individuals who feel this way, like they are worth less than other humans, need love and affirmation. This sensation of worthlessness stems from feeling that the attractions themselves are appalling to God. There is a vital need for gay Christians to hear that they are loved just as they are. They are beautiful just as they are, and they have the freedom to explore for themselves the question of God’s will for them and calling for them in regards to their sexual orientation.

Individuals who experienced this type of affirmation from their churches or families regarding their sexuality – unconditional love, acceptance that it is unchosen and unchanging, and the desire to support this person in discovering their calling from God – report feeling valued and loved and confident that God cares for them. This support must be genuine, and it must grant the person being supported the autonomy to reach her own conclusions regarding God’s will towards this aspect of her life. Josh Weed is man who received such support from his family when he shared with them his sexuality. “My parents were incredibly loving and supportive, which is part of why I believe I’m so well adjusted today...I *never* felt judged or unwanted or

that they wished to change anything about me. That is part of why I have never been ashamed of this part of myself.” His advice to Christians trying to support their gay friends or family is this: “You will never, ever give your gay loved one a better gift than to love and accept them for who they are, right now, period...Trust that they are in charge of their own agency and destiny. I promise you they will thank you.” To those who are gay and Christian (or Mormon as he is), he says: “Look in the mirror, and accept yourself as you are in this very instant. You are *you*. And your attractions are part of you. And you are totally okay!”<sup>171</sup> Gay Christians should feel empowered to go out and live confident in the fact that they are loved by God. This is not a love *despite* being gay, but a love *especially because* they are gay, because God loves *all* of them, as He does every single human being, with all of their frailties and all of their struggles.

Those who believe that gay sex is fully prohibited by God are at a slightly higher risk of feeling a lower sense of self-value in relation to their attractions. Of those surveyed, 16% of Side B respondents and 6% of Side A respondents said their sense of self-value had been negatively affected by their beliefs and practices in regards to their sexuality. This higher risk is directly linked to accepting one’s orientation as something good rather than as a type of disease that needs to be eradicated. It is certainly not being Side B in and of itself that causes a lower self-value, since numerous Side B respondents reported feeling a higher sense of self-value because of their current beliefs and practices. The difference is described well by one Side B man, “I feel my current beliefs have been instrumental in building my sense of self-value. It was in coming to terms with my sexuality that I truly came to understand that I am a child of God, made in His image and likeness, loved by Him from the beginning of time, and that nothing I do will change that.” This is echoed in the opinion of a Side A respondent, “Once I accepted myself and realized I was not broken, my self-esteem soared. My relationships improved. I felt closer to God.”

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<sup>171</sup> 32 Weed

Therefore, when it comes to self-value, being Side A or Side B makes no matter, it is all about being confident that God loves you just as you are, and that He has made no mistake in the fact that you have a gay orientation.

This is the reality gay Christians wish that their fellow believers would welcome into their churches and preach from their pulpits and share with their family and friends, especially those Christians who believe that God calls gay people to abstain from fulfilling sexually their attractions, since this is the realm of Christianity that has been more prone to cause gay people to feel worthless. This is the most important thing to remember. It is only with this firmly in place that one can consider how to respond to the weight of evidence supporting a demand for gay Christians to abstain from gay sex and to look to Him for a different calling instead.

In the confidence of gay orientation as a calling from God, what are the choices for the Christian who wants to submit to the prohibition of gay sex? One option is to live celibately. Christopher Yuan speaks of his initial knee-jerk reaction to contemplating the possibility of God calling someone to live celibately, “In the past, I always figured that just as I needed food and water, I needed sex. God wouldn’t anymore ask me to give up sex that He would ask me to give up eating or sleeping.”<sup>172</sup> Overtime, however, his views have matured as he has lived a celibate life, “Abstinence is not something unreasonable for God to ask of His people. Singleness is not a curse.”<sup>173</sup> Many other Christians have also found that chaste singleness has not been a curse for them, but an opportunity to grow closer to God than they would have otherwise. It is something that is difficult in many moments and not to be viewed lightly, but it can be a powerful tool used by God.

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<sup>172</sup> Yuan 185

<sup>173</sup> Yuan 188

This is true also for the thousands of heterosexual people who have chosen to live celibate lives. Some nuns, the Sister Servants of Mary, describe it this way: “What is being renounced as humanly fulfilling and beautiful is seen as a door to something even more beautiful and fulfilling, a relationship with God who is totally fulfilling and beautiful, even if not perceived perfectly in this life.”<sup>174</sup> Christians, both gay and straight, who chose to live in life-long celibacy for the sake of God are part of a profound witness of Christians stretching back all the way to the time of Christ. In the second century Athenagoras the Confessor wrote: “You can find many men and women who remain unmarried all their lives in the hope of coming closer to God.”<sup>175</sup> These Christians throughout the centuries believed that living out this sacrificial love for God in giving up sex was drawing them into an even deeper and more intimate relationship with their Lord.

Many gay Christians consider this sacrificial love of abstaining from gay sex a cross given them to carry by Christ, or rather, a cross Christ helps them carry. One man says, “I also think often of Jesus carrying His cross and realize that my same-sex attraction can be a cross that I bear that sanctifies me or a chain that drags me into the abyss – it’s all in what I do with it.” Another writes, “I have not been called by God to be married and have children, I am okay with that. I have been called into a personal relationship with God.” A third man says, “I remind myself that Christ never said it would be easy to die to self.” This sense of suffering with Christ is seen as an opportunity to grow into Him.

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<sup>174</sup> Sister Servants of Mary. (n.d.). Consecrated life FAQ. Retrieved April 17, 2013, from The Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas website: <http://kckvocations.com/three/faq>

<sup>175</sup> Athenagoras. *Presbeia* 33 as quoted by: Brothers of Saint Anthony's Monastery. (n.d.). Monasticism. Retrieved April 17, 2013, from St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery website: <http://www.stanthonyssonastery.org/monasticism.php>

This imagery of carrying a cross comes directly from when Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me.”<sup>176</sup> There is a strong tradition within the Christian faith that suffering is something God uses to develop faith and to draw people closer to Him. The letter of James tells Christians, “Consider it all joy my brethren when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”<sup>177</sup> Paul similarly writes, “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish that I may gain Christ...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”<sup>178</sup> These verses show that within Christianity, the idea of suffering has been turned on its head. What seems extremely undesirable to the world is something that can be used for good by God, and therefore, at some level, Christians are validated in choosing certain forms of suffering.

Jesus Christ himself is the greatest model of a human validly choosing suffering that it might be used by God to bring about good. He chooses to die on the cross, a suffering enormously undesirable and one that from a human perspective makes no sense to choose. He chooses this because He knows that this crucifixion will prove to be both the site of His bloody death and of His glorification as the true Messiah and Son of God. In the gospel of John, Jesus signifies this by multiple times speaking of His crucifixion as His being ‘lifted up.’ This verb He uses, *upsotho*, can be used both to refer to someone being lifted up onto a cross for crucifixion

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<sup>176</sup> Mark 8.34

<sup>177</sup> James 1.2-4

<sup>178</sup> Phil. 3.8, 10

and exalted into a high position.<sup>179</sup> The suffering of Jesus is the supreme example of how God uses suffering in this world as a means of glorification. In light of this, in times of suffering Christians can look to Jesus for encouragement and support and know that in some mysterious way, this suffering is a way of growing closer to Christ.

Many Christians who choose to live celibately echo these sentiments, and they believe that all they are giving up in not having sex or a loving partner for life is gained in growing closer to Christ, and more besides. They write:

- “In submitting my life so completely to His will (in all areas, not just my sexuality), I’m coming to see Him more clearly, to love Him, and to truly favor Him. My whole self hungers after more of God.”
- “Being gay gives me the opportunity to grow closer to Him in a way that only being gay can. I’m not saying it has always been easy, but it has definitely been worth it.”
- “Like most men, I need a challenge. Living out God’s will in this area is a real challenge...If I did not experience this situation, I doubt I would take my faith very seriously or have lived it out so intensely.”

Being celibate is a very weighty thing. It is giving up deeply desired relationships for the sake of Christ, and any Christian who takes up this way of life should be commended and respected, but more than that, he or she should be supported by the fellowship of believers so that together they might run this race and keep this faith.

Numerous people on the survey took the opportunity to speak out about the need for gay Christians to be supported by the church and to have the benefits of community intentionally extended to them, but especially to those gay Christians who are trying to live a celibate life. Wesley Hill says that as much as the love of Christ is beautiful and wonderful, people still need *human* love. “The New Testament views *the church* – rather than marriage – as the primary

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<sup>179</sup> Attridge, H. (Ed.). (2006). *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (New Revised Standard Version, Rev ed.). San Francisco, CA: HarperOne. p 1820

place where human love is best expressed and experienced.”<sup>180</sup> There is the potential for extreme loneliness in being single for one’s entire life. Justin Lee reminds Christians, “People don’t marry for the right to have sex; they marry for love and the opportunity to build a life together with another human being.”<sup>181</sup> One person said, “Your babies and your weddings are an intense source of pain, reminding us of our alien-ness and inability to ever be one of you. Couple this with the fact that we can never voice this out loud, and therein lies the Christian homosexual dilemma. It is one of perpetual sadness and loss.” These Christians believe that the people of the church are called to truly be the brothers and sisters of these single people – to invite them over for dinner, ask them out for coffee, see if they want to come along for a family vacation, and to embrace them, and be truly committed to them. There is a deep fear in the hearts of many single Christians that someday, when they are in their elderly years, they will be abandoned. Other people will have children and grandchildren to support them, care for them, visit them, but these single people will lack that. The people of the church need to be actively serving their single members, the young and the old and the in-between, and in doing so, they will be the family that these celibate Christians so greatly desire. It would be simplistic to claim that this is a perfect replacement for a spouse and a biological family, but it would certainly be a step in the right direction. It would still be an immense sacrifice to be a celibate Christian, but it would be one full of less anxiety and fear.

Some Christians who desire to live celibately and yet long for companionship find the answer in non-sexual romances. They look to the story of David and Jonathan as an inspiration. They do not see here a description of a sexual relationship, but of a deep and abiding friendship.

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<sup>180</sup> Hill 111

<sup>181</sup> Lee 103



Baxter

“The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul David, and Jonathan loved him as himself.”<sup>182</sup> They see in this description a type of connection with a person of the same gender that is full of vitality and love and is godly. These men loved one another with all of their hearts, and they made a covenant to one another to always be attentive to the other and as much as was in their power to protect one another and even each other’s families.<sup>183</sup> This love one that is deep and abiding and promises to be steady and attentive even through death is the type of friendship that many celibate Christians seek. One person writes, “The idea of being knit together in soul, apart from and without sex, is to me a formative example of valid same-sex affection.” Some would say that the words used to describe the friendship of David and Jonathan go beyond what a modern conception of friendship involves – though in many ancient sources, this type of friendship is present. The fact that the language is stronger than what most people mean when they say friendship leads to the use of romance instead, to call this a romantic friendship. Jonathan loved David as himself and David says that the love of Jonathan was better than the love of women.<sup>184</sup> This is very strong language for a friendship, but it is the type of language that is encouraging to gay Christians looking for human relationships of love, affirmation, and commitment. One man writes, “I was much heartened by the possibility of chaste, loving relationships with other men, which I hadn’t considered.” These abiding friendships in which it is acceptable to express deep and ardent love are for many a valid option for how to live as a gay Christian in this world. These couples are abstinent, but within this romantic friendship a person feels connected and loved and knows that someone is committed to stay by him or her all of his or her life.

Like any human relationship, these romantic friendships can have their difficulties. Some

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<sup>182</sup> I Sam. 18.1

<sup>183</sup> I Sam. 18.4, 20.14-17

<sup>184</sup> 2 Sam. 1.26

Baxter

would say that these couples are flirting with temptation. Two people who are attracted to one another, both physically and emotionally, openly confessing their love and living in a committed relationship obviously have potential to accelerate onto a sexual level. One man told of a woman he knew who warned him against this problem. She had lived in a romantic friendship with another woman, intending to stay sexually abstinent, but they were living in the same house and thinking of themselves as married, because that is how strong their love and commitment was. Because they already were thinking of themselves as married, it was possible for their relationship to turn sexual, and that is what happened. This is a challenge of which gay people within romantic friendships are well aware. Yet, there is also potential within them for gay Christians to fulfill the requirement of abstaining from gay sex while still having human love and deep, committed connections. As one person said, "I am glad to have found a relationship in which I can reconcile my need for companionship with my conscience on the question of chastity." Certainly, any people who are engaged in romantic friendships or considering them should take stock of the challenges and put into place practical helps to make the friendship as secure as possible against reaching a sexual level, but with this challenge openly acknowledged, these friendships may prove a great blessing to numerous gay Christians.

Other gay Christians who desire to abstain from gay sex enter into heterosexual marriages. For many, this idea evokes powerful emotions as they consider couples that struggled through difficult marriages and eventually divorced because one spouse was gay. Current culture seems to view a mixed-orientation marriage as an impossible reality. There are good reasons to be wary of it. The thousands of mixed-orientation couples who have gotten divorced are evidence of the potential for great pain that a mixed-orientation marriage has; but there is potential for pain in any marriage, and there are other factors that increase the risk of divorce

besides mixed-orientations. These other factors – like having been previously married, having kids from an earlier relationship, etc. – can be overcome, and so can the challenge of mixed-orientations. There are many gay men and women who are happily married to people of the opposite gender and find their marriages fulfilling and their lives flourishing.

Josh Weed is just such a gay person. He has been successfully and happily married to a woman for ten years now. He says, “My marriage is wonderful, and Lolly and I have an extremely healthy and robust sex life.”<sup>185</sup> He says that this is because, “Sex is about more than just visual attraction and lust and it is about more than just passion and infatuation....Sex at its deepest level is about *intimacy*...It is a beautiful physical manifestation of two people being connected in a truly vulnerable, intimate manner because they love each other profoundly. It is bodies connecting and souls connecting.”<sup>186</sup> One important aspect to the success of Josh’s marriage is that he told Lolly that he was gay long before they were married. They both walked into it being honest and open. Justin Lee writes about two mixed-orientation marriages in which the gay spouse was deceiving the straight spouse by implying he was actually heterosexual. One man, James, married a woman and told her he ‘used to’ have same-sex attractions, but no longer. He would actually be fantasizing about men while they had intercourse. Though so far he was faithful in body, he was far from faithful in imagination.<sup>187</sup> Another man, Terry, married twice hoping he would become straight; his first wife died. His second marriage was completely torn apart as he failed to become straight and could not keep up the deception.<sup>188</sup> If two people are entering into a mixed-orientation marriage, honesty is imperative.

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<sup>185</sup> Weed

<sup>186</sup> Ibid

<sup>187</sup> Lee 94

<sup>188</sup> Lee 85

This honesty was present for Josh and Lolly, as he told her about his orientation when they were both 16 years old and just friends. They were very good friends through high school and into college. They spoke of what Josh wanted in life, and how he desired to marry and have kids though he was gay. Lolly says that at first “in my mind, marrying someone *gay* was completely out of the question.”<sup>189</sup> Over time she, “realized that Josh was *everything* that I wanted in a husband (All except for the huge fact that he was gay.) He was dedicated to God above all else and he loved his Savior deeply.”<sup>190</sup> She thought about marriage and knew that: “When you get married you are accepting a person as a package deal – the good, the bad, the hard, the amazing and imperfect.”<sup>191</sup> Josh had already told her that he liked her and that he wanted to marry her and have a family even with his same-sex attractions. She decided she wanted to marry him. She says, “I did not choose to marry someone who is gay. I chose to marry Josh Weed, the man that I love, and to accept *all* of him. I have never regretted it.” The honesty of Josh in telling her about his orientation allowed his wife to decide to marry him in full knowledge that he is physically attracted to men. There is no deception, but the desire to work together in love through the struggles that a mixed-orientation marriage is bound to bring along.

This may explain why the heterosexual Lolly chose to marry a gay man, but why did that gay man ever want to marry a woman in the first place if he was physically attracted to men rather than women? Josh explains this by saying:

“One of the sad truths about being homosexual is that no matter what you decide for your future, you have to sacrifice something. It’s very sad, but it is true. I think this is true of life in general as well...If you...choose to live your religion, you are sacrificing the ability to have a romantic relationship with a same-sex partner. If you choose a same-sex partner, you are sacrificing the ability to have a biological family with the one you love. And so on. No matter what path you

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<sup>189</sup> Weed

<sup>190</sup> Ibid

<sup>191</sup> Ibid

choose, if you are gay you are giving up something basic, and sometimes various things that are very basic.”<sup>192</sup>

Josh wanted to have a wife and raise kids that were his own biological offspring. Now, he has three beautiful daughters. He says, “I have not regretted my decision one day of my life. My life is filled with so much genuine, real, vibrant joy that I would be remiss if I didn’t thank God for blessing me for my obedience and adherence to His guidelines as I understand them.”<sup>193</sup> He writes devotedly of his wife, “I want to grow old by her side. I wouldn’t trade her for any human on earth, male or female. She is my best friend, my lover, and my greatest gift.”<sup>194</sup> Some people doubt that he could be truly gay if he is married to a woman and has such a flourishing sex life, but he is sharing his honest experience of being able to love his life, his wife, and enjoy the intimacy he shares with her while still being physically attracted to males.<sup>195</sup>

The best illustration of how Josh thinks about his life comes through a story he tells. Once, he went to see a psychologist to get medicine for his ADHD. In the course of their conversation, he revealed that he is gay and married to a woman with three beautiful daughters. The psychologist was a lesbian herself living with a partner. She spoke of her daughter, the biological child of an ex-lover, and of how much she wished she could see this girl more. At one point, she told him that she thought it was sad he had to settle in his sex-life for something that was counterfeit. He was taken aback, because he does not consider his sex-life to be counterfeit

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<sup>192</sup> Weed

<sup>193</sup> Ibid

<sup>194</sup> Ibid

<sup>195</sup> Many people might wonder if he is bi-sexual, with a stronger inclination towards men than women. It is possible that he is not aware of his own bi-sexuality, but if one is to take his statements to be honest and self-aware, he insists that he is gay; the female body has no physical appeal for him. He was quoted earlier in the work about his junior high experience. He said that a girl asked him if all of the teens in the room took off their clothes, would he be turned on by the guys or by the girls. His response: “My answer, which I didn’t say out loud, was unquestionably the guys. And it was unquestionably *not* the girls. And that is still my answer.” (see p 7)

at all. He responded jokingly that he was sorry she had to settle for a counterfeit family. She immediately understood his point:

“Obviously, I don’t actually think a family with non-biological members is counterfeit in any way. I also don’t feel that my sex-life is counterfeit. They are both examples of something that is different than the ideal. I made that joke to make a point. If you are gay, you will have to choose to fill in the gaps somewhere. She chose to have a family in a way that is different than the ideal. I choose to enjoy sex in a way that is different than the ideal for a gay man.”

Josh is not alone in being a gay person in a successful mixed-orientation marriage. One man says, “Many are in fact married and raising a family who still have SSA<sup>196</sup>. I raised a family of 8 myself.” Yet another says, “I feel treasured by the Lord God, my Creator and Redeemer. I look at what I have now (a fulfilling marriage and natural-born children) and I am so overwhelmingly thankful.” This is therefore a valid choice for some gay Christians. Not all gay Christians are called into heterosexual marriage. Some might feel that even if they were completely honest with an opposite-sex spouse about their orientation, they could still not find fulfillment in a mixed-orientation marriage. This is perfectly understandable. Others, however, may wish that they could be married and have kids, but have felt that it would be somehow unfair to their possible future spouse. The testimony of Josh and of others shows that this is not the case. In honesty and with the grace of God, a mixed-orientation marriage has the possibility to be fulfilling and beautiful for both spouses.

There are, then, multiple roads for gay Christians to traverse towards a fulfilling life in obedience to what they see as God’s command to abstain from gay sex. Those who are gay and Christian have various ways to flourish in obedience. Like any life in Christ, the life of a gay man or woman is beautiful and has the potential to be a demonstration of great love for our Creator and Savior.

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<sup>196</sup> This is an acronym used by some to mean: same-sex attraction

Many gay Christians, however, feel that there are still reasons to maintain a Side A view and believe that God looks with favor upon gay marriages. This work challenges the most commonly offered explanation for why it is reasonable to have a Side A interpretation. In the survey, people were asked whether they believed gay sex was prohibited completely or only partially, and of those who said it was only partially prohibited, 75% mentioned the historical context as one of the reasons they interpret the Bible in this way, most of these expressly mentioning the belief that loving and committed gay unions did not exist in the New Testament period.<sup>197</sup> It was shown earlier that there are multiple evidences for committed, monogamous gay couples existing in and near Paul's time, even being married under Roman law. It is extremely likely, given this evidence and the wide travels of Paul, that he would have encountered this type of couple or at least heard of them. Even in light of this, some may still maintain the argument that the historical times have changed. The main argument, therefore, would be that Paul still did not understand sexual orientation as we do today, and that therefore what was seen as 'unnatural' is actually very natural for some people.

This, however, is a very tenuous claim upon which to stake a Biblical interpretation. The motivations for the behavior, from the viewpoint of Paul, do not matter. What matters is that they are in opposition to God's commands for sexual morality, which is one requirement the Gentiles were still expected to maintain based on the Council in Jerusalem. Paul sees homoeroticism as one way in which humans turn away from God and His commands, and therefore as a type of idolatry, putting something else higher than God. The same could be said of any other aberration from God's commands.

What then might people still appeal to in order to conclude in favor of Side A? The other most common response from gay Christians who held a Side A view was to look to the 'law of

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<sup>197</sup> Specifically 91 of 120 respondents

love.’ They say that it is clear in the New Testament that to love others and to love God fulfills all of God’s commands. Jesus says this clearly: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”<sup>198</sup> If all of the law and the prophets depend on these two commands, then in keeping them a person would be keeping the whole law. Gay Christians look at the loving and committed gay couples they can see in the world, how these couples give of themselves generously and support one another and live in fidelity toward one another. As one person described his experience of meeting gay Christian couples, “I started meeting many same-sex couples who bore good fruit, who were walking in love, generosity, and goodness, trusting God.” One gay couple has been together for over 60 years and says that the love they feel for one another is full of beauty and grace. Those who look to couples like this ask: How is this not keeping the two greatest commandments? For many, the manifestation of these lives full of grace is evidence that they are fulfilling the two greatest commandments and therefore are keeping God’s law. In this way, they argue that gay unions are blessed by God, and that the writings of Paul must either be misunderstood by the church and not really prohibit gay unions or are not universally applicable.

Many gay Christians who continue to believe that the New Testament does prohibit all gay sex, even inside of a union, also acknowledge the way these gay couples are being used by God. They see that many Christians who are in gay unions are evangelizing, starting churches, generously supplying the needs of the poor, being loving parents, and doing so many other things which God calls His children to do. These Side B Christians, however, do not see this as confirmation that the unions are blessed by God. They say that no person is perfect in God’s

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<sup>198</sup> Mt. 22.37-40



sight. All people have sinned and fallen short of His glory.<sup>199</sup> It is only by His grace that He uses *any* person to be His vessel in this world. The apostles themselves were known to fight with one another and to often fail to understand Jesus and follow Him perfectly, and yet they were mightily used as His messengers in the world. God does not say His followers need to be perfect before He uses them for His glory. So, the fact that God blesses the ministry of gay Christians who are living openly in sexually consummated relationships is not a guarantee that their behaviors in this regard are blessed by God. It is true that Jesus says the laws and the prophets are fulfilled in the two greatest commandments, but he also says: “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me.”<sup>200</sup> Therefore, Side B Christians say that in their love for Christ they keep the command to refrain from same-sex intercourse.

Those who maintain Side A positions also look to God’s attributes, and they see in His love and compassion evidence that God would be in support of gay unions. The Bible does not only attribute God with love; it claims that God *is* love.<sup>201</sup> Those who see the true love and devotion that gay partners can have for one another and the desire in the hearts of these men and women to express this love physically ask how this is any different than the same feelings felt by heterosexual couples. Josh Weed explained the reason for his vibrant sex life with his wife by saying, “Sex at its deepest level is about *intimacy*... It is a beautiful physical manifestation of two people being connected in a truly vulnerable, intimate manner because they love each other profoundly. It is bodies connecting and souls connecting.”<sup>202</sup> Numerous gay Christians would say that this is exactly what they want. They want to connect in body and soul with someone

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<sup>199</sup> Romans 3.23

<sup>200</sup> John 14.21

<sup>201</sup> I John 4:8

<sup>202</sup> Weed

they love. They want to share themselves completely and experience true intimacy. It just happens that each of these individuals desire to connect with a person of the same gender.

It is a deep and critical part of each gay person that desires this connection and wants to share this love. They say that this love is real and full. The college student Taylor made it clear that he is attracted not just to the bodies of males whom he likes. He finds himself attracted to them emotionally, to all of the personality traits and the intellectual activities that make them who they are. There is a longing for an intimacy with the very person increased by an intimacy with that person's body. This is something with which the vast majority of mature humans can empathize, though the greater part of humanity feels these desires towards the opposite gender. In light of these longings to connect with a person and share intimacy and express a powerful love that desires the best for the other person and values them for who they are as a person, many people conclude that these longings would be seen with favor by God. It is believed that He would be only too happy to see people express a deep and committed love. Knowing the great emphasis that God places on love throughout the Bible is perhaps the thing that creates the most tension within a person considering whether He might prohibit gay unions. If all they want to do is to love another person in everyway, how is it that God would ever deny that? There is, perhaps, a call by God for gay Christians to express a different and equally powerful kind of love. Yet, the tension remains.

It is ultimately up to each and every gay Christian to evaluate the evidence for both sides and to come to a conclusion. It is important that these men and women who are earnestly seeking for answers to this question have access to current information and scholarship. At the moment, many Christians are operating based on false impressions about the historical context of the New Testament. It might be that these Christians may still see the experiential evidence as powerful

enough to maintain a Side A persuasion, for the lives and witnesses of those gay people who are in committed unions is truly powerful. Still, it is only fair to these Christians that they have the full evidence before them. Also, some of these Christians will look at the love of God and ask how He could call people into lives with so much potential for loneliness and lacking so many of the things for which many human hearts long: a lifelong spouse to whom one can faithfully commit and show love to in both physical and non-physical ways and children to pass on a person's heritage to the next generation. These are seemingly the most intimate relationships humans can have with one another, and it can be nearly unbearable to be a gay person and to contemplate a life devoid of them. It would seem such a great loss if God had not really called gay Christians to abstain from gay sex and they had given up these relationships under false pretenses. Yet, it would also be a great loss if gay Christians have been called by God to abstain from gay intercourse in order to fulfill a great and deep calling of growing to know Him in a unique and vital way through this abstinence, and if due to false information many missed out on that deep calling in their lives. The seeking out of an answer to this question, therefore, requires great delicacy and humility. All people who have searched earnestly and humbly to answer this question deserve respect, no matter the conclusions they draw.

There is another vital question regarding this topic that has only been addressed in part in the sections above. Great detail has been given to the question of what God's will is toward gay sex. Less detail has been given to the question of what God's will is towards how people in the Christian church should treat their gay brothers and sisters. The simple answer to this question is found in the 'law of love' so readily quoted by gay Christians, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>203</sup> An even higher standard of this law of love is given by Jesus, "Love one another

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<sup>203</sup> Mark 12:31

even as I have loved you.”<sup>204</sup> The message of the New Testament is that those who consider themselves followers of Christ should treat all people with unfeigned love. What does this love look like when directed to gay men and women? It is valuable to listen to gay Christians themselves as a significant part of answering this question. The final question asked of those who completed the survey read: “If you could say one thing to the Church regarding its interaction with those who have a homosexual<sup>205</sup> orientation, what would you say?” There were two types of responses that were repeated time and again by these individuals, and both are enlightening in how a Christian might show sincere love to her gay brothers and sisters.

First, they ask that Christians treat them like humans, like people beloved by God. It was truly heart wrenching reading through so many responses asking Christians to treat gay people as if they truly are *people*. They insist that each gay person is so much more than his orientation, and that the members of the church are blinded to this fact:

- “I want the church to start seeing us as people, and not our orientation.”
- “Please stop treating us as if we are lesser people.”
- “Nobody has the right to devalue a person just because they are different.”
- “We are people and we bleed red as everyone else. GLBT people need support and friendship, regardless of whether you agree with them on every issue, love them as your neighbor.”
- “The church needs to realize that homosexuals are people just like them and not some sort of dangerous, perverse minority.”
- “Do not be afraid of us. Love us.”
- “We are real. We are here. We are people. Not freaks, not monsters, and no more in need of grace than you. We need love, affirmation, and community...We are Christians. Be Christ.”

It is a poor testament to the church that so many people feel not just a lack of love or support but *feel as if their fellow Christians see them as less than human*. These individuals ask for love, but on a more basic level, they simply ask for their personhood to be respected. There is currently a

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<sup>204</sup> John 13:34

<sup>205</sup> This survey was written before the author became informed about the negative connotations ‘homosexual’ can have in the gay community.

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strong and loud message of devaluation reaching gay Christians that makes them feel as if they are seen as not worthy of being a human. They ask that Christians awaken to the Church's God-given calling to show people their value as beloved children of God rather than being the loudest voice perpetuating the message of worthlessness.

How are Christians to go about sharing this message of love and of value? Gay Christians give them a solution that is simple and yet profound in its effects. They ask straight Christians to be open to talking to gay people, to get to know them as friends and companions, and to truly listen to their gay brothers and sisters:

- "Learn to know [gay people] well. Then form your opinion."
- "Listen, love, and stop acting like we're segregated in some way."
- "Extend yourself to [gay people] and love them. It is one thing to be struggling with your sexual orientation, but it's another to be struggling alone."
- "Rejection that is masked in the name of Love is a terrible thing."
- "The best thing that ever happened to me was to meet a straight guy who loved me unconditionally, and supported my search for true answers from the Lord without trying to dictate which way I should go."
- "When they take the time to listen and understand, I have found most people to be very receptive and thankful for my sharing."

For some people, the thought of sitting down and talking to a gay person and listening to what they have to say and getting to know them may be a frightening possibility. Some people feel as if gay individuals are somehow unclean, and that even being near them creates an opening for being defiled. Others do not actively think about it this way, but their actions strike gay persons as if that is the principle under which they operate. These gay Christians urge their fellow Christians to see this fear for what it is, a fear of the unknown. The solution is simple, get to know them, and they will no longer be the frightening 'other.' In fact, they assure their fellow Christians that once people take the time to get to know them as people – people who have favorite colors and favorite music, who love their pets, who enjoy sharing their hobbies– they

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will discover that these men and women are no different than any others. They are human, nothing less, nothing more.

Looking at the words of these Christian men and women, there is an additional request in regards to this forming of friendships and building of relationships. As a person begins to get to know gay people, gay Christians say: “*Please stop and listen before talking!*” Some Christians feel that if they sit down and have a cup of coffee with a gay person but do not tell that person before the end of the conversation that they believe gay sex is wrong, that this would be implicitly endorsing choices to have gay intercourse. This type of thinking believes that speaking the truth in love means making it clear to gay people that one believes God condemns their behavior, even though this relationship with this gay person is as yet unformed. Gay Christians ask that you be aware that this is neither necessary nor profitable to building relationships. Justin Lee wrote in a blog, “It’s no secret that I don’t think being gay is a sin or that gay relationships are sinful. But if you do, and you’re concerned about my eternal destiny, a strategy where you keep your emotional distance and regularly remind me of your disapproval isn’t going to change my mind.”<sup>206</sup> There is already a strong culture of disapproval. If a gay person feels that someone trying to befriend her is doing so with an agenda to change her views or practices, the relationship will be strained from the beginning and will likely be cut off before it has a chance to be any kind of friendship at all. Gay Christians ask that other Christians suspend their judgment long enough to actually become true friends. This in no way means that those befriending gay people are giving their approval to every choice and action of their gay friends.

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<sup>206</sup> Lee, ‘Loving them into hell?’

Christ Himself was more than willing to associate with marginalized people acting in ways with which He disagreed.<sup>207</sup>

Gay Christians desire these friendships. They want to feel the intimacy of someone caring for them as whole people, who are so much more than an orientation. One person writes, “Churches and Christian institutions shouldn’t be environments where gay people should have to feel like they have to hide their sexuality. I wish I could feel more open about my sexuality and my struggles with other believers.” Multiple other respondents expressed their desires for support groups and for ways to glean the Church’s strength for living out their lives. One person said, “I wish you would organize some sort of support groups for people like me...I could use some type of guidance, and support. So often it feels like I’m in this alone, like I’m part of a group of children their mother forgot about and left at the grocery store.” These men and women are looking for support, love, affirmation, and friendship. If a person is living in a sincere friendship with a gay person, opportunities are opened up for that person to bring up the topic of sexuality, and if they ask questions, space will be made for the Christian friend to share his or her views. This space, however, is only developed after there has been a sufficient time period of faithful friendship that creates the foundation for productive dialogue. The space is only available after a straight Christian has taken the time to really *listen* to the experiences of his or her gay friends.

Therefore, gay Christians ask for a true and genuine attempt at forming friendships, at listening to their thoughts, feelings, desires, struggles, and successes. They desire to be appreciated for the beauty of their humanity, as children of the Living God. They have voices.

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<sup>207</sup> Matthew 9.9-13; In fact, in many ways Christ had the strongest criticisms for those who considered themselves to be the religious fundamentalists of His day. See Matthew 23.

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They have valuable knowledge to share with the members of the church. The time has come to listen to them and to love them, with sincere interest and unfeigned love.

## **Conclusion**

Lived religion is a messy business. As a person navigates life from day to day, questions arise, and a faith that may have been so simple as a child or seemed obvious at the moment of conversion reaches a point of complexity. This is an experience that applies to various questions arising in the lives of Christians, but it is an especially heady experience for a Christian who discovers that he or she is attracted to members of the same sex. Over the years, many pieces have been written addressing the interaction between same-sex attraction and Christianity, but many have failed to address this experiential reality or they are devoted almost entirely to experience and do not have consideration for scholarship. It is hoped that this work has bridged these two realms, giving deference to the experienced realities of gay Christians while also looking vigorously at the scholarship.

For the gay Christian, questions about the living out of his faith often begin to emerge during the process of discovering his same-sex attraction. As it becomes increasingly apparent that he is primarily or exclusively attracted to members of the same gender, questions arise as to what is God's will regarding how he should react to these attractions. Is the attraction itself shameful and something that needs to be expunged? If not that, then what should he do about this attraction? Is it okay with God if he acts upon it and forms a loving, committed and monogamous gay union? Or, does God expect him to live with this attraction but not to have any gay sex? Is there a way to express this attraction without having sex? Perhaps the most powerful question



that emerges is: Why would God make people whom He knew would be gay? This question is at the heart of all of the others.

An attempt has been made to consider possible answers to some of these questions. These answers are not exhaustive by any means, but it is hoped they may provide a space for those on all sides to consider the complexity of the question and the various approaches one might take. A few tentative conclusions have been reached, but in humility it is acknowledged that future scholarship may challenge these conclusions and even disprove them.

The current conclusions are based on the Biblical passages that address the topic of gay sex. The passages from the Hebrew Bible that are most pertinent are Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13. Both of these passages seem to prohibit gay sex in general, using the Hebrew word *zakar*, a word that represents males in general rather than only prohibiting sex with a *qadesh*, a ‘male cult prostitute.’<sup>208</sup> These prohibitions, however, do not necessarily proscribe gay sex for Christians. Many of the laws of the Mosaic Law code are no longer obligatory for Christians.<sup>209</sup> Therefore, Christians look to the New Testament to see if it also prohibits gay sex. There are three passages that address homoeroticism: Romans 1:26-27, I Corinthians 6.9-10, and I Timothy 1.8-10. At face value, these passages do seem to proscribe all gay sex, especially since I Timothy and I Corinthians include *arsenokoitai* in their vice lists. This is a word with no previous examples of use before its inclusion in these Pauline epistles. The strongest evidence for its origin is a comparison to the Greek Septuagint’s translation of Leviticus 20.13: “And whoever lies with a male [*arsen*] the intercourse [*koite*] of a woman, both have done an abomination [*sic*]; they shall

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<sup>208</sup> Gagnon 63

<sup>209</sup> Acts 15

be put to death, they are guilty.”<sup>210</sup> Paul appears to be pulling words from the prohibition in Leviticus to create a word meaning, ‘men having sex with men.’ This action is prohibited.

In the passage in Romans, Paul also seems to view gay sex as an immoral action. The passage uses gay sex as an example of people turning away from the way God has intended humans to behave and turning to things God has prohibited. This disobedience is seen as idolatry, because God’s authority as the Almighty Lord is being thwarted and other things are given preference. It is followed by a list of various other actions that are also seen as turning away from God’s ways and living idolatrously.

A number of scholars have challenged these interpretations. The two most common arguments presented are: 1) Paul was unaware of any loving, committed and monogamous gay couples, therefore what he is condemning is not gay sex in general but only gay sex used exploitatively or in cult prostitution; 2) These passages prohibit gay sex when used by heterosexual people but not when used by gay people. Of those surveyed 75% of those gay Christians who believed that gay intercourse was only partially prohibited appealed to these arguments as supportive of their beliefs.

It was shown that there are numerous evidences for committed, loving monogamous gay unions existing in the time of Paul. References to such couples exist in the writings of Cicero, Juvenal, Martial, and popular Greek novels. These references indicate that these relationships were present in Paul’s time, some of them even being counted as legal marriages under Roman law. Paul was a well-educated and well-traveled man. As such, it is highly likely that he was aware of these relationships, and yet he still issues a full proscription of gay intercourse.

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<sup>210</sup> Scroggs 86

Therefore, an appeal to Paul's historical context does not give strong support to a viewpoint that God blesses intercourse within a gay union.

As to the argument that Paul was only prohibiting gay sex when used by heterosexual persons, this also finds no support when one considers the historical context of Paul. Multiple scholars agree that in Paul's time there was no concept of exclusive sexual orientation.<sup>211</sup> People were generally viewed as bisexual beings, capable of sex with either gender. If this is the case, it is extremely tenuous to argue that Paul is making a moral distinction based on a concept of sexual orientation of which he is unaware.

Although these considerations lend strong support to the conclusion that the New Testament completely prohibits gay sex, some Christians see evidence in the lives of gay Christian in same-sex unions as persuasive reasons to believe that God has indeed blessed these unions including the sex shared between these loving partners. It is seen that there is often a deep and sincere attraction between these loving and committed gay partners and that God often uses these men and women as parts of successful ministries. Besides this experiential evidence, many look at the descriptions in the Bible of God as loving and compassionate. They ask: If God is loving and compassionate, why would He ever condemn gay sex when used as an expression of deep, committed love between two people? Is it not reasonable to believe that sex in these relationships can be used to build intimacy and to express love just as it can be used in heterosexual marriages? For these reasons, many remain convinced that God only prohibits gay intercourse when used outside of such unions, just as He prohibits heterosexual intercourse when used outside of marriage.

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<sup>211</sup> Boswell 59,73; Smith 243,244; Via 15

For those who look at the evidence and believe it is strong enough to conclude that God does fully prohibit same-sex intercourse, there are multiple options for how to live in obedience to the proscription while creating a fulfilling and joyful life. Some find the answer in living singly and celibately. Others participate in romantic friendships, expressing deep love for a member of the same-sex while remaining chaste. Finally, there are those gay Christians who enter into marriage with a heterosexual spouse. All of these choices require a deep commitment to sacrificing one's same-sex desires for the sake of God's calling. They require honesty with oneself and with one's partner, whether that partner is a romantic friend or a heterosexual spouse.

The sacrifice involved in giving up sexual fulfillment of one's same-sex attractions is a sacrifice that can feel like a heavy burden, like a cross to be carried uphill. Numerous Christians feel that this is precisely what it is, a cross they carry in response to Jesus call to take up a cross and follow Him.<sup>212</sup> Just as the cross of Jesus Christ proved to be both the site of His crucifixion and His glorification, gay Christians often feel that this journey of sacrifice is both a process of dying to self and of growing into more perfect reflections of the glory of God. In a strange way, it is a calling from God, a calling to leap into His arms with complete abandon, in order that He might lift you up in due time.<sup>213</sup>

When one begins to dig deep into the realities of living as a gay Christian, it becomes apparent that it is a complex situation. There are tensions. There are questions that seem to lack clear and cohesive answers. There are people pointing in multiple directions trying to provide

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<sup>212</sup> Matthew 16.24

<sup>213</sup> I Peter 5.6

solutions. Ultimately, each gay Christian must determine for herself what she believes and how she intends to respond to her sexual orientation.

The Christian church has the potential to be a support rather than a burden on this journey a gay Christian takes trying to determine what is God's will for him as he lives his daily life. One simple way to be supportive is to acknowledge that the vast majority of gay people experience their orientation as unchosen and as unchanging. With this premise in place, there is space to have compassion for the pain and the tension a gay Christian may feel as he tries to determine God's will. He must wrestle with that foundational question: Why did God make me knowing that I would be gay? He is dealing with the very essence of theology. His faith is seeking understanding. Christians can come alongside their gay brothers and sisters, and they can assure them that they are loved just as they are. They can affirm the valuable place of gay Christians within the body of Christ, that they are beautiful people made in the image of the Eternal God, and that they are God's beloved children who have a unique perspective to share with the Church. Gay Christians ask that their fellow believers would befriend them and truly listen to their struggles and to the questions that may take a lifetime to answer.

Debate on the topic of same-sex unions is currently tearing apart large sections of the Christian Church, but it is also tearing at the souls of individual believers. In trying to solve the large-scale divisions, it is easy to forget that this question ultimately concerns real people trying their best to live as faithful believers in this world. This more than anything else is the purpose of this work: to remind those within the church that same-sex attraction is something that affects numerous people on profound levels. Remember always that this moral debate is not a dry academic affair, but it is a profound part of the experience of living and breathing human beings.

Same-sex attraction is an unchosen and, with rare exception, an unchanging disposition. This attraction is something that profoundly affects many Christians around the world. It is to be considered as an innate characteristic of certain people, and it gives them a perspective on the world most Christians do not have. God made them knowing they would have these attractions, and it is His will that they might be full members of the Christian body, sharing their valuable perspective with their brothers and sisters. He loves them just as they are, and He has plans for them to flourish and to live joyfully as gay people in this world. This does not mean that He intends for them to fulfill sexually these attractions. The Bible seems to prohibit gay intercourse. Therefore, God has called gay Christians to live sacrificially by abstaining from gay sex. This sacrifice is part of sharing in the sufferings of Christ, something all Christians are called to do. This strange beneficial work of suffering can be perplexing but also encouraging. It is a mysterious and awe-inspiring affair that God uses even the struggles and the pain in this world to build His kingdom in the hearts of His sons and daughters.

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